

Roanoke City Council to vote again on rezoning changes

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, a slate of zoning amendments that took effect this spring will remain in place.

by [Samantha Verrelli](#) September 13, 2024

Roanoke residents will have their last public chance to address the city council on Monday with concerns over an ongoing zoning controversy. But, regardless of the council's vote, a slate of amendments that took effect this spring will remain in place.

A public hearing at 7 p.m. Monday will lead to a vote on whether to pass again, with minor changes, the set of amendments approved in March. The amendments came after studies showed an immediate need for housing in Roanoke, and they allowed for greater building density in residential neighborhoods.

This resulted in a lawsuit against the city by 13 homeowners who claimed that the city hadn't followed proper procedures for advertising the vote and holding public hearings. In response, the city rewrote the amendment package, with very minor changes, to be run through the approval process again.

The vote on Monday is likely to have more effect on the status of the suit than on the amendments themselves. Either way the council votes, the amendments from the spring will remain active.

If the council readopts the amendments, City Attorney Tim Spencer said, "The majority of the lawsuit becomes moot." If it votes "no," he said he will need to talk to the council to determine next steps.

The city has cited studies that show a dire need for housing in the city. The problem, said Chris Chittum, director of planning, building and development, is one of scarcity. He said increased housing availability will in turn help affordability. The housing studies the city cited, among other resources, can be found [here](#).

Concerns raised by residents have included traffic, property values, density changes, neighborhood character and parking. Read more about the amendments, the suit and the decision to consider readoption [here](#).

On Aug. 12, the planning commission voted against recommending the readoption to council, after originally recommending adoption of the first set of amendments in March. Read more about the vote [here](#).

Since that vote, Chittum has hosted three zoning reform open houses at city libraries where he presented information about the amendments and fielded residents' questions.

At these open houses, residents expressed fears that developers would build to the maximum allowed density in the city. Chittum said these worst-case scenarios are unlikely. The majority of Roanoke's residential areas only sit at 40% to 45% of allowed density, a figure that is expected to rise just 3% over the next 30 years, even with the recent zoning changes.

"We went through [the readoption] to have a good faith process to ensure that we follow the process in an effort to address many of the concerns raised by the plaintiffs in their lawsuit," Spencer said.

Anthony Stavola, a plaintiff in the suit against the city, said he thinks council should “table or postpone making a final decision until after the election” and after the hire of a new permanent city manager.

Three council seats and the mayor’s seat are up for election in November. The city has had an interim city manager, Lydia Pettis-Patton, since June following the abrupt resignation of Bob Cowell. Spencer recently said the city is on schedule to hire a permanent city manager, which the city originally said should be done in the fall.