

# Three Zoning Changes - Focus Groups

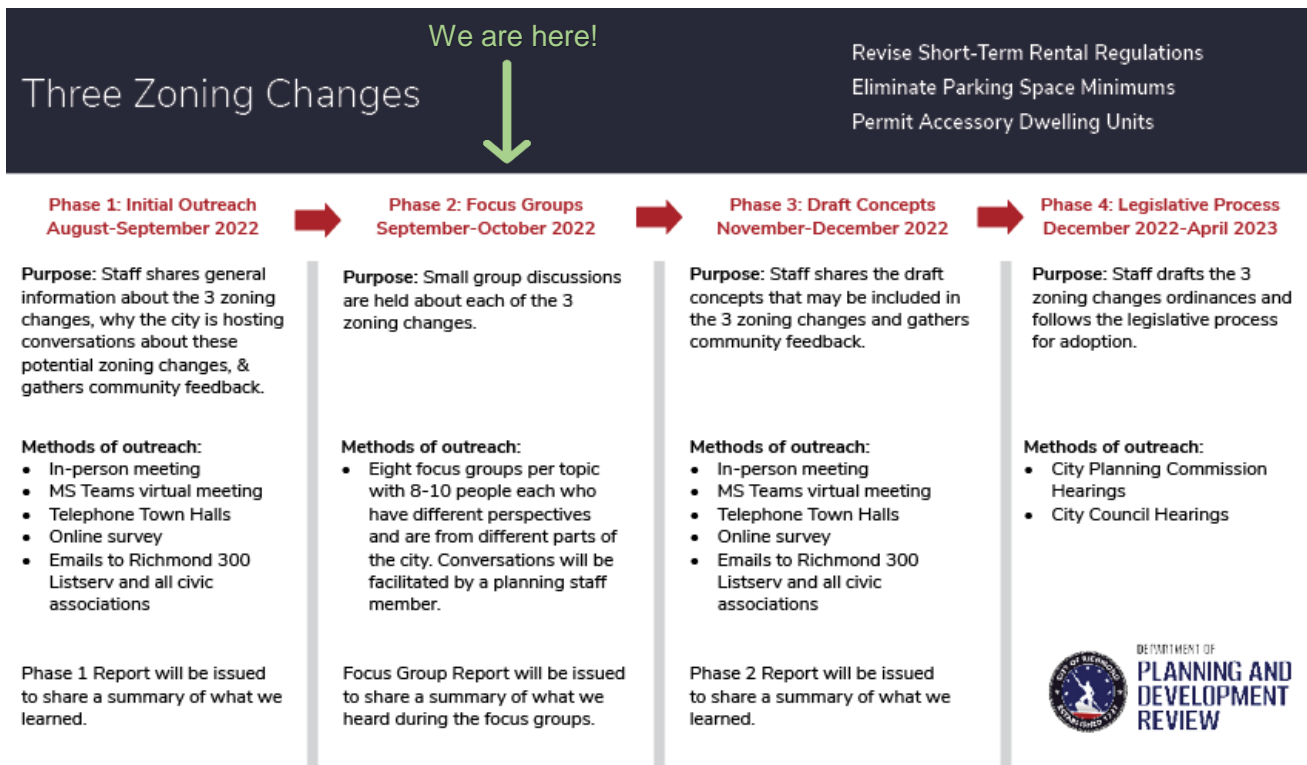
## Report – October 2022



The second phase of community engagement for the proposed zoning changes for short-term rentals, parking minimums, and accessory dwelling units focused on gathering community input through staff-facilitated focus groups. During these meetings, staff from the Department of Planning and Development Review (PDR) provided a forum for community members from different parts of the city to gather into small groups and discuss their opinions.

### Timeframe

The focus groups occurred from September 27 to October 12, 2022. This engagement effort made up Phase 2 of the community engagement process for the three proposed zoning changes.



### Promotion

The focus groups were open to anyone interested in the three zoning changes. PDR Staff promoted these focus groups in Phase 1 of community outreach. In addition, those interested in participating could request to join a focus group on the PDR Three Zoning Changes website.

