

12.4.24 meeting memo (recycled from 11.20.24)

Some thoughts about the proposed “Density Bonus Program” as this program is being developed:

1. “Spot zoning” may be an issue, as currently the program applies to one parcel only. Possible mitigating factors: a) we are considering applying it to other districts as we proceed with our updates, just haven’t done that yet; b) It does apply to one whole zoning district in which there are two parcels. c) who would sue, Buttermilk? (would they waste resources on this?)
2. The appetite for “affordable housing” in the small towns seems to have cooled parallel to the State’s endorsing larger projects (with “bonus” density built in) – CCRPC recommends focusing on just more housing, especially in the already-built-up village centers, as per “enabling Better Places” and, even better than that, abandoning the whole density concept entirely (as ACCD recommends) with the idea that this is more feasible in small towns . We spoke with Taylor Newton of CCRPC and Jacob Hemmerick of ACCD about this.
3. The idea of “public parking” for bonus units is not that popular with Pete and Josh. Six parcels in the village floodplain (on Esplanade and Lower Bridge St) have applied for FEMA buyouts, and these parcels may not be built on again. Parking, however, would be allowed. Public parking there? Also, many feel that there is only the “perception of a parking problem,” but that there are actually enough parking spaces at almost anytime of day in the village.
4. It is administratively cumbersome to bind the town to “in perpetuity” requirements, given that the town staff and committees turn over regularly, These would have to be monitored and enforced. Mitigation: just require “affordability” for 15 years, which is the same as Act 47 requires for ‘Affordable housing developments” Even this requires staff time and attention and monitoring that might not be available.
5. Understanding that Buttermilk has asserted that they are not interested in either affordable housing or giving up any of their parking, it is possible that we can remove the commercial requirement, and they elect to stay with their 31 units. In this case, they will have to make the units larger and more expensive to fill the ground floor. Given that we have a housing crisis, and a lack of all types of housing, does this make sense? The smaller units would be the ones to more nearly approach being “affordable.” In addition, Buttermilk has spoken to Tyler about the lack of any interest in renting the commercial space in building 1, now completely empty, so would it make sense to allow at least some of this space to become residential? Maybe keep only the front ¼ commercial. Once again, we have a housing crisis, and with this scenario, we have wasted a further opportunity to add much needed housing. Mitigation: just increase the base residential density to 20 U/A to give Buttermilk the extra units (15) necessary to fill the ex-commercial spaces with a mix of sizes/prices of units.
6. CCRPC tentatively estimates Richmond’s share of new housing at 165 units by 2029, or approx. 36/year for the next 4 ½ years. So far in 2024 there have been 14

CO's issued for new dwelling units (5 ADU, 9 SFD), and 6 permits issued for future year CO's (3 ADU, 3 SFD).

Addendum to memo (11.24.24)

7. The current draft has gone out to Town Attorney Dave Rugh, and to Josh Arneson and Pete Gosselin, to review for legality and feasibility.