

PARTNERSHIP FOR SMARTER GROWTH

Background Paper and Questionnaire for City of Richmond Candidates

About PSG:

The Partnership for Smarter Growth's (PSG) mission is "to educate and engage the communities in the Richmond region to work together to improve our quality of life by guiding where and how we grow." We've hosted forums keynoted by nationally recognized leaders in urban planning and transportation and tours in the city and surrounding counties. We've partnered with RVA Rapid Transit in a successful campaign to win public support for the Pulse Bus Rapid Transit and a modern, region-wide transit network. We've endorsed smart growth plans and projects and pressed for an improved planning process in the City of Richmond.

Endorsement of Bike Walk RVA and RVA Rapid Transit:

We endorse the issues and questions provided to the candidates for Mayor and Council by Bike Walk RVA and RVA Rapid Transit/Virginia Transit Association/Virginians for High Speed Rail, to which we add the following discussion and questions about the planning process in the City and public engagement in that process.

Background to Planning Challenges in the City:

The city created the Downtown Master Plan and the Riverfront Plan through an extremely popular and hands-on public engagement process. Yet in recent years, administration decisions regarding the football training center, Shockoe Bottom stadium proposal, East End riverfront, and the Boulevard have failed to include serious public engagement and careful alternatives analysis prior to decisions being made. These failures have resulted in major shortcomings in city proposals and contributed to a breakdown in trust between the city and its citizens.

Determining the appropriate types of development for particular parts of the city is hampered by an out of date citywide master plan. In turn, the city doesn't have current sector plans for each defined commercial and mixed-use neighborhood.

Nearly every development project is reviewed under a special use permit without making the required findings under the City Charter and without sector plans to provide guidance on how a project should conform to the community vision. The city seeks few, if any community benefits and design changes in return for special use permits and rezoning. Zoning for many areas of the city is out of date and reflects a time when manufacturing dominated much of the city.

The city planning function has been made subservient to chasing economic development deals. The city has cut planning positions, and lost planning staff who have been frustrated by the lack of commitment to effective planning and public engagement.

Further frustrating public involvement, the city makes it very hard to track planning and zoning issues via the city website. Instead of providing landing pages for individual neighborhoods or

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issue areas, where all relevant documents can be found, the site forces a citizen to search in scattered locations including for disconnected ordinances in the legistar database.

Improving Public Engagement and Process in Planning and Zoning:

Richmond has a diverse, creative and engaged citizenry, waiting to hear how the next Mayor will involve them in the process of planning the future of our city. *(Candidates can copy and paste questions to a new page to create room to answer each question).*

Planning Process:

- 1) What will you do to improve planning and zoning in the City of Richmond, including involving the public in planning?
- 2) What will be your approach to potential economic development deals which don't conform to current city plans/zoning or where the city doesn't have an updated sector plan?
- 3) Will you direct and fund upgrades to the city website that make planning information and ongoing initiatives easier to find and track?

Other Planning Issues:

Land use and transit: To be effective, public transit investments like the Bus Rapid Transit need to be integrated with land use and achieve economic benefits for all residents.

- 1) Do you support mixed-use transit-oriented development within walking distance of the BRT?
- 2) How will you ensure that the BRT investment enhances economic and social equity?

Parking: Downtown Richmond is marked by many blocks of above-ground structured parking and surface parking lots. These deaden the streets, occupy land that could be more productive mixed-use development with ground floor retail, and reduce the city's potential tax base.

- 1) Will you support a study of the parking inventory and an evaluation of progressive parking policies and zoning to promote use of transit, walking and bicycling, and to encourage redevelopment of parking lots and placement of parking underground?
- 2) Will you support reduced parking requirements within walking distance of high-frequency transit?

Archaeology: Despite a rich history, the city lacks an ordinance to ensure archaeological research is conducted, and artifacts safeguarded, prior to construction.

- 1) Will you support an archaeology ordinance and commission?

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Trees: Our trees are a valuable economic and environmental asset and have a strong constituency of committed supporters. Despite appeals, the city has not updated its tree ordinance and lacks an effective and well-funded tree canopy investment strategy.

- 1) Will you support an update to the tree ordinance, require a citywide inventory of trees on public property, a strong tree commission, and the funding necessary to preserve and expand the tree canopy?