From: Brown, Jonathan W. - PDR
To: Darby, Anne W. - PDR
Subject: FW: Please include this letter re: Planning Commission agenda 9-8-2020
Date: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 11:18:25 AM

Anne,
Just received this morning....

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From: Jonathan Marcus [mailto:jonmarcus59@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 10:10 AM
To: Brown, Jonathan W. - PDR <Jonathan.Brown@richmondgov.com>
Subject: Please include this letter re: Planning Commission agenda 9-8-2020

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To the Planning Department, the Planning Commission, and Richmond City Council:

A Request From The Following Civic Associations:
Carver Area Civic Improvement League
The Fan District Association
Historic Jackson Ward Association
Monument Avenue Preservation Society
Newtowne West Association
RVA Coalition of Concerned Civic Associations
West Grace Street Association

We request that the proposed rezoning of the Broad Street corridor be paused until after all covid-19 quarantine restrictions have been lifted, and thereafter until proper public engagement has been completed as required by City Council and the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan. We have expressed these concerns to the Planning Department, which include:

- **The Pulse Corridor Plan, codified by City Council, states on Page 30, "A City-initiated rezoning process involves extensive public input to evaluate and determine new zoning designations that align with adopted Future Land use, but are more precisely tailored to that area's existing context and community vision." This "extensive public engagement" has not occurred, and the area's "existing context and community vision" have not been taken into account.**

· **The Planning Department maintains that appropriate zoning discussions with citizens have taken place. It pains us to state that this is simply not true. Yes, some meetings have taken place in certain (not all) neighborhoods, and broad concepts such as "Land Use" have been presented. In limited cases, building heights have been discussed. However, the details of specific zoning categories, and particularly the height of new buildings allowed on the north side of Broad Street and parts of West Grace Street under the proposed zoning, have <u>not been mentioned</u> in meetings, nor has "extensive public input" been solicited or considered. Proper, constructive presentations must include graphics displaying possible building heights by right on specific parcels, accompanied by information in plain language on density, traffic impacts, alley function, infrastructure impacts, and consideration of unforeseen consequences. In short, the essential elements of *extensive public engagement* have been ignored by the Planning Department.**

· **By studying the proposed zoning, citizens have discovered that the Planning Department's proposals allow buildings over 20 stories tall in an uptown area surrounded by predominantly two and three story tall historic neighborhoods. For comparison, City hall is 19 stories tall, and only a few buildings in the entire city are taller. The very idea of introducing central business district heights into these low-rise neighborhoods does not comply with City Council's requirement to "more precisely tailor to that area's existing context and community vision."**

· **The Pulse Corridor Plan specifies, on Page 29, ". . . a new mixed-use zoning district that allows mid-rise buildings, up to 12 stories in building height." We don't know how or why the stipulation of *up to 12 stories* – after public engagement – secretly became *over 20 stories* – without public engagement. Such a breach of the council ordinance and the public trust is utterly unacceptable.**

· **We maintain that Broad Street is part of our public trust, part of the legacy of our historic city, and as such, Broad Street belongs to all the citizens – whether they live on it, a block away, a mile away, or across town. The rezoning under consideration will determine what our city becomes in the next hundred years. Therefore, the question of what do *we* seek to become must be lifted from the shadows of city hall and shared as an open question for the entire citizenry.**

· **Transparency in government has been missing from many facets of city administration in Richmond. Too often, we the citizens are told of a program with broad consequences after it has been developed in private. All too often, such programs do not serve the will or the preferences of the citizens. This "behind closed doors" rezoning process is bitterly familiar. Let's use this rezoning episode to renew the spirit of democratic governance.**

· **We request a list of all the private meetings concerning this area and these properties that have occurred between City staff and elected officials since the adoption of the Pulse Plan. We also request ownership information on the individual parcels proposed for rezoning. Were these benefitting entities and individuals accorded greater access to City decision makers than the surrounding neighborhoods that will bear the brunt of these development impacts and costs?**

· **Due to the current pandemic, associated quarantines, and limits on public engagement, the request to pause the rezoning process is particularly urgent. A proper, vital, public consideration of our city's future can take place only in person; in large, open public gatherings, with solid information, legible maps and renderings, and most of important, discussion from all stakeholders.**
An open process is the most expedient path to serving the interests of developers who are eager to plan for new projects in the corridor, as well as the citizens who are eager for appropriate development.

· **We urge you to heed the words of Martha Wingfield, President of the Board of Directors Partnership for Smarter Growth: ". . . during the state of emergency and in accordance with Attorney General Herring's legal opinion and fundamental principles of ensuring public participation and transparency in local decision-making, we urge all Richmond area elected bodies to limit their agendas to emergency-related and budgetary issues. <u>We recommend deferring all permanent non-emergency decisions, such as land use decisions</u>, unless the elected body makes an explicit and documented finding of urgency."**

Therefore, we the undersigned again request that the rezoning process be paused. We are eager to see the action plan from the Planning Department which addresses unresolved concerns about the zoning process. Signatories below support growth and development that serves all stakeholders and growth vectors, including developers, the city coffers, new entrepreneurs, new residents, higher density, and new vitality in our city, all while simultaneously honoring the neighborhoods which have made this Broad Street corridor so desirable after decades of decline. We maintain that all stakeholders can work together to achieve growth for the common good.

We look forward to an action plan from the Planning Department that opens these zoning questions to the public so that we may all work together for Richmond's future. The action plan must include a pause until after quarantine restrictions are fully lifted on public gatherings, and must follow with community meetings which include the full range of information exchange with large scale maps and renderings as well as adherence to community preferences regarding scale, context, and other considerations expressed by citizens and as mandated in the Pulse Corridor plan.

Respectfully Signed,

Carver Area Civic Improvement League
The Fan District Association
Historic Jackson Ward Association
Monument Avenue Preservation Society
Newtowne West Association
RVA Coalition of Concerned Civic Associations
West Grace Street Association