

City of Richmond

*900 East Broad Street
2nd Floor of City Hall
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov*



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 29, 2022

10:00 AM

Special Meeting

Council Chambers

Urban Design Committee

Call to Order

Public Access and Participation Instructions - Urban Design Committee

Attachments: [09 29 2022 Public Access and Participation Instructions - Urban Design Committee](#)

Roll Call**Secretary's Report****Consideration of Continuances and Deletions from Agenda****CONSENT AGENDA****REGULAR AGENDA**

Final location, character, and extent review of the interim (temporary) condition of the traffic circle located at 1700 Monument Avenue (formerly Lee Circle).

Attachments: [UDC 2022-16 UDC Report to CPC](#)
[UDC 2022-16 Staff Report to UDC](#)
[UDC-16 Application](#)
[UDC-16 Narrative](#)
[UDC-16 Site Plan](#)
[UDC-16 Landscape Sample](#)
[Public Input - Combined](#)
[Public Input - UDC Member Letters](#)
[Public Input - MAPS](#)

This application was presented by Mr. Kevin Vonck and Mr. Ray Roakes.

Committee Chair Quilici asked if the applicant was present.

The applicants, Jeannie Welliver and Mark Lewis from the Department of Public Works, approached the podium. Welliver noted that DPW is planning to assess landscaping at multiple traffic circles in the City and that the Lee Circle is in one of the worst conditions.

Committee Member Woodson asked if anybody from Urban Forestry was present.

Charles Robinson from the Department of Urban Forestry approached the podium.

Committee Member Woodson asked if Urban Forestry was willing and capable of undertaking the needed maintenance.

Robinson said that the irrigation system will add value to the space and the choice of plants will contribute to the resilience of the landscaping.

Committee Member Woodson asked if the irrigation system is currently operable.

Robinson said it is not, but it is planning to be installed this Fall.

Jeannie Welliver said that DPW is unsure about the costs of the plants but that the goal for the project is to stay at or below one hundred thousand dollars.

Committee Member Woodson asked how the one hundred-thousand-dollar budget was determined and expressed concern about it being too low. He referenced Fire Station 12 which came in two million dollars over budget.

Nancy Rodrique, the landscape designer for the plan, spoke via Microsoft Teams about native plant material within the project plan. She said that there were additional options for native plants if changes are requested by Staff.

Committee Member Gemmer asked if the irrigation system is part of the planned budget.

Welliver said no, the irrigation system will be on top of the allotted costs of the plants. She added that the traffic circle is not supposed to be a public space and should be used solely for the purpose of a traffic circle.

Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan asked if there was a fence being built at the perimeter of the circle.
Welliver said no.

Committee Member Gemmer asked where the idea of limiting access by adding landscaping came from.

Welliver said that populating traffic circles is not favorable from a traffic safety perspective. This is both a DPW and VDOT position. In the future, the circle may be reimaged differently. She added that it has not historically been populated, even with the monument was present.

Committee Member Gemmer asked if there are examples of traffic circles currently being used as public spaces.

Charles Robinson said that he is not aware of any. He commented that the current design is not advantageous for pedestrians. The idea is to make the circle aesthetically pleasing but not encourage walking. It was never designed for pedestrians to get to the circle safely. He agreed that the future use could change.

Committee Member Mignardi asked why the plan isn't simpler if they want to keep the space as a traffic circle and stay under budget, particularly if the plants are temporary. Welliver said they wanted the space to look attractive while discussions about how the space will be used in the future are ongoing.

Committee Chair Quilici emphasized the space's significance and role in national and international news. He said that the Urban Design guidelines recommend community engagement and asked who the applicants have engaged with about this design.

Welliver said this design did not go to the community for review.

Committee Chair Quilici said there are concerns from the public about maintenance.

Robinson said that Urban Forestry staff feel that an adequate irrigation system and hiring of additional staff to monitor locations like this will ensure proper maintenance. Committee Member Danese asked how often the space will be visited by staff.

Robinson said that with irrigation there will be less staff visitation but that he anticipated once or twice a week in the beginning.

Committee Member Woodson asked if amendments to the soil are included in this plan.

Robinson said arborists are involved with the process and planting and if amendments are necessary, they may be included.

Rodrique said topsoil testing is including in the plan and amendments may be made if the soil is out of balance.

Committee Chair Quilici said there are instances of the traffic circle being used as a gathering space and asked if, during the design, there was any consideration of the plan providing better access to the space.

Welliver said no because it is a traffic circle and that they are currently unsure how community members want to utilize the space.

Planning Director Vonck said that once the monument was removed, the Commonwealth of Virginia gave the property to the City. Future planning efforts will be led by the City but there is nothing in the queue to discuss those efforts.

Committee Member Woodson noted that location is key in these discussions. He questioned if this beautiful plan could be placed in another location in the City since there are drawbacks with this location.

Committee Chair Quilici opened the floor for public comment.

Alex Criqui, the creative director for Reclaiming the Monument, said that his foundation has public art funding and has received two proposals from internationally recognized artists to install art in Lee Circle. He asked the Committee to consider an alternative design and accept public solicitation so that artists can add to this highly important public space. He also disagreed with decisions being made about the space without community input on the design and said the plan was active erasure of the 2020 racial justice protests. He declared that artists and advocates around the world are still paying attention to the space, and he receives letters regularly. He added that there are multiple national examples of traffic circles with pedestrian crossings.

