



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: September 4, 2018
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of Monroe Park – modifications, 719 W. Franklin St.; UDC 2018-31**

I. APPLICANT

Don Summers, Department of Public Works, Division of Capital Projects

II. LOCATION

719 W. Franklin St.

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final location, character, and extent review of modifications as part of the larger Monroe Park Renovation.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This application seeks review on the placement of power equipment behind the existing World War II Memorial and proposed signage for the Pavilion Plaza. Additionally, this application makes note of an update to the phasing of construction of the Pavilion Plaza.

A modified planting plan has been developed for the screening of power equipment behind the WWII Memorial. This updated plan calls for the use of 12 'Kay Parris' Magnolias, a more compact type of *Magnolia grandiflora*, to be planted around the power equipment for enhanced screening and six 'Green Beauty' Boxwoods on either side of the memorial, a consideration made by the landscape gardeners to Charles Gillette in 1944.

Signage is proposed for the northern-most pier at the entrance to the Pavilion Plaza. This will consist of a 2'-9" X 1'-1.5" aluminum stenciled plaque, proposed to be backlit.

The previously approved seat walls around the perimeter of the Pavilion Plaza will be phased in due to budgetary constraints. The interim design calls for the use of a combination of landscaping and hardscaping until the seat walls can be installed.

Staff recognizes the many constraints and modifications needed for the continuation of the renovation of the park and considers that the planting plan will not only shield the power equipment from the public but may enhance the WWII Memorial. Furthermore, it is believed the proposed signage will minimally impact the overall design and use of the Pavilion Plaza.

The Urban Design Committee (UDC) recognizes the contribution by the sponsor but suggested the sign not be installed and that the sponsor be placed on the donor sign

along with other donors. Additionally, the committee discussed the alternatives for the placement of the power equipment.

The UDC put forth two motions which failed, the third motion passed.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- That the Dominion Power sign on the Pavilion plaza not be installed as proposed and that Dominion Power, instead, be acknowledged in the proposed Donor sign (previously approved by Planning Commission)
- That the landscaping plan be approved as proposed, with the addition of a security camera to cover the area behind the memorial.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed modifications are located within Monroe Park which is bordered by Belvidere Street to the east, Main Street on the south, Laurel Street to the west, and Franklin Street on the north. The public urban park property is surrounded by a number of high-density zoning districts, including multi-family residential, institutional, and religious buildings.

The National Register nomination form notes that Monroe Park is an irregularly shaped, five-sided public park located in central Richmond, between downtown and the Fan. Its design consists of a geometric network of radial walks which focus on adjacent streets and on a central fountain. The design of the park and most of the features in it date from the 1870s; the modern plantings of small trees and shrubs tend to obscure the original axial planning of the park. The Monroe Park Master Plan contains a list of historic species that, at the time, existed in the park.

A series of late 19th-century houses interspersed with monumental churches and public buildings, as well as several high-rise apartments and VCU residence halls face the western, northern, and southern sides of the park. These buildings range in height from two to eighteen floors, and include examples of the Gothic, Moorish, Italian Renaissance, Second Empire, Jacobean Revival, and Georgian Revival styles. The park is bounded on the east by Belvidere Street, a six-lane, principal arterial.

In addition to the fountain, the park is embellished with two major statues and two smaller monuments, as well as the Checkers House, an octagonal pavilion which once held public toilets. Only one statue and the fountain are related to the plan of the park.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as part of a "park...public building or structure" under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

This project is part of the larger Monroe Park Master Plan. The Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission reviewed the Monroe Park Master Plan conceptually in October 2007, and then approved a final version of the plan in February 2008. In 2009, the Urban Design Committee and the Planning Commission approved final construction plans for the renovation of Monroe Park without conditions which included the approval of a fixed door for the bathroom and a functioning door for the adjacent space and two service windows with rolling doors to replace existing stationary windows.

In 2016, revisions to the renovation of the Checkers House to accommodate an ADA accessible restroom facility were submitted to, and approved by, the Permits and Inspections division. This did not require Location, Character, and Extent review as the proposed renovations did not impact the exterior of the building.

In 2017, various revisions and updates to the overall renovation of Monroe Park were submitted including:

- UDC 2017-08 Final review of Monroe Park Revisions
 - Permeable Pavers
 - Bio-filtration Planters
 - Planting Plan
 - Park Lighting-Interior
 - Park Lighting-Perimeter Streetscape
 - Checkers House Plaza – Wall Materials and Layout
 - Drinking Fountain
 - Bike Racks
 - Stage and Flagpoles
 - Games Court Design
 - Tree Removal Plan
- UDC 2017-12 Conceptual Review of Laurel Street Event Venue – Monroe Park Pavilion
- UDC 2017-17 Final Review of Laurel Street Event Venue – Monroe Park Pavilion
- UDC 2017-18 Final Review of Monroe Park Furnishings
- UDC 2017-19 Conceptual Review of Monroe Park Portland Loo
- UDC 2017-33 Final Review of Monroe Park Portland Loo
- UDC 2017-35 Final Review of modification to Checkers House Plaza (Monroe Park Revisions)

