



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: October 20, 2014
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of streetscape improvements to Brookland Park Boulevard, between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue**

I. APPLICANT

Manouchehr Nosrati, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

Brookland Park Boulevard, between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of streetscape improvements along Brookland Park Boulevard, between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This proposal is to provide curb extensions and other streetscape improvements along Brookland Park Boulevard between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue, adding to similar improvements already installed at other intersections in the project area that were reviewed by the UDC and approved by the Planning Commission in 2010.

The Urban Design Committee is appreciative of the efforts already undertaken to work with property owners in the commercial area to close, narrow, or relocate vehicular access to the side streets in order to provide curb and sidewalk on Brookland Park Boulevard. The Committee encourages the applicant to continue to work with property owners to continue this initiative through the completion of the plans and construction. The provision of several bike racks in the commercial area can also help to offset the parking loss.

The Committee finds that the proposed improvements will have a positive impact on pedestrian activity through decreased crossing distance and lowering vehicle speed. The extra sidewalk provided by the curb extensions will allow more capacity for the queuing of pedestrians waiting for the opportunity to cross. The proposed landscaping will contribute greatly to the aesthetics of the neighborhood

The Committee finds that the proposed streetscape improvements are consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines, with the recommendations made at conceptual review, and with the previous improvements on an adjacent section of the corridor. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval, with the following conditions:

- That the applicant continues to work with property owners through the completion of the plans and construction to close, narrow, or relocate vehicular access to the side streets in order to provide curb and sidewalk on Brookland Park Boulevard.
- That the applicant considers additional vertical landscaping in those curb extensions where the presence of overhead or underground utilities or sight line issues prevents the planting of street trees.
- That the landscape palette be modified to add one evergreen species to each curb extension, to replace one of the other plants.
- That the proposed trash can matches the existing can used on the corridor, which does not have a center lid.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The affected right-of-way is along Brookland Park Boulevard between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue and lies within the R-5 (Single-family residential), UB-PO5 (Urban Business with a Parking Overlay), and B-2 (Community Business) zoning districts. The parcels along the right-of-way are primarily developed with commercial structures, with several vacant lots, and some residential uses oriented towards the side streets. The neighborhoods adjacent to the project area are zoned R-5 and R-6 (Single and two-family residential) and are improved with single-family and two-family attached dwellings in a dense development pattern.

This section of Brookland Park Boulevard contains one travel lane in each direction, with on-street parking on each side and a posted speed limit is 25mph. The curbs and sidewalk in this area are composed of concrete. There is a narrow planting strip along the portion of the corridor where there are residential uses fronting on the side streets, but in the commercial areas the sidewalks extends all the way to the curb. The commercial area is plagued by vacant storefronts, extensive curb cuts, and lack of maintenance.

b. Scope of Review

The project is for the construction of curb extensions and is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter as a “narrowing of streets”.

c. UDC Review History

In October 2013 the UDC reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the conceptual plans for this project, with the following conditions:

- That the final plans show the location of any legal on-street parking spaces that will be lost as part of the improvement project.
- That the final plans show the location and dimensions and of any GRTC bus stops along the project corridor.
- That the applicant considers providing a paved line along the corridor delineating the on-street parking area.
- That the applicant considers providing markings that delineate the individual on-street parking spaces.

- That the curb extensions provided by the alleys are reduced to their minimum size to increase space for on-street parking.
- That the applicant work with property owners in the corridor to narrow, eliminate, or move to side streets the vehicular access to their properties.
- That the applicant identifies new locations for freestanding ornamental lights, to match the existing fixture, and to identify locations where fixtures can be mounted to the rear of utility poles, as is currently done.
- That the applicant provides long and narrow tree wells in the western area of the corridor where there are residential uses fronting on the side streets, allowing both for additional street trees and areas of widened sidewalks.
- That the final plans show the precise location of the proposed street trees, and provides a landscaping schedule indicating plant species, quantity, and size at the time of installation.
- That the planting palette is reflective of the plants utilized for the “6 points” roundabout further east on Brookland park Boulevard.
- That more trees are provided in the project area, especially in the commercial area.
- That prior to final review, the applicant provide evidence that the landscaping plan has been reviewed and approved by the Urban Forestry division of the Department of Public Works.
- That the final plans indicate the number and location of any amenities such as benches, trash receptacles, etc.

In July 2010 the Urban Design Committee reviewed and the Planning Commission granted final approval to similar improvements along Brookland Park Boulevard, from Garland Avenue to Cliff Avenue, including curb extensions at the intersections with Lamb Avenue and Woodrow Avenue.

d. Project Description

This proposal is to provide curb extensions and other streetscape improvements along Brookland Park Boulevard between Montrose Avenue and Woodrow Avenue, adding to similar improvements already installed at other intersections in the project area that were reviewed by the UDC and approved by the Planning Commission in 2010.

Concrete curb extensions will be provided at the intersections with Montrose Avenue, Edgewood Avenue, Griffin Avenue, Fendall Avenue, Hanes Avenue, Garland Avenue, and Barton Avenue. The intersections with North and Fendall Avenues are both signalized, with dedicated right-turn lanes from Brookland Park Boulevard for both east and westbound traffic. At Fendall Avenue, there will only be curb extensions on the southeast and northwest sides of the intersection. North Avenue is not proposed to receive any curb extensions. These curb extensions, 6’ deep by approximately 40’ long, will be planted with Chinese Pistache trees, a medium-sized deciduous tree, where there are no conflicts with utilities, and will be underplanted with shrubs (knock-out roses), ornamental grasses (Oriental Fountain grass) and groundcovers (Blue Hill Mountain Sage). Where the curb extensions are installed, the curb face to curb face dimension will be 32’, reduced from the existing 44’.