## Focus Groups Summary

Staff held two in-person focus group meetings per zoning change. Each of these focus groups provided a morning and evening option. Staff sought to shape focus groups with a diversity of opinions and neighborhoods represented within each group to have various viewpoints in each discussion. The goal of the focus groups was to give staff an understanding of community concerns, hear the opinions of others, and collectively discuss resolutions. Each group consisted of 4-8 participants, a staff facilitator guiding the discussions, and a scribe taking detailed notes. In total, **108 people** from the public participated in the focus groups.

## Focus Group Attendance

| Topic                    | Date & Time                     | City Staff | Public | Location     | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| Parking Minimums         | Tuesday<br>9/27/22<br>9-10am    | 8          | 20     | Main Library | 28    |
| Parking Minimums         | Wednesday<br>9/28/22<br>6-7pm   | 7          | 24     | Main Library | 31    |
| Accessory Dwelling Units | Tuesday<br>10/4/22<br>6-7pm     | 7          | 17     | Main Library | 24    |
| Accessory Dwelling Units | Wednesday<br>10/5/22<br>9-10am  | 7          | 12     | Main Library | 19    |
| Short-term Rentals       | Tuesday<br>10/11/22<br>6-7pm    | 7          | 20     | Main Library | 27    |
| Short-term Rentals       | Wednesday<br>10/12/22<br>9-10am | 7          | 15     | Main Library | 22    |



## Facilitator Questions

### Parking Minimums:

- 1) What do you think eliminating parking minimums from the zoning ordinance means?
- 2) Where do you experience parking challenges the most?
- 3) How do you think eliminating parking minimums will benefit/harm the city?
- 4) Do you agree or disagree that there is a better use for land other than parking? Please explain.

### Accessory Dwelling Units:

- 1) Do you think accessory dwelling units should be allowed by-right in all residential districts?
- 2) Do you think short-term rentals should be allowed in accessory dwelling units? Please explain.
- 3) Do you agree or disagree that there should be a design review process for attached and detached accessory dwelling units? Please explain.
- 4) What makes it difficult to build an accessory dwelling unit in the city?
- 5) Tell me about your first experience getting a special use permit for an accessory dwelling unit.

### Short-Term Rentals:

- 1) Do you agree or disagree that short-term rentals benefit the city?
- 2) Do you agree or disagree that the minimum 185-day primary residency requirement should remain?
- 3) Should there be a limit on the number of short-term rentals per owner?
- 4) Tell me about your experience setting up a short-term rental in the city.

*Note: Facilitators used these questions to guide the discussions. Other facilitator questions and comments may have occurred depending on the responses of the group.*



## What we heard | Parking Minimums

### Benefits:

- Boosts small business growth
- Rents will go down due to decreased development costs
- More pedestrian infrastructure
- Potential for more multi-modal development
- More walkable, bike-friendly neighborhoods
- Reduction of impermeable surfaces
- Opportunities for more green space

*“Doing away with the minimum allows developers to create creative, unique, and neighborhood friendly uses like Joe’s Inn throughout the city.”*

*“We need to stop designing projects around cars and designing around people and housing people rather than trying to figure out where to park. Carytown is a great example of those businesses who, if they tried to open today, they wouldn’t be allowed because of the requirements. The Fan and Scott’s Addition are great walkable, community-focused areas where the businesses are real assets to the City.”*

*“Parking problems are the price of admission to enjoy the city environment and we understand that. Drive around the block and you’ll find a spot.”*

*“Nobody ever says ‘what beautiful parking.’ They talk about the buildings.”*

*“Developers have eliminated spots to put more units in the buildings. You can have 10 more affordable units and it increases affordable housing in the communities.”*

*“I moved here from San Francisco and it’s not hard to park here. Where parking is tight you only have to park ½ block away.”*

*“Businesses have to follow complex rules and meet arbitrary parking requirements which could hinder business.”*

*“Developers will be able to respond to market rather than rules. Less surface parking creates more room for development. No developer will build a development that can’t provide parking to its residents.”*

*“Cities aren’t getting as much revenue from parking lots compared to other uses.”*

*“Rent would be cheaper if it didn’t have to subsidize a parking spot. It could also open up room for more affordable housing development.”*

*“In some areas, it could benefit small business growth if they don’t have to have a bunch of space they have to buy or rent to address parking.”*

*“Surface parking lots are terrible for storm water runoff and are hot in the summer. Potential green space is taken up by parking.”*

