

*To access digital component of entry, enter contest@lee.net as the username and the password Newspaper1.*

## **Richmond casino plan included \$26.5 million upfront for child care programs. Now what?**

[https://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/levar-stoney-education-richmond-grand-casino-and-resort-urban-one-churchill-downs/article\\_31e7aa96-7f27-11ee-a9af-7f71b14f1460.html](https://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/levar-stoney-education-richmond-grand-casino-and-resort-urban-one-churchill-downs/article_31e7aa96-7f27-11ee-a9af-7f71b14f1460.html)

The [proposed \\$562 million Richmond Grand Casino and Resort](#) promised thousands of jobs and millions in revenue, including funding for badly needed child care services under the terms of a development agreement with the city.

Tuesday's election, in which Richmond voters rebuffed the contentious casino plan for a second time, takes that money off the table — and raises questions about what comes next for child care funding.

“The \$19 million a year could have funded wraparound care for all Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative in the city, and we could have funded additional toddler and infant care,” said [Ann Payes, CEO of the Richmond early childhood school readiness group Thrive Birth to Five](#). “So, without that, it’s just going to be a struggle to get enough funding so that it’s accessible and affordable for families.”

Payes was one of several child care officials who appeared with Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney at a September news conference to announce that casino revenues would support child care programs.

“We know that Richmond families are currently struggling to access early childhood care and education,” Stoney said.

Under the terms of the agreement with the city, casino developers Urban One and Churchill Downs were to direct a one-time upfront payment of \$26.5 million to municipal coffers. An additional \$19 million in casino revenue would go to the city each year after that.

At the news conference, Stoney said the first allotment of money would go to building child care and education centers at T.B. Smith and Southside community centers. A total of \$8 million would pay for parks and recreation projects, and \$4.5 million was to be put into a trust fund to expand child care access to low- to middle-class Richmond families.

Stoney pointed to the casino revenue as a reason voters should approve the referendum. The long-term funding was seen as a solution to reducing lengthy wait times for child care, as well as reducing the financial burden.

“Frankly, tuition is too expensive,” he said at the news conference.

Child care costs have soared in recent years, jumping 32% between 2019 and this year, according to a Bank of America Institute. The current average rate for yearly child care for one child is \$14,000, according to the [2023 Kids Count Databook](#), an annual child care statistics report.

### **Stoney: ‘We are back to where we were’**

The funding earmarked for the community also was a key component of the voter outreach by Urban One and Churchill Downs, which pledged an additional \$16 million to charities over 10 years.

The Tuesday vote came about two years after voters rejected a referendum for a similar gaming development. For the second round, the developers mounted an aggressive advertising and get-out-the-vote effort, spending \$10 million.

Plans for the site at 2001 Walmsley Blvd. and 4700 Trenton Ave. off Interstate 95 called for a 250-room hotel, a 3,000-seat concert space, a 55-acre outdoor park and other amenities. The developers projected that \$30 million in annual tax revenue would be produced. The development agreement did not include tax incentives.

But the plan faced opposition from groups that questioned the approval process and the impact of gambling on economically distressed areas around the casino.

The measure ending up failing by a [62%-38% vote](#), a difference of 13,185 ballots.

According to the mayor’s office, the Tuesday election means its plans of addressing the child care shortage are no longer viable and the likelihood of proposed projects coming to fruition is slim to none.

“When Richmond voted no for the casino, they also voted no for \$26.5 million upfront to build two new child care centers, and \$19 million annually to establish the Richmond Child Care and Education Trust Fund,” Stoney said. “We are back to where we were prior to this opportunity.”

Stoney, who has been mayor since 2017, has been vocal about school funding and was appointed chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Children, Health and Human Services Committee. [Politico, citing an anonymous source, last week also reported that Stoney, a Democrat, planned to launch a run for governor later this year.](#)

With the casino plan rejected, Stoney spokesman Gianni Snidle said the [Child Care Trust Fund](#) is also effectively dead and there are no plans to break ground on new child care centers.

