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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at Cardinal Elementary School, 1745 Catalina Drive; UDC 2021-04**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Jason Kamras, Richmond Public Schools

**II. LOCATION**

1745 Catalina Drive

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond School Board

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at the newly constructed Cardinal Elementary School.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The project involves the construction of a freestanding monument sign with an LED message board at the newly constructed Cardinal Elementary School. The monument sign will match the existing monument sign in material and design and will be compatible with the main school building, utilizing the same brick and cast concrete.

The new monument sign will be located at the entrance to the parking lot of the school building off of Catalina Drive. This is a residential area surrounded by single-family detached homes.

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the plan with the following conditions:

- The applicant locate the new monument sign and associated LED message board closer to the main school building, further away from the residences along Catalina Drive;
- The applicant consider programming a shut-off after a time late in the evening so that the LED message board's illumination does not impact the surrounding residences;
- The proposed signs do not change messages, produce animations, or flash any more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.

**Staff Contact:**

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## V. FINDINGS OF FACT

### a. **Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property, totaling approximately 15 acres, is bound by Cranford Avenue on the south, a residential area to the north, Catalina Drive on the west, and Broad Rock Boulevard on the east.

The property is within a residential neighborhood and mostly surrounded by detached residential properties. A buffer of trees separates the parcel from properties fronting along Broad Rock Boulevard. The new monument sign will be installed at the entrance to the parking lot along Catalina Drive.

### b. **Scope of Review**

The proposed signage is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “public building or structure”.

### c. **Project Description**

Richmond Public Schools proposes to construct a brick and precast concrete monument sign with a LED display board at the newly constructed Cardinal Elementary school, formerly known as Greene Elementary School.

The new monument sign will be 5’8” tall, 1’7” wide, and will feature an electronic LED message board and address numbering on each face. The sign will be located at the entrance to the front parking lot of Cardinal Elementary School along Catalina Drive.

No landscaping is being proposed around the base of the new signage.

### d. **UDC Review History**

At the November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 meeting of the Urban Design Committee, the Committee reviewed and approved the Conceptual location, character, and extent review of a new elementary school at 1745 Catalina Drive (UDC 2018-48).

Subsequently, the Planning Commission approved the conceptual design with UDC’s recommended conditions of approval at their November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 meeting.

At the January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 meeting of the Urban Design Committee, the Committee reviewed and approved the Final location, character, and extent review of a new elementary school at 1745 Catalina Drive (UDC 2019-02).

Subsequently, the Planning Commission approved the final design with UDC’s recommended conditions of approval at their January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 meeting.

The approved design included the review of a new identification monument sign for the new school. The monument sign being reviewed with this submission is for an additional monument sign that will include an electronic, LED message board.

### e. **Master Plan**

Objective 1.4, k. of Richmond 300 proposes to “promote an attractive environment by minimizing visual clutter and confusion caused by a proliferation of signage, ensuring that public and private signage is appropriately scaled to the pedestrian experience (pg. 100).”

f. **Urban Design Guidelines**

*Regarding placement and size, the Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations pertaining to signage, including that “freestanding signs should relate to the architecture of the building”, and that the “the sign’s base may be constructed of like building materials” (pg. 23). The message on a sign must be “easy to read and direct” and also “relate to the use of the building”. A sign’s “lettering should be 4-14 inches high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed” (pg. 23). The proposed sign will utilize an electronic message board that will have information on upcoming school events and important dates, and will relate to the use of the building.*

*The Urban Design Guidelines state that the “sign color should relate to and complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent highlights and trim colors” and that, “freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (pg. 24). The proposed monument sign will be constructed using the same color brick and brick pattern as the existing monument sign, and as the newly constructed school building.*

*Illuminated signs “are not appropriate in or adjacent to residential areas” (pg. 24). If a sign is illuminated, it “should have light lettering and dark, opaque backgrounds for improved readability and minimal glare” (pg. 24). For signs that are indirectly illuminated, “the spotlights should be shielded to minimize glare” and “all lighting and electrical parts should be concealed from view” (pg. 24). The guidelines also state that “Freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (pg. 24). While the new proposed sign is located on Richmond Public School’s property, the property is surrounded by single-family homes. Staff finds that the placement of an electronic sign in close proximity to the residential buildings is not appropriate, and recommends that the electronic message board sign be located closer to the main building, set back from the street and far away from the residences on Catalina Drive. Staff also recommends that the brightness of the electronic sign be programmed to shut off past a certain hour, in order to further reduce potential impact on the surrounding neighborhood.*

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

- a. **Vicinity Map**
- b. **Application**
- c. **Plans**