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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: September 21, 2015  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the stage canopy and sun shelters at Kanawha Plaza, 701 E. Canal Street**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Dr. Norman Merrifield, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**II. LOCATION**

701 E. Canal Street

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character and extent review of the stage canopy and sun shelters at Kanawha Plaza.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This is the review of the stage canopy and sun shelters at Kanawha Plaza. The site layout, grading and hardscaping have all been previously approved by the Planning Commission in May 2015, as was the removal of the existing pedestrian bridge over Canal Street. One of the conditions of approval by the Planning Commission in May was "that the details, including lighting, final plantings, the stage canopy, furnishings, and bike racks, be reviewed by the Urban Design Committee at one of their regular meetings". At the June 4<sup>th</sup> UDC meeting, the applicant brought forth the landscaping and furnishings package, which included the stage canopy design but not the sun shelters. The UDC recommended "that the applicant returns to the UDC when plans are finalized for the stage canopy, and that a report from a qualified sound engineer is presented at that time", and that condition was upheld by the Planning Commission at their meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Urban Design Committee continued to express concerns regarding the design of the stage canopy and the sun shelters. Specifically, the Committee discussed the potential acoustic imbalance related to the use of the "RVA" logo on one side of the stage. There was also robust discussion regarding "RVA" as a recent brand for the City and whether it was good design to have it as a permanent, though non-structural, component of the stage canopy. The Committee expressed a preference for a demonstrative stormwater management solution for the large volume of water that will run off from the stage canopy roof rather than a rain chain leading directly into a storm drain. The Committee also raised issue with the 8" diameter supports for the sun shelters, finding them too bulky compared to the 10" diameter supports for the much larger stage canopy. The Committee also found the 2' 8" depth of the seat wall at the base of the sun shelters to be too small to function as a seat since it would be interrupted by the 8" support pole.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission deny the final application for the stage canopy and sun shelters. The Committee expressed a willingness to continue to work with the applicants on the design of the stage canopy and sun shelters and provided the following recommendations:

- That the light levels in the sun shelters be reduced to be consistent with the light levels under the stage canopy.
- That the applicant reconsiders the scale of the columns used to support the sun shelters.
- That the applicant considers removing the granite seat walls at the base of the sun shelter columns.
- That the applicant returns to the Urban Design Committee with a proposal for some sort of demonstrative stormwater management solution for the stage canopy.
- That the “RVA” logo is removed from the stage canopy design due to acoustic and iconographic concerns, and that the applicant proceeds with a symmetrical design of the stage canopy.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property, Kanawha Plaza, is an urban park encompassing 2.8 acres on two city blocks, partially located over top of the Downtown Expressway (Interstate 195). Kanawha Plaza is located in the B-4 (Central Business) zoning district and is isolated by roadways: S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street to the east carries 10 lanes of two-direction traffic; E. Canal Street to the north carries five lanes of two-direction traffic to the east of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street (a recent configuration due to the construction of the Gateway Plaza building and the closing of a portion of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street) and four lanes of one-way westbound traffic to the west of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street; S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the west carries four lanes of one-way northbound traffic, and E. Byrd Street to the south carries four lanes of one-way eastbound traffic. The posted speed limit on each of these streets is 25mph, and there is no on-street parking along of the street frontages of the park.

The former RMA parking deck and plaza (now owned by the City) and the WilliamsMullen law firm headquarters building are located to the east of Kanawha Plaza, the Federal Reserve Bank is located to the south, the Downtown Expressway emerges to the west, and on the north are the Dominion office tower and the under-construction Gateway Plaza, which will be home to the McGuireWoods law firm among other tenants.

Kanawha Plaza was designed by landscape architects Zion & Breen and completed in 1980. Zion & Breen also provided landscape design for the Philip Morris corporate offices and research center in Richmond and is best known for its design of Paley Park in New York City. The park contains open lawn space, small groves of trees, brick walkways, and a large sunken pool fed by a heptagonal stepped fountain that sits at the corner of S. 9<sup>th</sup> and E. Canal streets. Portions of the park to the east and west over the expressway have been “notched” out so that the expressway is exposed to pedestrians on the S. 7<sup>th</sup> and S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalks, however, walls in the park shield the view of traffic below,

attenuate the sound from the expressway and until recently provided built-in seating. The plaza is open at street level but can also be accessed from the Dominion headquarters by way of a pedestrian bridge that crosses over E. Canal Street and terminates in a spiral ramp by the fountain.

