



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: April 20, 2015
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of Phase 1A of the renovations to Kanawha Plaza, 701 E. Canal Street**

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 Phase 1A of the renovations to Kanawha Plaza at 701 E. Canal Street.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project involves the first phase of the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, a 2.8 acre urban park located downtown on two city blocks surrounded by office towers. This is envisioned as a three-phase project, with Phase 1A including the renovation of the Plaza hardscaping, landscaping and lighting in advance of the World Cycling Championship in September of this year. Phase 1B of the project will occur after the bike race in September and will include fountain renovation and installation of the splash pad, a permanent stage canopy, exercise equipment and a focal point at the terminus of S. 8th Street. Phase 2 of the project, which is without a timetable at this point, seeks to enlarge the Plaza by enclosing the two openings over the Downtown Expressway, allowing for construction of permanent restrooms and creating areas for potential items such as a dog park, tot lot and video displays.

At present, Kanawha Plaza is an underutilized, poorly maintained and hard to access public park. The Urban Design Committee is very supportive of the collaborative effort to renovate and reinvigorate the park and particularly supports improving visibility into the park and providing a flexible, multi-use space that can accommodate users at any time of the day. The Committee finds these aspects crucial to the long-term success of the park renovation.

Equally important to the long-term success of the park is improving access from neighboring streets. The Urban Design Guidelines are not supportive of pedestrian aerial bridges, as they remove valuable street level activity, and while the Committee is pleased that the pedestrian bridge is proposed to be removed, it is acknowledged that this bridge does provide the solitary entrance into the park where pedestrians do not have to contend with vehicles. To balance the loss of the bridge, the Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission asked the applicant to work with the Department of Public Works to ensure that every pedestrian crossing to the park contains a

pedestrian countdown signal, preferably with an audio component, and ladder-style crosswalks. At the corner of S. 7th and E. Canal streets, where the westbound traffic is split into two sections (those continuing west on Canal and those entering the Downtown Expressway), it appears that there is an opportunity to create a curbed pedestrian refuge as has been created at the corner of S. 9th and E. Canal Streets. At the intersection of S. 8th and Canal streets and again at S. 7th and Byrd streets, it appears that there may be opportunities to shorten pedestrian crossing distances by providing curb extensions.

Given the importance of these access improvements to the long-term success of the park, the Committee would ask the applicant to work with staff of the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning & Development Review to incorporate such features into the overall plans for the site, to be submitted in Phase 1B.

The Committee discussed the plans for the park at length, and shared numerous concerns, including how the lack of clarity on the future of the fountain impacts the site design and that there seems to be an overall lack of identity for the park due to the abundance of planned uses. The Committee also expressed concern that there are too many pavement types being used interior to the site, and instead favored a simpler design. The Committee also had concern about the unfinished landscaping plans, the use of invasive species and absence of native species. As a result, the UDC formed a subcommittee to work with the applicant on refinement of the Phase 1A and future plan phases.

The Committee acknowledges that these plans are being developed in a very tight time frame and did not want to prevent the project from moving forward. It is the desire of the Committee to allow for further refinement of the details while allowing for important site work to begin. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval of Phase 1A of the plans only for the purpose of demolition and grading of the site. The UDC requests that the applicant work with the UDC subcommittee to further refine the details and bring back the plans to the May UDC meeting, with the following recommendations on the design:

- That the applicant considers shifting the walkway from S. 8th Street to the west, aligning more with crosswalk, to avoid cutting off a section of the fountain.
- That all sidewalks at the perimeter of the site are composed of brick (except those provided over the expressway) including areas where a roll-top curb is proposed for vehicular access.
- That the applicant considers reducing the number of different pavement types utilized on-site.
- That the applicant reconsiders the provision of a dumpster on the site.
- That the Phase 1B plans include a final landscape plan and schedule to include plant species, location, quantity, and size at the time of installation.
- That the Phase 1B plans include a signage package, if any is proposed.
- That the Phase 1B plans include details on the proposed stage canopy and sun shelters, including but not limited to structural components, materials, dimensions and finishes.
- That prior to Phase 1B consideration the applicant works with the Department of Public Works and Department of Planning & Development Review to ensure that every pedestrian crossing to the park contains a pedestrian countdown signal, preferably with an audio component, and ladder-style crosswalks.
- That prior to Phase 1B consideration the applicant works with the Department of Public Works and Department of Planning & Development Review to explore the

opportunity of creating a curbed pedestrian refuge at S. 7th and Canal Streets as has been created at the corner of S. 9th and E. Canal Street, and to incorporate such a feature into the overall plans for the site if it is deemed a possibility.

