



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2023-07	FINAL Location, Character, and Extent Review Meeting Date: 03/20/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Dana Fox, Richmond Public School
Project Description	FINAL location, character, and extent review of the demolition of an existing and construction of a new high school, sports fields, and site improvements.
Project Location	
Address: 4314 Crutchfield Street	
Property Owner: City of Richmond School Board	
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes to build a new 1800 student high school to replace the existing George Wythe high school. The project will provide parking for buses and staff as well as an athletic field complex. The existing George Wythe high school will be demolished and replaced with athletic field complex once the new high school has been built and occupied.	
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	The UDC reviewed and recommended approval of the CONCEPT application in September of 2022. The Planning Commission reviewed and approved the CONCEPT application in October of 2022.
Recommended Conditions	1. UDC recommends that the Applicant continue to provide outdoor lighting that is sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. 2. UDC recommends that the Applicant re-use of existing materials onsite, where feasible. 3. UDC recommends that the Applicant continue work with GRTC to provide and coordinate improvements to the bus stops located adjacent to the site. 4. Applicant to address pedestrian scale of the Midlothian Turnpike Facade and street presence for nighttime aesthetics.

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Northrop neighborhood between Crutchfield Street and Midlothian Turnpike. The site is zoned R-4 - Residential (Single Family), and consists of roughly 27.80 acres. The property currently consists of the existing George Wythe High School and associated sports fields. Residential multi-family uses are located along Crutchfield Road and Midlothian Turnpike, single family is located to the east of the property, and commercial uses are located to the west. In the greater neighborhood, the Midlothian Turnpike Commercial Corridor begins to the west of the site.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to FINAL location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter
Project Description and Analysis	The purpose of the project is to develop a FINAL plan for the construction of a new high school and associated sports fields and site improvements. The project site currently consists of the existing George Wythe High School. The new school is intended to house 1800 students with the potential to increase capacity to 2,000 students. The proposed building will be constructed primarily over the existing sports fields and the existing school will be demolished once that construction is completed. A new tennis, basketball, football, soccer, and baseball field are proposed to be roughly the location of the existing school building. The primary entrance to the proposed building will face Crutchfield, similar to the current building orientation. Bus drop off will be facilitated on the Midlothian Turnpike façade although will be accessed from Crutchfield Road. Vehicle access will occur primarily from Crutchfield Street but a secondary entrance will provide access from Midlothian Turnpike. The primary student drop off and pickup location will be the main entrance along Crutchfield Street during school hours. Afterhours sport drop-off/pickup will be facilitated along the west side of the building, a location near the gym and outdoor sports fields. Visitor parking will be provided near the main entrance. The architecture of the proposed building is adapted from a prototypical school design previously constructed in Chesapeake, VA. The architecture uses red brick, architectural precast concrete, architectural metal wall panels, and prefinished metal trim as primary materials. The windows will be high performance insulated glazed glass with thermally broken aluminum storefront framing. Massing is spread among several wings of the building, which also increases the exterior wall space for allowing light into the interior. Windows and architectural features such as trim and material changes also reduce large monotonous expanses on the facade. The architecture reflects and highlights the primary entrance on Crutchfield Street and the applicant has added architectural features and landscaping to improve the quality of the façade facing Midlothian Turnpike, as requested during the CONCEPT review. The building is serviced by a delivery bay and maintenance area located along Midlothian Turnpike with a screen wall and further landscaping to block view of the area from the right-of-way, as requested during the CONCEPT review. The proposed project will include sustainability considerations and the narrative states that the goal is to have the building qualify for LEED Silver. Vehicle charging stations will be provided onsite. The applicant has stated that light colored materials will be used on the roof to reduce heating affect and the roof will be designed to be solar panel ready for future installation, as requested during the CONCEPT review. Landscaping will use primarily local species and will maintain several existing trees onsite, protected through construction - including a particularly large tree located along Midlothian Turnpike. Landscape buffers consistent with City parking requirements will screen parking areas from the street and surrounding properties. Plantings along the foundation of the building are proved to enhance the base of the building. The applicant has provided a number of trees and other landscaping materials throughout the site, many trees providing opportunities for shade adjacent to the various play fields. Site improvements will include paved walk paths connecting the proposed school building to the street, and providing circulation internal to the site between school and sports fields. The narrative states these paths will be ADA compliant. There are several instances where walkways cross internal drive isle and pedestrian markings are provided, as requested during the CONCEPT review. Two retaining walls are now included in the FINAL plans that were not included in the CONCEPT due to further analysis of site grade. These retaining walls will be made of painted concrete to enhance visual character. Where the retaining walls comes close to adjacent residential dwellings, Staff has recommended the Applicant to reach directly out to those property owners so that they are familiar

with the project.

