



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico  
Program Title: Community Engagement During COVID-19 Pandemic  
Program Category: Customer Service

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis  
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Department: Public Relations  
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Email: dav127@henrico.us

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton  
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration  
Signature: 

## **Executive Summary**

Transparency and public input are paramount to informed and positive decision-making in the planning process, especially for proposed development projects. All applications for rezonings and provisional use permits require a public hearing with the Henrico County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Often Commissioners and Board members request applicants hold community meetings to provide citizens a greater understanding of the project and an ability to voice their support or concerns. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the applicant coordinated and facilitated these meetings at local schools and other venues, which have been closed or unavailable for public use. The Henrico County Board of Supervisors was determined to continue with “business as usual,” especially as it related to providing residents an opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns regarding pending development requests. The Planning Department was tasked with creating a process to ensure any citizen who wished to become more informed, comment, or ask questions of an applicant was afforded a consistent, safe and secure option. The resulting program includes a representative-sponsored website, expanded notification areas, and access to a videoconferencing platform. Since May 2020, planning staff has conducted nearly 30 virtual community meetings, ensuring public participation continued throughout the pandemic.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

The Henrico County Planning Department experienced an increase in year-over-year rezoning and provisional use permit submissions after the onset of COVID-19 despite the pandemic causing major disruptions to traditional work environments, educational instruction, and businesses. Notifications and public hearings are required in order for the County Board of Supervisors to take action on these land use applications. The challenge became how to engage citizens and garner meaningful input when attendance at public hearings is limited due to COVID-

19. In addition, as typical meeting spaces (libraries, schools, church multi-purpose rooms) were closed, applicants/representatives were unable to hold community meetings to apprise residents and stakeholders of their requests prior to the public hearings. Unwilling to forego the most effective means of informing and educating the community, the Henrico County Board of Supervisors requested applicants and staff coordinate their efforts to identify and establish a program to ensure community participation continued uninterrupted.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

The revised community meeting process has enabled the Planning Department to continue receiving necessary input on proposed development projects. It created an environment that encourages and enhances citizen participation, especially during a pandemic when in-person gatherings have been otherwise limited. The former community meeting process was made virtual and easy to access.

The project provided an innovative approach to engage stakeholders who were unable to attend community meetings. This offered a new way for residents, business owners, and other interested parties to share their comments and concerns regarding their community. The improved public engagement process could be a model for surrounding localities to follow if interested in improving their community input.

This process has been so successful it will remain a requirement of future meetings and public hearings once the pandemic ceases. The Webex community meeting process exemplifies the County's commitment to increased and enhanced citizen engagement, especially when meeting in-person is not an option.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

As part of the rezoning and provisional use permit process, Planning staff encourages applicants to contact property/business owners, residents, and relevant neighborhood groups in the vicinity of a proposed development to gain their feedback. Conducting such a meeting provides a greater understanding of community issues and concerns. Prior to May 2020, the coordination and facilitation of these meetings was the applicant's responsibility. They would consult with the member of the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in whose district the project was proposed to determine the need for a meeting. If one was deemed necessary, they would secure a location, confirm the attendance of the Planning Commissioner, Board of Supervisors district representative, and case planner, and then notify community members. Planning staff's involvement was limited to answering questions related to zoning ordinance requirements, future land use designations, and inquiries about the procedural processes of rezoning.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, two planners were tasked with creating a process to ensure citizens who wished to participate in a meeting or comment remotely were provided safe and secure options at no cost. The Department of Information Technology (IT) had previously identified Cisco's Webex as the preferred videoconferencing platform for the County because it was deemed more secure than other similar options available. Webex has two options for videoconferencing – a "meeting," which is more informal and an "event," which requires a host. The meeting format allows equal participation between attendees, while an event permits a host to control video/audio settings and sharing of information. Given the need for community meetings to have structure (allowing an applicant to make uninterrupted presentations), staff scheduled all such requests as events. All community meetings during the pandemic have been now coordinated and facilitated by Planning staff.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Virginia Governor's Executive Orders regulated in-person gathering limitations. These restrictions fluctuated between permitting 10, 25, and 50

people to gather while maintaining social distancing requirements. The format of the community meetings is based on what is currently allowed.

Originally, in-person attendance was limited to the applicant, case planner, Commission member, elected Board representative, along with Webex and IT staff. These community meetings were held in either a small County auditorium or a conference room in the Planning Department. When the auditorium was used, Information Technology staff was needed to coordinate the use of technology in conjunction with audio and visual components. Recently, virtual meetings have been completely remote. The applicant, representative, case planner, Planning Commissioner, and Board member all join from a location of their choosing. The Webex staff facilitates the meeting remotely.