**b. Scope of Review**

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “park” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

**c. UDC Review History**

At its meeting on June 15, 2015, the Planning Commission approved the final plans for the landscaping and furnishings package associated with the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, with the following conditions:

- That any future improvements are submitted to the UDC for separate review at such time as those plans are more defined.
- That the Boreal light fixture utilizes the cyan filter as opposed to the magenta filter, and the Branches mesh drum pattern as opposed to the Foliage mesh pattern.
- That the landscaping plans reduce the amount of lirioppe, add some other evergreen groundcovers (sedums, creeping rosemary, juniper, barren strawberry, etc.), reduce the amount of *Itea* by replacing half of it with *Clethra alnifolia* (maybe ruby spice or one of the dwarf pink blooming varieties), and that male holly plants are provided to allow for berries.
- That the applicant returns to the UDC when plans are finalized for the stage canopy, and that a report from a qualified sound engineer is presented at that time.

At its meeting on May 18, 2015, the Planning Commission approved the final plans for Phase 1A of the Kanawha Plaza renovations, with the following conditions:

- That the details, including lighting, final plantings, the stage canopy, furnishings, and bike racks, be reviewed by the Urban Design Committee at one of their regular meetings.
- That the applicant work closely with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning & Development Review to design appropriate, pedestrian access that prioritizes pedestrian safety.
- That the Applicant is encouraged to approach phase 2 of the proposal in a more inclusive manner that includes broad public input and taking full advantage of Kanawha Plaza’s potential role as a hub park connecting Manchester, by way of the riverfront and especially the Dam Walk, to downtown, as well as a rare green oasis between the Western and more Eastern parts of the City.

**d. Project Description**

This is the review of the stage canopy and sun shelters at Kanawha Plaza, the overall renovation plans for which were previously approved. A stage with a canopy is proposed near the northwestern corner of the site. The canopy is 60’ 9 ½” deep and flares from back (43’ 6” wide) to front (85’ 8” wide). The canopy rises up in the front (30’ 2¾” tall) and back (27’ 6” tall), with a low spot (23’ 2”) about 2/3 of the way back that will allow rainwater to drain from the canopy by

way of a rain chain into a stormwater drain located in the adjacent landscaped area. The canopy roof will be composed of a grey standing seam metal roof supported by 10" round tubular steel that is painted in a hammered silver color. The underside of the canopy will be sheathed in composite wood veneer panels with interspersed 6" recessed LED downlights at a color temperature of 3000k.

On the left side of the stage will be a large (2' deep and 16'8" tall x 49' 8½" long) 'RVA' logo created out of pre-oxidated corten steel panels with a stainless steel wave overlay. The logo is not a structural component of the canopy, but rather is used to hide electrical panels that are currently located along the wall separating the park from the expressway. In order to minimize acoustical issues during concerts, the sound engineering firm hired by the applicant has recommended that the logo be filled with sprayed-in foam insulation, and the design includes this.

The stage opens to a large lawn area planted in Bermuda grass and surrounded by landscaped areas. In addition to landscaped areas, two sun shelters will be provided around the perimeter of the lawn. The shelters are each 33' long and 18' wide. Two separate sections of the roof overlap at the peak at just over 14' in height, and the low edge of the roof is 9' above grade. Each shelter roof will be composed of grey standing seam metal and supported by 8" round tubular steel that is painted in a hammered silver color. The underside of the roof will be sheathed in composite wood veneer panels with interspersed 4" recessed LED downlights at a color temperature of 3000k. The support columns will be set into small granite seat walls to match those in other areas of the park.

**e. Master Plan**

The Downtown Master Plan notes that the plaza "is surrounded by walls, limiting visibility from the street and pedestrian accessibility. As a result, the plaza is vacant most of the time. The park should be cleaned and repaired as necessary and the walls should be removed where structurally feasible to increase the visibility and pedestrian access to the park. Access can also be improved with the use of clearly defined crosswalks and pedestrian signals on the roads adjacent to the park, and by reducing the speed of traffic on the adjacent roadways. Another way to improve accessibility and increase the use of Kanawha Plaza is to develop a portion of the four-acre open space with active uses, such as a civic or office building. Additional foot traffic will improve safety by providing "eyes on the plaza." The size and character of this proposed building should be determined by the load capacity of the plaza's platform, as was the case with the RMA parking deck between Ninth and Tenth Streets that spans the Downtown Expressway (page 4.29).

Though not specific to the property, the Plan advocates for the planting of street trees to create desirable addresses and enhance the pedestrian environment (page 4.21).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines notes that "successful public parks, 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" (page 9). As to landscaping, the Guidelines state it should "provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest" and should "include diverse plant

species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings". The Guidelines note that "shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting" (page 10) and that "significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained". Lastly, the Guidelines note that "all park projects should include a maintenance plan which addresses all phases of the project, including both landscaping and facilities" (page 9). 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).

The Guidelines note that "Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces". Also, "adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should be provided in the design of plazas" (page 14). The Guidelines go on to say that "exterior lighting should also avoid light pollution by directing light downward (page 22). The Guidelines also note that "furnishings and streetlights should coordinate with each other in style, color and finish" (page 24).

## **VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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