



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: October 4, 2018
RE: **Final review of Electronic Message Center encroachments at the Greater Richmond Convention Center, 5th and E. Broad Streets, 3rd and E. Marshall Streets; UDC 2018-38**

I. APPLICANT

Michael Long, Holiday Signs

II. LOCATION

403 N. 3rd Street

Property Owner:

Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final review of electronic signage encroachments into the City right-of-way

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This plan for electronic signage encroachments around the Greater Richmond Convention Center is planned to provide information to passersby and users of the convention center. There is not much language regarding the installation of electronic message centers (EMCs) in the Urban Design Guidelines however staff believes that EMCs have the ability to provide high-quality visuals that may enhance the vibrancy of a community when executed appropriately.

Therefore, Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend the Director of Public Works grant approval with the following conditions:

- That the proposed sign for 3rd and E. Marshall Streets be moved to 5th and Marshall Streets to reduce negative impacts on abutting historical residential neighborhoods
- That the proposed signs are adjusted for appropriate brightness
- That the proposed signs utilize the highest resolution possible to ensure high-quality visuals
- That 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 proposed components of the project are affixed to multiple facades of the Greater Richmond Convention Center (GRCC) at the intersections of N. 5th and E. Broad Streets and N. 3rd and E. Marshall Streets. The proposed locations are

located in a district zoned as DCC, Downtown Civic and Cultural. This designation is applied to sites containing or adjacent to a major public space or building intended for public assembly.

The proposed location at N. 5th and E. Broad Streets is bordered to the east by N. 5th Street, a one-way, south bound, 4 lane road consisting of two turn-only lanes flanking two thru lanes with a posted speed limit of 25MPH. It is bordered by to the west by E. Broad Street, a two-way arterial that consists of six lanes split by a median and with a posted speed limit of 25MPH. The three west bound lanes consist of two thru lanes and a curb-side bus lane for both the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and the regular bus routes. The three east bound lanes consist of a similar design with two thru lanes and a curb-side bus lane shared by the BRT and the regular bus routes.

The proposed location at 3rd and E. Marshall Streets is bordered to the north by E. Marshall Street, a one-way, east bound, 3 lane road with a posted speed limit of 25MPH. It is bordered to the west by N. 3rd Street, a two-way street that consists of four lanes, two south bound and two north bound with one lane turn lane dedicated to east bound traffic. The posted speed limit is 25MPH.

b. Scope of Review

The project encroachments consist of three Electronic Message Centers (EMCs). The encroachment process is administered through the Department of Public Works, which has requested that the Urban Design Committee (UDC) provide design advice on certain types of encroachments. The UDC does not have the authority to approve encroachments, but rather provides advice to the Department of Public Works.

c. UDC Review History

Staff did not find record of the use of EMCs in past approved plans, encroachments, nor renderings. The following records indicate what was originally approved for encroachments for the GRCC.

At the regular December 1999 meeting, UDC staff recommended approval of encroachments associated with the GRCC, although a recommendation by the UDC was not found, there is an official memo from the Director of DPW to the City Council requesting the authorization of the following encroachments (as illustrated in an approved design):

- Below grade foundation elements
- Steps
- Roof overhangs
- Overhead canopies
- Overhead pedestrian bridges

At the regular July 1998 meeting, the UDC recommended conceptual approval of the new construction of the GRCC with the following recommendations:

- Suggested the use of an architectural feature at the intersection of 3rd and Leigh Streets in order to strengthen the gateway approach. This feature could relate to the architectural environment of Jackson Ward.

- Suggested strengthening the pedestrian scale and environment along Broad Street façade.
- Requested that the architect look at alternatives for “lighting” the appearance of the eyebrow canopy roof on the north side of Marshall Street. Also, make attempts to emphasize the pedestrian environment of that portion of Marshall Street between 3rd and 5th Streets.

d. Project Description

The installation and operation of the EMCs will be for the purpose of educating the public about events that will be taking place at the facility. It is customary for convention centers to have one or more EMC to help inform the public about upcoming events at the facility. EMCs were contemplated as part of the original build out of the GRCC but were removed from the original project due to value engineering to reduce overall cost to build the facility.

The proposal calls for the installation and operation of three full color EMCs with identical dimensions of 75.5”(H) x 126”(W). Each EMC is to be placed 144” above grade with all power and communication equipment placed inside the buildings on which they are mounted. It is proposed that the EMCs will change messages every eight seconds (or less often as needed). The units will not scroll data or show animation. All transitions between messages will be full screen changes. All proposed EMCs will be controlled by GRCC staff and will display content related to GRCC functions.

e. Master Plan

While there is no specific language in the 2009 Downtown Plan regarding electronic signage around the GRCC, it makes note of certain design and scale considerations that are relevant to the application, “New construction should respect the historic façades that still exist in City Center, and should carry the same levels of detail and quality as the historic architecture in Downtown.” (page 4.21) It further states “The Convention Center currently turns its back on Jackson Ward by fronting North 3rd Street with blank walls, service uses, and a building that is out of scale and character with the architecture of Jackson Ward. New infill construction along the West side of 3rd Street should be encouraged to create a transition between the Convention Center and the residential scale buildings of Jackson Ward.” (page 4.9)

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines contain several recommendations for signs. Regarding placement and size, they note that “A sign should fit the architecture of the building. A sign should not be too large for a building or overwhelm its architecture. Signs should not obstruct architectural elements and details that define a building’s design. Signs should be placed so that they are sensitive to the signs of adjacent businesses. Freestanding signs should also relate to the architecture of the building.” In terms of message, the guidelines note “A sign’s message should be easy to read and direct. It should not contain too much information. The message should clearly relate to the use of the building. The use of “sponsor” advertising should be discouraged. This type of advertising has an assembly line appearance, sends a confusing message...” (page 23) In terms of illumination, “Internally illuminated signs are not appropriate in or adjacent to

residential areas. Internally illuminated signs should have light lettering and dark, opaque backgrounds for improved readability and minimal glare. For indirectly illuminated signs, the spotlights should be shielded to minimize glare. All lighting and electrical parts should be concealed from view. (page 24)

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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