The Applicant has provided landscaping trees for parking islands along the internal access lane most adjacent to the Crutchfield right-of-way. Staff has asked the Applicant to situate these trees within the wells to also double as street trees along the Crutchfield Street sidewalk, shown on the current drawn site plan.

Pedestrian access to the main entrance, which faces Crutchfield Street, is facilitated by paved walkways from Crutchfield, along interior driveway that facilitates student drop off and pick up. The front entrance includes outdoor seating and a canopy structure providing shade and weather cover for waiting students. The applicant has stated that student drop-off/pickup times and the times that teachers are primarily accessing the building do not overlap, so conflicts due to the potentially high volumes of users, if that were the case, will be limited. The entrance was enhanced to facilitate both vehicle and pedestrian access, as requested during the CONCEPT review.

There are three existing bus stops along the Crutchfield Street frontage of the project site. Currently, one of the stops is located directly in front of the entrance to the existing building, providing strong pedestrian access. The two remaining stops are located at the edge of the site and primarily serve sports fields and multifamily residential uses adjacent to the site. The Urban Design Guidelines suggest that improvements be included with ongoing projects such as providing shelters, benches, and sidewalk space and access. The Applicant is working with GRTC to address these concerns, as requested during the CONCEPT review.

The Liaison for Councilmember Stephanie Lynch, 5th District, has asked the Applicant to work with the Department of Public Works to enhance pedestrian safety along the various access routes to the school, but are primarily located off the subject site. Staff strongly supports any efforts to enhance pedestrian safety, but those improvements are not a part of this application.

Bike parking is provided throughout the site, as requested during the CONCEPT review.

Outdoor seating is provided between classroom wings, the location providing some shade and protection from wind for users being shielded by the building on three sides. Landscaping is provided adjacent to outdoor seating to enhance user comfort. Shade structures have been provided within the center courtyard which will increase the viability of plants and comfort of users in the space.

Basketball, tennis, track, baseball, soccer, and football fields will be constructed. Bleachers will face the track/soccer/football field, one home and one away. Restrooms, refreshment stand, ticket booth (marked as "T" on the site plan) and maintenance storage are also proposed to service the sports fields.

The UDC heard the application at the March 9, 2023 UDC Meeting. Discussion included the providing further pedestrian scale detail and lighting for the façade that faces Midlothian Turnpike, . The Applicant stated that the building is solar ready but will definitely have solar panels installed, but is not part of the current project. The UDC recommended approval with conditions.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	<i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i> <i>Sustainability - City facilities can help showcase green building features.</i> <i>Thriving Environment: City-owned buildings and land are opportunities for energy retrofits and green infrastructure to further Goals 15 and 16, as well as locations for new parks, urban agriculture, and resiliency hubs to further Goal 17.</i>	Big Moves: Realign City Facilities The building will be designed to qualify for LEED Silver and the roof will be solar panel ready.
	Objective 2.1 - Align new facilities and improve existing City owned facilities. <i>f. Implement programs to improve the energy efficiency of City-owned buildings</i> Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment. <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> Objective 10.4 - Increase the number of low-emission vehicles. <i>b. Seek opportunities to install electric charging stations on publicly owned land, balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.</i> Objective 15.4 - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills. <i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i> Objective 16.3 - Reduce water consumption by 10% per capita. <i>b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.</i> Objective 16.4 - Increase green stormwater infrastructure <i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way</i>	Master Plan Objectives Richmond 300 includes a number of sustainability objectives specifically relating to public facilities and City owned properties. Renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable stormwater management, and sustainable construction should be considered. Electric vehicle stations are provided. 1. <u>Staff recommends that the Applicant continue to provide outdoor lighting that is sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</u> 2. <u>Staff recommends that the Applicant re-use of existing materials onsite, where feasible.</u>

	Objective 17.3 Reduce urban heat a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight. b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities Objective 17.6 Increase the resiliency of infrastructure and community assets. h. Increase local renewable energy generation (see Goal 16). h. Identify community facilities to serve as resilience hubs and update systems to be more resilient. Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023. g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife. Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution. b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.	
Urban Design Guidelines		
PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3	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 introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas. The design guidelines also require GRTC transit stops to be considered during design and construction and maintained as comfortable, safe, and of quality design.	PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage; sustainability and compatibility considerations should be included. Significant improvements to the site landscape include stormwater and sustainability considerations. Underground stormwater storage is provided. GRTC Transit Stops Three bus stops are located along the Crutchfield Street frontage of the subject site. These stops serve the site as well as surrounding multi-family residential uses. <u>3. Staff recommends that the Applicant continue work with GRTC to provide and coordinate improvements to the bus stops located</u>