When health guidelines permit larger gatherings, an in-person element is incorporated with the virtual Webex component. These “hybrid” community meetings allowed those who are comfortable attending in-person to do so in the same room as the applicant, representative, case planner, Planning Commissioner, and Board member. The Webex option was made available to those who chose to join virtually because of the pandemic or lack of available transportation. Both options permit attendees to view the applicant’s presentations and participate in a question-and-answer session.

The hybrid community meetings have been most commonly held in County recreation centers; however, the small auditorium and the Richmond Raceway were also utilized. In selecting a new location, room capacity is reviewed by the County’s Transition Task Force – Site Assessment Group to guarantee all social distancing guidelines are enforced. Once approved as a potential location, Webex, IT, and Recreation/Parks staff held dry runs and technical checks to ensure each facility had the appropriate equipment.

To increase citizen awareness, the Department requested applicants create a website/web presence where application information such as site size, proposed zoning district, concept plans, elevations, and draft proffers (conditions) are made available to citizens (**Fig. 1 and 2**). Each website should include contact information for the representative and case planner or possess a comments section in which all remarks are simultaneously sent to the representative and case planner (**Fig. 3**). The website/web presence is generally active for a minimum of two weeks prior to the community meeting and until the request is heard at the Board of Supervisors' public hearing.

To schedule a community meeting, case planners coordinate with the applicant, Commissioner, Board member, and Webex staff. In consultation with the applicant, and often the Board and Planning Commission members, staff identifies a notification zone (**Fig. 4**). Mailing addresses generated using real estate records are provided to the applicant, who in turn, notifies all identified property owners in the area via U.S. mail. The correspondence informs everyone of the pending request, directs them to the project website for additional information, and alerts them of the community meeting. When health guidelines permitted gatherings of 25 or more people, the letters include the date, time, and location of the upcoming community meeting at a designated county facility. Those wishing to attend in-person are informed that CDC guidelines, including social distancing and mask-wearing, will be in effect. For those who choose not or are unable to participate in-person, or when the health guidelines limit gatherings of more than ten people, information on how to attend virtually is also provided in the letter (**Fig. 5**).

The County is aware videoconferencing platforms are a fairly new technology that everyone has had to become familiar with during the pandemic. Each platform has its own process for joining an event or meeting, and Webex is no different. To assist all participants, Webex instructions and

tips are provided in the notice letters. Recently, a County phone has been designated as a Webex support line for those experiencing difficulties joining the event. In the notice letters, stakeholders are provided the phone number and an identified time prior to the meeting during which staff are available to assist citizens. It is recommended those joining do so early to determine whether they will need assistance. The phone remains on throughout the meeting. If voicemails are left, Webex staff forwards the contact information to the case planner so they may directly reach out to the citizen following the meeting.

Depending on the type of meeting, coordination with IT and facility staff has been required. Webex staff creates an event invitation, requiring all citizens register online prior to joining. This registration, which includes each person's name and address, creates a virtual sign-in sheet of attendees. Following the meeting, the case planner incorporates this list into the official case file. Attendees are then included in future County notification mailings for both the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors' public hearings on the request.

The Webex component of the meetings utilizes two staff members, the host, and an alternate host. At the beginning of the event, the host welcomes all attendees and explains the format of the meeting and how to participate. Using the chat feature, the alternate host messages all attendees to create a queue of speakers. At the appropriate time, the host unmutes speakers and introduces them. Once their questions or comments have been addressed by the applicant or representative, the host mutes them and moves on to the next person in the queue. When these community meetings have an in-person component, the host coordinates Webex participation equally throughout the public comment portion.

The Planning Department recognizes not everyone has access to the internet and offers the option for phone-in attendance. In the letters notifying the community of these meetings, contact information for the applicant and case planner is provided. The applicant is required to supply hard copies of the information to any citizen who requests it.

Videoconferencing has become a standard component of community meetings and is expected to remain a requirement for future meetings. The two staff planners have spent approximately 60 hours training other members of the Department using presentations and shadowing/hands-on experience.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The software used for the community meetings consists of programs already owned or licensed by the County. The Planning Department identified two on-staff planners and tasked them with learning the details of Webex.