“When Richmonders voted against the casino, they voted against the strongest local child care proposal,” he said.

At the September news conference, Stoney said that if the project did not pass, then he would consider different ways to help address the crisis.

“The alternative is us trying to find ways through raising taxes, using the revenues that we currently have,” Stoney said.

Payes in an interview last week said “child care can’t really happen without government funding” and one way to fund initiatives is by increasing taxes.

Snidle said the plan is to advocate for state and federal funding streams and that there are not any plans to seek a tax increase to fund child care.

He said Stoney “will continue to fight for quality, affordable child care.”

[Paul Goldman](#), a political strategist who led one of the political action committees that opposed the casino, said he does not buy the mayor’s this-or-that approach to funding child care in the city.

Goldman said the mayor should not have relied solely on the casino to meet the needs of the city’s children. Instead, he said, it was a way to draw in voters, which failed along with the project.

“You can’t tell me the only way to help kids is to rip off their parents,” Goldman said. “We’re not lacking in money in Richmond; what we’re lacking is a vision and a will to do it.”

### **What comes next**

The city is in the process of filing two stabilization grants, including a \$100,000 [American Rescue Plan Act](#) grant for the Fulton Montessori as well as an additional \$100,000 from the Children’s Fund to go toward the Circle Preschool Program of SCAN, a local nonprofit organization aimed at preventing and treating child abuse.

[On Monday](#), the City Council is scheduled to vote to allocate \$25,000 to the Richmond Imagination Library, a chapter of Dolly Parton’s nonprofit organization that provides free books to young people.

Last month, a full-time early childhood specialist was hired to help guide the city in child care investments.

The Richmond Public School system is also applying for Head Start and Early Head Start grants to increase the number of available child care slots.

“If Richmond Public Schools chose to increase its requested EHS slots, the city would prioritize a local match in the FY2025 budget process,” Snidle said.

Other organizations like Thrive Birth to Five are turning to the state and federal government to increase funding as well.

“Fortunately, this has really elevated the level of concentration and intentionality about early childhood care and the City Council has really committed to making early childhood care happen no matter what,” Payes said. “It’s going to be much slower, but we’re going to try everything we can.”

=

### **Lessons from Atlantic City: What can Richmond learn from the 'World's Playground'**

[https://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/richmond-election-day-nov-7-atlantic-city-casino-gaming-venue/article\\_56ee0680-7358-11ee-93a7-a3867a00c450.html](https://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/richmond-election-day-nov-7-atlantic-city-casino-gaming-venue/article_56ee0680-7358-11ee-93a7-a3867a00c450.html)

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Five hours north of Richmond and east of Philadelphia, a giant white sign dangles over an overpass welcoming visitors to the “World’s Playground.”

“Welcome to Atlantic City.”

Forty-seven years ago, [a state referendum brought legalized gambling to this seaside community](#) and fueled an era of economic growth that brought millions of dollars to South New Jersey each year.

Today, 300 miles to the south, [Richmond residents are poised to vote](#), for a second time, on their own gaming referendum. A yes vote on Nov. 7 would green light a \$562 million South Richmond entertainment and gambling complex on land now occupied by vacant buildings once owned by Philip Morris USA.

The [Richmond Grand Resort and Casino](#) proposal has touched off a record-breaking \$8.1 million campaign by the casino developers featuring free rides to the polls, free lunch and a concert by supporters, who have mounted a get-out-the-vote effort touting economic development, job creation and the revival of Richmond’s South Side.

Opposition groups, who have been vastly outspent, have said a casino will exploit problem gamblers and those who can’t afford to lose money while siphoning off customers from existing restaurants and other businesses.

In numerous ways, the gambling environment facing Richmond (population 226,600) is vastly different from that of Atlantic City (population 38,000) — with different regulations, different economies, different sizes, different histories.

