

From: [Emily Thomason](#)
To: [Onufer, Kathleen M. - PDR](#)
Subject: UDC Comments
Date: Thursday, June 09, 2016 12:18:55 AM
Attachments: [Letter to UDC - Linden project - 6-8-16.pdf](#)

Good evening,

Please see attached my comments regarding the Linden proposal on today's UDC agenda. I apologize for the lateness of my comments (it has been a busy week).

Thanks,

-Emily

Dear Urban Design Committee,

I urge you to vote against the so-called "narrowing" of Linden Street (though it actually calls for the vehicle travel lane to increase from 11' to 14'... a width which would be better suited for a highway with a 70 mph speed limit than a pedestrian-oriented college campus). As a current VCU student, I know how fast cars speed through campus (even if they're zooming to a red light- it's the urge to travel fast along wide streets). This plan proposes turning Linden into a runway, not a walkway.

Much has been said about the "closing" or not "closing" of streets but that phrasing assumes that car access is the only (and best) measure of "access". In fact, a campus that is fully permeable to people biking and walking makes much more efficient use of precious urban space than vehicle roadways.

We need to truly consider the definition of "access" on a street like this. Is maintaining car access on this small street and encouraging its use as a cut-through to avoid traffic or lights elsewhere worth all the potential conflicts and danger to cyclists and pedestrians? Adequate sidewalk for thousands of pedestrians in a day isn't just a "nice to have" like decorative street lighting. People walking and biking aren't an inconvenience to be managed. They're what makes the campus vibrant.

Further, a few technical comments:

- 1) Two-way car access on Park Avenue will add confusion in a place where there's likely to be lots of pedestrians, bikes, skateboards and other vehicles mixing. A simple one-way loop would make traffic more predictable. Concern has been voiced from transportation engineering regarding the inconvenience of reconfiguring that signal but a decision about the traffic pattern should be based on user safety and simplicity, not one-time inconvenience.
- 2) How many new bike racks are planned for the area (where there is often limited bicycle parking, even with newly-added racks and regular clearance of abandoned bikes)? Also, it is likely that unsupportive U-racks were chosen because wave racks, like those nearby, would be much better (and keep the bikes from becoming a disorderly pile) but the limited proposed space for pedestrians is too linear to make this superior bicycle parking design work

well. If the block were pedestrian-only, there would be more than enough space for wave racks, seating and walking space as in the nearby car-free spaces.

- 3) The plan also calls for a narrow painted bike lane. A wider bike lane (not a 5' lane where 3' of that width is gutter), is a much better use of the total space (if vehicle traffic is to be allowed). NACTO suggests a 6' minimum width lane "adjacent to a curbface".¹ However, if increased bicycle safety and access is the goal, making the street car-free is the best approach.
- 4) Further, on the landscape planning documents, the bike lane is displayed as more than half in the gutter. This is non-standard. According to the Richmond Bicycle Master Plan, bike lanes should be "5 foot minimum when adjacent to curb and gutter".² To constitute a 5' bike lane, there should be 5' of non-gutter roadway designated. As the first dedicated bicycle facility on the Monroe Park Campus, this bike lane shouldn't be an after-thought.

Given the technical and larger issues here, I urge the UDC to consider the likely impact of this plan (reduced pedestrian safety, increased conflicts and higher vehicle speeds due to the widened travel lane and opportunity to cut-through) and really discuss what "access" means to this narrow street at the heart of VCU's campus.

-Emily

1 "Conventional Bike Lanes". NACTO. 2015. Retrieved from: <http://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/bike-lanes/conventional-bike-lanes/>

2 2015 Richmond Bicycle Master Plan. City of Richmond. Pp 100, 119. Retrieved from <http://www.richmondgov.com/bikeped/documents/RichmondBicycleMasterPlan.pdf>

From: [Nicholas Smith](#)
To: [Onufer, Kathleen M. - PDR](#)
Subject: Comments opposing UDC 2016-21
Date: Thursday, June 09, 2016 12:11:28 AM
Attachments: [Linden comments Nicholas Smith UDC 2016-21.pdf](#)

Hello,

Attached are my comments on UDC 2016-21, the so-called "narrowing" of Linden Street between Floyd and Grove Avenues. Please accept my apologies for its submission time.

