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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: September 5, 2017  
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent review of modifications to Phase II of the Canal Walk Improvements, Canal Walk (north side) between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets; UDC No. 2017-32**

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**I. APPLICANT**

M. Khara, 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 Phase II of the Canal Walk Improvements, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

Staff is generally supportive of the modifications to the previously approved improvements for the Canal Walk between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. The replacement of the granite veneer with an architectural concrete finish will not negatively impact or detract from the character of the project. Furthermore this modification will allow for continued implementation, ultimately adding to the accessibility and enhanced pedestrian activity envisioned in the Riverfront Plan.

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

- 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.

**Staff Contact:**

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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 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 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 commercial/entertainment uses (Lady Byrd Hat Factory) and a midrise

multifamily dwelling (Vistas on the James). 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 12<sup>th</sup> Street. East of 12<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 May 2012 both the Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission approved plans for final location, character, and extent review for Canal Walk Improvements between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets (UDC 12-17).

**d. Project Description**

The Canal Walk Improvements Project received final approval from the UDC in April 2012. 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 plans to continue the plaza, landscape, and lighting improvements west along the Canal up to the eastern side of the White Building, including the staircase connection from the Canal up to 11th Street.

The second phase of the project was bid in early 2017. Bids came back higher than expected. The project team considered various value engineering solutions, including re-phasing the work in this area. Re-phasing is not feasible or cost effective due to the substantial grade changes and staircase implementation. Through the value engineering process, the project team learned that substantial funds were allocated in the bid towards granite veneer along the proposed retaining walls.

This application seeks approval of an architectural concrete finish for the proposed walls in place of the granite veneer. This is consistent with existing architectural elements onsite and will not take away from the character intended

from the original design, but will provide for the project's continued implementation.

**e. Master Plan**

This project aligns with the Riverfront Plan, adopted in November of 2012, six months after 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. Efforts are underway to expose more of the James River & Kanawha Canal to daylight near 13th Street, as well as reconfiguration of the Haxall Canal edge near 12th Street to increase access to the water sheet, and expand universal-access connections to the City street grid above. A public elevator is currently planned to link the 10th Street sidewalk to the Canal Walk behind the Italianate Building. The Riverfront Plan supports efforts to expand access along and across canals to make visits easier to navigate on foot" (page 54.)

**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**