



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2024-20	Final Location, Character, and Extent Review	Meeting Date: 05/21/2024
Applicant/Petitioner	Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries	
Project Description	UDC 2024-20 CONCEPT Location, Character, and Extent review of the Greening Richmond Public Libraries: Ginter Park Branch project, located at 1200 Westbrook Avenue.	
Project Location		
Address: 1200 Westbrook Avenue		
Property Owner: CITY OF RICHMOND PUBLIC WORKS		
High-Level Details: <p>The applicant proposes sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.</p> <p>Improvements to the site include public space improvements, art, a new parking lot, enhanced landscaping and hardscaping, and green stormwater facilities.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	The design was informed by public questionnaires and the collaborative project management effort of Richmond Public Library staff, RVAH2O, The James River Association, and Four Winds Design.	
Recommended Conditions	1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be relocated or improved for the FINAL Application.	

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Ginter Park neighborhood. The property is situated on the corner of Westbrook Avenue and Brook Road. The property currently consists of the Ginter Park Branch Library and associated landscaping and parking lot.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter and review and recommendation under 17.05.

Project Description

The Applicant States:

“The purpose of the project is to develop a series of bioretention basins and areas of pervious pavers designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from a portion of the roof, sidewalks, and parking lots; reduce the heat island effect of the parking as possible; create an accessible route from public sidewalks into the building; and create a small public park that features shaded reading areas, play space for children, an interpretive edible plant space, and opportunities for education about the importance of native plants and managing stormwater runoff. Some impervious area and most non-native species will be removed with native plants added for shade, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystems services. The project strives to become a model of sustainable site development with educational components accomplished with an interpretive sign, special library programs, and community involvement and support.”

“Sadly, a 32” diameter Southern Magnolia and two smaller Slippery Elm trees will need to be removed to achieve the design. The project team plans to arrange for on-site milling of these trees with the intent of trading the magnolia lumber for dried lumber of a species more suitable for outdoor use. The existing non-native shrubs that are disease free and not invasive will be offered to the community as free transplants to save on demolition costs and reduce construction waste. To further reduce building waste the berm that defines the park perimeter will consist mostly of excavation spoils including an old roadbed the limits infiltration value. The stone benches will be constructed of reclaimed granite from the previous project at East End Library.”

Staff Review:

The purpose of the project is to develop a CONCEPT plan for the construction of sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.

The narrative states that the goal of the project is to filter runoff while detaining stormwater so that excess volume can infiltrate to the ground and be recycled by landscaping plants.

The site will provide greater landscaping and permeable pavers, new public space, and art. Native plants are proposed for added shade, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystems services.

GRTC Bus Line 14 is located on the primary street frontage along Brook Road, a stop is located in front of the project site. Staff has provided a condition of approval that the Applicant work with GRTC to determine if the stop needs to be relocated or otherwise improved with a concrete pad, bench, shelter, etc.

The applicant is working with the Richmond Public Art Commission to provide art throughout the site.

New gathering spaces are also provided with the project, including an arbor seating area and Childrens Garden. A small burm is proposed to create a sense of buffer from the street, while not being high enough to block views for the purposes of safety.

Staff strongly supports the enhancement of this space in terms of stormwater and landscaping, as well as the transformation of the space into a more usable location rather than a front lawn type of design.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval with the following conditions:

1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be relocated or improved for the FINAL Application.

UDC Recommendation:

Approval with the following condition:

1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be relocated or improved for the FINAL Application.

The Committee discussed pollinator friendly maintenance; street trees interfering with bike lanes; tree

removal and recycling; comfort of seating fixtures; and stormwater infrastructure.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	<p><i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i></p> <p><i>Sustainability - City facilities can help showcase green building features.</i></p> <p><i>Beauty – Oftentimes, City facilities serve as beautiful landmarks that anchor a neighborhood and create a distinctive place through architecture and site design.</i></p>	<p>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</p> <p>The project includes a number of sustainability green features that will be showcased for the community. The library will also facilitate learning opportunities to enhance knowledge of sustainability in the community.</p> <p>The addition of greater landscaping and site features will contribute to the beauty of the site and the ability of the library to anchor the neighborhood through distinctive place making.</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>Objective 10.4 - Increase the number of low-emission vehicles.</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>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>Master Plan Objectives</p> <p>Richmond 300 includes a number of sustainability objectives specifically relating to public facilities and City owned properties. Sustainable stormwater management is a primary concern and will be enhanced by this project. ROW stormwater will also be treated by this project, furthering RVA 300 Goals.</p> <p>Further landscaping in parking areas and the street sidewalk will reduce heat island effects.</p> <p>Native, adaptive, and pollinator plantings will be utilized.</p> <p>Art is proposed.</p>
Urban Design Guidelines		
PAVING AND	<i>The design guidelines suggest</i>	PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS

<p>SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3</p>	<p><i>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 introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i></p>	<p>The project will install pervious pavers in the in certain locations. The project will also install bio-retention facilities that will treat stormwater from both onsite and the ROW.</p>
<p>LANDSCAPING – Page 10</p>	<p><i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long term maintenance should be considered.</i></p>	<p>LANDSCAPING</p> <p>Landscaping is used to create interest and enhance the beauty of the existing site. Diverse species and long term maintenance is considered.</p>
<p>STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT – Page 11</p>	<p><i>Design guidelines encourage use of Low Impact Development design elements that that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, minimize, and detain stormwater runoff are applied to not only open space, but also rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, and sidewalks.</i></p>	<p>STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Low impact stormwater practices are included with bio-retention facilities and permeable pavers.</p>