



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: May 21, 2018
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent review of modifications to Phases II and III of the Canal Walk Improvements, Canal Walk (north side) between 10th and 12th Streets; UDC No. 2018-20**

I. APPLICANT

Lamont Benjamin, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

Canal Walk (north side) between 10th and 12th Streets

Property Owner:

CITY OF RICHMOND

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of modifications to Phases II and III of the Canal Walk Improvements, between 10th and 12th Street.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Staff is generally supportive of the proposed modifications to the Canal Walk between 10th and 12th Streets. The proximity of the Canal Walk Improvement project to a private development offers an opportunity for cost savings when paired with additional value engineering. The structural system for the walkway was originally proposed as concrete but is now proposed as steel. This application is seeking approval of this change to steel along with the screening of the steel walkway system as well as a change from the utilization of tree wells to fiberglass planters.

The third phase, an additional component to this application, proposes to improve the area on the north side of the canal between 10th and 11th street. It is currently vegetated and unimproved. This application proposes to install hardscape that meets the floor of the adjacent building which may be redeveloped for residential and possible commercial space. Railings, trashcans, streetlights, and other site amenities are still consistent with existing architectural elements onsite, as in previous submissions.

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

- The new steel structure and screen are not painted but maintain a galvanized metal finish
- The proposed benches are a true wood bench, as specified in the plans
- The lighting fixtures are a 3000k light color and should match the color of existing lighting
- A five foot clearance be maintained between the guard rail on the southern side of the walkway and the planters
- The planter boxes are placed in a way that considers the façade of the building openings and the possible future commercial uses of the buildings

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed project consists of public improvements along the Haxall Canal between 10th and 12th Streets. The site is located in an area zoned B-4. The proposed improvements are surrounded by mixed-use, historic buildings that have been renovated into mixed-uses consisting of residential and commercial uses. The adjacent properties to the east, fronting on the Canal are occupied by a mix of uses including commercial/office use and several midrise multifamily dwellings. The property to the south across the Haxall Canal is occupied by a mixed-use development (Riverside on the James) and the properties to the east are occupied by high rise office buildings.

The Floodwall is located to the south of the Kanawha Canal and the Downtown Expressway is located to the north of the area.

The Richmond Canal Walk consists of two canal sections with origins in the eighteenth century, the Haxall and lower section of the Kanawha Canal. Historically both canals were waterways with different functions that were never connected to each other. The Haxall Canal, an early millrace, extends along the northern border of Brown's Island and terminates at 12th Street. East of 12th Street, the Kanawha Canal is a remnant of the tidewater portion of the James River and Kanawha Canal, that once extended farther westward to the main canal Turning Basin. The Kanawha portion of the Canal Walk contains a significant remnant of Tidewater Connection locks descending eastward from 12th Street. A large stone bridge across the canal is situated at the eastern end of these locks.

b. Scope of Review

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

c. UDC Review History

In August 2017 the Urban Design Committee reviewed final modifications to Phase II of the Canal Walk improvements. The UDC recommended that the CPC approve the modifications with the following conditions:

- That the applicant has the option of removing the smooth granite and replacing it with a poured-in place concrete with appropriate expansion joint details and the option to place rough granite caps on walls where there are seating areas, however the applicant sees fit.

In May 2012 both the Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission approved plans for final location, character, and extent review for Canal Walk Improvements between 10th and 12th Streets (UDC 12-17).

d. Project Description

The Canal Walk Improvements Project received final approval from the UDC in April 2012 and again in August 2017. Since this time, the Department of Public

Works has been working with the Department of Planning and Development Review to implement the project in phases. The initial phase of implementation was completed in summer 2015 and included the new pedestrian bridge across the canal as well as plaza, lighting and landscaping improvements along the Italianate building. The second phase and the third phase of the plans continues the plaza, landscape, and lighting improvements west along the Canal up to the eastern side of the Haxall Point Bridge, including a spiral staircase connection from the Canal up to 11th Street and another staircase up to 10th Street.

On the west end of the site, the Locks Tower project is currently under construction. Due to the proximity of this project, coordination between the Locks Tower project's contractor and the design team provide an opportunity for cost savings. Further value engineering work has been completed resulting in a proposed change of the structural system for the walkway, previously proposed as concrete, now proposed as steel.

This application seeks approval of the proposed screening of the steel walkway structural system, as well as the proposed landscape change from tree wells to fiberglass planters. Railings, trashcans, streetlights, and other site amenities are still consistent with existing architectural elements onsite, as in previous submissions. We do not anticipate that this change will take away from the character intended from the original design, but will provide for the project's continued implementation. Included below is the original final applicant report from the April 2012 UDC submittal, with updated project schedule information.