		<u>adjacent to the site.</u>
STREET DESIGN – P.6	<i>Intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner.</i>	Street Design Pedestrian improvements internal to the site are provided, as requested at the CONCEPT review.
LANDSCAPING – Page 10	<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>	LANDSCAPING Several established trees will be maintained and protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and shade for pedestrians throughout the site.
STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT – Page 11	<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>	STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT Information on stormwater strategies is not provided within the application. Stormwater specifics will be finalized at a later stage, but should include low-impact design combined with landscaping to compliment an attractive and accessible outdoor space and public realm. Underground stormwater storage is provided.
GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES – Page 13	<i>Guidelines suggest that buildings should be oriented toward the primary street that borders the site and architecturally acknowledge all adjacent public right-of-ways. A building's entrance should be easily recognizable, at ground level, and appropriately design to accommodate persons of differing mobility levels. Efficiency should be considered when deciding building location and orientation such as passive solar heating design and maximization of natural light.</i>	GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES The building is located toward the center of the property between Crutchfield Street and Midlothian Turnpike. Pedestrian and Vehicle access is primarily provided from Crutchfield due to the volume of traffic along Midlothian Turnpike. The main building entrance faces Crutchfield Street. Requirements for drop-off/pickup circulation makes it difficult to have the building directly front on the right-of-way for Crutchfield Street. However, the applicant has limited the amount of parking located between the building and street. The architecture acknowledges Crutchfield and Midlothian, and improvements were made to the Midlothian Turnpike façade, as requested during the CONCEPT review.
BUILDING SETBACK – Page 14	<i>The guidelines state that new buildings should have the same or similar setback as existing buildings on the same street. There will be situations, however, where a different setback would be appropriate for the type of building and the desired environment. Examples would include larger public buildings, such as schools and recreation centers, located within urban residential areas. In certain cases, a new building should be constructed with a minimal setback to reinforce the traditional street wall.</i>	The site is located in an auto-oriented neighborhood and surrounding buildings are primarily multi-family and often include large setbacks from the street. The existing building includes a large setback from the street, where the proposed building will create a better connection to the street with landscaping and pedestrian improvements.

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. Operational features and parking should be screened from view.</i>	Parking areas include landscaping and screening to the requirements listed in the City Code. Pedestrian circulation throughout the site is provided. Pedestrian improvements internal to the site are provided, as requested at the CONCEPT review.
BUILDING PROPORTION – Page 15	<i>Building massing should be compatible with the surrounding uses; although, important public buildings may require larger sizes. Visual impact can be minimized via design techniques such as setbacks or varying surface and roof planes. Height and roof design should be sensitive to surrounding uses, but may be taller on corners to frame access to the block.</i>	The surrounding neighborhood is largely auto-oriented and includes large buildings setback from the street. That stated, the proposed building begins to introduce a more conscious effort toward urban design by using quality materials and architectural design. The large foot print of the proposed building is broken up by splitting the building into several wings. Landscaping along the street as well as adjacent to the building is used to soften the impact of the building. Different materials and architectural features are utilized to further break up large facades. Differing roof heights and façade planes create visual interest. A screen wall was provided between the utility area and Midlothian Turnpike, as requested by the CONCEPT review.
FAÇADE DESIGN. – Page 18	<i>Building materials should be compatible with surrounding uses and not cause visual confusion by using numerous different materials on a single façade. Material quality and design should complement those on the existing building and be sufficiently durable and sustainable.</i> <i>Building design should take cues from the surrounding area. An easily recognizable, inviting and accessible entrance should be included and ground level design should be comfortable for the pedestrian. Large expanses of blank or undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Access for users of differing mobilities should be included; handicap ramps or other handicap considerations should be incorporated into the façade design and to a high design quality.</i>	Materials include uses red brick, architectural precast concrete, architectural metal wall panels, and prefinished metal trim as primary materials. Staff recommends that the Applicant re-use of existing materials onsite, where feasible. The design uses a number of strategies to reduce the impact of large facades and provide a quality architectural design. The main entrance is highlighted and accessible. The site will be designed to meet ADA requirements.