

Roanoke City Council reaffirms controversial zoning reforms amid community pushback

Supporters and opponents of the zoning changes spoke at Tuesday's public hearing

ROANOKE, Va. – Roanoke City Council has reaffirmed its decision to eliminate single-family-only zoning in the city, despite legal challenges and vocal opposition from some residents.

The council's vote on Tuesday followed a lawsuit that forced the city to revisit the changes, first approved in March, sparking renewed debate on the future of the city's neighborhoods.

Anthony Stavola, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, expressed concerns that the zoning reforms would drive up housing costs rather than increase affordability.

"We understand there's a need for affordable housing," Stavola said. "Unfortunately, studies show these types of zoning changes often result in more expensive housing."

The zoning changes aim to allow for the construction of multi-family housing in areas previously restricted to single-family homes.

Proponents argue this will increase the housing supply, leading to more affordable options.

However, opponents fear the changes will alter the character of established neighborhoods and lead to issues like overcrowding and parking shortages.

On the other side of the debate, younger residents, like aspiring homeowner Robert Brown, believe the reforms could make living in Roanoke more attainable.

"Housing right now is beyond my reach," Brown said. "To have middle-level housing for young professionals is a great welcome."

The council voted 6-1 in favor of the zoning changes, with Council Member Stephanie Moon Reynolds casting the lone dissenting vote.

Reynolds argued that the decision was premature, citing concerns about the city's lack of a permanent city manager.

"I have reservations about moving forward," she said, emphasizing the divided opinions within the community.

Other council members remained firm in their support, dismissing fears that increased multi-family housing would harm neighborhoods.

"I don't buy this notion that the fear of seeing increased multi-family housing is going to ruin our neighborhoods," Vice-Mayor Joe Cobb said.

The city expects the reforms to have long-term benefits, though the full impact may not be felt immediately.

With the upcoming November elections, opponents of the reforms are hoping to sway the council's composition. Many have vowed to make their voices heard at the ballot box.

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