



To: City Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: April 18, 2016
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent review of Maggie Walker Memorial Plaza; UDC No. 2016-12**

I. APPLICANT

Mark A. Olinger, Director, Department of Planning & Development Review

II. LOCATION

98 W Broad St, Richmond, VA, 23220

Property Owners:

City of Richmond Right of Way, Department of Public Works

III. PURPOSE

This application is for conceptual review of a plaza and public open space around a statue commemorating Maggie L. Walker.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project will result in the inclusion of a public plaza around a commemorative piece of artwork and statuary to the incomparable Maggie L. Walker in a location long-recognized for its civic prominence. The project will bring the vision laid out in the 1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines to fruition.

The Urban Design Committee received extensive public comment, both in advance of the meeting, as well as at the meeting. Two alternate designs were presented by community stakeholders. The Public Art Commission's Maggie L. Walker Site Selection team presented on their over two-year long process. The Commission of Architectural Review submitted a letter of advice to the Urban Design Committee on Location, Character, and Extent, as well as comments on the review process. Many commenters, as well as Committee members, had questions about the budget for the project.

Urban Design Committee members were concerned with design and budget constraints around pervious surface, increasing shade within the plaza, increasing flexible seating options in the plaza, that the plaza be a point of transition between Broad St and Jackson Ward that references materials of Jackson Ward, and that pedestrian access to the plaza be prioritized through crosswalks and other improvements.

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

- Strategies to increase the size of the plaza space and expand hardscape, including re-orienting more seating towards the memorial and public art elements
- Strategies other than bollards to delineate the plaza boundary along the West Broad St. curb
- Removing the street tree(s) which may be located within the Brook Road historic bed

- That the applicant investigate a species other than Everclear that create shade and enclosure for the trees on Adams St;
- Removal of the dedication wall that's a component of the plaza design;
- Recommend investigating locally or regionally-sourced granite materials for public art components;
- Recommend exploring ways to create more shade in the plaza;
- Recommend exploring ways to create a variety of seating and increased pedestrian opportunity for viewing and interacting with the statuary;
- Recommending that the curb lines of the historic Brook Rd right of way be maintained and that use of cobblestone or other local material on Brook Rd be utilized to bring Brook Road to plaza-grade;
- Recommend downlighting on the statuary to be 3000 color temperature;
- Recommend that the applicant provide schedule and cut-sheets for lighting, furniture, receptacles, and bicycle accommodations with materials that are referential to the culture of Jackson Ward;
- Recommend a future study of parking and loading requirements around the plaza;
- Recommend the addition of a crosswalk at Adams and Brook Road to facilitate safe pedestrian movement to plaza;
- Recommend maintaining and preserving sightlines to the Maggie Walker statue.
- Recommend that the applicant study further stormwater strategies.

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site consists of a triangular parcel bounded by N Adams St, W Broad St, and Brook Rd. that is owned by the Department of Public Works as part of City right-of-way, as well as the road bed of Brook Rd between W Broad St. and N Adams St. In December 2015, the Planning Commission and then City Council passed Ord. 2015-251-245 to close the vehicular travel a portion of Brook Rd located between W Broad St. and N Adams St. for the purpose of creating an urban plaza as part of a public art project.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as a public square and park under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

At their February 16, 2016, meeting, the Planning Commission resolved that the Public Art Commission is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the design and location of the public art commemorating Maggie L. Walker and the Urban Design Committee is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the location, character, and extent of the public plaza surrounding the art. The motion carried unanimously.

c. UDC Review History

In 1992, the UDC approved the Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines which include the site and directly address it with recommendations.

d. Project Description

This project involves the creation of a plaza and public open space at the intersection of West Broad Street, North Adams Street, and Brook Road as part of a larger commemoration of Maggie L. Walker, including a statue and interpretive elements.

The Public Art Commission Site Selection Team for the project has reviewed the public art component of the plaza; the full Public Art Commission will review the art component at their April 12 meeting. The concept for the memorial revolves around a central sculpture of Maggie Walker on a pedestal, potentially to include inscriptions about her life, achievements, quotes, and timeline.

The program for the plaza includes: a primary focus on the sculpture plaza with seating; an expanded hardscape area; continuing accommodation of loading, deliveries, and valet parking in support of the existing businesses that face the plaza; and offering flexible space for small events, school field trips, and a starting point for tours of the Jackson Ward neighborhood.

