



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2022-20	Conceptual Review Meeting Date: 10/17/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Wang Yongpin, PE, Department of Public Works Capital Projects
Project Description	Conceptual location, character, and extent review of the Leigh Street Streetscape Improvement project.
Project Location	
Address: Leigh Street ROW between North 12 th and North 3 rd Streets	
Property Owner: City of Richmond	
High-Level Details: As part of planned improvements to the Biotech Research Park, the project proposes traffic, pedestrian, bike, and landscape improvements along Leigh Street, between North 12th and North 3rd streets. The project proposes a new shared use path along the north side of Leigh Street, extending from the existing bike lanes on the Leigh Street Viaduct to the intersection of North 4th Street.	
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, raymond.roakes@rva.gov , (804) 646-5467
Previous Reviews	The application was heard at the October 6, 2022 UDC meeting. At the meeting, the Committee voted to recommend approval with conditions.
Conditions for Approval	1) Applicant to maintain a minimum of 10ft pedestrian path along the south side of Leigh Street throughout the project area. 2) Acknowledge on plans and in the narrative opportunities for future connections along the lower portion of Leigh Street to surrounding streets and any future plans (such as the Downtown Master Plan, Fall Line Trail, or other bike infrastructure plans) that might impact the proposed design or provide an opportunity to connect to other transportation

	networks.
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Findings of Fact

Site Description	The proposed project includes the right-of-way of Leigh Street, between North 12th Street and 3rd Street. A majority of the project takes place within the ROW, but several small ROW acquisitions are included. The project is located in the Center City neighborhood, adjacent to the VCU Medical Center, VCU MCV Campus, the Temporary GRTC Transfer Station (under construction), the Virginia Biotech Park, the Coliseum, and the Convention Center. Bus stops affected by the project include stops adjacent to the intersection of Leigh Street and North 11th Street; plus Leigh Street and North 8th Street. Leigh Street, in its current configuration, includes 6 lanes, two travel lanes, and one parking lane in each direction. Public Works states in the narrative that this section of Leigh Street is underutilized by vehicle traffic, but sees an ever increasing pedestrian and bike user count. This usage can be attributed to the presence of the Convention Center, educational institutions, and the VCU Hospital. Tree wells and sidewalk exist along the street, but are often in low to poor condition. A portion of Leigh Street in the project area goes below grade to facilitate utility access for the Coliseum and Altria Building.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to conceptual location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.
Project Description	The Leigh Street Streetscape Improvement Project Conceptual Plan includes site, roadway, and streetscape improvements within the right-of-way of Leigh Street, between North 12th and North 3rd Streets. The scope of the project includes a new shared use path, landscape improvements, stormwater improvements, pedestrian enhancement, and the removal of street parking lanes. The scope of this project does not include the bridges that go across the portion of Leigh Street that is below grade. The scope is also limited to what is proposed by the inclusion of grant funding from both State and Federal sources. Sidewalk/Pedestrian Infrastructure: The existing sidewalk will be renovated or relocated, depending on the location. Brick, standard City sidewalk concrete, and decorative concrete will be utilized. Bumpouts, crosswalk improvements, and median pedestrian zones are provided that increase pedestrian safety. Turning lanes are redesigned and optimized for pedestrian safety. The reduction of road width by the removal of parking lanes increase pedestrian safety by reducing the amount of time that pedestrians are within the path of vehicles. Reduced road width also will reduce vehicle speeds, further enhancing pedestrian safety and comfort. New traffic signals and pedestrian signals are included with new timing and phasing. Bus Stops: The applicant is working with GRTC to determine bus stop needs. Shared Use Path: A shared use path is proposed along the north side of Leigh Street. The path is wider than a standard sidewalk and will allow bike users to more safely travers the area. The path will link to the existing bike lanes on the Leigh Street Viaduct. The shared use path (on the north side of Leigh Street) connects with the Viaduct Bike Lane (south side) at the North 11th Street intersection by using a new street crossing specifically for use by bikes. Lighting: Lighting is not included in this Concept Plan and will be determined at a later stage.

	Landscaping: The project creates a safer pedestrian environment and allows for more green space and stormwater retention. A continuous tree lawn is proposed between the sidewalk and street curb, rather than smaller and more confined tree wells, which will facilitate greater tree health. Street Trees: A mix of flowering trees (i.e., Honey Locust, Kentucky coffee tree, Tulip Tree) have been proposed. See the proposed plant palette for further details. Plantings: Greenspace will have native or adaptive low growing plants and small trees, see the proposed plant palette for further details. Several existing trees will be removed along the Altria Building frontage, the median in front of the GRTC Transfer Station, and a handful of other locations. These tree removals are unavoidable due to the lane shift required to fit the shared use path. A number of new trees will be provided. Native and pollinator shrubs and groundcover will also be utilized.
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Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	TEXT	STAFF ANALYSIS
Richmond 300 Master Plan	<i>The Richmond 300 Master Plan states that “public parks serve a vital role to the health and well-being of Richmond’s residents and its environment. (pg. 99).</i> <i>The City of Richmond’s Master Plan, Richmond 300, speaks to the improvement of Public Parks in vision #4, stating that the City should encourage the creation of a balance of natural rather than hard landscape in creating and improving parks (4.3.k) and that the city should strengthen the streetscape connections by installing pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, pathway, and trails where such infrastructure is missing (4.4.b) (pg. 104).</i>	The Conceptual Plan aims to improve an existing section of streetscape with a new high quality green infrastructure and landscaping along with stormwater retention facilities and improved pedestrian infrastructure.
Public Parks	<i>Successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort” (pg.9)</i>	The subject parcels are located in a Center City area of Downtown, an area of the city that is in need of more quality landscape and pedestrian infrastructure due to existing high usage and predicted growth.
Landscaping	<i>Landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings. Shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the</i>	The conceptual landscape plan consists of native or adaptive species, both flowering and nonflowering, that are appropriate for locations in heavily urban areas.

	<i>predominant plant material in an urban setting” (pg. 9)</i>	
Paving Materials	<i>Impervious material on a site should be minimized to limit stormwater runoff and heat gain. Preference should be given to pervious pavement materials that allow for stormwater recharge, especially in minimally used parking areas, such as park and sport facility parking areas. (pg. 3)</i>	No pervious materials are currently included, but stormwater improvements, including several retention facilities, are provided.