

CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
WORK SESSION MINUTES
November 29, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.
City Hall Council Chamber, 605 E. Main Street

The Charlottesville City Council held a special meeting in the format of a work session on Wednesday, November 29, 2023. Mayor Snook called the meeting to order with all members present: Mayor Lloyd Snook, Vice Mayor Juandiego Wade, Councilors Michael Payne, Brian Pinkston and Leah Puryear.

James Freas, Director of Neighborhood Development Services introduced the topic: Draft Zoning Ordinance - Special Deliberations on Zoning Map. He introduced staff and consultants who were available to answer Council questions:

- Missy Creasy, Deputy Director of Neighborhood Development Services
- Jenny Koch, Urban Planner with RHI
- Lee Einsweiler, Principal at Code Studio, and
- Christy Dodson, Associate Principal at Code Studio.

According to a memo from Mr. Freas, dated November 29, 2023: “The Zoning Map defines where the requirements of the Zoning Districts apply. As each district’s rules define the intensity of development, in terms of height, massing, and mixture of uses, which in turn relates to the types of homes and businesses that can locate there, these districts effectively define the feel of a neighborhood, the opportunities available there, and what types of households will live there. These districts also define the change in these places over time, as the City evolves and adjusts to meet the changing needs of the community for residential and commercial growth, different types of housing, and community expectations for addressing priorities like climate change, historic preservation and others. The opportunity and challenge of developing the zoning map is in addressing the many different interests and perspectives involved.”

Mr. Snook raised questions about the handling of entrance corridors, and the future role of the Entrance Corridor Review Board (ERB). He asked about the criteria around the affordable housing bonus. He stated that the direction of the Draft Zoning Ordinance will cause the loss of architectural appeal for the sake of maximizing capacity as an engineering solution to meet demand.

City Attorney Jacob Stroman stated that the ERB would be able to address massing issues and setbacks.

Attorney Sharon Pandak advised that there is a need to update all guidelines, and that Council should clarify what the ERB can do within the confines of the Zoning Ordinance.

Council discussed the mayor’s concerns.

Ms. Puryear expressed concern about displacement in various areas of the city.

Council discussed the need to articulate powers of the ERB in an ordinance, and to use a Special Use Permit process for certain building requests at entrance corridors except the US 29 North corridor, as an interim measure until ordinance parameters are defined and approved by Council. Mr. Freas mentioned the proposed use of the Core Neighborhoods Corridor Overlay.

Ms. Pandak suggested phrasing the architectural appeal guidelines as “harmonious community”.

Councilors expressed concerns about allowing commercial uses in residential districts, and a majority agreed to revisit the consideration at a future Zoning Ordinance review.

Council began the discussion about zoning district definitions with a question about the phrase “house-sized development”. Mr. Freas stated that restraining the area footprint of a development minimizes flexibility for layout. Ms. Dodson added that several factors influence the guideline of “house-sized” development in the R-A designation. Mr. Snook asked about a discussion from two years ago with the consultants who ensured the plan would be for house-sized development in R-A zones, and he disagreed with 9,000 square feet being considered house-sized development. Definitions of zoning types were also discussed.

The following summary follows a review of specific areas of the Zoning Map, and associated zoning rules, where Councilors requested review of the proposed zoning. Council provided guidance to staff on zoning rules to apply for these areas.

- **Plymouth Road:** As an implementation of the Medium Intensity Land Use, the R-B zoning in the area of Plymouth Road is intended to introduce a housing type that can be more affordable than single family homes, diversifying the housing available in this area. The Medium Intensity designation here likely stemmed from the access to Greenleaf Park.
- **Davis Avenue:** Davis Avenue, and its parallel street, Watson Avenue, have lots and infrastructure that can readily accommodate the proposed R-B zoning designation. The Comprehensive Plan identified this area as Medium Intensity because of the access to Davis Field and associated park space with the intention of introducing a housing type that can be more affordable than single-family homes, diversifying the housing available in this area.
- **Jefferson Park Avenue (JPA):** Dating back as far as the 2003 Comprehensive Plan and associated zoning amendments, the area along JPA has been identified for more intensive development to accommodate student housing. The current zoning allows up to 8 or 9 stories by special use permit for those lots fronting JPA while the side streets are zoned for two-unit buildings. The proposed zoning is for up to 5 stories (7 with affordable housing bonus) along JPA, with 8 stories at key intersections (10 with affordable housing bonus). The side streets are proposed for 3 stories (5 with affordable housing bonus).
- **Rugby Avenue:** Rugby Avenue is a key corridor connecting Preston, Rose Hill Drive, and the Route 250 bypass and is appropriately designated as Medium Intensity in the Comprehensive Plan. The mapping logic methodology for designating the R-C district identified the intersections of streets designated as neighborhood A streets or higher, which includes both the intersection of Rugby Avenue and Rose Hill as well as Rugby Avenue

and Rugby Rd/Preston Ave. The methodology calls for the R-C designation to extend 600 feet or to the next cross street.

- Orange Street: The East High Street corridor is proposed for CX-5. This zoning designation reaches a couple of lots down Orange Street. Council could limit the CX-5 designation to just the first lot on the corner of E. High and Orange and put the following two lots in the R-A district matching the designation of the remainder of the street.
- Preston Ave: Preston Avenue between 10th Street and Rugby Road is another significant road that had been identified for multi-unit development. Much of this area is already zoned for that type of use in the current ordinance. There are three small lots on Rosser Street proposed for RX-3 that Council may want to consider shifting to the R-A designation, consistent with the remainder of the street.
- Locust & Calhoun: The R-C designation at this location is the result of the mapping logic methodology, which identified corner lots at lower intensity intersections within the Medium Intensity land use areas. If Council would like to change the zoning designation, the next option would be R-B.
- Transitions: There are two types of transitions used where higher intensity districts abut lower intensity districts.
 1. Common Lot Line – where the transition occurs along the back or side lot line, the higher intensity property must incorporate setbacks, landscaping, and stepbacks to manage the transition.
 2. Across Street – where the transition occurs across a street, the higher intensity property utilizes stepbacks. A key difference in these transitions is that in these districts, there is still an interest in achieving a strong “streetwall”, which is a defined and consistent edge close to the pedestrian zone that supports the sense of safety and comfort for pedestrians. Therefore, the setback remains 5 to 15 feet in the RX districts and 0 to 10 feet in the CX and NX districts. Significantly, the setbacks are measured after allocating space for the required streetscape, which includes sidewalk and greenzone (trees). The total width for the required streetscape is based on the street type, with the narrowest in the code being 11 feet. With this requirement, every ‘across the street transition’ effectively includes a minimum 6-foot-wide sidewalk and a row of street trees in a minimum 5-foot “greenscape zone”.
- Gateway Areas: Many of the roadways entering the City are proposed for greater heights/higher intensities close to or at the entrance. This result is a reflection of two ideas that guided aspects of the land use map. One of these ideas reflects the urban design principle of marking key intersections with taller buildings and greater intensity of use. Some of these key intersections happen to be near the city borders such as the intersection of E. High and Long Street, which is proposed for CX-8. The other idea was to take advantage of the large suburban style commercial strip malls that are under single ownership and therefore potentially more easily developed with mixed use buildings.

Consideration of redeveloping these locations with more mixed-use urban environments has been a consistent theme since the Comprehensive Plan process began in 2017.

Ms. Pandak clarified that the proposed Zoning Ordinance does not recommend downzoning in any area.

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

BY Order of City Council

BY Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council