

Why the Definition of “Light Industrial” Matters

When cities plan for growth, **definitions matter**. One vague term can quietly change what gets built — and where.

In Virginia Beach, the term “**light industrial**” is defined more broadly than many people realize. That matters because this definition appears in the City’s zoning ordinance, which are the legal rules that decide what projects can move forward.

Nationally Recognized Definition of “Light Industrial”

In most cities, *light industrial* refers to **low-impact uses**, such as:

- Research and testing facilities
- Small-scale manufacturing or assembly
- Technology, lab, or prototype spaces
- Uses that generate **minimal noise, traffic, and pollution**

These uses are typically designed to coexist near offices, schools, and medical or research campuses.

They **do not** usually include:

- Large warehouses or distribution centers
 - High-traffic truck yards
 - Industrial operations with significant noise, emissions, or runoff
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Why Virginia Beach’s Definition Raises Concerns

Virginia Beach’s current zoning language allows a **much wider range of activities** under the “light industrial” label than many nationally recognized standards.

Because the definition is broad:

- Very different types of projects can be grouped together
- Developments are evaluated case-by-case instead of against clear rules
- Residents may be surprised by what is technically allowed

Adjusting this definition will support **clarity and predictability** in Planning decisions.

Why This Matters South of the Green Line

Land south of the Green Line has long been protected because of:

- Flooding and environmental sensitivity
- Military compatibility requirements
- Limited infrastructure
- Decades of adopted planning commitments

When zoning definitions are vague, those protections become easier to work around — even if the Comprehensive Plan sounds protective on paper.

A Practical, Balanced Fix

This issue doesn't require eliminating economic development. It requires **clear rules**.

A common-sense approach would:

- Clearly define “light industrial” using nationally recognized standards
- Limit those uses to areas already planned and equipped for them
- Remove language that allows land use south of the Green Line to be reinterpreted one project at a time

Good planning should be **transparent, predictable, and consistent** — for residents, staff, and decision-makers alike.

Why Clear Standards Benefit Everyone

Clear zoning definitions:

- Protect taxpayers from unexpected infrastructure costs
- Reduce conflict and confusion
- Help residents understand what to expect in their communities

Most importantly, they help ensure that **Virginia Beach's actions match its stated plans and promises**.