Prior to the resumption of community meetings, they received substantial training from Information Technology staff in order to facilitate the Planning Commission public hearings. The planners then used their foundational knowledge of Webex to create the process for community meetings. IT staff was available for consultation, as well as assistance for dry runs and technical checks at various facilities throughout the county. IT and Recreation/Parks staff were instrumental in coordinating facility planning and technology, audio, and video needs for those meetings that contained an in-person component.

Webex staff facilitated training for other Planning staff. Following these sessions, shadowing and hands-on opportunities are provided to refine their skills. Once staff has completed the instruction



and participated in several shadowing sessions, they are considered fully trained and able to assist in future videoconferencing. Eventually, all planners will have enough experience to run community meetings without support from the original Webex staff. This will result in more flexibility when identifying staff availability for future meetings. Now that the program has been implemented and refined, the on-going operating cost is compensation for staff hours of the two designated Webex hosts/facilitators.

For the timeframe of May 2020 through January 2021, a breakdown of the cost for implementation and meetings held is listed in the table below.

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Information Technology	Technology Assistance	Staffing	\$4,814.58
Recreation and Parks	Facility Assistance	Staffing	\$857
Planning	Program Implementation and Community Meeting Facilitation	Staffing	\$27,514
<b>Total Cost</b>			<b>\$33,185.58</b>

### **Program Results**

Unlike neighboring jurisdictions, the County decided to continue processing rezoning and provisional use permit submissions at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surprisingly, there were increased requests in comparison to last year. The revised community meeting process was created and implemented to ensure continued public engagement during the COVID-19

pandemic. The addition of videoconferencing provides opportunities for stakeholder input that otherwise might not have occurred due to restrictions on in-person gatherings.

These proposals often change based on constructive conversations between the applicant's representative and the public at these events. Discontinuing community meetings during the pandemic, could have ultimately impacted the surrounding neighbors in a negative way. Community engagement is imperative for well-designed development. By incorporating videoconferencing, community meetings continued while observing social distancing guidelines. Without this opportunity, normal business operations would have been hampered, and future development in the county would have stalled.

Feedback on the project has been positive. Over the last year the process has been reviewed multiple times to identify improvements. This innovative method of citizen input has received positive responses from county representatives, including appointed and elected officials. The videoconferencing feature will remain a standard component of community meetings going forward. In addition, the financial benefits of continued operations to the public, and the overarching success of the program increases opportunities for citizens to interact with their elected and appointed officials, county staff, and members of their community.

### **Brief Overview**

The Henrico County Board of Supervisors determined to continue with "business as usual" during the COVID-19 pandemic tasked the Planning Department with developing a virtual community engagement process. The program created ensures any citizen who wish to become more informed, comment, or ask questions of an applicant, is afforded a consistent, safe, and secure option. The resulting program includes a representative-sponsored website, expanded notification

areas, and access to a videoconferencing platform. The community engagement process required multiple revisions to reflect changes in health regulations and social distancing guidelines.

Adhering to health regulations, all-virtual and hybrid community meetings were developed. The hybrid meeting format allowed those who preferred to attend the meeting in-person to do so, while still providing a virtual component. These meetings, typically located in County facilities, resulted in collaboration between Planning, Information Technology, and Recreation and Parks staff.

Between May 2020 and January 2021, Planning held nearly 30 virtual and hybrid community meetings, ensuring public participation continued throughout the pandemic. The addition of videoconferencing provided opportunities for stakeholder input that otherwise might not have occurred due to restrictions on in-person gatherings. The added accessibility of providing a virtual component to community meetings will continue long after the pandemic has ended.

