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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: May 7, 2015  
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent Review of an addition to the Emergency Communications Center and associated site improvements at 3516 N. Hopkins Road; UDC No. 2015-11**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Beth Rappaport, Dept. of Public Works

**II. LOCATION**

3516 N. Hopkins Road

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for conceptual Location, Character and Extent review of an addition to the Emergency Communications Center and associated site improvements at 3516 N. Hopkins Road.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This project involves the construction of an addition to the existing Emergency Communications Center (ECC) and associated site improvements at 3516 N. Hopkins Road to accommodate transferring Ambulance Authority dispatchers to the Emergency Communications Center.

The proposed addition materials will match the existing building materials, which, due to the nature of the services provided within, are low maintenance and structurally durable to ensure that the center can function even during extreme weather conditions. Staff notes that the overall property is not widely visited by the citizenry, and the building will not contain public-facing functions.

Staff finds that the proposal is consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines and with the zoning and Master Plan Land Use designations for the site. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval, with the following conditions:

- That the final plans include a landscaping plan and schedule, showing plant species, quantity, location and size at the time of installation.
- That the final plans include a lighting plan, showing make, model and finish for any light pole and fixture, as well as fixture light source and color temperature.
- That the applicant considers providing pervious paving in the new parking area.
- That the applicant considers providing additional windows into the office and common spaces in the northern façade.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

## **V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property is located on the east side of N. Hopkins Road between Jefferson Davis Highway and Cofer Road, behind a large City property containing buildings housing the Richmond Transfer Station, Department of Public Works Inspections Department and Radio Shop and offices. The M-2 (Heavy Industrial) zoned property totals 4.6 acres of land and is improved with the existing Emergency Communications building, an approximately 14,500 square foot structure constructed in 2000. The 400' tall emergency communications tower is located on an adjacent property to the south. A large portion of the site is paved and developed, however, there are also stands of trees to the southwest of the building and along the western property line which help to screen the site from the adjacent auto scrap yards.

The surrounding properties on the east side of N. Hopkins Road are also zoned M-2 while the properties on the west side of N. Hopkins Road are zoned M-1 (Light Industrial). Both sides of the corridor are improved with warehouses and manufacturing facilities, with the exception of Mt. Olivet and Maury Cemeteries. A CSX rail line abuts the subject property to the south, and on the other side of that is an area zoned R-4 (Single-family Residential) that is improved with single-family detached dwellings.

### **b. Scope of Review**

The proposed building and site plan are subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as a public building.

### **c. UDC Review History**

In 1998 the UDC reviewed and Planning Commission approved the existing Emergency Communications Center building and site plan.

### **d. Project Description**

This project involves the construction of an addition to the existing Emergency Communications Center (ECC) and associated site improvements at 3516 N. Hopkins Road. The applicant's report notes that all 911 calls originating in the City of Richmond are currently received in the Emergency Communications Center. Fire and Police response are dispatched from this facility, however, calls for the Richmond Ambulance Authority are transferred to their facility at 2400 Hermitage Road. Transferring these calls creates a delay in response time and is operationally inefficient. To improve emergency services, an expansion to the existing building is proposed to accommodate transferring the Ambulance Authority dispatchers to the Emergency Communications Center.

The existing building is a single-story, approximately 14,500 square feet structure composed of light grey and white ground-face CMU blocks scored in an 8" by 8" pattern. The exterior also has highlights of 16" by 16" blue-glazed CMU blocks. The windows are bullet-resistant glass in an aluminum frame painted red, and the roof is a pre-finished grey standing-seam metal. All building materials on the addition will match the existing building.

The building addition, proposed on the north side of the existing building in a grassy field, will add over 6,200 square feet of space to the Emergency

Communications Center. The added space will primarily be used for radio operations, where calls for service are received by the call-takers, and then sent to the dispatchers for response by police, fire or rescue. Each call-taker or dispatcher works at a console, each with multiple computer monitors displaying a variety of information. Per the Applicant's Report, lighting levels are kept low, and acoustical sound, both within the Operations Room and from outside the facility, is also kept low. The Applicant's Report also notes that natural light, although desirable, needs to be carefully considered to reduce glare on the monitors and to prevent people outside the building from being able to see the information on the monitors. Due to the confidential nature of the work of the personnel who have a private or semi-private office, windows to the exterior are operationally undesirable. The existing windows on the exterior of the building are glazed with dark tinted glass.

Per the Applicant's Report, because the ECC is a critical communications facility, it is open continuously with no interruption in operations. The building envelope is moderately hardened to prevent debris from damaging the building during extreme weather events, and to protect the personnel and equipment. Window openings are minimal and bullet resistant. Redundant mechanical and electrical generation equipment ensures that if one system fails, or is inoperable due to routine or unscheduled maintenance or damage, the second units are able to be put into service.

A large portion of the site is paved and developed, however, there are also stands of trees to the southwest of the building and along the western property line. The main parking lot is to the south of the building, and will remain unchanged. A row of parking spaces along the access road to the east of the building will be expanded into a grassy area to accommodate the new employees. Twelve spaces will be removed, but 35 will be gained, for a net increase of 23 and a total of 80 spaces provided on-site.

Several trees will be removed in the area of the addition, including a few large oak trees. The landscaping plans call for the planting of new large deciduous and evergreen trees as well as medium-sized and ornamental trees, primarily in the expanded parking area. The area around the building will be planted mainly in medium trees and shrubs, in addition to the existing vegetation that will be retained. For each of the plant types, several potential species are listed.

Strategies for stormwater management are still being developed. For storm water quality management, the applicant is exploring using pervious pavers and filterra units and possibly purchasing nutrient credits. For storm water quantity management, the Applicant's Report notes that underground detention beneath the new parking lot appears to be the most appropriate technique.

The project budget estimate for the addition and renovation of the existing building is \$3,400,000, with construction funding being sought in this year's CIP budget. Construction on the addition is scheduled to start in October 2015. Once the addition is completed renovations to the existing facility will begin. The project is expected to be completed in September of 2016.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject properties are located within the Old South planning district as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Master Plan recommends Industrial uses for this property, and defines the primary uses in this land use category as a wide variety of manufacturing, processing, research and development, warehousing, distribution, office-warehouse and service uses (page 135).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

In general, the Urban Design Guidelines note that “the quality, design, and condition of all public facilities sets the image of the City, and sends a message about the values placed upon the services provided” (page 13). The Guidelines also note that building materials “should be appropriate for the size and architectural style of the building” and that “many different materials on a single building lead to visual confusion and should be avoided” (page 17). Building materials should also be “aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance” (page 17).

The subsection on materials continues to say that “building textures and their combinations should add continuity and not conflict or detract from each other” and that “textures should be appropriate for the size, proportion and architectural style of the building and its surroundings” (page 17). Referring to building colors, that Guidelines note that they “should be coordinated and compatible with each other and with adjacent buildings” (page 17). The Guidelines also state that “windows, projecting cornices, and architectural details, such as decorative masonry bands in an accent color, may be used to break up flat building planes” (page 19).

The Guidelines note that landscape plans should “include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to “mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source” (page 11).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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