Alice Massey, a neighbor, said that in her 26 years of residency, traffic was a problem until the traffic design was improved. She added that current planters are not being maintained well by DPW. She said that the City has an opportunity to increase native plants in the design and reconsider plants that may become invasive.

Pedro Ledesma spoke via Microsoft Teams. He said that the Lee Circle is very meaningful as a public space for himself and many others to come together and heal. He questioned how much research was done on traffic circles that are utilized as public space since he knows of many examples. He said that a design for this Circle will set an example for the country and that community members provided input through their usage of the space since 2020.

Committee Chair Quilici closed the floor to public comments.

A motion was made by Woodson, seconded by Danese, to deny the application based on the location and character being inappropriate with the recommendation that the fence and jersey barrier be removed.

Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan asked Mr. Vonck how much it would cost to

conduct a planning process for Monument Avenue that is grassroots-based, focused on community engagement.

Mr. Vonck said that the low end could be fifty thousand dollars and the high end two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan said that the design is fine but that the community is divided and there are no funds currently allocated to a planning process. He suggested that the plan design budget could be allocated toward a planning process instead.

Committee Chair Quilici agreed and said that there is broad consent that the fence should be removed and that they had previously voted to not plant in other monument sites.

Committee Member Gemmer said that she appreciates DPW's assertion that the space is solely a traffic circle but that, because the space has emotional value, that the community should decide how the space should be used. She added that making that decision has emotional and political consequences and that taking a position without community input is a bad idea.

Committee Chair Quilici asked if the motion should be amended to include engagement of stakeholders and the community.

Committee Member Woodson said it is a good point but isn't right for the motion because they don't have the ability to dictate what DPW does with their funds.

A motion was made by Committee Member Woodson, seconded by Danese, that this Location, Character and Extent Item be recommendation for denial to the Planning Commission. The motion carried by the following vote:

Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent to demolish the existing George Wythe High School and construct a new High School, sports fields, and associated site work (4314 Crutchfield Street)

Attachments: [UDC 2022-17 UDC Report to CPC](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Staff Report to UDC](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Application](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Narrative](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Site Plan](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Site Elements](#)
[UDC 2022-17 Architecture](#)
[UDC Member Comment Letter - Mignardi](#)

This application was presented by Mr. Ray Roakes.

John Carty, the applicant, said that the recommendation for sensitive outdoor lighting may not be feasible because they will be holding athletic events at night but that they could be timed. Sustainable stormwater features have not currently been considered but that permeable pavers are not a requirement. They are not looking to create more access to nearby bus stops for safety and security reasons.

Committee Member Gemmer asked if there is any student parking.

Carty said the main parking lot will be used by students.

Committee Member Gemmer asked how many students drive to school and agreed with Staff recommendations that the Midlothian Turnpike façade be improved.

Carty estimated that around 80% of students attend the school by bus.

The co-applicant, Mike Miller, said that there are a number of service areas that are located along the Midlothian Turnpike façade where additional lighting could be detrimental to the usage of those spaces. He added that around 40% of the original design has been altered from feedback. The first prototype of this building has previously been built once in Chesapeake.

Committee Member Gemmer said that from the Urban Design Committee perspective, the side along Midlothian Turnpike is the most seen façade and should have as most visual presence as the front. She questioned the miniscule amount of space between the athletic fields and the street.

Miller noted that the parcel is a little over 27 acres, is linearly shaped, and has significant elevation changes. With those constraints and the fact that the school doesn't currently have a softball field, it is going to be tight.

Committee Member Mignardi commented that there is a good opportunity to add more trees along the eastern side of the parcel adjacent to the residents.

Carty said the reason they haven't added any there is because of the elevation drop.

Committee Member Woodson asked if there are plans for solar installation. He also asked if there is a fly loft in the back of the auditorium.

Miller said that is yet to be discussed. He added that there is a balcony planned with an AV booth but that the design is not far enough along to think about catwalks or fly lofts.

Committee Member Woodson suggested some traffic curbing measures would be great since speed is a problem.

Committee Chair Quilici asked if the applicants could describe the strategies for energy efficiency.

Miller said they have discussed geothermal and solar options. The design team is the same that worked on River City School which is a LEED silver building.

Committee Chair Quilici asked about bicycle and pedestrian access.

Carty said that pedestrian access exists both on Midlothian and Crutchfield but that there isn't an intersection within the limits of the site. They are making sure the sidewalks are in good condition.

Committee Chair Quilici questioned if landscaping could be extended to maximize tree canopy along the Midlothian Turnpike streetscape within parcel limits.

Committee Member Gemmer asked if there is exterior signage planned to direct vehicular traffic.

Miller said that there are no plans but there could be discussions in the future. He added that the layout is not ideal but there will be some need for RPS traffic direction which they can discuss with them.

Committee Member Gemmer questioned if there was a way architecturally to make the main façade more welcoming to students as the main entryway.

Committee Chair Quilici asked if there would be a fence around the school perimeter.

Miller said there will be a fence around the athletic complex but it's undecided if there will be a fence around the rest of the school. They don't want the school to feel uninviting.

Committee Member Woodson said that the project could get additional LEED credit for applying bird-safe glass.

Committee Chair Quilici opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

A motion was made by Hepp-Buchanan, seconded by Danese, to approve the application with staff recommendations.

A motion was made by Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan, seconded by Danese, that this Location, Character and Extent Item be recommended for approval to the Planning Commission, due back on 10/3/2022. The motion carried by the following vote:

OTHER BUSINESS

Adjournment