



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: April 21, 2014
RE: **Agenda Item No. 6, Location, Character and Extent: Final review of a drop-off/pick-up drive at Cary Elementary School at 3021 Maplewood Avenue**

I. APPLICANT

Sandra Christian, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

Cary Elementary School, 3021 Maplewood Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond School Board

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of a drop-off/pick-up drive at Cary Elementary School at 3021 Maplewood Avenue.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project involves the construction of a drop-off/pick-up access drive in front of Cary Elementary School. Currently students who travel to/from school by vehicle are dropped off at the curb in front of the school on Maplewood Avenue. Students who travel to/from school by bus are dropped off at the curb on the S. Belmont Avenue side of the school, coming into the school from a side entrance.

Parking on the south side of Maplewood Avenue is prohibited from 8am to 4pm on school days. The school currently sets out traffic cones and temporary signs delineating a lane for student drop-off and pick-up. A representative from the school patrols the sidewalk on Maplewood Avenue, assisting students out of their cars and into the school. There is also a crossing guard that is stationed at the speed table on Maplewood Avenue just east of S. Belmont Avenue.

In November 2013 the Urban Design Committee (UDC) considered and, at the applicant's request, deferred an application for final consideration of this item, citing concerns regarding the design of the access loop. At this meeting the UDC also created a subcommittee of two members to work with the applicants, school administrators and parents to consider alternative designs. A meeting of these stakeholders was held at the school on November 15, 2013.

In January 2014, the UDC recommended and the Planning Commission granted conceptual approval of a revised set of plans that incorporated the previous concerns of the Urban Design Committee and the input of the stakeholder group, with conditions.

While this proposal is not entirely consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines, the Urban Design Committee finds that the revised plans are a marked improvement over the initial proposal. The Committee further finds that the current proposal is consistent with the conversation and findings of the meeting of stakeholders held after deferral of the proposal at the November meeting and with the recommendations made by the UDC and Planning Commission during conceptual review. Lastly, the Committee finds that the proposal addresses the safety concerns associated with student drop-off on a busy street while also taking into consideration the site constraints. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval as submitted.

Staff Contact:

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject property occupies the entire block bounded by Maplewood Avenue on the north, S. Sheppard Street on the east, Grant Street on the south, and S. Belmont Avenue on the west and lies within the R-4 (Single-family residential) zoning district. The 10.6 acre property is home to Cary Elementary School, which was constructed in 1953. There are detached residential dwellings to the west and south, a mix of detached and attached residential dwellings to the north, and City Parks and Recreation facilities to the east. The Powhite Parkway and Downtown Expressway are in close proximity to the school to the west and north.

Maplewood Avenue is one-way heading east at a posted speed of 25mph, with unrestricted on-street parking on the north side of the road. Parking on the south side of the road is prohibited from 8am to 4pm on school days. There is an exit ramp from the Powhite Parkway that merges into a western portion of Maplewood Avenue that connects the City Stadium neighborhood over the Parkway. These two roads merge just west of where S. Belmont Avenue enters Maplewood Avenue. To slow traffic down, a speed table has been installed across Maplewood Avenue just east of the intersection with S. Belmont Avenue.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as a “street or public way” under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

In November 2013 the UDC considered and, at the applicant’s request, deferred an application for final consideration of this item, citing concerns regarding the design of the access loop. At this meeting the UDC also created a subcommittee of two members to work with the applicants, school administrators and parents to consider alternative designs. A meeting of these stakeholders was held at the school on November 15, 2013.