New Jersey has nine casinos, which under the 1970s voter referendum can only be in Atlantic City. Virginia, which legalized casinos in 2020, has five casino licenses, with only one going to Richmond.

Still, as the East Coast's inaugural venue for legal casinos, Atlantic City serves as a kind of early litmus test case for communities considering gambling operations. For Richmond, it may provide a glimpse into the potential challenges and opportunities that may be ahead.

"Is Atlantic City better off for having casinos? Yes. The kind of economic and social impact that it has had I think is positive," said Dan Hannigan, a former spokesman for the [New Jersey Casino Control Commission](#), which acts as the state's gaming board. "Has that rising tide lifted all boats? No. But, it made it better."

### **Creating the Las Vegas of the East Coast**

Atlantic City has a long history with gambling and resorts. When New Jersey state residents approved a second gaming referendum in 1976, it opened the floodgates to what became the city's cottage industry. For years at that time, if you wanted to legally gamble, Las Vegas and Atlantic City were your primary options in the U.S.

Through the 1980s and 1990s Mike Tyson's televised fights and Miss America pageant broadcasts spread the city's fame. Donald Trump sought to build a casino empire there.

But the city was also battered by stiff economic headwinds, recessions and, most recently, COVID-19 pandemic. There's also been intense competition from nearby venues in other states where gambling is now allowed, as well as online gambling.

Bryant Simon, a Temple University history professor and author of "Boardwalk Dreams," said the reason New Jersey began pushing for casinos was to supplement state and local economies that had fallen dramatically. State regulations also mandated companies pay a percentage to Atlantic City's tourism district as well as elderly and disability services.

"Cities were really struggling for ways to revive themselves. With the loss of industry and white flight, I think everybody was excited to see the casinos were going to come. But, I think what people in Atlantic City felt like was going to happen, just didn't," Simon said. "That wealth didn't necessarily roll or even trickle down into the community."

When Resorts International, the first casino built in the city, opened, predictions were that the interstate would be backed up for 25 miles. Restaurants prepared massive amounts of food. By the end of the day, those restaurants were having to throw it all out.

Hundreds did come. But they stayed within the resort. With shops, restaurants, gyms and spas all within one building, there was no need to leave. So, in many ways, the casinos out-competed local businesses.

“The number of restaurants declined. The value of land went up, making it harder for people to stay there. People tore down and burnt down houses to have unimproved land so their taxes wouldn’t go up,” Simon said.

Simon’s observations are exactly what J. Elias O’Neal says he is concerned about. The Manchester resident said he isn’t against a casino in the city. However, he does have a problem with the current proposed site, which sits in a predominantly poor, Black community in an active industrial zone.

“Casinos take money and prey off of the same people who live in the Eighth and Ninth districts,” O’Neal said. “I don’t think they have their best interests in mind.”

### **Richmond Casino learns from Atlantic City**

In a lot of ways, Atlantic City was the blueprint as to what to do — as well as what not to do.

For Hannigan, a key piece of the puzzle is how a state chooses to regulate these venues. He said that with more state regulations, a casino development will be better as there are safeguards in place to ensure folks are not being taken advantage of by multimillion-dollar companies.

Under Virginia’s rules, casinos are limited to specific locations and must be privately owned and report to a state-appointed oversight board. Company owners are subject to criminal background checks and meet additional regulations set by the localities that house them.

This is all to ensure “gaming operations are conducted with order and the highest degree of integrity,” the state code reads.

Richmond Grand Resort and Casino spokesman Michael Kelly said the Virginia project is drastically different from any Atlantic City casino, and that it isn’t a fair apples-to-apples comparison.

“Richmonders don’t have to look outside the state to see the real-world impacts of these kinds of projects,” Kelly said. “Casinos are now open in Portsmouth, Danville and Bristol and they are employing hundreds of Virginians and generating millions in revenue for those communities.”

