
Correction

June 18, 2024, 4:57 p.m.: Roanoke City Council on June 17 started a process to possibly amend a consequential zoning revision that it passed in the spring. An earlier version of this story contained an inaccuracy: that council had actually repealed the earlier action. The story has been updated.

The vote Monday only began those processes, said City Attorney Tim Spencer. Whether or not the zoning changes are repealed, it will require the usual months-long public notice period, plus workshops and other opportunity for input, he said Tuesday.

“This takes away all doubt,” Spencer said to the city council. “And allows us to move forward in a more efficient and transparent way.”

Neighborhood zoning reform was part of a 58-page ordinance that passed on a 5-2 city council vote in March. The matter took up most of a four-hour city council meeting that stretched past 11 p.m., including a mixture of supportive and oppositional comments from more than 20 citizens.

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Filibuster slows, doesn't stop passage of omnibus Roanoke zoning reform

One intent of the zoning changes is to better enable the creation of affordable housing, city planners said in March. Most of the city's land is zoned for single-family housing, creating a bottleneck in the types of available dwellings.

It was a 4-1 vote to repeal the zoning reforms on Monday, with Councilwoman Stephanie Moon Reynolds casting the lone vote against. Councilwoman Vivian Sanchez-Jones was absent, as was Councilman Luke Priddy, whose resignation is effective June 30.

Residents sue to repeal Roanoke zoning overhaul

As of Monday afternoon, the city had not filed any response with the courts to that April 17 lawsuit, according to court documents listed online.

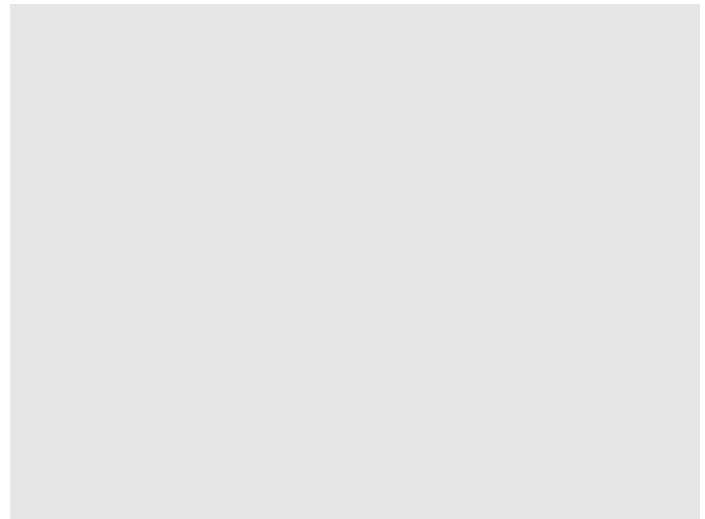
Moon Reynolds voted against the zoning reform in March, and she voted against the reconsideration measures on Monday.

“What is interesting to me is that city staff refuses to admit the errors that were made in the public notice that was required at that time,” Moon Reynolds said. “Especially when questions were raised by the public and myself about some of the errors that were in the ad itself.”

Moon Reynolds said her initial warnings about possible litigation fell on deaf ears. She said to her, the reform is not about introducing more types of housing, but rather more density of housing.

“This obscures the true impact of the amendment: a significant increase in housing density across all neighborhoods, including my own,” Moon Reynolds said.

“It appears the staff is attempting to downplay this critical aspect from public scrutiny.”



Moon Reynolds

HEATHER ROUSSEAU, The Roanoke Times

Moon Reynolds said she voted no due to lack of staff transparency. She said without substantial changes, she will be compelled to vote no again on future zoning reform.

Vice Mayor Joe Cobb said city staff held 13 open houses at libraries across the city in the run-up to the zoning reform vote in March.

“Exclusionary zoning was created to keep people from living in certain parts of our city,” Cobb said. “This specifically addresses that history of segregation, and I hope that will become part of the conversation.”

Cobb

File 2024, The Roanoke Times

Planners: Zoning changes encourage more housing in Roanoke

One of the Roanoke citizens who signed onto the lawsuit against zoning reform is former Mayor David Bowers. He is running for mayor this year as a Republican against Cobb, a Democrat, and Moon Reynolds, an independent.

“The council not only doesn’t know what they’re doing,” Bowers said. “They obviously also don’t know how to do it.”

He said the lawsuit was a success. There are other ways to address housing shortages, he said.

“There are thousands of units in the city of Roanoke that need to be updated or are dilapidated or are vacant,” Bowers said.

“That, to me, is the real issue.”

come to the meetings, come to the hearings. Speak up.

After its 2 p.m. session Monday, the city council met behind closed doors to consult with legal counsel for advice about an unspecified legal matter.

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By Luke Weir