### Concerns:

- Unreliable public transportation and unsafe bike lanes
- Potential congestion issues
- Issues of safety for pedestrians
- Issues of safety for cyclists
- Developers will choose not to add parking

*“People park in my neighborhood in front of houses to access Byrd Park.”*

*“Living in Manchester, we are getting really dense. Some apartments offer paid parking for like \$100 so many people just park on the street so they don’t have to pay. I often see people parking on the street in crosswalks and in front of hydrants.”*

*“There is already no on-street parking in Manchester. With additional larger projects coming online, where will those people park?”*

*“I need to drive to get groceries. If I take the bus, it will take me double the time.”*

*“If the City continues to develop as it has, redeveloped areas will become increasingly congested like Scott’s Addition.”*

*“It is not safe when people are driving around looking for parking.”*

*“When you have an area that’s supposed to be walkable but there’s not grocery store or pharmacy, how do people get to those things? It’s no longer walkable.”*

*“Parking overflow into a neighborhood destroys its character and quality.”*

*“City of Richmond doesn’t currently have mass transit infrastructure necessary to allow persons to move around without cars.”*

*“Eliminating the minimums is a giveaway to developers. Developers will abuse this.”*

*There are safety issues with walking around downtown at night. A car is safer than being out walking on the street.”*

*“Parking multiple blocks away could be unsafe.”*

**Ideas:**

- Create parking maximums
- Should be done on a case-by-case basis depending on the neighborhood
- Focus on transit improvements first

*“Do we owe something to residents to have parking on street in front of their residence, who has the right to that good?”*

*“There are a lot of churches that have purchased adjacent lots. These are areas where there could be more parking.”*

*“There is too much free parking on the streets, if you had to pay to park in streets, more people would utilize the paid parking area in decks.”*

*“We shouldn’t encourage people to drive to bars. Scott’s Addition specifically is mostly bars.”*

*“Get the infrastructure in place first so that it is safe to walk, bike, and ride transit before removing parking.”*

**Areas cited as having the most parking issues:**

- Manchester
- Carytown
- Scott’s Addition
- City Center
- The Fan
- Museum District



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## What we heard | Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

### Benefits:

- Potential for aging in place
- Opportunities for wealth building
- Multigenerational living on one property
- Can add to affordable housing stock
- Will support a growing population

*“Large percentage of Church Hill homes have basements that would be well equipped to become ADU.”*

*“Denser neighborhoods can create new housing there instead of messing with existing buildings.”*

*“It might be counterproductive to restrict person’s ability to invest in their property, bring tax revenue into the city, and create more places to live in desirable areas by not allowing ADUs.”*

*“I am interested in what ADUs could provide in the city. It’s been happening in places like California for years to help with housing and affordability. I have an aging parent and it would be nice to have her right next door.”*

*“Market forces would get people to create higher quality ADUs.”*

*“We are growing and we need housing units to house a growing population.”*

*“If the people who had to work on Special Use Permits (SUPs) no longer have to, they could shift around their work.”*

*“ADUs can reduce the burden of home ownership with the added income.”*

*“ADUs can provide housing for the elderly, transitioning young adults, and low-income individuals.”*

## **Concerns:**

- Cost is a major barrier
- Could affect neighborhood character
- Could obstruct light for neighbors
- Privacy concerns
- Potential for substandard housing

*“I wonder if our infrastructure could handle the increase in households. I worry about overburdening our utilities.”*

*“How much of the city would automatically be excluded from building ADUs if we create setback or lot coverage requirements?”*

*“A big deal is also where the windows and doors are because there can be problems with where a door or porch is located. It can limit privacy, too.”*

*“By-right implies you can do whatever you want with impunity.”*

*“Not having any parking or being able to support people living there is not responsibly creating density.”*

*“I like the idea but do not like property owners who do not live on the property to add more density on their properties.”*

*“When I went through the SUP process, I didn’t have any representation which you need to explain things and get you in contact with people. It became politicized and I spent hours on getting it through City Council and having meetings with my City Councilperson and civic association. I faced a ton of pushback from neighbors speaking up against me at City Council meetings even though it was supported by PDR and the Planning Commission.”*

*“Maybe there’s not as much demand as anticipated. I worry that the only people who are going to do it are going to be the people from rental companies.”*