In August, Virginia’s first casino in Bristol, which will eventually house the future Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, reported \$13.53 million in adjusted gaming revenues in the previous month alone. Danville’s temporary spot generated \$21.4 million since opening in May.

Bristol Mayor Neal Osborne pointed to an influx of tax revenue generated after the casino opened. He said Richmond voters should support the development.

“Take it from the mayor of the city with the first casino in Virginia, and the locality that drove the push to legalize casino gaming in Virginia. This project will revitalize that area of Richmond with new development, new tax revenue, and most importantly, new jobs,” Osborne said in a message on X earlier this month.

The Richmond plan calls for a 250-room luxury hotel, a fitness center, outdoor pools, a spa, a 55-acre park, a gaming floor, a 3,000-seat concert venue, local restaurants, breweries and a high-tech film and audio production facility. The project is planned at 2001 Walmsley Boulevard and 4700 Trenton Avenue off I-95.

Developers Maryland-based Urban One and Kentucky-based Churchill Downs revealed plans for the project in August, following a series of legal and city approvals. Voters two years ago narrowly voted down plans for a similar gaming venue on the same site.

Supporters say the new project will generate 1,300 permanent hospitality jobs with an average compensation and benefits of \$55,000.

A projected \$30 million in annual tax revenue is expected. The development agreement also directs the operators to give the city \$25.5 million if the measure passes and another \$1 million after finances are closed. City officials have said that funding will help create an education trust fund and finance childcare.

An additional \$16 million is being pledged to charitable donations.

The project has received the backing of several clergy groups and union organizations. In September, it was announced that the project would pay construction workers “family-sustaining wages and benefits.” The developers have declined a request to outline the specific pay.

Supporters of the casino say the industry is highly regulated and has measures to discourage gambling addicts.

“Problem gaming is something I take very seriously, and our company takes very seriously,” William C. Carstanjen, CEO of Churchill Downs, which has 29 casinos, told The Times-Dispatch this month.

Still, Paul Goldman, political analyst and founder of the No Means No Casino political action committee, said there is concern that the casino will further isolate South Side residents who largely live below the poverty line and are in predominantly Black and Hispanic communities.

Historically, there is cause for this concern. In Atlantic City, for example, there were instances where local and state officials made promises to its residents that were not met, Simon said.

The tax revenue collected from Atlantic City casinos poured into the state, but did not trickle down to the localities themselves. Simon said this is most evident with the city's poverty rate, which as of the 2020 census was at 38%.

Today, casinos still serve as the main source of revenue for Atlantic City and the region.

"Casinos are like to Atlantic City what cars are to Detroit or what steel is to Pittsburgh," Hannigan said. "It became the principal business."

Jane Bokunewicz, director of the Lloyd Levenson Institute at New Jersey's Stockton University, which studies the Atlantic City gambling industry, said money won by casinos is just part of their overall contribution to the state's economy.

"Casinos are often the largest employers in a region, with major commitments in terms of wages and benefits," she said. "People employed by casinos use those wages and benefits to purchase additional goods and services, generating secondary economic impact."

Bokunewicz said casinos spend significant sums on operating costs, including purchases of goods and services like food, linen, hotel room amenities, laundry services and building maintenance. They also hire local builders and vendors for construction and ongoing capital improvements.

In total, the New Jersey casinos employ roughly 22,000 people — a large portion of whom are local and are union. At one time, that number was nearly doubled. The proposed Richmond project estimates a total of 1,300 jobs with 60% hires coming from the city.

### **'The casinos changed that'**

Along the wrought iron wall that separates the Gardner's Basin dock from the swirling bay waters below, Samuel Smith and Ramon Maysonett, two Atlantic City natives, spend most of their days listening to music, casting lines and frying up the sea bass, bluefish and croaker they catch on a small propane grill.

The spot is one of the few remaining local hotspots. It was also a part of a casino-funded rehabilitation project. The concrete benches along the wall were once a part of Smith and Maysonett's high school.

