



Staff Report
 City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2025-05	Final Review	Meeting Date: 2/18/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Applicant: Ryan Rinn, Capital Projects Planner	
Project Description	UDC 2025-05 - Location, Character, Extent review for the Browns Island Improvement Plan .	
Project Location		
Address: 500 Tredegar Street, Richmond VA 23219		
Property Owner: City of Richmond - Recreation & Parks		
High Level Details: <p>The Brown’s Island Improvement Plan, originally approved in 2019, has been updated as it moves toward implementation. In 2024, Venture Richmond advanced the project into the Schematic Design phase, refining major elements with guidance from 3North and Timmons Group. To streamline costs and focus efforts, the scope has been adjusted to exclude Tredegar Street improvements and Sturgeon Cove, concentrating solely on enhancements within the island. Notable changes include the combination of The Front Porch and The Clearing into a single area called The Lookout, the relocation and redesign of the Manchester Breezeway due to VDOT regulations, and a scaled-down approach to the River Terraces to improve feasibility and safety.</p>		
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
	STAFF RECOMMENDS THIS ITEM BE CONSIDERED BY THE URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE DUE TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK	
Staff Contact	Kevin Costanzo - Kevin.Costanzo@rva.gov	
Previous Reviews	Previous Brown’s Island Improvement Plan was submitted for review in 2019. (UDC 2019-29)	

Conditions for Approval

- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on a comprehensive lighting plan for the project area, ensuring that outdoor lighting minimizes unnecessary light pollution where applicable.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the use of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, as appropriate and in alignment with the Urban Design Guidelines.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the integration of public art where feasible, as well as opportunities for future public art installations.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the reuse of existing onsite materials within the design plans, where feasible.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide a maintenance plan during the Final UDC review phase, covering landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, permanent structures, and other site elements, including the proposed splash pad.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall evaluate the feasibility of an additional bridge connection from Brown's Island to Tredegar Street or an alternative solution to alleviate potential congestion of non-motorized traffic.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall explore additional opportunities to incorporate design elements that reflect the history of the island.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall consider incorporating permanent food service opportunities in the final submission.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall ensure a consistent design approach for wayfinding signage throughout the project area.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall explore additional site features that enhance connectivity and accessibility, particularly regarding micro-modal transportation. This includes bicycle parking and racks throughout the project area and the potential for public showers at the Haxall Garden location to support watercraft activities at the proposed dock.
- Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on materials for proposed public buildings and site furnishings, such as benches and waste receptacles. Materials should be aesthetically compatible with the surrounding context and durable enough to require minimal maintenance, including resistance to graffiti, natural aging, and weathering.

Findings of Fact

Site Description	<p>The project site is located at 1 Brown’s island and is bordered by Tredegar Street and 10th Street to the North and West, the Manchester Bridge to the East, and the James River to the South. Brown’s island includes hardscape and open space for events, as well as walking paths, and landscaped areas along the canal and river.</p> <p>Notable sites that surround the project area include: Historic Tredegar Iron Works to the North, T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge to the South, and the Richmond Canal Walk along the North Bank of the Haxall Mill Canal.</p>
Scope of Review	<p>The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 and 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.</p>
Project Description	<p>The Brown’s Island Improvement Project includes a series of upgrades to improve infrastructure, accessibility, and public amenities. The plan focuses on five key areas, each with specific proposed enhancements.</p> <p>The Lookout will feature a widened approach to the Potterfield Bridge, a new welcome plaza, permanent restrooms, vendor kiosks, and seating areas, including bleacher-style seat walls and trellis swings. The plan also includes terraces along the Haxall Canal and a re-established tree grove with a shaded area for seating and recreation.</p> <p>Haxall Gardens will include additional seating, lighting, public art, and landscape enhancements along the canal, complementing ongoing improvements along the Canal Walk.</p> <p>The Point will modify the existing stair terrace near the 7th Street pedestrian bridge into deck terraces with shade structures. Additional features include an interactive water feature, embankment slide, nature play elements, and an ADA-accessible pathway connecting the bridge landing to the main island.</p> <p>River Terraces and the Great Lawn will introduce new hardscaped terraces along the James River for seating and river access. A widened esplanade will accommodate vendors during events, with planters and sculptural seating elements incorporated into the design.</p> <p>The Manchester Breezeway will transform the space beneath the Manchester Bridge into a permeable paver plaza. A new Flex Pavilion will support event logistics, including concert operations, and provide space for temporary and pop-up programming during non-event periods.</p>

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Provide Greenways & Parks for All:	<p><i>Create a parks system that is easily accessible by all Richmonders and connected by a greenway network.</i></p>	