*“Could ADU’s affect other property values within the same block?”*

## **Design Review:**

*“How does a design review process add onto costs? A lot of homeowners who want to have an ADU might be price-sensitive when it comes to construction and financing.”*

*“Materials, architectural features, and height are all concerns for design review process.”*

*“I don’t want ADUs to have too many cumbersome design standards that make it too hard to create one.”*

*“I think a design review is a slippery slope and should only be there to prevent really egregious things. I would say we need to be careful being overly stringent.”*

*“Somebody could build out a unit in a shipping container in areas with more design character, so I don’t know if I’d want to see that.”*

*“No design review as long as the ADU meets applicable codes.”*

*“I think general restrictions in terms of public safety and setbacks are more important than the look of the structure.”*

*“There has to be room to examine neighborhood character and design before allowing them by-right because each neighborhood is different.”*

**Ideas:**

*“Don’t handcuff parking to ADUs or you won’t have any ADUs.”*

*“Could we regulate interior vs. detached ADUs differently?”*

*We should keep setbacks and height restrictions. No one wants a three story ADU right on the property line.”*

*“If you wanted to incentivize affordable housing, it would be an enforcement challenge for staff.”*

*“There should only be one ADU per lot and it should be a minority of the square footage of the main house.”*

*“Is there a city we have looked at to model our ADU ordinance after? What city is doing it really well?”*

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**What we heard | Short-Term Rentals (STRs)****Benefits:**

- Can support local businesses
- Provide more unique experiences for visitors
- Hosts feel like ambassadors for the city
- Provides supplemental income to hosts
- Potential for additional city tax revenue

*“I’d like to have the opportunity to have more than one STR because I enjoy hosting so much.”*

*“People enjoy having STRs as an alternative to a standard hotel room. They can provide more historic, unique experiences.”*

*“There is a common idea that STRs have tons of bad actors. Because it’s a self-regulating situation, high maintenance is needed and forces you to keep property in great condition.”*

*“I have hosted my own STR for 7 years. I love designing new spaces and meet many great people.”*

*“STRs can help people afford buying property while also giving visitors an affordable place to stay.”*

*“The city can greatly benefit from the extra tax revenue.”*

*“I’ve had a long-term rental in Church Hill and had bad experiences with 1-year leases. Short-term renters don’t use appliances as much and generally aren’t as hard on property as with 1-year leases.”*

*“I like having an STR because I can interact with guests and tell them the best places to eat.”*

**Concerns:**

- Noise, parties, and other disturbances
- LLCs or out-of-town owners buying up properties
- Limited ability for enforcement
- Can take away from long-term housing stock
- Multifamily buildings with multiple STRs
- Can exacerbate the lack of affordable housing



*“I’ve had experiences with unwanted partying at a property and the only way for the police to assist is if the property owner says they’re trespassing.”*

*“When you share walls with people, it’s hard to share walls with a hotel. I didn’t sign up for that. There are lots of disturbance concerns. The people who are in and out of a unit don’t have the accountability that a neighbor would have.”*

*“Supply and demand drives prices up in Richmond. As investors buy up properties there are less quality properties leftover for families/permanent residents.”*

*“Investors will buy homes just for STRs. It’s scary to put an anonymous person with no accountability in the neighborhood.”*

*“How can families afford to live and grow in their neighborhoods?”*

*“We need to think more about long-term residents. People feel they’re getting kicked out of their community.”*

*“STRs should not be used as just investment tools.”*

*“Some guests are disrespectful of neighbors and don’t have to take ownership of their actions.”*

#### **Residency Requirement:**

- The residency requirement should remain
- Concerns with inability to enforce the requirement

*“It could open the door for out of town or out of state operators if we don’t have a residency requirement.”*

*“I think what would be as valuable is to restrict the number of days you can rent as an STR rather than have a residency requirement.”*

*“Instead of a primary residency requirement, could it be a city resident requirement? That way you know they are local.”*

*“If you have a residency requirement, it takes care of the other issues with people renting out multiple other properties.”*

*“In R-6 districts you should definitely have the primary residency requirement.”*

*“How would the city even monitor and enforce the residency requirement?”*

*“Without onsite owners, you don’t know who to contact if there’s an issue and nobody to complain to.”*