In Atlantic City, the tax revenue collected from the casinos goes toward tourism-related ventures with operators working with state authorities to determine where to put funds. The dock is just one of the projects completed throughout the years. In Richmond, the proposed local tax revenue tallies \$30 million, with a large portion dedicated to public schools.

For natives Smith and Maysonett, they can remember a time before the casinos came. The memory is bittersweet.

On the one hand, they said, the casinos offer jobs and bring in money, but the developments also have taken over some places they loved, led to business closures and brought in crime.

“This is my home. It’s a beautiful place. It’s a nice place. There’s nowhere else in the world like Jersey,” Maysonett said. “But, there wasn’t this everything’s open 24 hours. Back in the day, Saturday was Saturday, Sunday was Sunday, and Friday was Friday. The casinos changed that. Some for good. Some for bad.”

For Richmond’s proposed project, developers are reassuring residents that safeguards will be in place.

One, it would be the sole casino in the city.

While Rosie’s Gaming Emporium neighbors the proposed site, there’s little competition — a factor which helped fuel some of the Atlantic City’s woes. Virginia has only issued five licenses for the entire state with the last one proposed for Richmond and the developers have said, if it loses the referendum, it will look elsewhere to build a casino.

Kelly said a Richmond casino “will be one of the largest be the largest private sector investments in Richmond in decades and won’t use a single penny of taxpayer funds, unlike other pending projects across the city which rely on public tax dollars.”

### **What comes next for Atlantic City**

In recent years, Atlantic City business owners have begun reclaiming areas affected by economic downturns. One in particular is coined the “Orange Loop.”

There, local artists, chefs and entrepreneurs have taken over the block and are carving out a piece for themselves. This comes after a decline in casinos as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that allowed for the local scene to compete in the market.

They also are bouncing back from steep declines during COVID.

Overall, four of the Atlantic City casinos in September tallied more money from in-person gamblers — about \$246 million — than in September 2019, prior to COVID, according to state data.

The casino gambling industry generated about \$329 billion a year in economic activity and the industry paid \$52.7 billion last year in taxes to federal, state and local governments, up 29% since 2017, the report said.

“When it comes to the number of jobs, the amount of investment, the tax revenue, the things that were spelled out, casinos far exceeded all of those impacts,” Hannigan said. “It created more jobs, generated a lot more tax revenue than they anticipated. Now those things did change through the years.”

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

-

## **Richmond's mobile home community issues plea: 'We just want them to listen to us'**

[https://richmond.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/richmonds-mobile-home-community-issues-plea-we-just-want-them-to-listen-to-us/article\\_416505ae-f5b1-11ed-9dfd-43ff1624a81b.html](https://richmond.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/richmonds-mobile-home-community-issues-plea-we-just-want-them-to-listen-to-us/article_416505ae-f5b1-11ed-9dfd-43ff1624a81b.html)

For some of those living in [Rudd's Mobile Home Park](#) in South Richmond, it is a life largely spent in fear.

It began when city officials sent out [inspection notices](#) to residents 10 years ago. The instructions were clear: If their homes did not meet city-established standards, then residents would be forced to vacate them. Those fearing evictions fled. Those who remained received orders to vacate. In the aftermath, with no means to take their homes with them, dozens of trailers were left deserted.

The mobile home park is illustrative of the housing crisis in Richmond as families find themselves hard-pressed, if not desperate, to find homes that they can afford.

Asked to be identified only by their first names out of fear for their safety or, for those who are undocumented, fear of immigration agents, residents spoke to the Richmond Times-Dispatch about the dire conditions they face trying to keep roofs over their heads as each day brings unique challenges.

For a woman named Mirella, most of her days are riddled with anxiety at the possibility of coming home to one of her children falling through the floor. She moved into her uncle's mobile home after he abandoned it during the exodus. While the home had failed inspection, it was better than no home at all.

