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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: May 18, 2020  
RE: **Conceptual location, character, and extent review of the Fonticello/Carter Jones Park Master Plan, 2813 Bainbridge Street; UDC 2020-08**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Ryan Rinn, Community and Economic Development Analyst, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

**II. LOCATION**

2813 Bainbridge Street

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for the conceptual location, character, and extent review of the Fonticello/Carter Jones Park Master Plan.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

Fonticello/Carter Jones Park serves as a central public park in the Woodland Heights Neighborhood. In its current condition, the park has a number of aged facilities that no longer meet the needs of the community. The Master Plan responds to community input by proposing upgrades to the existing facilities, such as the expansion of the skate park and Food Forest project, as well as the rehabilitation of the historic Fonticello Spring. A network of new sidewalks and multiuse paths throughout the park will provide easy passage through the grounds for bikers, walkers, and runners.

The plan also responds to the tragic 2019 shooting of Markiya Dickson on park grounds by creating a memorial space and imagination zone in her memory.

Proposed landscaping will provide a variety of shade trees, evergreens, shrubs, bushes, and ground covers that will be utilized in landscaped buffers, bioretention areas, and for four-season interest.

The reorientation of existing features and addition of new features to the park grounds will enhance safety and security and provide opportunities for a greater range of community members to utilize the facility.

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

- Pedestrian bollards not be utilized within the interior of the park, and other design measures be considered in preventing vehicle ingress in locations where service vehicle access is not needed.

- The applicant consider pervious paving in the material selection for the sidewalks and multi-use paths within the park, except where skating elements are being proposed, and a harder surface material is more appropriate.
- As new signage is proposed within the park, it be consistent in material and design that is sensitive to the character of the surrounding historic neighborhood.
- The applicant identify appropriate locations in the park for new bike parking facilities.

**Staff Contact:**

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The project site is approximately 15 acres located at 2813 Bainbridge Street. The site is bordered by Bainbridge Street to the southwest, Perry Street to the northeast, W. 29<sup>th</sup> Street to the southeast, and a residential neighborhood to the northwest. The primary entrance to the park is from Bainbridge Street via a central asphalt access drive that cuts through the center of the park to Perry Street on the north side; however, the drive is currently closed to through traffic. There are sidewalks on three sides of the park along West 29th Street, Perry Street, and Bainbridge Street—and some historic brick pathways within the park itself.

**b. Scope of Review**

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “park” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

**c. UDC Review History**

The UDC reviewed improvements to the Fonticello Spring in 1979. There are no additional reviews that have been brought before the UDC.

**d. Project Description**

The Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities (DPRCF) has completed a master plan for the existing Fonticello/Carter Jones Park. The park dates to the early 20th century and the development of the Woodland Heights and Swansboro neighborhoods. Many of the park’s facilities need renovations and upgrades to better suit the current needs and wishes of the community. As the park master plan is implemented, DPRCF will return for final review and approval of individual phases of the park redesign.

The park is currently programmed with a pavilion and restrooms (built in 1946), the Fonticello Spring, baseball fields, a playground, small picnic shelters, tennis courts, a skate park, basketball courts, horseshoe pits, butterfly garden, and permaculture garden/food forest project. These programmatic features will be maintained and most of them will be renovated or relocated, with the exception of the tennis courts and horseshoe pits which will be removed. The Fonticello Spring is currently closed, as are most or all of the city’s historic springs, due to a lack of maintenance and issues with water testing. There is community interest in reopening the spring for use in the future. The park also houses a cell tower, which will remain.