In January 2014, the UDC recommended and the Planning Commission granted conceptual approval of a revised set of plans that incorporated the previous concerns of the Urban Design Committee and the input of the stakeholder group, with the following conditions:

- That, prior to submittal for final review, the applicant provides evidence that Zoning Administration has reviewed the proposed plans for conformance with the applicable zoning regulations.
- That the tree well at the western end of the island be in the same location and of the same dimensions as the existing well at the eastern end of the island.
- That the sidewalk on the island only be provided along the street between the tree wells.
- That the sidewalk on the island be angled where it meets the crosswalk to better reflect the pedestrian traffic pattern.
- That the landscaped portion of the island contains closely spaced low-growing evergreen plants to encourage pedestrians to pass across the access loop at the crosswalk. The plants selected from the palette proposed by the applicant are: Abelia "Rose Creek", Hydrangea quercifolia "Little Lamb", Ilex Hoogendorn "Soft Touch" and Itea "Little Henry" Virginia Sweetspire.
- That the evergreen plants in the landscaped portion of the island are interspersed with annual and perennial flowers to provide seasonal interest.
- That the applicant considers providing additional trees in the landscaped portion of the island.

d. Project Description

This project involves the construction of a drop-off/pick-up access drive in front of Cary Elementary School. Currently those students who travel to/from school by vehicle are dropped off at the curb in front of the school on Maplewood Avenue. The school currently sets out traffic cones and temporary signs delineating a lane for student drop-off and pick-up. A representative from the school patrols the sidewalk on Maplewood Avenue, assisting students out of their cars and into the school. There is also a crossing guard that is stationed at the speed table on Maplewood Avenue just east of S. Belmont Avenue. Students who travel to/from school by bus are dropped off at the curb on the S. Belmont Avenue side of the school.

The proposed access drive would be approximately 290' long and 19' from the face-of-curb to face-of-curb. Drop-off would be permitted on the southern side of the drive, with the northern side left open for circulation. The drive would permit parking for 12 vehicles. New sidewalk will be provided to the south of the loop, connecting to the existing sidewalks to the east and west of the proposed drive. There will be an accessible ramp installed in the center of the new sidewalk, aligning with the entrance to the school.

The island created by the access drive will contain both 5'7" depth of the existing sidewalk in the central area and 5'7" depth of a landscaped area, with full-depth sections of landscaping on the ends. This configuration of sidewalk and landscaped area will help direct any students who are dropped off on Maplewood Avenue towards the crosswalk connecting the island to the sidewalk directly in front of the school entrance.

Construction of the access drive will require the removal of two existing street trees and several shrubs from the landscaped area in front of the school,

however, the new island will be heavily landscaped. At the eastern end of the island is an existing elm tree that will be retained. Four new Zelkova trees, 2.5" in caliper at the time of installation, will be installed: 3 in the island and 1 in a vacant tree well to the east of the island. The Zelkova is a medium-growth tree attaining a height and spread of 50'-75'. The plans also call for the installation of two smaller trees in the island on each side of the crosswalk, to be planted either with Japanese maples, Japanese snowbells, or a combination of the two. The remainder of the planting area in the island will be landscaped with a total of 92 shrubs (6 Rose Creek Abelias, 50 Ilex Hoogendorn "Soft Touch" Hollies, and 36 Loropetalums) and hundreds of groundcover plants (126 Blue Rug Junipers, 206 Variegated lirioppe plants, and 70 Barren Strawberry plants).

The project budget is \$90,000, funded by the City, and work is anticipated to begin this spring/summer.

e. Master Plan

The subject property is located within the Near West planning district as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Master Plan recommends Public and Open Space uses for this property, a designation that includes publicly owned and operated parks, open spaces, schools, and other government and public service facilities (page 135). The Public Facilities section of the plan does not contain any specific recommendations for this school.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state that "It is the priority of the UDC to give deference to pedestrians over other modes of travel" (page 5). The Guidelines go on to say that "the number, size and location of curb cuts should be examined for potential conflicts with pedestrian and vehicular circulation" and that "parking should be relegated to remote areas of the site so that the orientation of buildings can be given a direct connection to the public right-of-way". The Guidelines are also supportive of traffic management techniques that slow traffic, decrease unsafe driving practices, and minimize cut-through traffic, noting that these techniques "should be used to improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists and enhance neighborhood character" (page 7). "Traffic calming elements", the Guidelines continue, "should be well designed so that they provide for an aesthetic contribution to the urban character of the neighborhoods in which they are placed" (page 7). Lastly, the Guidelines also note that site development "should minimize large expanses of impervious surface" (page 4).

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" (page 10). The Guidelines further state that "shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting" (page 10).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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