**Community Engagement During COVID-19 Pandemic**  
**Supplemental Material**

Figure 1: Website

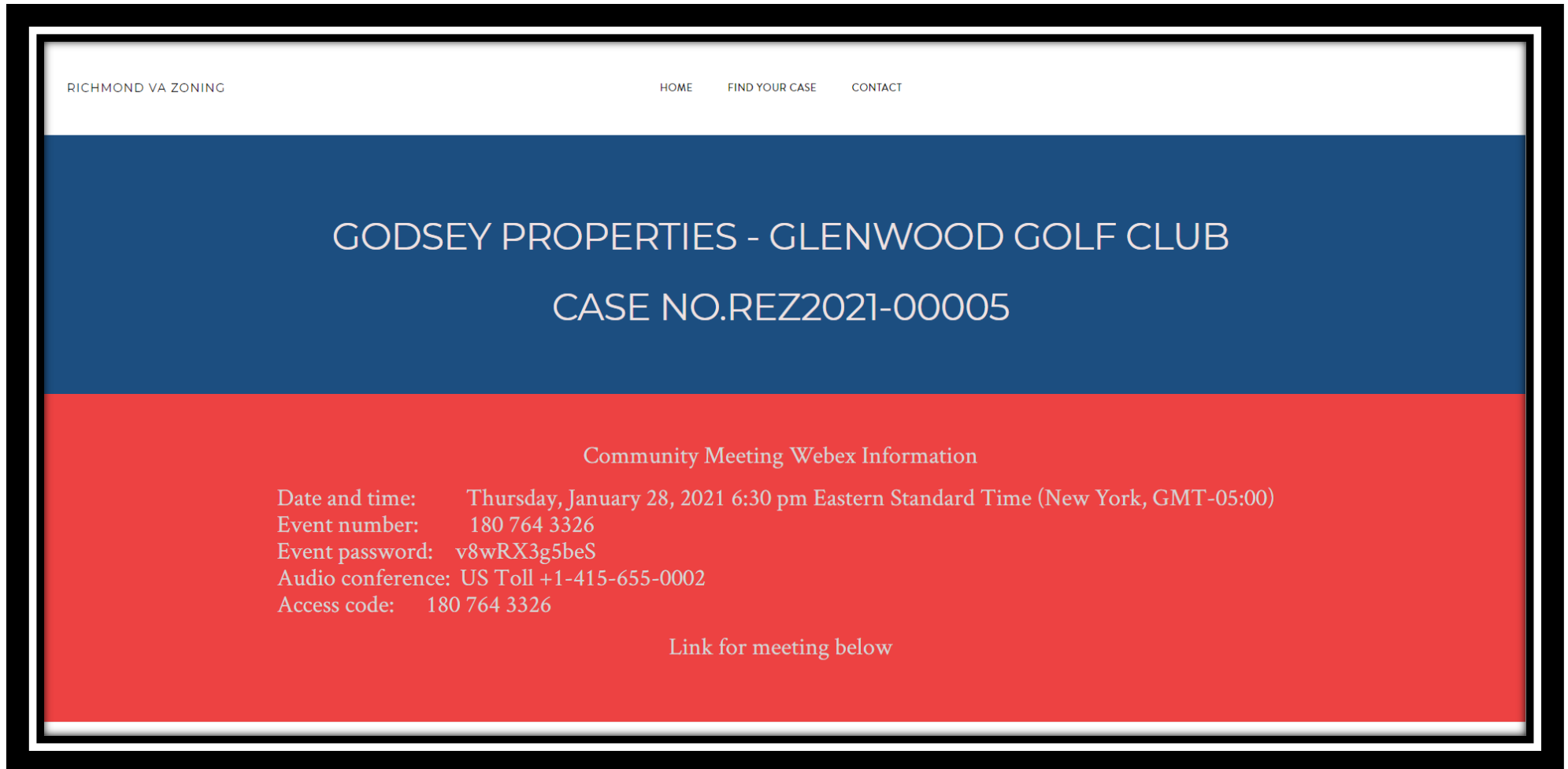


Figure 2: Website Exhibits

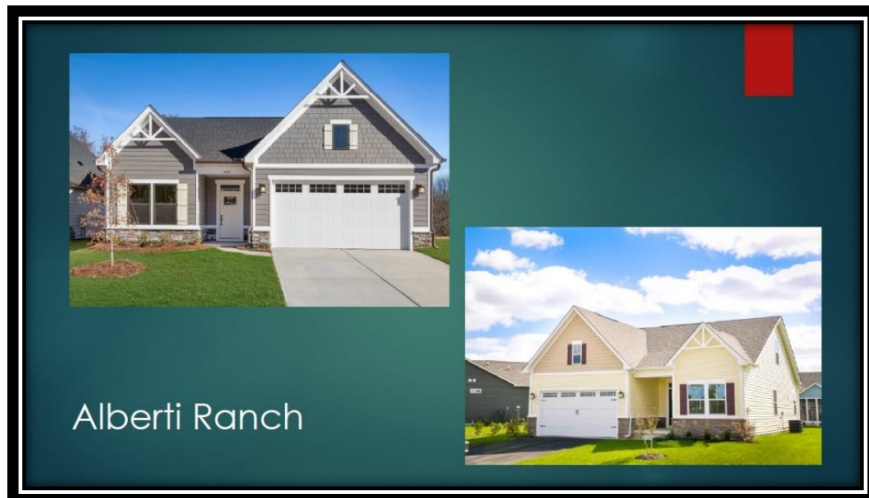


Figure 3: Website commenting

### Comments

\* INDICATES REQUIRED FIELD

**NAME \***

**EMAIL \***

**COMMENT \***

Figure 4: Notification Area

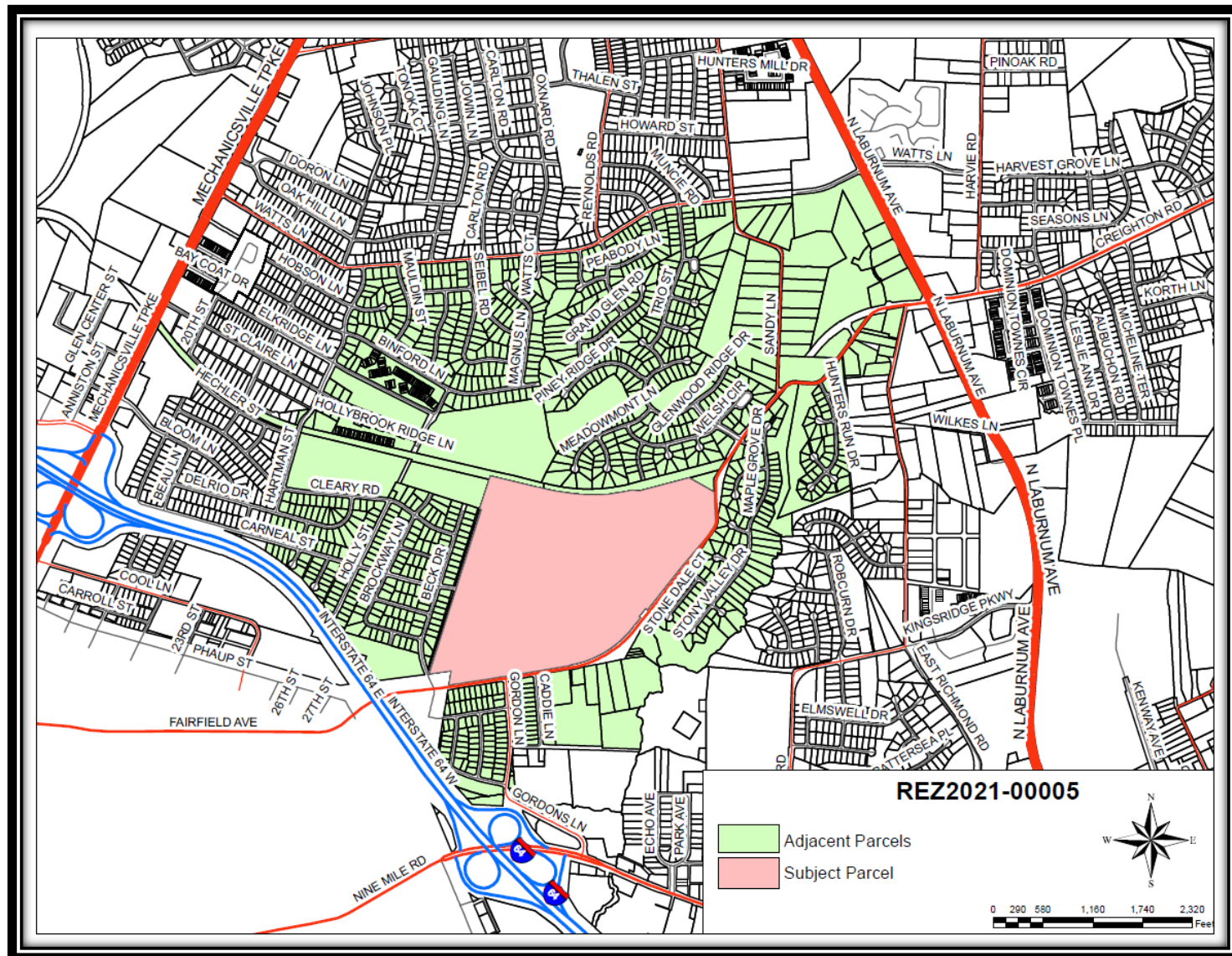





Figure 5: Community Meeting Notification

**ROTH JACKSON**  
ROTH JACKSON GIBBONS CONDLIN, PLC

Andrew M. Condlin  
Richmond Office  
(804) 977-3373 (direct)  
acondlin@rothjackson.com

January 15, 2021

VIA U. S. MAIL

Interested and Adjacent Neighbors

Re: REZ2021-00005 / PUP2021-00001  
Glenwood Golf Club - 3100 Creighton Road

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

My firm is assisting Godsey Properties Inc. in the Rezoning and Provisional Use Permit requests for the above referenced property. This approximately 120 acres is currently zoned A-1. We are seeking a rezoning to R-5AC to allow for single family detached, for-sale homes.

