



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

ORD. 2021-151: To amend the official zoning map for the purpose of rezoning certain properties in the Science Museum, Allison Street, and VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Station Areas, in order to implement the adopted Richmond 300 Master Plan and Pulse Corridor Plan, and to amend the official zoning map for the purpose of designating certain street blocks as "priority streets" and certain street blocks as "street-oriented commercial streets" in the Science Museum, Allison Street, and Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Union University Pulse BRT Station Areas.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Department of Planning and Development Review
Date: June 21, 2021

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

This rezoning includes the areas around the Science Museum, Allison Street and VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Stations. The total area is bounded generally by Arthur Ashe Boulevard on the West; I-95/64 and the railroad on the North; Belvidere Street on the East; and the alley between West Grace Street and West Broad Street on the South.

PURPOSE

To amend the official zoning map for the purpose of rezoning certain properties in the Science Museum, Allison Street, and VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Station Areas, in order to implement the adopted Richmond 300 Master Plan and Pulse Corridor Plan.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This Ordinance would revise the City's official zoning map for the purpose of rezoning certain properties around the Science Museum, Allison Street and VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Stations Areas to match the Future Land Use Plan, vision, and recommendations envisioned in the Richmond 300 Master Plan and Pulse Corridor Plan. At a broad level, the changes in zoning would allow for more residential and commercial uses at higher densities, while phasing out the existing light industrial zoning.

Staff recommends approval of the ordinance, subject to potential amendments which may be discussed during the Planning Commission hearing.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

The Richmond 300 Master Plan and the Pulse Corridor Plan set recommendations and policies to guide the future growth of the city. Objective 1.1 of Richmond 300 and Corridor-Wide Recommendation 2 in the Pulse Corridor Plan both recommend to rezone the city in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan. New development which is supported by the Pulse BRT is envisioned to be mixed-use, higher density, walkable, and require less parking due to the prevalence of transit and other non-automobile transportation options.

Master Plan

The Future Land Use Plan contained within the Richmond 300 Master Plan designates the areas around the Science Museum, Allison Street, and VCU/VUU Pulse BRT Stations into broad land use categories, including: Destination Mixed-Use, Corridor Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Mixed-Use, and Institutional.

The Future Land Use Plan designates the area generally north of W. Broad Street and west of N. Lombardy Street, with the exception of the Newtowne West neighborhood, as “Destination Mixed-Use,” which is described as, “key gateways featuring prominent destinations, such as retail, sports venues, and large employers, as well as housing and open space. Located at the convergence of several modes of transportation, including Pulse BRT or other planned transit improvements.” Future development is envisioned to be mixed-use in nature, at higher-density, and transit-oriented, with ground floor uses that engage and enliven the street. Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated.

The Future Land Use Plan designates property on the south side of W. Broad Street generally between N. Harrison Street and N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard as “Corridor Mixed-Use,” which is described as, “major commercial corridors and envisioned to provide for medium- to medium-high-density pedestrian- and transit-oriented development.” Future development is envisioned to be mixed, either horizontally in several buildings on a block or vertically within the same building. Developments continue to introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity. Building heights generally range between two to ten stories. Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated.

The Future Land Use Plan designates the residential neighborhoods of Carver and Newtowne West as “Neighborhood Mixed-Use,” which is described as, “existing or new highly-walkable urban neighborhoods that are predominantly residential with a small, but critical, percentage of parcels providing retail, office, personal service, and institutional uses.” Building heights generally range between two and four stories. Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated.

The Pulse Corridor Plan describes the vision of the Science Museum and Allison Street Pulse BRT Station Areas in part, as, “The significant redevelopment of low-density parcels at W. Broad Street and Boulevard creates a prominent node with signature architecture that capitalizes on this strategic gateway to the city. New, taller, mixed-use development that promotes walkability extends down the north side of W. Broad Streets toward the Science Museum’s landmark public grounds and the Pulse Station from the Boulevard gateway intersection. Major redevelopment around the Allison Station breaks up superblocks by reintroducing the street grid and creating a walkable environment with high-density, mixed-use buildings on the north side of W. Broad Street; medium-density, mixed-use buildings infill the south side of W. Broad Street.”

