



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
File ID: UDC-090650-2021
Date: May 6th, 2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of a pedestrian plaza and parklet at the intersection of Brook Road and W. Marshall Street; UDC 2021-15**

I. APPLICANT

Sean Wheeler, Walter Parks Architects

II. LOCATION

Right-of-way at the intersection of Brook Road and W. Marshall Street

Property Owner:

City of Richmond

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a pedestrian plaza and parklet pedestrian enhancement at the intersection of Brook Road and W. Marshall Street.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the proposed parklet and pedestrian plaza is in compliance with the City of Richmond's Urban Design Guidelines and the City of Richmond's Parklet Design Guidelines, and furthers the objectives of the Richmond 300 Master Plan by constructing a creative public space that will add to the vibrancy, activity, and usability of the right-of-way at the intersection of W. Marshall Street and Brook Road.

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- The parklet include a reflective feature
- The applicant work with the Department of Public works to find an appropriate solution to differentiate the pedestrian plaza from the travel lane

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject rights-of-way consist of on-street parking spaces directly in front of Art 180 and a section of underutilized paved area adjacent to Gallery 5. This area is zoned RO-2 (Residential Office) and is located within the Jackson Ward City Old and Historic District. W. Marshall Street in this location is one-way east-bound with a posted speed limit of 25 mph, and developed with apartment homes, offices, and businesses.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as part of a “public structure” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

The Urban Design Committee has not previously reviewed any projects for this location.

d. Project Description

The Brook and Marshall Placemaking Project has three elements grouped together at the intersection of W. Marshall Street and Brook Road. The first element of the project is the installation of a pedestrian plaza near the front door of Gallery 5, which is situated on a sharp angle of under-utilized street space. The second element of the project, which will go through a separate application process, is an intersection mural in the trapezoid intersection of Brook and Marshall. Finally, a parklet will be installed in front of ART180, providing a gathering and education space for their program youth and surrounding community members. This application is for final review of an encroachment for the plaza and parklet.

In June of 2020, the City of Richmond received a \$25,000 Bloomberg Philanthropies grant, which has now been awarded. Venture Richmond is acting as the fiscal agent and is also contributing \$5,000 to the project as a grant match. The total project budget for all three elements is \$30,000. The budget is broken down as follows, though some adjustments may occur:

- Plaza: \$10,000
- Mural: \$5,000
- Parklet: \$15,000

Community engagement on this project has been underway for several months with neighboring businesses and community associations. A majority of those who attended the engagement events were in support of this place-making project.

Parklet

The parklet will be located in the parking spaces directly in front of the Art 180 Building, and will be 30 feet 5.5 inches long and approximately 6 feet deep.

The base of the parklet will consist of three 10 foot modular units that are constructed out of 2x4 joists. Decking boards will be installed perpendicularly over these joists. There will be a guardrail on the street-facing sides of the parklet constructed of horizontal wooden boards that are spaced 1 ½ inches apart to allow for visibility into the parklet.

The parklet roof is proposed to be a sloped glass solar panel array and/or polycarbonate paneling supported by 8 6x6 wooden posts, and will utilize a half round aluminum gutter system including rain chains anchored into planters. The solar roof will generate electricity for light features, charging stations, and various low voltage devices that may be installed.

Angled bike racks will be installed on the west side of the parklet and spaced 3 feet apart, allowing adequate space for bike parking. There will also be a triangular planter on the west side of the parklet which will have storage for battery equipment associated with the photovoltaic roof once installed. The parklet will have a two-foot buffer zone on the street-facing side and a 4-foot buffer on east and west ends of the parklet. Bike racks and raised wooden planter beds will be placed in the buffer zones surrounding the parklet as additional physical barriers.

Inside the parklet there will be porch swings suspended from the ceiling. These swings are removable, allowing flexible use of the space. The porch swings are designed to be removed and placed between raised planters that will be located against the face of the Art 180 Building, creating seating areas outside of the parklet.

Staff notes that the proposed parklet will be anchored into the ground, which is not required by the City of Richmond's Parklet Design Guidelines; however, the applicant has clarified that it is not possible to meet design loads without anchoring this parklet to the ground, and that the connection to the ground is minimized, using grouted anchor bolts. If necessary, the assembly could be unscrewed from the anchor bolts and moved.

Pedestrian Plaza –

The pedestrian plaza will be located to the east of Gallery 5 in a triangular, underutilized portion of right-of-way, and will extend about 60 feet out from the corner on either side, until the two sides meet at a sharp point creating a triangular plaza. The plaza will have bike parking on both ends and will be surrounded by bollards spaced 10 feet apart. The bollards will be fixed, with the exception of those that will be within the firetruck turning radius, which will be collapsible. The bollards will all have the same exterior design and utilize reflectors.

The existing brick apron to the original fire engine bay on the corner of Gallery 5 will extend into the plaza space, and the existing asphalt may be painted as part of the intersection mural.

Staff notes that the Department of Public Works does not support the use of bollards within the public ROW and suggests that the applicant consider other creative ways to delineate between the plaza and the travel lane. No furnishings are being proposed within the plaza, as the applicant has specified that this is a flexible space that could serve many purposes that benefit pedestrians. Lighting is not a component of this project. Gallery 5 will be responsible for the plaza space.

The project is scheduled to be completed at the end of August 2021.

e. Master Plan

The City of Richmond's Master Plan, Richmond 300, in objective 17.1, speaks to increasing the number of Richmond residents within a 10-minute walk to high-quality open space to 100%, prioritizing low-income areas with a high heat

vulnerability index rating. Objective 17.1.f suggests that the City promote the Parklet Program and encourage the development of parklets throughout the City (pg.168)

f. Urban Design Guidelines

While the City of Richmond’s Urban Design Guidelines do not mention parklets specifically, the guidelines reference public parks:

“Public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape. Parks should respond to the environment in which they are located and should be designed in accordance with their intended use” (pg. 9). Parklets are a unique way to reclaim right-of-way for public use, and respond to the need of gathering/green space in an urban setting. The proposed parklet and plaza will be open to the public for use. This place-making project will respond to its setting, providing a gathering and seating space that is shaded in a location that does not currently have these amenities.

The Guidelines note that *“site furnishings, such as benches and trash receptacles, should be appropriately styled and scaled to complement building architecture” (page 24).* The Guidelines also note that *“site furnishings should be durable, both in construction and finish, and be easy to maintain and to install” (page 25).* Staff finds that the parklet design and all related furnishings and materials are in compliance with the *City of Richmond’s Urban Design Guidelines and Parklet Design Guidelines.*

The provision of plazas adjacent to buildings serving the public is encouraged. 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). The proposed plaza will have a gradual change in grade from the sidewalk to the street, being placed adjacent to an existing curb cut. Historic preservation will be taken into consideration, as the original brick pavers and ramp that make up the entrance to the original fire engine bay on the Gallery 5 building will be preserved and utilized as a component of the plaza. Public art in this space will consist of an intersection mural and painted asphalt within the plaza which will be reviewed in a subsequent application. No specific seating, lighting, or trash receptacles are being proposed with this plaza, as it is proposed to be a flexible space with no specific permanent use that would require such permanent amenities.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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