Given virus-related restrictions, we will not be having an in-person meeting regarding the request, but will instead host a virtual meeting at 6:30 p.m. on January 28, 2021. You can find additional information on this request as well as access the WebEx link for event registration by going to the project website at [www.rvazoning.com](http://www.rvazoning.com) and clicking on "Find Your Case" and then click Glenwood Golf Club.

You may also leave a comment on our website that will simultaneously be sent to my office and the Henrico County Planning Office.

WebEx information is below:

Date and time: Thursday, January 28, 2021 6:30 pm Eastern Standard Time (New York, GMT-05:00)

Event number: 180 764 3326

Event password: v8wRX3g5beS

Audio conference: US Toll +1-415-655-0002

Access code: 180 764 3326

[01173484.v2]

**RICHMOND**  
1519 Summit Avenue, Suite 102, Richmond, VA 23230  
P: 804-441-8440 F: 804-441-8438


**TYSONS CORNER**  
8200 Greensboro Drive, Suite 820, McLean, VA 22102  
P: 703-485-3535 F: 703-485-3525

WWW.ROTHJACKSON.COM

January 15, 2021  
Page 2


Please be aware the meeting will start promptly at 6:30 p.m. If no one joins the event, it will end at 6:45 p.m. As the community meeting requires registration, we recommend you log-in early using the instructions provided in this letter to complete the process. Should you have technical difficulties joining WebEx, you may call (804) 517-1663 from 6:00 p.m. - 6:20 p.m. and staff will try to assist you. The phone number is to be used for technical assistance only; all questions and comments regarding the case must be directed to the applicant during the community meeting.

In the meantime, should you have any questions or concerns, my contact information is (804) 977-3373 or acondlin@rothjackson.com, or you may also contact Livingston Lewis, Henrico County Planner, at (804) 501-5822 or lew02@henrico.us.

Sincerely,  
  
Andrew M. Condlin

Enclosure

[01173484.v2]

**RICHMOND**  
1519 Summit Avenue, Suite 102, Richmond, VA 23230  
P: 804-441-8440 F: 804-441-8438

**TYSONS CORNER**  
8200 Greensboro Drive, Suite 820, McLean, VA 22102  
P: 703-485-3535 F: 703-485-3525



Figure 6: Webex Instructions

**WEBEX INSTRUCTIONS FOR A COMMUNITY MEETING**

**Important Notes:**

When joining a WebEx event, you will be automatically muted upon entering. To request to speak, you must use the chat feature, found at the bottom of your WebEx screen. Please direct all your questions or comments to the applicant or their representative; WebEx staff is not able to answer your inquiries. Those joining by phone will only be able to listen, not ask questions/comment.

1. Go to [www.webex.com](http://www.webex.com).
2. Choose Join a Meeting from the choices across the top of the page.
3. Once redirected, enter the event number provided in the mailed community meeting notification.
4. You will be taken to the Event Information page. You must register prior to joining the event. Click the blue Register link next to the Event status box.
5. After clicking Register, you will be required to fill out the fields marked with an asterisk \*. Click **Submit**.
6. After clicking Submit, you will have successfully registered for the meeting. Click Done.
7. You will receive an email confirmation with an invitation for the event.
8. From the email, sent from [messenger@webex.com](mailto:messenger@webex.com), click on the Join Event button.
  - a. If this is your first time joining a WebEx event, you may be redirected to a new URL to add a Chrome Extension for WebEx.
    - i. Click **Add WebEx** to Chrome.
    - ii. Select **Add Extension**. You will be redirected to the WebEx event page.
9. In the Join Event Now box, the fields should already contain the information you provided on your registration form. If not, you will need to retype the information.
10. Click **Join Now**.
11. You will join the event with your microphone muted and video turned off.

**To join the WebEx Event by phone (for listening purposes only)**

1. Call the phone number +1- 415-655-0002 US Toll
2. Enter the Event Number provided in the community meeting notice.

**Tips**

- Chrome internet platform is preferred
- If joining by a smart device (smart phone or tablet), the event password may be required. If so, enter the password provided in the community meeting notice.