



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

ORD. 2019-170: To amend City Code §§ 30-440.1, 30-440.2, 30-440.4:1, 30-440.6, and 30-440.7, concerning permitted principal and accessory uses, principal uses permitted by a conditional use permit, requirements for areas devoted to parking or circulation of vehicles, height, and building façade fenestration in the B-4 Central Business District, and to amend ch. 30, art. IV, div. 22 by adding therein a new § 30-440, concerning the intent of the district, for the purpose of modifying elements of the B-4 Central Business District and promoting dense, transit-oriented development with greater building height than elsewhere in the region.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Department of Planning and Development Review
Date: July 15, 2019

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

The B-4 district is located in downtown Richmond, predominantly in the Central Business District, running west along Grace and Broad Streets to Belvidere Street.

PURPOSE

To amend the official zoning ordinance text for the purpose of updating the B-4 district to remove incompatible uses, adding priority street designations, and adding a *district intent* section, and adding a three-story height minimum and removing the allowance for breaking the inclined plane by 50% of the length of the building along the street.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This Ordinance is one of a set of five, which together will revise the City's official zoning map and ordinance text for the purpose of rezoning certain properties in Monroe Ward, bounded by Belvidere Street to the west; Broad Street to the north; the Downtown Expressway to the south; and Ninth Street to the east, in order to increase density and accommodate growth and development while preserving the character of the neighborhood and rebuilding neighborhood context. Each Ordinance represents one of five elements to this process, a combination of which will reach the desired outcome:

1. Changing zoning classification of certain parcels from light-industrial or auto-oriented designations to those more in keeping with the existing building patterns and intent of the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan;
2. Adding Street-Oriented Commercial and Priority Streets in the area to the official zoning map;

3. Creating a Plan of Development (POD) Overlay District for the area to ensure development is consistent with the six form elements of the Pulse Corridor Plan;
4. Amending the B-4 district to remove incompatible uses, add a three-story height minimum, and remove the option to break the inclined plane of 4:1 by 50% of the length of the building along the street; and
5. Amending the RO-3 district to remove incompatible uses and add form-based elements.

Staff recommends approval of the ordinance.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

These amendments arise out of the recommendations of the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan, an analysis of the existing zoning ordinance and its application across the city, and an extensive public engagement process, both for the plan and for this area rezoning. There is significant building activity in the Central Business District which continues to move west into Monroe Ward and expansion of VCU's Monroe Park campus has stretched east of Belvidere into Monroe Ward. While Monroe Ward is home to an array of historic structures, there are also a significant number of surface parking lots, several of which take up entire blocks. This proactive rezoning process is in order to ensure that new development is in keeping with the principles of the Pulse Plan.

Master Plan

The area for this rezoning is part of the Arts District Station Area in the Pulse Corridor Plan, an adopted amendment to the City's Master Plan. The Pulse Plan Future Land Use map labels the area as "Downtown Mixed Use".

(Note: the Arts District Station Area also includes Jackson Ward, but the character of the neighborhoods and existing zoning already align with the Future Land Use map designation.)

Rezoning Monroe Ward to districts that align with the future land use map is the first recommendation for this study area (p.84). The plan envisions a strong transit-oriented node at each station area along the corridor, and describes Monroe Ward's future land use as high-intensity pedestrian- and transit-oriented development," with tall signature buildings, active commercial ground floors, few driveways cutting through sidewalks, and little to no setbacks for commercial building, adding that new buildings will add to the already "incredibly dynamic and diverse building stock, creating a truly eclectic urban neighborhood" (p.84). The plan recommends that new zoning does not allow surface parking lots as a principal permitted use.

Existing and Proposed Zoning

Staff has completed an extremely thorough analysis and vetting of exactly the tools needed to accomplish the plan vision and spur development while preserving the historic character of the neighborhood. Staff has also responded to citizen comments and concerns.

As a result, there are five elements to this rezoning process:

1. Rezoning the area from either light industrial (M-1) or auto-oriented commercial (B-3), to transit-oriented development (TOD-1) or downtown mixed-use (B-4);
2. Adding Priority and Street-Oriented Commercial designations in the area to the official zoning map;
3. Creating a Plan of Development Overlay District for the area to ensure that new development meets the six design elements of the Pulse Corridor Plan;
4. Amending the B-4 district; and
5. Amending the RO-3 district to remove incompatible uses and add form-based elements.

This Ordinance is specific to amending the B-4 district. The initial proposal in October of 2018 was to remove the inclined plane from the district. This ordinance expands on that as a result of research and discussion in the intervening months.

The B-4 district currently does not specify a maximum height, as long as no “portion of a building shall penetrate an inclined plane originating at the centerline of each abutting street and extending over the lot at an inclination of one foot horizontal for each four feet vertical and provided, further, that such inclined plane may be penetrated by a building wall adjacent to a street for a horizontal distance not exceeding 50 percent of the length of the property line along the street” (Sec. 30-440.6).

As staff evaluated the proposal as a whole and thought of the best method to ensure that the vision of the Pulse Corridor Plan is met, the proposal shifted to: keeping the inclined plane (minus the 50% provision); adding a minimum height of three stories; and removing uses that are incompatible with a walkable downtown area such as contractors shops, janitorial supply, funeral homes, parking areas and parking lots (currently allowed by Conditional Use Permit).

This Ordinance also inserts Priority Streets designations into requirements regarding multi-family dwelling units, hotels and parking structures, requiring a portion of the ground floor of said uses to house another permitted principal commercial use.

Attached Summary Document

In order to convey the ideas and reasoning behind this rezoning process clearly and thoroughly, staff created a summary document complete with explanatory text, maps of

existing and proposed zoning, exact zoning changes, and explanation of each recommendation. Please see attached summary for further details.

Public Engagement

As the Pulse Corridor Plan was developed over the course of 2015-2017, City Staff held numerous public forums, set up online surveys, attended standing civic association meetings, and tracked public feedback.

In July 2017, staff held two public open houses at the Main Library to discuss the Monroe Ward rezoning, and provided informational maps and comparisons of zoning districts. In addition, a letter was sent to each property owner of over 400 addresses which will be affected by the rezoning. Of the 400 property owners affected, PDR received only two letters expressing concern or opposition, and has subsequently engaged with both parties.

In November 2018, staff once again sent notices in postcard form to 444 individual property owners, and received one inquiry of concern regarding parking, and twelve letters or emails from Historic Richmond Foundation and members regarding height and protection of historic buildings on Franklin Street. Because of this concern, staff altered the proposal to keep the current zoning on Franklin Street and make alterations to the district to ensure future uses and form are compatible with the existing character of the street.

Staff has received letters and emails of support from large property owners, developers and one affordable housing expert. Staff continues to regularly discuss the rezoning with property- and business-owners in the neighborhood, who are largely supportive of the rezoning and positively anticipate its effects on the neighborhood.

Staff Contact:

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