



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: September 19, 2016
RE: **Revisions to Final Location, Character and Extent review of Main Street Station Site Plan, 1500 E. Main Street; UDC 2016-37**

I. APPLICANT

Jeannie Welliver, Department of Economic and Community Development

II. LOCATION

Main Street Station, 1500 E. Main Street

Property Owner:

City of Richmond General Services

III. PURPOSE

The application is for revisions to the previously-approved final location, character and extent review of a proposed site plan for the parcels adjacent to and containing Main Street Station, in response to new design elements and the need for cost savings.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This proposal involves a set of changes to a previously approved design for improvements to the parcels containing and adjacent to Main Street Station associated with the rehabilitation of Main Street Station's train shed to serve as the State and City's premier Welcome and Travel Center as well as the region's multimodal transportation center.

The Committee finds the project to be well-considered overall, and that the changes proposed to materials do not negatively impact the overall design. Many elements, such as the addition of a water fountain and configuration of flexible plaza space, create a better design with a wider array of uses. The applicant also brought updated information on the lighting plans and canopy design for the project.

However, the Committee and the applicant spoke at length about staff concerns and public comment about the location, character, and extent of the bicycle accommodations included in the plan, particularly regarding safety and security. Staff worked with the City Pedestrian, Bicycle & Trails coordinator to craft recommendations specific to bicycle movement and storage through the site. The applicant directly addressed some of the staff conditions, including the bollards and the need for ingress and egress to the bike share station, but also spoke to plans for other long-term bike storage located off-site. The applicant also discussed some of the circulation issues through the site, as well as the design of the canopies and how they fit into the overall ironwork of the station. While recognizing that the landscape plan was previously approved, the Committee was very concerned with the use of an invasive groundcover, including two species of Eunonymous, as undesirable for the site. The applicant spoke to the difficulty of the site and why they had selected this species, but the Committee remained unsupportive and

encouraged the applicant to pursue replacement groundcover plantings or to provide more hardscape to avoid using invasive species.

The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the design with the following conditions:

- That the proposed bike lane on East Franklin Street taper into the right-of-way that travels underneath the train shed to provide a seamless transition
- That the bike share station have a clear ingress and egress to and from 15th Street, including relocating the existing signage in place, as well as a direct hardscaped and ramped connection to the western path of the parking area for direct access to Franklin Street
- That the number of retractable bollards be reduced to one or three, to provide an odd number and ease in path selection through the site and contain a reflective element for low-light conditions
- That the applicant work with the Transportation Engineer and Pedestrian, Bicycle & Trails Coordinator to ensure ramps are aligned to ensure appropriate sidewalk width and pedestrian desire lines are maintained

As well as the additional consideration:

- That the applicant consider designating some bicycle parking as long-term, with lockers or other protected storage, and remove excess bicycle parking with poor sight lines from the project
- That drought-resistant, non-invasive groundcover be used in the landscape plan.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject properties are located east of N. 15th Street and North of E. Main Street adjacent to Main Street Station and are all located in the M-1 (Light Industrial) zoning district. Much of the subject area is shadowed by the elevated Interstate 95. Main Street Station is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of Richmond's most recognizable community landmarks. Designed by Wilson, Harris, and Richards in 1900 and completed in 1901, it is one of the great examples in the country of a head house-shed train station and the French Chateau style of public architecture.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed site plan is subject to location, character, and extent review as a "square, park, or other public way, ground, or open space" under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. Project Description

In addition to Main Street Station, the subject properties previously contained a surface parking lot containing 106 spaces and serving cars and light trucks; this lot has been used for construction laydown and site utility installations associated with the train shed rehabilitation.

This plan formalizes the parking area south of Franklin Street to provide for multiple different users, including bus and motor coaches along with vehicles. The proposal is to provide two entrances from Franklin Street leading to a better

defined parking area containing curbs, islands, and brick pedestrian pathways from the parking area to the plaza. The proposal also includes a pull-in area for passenger pick up/drop off adjacent to Main Street Station, and another pull-in area north of Franklin Street for buses, shuttles, and taxis.

At the north side of the parking area alongside the extended sidewalk of Franklin Street, the proposal includes a bricked area where motor coaches, trolley buses, or hotel shuttles could pick up/drop off visitors. A line of 15 bollards defines this area from parking and a further 5 bollards as well as curb mark a hardscaped area. This hardscaped area is proposed with twelve granite benches, six Quercus Phellos trees, and a trash & recycling receptacle.

Since the previously-approved plans, a bike share station location has been added to this area, in the Southwest corner at the intersection of 15th Street and E Main Street on a reinforced concrete sidewalk & plaza area to the south of the “mechanical building”. A line of bike racks is designated along the east frontage of this building, along with a bicycle repair station. The concrete area was previously cobblestone, and includes a dog depot spot. Landscaped areas line the 15th Street sidewalk; a planting schedule of shrubs, groundcovers, and perennials as well as a section of six Lagerstromemia Indica is included in the plan. The parking area is asphalt, with brick pavers for parking islands, sidewalk crossings, and the bus slip area.

