

Could Roanoke again repeal limits on single-family housing? Talks resume Monday

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Conversations about residential zoning will resume again in Roanoke on Monday, with at least one city council member inquiring about reversing controversial changes made last year.

Councilman Nick Hagen wants city staff to study potential effects of repealing zoning changes that were twice approved by the city council in 2024. Some residents have been calling — and suing — for the repeal since the initial approval.

“There is a desire to repeal the above ordinances which deal with the zoning changes,” Hagen wrote in council documents. “Alternatively, there is a desire to amend the ordinances to address policy and transparency concerns.”

What troubles some neighbors about these changes is the removal of a single-family housing category, which dominates residential land use in Roanoke. A housing shortage is driving up costs of rent and property taxes.

Planning staff say the change opens opportunities for sorely needed multifamily-style housing, like duplexes and smaller-sized apartments. It’s one of several methods to address the housing shortage, staff say.

In the year after the zoning changes were enacted, 36 additional housing units were approved for construction, city planners said previously. It’s an incremental change, but one that would add up over the course of years, according to city planners.

Additionally, residents have voiced concern that the changes reduce their say in what might get built near their homes. It was a controversial enough issue that the council voted twice — 5-2 in March, and 6-1 in September — to reaffirm the zoning changes.

Two groups of residents have sued for the ordinances’ repeal. City attorneys filed a motion in April to dismiss those lawsuits, with a decision still pending from the circuit court as of Aug. 1, according to court records online.

Zoning was a top issue for voters during the 2024 city council elections that brought four new members to council, including Hagen. Also new to the city council are Phazhon Nash, Evelyn Powers and Vice Mayor Terry McGuire.

Each of those new members, including Hagen, said before and after elections that they were open to the discussion about repealing or revising the measure. It was a big change, and reversal would also have impacts, Hagen wrote in council documents.

“Such a massive zoning change does require careful study,” Hagen said. “As such, I would like to see staff come back with anticipated real world effects of an outright repeal and/or options for amending to ensure community involvement with developers and neighborhood engagement.”

It’s not the only housing-related item on the city council agenda for Monday. For senior living, Virginia Lutheran Homes has applied for \$40 million in bonds to expand Brandon Oaks Life Plan Community, and is seeking city approval.

The city council will also vote on approval of a five-year plan for using \$2.5 million in annual funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“These funds support programs to provide affordable housing, public services, neighborhood revitalization, economic development, homelessness prevention, and services to low and moderate income people,” city documents said.

The council day starts at 9 a.m. Monday, with a joint meeting of the economic development authority, as well as briefings on the cigarette tax code, hybrid canines and the newly forming homelessness task force.

The housing-related items are scheduled for the 2 p.m. council session, broadcast on YouTube live from the city municipal building.