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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: September 4, 2018  
RE: **Conceptual location, character, and extent review of streetscape improvements around the intersection of Williamsburg Avenue and East Main Street and along Nicholson Street; UDC 2018-32**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Marvin Tart, Department of Public Works, Division of Capital Projects

**II. LOCATION**

Intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue and Nicholson Street (between Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue)

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Public Works

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for the conceptual location, character, and extent review of intersection and streetscape modifications as they tie into the East Riverfront project.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed enhancements to the intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue and the area along Nicholson Street seek to improve the pedestrian realm to the extent possible, given the scope of the project. The addition of landscaping, shade trees, sidewalks, lighting, and high visibility crosswalks will allow for safer pedestrian crossings in an urban environment, encouraging more activity.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following conditions:

- Priority is given to the planting of shade trees over ornamentals, according to specifications as established by Urban Forestry, when possible
- Sidewalk widths are maximized to the extent possible
- Crosswalks are added across all three roads in close proximity to the intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue to enhance connectivity and accessibility
- That furnishings are provided to further enhance the pedestrian realm and to promote activity and interaction with the surrounding uses where possible, in a way that does not encroach on effective sidewalk width
- That the timing for the crosswalks allow for a pedestrian to cross the entire width
- That a raised median on East Main Street, west of the intersection where a space is formed between lanes, be considered for a pedestrian refuge
- That sharrows are placed on Nicholson Street
- That, for final review, the applicant provide a landscaping plan that includes a complete plant schedule, the precise location of all plant materials, and a landscape maintenance analysis. The plant schedule must show number, size

and type of each planting proposed. If existing trees are to be removed, their size, type and location must be noted on the landscape plan

- That, for final review, the applicant provide the location of all lighting units, annotating where they are located on a site plan, including wall-mounted, site and parking lot lighting. Other site details, such as benches, trash containers and special paving materials, should also be located on a site plan. Include specification sheets for each item
- That, for final review, the applicant provide samples of all proposed materials

**Staff Contact:**

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

Phase I of the project surrounds the intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue. Land use around this area varies widely with City Old and Historic District site (Woodward House), a highly used city park (Libby Hill), multi-family residential dwellings, and asphalt parking lots that may house future development. The zoning designations in the surrounding area consist of B-5 (Central Business District), M-1 (Light Industrial), M-2 (Heavy Industrial), R-6 (Single-Family Attached Residential District), and R-48 (Multifamily Residential).

Currently, three roads utilize the intersection. Two of the three roads, South/East-bound East Main Street and West-bound Williamsburg Avenue, have two lanes with each lane designated a turn direction. North-bound East Main Street is one lane in each direction, with a single lane for proceeding through or turning. Posted speed limits for roads entering and leaving the intersection range from 25 mph to 35 mph.

Phase II of the project consists of the area along Nicholson Street (between Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue) Land use around this area consists of M-1 (Light Industrial), M-2 (Heavy Industrial), R-6 (Single-Family Attached Residential), RF-2 (Riverfront District). Stone Brewery is located on the north side of Nicholson Street, near Williamsburg Avenue and the East Riverfront Project is located toward the western side of Nicholson Street, near East Main Street

Nicholson Street is currently a two lane road with one lane of traffic in each direction with posted speed limits of 25 mph.

**b. Scope of Review**

This project is reviewed under Section 17.07 for location, character, and extent as a street or other public way.

**c. Project Description**

Route 5 currently routes traffic along East Main Street until it turns into Old Osborne Turnpike east of Rocketts Landing. There are developments planned along the East Riverfront corridor on East Main Street. The redesigned intersection will continue to allow access to the East Riverfront corridor and improve the connection of the traffic flow from East Main Street to Williamsburg Avenue. This improvement will enhance safety by providing route continuity via

an improved roadway design. The existing intersection is a source of motorist confusion which has resulted in fifteen (15) accidents since 2014.

The City’s current plan is divided into two phases. Phase I is the intersection improvements at East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue, and Phase II is the streetscape design on Nicholson Street.

Phase I is the intersection improvements at East Main Street/Williamsburg Avenue. This phase begins west of the existing intersection and terminates at 31st Street to the east. It will also tie in what will now be the intersecting East Main Street and connect into the newly reconstructed bridge over Norfolk Southern Railroad. Phase I will be built in stages requiring the use of detours for the East Main Street connection due to grade adjustments at the intersection.

To improve the intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue – Phase I, specific design elements include:

- Motorist and pedestrian safety
- Design improvements that create a continuous flow movement through the intersection.
- Pedestrian and bike connectivity from Libby Hill and Poe’s Pub area utilizing existing park paths, sidewalk, and streets.
- Full signal modernization with high visibility cross walks
- Pavement replacement and/or mill & overlay

Phase II is the streetscape design of Nicholson Street. This phase begins at the intersection of Williamsburg Avenue and will terminate just past the railroad (CSX) trestle, where it ties into the East Riverfront project improvements.

To enhance Nicholson Street – Phase II with a streetscape design and to tie in to the improvement constructed by the East Riverfront project. Specific design elements to include:

- Landscaping
- On-street parking
- Decorative lighting
- Sidewalk extension
- Pavement mill & overlay

The intersection improvement project will be funded using state revenue sharing funds. The preparation and documentation of all necessary environmental documents, project development phases and permitting will be completed as required when utilizing state funds, Funding – Revenue Sharing:

PE	– 375,000
RW	– 100,000
CON	– 1,825,000
TOTAL	– 2,300,000

The project shall be developed in accordance with the following proposed schedule:

Public Meeting	August 2018
Conceptual UDC and PC Meeting	August 2018
60% Plans	September 2018

Final UDC and PC Meeting	November 2018
Environmental Documents Complete	December 2018
Final Plans (100%)	January 2019
Advertisement	February 2019
Begin Construction	April/May 2019

**d. UDC Review History**

Staff was unable to find any existing records related to this project.

**e. Master Plan**

This project is located in the East Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan specifically mentions that there is a need for “reconfiguration of the roadway system near the Intermediate Terminal to connect Route 5 (Main Street) with Williamsburg Avenue.”

The Plan additionally notes that “any planned accommodation of inbound commuter traffic from eastern Henrico County into the City should not include the widening of either Government or Williamsburg Roads.”

On the Transportation and Roadway Improvements map, the intersection of East Main Street and Williamsburg Avenue is highlighted as needing “Operating Improvements” and certain roadways have been identified as potential bikeways including a proposed roadway that is a continuation of Stoney Run Dr. through land that is currently Stone Brewing, crosses Nicholson Street, and ties into the Capital Trail near Orleans Street

It’s worth noting this project falls just outside of the Richmond Riverfront Plan, adopted by Richmond City Council in November 2012 as a part of the City’s Master Plan and Downtown Plan, which is the City’s vision document for the Riverfront. A 2017 amendment to the plan designates all projects contained within the downriver area, from Great Shiplock Park east to the border with Henrico County, as Priority 1, allowing planning, design, and construction to proceed simultaneously.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Environment section of the Urban Design Guidelines state that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements. A preference should be given toward materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. Lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (page 9). The guidelines mention that “plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas” in terms of landscaping. (page 10).

Under the Storm Water Management and Low Impact Development section, the guidelines note that “site development should take measures towards conservation of natural resources. Where feasible, developments should also promote impact minimization techniques through alternative storm water management practices” (page 11). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to “mimic a site’s predevelopment

hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source” (page 11).

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes “site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months.” (page 25).

## **VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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