<p>Goal Alignment</p>	<p><i>High-Quality Places: Creating great public parks and green space is a fundamental element in establishing high-quality neighborhoods and Nodes throughout the city. The High-Quality Places section of the plan refers to parks and greenways in several parts, most notably in objectives to reach Goal 1 and Goal 4.</i></p> <p><i>Equitable Transportation: Connecting parks with greenways is a core component of Goal 8 within the Equitable Transportation section, which focuses on expanding the non-car transportation network. 198 RICHMOND 300: A GUIDE FOR GROWTH</i></p> <p><i>Diverse Economy: Parks, greenways, and recreation spaces are key drivers in Richmond's tourism economy (see Goal 12). A robust parks system can also help retain, grow, and attract businesses within Richmond as parks help attract employees to live and work in the city (see Goal 11).</i></p> <p><i>Inclusive Housing: Oftentimes, after parks are developed in areas that have lacked green space, property values increase and there is the potential for existing residents to be displaced. At the same time, access to a park is essential for low-income communities to help improve their health outcomes. Therefore, the Inclusive Housing section of the plan has several strategies to preserve and expand housing for lower-income households and there is also a Big Move related to housing.</i></p> <p><i>Thriving Environment: A system of parks and greenways is essential in reaching the clean air (Goal 15), clean water (Goal 16), and resilient and healthy community (Goal 17) goals listed in the Thriving Environment section.</i></p>	<p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on a comprehensive lighting plan for the project area, ensuring that outdoor lighting minimizes unnecessary light pollution where applicable.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the use of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, as appropriate and in alignment with the Urban Design Guidelines.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the integration of public art where feasible, as well as opportunities for future public art installations.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on the reuse of existing onsite materials within the design plans, where feasible.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide a maintenance plan during the Final UDC review phase, covering landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, permanent structures, and other site elements, including the proposed splash pad.</p>
<p>Realign City Facilities:</p>	<p><i>Improve City buildings (schools, libraries, fire stations, police stations, etc.) to provide better services in efficient, shared-use, accessible facilities to better match and serve the growing city.</i></p>	
<p>Goal Alignment</p>	<p>Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment.</p> <p><i>c. Link public art with major public facility initiatives (e.g., plazas, buildings, parks, bridges) and expand the definition of public art to include architectural embellishments of buildings, or landscape features.</i></p>	<p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall evaluate the feasibility of an additional bridge connection from Brown's Island to Tredegar Street or an alternative solution to alleviate potential congestion of non-motorized traffic.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall explore additional opportunities to incorporate</p>

	<p>Objective 15.4 - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.</p> <p><i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.3 - Reduce water consumption by 10% per capita.</p> <p><i>b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.4 - Increase green stormwater infrastructure</p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way</i></p> <p>Objective 17.3 Reduce urban heat</p> <p><i>a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight.</i></p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities</i></p> <p>Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity</p> <p><i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i></p> <p><i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i></p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution.</p> <p><i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i></p>	<p>design elements that reflect the history of the island.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall consider incorporating permanent food service opportunities in the final submission.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall ensure a consistent design approach for wayfinding signage throughout the project area.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall explore additional site features that enhance connectivity and accessibility, particularly regarding micro-modal transportation. This includes bicycle parking and racks throughout the project area and the potential for public showers at the Haxall Garden location to support watercraft activities at the proposed dock.</p> <p>Staff recommends that the applicant shall provide final details on materials for proposed public buildings and site furnishings, such as benches and waste receptacles. Materials should be aesthetically compatible with the surrounding context and durable enough to require minimal maintenance, including resistance to graffiti, natural aging, and weathering.</p>
<p>Urban Design Guidelines</p>		
<p>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3</p>	<p><i>The design guidelines suggest compatibility, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, cost, and sustainability be considered when designing pavement areas. Impervious areas should be limited and pervious pavement materials should be</i></p>	<p>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS</p> <p><u><i>Staff recommends inclusion of sustainable considerations such as stormwater retention and permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</i></u></p>

	<i>introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i>	
	<i>(P.9) <u>Environment, Public Parks</u>: Successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort.</i>	The park includes a number of activities for all ages, abilities, and interests.
	<i>(p.10) <u>Landscaping, Design</u>: Landscaping should not only provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest, but should also be designed to minimize human impact on the environment. Designs that include conservation landscaping, strategically minimize the urban heat island effect, or decrease stormwater runoff are strongly encouraged.</i>	The proposal increases the amount of landscaping in what is currently open lawn. Minimal, if any, trees will be removed and many more will be planted through a reforestation effort.
	<i>(P.10) <u>Landscaping, Species Diversity</u>: Landscape plans should include a diverse palette of plant species that include evergreen trees, flowering and shade tree species, shrubs, ground cover, and annual and perennial plantings.</i>	The proposal includes native species. The proposal also includes a specific native species meadow that will be pollinator friendly.
SITE FEATURES – Page 14	<i>The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users.</i>	A number of outdoor spaces and amenities add interest and usable space for pedestrians. This diversity of uses will enhance pedestrian activity throughout the site.