- That prior to Phase 1B consideration the applicant works with the Department of Public Works and Department of Planning & Development Review to explore the opportunity of creating curb extensions at the adjacent street intersections that lead into the park.
- That prior to Phase 1B consideration the applicant works with the Department of Public Works and Department of Planning & Development Review to determine if it is possible to provide on-street parking along S. 7th Street.
- That the applicant considers ways to provide year-round interest in the fountain design, regardless of whether or not the water is running.
- That a focal point is provided at the terminus of S. 8th Street.
- That any Phase 1B and Phase 2 improvements are submitted to the UDC for separate review at such time in the future as plans are more defined.
- That the seat wall design be modified to create unique seating group areas.
- That the portable restroom setup and enclosure be re-oriented for security purposes.
- That a more cohesive furnishings and materials packet is submitted for the site.
- That the food truck lane paving material is darker (easier to maintain) and utilized just for the lane, and that the remainder of the paving in the immediately adjacent area matches the paving material for the rest of the site, to define those as two separate areas.

Staff Contact:

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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. 9th 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. 8th Street (a recent configuration due to the construction of the Gateway Plaza building and the closing of a portion of S. 8th Street) and four lanes of one-way westbound traffic to the west of S. 8th Street; S. 7th 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. 9th 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. 7th and S. 9th 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

The UDC reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the design of the park in 1977. In February 2015, the UDC reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the conceptual plans for this project, with the following conditions:

- That the applicant considers ways to provide year-round interest in the fountain design, regardless of whether or not the water is running.
- That the design in the area around the fountain ties into the landscape plans for Gateway Plaza and recognizes the intended connection to the river.
- That the splash pad ties into the fountain design.
- That a focal point is provided at the terminus of S. 8th Street.
- That the design of the Plaza looks at different scales of gathering spaces for user groups.
- That there is a general reduction of hardscape in the overall plans.
- That the proposed synthetic turf is replaced with real grass.
- That the final plans include representative renderings of key areas of the park.
- That the final plans include a tree survey for the park and the adjacent street trees indicating tree species, caliper size, health and whether or not it is to be removed.
- That the final plans include a grading plan.
- That the applicant endeavors to retain as many existing healthy trees as possible, or phase the replacement of trees over multiple years.
- That the final plans include a landscape plan and schedule to include plant species, location, quantity, and size at the time of installation.
- That the final plans include the planting of street trees on all park frontages where appropriate.
- That the applicant considers alternate locations for the splash pad that are more interior to the site.
- That prior to final consideration the applicant works with the Department of Public Works to ensure that every pedestrian crossing to the park contains a pedestrian countdown signal, preferably with an audio component, and ladder-style crosswalks.

- That prior to final consideration, the applicant works with the Department of Public Works to explore the opportunity of creating a curbed pedestrian refuge at S. 7th and Canal Streets as has been created at the corner of S. 9th and E. Canal Street, and to incorporate such a feature into the overall plans for the site if it is deemed a possibility.
- That the parking needs that are currently shown internal to the site be met along S. 7th Street.
- That pedestrian access along S. 7th Street be provided regardless of the resolution of the parking
- That prior to final consideration, the applicant works with the Department of Public Works to explore the opportunity of creating curb extensions at the adjacent street intersections that lead into the park.
- That the applicant confirms with the Department of Public Works that there is sufficient right-of-way for a designated and separate food truck lane.
- That the final plans include all of the proposed Public Works projects in the right-of-way that will be done in conjunction with the project.
- That the final plans include details on the proposed lighting, including but not limited to pole and fixture model(s), height, finish, light source and light color temperature.
- That the proposed lighting fixtures have a maximum color temperature of 3000k.
- That the lighting fixtures be full cut-off.
- That the final plans include a photometric diagram.
- That the final plans include a signage package.
- That the final plans include details on the proposed stage canopies, including but not limited to structural components, materials, dimensions and finishes.
- That the final plans include details on all proposed site amenities, including but not limited to: handrails, fences, moveable furniture, benches, trash cans, bike racks, exercise stations and water fountains.
- That the applicant considers locating a bike rack near the park entrance point at the terminus of S. 8th Street.
- That the incorporation of public art includes involving the Public Art Commission and other appropriate stakeholders in regards to sculpture in the park or treatment of the blank walls over the expressway.
- That the service road shown in plans presented at the Urban Design Committee meeting on 2/5/2015 be integrated to not be so noticeably different than the design of the Plaza around it.
- That any Phase 2 improvements are submitted to the UDC for separate review at such time in the future as plans are more defined.