There are also concrete curb extension islands proposed for Brookland Park Boulevard where it intersects the mid-block alleys in the heart of the commercial area between Fendall Avenue and North Avenue. The islands will be set apart from the existing curb by approximately 2' to allow stormwater to continue to drain to the existing inlets. These islands, approximately 3' deep by 15' long (reduced from 25' long as shown during conceptual review), will be landscaped with shrubs and ornamental grasses.

All of the street intersections will be upgraded with ADA accessible ramps with red tactile warning strips to match those installed in the 2010 improvements. New brick paver crosswalks will be provided for all crossings at the signalized intersections with North Avenue and Fendall Avenue, and at all other intersections all of the pedestrian crossings will be striped with parallel lines. There will also be extensive replacement of concrete sidewalk and curb, especially towards the western end of the project corridor, where the new sidewalks will cover the existing planting strip. The applicant has been working with area property owners to close or narrow curb cuts where possible, and to date has identified seven entrances that can be closed or narrowed. This has resulted in a gain of several on-street parking spaces, but overall, as a result of the improvements, the existing on-street parking stock in the project area (currently 120 spaces) will be reduced to 102 spaces.

There are existing pedestrian light fixtures along the project corridor, some on freestanding poles and some mounted to the rear of wooden utility poles. A total of 10 new pedestrian light fixtures are proposed to be added to the existing wooden utility poles as part of this project. These fixtures will predominantly be placed on poles that are on the opposite side of the street from the existing light fixtures, creating a parallel rhythm of lights.

Nine new City standard "ribbon-style" benches with center armrests are proposed for the project area. The majority will be located in the curb extensions but on the side streets, underneath of new street trees. Two new ribbon-style trash receptacles are proposed at the intersection with North Avenue. There are existing trash receptacles at each of the intersections in the project area. Five new bike racks (black powder-coated inverted "U" style metal fixtures) are proposed in the commercial area. Like the new benches, they will be located in the curb extensions, but on the side streets.

In addition to the trees that will be provided in the curb extensions, there will also be trees planted in the sidewalk in various locations. Along the north side of Brookland Park Boulevard, single-trunk Crepe Myrtles are proposed due to the presence of overhead utilities. Along the south side, where there are no overhead utilities, Chinese Pistache trees are proposed. Sycamore trees are proposed adjacent to the side street curb extensions at several intersections. The landscape plan features several of the same plants that were utilized in the landscaping for the nearby 6 Points roundabout. The applicant held a meeting with the area civic association and received comments in opposition to providing street trees in the commercial area, where the sidewalks are narrow and there are conflicts with overhead utilities. The City's Department of Economic and Community Development is working with the businesses to enhance the facades of the buildings, including providing canopies that would provide shade and shelter.

The estimated construction cost for this project as designed is \$1,850,000. The construction will be split into 3 phases, with each costing approximately \$600,000. There is currently no funding to construct this project, and no estimate on when construction would begin.

e. Master Plan

The subject right-of-way is located in the North Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The majority of the project area is designated for Community Commercial uses, while portions toward the eastern and western boundaries are designated for Single-family (low and medium density) uses. Community High School, located on Brookland Park Boulevard between Lamb Avenue and Woodrow Avenue, is designated for Public and Open Space uses.

In regards to the corridor, the Plan states that “the area has limited parking, obsolete retail spaces, and difficult traffic circulation”, and further that “the proliferation of gas stations, auto repair stations, car sale lots, and outdoor storage lots renders the corridor unappealing” (page 251). The Plan goes on to say that “properties fronting Brookland Park Boulevard, particularly those east of North Avenue, should retain their pedestrian orientation without curb cuts and drive throughs” (page 258). Lastly, the Plan notes that “the Brookland Park Boulevard Commercial area should evolve in a manner consistent with the 1996 Revitalization Plan for the Brookland Park Boulevard Area” (page 258).

The Revitalization Plan for the Brookland Park Boulevard Area, adopted by the Planning Commission in 1996, recommends “widening the sidewalks along Brookland Park Boulevard by an additional two feet and replacement of the street trees to allow pedestrians (consumers) to walk in a more unobstructed manner along the street. This improvement would result in a reconfigured 60 foot right-of-way having two ten foot sidewalks (including a six-inch vertical curb), two eight foot parking lanes, and a cartway of twenty-four feet providing a twelve foot drive lane in each direction” (page 19).

Finally, the Revitalization Plan indicates that “defining the shopping district in this manner will place the pedestrian emphasis ahead of the commuter/arterial street emphasis both Brookland Park Boulevard and North Avenue now enjoy. This concept will very likely upset those interests that desire to move traffic through the area with the least resistance or impediments to traffic flow, particularly at peak traffic periods. However, difficult choices must be made if the image of this area is to change from its currently unfriendly pedestrian/consumer environment to one that is pedestrian/consumer oriented, with emphasis on the pedestrian” (page 20).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines are very supportive of on-street parking, noting that it “is important for not only providing for some of the parking needs of adjacent uses, but also as a means of defining the character of a corridor or neighborhood” (page 6). The Guidelines go on to say that “on-street parking creates pedestrian activity and provides a buffer between those pedestrians and moving traffic” (page 6).

The Guidelines are supportive of traffic management techniques that slow traffic (page 7) and that add “an aesthetic contribution to the urban character of the neighborhoods in which they are placed” (page 8). The Guidelines state that “the use of curb extensions, or bulb-outs, is recommended where appropriate” (page 7). In regards to landscaping, the Guidelines note that “landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines also encourage alternatives to metal tree grates, unless a precedent has been established in the area (page 21).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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