

Roanoke City Council votes on controversial zoning amendments

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ROANOKE, Va. (WDBJ) - In a meeting Monday night, the Roanoke City Council voted in favor of controversial zoning amendments initially approved in March, despite some public debate.

The amendments were designed to address the city's housing shortage and boost affordable housing options by permitting more multi-family units implemented earlier this year.

"I can think of no greater welcome than what you passed in March, a chance to live here. When I first returned to this beautiful city, I could not truly find a place to live that would match me," said Emergency Medicine Doctor Robert Brown.

The changes aimed to replace the previous single-family zoning restrictions, which some critics argue perpetuated segregation and limited housing equity.

"Zoning for single family only... prevents equity, it stymies generational wealth transfer, and it allows stereotypes and racist beliefs that thrive when relationships are not built with neighbors who are different than self," said Church Women United Member Virginia Sweet.

But many don't agree with the changes. Residents who fear the impact on their neighborhoods filed a lawsuit.

"On my little lot, where we have one house, about 9,000 square feet, someone could build four units on there. They could have up to eight unrelated people living in them. I mean, it probably would never happen, but that's what your ordinance would allow," said Roanoke resident William Hackworth.

"Diminish our property value, sow seeds of distrust between neighbors, provide no new affordable housing, create parking problems, strain our utility systems and threaten stability and character of our neighborhood," said Grandin Court neighborhood resident Owen McGuire.

The planning commission had also recommended against re-adopting the reforms last month. Despite these objections, Roanoke City Council members argue the zoning changes will foster inclusivity and growth.

"I think the single most important reason for amending our zoning code is ending segregation," said council member Peter Volosin.

"This zoning change will create opportunities for different types of housing that address the needs of families, young professionals, and seniors," said council member Vivian Sanchez-Jones.

"It is going to ensure that we use the remaining pieces of land very efficiently," said council member Trish White-Boyd.

The only member who voted against it was Stephanie Moon-Reynolds.