d. Project Description

This project involves the first phase of the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, a 2.8 acre urban park located downtown on two city blocks surrounded by office towers. This is envisioned as a three-phase project, with Phase 1A including the renovation of the Plaza hardscaping, landscaping and lighting in advance of the World Cycling Championship in September of this year. Phase 1B of the project will occur after the bike race in September and will include fountain renovation and installation of the splash pad, a permanent stage canopy and sun shelters, exercise equipment and a focal point at the terminus of S. 8th Street. Phase 2 of the project, which is without a timetable at this point, seeks to enlarge the Plaza

by enclosing the two openings over the Downtown Expressway, allowing for construction of permanent restrooms and creating areas for potential items such as a dog park, tot lot and video displays.

The topography of the interior of the park is fairly level, with several small rises in elevation in the vicinity of the existing tree groupings. The northeastern corner of the park near the fountain is at grade with the street sidewalk, but there is a set of stairs to access the interior of the site. The northwestern and southern edges of the park contain retaining walls elevating the park above the street sidewalk. The only accessible entrances to the park are off S. 9th Street, adjacent to the opening over the Downtown Expressway, and mid-block on E. Canal Street. On the southern edge of the park, the area behind the retaining wall contains trees and groundcover plantings, while at the northwestern edge the area behind the retaining wall contains an additional wall of angled brick. Just beyond the retaining walls in both of these areas are concrete screen walls. The northeastern corner of the park, in the vicinity of the fountain, is mainly hardscaped with bricks, many containing the names of individual donors, while the remainder of the park is primarily lawn with intersecting brick sidewalks.

Phase 1A of the plans proposes to improve visibility and access to the park by re-grading the entire site. This will entail removing several feet of soil (and therefore all of the existing vegetation with the exception of one tree at the corner of 9th and Byrd streets), and removing all of the retaining walls and concrete screen walls surrounding the plaza. The re-grading will allow for the replacement of the existing steps with sloped walkways and access ramps. Where currently there are only two accessible entrances to the park, as proposed there will only be one set of steps (at the terminus of 8th Street), and all other entrances will be accessible. There is a concrete pedestrian bridge connecting the park to the elevated Dominion building plaza that will be removed as part of this phase.

On the interior of the site, the Phase 1A plans call for providing space for a permanent concert venue with flexibility for other programs. A main stage with a canopy is proposed near the northwestern corner of the site. The stage foundation and flooring will be built in Phase 1A and will be composed of brick and exposed aggregate. A more detailed plan will be submitted for the canopy in Phase 1B, but conceptually, the applicants are showing a large RVA logo created out of pre-oxidated corten steel with a superimposed stainless steel wave supporting a grey standing seam metal roof.

The main stage opens to a large lawn area that will be planted with Bermuda grass. Around the lawn area will be a number of raised planting beds edged with 2' tall granite block seat walls and landscaped with crepe myrtles, shrubs and perennials. Two sun shelters, proposed to be topped with photovoltaic panels and containing outlets for the recharging of electronics will also be provided around the perimeter of the lawn. Another area on the perimeter of the lawn is being set aside as the future site of the splash pad, which, like the construction of the main stage canopy and the sun shelters, will fall under Phase 1B. For now, the site of the splash pad will be planted in Bermuda grass.