The brick sidewalk installed on 15th Street turns the corner to Franklin Street and transitions to concrete near the I-95 overpass. This proposal includes providing new brick sidewalk along both sides of Franklin Street from Main Street Station westward until it meets the existing brick sidewalk. The brick sidewalks will be laid in a herringbone pattern to match the existing. These sidewalks will also contain pedestrian-scaled street lighting to match those installed on 15th Street south of Franklin Street. Also proposed is a 6’ brick paver bike lane; the cobblestone road bed is now proposed to be asphalt, with two 11’ travel lanes.

There is an approximate 6’ change in grade from the high point on the western side of the train shed to the low point on the eastern side, so the portion of the street under the train shed would contain both a ramp in the center with stairways on either side to allow both bicycle and pedestrian travel. There will be two entrances to the train shed along this section of Franklin Street, with a set of four retractable bollards on both ends.

The train shed building is encircled by an area of cut decorative stone, a landscaped area, and a concrete sidewalk. A planting plan for the landscaped area is included in the plans; it includes Lagerstroemia indica along the perimeter of beds containing a series of shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers.

To the north of the train shed, on the ground level between the elevated rails, there’s a second plaza. This plaza has been redesigned from the previous design in order to allow for a more flexible outdoor space for hosting events and programming. It now has a concrete surface. An allee of 24 ginkgo trees proposed in tree wells with tree grates frames a central concrete plaza space. Custom linear fire features are incorporated at a break in the allee, although these items may be eliminated depending on cost constraints. A landscaped space in the center of the plaza is designated for a future water feature when funding becomes available.

Movable furniture to match the 17th Street Farmer's Market is proposed for this space; the project overall contains 21 movable tables and 89 movable chairs, all in black. Two trash and recycling receptacles and a water fountain are proposed for this plaza, and two dog depot sites are proposed at the western and eastern ends of the plaza along the sidewalk.

Grace Street through the site is proposed with new asphalt, rather than the cobblestone previously approved, and with city standard brick paver crosswalks at the eastern and western crossings of the site. A cluster of movable furniture is proposed at the northeastern corner of the site near the relocated train car and track.

Bicycle racks are proposed to be a city standard and are distributed throughout different areas of the site. There is an area of 6 racks are proposed between the north plaza and parking area; 30 flanking either side of Franklin St on the east side of the train shed with a bicycle repair station, 7 near the bike share station, and 15 racks on the brick western plaza site. These last two may be partially sheltered by the interstate overhead at the site, but these racks are otherwise unprotected from weather and offer short-term bicycle parking.

d. UDC Review History

In 1997 Main Street Station received location, character, and extent approval for use as a multi-modal transportation center. In November 2012, the UDC and Planning Commission approved a final design for the Main Street Station site work, with the following conditions recommended by the Urban Design Committee:

- That all new street lights match those already installed on N. 15th Street.
- That the applicant presents to the UDC details of the proposed site furniture, including but not limited to lighting interior to the parking lot, trash cans, benches, bollards and bike racks, if the racks are different than the City standard bike rack that has already been approved by the UDC.
- That the applicant presents to the UDC details on the proposed canopies at each side of the Franklin Street entrances through the train shed.

e. Master Plan

The subject properties are located in the Shockoe Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, with the majority of the parcels designated as being in the Urban Center Area, while Main Street Station is designated as being in the Civic Area. The Urban Center Area is characterized by “higher density, mixed-use development, typically arranged on a fine-grained street network, with wide sidewalks, regular tree planting, and minimal setbacks” (page 3.25). The Civic Area refers to “public sites dedicated for publicly used buildings dedicated to culture, government, and public gatherings” (page 3.28).

The Transportation chapter of the Plan recommends that Main Street Station be restored as an inter-modal center. One of the specific recommendations is that “any development plan for the property should include a new street through the two-block long train shed, in order to increase connectivity in the area and enhance pedestrian access” (page 5.24). The Plan further states that “an important component of the future of Main Street Station is to consider it for a multi-modal transportation hub for Downtown. A multi-modal hub could include increased passenger rail service, commuter rail service, light rail or streetcar buses, bus rapid transit, shuttles, taxis, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities” (page 5.24).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Public Facilities section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains a number of generalized recommendations regarding public facilities, including that “the City of Richmond’s Master Plan states that it is important that these facilities are convenient, attractive, and accessible. The quality, design, and condition of all public facilities sets the image of the City, and sends a message about the values placed upon the services provided” (page 13).

The Site Features subsection states that “circulation within the site should be geared toward pedestrian movements, not vehicular” and that “connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered during the design phase” (page 14). In regards to site layout, the Guidelines note that “the provision of plazas adjacent to buildings serving the public is encouraged. 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).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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