The new Pulse Adams St. station will be opposite the site in the median, further increasing pedestrian activity in the area. The design adds a new 12' sidewalk along the east side of North Adams St, where currently pedestrians crossing Broad St. have to divert from their path or walk into the roadway. The 11.5' existing diagonal sidewalk on the eastern side of Brook Road remains in the same location, but the current concrete material will be upgraded to City standard brick pavers, as will the new sidewalk on North Adams Street. The sidewalk along Broad St will remain at 17'.

The existing granite curb lines of Brook Road will remain on each side of the plaza. Brick pavers will be used to raise the street bed so it is flush with the plaza; these pavers are proposed to be a darker brick than the City sidewalk standard. The darker brick pavers will come all the way to the edge of West Broad St. and North Adams St., creating a band in the sidewalk path where that portion of Brook Road closed to vehicular traffic is located. They will also be turned in a pattern that will be parallel to the diagonal orientation of Brook Road. Granite end caps on each end of the block will be inscribed with "Historic Brook Road." There are opportunities for further detail work, such as an element in the top of one or both caps that could include a relief map of the city at a given point in history when Brook Road defined the route of travel leaving the city. Along West Broad St. and North Adams St. the new curb lines will match the existing granite.

There is an existing live oak tree that was planted in the early 1990s that is centered in the existing triangle formed by the three streets and in an elevated planter. This concept design removes this tree in order to allow for the development of the plaza with the Maggie Walker sculpture to be located on a pedestal in a central location and as the focal element. Crepe myrtles along Brook Road that are beginning to obscure business entrances will also be removed. Much of the shade that is cast in this plaza area is due to the existing buildings that enclose this space.

The conceptual landscaping plan includes upright columnar trees along both sides of Adams St. and along the Brook Rd. building wall façade. The trees will provide some light-filtered shade while still maintaining open views to the proposed

sculpture, soften the building lines, and define the plaza as a pedestrian space. The proposed species is *Ulmus parvifolia* "Everclear".

Planting beds will have low profile plant heights of 6-36" dependent on plant selection. Low- maintenance plants could include native grasses like *Pennisetum* "Hameln Dwarf", or medium maintenance low shrubs or groundcover with possible inter-planting with bulbs and daylilies.

Stormwater runoff from the site will be managed in the combined sewer system. There is currently just over 1000 square feet of pervious surface in this area; the design maintains the existing amount of pervious area such that the project does not need to construct additional stormwater retention elements.

The intent is that construction would begin in August 2016, and the plaza will be completed by December 2016.

e. Master Plan

The 2009 Downtown Plan identified this as part of an Urban Center Area. The Downtown Plan also contains a number of neighborhood-specific recommendations to "celebrate and showcase history with streetscape improvements and signage" (pg. 4.10). These include recommendations that "the historic African American flavor of Jackson Ward be maintained and celebrated...with monuments to important figures in Jackson Ward's development" (pg. 4.10). Additionally, the plan recommends that "in order to promote Broad St as a local and regional destination, it is essential that its history and cultural institutions be promoted and that a system of gateways and memorable intersections are created along the street" that make "clear-connections between Broad Street and its neighbors, particularly Jackson Ward (pg. 4.8)

The site is part a National Register Historic District as well as the Broad Street City Old & Historic District.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The 1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines, which were adopted by the UDC and have guided streetscape and public realm investment in the area over the last few decades, identify the site as an important Gateway/Key Intersection and have the following recommendations: "Adams Street Triangle – A similar opportunity exists at Adams and Broad with a view of the columns of the former Second Baptist Church to the south and another church on Marshall to the north. Although recently improved by the City with the addition of a live oak, the triangle represents a future opportunity for a small park, particularly if Brook Road between Adams and Broad was closed and restored as a pedestrian space along with the adjacent Northern triangle. This triangle is historically important as the intersection of a major north-south route (Brook Road) with Broad, and as such, historically had been considered as a natural location for statuary" (pg. 8).

The Urban Design Guidelines have this to say about public plazas: "The design of such plazas should avoid large changes in grade from the street. Plazas should provide a pleasant transitional environment for pedestrians from the street to the building(s) it serves. Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and

historic preservation to create inviting spaces. Adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should also be provided in the design of plazas.” (pg. 14).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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