



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: December 21, 2015
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent review of a sign identifying Albert Hill Middle School, 3400 Patterson Avenue**

I. APPLICANT

Shante' Knight, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

Albert Hill Middle School, 3400 Patterson Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond School Board

III. PURPOSE

The application is for conceptual location, character, and extent review of a sign identifying Albert Hill Middle School.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project involves the installation of a freestanding, two-sided identifying sign in front of Albert Hill Middle School at 3400 Patterson Avenue. The sign is proposed to be installed near the intersection of Patterson Avenue and N. Nansemond Street, perpendicular to Patterson Avenue and set back 6' from the property line. The applicant's report notes that the sign will provide the school with an opportunity to communicate scheduled events to the students and greater community.

Albert Hill Middle School is one of the City's more architecturally significant school buildings. The Urban Design Committee was presented signs from other architecturally significant City school buildings. Some (Bellevue Elementary and Binford Middle) have no sign at all; others (Fox Elementary and Stuart Elementary) have a more reserved sign that does not contain a changeable message board or illumination cabinet; two (Swansboro Elementary and Jefferson High) have a sign similar to the one proposed for Albert Hill Middle School, with an internally illuminated and changeable message board. It is difficult to discern any pattern in the provision and design of school signs; indeed it seems that signs have been designed on a school-by-school basis. The Committee has no objection to the provision of a sign on school grounds or to the proposed siting of the sign, but would prefer a sign that was more unique and sensitive to the architecture of the school building. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval, with the following condition:

- That the applicant should proceed with sign colors that are more subtle and in keeping with the building.
- That the sign should be designed more proportionately with the building.
- That landscaping around the sign is not required.

The Committee Chair appointed a two-member subcommittee to work with the applicant on the sign design prior to final review.

Staff Contact:

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Albert Hill Middle School occupies the block bounded by Park Avenue, Roseneath Road, Patterson Avenue and N. Nansemond Street. The three story, 99,000 square foot Mediterranean Revival school was designed by Charles Robinson and sits on 3.3 acres in the R-48 (Multi-family Residential) zoning district. The adjacent blocks to the north, west and south are also zoned R-48 and are developed with multi-family and single family attached and detached dwellings in a dense development pattern. There are also a number of small commercial and office uses in the immediate vicinity. To the east of the site is an area zoned R-6 (Single-family attached Residential) developed with multi-family and single family attached and detached dwellings in a dense development pattern.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed sign is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “public building”.

c. UDC Review History

Staff was unable to identify any previously reviewed UDC projects for the subject property.

d. Project Description

This project involves the installation of a freestanding, two-sided identifying sign in front of Albert Hill Middle School at 3400 Patterson Avenue. The sign is proposed to be installed near the intersection of Patterson Avenue and N. Nansemond Street, perpendicular to Patterson Avenue and set back 6’ from the property line and will provide the school with an opportunity to communicate scheduled events to the students and greater community.

The sign will be 6’ 8” tall (a 4’ sign area atop a 28” base, with a 3” recessed area between), 8’ wide and 20” deep. The base of the sign will be composed of aluminum coated in a beige-colored textured paint to mimic the school building finishes. The recessed section between the base and the sign area will be aluminum painted black, and the sign area will be aluminum painted orange. The sign area contains a white lexan internal illumination cabinet with three rows that accept 6” tall changeable letters. Atop that is the name of the school with the tiger logo, all of which will also be internally illuminated.

The landscape plans include six Heller’s Japanese holly plants and 4 andora juniper plants to be planted around the base of the sign.

The project cost is \$8,000, with funding coming from the school Parent/Teacher Association. Once all approvals are in place, fabrication and installation should be complete in approximately one month.

e. Master Plan

The subject property is located in the Near West Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan places the subject area in the Public and Open Space use category, with primary uses including government facilities.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines impart that “sign lettering should be 4” to 14” high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed. The Guidelines also note that “freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (page 24).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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