A decade later, the home has fallen even [further into disrepair](#) — barely habitable for Mirella, her children and their roommate, Cristofer.

In certain spots, the floor is caving in. The walls, painted a light blue to hide cracks and holes that provide access to unwanted animals, are sagging in places from water damage. With every heavy rain, the house worsens as water seeps in through the ceiling and pools on the floor.

Every night, Cristofer makes his rounds throughout the house unplugging any devices. The trailer is one of many in the park not connected to a fuse box. So in order to prevent fires, he makes sure nothing is left on. When the pair cooks on the stove, they are sure to pull the oven away from the wall in order to lessen the risk of a fire.

While Mirella, Cristofer and her children's living situation is less than ideal, they are not alone. Most of the park's residents face similar problems.

"My kids were born in the U.S. and they deserve to live like other citizens in a healthy, safe home," said Mirella, speaking through a translator from the group [Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Communities](#). "They shouldn't have to live like this, so I'm doing this for them. I'm fighting for my kids."

### **Help is on the way?**

For years, RISC, a faith-based organization representing more than 20 congregations in the region, has been at the forefront, fighting to bring awareness to such issues as affordable housing, safe and healthy living conditions and underserved communities.

When several congregants came forward about their unsafe living conditions, RISC made it a priority to advocate for the predominantly Hispanic community that live and work in the city but do not have adequate [access to proper housing](#).

Mobile homes are [ineligible for home insurance](#), as they are considered vehicles. If homes fall into disrepair, homeowners are forced to pay out of pocket. But, as many park residents are [living on the poverty line](#), it is a struggle to afford rent, let alone the drastic costs of repairs to their homes.

After making numerous requests over the better half of the year to meet with the city, RISC members finally got the opportunity last Thursday morning.

In a conference room on the second floor of the [First Presbyterian Church](#), nearly a dozen RISC board members met with housing experts and city officials to discuss plans moving forward, with promised city funds aimed at addressing the issue.

In [last year's budget](#), the city allocated \$300,000 solely for mobile home repairs. This year's recently [approved budget](#) sees an additional \$500,000 added to the total.

The initial \$300,000 allocation came after years of persistence from park residents who brought the problems they face on a day-to-day basis as a result of their living conditions to the city officials.

Paulina, a Ford Mobile Home Park resident and RISC member, is on the front line, pushing for healthier living conditions. Her activism began years prior, when her own mobile home caught fire and burned down and the fire spread to a neighboring home.

While her church, [Sacred Heart Catholic Church](#), helped her find and acquire a replacement home, the replacement failed an inspection.

Now, it leaks when it rains, and her floors are decaying. With no way to adequately regulate temperatures, she battles both extremes in the winter and summer months.

With six children ages 12 to 22 living in the home, Paulina said safety is always a concern. When it rains heavily, Paulina and her children opt to stay at their church.

So when the Richmond City Council approved the funding, Paulina said, she was hopeful that help was on the way. However, as the months continued to pass by without any word from the city, hope dwindled.

Sherrill Hampton, the city's Housing and Community Development director, said the delay in funds was largely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With numerous tasks to manage and a [limited staff](#), the city could not keep up with the demand. Now, nearly a year after the allocation of the funds, the city is set to release them on June 5 and residents will be able to apply to receive them.

"When you're sitting, watching rain come in through your windows and being told to just wait for the funds to come in, it's hard," Paulina said. "We are just asking the city to listen to us."

The meeting, which grew terse at times, was the first public mention as to how the city plans to use the funds, how they will be implemented and who will be [eligible to receive them](#).

In attendance were Hampton, her department's senior project development manager Loren Brown and [project:HOMES](#) representatives Lee Householder and Marion Cake.

Brown said the city has reached a project agreement with the nonprofit organization project:HOMES to serve as the in-between for the city and the residents.

So the city will turn the funds over to the nonprofit, which will then use the funds to assess the needs, prioritize aid and make the necessary repairs.