To the south of the main lawn are two areas set aside for exercise equipment and a future public art installation. In Phase 1A, the public art site will be planted in turf grass and landscaped with trees. The area set aside for the exercise

equipment will be prepared with poured concrete and poured circular rubber pads, but the installation of the equipment will occur in Phase 1B.

For Phase 1A the fountain will largely remain as is, though it will be cleaned up and activated. Concrete core testing is underway to determine the structural integrity of the fountain, and the results of that testing will determine the future course of action. One proposed alteration in Phase 1A that affects the fountain is the location of a walkway extending southward from 8th Street that will cover over the westernmost steps of the fountain, necessitating the construction of a retaining wall in portions of the fountain area.

The eastern portion of the site, encircling the Downtown Expressway opening, will be set aside for a food truck lane and dining/sitting area. The food truck lane is accessed by roll-top curbs located on 9th Street and Byrd Street. Portable restrooms will be located in this area, screened by a 7' tall granite block wall. At the corner of 9th and Canal, the applicant has provided several planting beds that mimic those at the Gateway Plaza across the street. It has also been determined since conceptual review that the pedestrian refuge in Canal Street at that corner will be planted by the owners of Gateway Plaza when they landscape their property.

In addition to the landscaped areas specifically mentioned, there are other portions of the site that will received a landscaping treatment; the largest of these are around the Downtown Expressway openings. All landscaped areas will be irrigated. Landscaping plans are not complete as far as the total number of individual shrubs, perennials and groundcovers, but the quantity of trees is finalized. In addition to trees planted interior to the site, the plans call for the replacement of all of the street trees surrounding the park in 6' by 8' wells.

The plans also call for replacing all of the existing sidewalks around the perimeter of the park with brick laid in a herringbone pattern, except for those portions over the Downtown Expressway and at the northwestern corner of the site. This design will use new brick intermingled with the existing bricks from the park that are etched with donor names. In the area at the corner of S. 7th and E. Canal streets that is currently hardscaped with a large section of concrete paver sidewalk interrupted by tree wells (many of which are vacant), the plans call for providing a hardscaped area that would allow for backstage delivery and artist access on days when the Plaza is used for events. This hardscaped area would be flush with the sidewalk level, and will be accessed by two roll-top curbs provided on S. 7th Street.

Interior to the site, the hardscaped areas will be composed of four different types of material: brown stone aggregate concrete, gray stone aggregate concrete, white gravel aggregate concrete, and concrete pavers in 'Fossil Beige'. In places, the interior pathways "swoop" out into the sidewalk area. Per the Applicant's Report, the different material types are arranged in a wavelike pattern to mimic water movement, provides interest at ground plane level, suggest the site's past history as a turning basin, and provide a contemporary appeal from the high rise buildings above.

Several types of lights are employed throughout the site. The primary light is the KIM lighting Era PicoEmitter LED fixture, painted black, on a crook neck atop

either a 14' or 20' tall round pole, also painted black. These fixtures are full cut-off and have a color temperature of 3000k. The poles around the perimeter of the lawn area will also hold an ERCO Gecko Floodlight fixture to throw light onto the lawn. The food truck area will be lit by the URBIS Boreal cast aluminum LED fixture with acrylic diffuser in the foliage drum pattern atop a 12' round aluminum pole. In-ground lights will also be used around the site and to light some trees from below.

Concrete bollards will be located in several areas, notably along the food truck lane, to limit the areas in which vehicles can operate. Four bike racks will be placed near various entrances to the park. City standard ribbon-style trash cans will also be located throughout the site. A dumpster is proposed to be located behind the main stage in the northwestern corner of the site, and will be screened by a 7' tall granite wall.

Phase 1A and 1B of the project are estimated to cost between \$4,000,000 and \$6,000,000. The City is partnering with a number of corporate sponsors, including Dominion Resources, who are working collectively to improve Kanawha Plaza. Demolition work is expected to commence in late May, with construction starting by mid-June of this year.

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 state that the Urban Design Committee does not support the use of pedestrian bridges (page 28).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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