



**County of Albemarle
Department of Community Development**

Memorandum

To: Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
From: Rachel Falkenstein, Principal Planner
Division: Planning Division
Date: October 2, 2019
Subject: Rio29 Form-Based Code – Planning Commission Work Session #2 Summary

County staff have scheduled four work sessions with the Planning Commission to discuss and receive feedback on a series of form-based code topics for the Rio29 area. On September 17, 2019, staff presented background information, research and recommendations related to streets, parking, and amenity spaces to the Planning Commission. Upcoming work session topics include: 3) architecture, housing and the arts, and 4) a comprehensive review of a draft form-based code “framework”.

Streets

Staff provided an overview of background information, research and community input for Rio29 streets (Attachment A3 and A4). Following this presentation, staff brought one question for discussion and input from the Planning Commission where public and stakeholder input was mixed. The question and the corollary Planning Commission response is outlined below:

Which conceptual streets on the Rio29 Future Connectivity Plan should be subject to higher street improvement requirements, known as “destination streets”?

Staff recommended all “Local Streets” inside the Core area be subject to higher street improvement requirements, classifying them as “Destination Streets”. The property owner/developer would be given the option to develop their equivalent length in other areas of the quadrant, provided that destination streets are continuous and have logical extensions from the Core to other character areas.

The Planning Commission supported staff’s recommendation (above), except for using a new term to identify these streets as “destination streets”. Commissioner Dotson suggested that adding a new term to apply to streets, in addition to the terms already used of local, avenue and boulevard would make the code more confusing. Commissioners Firehock and Bivins encouraged staff to develop regulations to ensure healthy green infrastructure along streets. Commissioners were supportive of improved transit amenities at all transit stops and asked staff to provide a more detailed transit plan for the area. In general, Commissioners acknowledged the need for public investment in transportation infrastructure to support multi-modal transportation opportunities in Rio29, especially public transit.

Parking

Staff provided an overview of background information, research and community input for Rio29 parking (Attachment A3 and A5) as well as an article supporting the argument for a market-based approach towards parking (Attachment A6). Following this presentation, staff brought one question for discussion and input from the Planning Commission. The question and the corollary Planning Commission response is outlined below:

How should staff update the parking standards for the Rio29 area?

Staff recommended a comprehensive and market-driven approach toward parking in Rio29 where: on-site parking is not required to be provided for each use; shared parking is encouraged; and a “park-once” approach is allowed and encouraged. This “park-once” approach would enable users to park and reach their destination(s) within a five-minute walk. Staff also recommended removing minimum parking requirements, creating parking maximum requirements (determined by use or building footprint) and requiring bicycle parking across all character areas.

Several members of the Planning Commission agreed with staff’s recommendation and saw parallels between the Rio29 area and the case study that staff shared for the City of Buffalo, New York which removed with parking requirements entirely. Alternatively, the City of Buffalo requires applicants to submit a parking study for projects over a square footage threshold. Commissioners Riley, Spain, and Bivins supported staff’s recommendation to eliminate parking minimums and require parking maximums. Commissioner Spain expressed concern about this approach and how it might affect persons who are not able to walk long distances to parking. Commissioners Keller and Dotson did not favor removing parking minimum requirements, they alternatively recommended including parking minimums in the code, but not requiring all parking to be located on-site. The parking minimums could be met with off-site, shared, or district parking options. Commissioner Keller noted that eliminating parking requirements is a worthy long-term goal but felt that the infrastructure was not currently sufficient to support alternative modes of travel that would allow users to visit the area without a car.

Amenity Space

Staff provided an overview of background information, research and community input for Rio29 amenity space (Attachment A3 and A7). Following this presentation, staff brought one question for discussion and input from the Planning Commission. The question and the corollary Planning Commission response is outlined below:

How should a form-based code for Rio29 balance the goals of a community “enhanced through conservation and public amenities” with increased flexibility for the development community?

Staff recommended using the Rio29 Small Area Plan’s Future Conservation Network Map to establish the basis for Rio29’s required outdoor space components and requiring construction of public space shown on the Plan at the time of redevelopment. Staff also recommended requiring a percentage of open/amenity space within each development, dictated by the property’s character area. To provide additional flexibility, staff recommended allowing a developer to contribute cash-in-lieu of providing public space on-site to assist with off-site construction of amenity space.

Commissioners were supportive of the cash-in-lieu of recommendation to allow flexibility for developers and property owners and to help fund future amenity spaces. However, Commissioners generally felt that there was not enough amenity space shown on the Future Conservation Network from the Rio29 Small Area Plan. Commissioners asked to see a graphic depiction of the area with more frequent amenity spaces, with a focus on more greenways, small parks and plazas dispersed throughout the Plan area. Commissioners Firehock and Spain also encouraged staff to also think about the design of the amenity spaces with a desire to avoid large undefined spaces which become poorly used spaces. They stated it is important that spaces have key quality design features, such as shade and seating, so that spaces usable and attractive to users. Lastly, Commissioners acknowledged a need for public investment to support public amenity spaces and help catalyze redevelopment.

The third Planning Commission work session will be held on October 15, 2019 focused on the topics of housing, architecture, and arts.