The Pulse Corridor Plan details the scale and form of future development on the south side of W. Broad Street as, “New development on the south side of W. Broad Street should be limited to four stories in height between Ryland and Strawberry Streets, and five stories in height between Strawberry Street and Boulevard, with the exception of key intersections, such as at W. Broad and Robinson Streets and W. Broad Street and N. Boulevard, which should be developed at a higher scale befitting their role as standout corners, with extensive discussion with the surrounding community. In order to reduce its effect on lower-scale residential uses to the south, any new development here should employ a 20’ rear yard setback from alleys, as well as massing strategies, such as a two-story stepback from the rear, that push the massing toward W. Broad Street.”

The Pulse Corridor Plan describes the vision of the VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Station Area as, “the area around the VCU & VUU Station continues to develop as a street-oriented commercial corridor and urban avenue, providing shopping, dining, and housing for students and neighborhood residents alike. The station area continues to benefit from its proximity to the VCU Monroe Park campus and continues to be a job center and nexus of activity with services and cultural attractions for the region. The intersection of Belvidere and W. Broad Streets becomes a signature intersection with new development complementing the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art with prominent architecture.”

Existing and Proposed Zoning

Existing zoning throughout the area around the Science Museum, Allison Street, and VCU&VUU Pulse BRT Stations varies considerably. The Carver neighborhood south of W. Leigh Street is currently zoned R-6 Single-Family Attached, while the Carver neighborhood north of W. Leigh Street and the Newtowne West neighborhood are currently zoned R-7 Single- and Two-Family Residential. The south side of W. Broad Street west of N. Harrison Street is zoned UB-PO4 Urban Business (with a Parking Overlay). The interior of the neighborhood is primarily zoned M-1 Light Industrial.

The proposed zoning would implement the vision of the Richmond 300 Master Plan and Pulse Corridor Plan by eliminating the inappropriate industrial zoning while providing

opportunities for more transformative development on vacant and underutilized land, as well as designating existing residential neighborhoods as a more appropriate zoning district that would provide the opportunity for infill development that is consistent with the existing character of these neighborhoods.

The interior of the neighborhood is proposed to be rezoned from M-1 Light Industrial and B-3 General Business to TOD-1 Transit-Oriented Nodal. The TOD-1 Transit-Oriented Nodal District allows a mix of retail and service uses, as well as residential dwelling units. New buildings are required to be a minimum of two stories and a maximum of 12 stories. Form-based requirements exist for fenestration details, the location of driveways and parking areas, and landscaping of parking areas. No off-street parking requirements exist for uses except hotels and motels and residential dwelling units for buildings with more than 16 units, above which one off-street parking space is required for every two dwelling units.

The south side of W. Broad Street is proposed to be rezoned from UB-PO4 Urban Business (with a Parking Overlay) to B-5 Central Business west of Strawberry Street and B-6 Mixed-Use Business east of Strawberry Street and west of Ryland Street. The B-5 Central Business and B-6 Mixed-Use Business districts allow for a mix of residential and commercial uses. Building height in the B-5 District is limited to five stories, and limited to four stories in the B-6 District, except where an entire block is being redeveloped, in which case the maximum building height is five stories. Off-street parking requirements in the B-5 District only exist for hotels and motels, and residential developments with more than 16 residential dwelling units, above which one off-street parking space is required for every four dwelling units. Off-street parking requirements in the B-6 District for commercial uses are based on the square footage of uses, while for residential uses, one parking space is required for each residential dwelling unit.

The Carver neighborhood south of W. Leigh Street is proposed to be rezoned from R-7 Single- and Two-Family Residential to R-8 Urban Residential. This change in zoning would lower the lot size required for new development which is more comparable with the existing lot sizes of the neighborhood. The change would also allow for some multifamily and commercial uses by Conditional Use Permit only. Such uses include multifamily dwellings up to four dwelling units, live/work units (with conditions), as well as other neighborhood-appropriate commercial uses such as art galleries, barber shops, grocery stores, laundromats, offices, and restaurants.