The project under final consideration consists of public improvements along the Haxall Canal between 10th and 12th Streets. The proposed improvements are in the vicinity of the former Reynolds manufacturing facility, which ceased operations and is currently under construction as a private mixed-use residential redevelopment.

The redevelopment of this portion of the Canal will be completed through a public and private partnership between the City, Venture Richmond and North Falls (the developer). Unlike the Canal development that has occurred to this point, the public and private improvements may occur simultaneously. In past development efforts along the canal City improvements were completed first and served as a catalyst to the private development that followed. The completion of the private development will create another major retail and entertainment attraction and will increase residential density along the Canal. Careful planning is required to ensure that the public improvements completed by the City result in a public space that respects and spotlights the City's history, is interesting, entertaining, and accessible.

The application that is being presented for final review has been developed by 3North with input from affected City Agencies (Public Works, Public Utilities, Economic & Community Development, and Planning & Development Review), Venture Richmond and the developer. The plan proposes a series of stairs, hardscape, and landscape improvements along the north side of the Haxall Canal between 10th and 12th Streets. The portions of the Canal improvements east of 12th Street, as presented in the Conceptual Review phase, will be submitted as a separate final review application in the coming months.

The north side of the Haxall Canal between 10th and 11th Street is currently vegetated and unimproved. The proposed plan for hardscape along this portion of the Canal would necessitate an increase in grade and the wall of the Canal in order to bring the grade to meet the floor of the adjacent building proposed to be redeveloped for residential and possible commercial purposes. Both 10th and 11th Street are elevated above the Haxall Canal and stairs are proposed from the proposed Canal Walk to these Streets.

Funds have been allocated through the City of Richmond CIP funding and VDOT revenue share funds for the next phase of the Canal Walk Improvements. Construction is anticipated to begin in the second half of 2018 in an effort to align with the completion of the adjacent buildings currently under construction.

e. Master Plan

This project aligns with the Riverfront Plan, adopted in November of 2012, six months after the initial phase of this project was approved. Specifically, this project addresses increased accessibility and enhanced pedestrian activity.

The Riverfront Plan notes “The City of Richmond continues to work with private developers to shape prospective new construction and adaptive reuse of existing structures to incorporate ground level retail beneath upper floors of residential and commercial office space. Achieving a true mixed-use will be instrumental in activating the Canal Walk eighteen hours a day, balanced with residents attracted to the Riverfront living. The Riverfront Plan supports efforts to expand access along and across canals to make visits easier to navigate on foot” (page 54.)

Additionally, the subject properties are located in the James River Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, and are designated as being in the Downtown Urban Center Area. The Downtown 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.

The Plan notes that “new interest has been taken in the canals as recreational and historic resources” (page 4.43). The Plan also notes that one challenge to canal and riverfront accessibility is the “privatization of land along the river. Mayo Island, half of Brown’s Island, Vauxhall Island, and most of the Canal and James River waterfront is privately held by individuals, corporations, and industrial owners”. The Plan continues to say that “While it is impractical to consider buying back all of these properties for public use in the present generations, the City should plan strategic purchases of some of these properties, and should secure waterfront access and trail rights-of-way from the others, regardless of whether there is future development by the private and/or public sectors. If public access to the waterfront and trail right-of-way has not been secured previously, these rights should be provided at the time of any public or private development on a canal or riverfront property” (page 4.43).

Specifically addressing the Canal Walk, the Plan states that “the Canal Walk should continue to be developed and maintained at its current high level of care. Adaptive reuse or unobtrusive infill development should be arranged to provide

frontage on the canal without blocking existing views to the James River.” (page 4.47).

The City adopted the Richmond Riverfront Master Development Plan prepared by the planning firm Wallace, Roberts & Todd, in 1994. The purpose of the plan is to guide development along the riverfront, a designated area that includes the subject properties. The Plan contains a section on design guidelines, not mandatory but recommended, which are intended to “reinforce an overall conceptual identity, recall historical images, and provide continuity and linkage with surrounding areas of the City” (page 2).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines have several suggestions pertaining to streetscape design; in particular they note the importance of assuring that streetscapes are designed to reflect the character of the neighborhood and to offer a safe, comfortable environment for pedestrians. The elements of a streetscape that can be used to create such environments includes: landscaping, sidewalks, street paving, street furniture, signs, awnings, and street lighting (20-27).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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