When RISC members asked to view the contract between project:HOMES and the city, which is public information, they were met with pushback from Hampton, who said they are welcome to send a [Freedom of Information Act](#) request. She added that if they want

to have a collaborative relationship with the city, then the organization should trust her and the department.

“I’m giving my word and I know project:HOMES, the work that they’re going to do, they’re giving their word to do a top-notch job to the best of their ability with the funds that we have,” Hampton said.

In order to be considered for the [mobile home repair program](#), residents must own the mobile home, live in one of the seven parks within the city limits, spend at least 30% of their average monthly income on land rental and home costs and live in a home produced earlier than 1976.

If residents meet these four criteria, then they can apply to receive aid with up to \$12,000 in repairs that will be prioritized based on concern. Hampton said that if repairs exceed \$12,000, then the city will not be responsible to fund the rest.

However, if project:HOMES has additional revenue, then it may consider covering the remaining cost, said Cake, the group’s vice president of affordable housing.

“If the unit exceeds the \$12,000 and project:HOMES has no further money to leverage, then that unit would not be addressed because we don’t have money to do that,” Hampton said.

While initially touted as a mobile home repair and replacement program, Hampton said that, as these funds are limited, they will not be used for replacement.

Project:HOMES has set standards approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as to what homes it provides and purchases. This is largely to ensure homes are sustainable and will last longer than the average mobile home.

Essentially, instead of constantly putting Band-Aids on problems, they seek to offer long-term solutions that will withstand the average wear and tear [mobile homes face](#).

But it comes at a higher cost.

Cake said the organization estimates it will cost roughly \$130,000 to purchase one replacement home, as the organization will have to buy the homes from other manufacturers instead of crafting them themselves. This increases the price tag by an average \$30,000.

“During periods of high demand, it can be difficult to get existing manufacturers to build our type of units when their standard products, which are built to a lower standard, are selling well,” Cake stated in an email.

In April, [the city council voted 6-1 to deny a special-use permit request](#) submitted by project:HOMES to build a warehouse facility on a vacant lot zoned residential, a block and a half south of Midlothian Turnpike, to assemble modular homes.

With [council President Michael Jones](#) — who represents the 9th District in which the site is located — citing limited residential space and leading the charge against the proposal, the organization had to scrap its plans and turn to other avenues.

Cake said the decision directly affected its ability to provide affordable replacement homes to residents and raised the costs of replacing aging dwellings.

### **Is it enough?**

In total, there are an estimated 1,000 mobile homes in the city's seven mobile parks. The Ford Mobile Home Park off Richmond Highway, where Paulina, Mirella and Cristofer live, has more than 100 dwellings.

Paulina, Mirella and Cristofer are confident that all the homes in their park would not pass inspection and are in need of repair.

With the allocated first round of funding, the organization is contractually required to repair a minimum of 18 homes.

As they passed scribbled notes across the table, several RISC members expressed their concerns to the city regarding the implementation of the funds, whether they were coming soon and the eligibility requirements surrounding them.

Amy Starr Redwine, co-president of RISC, said the city will be able to help only a small percentage of the hundreds of homes in desperate need of repair and that strict eligibility requirements limit those that are most vulnerable.

Cake said mobile homes built before 1976 will not be eligible for the program, as the organization's self-established manufacturing requirements cannot ensure sustainability with older units.

But RISC members fear that, with a large percentage of homes 47 years or older, those who need the most help will be left out.

Despite this, the city is moving forward with the contract agreement, and the first round of funds is set to be released the first week of June. Hampton said the city is still in the design phase for the budget's funding for this year. As a result, she cannot provide any additional information.

Paulina said help is badly needed. She said it has been an uphill battle as she has spent years trying to drum up awareness and call attention to the problems she and her community face daily.

“I just want them to listen to the community,” Paulina said. “We want to give them a chance to do what they said they would do and, if they don’t, we will keep coming back.”