The project team has developed a site program to combine the existing features with the following new additions:

- A plaza with an overhead shade structure adjacent to the existing pavilion
- An amphitheater and stage
- A public art and memorial space to honor the memory of Markiya Dickson
- The Markiya Dickson Imagination Zone, with a splash pad and play equipment for younger and older children. The existing play equipment is relatively new and in good shape and can be reused here.
- Relocated basketball courts, placed closer to the interior of the park and Bainbridge Street, but buffered with landscaping in the form of a rain garden or bio-retention area
- An expanded skate park
- A refurbished Fonticello Spring surrounded by a new plaza
- A native plant and pollinator garden with a garden path to replace the existing butterfly garden
- A central multiuse pathway that provides an arterial pedestrian and biking path crossing from the west side to the east side of the park
- A loop trail with skate spots, small skating elements adjoining the path that are intended to draw the skateboarding experience out into other areas of the park
- A running trail crossing the open lawn on the western side of the park
- Picnic shelters replacing the existing structures and rearranged across the site
- Rain gardens and/or bio-retention areas that provide for ecologically-sound landscaping and stormwater management, some of which can double as landscape buffers
- Bollards for blocking vehicular access and slowing bicycle traffic into the site
- A loop drive formed by part of the footprint of the existing access drive and additional driveway just north of the pavilion
- A storage area for landscape materials to be used in the park and Food Forest
- Future expansion and development of the existing Fonticello Food Forest with the addition of a Food Forest Path

Landscaping on site will consist of the preservation of as many healthy trees as possible along with the removal of invasive species and dead or dying trees. Any non-invasive trees that are removed will be replaced. Large and small shade trees, flowering trees, evergreens, and plants that provide four-season interest are proposed throughout the park. A variety of grasses, shrubs, and ground cover will be implemented planted as well as the reseeding of disturbed lawn areas. A native plant and pollinator garden will replace the existing butterfly garden, and planted bioretention areas are proposed that could serve as linear landscape buffers.

Landscape maintenance will primarily belong to DPRCF as the property owner. DPU is responsible for maintaining stormwater best management practices on City-owned properties. Tree care of trees on City-owned property is the responsibility of the

Urban Forestry division of the Department of Public Works (DPW). There are also informal groups that have expressed future commitment to maintenance of the park.

The City does not currently have funds budgeted for improvements at Fonticello/Carter Jones Park. DPRCF wishes to have an approved conceptual master plan in place in order to advance the implementation of improvements as funds are available for further design and construction. Future funding will be included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and grant funding sources pursued by the City.

Construction is not being proposed by this plan. This is a conceptual review, and full implementation of the proposed improvements could take up to three years with a phased construction process.

**e. Master Plan**

This project is located in the Old South Planning District of the current City of Richmond Master Plan. Although Fonticello/Carter Jones Park is not specifically mentioned in the Master Plan, the updates and additions to the park being proposed speak to the Master Plan's Public Facilities vision goal that, "Richmond's citizens will be served by modern, convenient, attractive, and accessible educational and recreational facilities"(pg.20).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines state that "Successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort" (pg.9). The Fonticello/Carter Jones Park Master Plan proposes amenities that will accommodate a variety of users, and provides access from each side to the surrounding neighborhood.

When referencing park maintenance, the guidelines recommend that "All park projects should include a maintenance plan which addresses all phases of the project" (p.9), and that "Significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained" (p.10). The conceptual landscape plan for Fonticello/Carter Jones Park includes the preservation of as many healthy trees as possible. The park Maintenance Plan will primarily belong to DPRCF.

The Guidelines recommend that "Landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings. Shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting" (pg. 9). There are a variety of trees, shrubs, and ground covers that will be incorporated into the landscape plan for Fonticello/Carter Jones Park that will provide shade and four-season interest.

Historic preservation is considered in the Urban Design Guidelines stating that, "Historic elements should be surveyed and preservation should be considered for both facilities and landscapes" (pg. 9). Fonticello/Carter Jones Park is located in the Woodland Heights National Historic District with an era of significance from 1880-1958. The Park includes a pavilion that was constructed in 1946, as well as the Fonticello natural spring and old brick pathways. The Park Master Plan includes the rehabilitation of the pavilion and the historic Fonticello Spring. The

old brick pathways will be replaced, as they are in poor condition and unsafe. Repair or repurposing is not feasible, as the brick pathway is held together with mortar, and any removal would cause further damage to the brick.

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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