

Sherwood Park Civic Association (SPCA) Special Meeting Notes

September 21, 2026

The meeting was hosted by Union Presbyterian Seminary and attended by approximately 35 residents. Donna Hughs opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and introducing John Gass and Kevin Vonck, Planning Director for the City of Richmond. John proceeded to ask Kevin questions submitted by the SPCA community about the 3rd Draft of Code Refresh. A sample of the questions and answers are listed below.

1. Councilperson Gibson mentioned the Cultural Heritage Stewardship plan last week, and some of us don't recall the key points of the plan and how it will interact with zoning, particularly the latest version of Code Refresh. Please elaborate.
 - Despite the vast number of historic and cultural resources in Richmond, the City has never had a city-wide comprehensive plan or process for identifying, evaluating, and protecting these community assets. The purpose of a CHSP is to identify, preserve, and promote stewardship of a community's cultural assets and historic resources. These may include buildings, structures, places, landscapes, below-ground resources (like archaeological artifacts or cemeteries) or more intangible types of resources like community ties and oral history. A plan also provides a way to manage change as communities evolve and grow over time. Therefore, preparation of this plan was identified as an important next step following the adoption of *Richmond 300*.
 - This must go in front of City Council for consideration and approval. Specific considerations:
 - How we manage cultural and historical resources
 - Regulatory policies
 - City-wide archaeological projects
 - Real estate tax abatement considerations
 - Design overlay districts
 - An example - the Fan is considering establishing a design overlay district in order to delay demolition projects and ensure they go through an approval process. To establish a design overlay district, the planning commission presents areas in need, or a civic association submits a proposal or poll from their respective neighborhood, and it then goes to the planning commission and city council.

2. The Commonwealth allowed cities to enact measures encouraging attainable housing, beginning implementation in July 2027. A Council paper is circulating to create the first step, an Advisory Committee, to guide efforts by the Council. How will that group interact with Code Refresh, especially schedule-wise?
 - John shared the 1st step would be to form an advisory committee which would take considerable time:
 - Then establish who can join this committee
 - What type of incentives could be provided
 - Review areas of feasibility
3. In 2020 The Canopy apartments were built after months long back and forth with neighborhood associations. In the end, 301 apartments were built on 15 acres of land. Under Code Refresh these apartments would be zoned RM-C. The remaining 19 acres of the Westwood Tract have been left as open space which is privately owned by the Seminary. The proposed Code Refresh zoning is a new category in Draft 3. Campus (CMP) “Allows for a range of larger-scale civic, educational, medical, office, and residential uses, generally within multiple buildings centered around a series of interconnected open spaces.” Multiple buildings could be up to 7 stories high, with 10-foot setbacks, parking between the street and the buildings, and 40% lot coverage with 20% vegetation. Originally, this parcel was proposed to be zoned Institutional which would have restricted buildings to 3 stories and 70% lot coverage. Why was the designation changed to a new category? Why are they not zoned the same as The Canopy? Or how about Open Space, per current usage by the Seminary? The City has Richmond 300 goals for more community park areas throughout the City, yet land availability and cost make this challenging. Youpon Place is effectively a “free city park” enjoyed by people from a wide area of Northside. Wouldn’t it be a win to keep it that way?
 - The Open Space was established as a Campus because it is not paid for by the City and is privately owned by the Seminary. Additionally, it was designated as Campus (CMP) because no buildings are set on it. The City would look at the setbacks to ensure higher stories would, indeed, be set back. The Park is designated as a Campus. There is no cap on the number of units - Code Refresh 3 established Campus areas which allow for larger scale buildings up to 7 stories.
4. What happens to Campus designation when no longer an apartment/campus designation?

- John did not have an answer, but said they are looking into that.
5. Last year Council approved the 5 Points Neighborhood Node. Richmond 300 defines a neighborhood node as “A local crossroads typically within, or next to, larger residential areas that offers goods and services to nearby residents, employees, and visitors.” The master plan calls for the development of a network of Great streets with urban design and multi-modal access that creates beautiful and welcoming corridors throughout the city. How will those goals be reached for the neighborhood node with the currently proposed zoning? What is the process / timeline for integrating Nodes into the zoning process, when the ordinance for Node predates Code Refresh?
 - There are currently different recommendations to change zoning or establish overlay districts. Zoning doesn’t currently align with the master plan.
 6. The Thrive Church is a 1-story church in an area of 1-story homes. A MX-3 designation would be oppressive in height/volume, and permitted uses could be problematic to the context. Is there another District that could be less offensive?
 - MX-3 zoning is available for churches who may want to do more – can allow for more independence. If housing options are different than neighborhood, could be designated as RMB (12), or up to 1500 sq ft of commercial space, or group living.
 7. There are 2 roughly similar petitions getting strong support for establishing a Referendum allowing voters to decide on sweeping zoning changes. If successful, the Referendum would be in the November 2027 election cycle at earliest. Both petitions are calling for a retroactive implementation, possibly voiding Code refresh if passed by Council. How would a retroactive voiding work?
 - Council would have to decide what happens with these referendums if passed and voted upon.
 8. Question about 3207 Hermitage Road (Builders Exchange Building) – could developers obtain special use permits?
 - Kevin will look into this. Developers would have to act on their permits within 3 years of approval; otherwise, it is void if the permit has expired.

We ran out of time to address the remaining questions, but John assured us he would try to obtain answers.

Council member Gibson then addressed the group regarding Waldorf School's ordinance #2026-109 for the slip lane project. She provided the background which led us to where we are today. Waldorf's ordinance was to go in front of the Council on Monday, September 28th, but she was in favor of delaying the proposal for Council review. Some of the reasons cited were neighborhood objections, the aesthetic ramifications, and traffic and safety concerns. If it was to be approved, the school would have 18 months to submit a master plan. The Department of Public Work would then approve depending on certain conditions being met and whether it aligns with The Master Plan. Neighborhood attendees spoke up about the numerous concerns already raised (i.e. safety, Olmstead neighborhood, etc.) The slip lane closed for 3 years due to safety. DPW staff attending had not been asked to evaluate the proposed use of the property itself, including the potential impacts of the proposed 34-space parking lot, drop-off and pick-up lane on the surrounding community, roadway, traffic, pedestrian, or bicycle circulation. Their understanding was that they were being asked primarily whether they had any objection to the sale of the City property only. Councilperson Gibson proposed revisiting the plan with mediators. She also pledged to work with the city planning department to look at safety concerns. She had asked for a traffic study done (that was not done) but will ask again. Waldorf indicated it may withdraw the ordinance.