Thank you,

Nicholas Smith

Dear Chair Almond, Members of the Urban Design Committee,

I'd like to express my opposition to UDC 2016-21, the so-called “narrowing” of Linden St between Floyd and Grove Avenues. In fact, this plan calls for the travel lane to increase from its current 11 feet to 14 feet: it's actually a widening, not a narrowing, of the travel lane, creating a lane width that is contrary to the Committee's Urban Design Guidelines.¹ **It is clear from this and other worrisome inconsistencies that this project has not had proper consultation in the VCU and Richmond communities, is inconsistent with both the VCU and City Master Plans and is against the public interest of a safe, pleasant pedestrian environment in the heart of VCU's Monroe Park Campus.**

VCU's 2013 Master Plan, “VCU 2020”, lists first among the following “opportunities available to the university to improve transportation, safety, security, access, mobility, and economic viability for vehicular traffic, transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians”:^{2 3}

“Vehicular Circulation: Strategic street closing of Linden Street between Grove and Floyd Avenues”

– VCU Master Plan

This Master Plan was developed in cooperation with all parts of the VCU community. Students, staff, faculty, the Urban Planning Department and others were all consulted, and the plan that was adopted by the Board of Visitors is still current VCU policy. Even the Fan District Association, when given a presentation about the street closure a few years ago, responded favorably to making the street pedestrian-only (concerns voiced centered not on making the street car-free, but around parking, which could be maintained by angle-in parking on Grove regardless of what happens to Linden).

However, the item before you today is in direct conflict with the VCU Master Plan and has had little if any community disclosure, let alone input. Students have not been told about this change of plans, nor have most university staff or faculty that I spoke with (and nearly all voiced their approval of making the street pedestrian-only). I have talked to dozens of people about this on campus and the most common response was “I thought they were closing this street to cars, why are they reversing this and not telling anyone?” One person even said when I mentioned the plan to close Linden:

“Wow, I'm really glad they're finally closing Linden; I almost got hit here the other day!”

She was dismayed to learn that car traffic would still be allowed on the street.

It is unclear if the community has been consulted about this sudden and quiet change in plans, but there is no reference to any VCU or local community outreach or input in the application or the staff report for those outside or inside of VCU. This contrasts directly with the community outreach in the VCU Master Plan, and as VCU is not engaging the community, the Urban Design Committee is the only one can learn of or comment on this reversal of policy.

1 “[T]he lane widths on local and collector streets should be between 9 and 10 feet.”

2 VCU Master Plan, pg 100. http://www.fmd.vcu.edu/docs/VCU_MasterSitePlan_FINAL.pdf

3 Note that the purpose of this opportunity is quoted as being for improving safety, security and access for all modes including vehicular traffic. The plan agrees that closing Linden to vehicular traffic will be an improvement for everyone, including vehicular traffic.

With this proposal, VCU is asking for something that is contrary to their official policy and doing it on the decision of just a few people with little to no consultation during summer when nearly no one is paying attention (and when students who might have come to this very meeting are no longer on campus). This is not the process the VCU and Richmond communities expect.

The City's Downtown Master Plan is no different. It is interesting that the staff report for this item quotes the DMP as saying:

“A key recommendation ... is to protect 'the pedestrian character, college atmosphere, and security of the campus'”

– Staff Report on this item

This project calls for the opposite of protecting “the pedestrian character, college atmosphere and security of the campus”: it ensures that cars will continue to use this street as a cut-through, an anathema to these three points. This reference from the staff report shows that today's proposal is incompatible with the City's plan and further argues against approval.

