



February 26th, 2024

TO:

Raymond Roakes
Secretary to the Urban Design Committee
Department of Planning and Development Review
900 E. Broad Street, Room 510
Richmond, VA 23219

FROM:

Charlie Wilson
Baker Development Resources
530 East Main Street, Suite 730
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Urban Design Committee Application for Pedestrian Plaza at 501 Orleans Street, Richmond, VA 23231

My firm is representing 501 Orleans LLC (the “Owner”) in their application for Urban Design Committee (“UDC”) review of a proposed pedestrian plaza abutting an upcoming development at 501 Orleans Street(E0001441036) and 4811 S. 37th Street (E0001441030) (the “Property”). The Property is located at the intersection of Orleans Street and Williamsburg Ave, with additional frontage onto S. 37th Street. The Property is approximately 0.54 acres in lot area.

PROJECT PURPOSE:

The proposed pedestrian plaza is intended to enhance the pedestrian realm in front of the building along Orleans Street. By pulling back the building, there is an opportunity to enhance the placemaking for a development that has otherwise already been seen positively by City staff with the foregoing Plan of Development approval.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT:

Preceding this request, this particular development has undergone three separate City approvals: 1) a conditional rezoning from the M-1 Light Industrial District to the B-5 Central Business District (Ordinance 2022-225); 2) a Plan of Development approval for a 5-story mixed use building (POD-121434-2022) (the “POD”); and 3) a building permit to implement the POD approval (BLDC-125813-2023) (the “Building Permit”).

The approved POD and the Building Permit site plans locate the proposed 5-story mixed-use building approximately 4.32 feet (measured to the foremost point of the front façade) from the property line along Orleans Street. The actual front yard setback varied, though, based on the recesses and projections of the front façade with associated balconies and architectural features. Regardless, this was deemed conforming to zoning based on the following regulations for front yards in the B-5 zoning district, specifically Section 30-442.4(1)(a):

Sec. 30-442.4. - Yards.

Yard regulations in the B-5 district shall be as follows (see Article VI, Division 4 of this chapter):

(1) Front yard.

a. No front yard shall be required. In no case shall a front yard with a depth greater than ten feet be permitted, provided further that not more than ten percent of the building wall of the street level story along the street shall be set back more than ten feet, except as may be authorized pursuant to subsections (1)b and (1)c of this section.

b. A front yard with a depth greater than permitted by subsection (1)a of this section may be provided when such front yard is improved for purposes of a pedestrian plaza or outdoor dining area as permitted by Section 30-440.1 and is approved subject to a plan of development as set forth in Article X of this chapter. Except where the property is within an old and historic district, the City Urban Design Committee shall review the application and plans and submit a recommendation to the Director of Planning and Development Review prior to approval of such plan of development by the Director.

c. A building entrance feature that is set back from the street a greater distance than the primary building façade along the street and that is no greater than two times the width of the building entranceway shall be permitted, and shall not be subject to this subsection.

In the lead-up to commencing construction, the contractor met with Dominion Energy to further discuss the project planning and schematic details of servicing the site. Previously, Dominion Energy was open to relocating the three poles and associated transmission lines on the southern side of the Orleans Street right of way, and the project was planned accordingly. However, in these final discussions, Dominion became unwilling or unable to relocate these transmission lines. This became problematic because of a Dominion requirement that new buildings not be located within ten feet of a transmission line. With the Building Permit approval showing a 4.62' setback from the property line along Orleans Street, the new building would be within ten feet of the transmission line.

Rather than redesign the building itself to address this, the Owner is proposing to bring the proposed building further away from the property line. In doing so, it can keep the architectural variation that was a positive feature that supported the POD approval—the building could be redesigned with a monolithic/flat façade, maintain a ten-foot setback, and not need a UDC review of a pedestrian plaza—for instance.

As shown in the proposed site plan, the front surface of the front façade is setback ten feet from the property line. However, with the varying façade depth, the actual front yard setback is slightly greater than that. As delineated in the above zoning ordinance excerpt (Sec. 30-442.4(1)(b)), a setback of greater than ten feet is permitted in the B-5 zoning district if the setback area is improved for purposes of a pedestrian plaza and approved by the UDC. With that, the proposed pedestrian plaza allows for the quality building details already vetted by POD to remain intact, while satisfying Dominion Energy. As a bonus, the pedestrian plaza in many ways enhances the development and allows for greater pedestrian accessibility to the building.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions after reviewing the request, please feel free to contact me at (804)822-5428 or via e-mail at charlie@bakerdevelopmentresources.com.

Sincerely,


Charlie Wilson