#### **Ideas:**

- City needs to streamline the permit process
- Could require an annual inspection
- Limit number of STRs per person

*“The restrictions need to be differentiated based upon your certificate of occupancy, meaning a single-family has certain restrictions versus a multifamily property.”*

*“If we can’t enforce laws, they don’t do any good. Enforcement is a huge issue. All this time spent on re-writing the ordinance is nothing without the enforcement piece.”*

*“The city should consider significant fines for noncompliance. You have to hit people in the wallet to get them to comply.”*

*“The current permit process for STRs took me 4 months which is too long.”*

*“STR sites could require proof of city permits to create a posting.”*

*“What is the tax collection structure? Does the local occupancy tax that was implemented in October go to the city?”*

*“Homeowners should be allowed to create an ADU and put STR in it.”*

*“Could we limit the number of STRs per neighborhood or by district?”*

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### **Next Steps**

PDR Staff will compile all feedback from Phases 1 & 2 and develop draft concepts for the three zoning changes. PDR will host another round of community engagement in early December to discuss these draft concepts. Please monitor the website below with dates and information for future community meetings and feedback opportunities:

<https://www.rva.gov/planning-development-review/zoning-changes>



## Appendix: Focus Group Attendees

|                      |                     |                    |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Loreyna Adkins       | Randy Jones         | Martha Warthen     |
| Paige Alcorn         | Nicole Keller       | Stephen Weisensale |
| Katelyn Almeda       | Katherine Kelly     | Sarah Weisiger     |
| David Auman          | Samantha Kenny      | Laurance Wieder    |
| David Barnett        | Thomas King         | Darin Williams     |
| Margaret Barre       | Andria Kobylinski   | Sidney Wilson      |
| Brandon Beall        | Georgia Krapf       | Christina Woolford |
| Brian Beard          | Burton Kunz         | Joseph Yates       |
| Brooke Betts         | Sarah L'Herrou      |                    |
| Brian Bills          | Justin Liang        |                    |
| Mark Brandon         | Gregory Lucyk       |                    |
| B.Y. Brown           | Mason Mairead       |                    |
| Robert Brown         | Jill McAuliffe      |                    |
| Caryl Burtner        | Connie McHale       |                    |
| Mark Cardona         | Hannah McHugh       |                    |
| Janes Carlson        | Eric McWilliams     |                    |
| Whit Caulkins        | Richard Meagher     |                    |
| Jeselle Christenson  | Robert Melvin       |                    |
| Whit Clements        | Charles Menges      |                    |
| Carole Conner        | Patty Merrill       |                    |
| Greg Cooperman       | Luigi Mignardi      |                    |
| Thomas Courtney      | Kirk Milikan        |                    |
| Caley Crawford       | EG Miller           |                    |
| Mitchell Danese      | Haley Minter        |                    |
| Andrew Duke          | LaJuan Neal         |                    |
| Kathleen Duncan      | David Patton        |                    |
| Moriah Fetter        | Tim Pfohl           |                    |
| Sybil Foxworth       | Evan Price          |                    |
| Lizzie Garrett       | Will Quinn          |                    |
| Clark Glave          | Tyler Rackley       |                    |
| Wyatt Gordon         | Susan Rebillot      |                    |
| Micah Graf           | Anne Richardson     |                    |
| Thomas Grant         | John Richmond       |                    |
| Elizabeth Greenfield | Ryan Robertson      |                    |
| Deanna Griffin       | Taylor Rule         |                    |
| Glenda Haggins       | Beth Rutledge       |                    |
| Lisa Hahn            | Melissa Savenko     |                    |
| John Hamilton        | Erik Shilts         |                    |
| Tiffany Harris       | Erica Sklar         |                    |
| Donta Harris         | Joe Sokohl          |                    |
| Cynthia Harrison     | Michael Stapor      |                    |
| Grady Hart           | Mary-Helen Sullivan |                    |
| Brian Hayes          | Mark Terrill        |                    |
| Kerthy Hearn         | Elizabeth Upadhyaya |                    |
| Rose Hinnant         | Stacie Vanchieri    |                    |
| Thomas Innes         | William Vaughan     |                    |
| Allana John          | Matthew Via         |                    |
| Kirk Johnson         | Lance Warren        |                    |