The DMP does suggest that street closure should be carefully considered. This is understandable; an urban street grid is preferable to the disconnected subdivisions often found in suburban-style development, and some street closures in Richmond, like the 6th Street Marketplace, were not successful.

But times have changed and street closures should be context-specific. VCU is not just an urban environment: it is college campus. College campuses, even those in urban environments, should create an atmosphere that is both open and safe for pedestrians and cyclists, their primary users. Increasing pedestrian access increases permeability and links the campus with the community while encouraging vehicular traffic to avoid the core campus (and Linden qualifies as “core campus” because all adjacent buildings are part of VCU).

Even on campus streets open to vehicular traffic, the vast majority of users are pedestrians. In a 30-minute time-use study I recently conducted on this block of Linden, there were **34 people in motorized vehicles (most of whom were driving alone), 22 people riding a bicycle and 778 people walking. This means that 96% of users on Linden were not in a motorized vehicle. If pedestrians counted as “traffic” (i.e. vehicles) for traffic count purposes, Linden would have more average daily traffic than all but the busiest arterials in the city, around 15,000-20,000 people per day. (If people were counted and planned for like cars, we'd be talking about expanding capacity and reducing conflicts; instead, pedestrians are squeezed onto the sidewalk while cars get 14 foot travel lanes.)**

This plan calls for 40% of the total space to be devoted to 4% of the users (vehicles). We design interstates for cars only; we should design our busiest pedestrian environments without cars. **And the minimal through-traffic can just use Harrison, Main and Cary. This has the additional benefit of not funnelling unnecessary traffic onto Floyd, Richmond's only bike-walk street.**

There is often discussion in urban planning about who public spaces should be for. The consensus is swinging toward making public spaces for people, not for cars, and for separating modes so people feel and are safe. The in-force VCU Master Plan does not propose “closing” Linden to vehicular traffic – it proposes “opening” Linden to people who walk and bike. **Making this street pedestrian-only will be**

a success because it's already a success on campus: Linden south of Floyd, Shafer south of Franklin and the Compass are great places because they restrict vehicular access, not in spite of it.⁴

That's why after finding out about the renegeing of this promise from VCU, just as students were taking final exams and readying to leave for 3 months, students were eagerly signing a petition to reverse this decision at about the rate of 1 per minute. After all, as one signature signer said:

“Who would look at the Compass and think: 'You know what would make this better? Cars driving through it!’”

Please don't let this harmful project go through. It prioritizes vehicle access, increases danger for people walking and biking (the vast majority of users), is inconsistent with a variety of both VCU and City of Richmond policies and is being done with virtually no community input. At a minimum, please tell VCU and the City to partake in some real community engagement before you make a recommendation. Let's not have another half-baked project quietly pushed through that we will surely regret later. Let's design with people, not cars, first.

Thank you,

Nicholas Smith

⁴ Obviously access is maintained for emergency, security, maintenance and a few delivery vehicles.

From: [John Bolecek](#)
To: [Onufer, Kathleen M. - PDR](#)
Subject: UDC comments
Date: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 9:01:58 PM
Attachments: [14thfranklin.pdf](#)

Kathleen,

Below are a few comments.

Item 2: Please ensure the standard curb ramp design is 2 per corner (1 per each direction of crossing). See the attached PDF on how to modify the proposed design.

Item 3: I would like to express my support for the bike share program and these well thought out station locations. I would like to also thank the city for including a bike share station in Oregon Hill.

Item 4: Please ensure the transition from the portion of Park St open to vehicular traffic to the pedestrianized portion has a smooth transition of at least 10 feet wide. This is a very common bike route and the curb cut needs to be wide enough for a bicycle in each direction to use it at the same time.

This streetview image shows the current inadequate ramp:
<https://goo.gl/maps/SZP8VPkxY4k>

Thank you,

John Bolecek
5th District