

LaToya Gray-Sparks

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December 7, 2022

The Honorable Ray Roakes
Urban Design Committee
900 E. Broad Street, Room 510
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mr. Roakes:

I am sending this letter to express concerns about the proposed relocation of a training center to the site of the Hickory Hill Community Center by the Richmond Fire Department. I am currently a graduate student in urban and regional planning (M.U.R.P.) at the Wilder School of Virginia Commonwealth University and am a former Advisory Council member of *Richmond 300*. I am writing this in support of Southside community members living in and around the Hickory Hill Community Center.

There are many concerns that were raised by residents in and near the Hickory Hill Community Center during a presentation by the Fire Department on December 1, 2022. Some of the primary concerns centered around noise and smoke pollution—including synthetic smoke, repetitive metal on metal striking sounds, gasoline powered equipment and alert devices that would be used in training exercises. Another concern raised is that the training facility would be in close proximity to residential neighborhoods and near where children and adults play—which would be greatly disruptive. Finally, there are concerns about the diminishment of current greenspace in the neighborhood as well as interference with soccer field activities that currently take place at the site. One of the primary goals from the *Richmond 300* plan included the establishment of greenspace in walking distance of *all* neighborhoods throughout the city. Diminishing the amount of greenspace in a historically marginalized neighborhood would be a step in the *wrong* direction and not in alignment with the mission of fostering a thriving, equitable and more inclusive city as espoused in the *Richmond 300* comprehensive plan.

I ask that you take these concerns into consideration. I would also strongly urge more engagement directly with the residents in and around the Hickory Hill Community Center going forward. While the *Richmond 300* comprehensive planning process may be complete, I believe that the planning process was just the start of what should be a long-term partnership with communities throughout the City of Richmond as we plan and develop a more thriving, inclusive, and sustainable city for all. This is particularly crucial for communities that have been historically marginalized by past exclusive and inequitable planning practices.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

LaToya Gray-Sparks

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