The Carver neighborhood north of W. Leigh Street and the Newtowne West neighborhood are proposed to be rezoned from R-6 Single-Family Attached to R-7 Single- and Two-Family Residential. This change in zoning would reduce the lot size required for new residential development which is more comparable with the existing lot sizes of the neighborhood.

Properties located in part along W. Marshall Street, N. Lombardy Street, and Bowe Street are proposed to be rezoned from M-1 Light Industrial and R-53 Multifamily Residential to R-63 Multifamily Urban Residential. The R-63 District allows for residential uses, including multifamily, as well as neighborhood-appropriate retail and service uses on corner sites only. Building heights are generally limited to three stories.

The properties located north of W. Leigh Street and east of Oak Street are proposed to be rezoned from M-1 Light Industrial to B-7 Mixed-Use Business and the properties located to the northwest of Newtowne West are proposed to be rezoned from M-1 Light Industrial and M-2 Heavy Industrial to B-7 Mixed-Use Business. The B-7 District allows for a mix of retail and service uses, residential dwelling units, and limited warehousing and production uses. New buildings are typically limited to five stories in height, unless a development includes an entire block, in which case the maximum building height is six stories. Form-based requirements exist for fenestration details, the location of driveways and parking areas, and landscaping of parking areas. Off-street parking requirements for residential uses consist of one parking space per one dwelling unit. Commercial parking requirements are based on the square footage of the specified use. There is a 50% reduction in off-street parking required for existing buildings.

One important distinction of the B-7 Mixed-Use Business District is that while most uses found in the M-1 and M-2 districts are not allowed in the B-7 district, such uses that are existing prior to being rezoned are not considered non-conforming and can continue to operate as well as be maintained, expanded, and rebuilt. This distinction will allow existing industrial uses in the area to continue to operate without encumbrance, while allowing for the addition of residential and other uses that are envisioned for the future of the neighborhood.

Street oriented commercial frontage and priority street designations are proposed to be designated in this area. W. Broad Street between N. Belvidere Street and N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard, as well as W. Grace Street between N. Belvidere Street and Ryland Street are proposed to be designated as street-oriented commercial frontage, meaning that new developments would be required to provide that a minimum of one third, or 1,000 square feet, of the floor area of the ground floor of new buildings have a principal uses other than dwelling units of a depth not less than 20 feet.

Priority street designations are proposed on several streets in this area. The priority street designation would apply the form based requirements of principal street frontages when a building has multiple street frontages, and includes fenestration requirements, parking being located behind buildings, and limits to driveways across such streets when other access is available. The following streets are proposed to be designated as priority streets:

- W. Broad Street between N. Belvidere Street and N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard
- W. Grace Street between N. Belvidere Street and Ryland Street

- W. Leigh Street between N. Belvidere Street and DMV Drive
- Hermitage Road between W. Broad Street and Ownby Lane
- N. Lombardy Street between W. Broad Street and I-95/I-64

Public Engagement

As the Pulse Corridor Plan was developed between 2015 and 2017 and the Richmond 300 Master Plan was developed between 2017 and 2020, PDR staff held numerous public forums, set up online surveys, attended standing civic association meetings, and tracked public feedback.

In December 2019, staff hosted two public open house sessions at the Science Museum of Virginia with a presentation and a question/answer session on the rezoning. A letter was sent to each affected property owner notifying them of the intent to rezone, of the public open houses, and where to get more information. Staff had many conversations with property owners in the area, as well as representatives of VCU and Sauer Properties, all of whom have expressed support for the rezoning.

Following the withdrawn legislation to rezone the area in December 2020, PDR staff has continued to work with property owners and neighboring civic associations to further refine this rezoning proposal.

A virtual, public meeting was held to discuss the proposed rezoning on June 8, 2021. Nearby civic associations were notified of the meeting beforehand, which was also advertised virtually on City social media accounts and through the Richmond 300 email list. There were approximately 20 public attendees at the meeting. Feedback on the proposed rezoning was generally positive.

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