In 2018, plans for another revision to the renovation of the Checkers House were submitted and subsequently approved by the Planning Commission. In the same year, designs and locations for wayfinding signage within the park were submitted for review and subsequently approved by the Planning Commission.

d. Project Description

This submittal is a part of the ongoing renovation and restoration of Monroe Park by the City of Richmond and the Monroe Park Conservancy. The park is scheduled to be reopened in August of 2018. This application consists of two

modifications (World War II Memorial Planting and Pavilion Signage) and one update on phasing (Pavilion Plaza).

Regarding the World War II Memorial Planting, the permanent power supply for the site has been located behind the existing World War II Memorial in the park due to various project constraints. This submittal contains a planting plan designed to screen the electrical structure and to add plantings to the World War II Memorial that were included in its original Charles Gillette design.

What follows is a timeline of the permanent power relocation:

February 2017

Project team met on site and determined Main and Pine to be the location for the permanent power entrance to the park.

Dominion informed the project team that the location wouldn't work.

May 2017

Project team met Dominion on site and were told we had to relocate the power pole to Laurel Street. Dominion stated they wouldn't put it under ground and it couldn't go in the sidewalk. It also had to be opposite the street from the existing power pole in the alley across Laurel. The only place that left was just inside the park, set in from the bio-retention basin. This conflicted with a large existing Magnolia.

Project team convinced Dominion to put the power pole in the sidewalk to avoid impacting the Magnolia tree. A transformer would be located on the pole.

It was determined that the enlarged size of the power equipment would not work in the Checkers House due to Dominion regulations. Additionally, the equipment was required to be located as close as possible to the power pole. The project team came to the conclusion that the back side of the War Memorial was the feasible solution. Screening on one side would conceal the equipment from the park and minimize impact of the equipment to the overall layout.

June 2017

Electrical drawings were revised showing the new 800amp service, to include a meter bank and CT cabinet, behind the WWII memorial:

- Providing a 400Amp electrical panel for the Checkers Building.
- Providing a 150Amp electrical panel for the Monroe Park lighting and pole receptacles.
- Providing a future power conduit to be located on the east side of the park from the new power service location.

As part of the modification to the Pavilion Plaza component of the plan, the entrance to the pavilion will be flanked by two brick piers with recessed detailing, comparable to other masonry features within the park. The brick will match the color of the seat walls in the Checkers House plaza and the seat walls in Phase II of the Pavilion Plaza. The northern-most pier will have an aluminum plaque, provided by Dominion, to show their support of the Pavilion and Plaza.

Due to changing budgetary constraints, the Pavilion Plaza will not see the installation of the approved seat walls when the park opens, instead a combination of landscaping and hardscaping will be utilized in the interim.

e. Master Plan

Following the adoption of the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan and the 2009 design of the park, the 2009 Downtown Plan contained recommendations for the surrounding neighborhoods and areas, as well as specific language about Monroe Park that “promote Monroe Park as the center of a campus and a community. With the growth of the Monroe Park Campus that surrounds the park on four sides, Monroe Park is becoming more important to the University as its primary green space, and as such has been endorsed as a central feature within the campus by the VCU 2020 Master Plan. The City and the Monroe Park Advisory Council have developed the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan that will guide future enhanced use of the park as a cultural and passive recreational center for the campus and the neighborhood. This park plan has been reflected in the illustrations in the Downtown Plan. Respect for the park’s historic integrity and increased maintenance and security are key to the park’s success.”

The 2009 Downtown Plan further suggests the park receive “...a facelift with rehabilitated public facilities, new shade trees, improved lighting, and wireless Internet access.”

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Environment section of the Urban Design Guidelines state that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements. A preference should be given toward materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. Lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (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 Public Facilities section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains relevant suggestions on site programming such as “connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered.” In regards to plazas, the section states “the design of...plazas should avoid large changes in grade from the street. Plazas should provide a pleasant transitional environment for pedestrians from the street to the building(s) it serves. Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces. Adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should also be provided in the design of plazas” (page 14).

The Urban Design Guidelines contain several recommendations for signs, including that “a sign’s message should be easy to read and direct” (page 24). Generally, the Guidelines impart, “sign lettering should be 4” to 14” high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed. One inch should be added to the lettering height for each additional 50’ between the sign and the viewer” (page 24). The Guidelines note that “signs should be placed so that they are sensitive to the signs of adjacent businesses” (page 23).

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes “The color of brick and concrete pavers should coordinate with building architecture and adjacent streetscape pavements” (page 20). The section notes that “site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months.” (page 25).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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