

Son, Joshua L. - PDR

From: Richard and Eniko Rumrill <randerumrill@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 8, 2018 3:23 PM
To: Marvin.Tart@richmond.gov; Thomas Wilds; Son, Joshua L. - PDR
Subject: East Main Street/Williamsburg Ave. intersection questions
Attachments: James River pedestrian access.docx

Dear Mr. Tart and Josh Son,

Thanks for your work on East main Street and Williamsburg avenue, I have walked or run across the new Main Street bridge and traffic circle over 150 times in the past year and am very excited to see the improvements in that area. I copied Thomas Wilds on this as I have been involved with his work on the Church Hill Transportation committee and we are both very interested in pedestrian access from Church Hill to the river. I have also attached a draft of a document the Church Hill Transportation committee has been working on concerning pedestrian access to the river from Church Hill.

I have often taken my 3 and 6 year old daughters and other children across Williamsburg Avenue at the base of the Libby Hill steps to play in the sand volleyball courts near Rockets landing or sit on the benches near the future Stone Bistro. In all my walking I have been baffled that Williamsburg Avenue and East Main function like a suburban highway through the middle of an Urban area. This area may be one of the best ways for a pedestrian to get from Church Hill to the river and yet Williamsburg Avenue was designed as a divided highway and is still treated as a highway into the city.

The project description states that "E. Main Street starts as an urban section with four 10-ft travel lanes and weeds to a divided facility with a 14-ft wide median and 11 ft lanes to tie into the existing roadway section the existing roadway section on Williamsburg Avenue." It seems to me that the problem is that E. Main east of 25th street is not treated as an 'Urban section' until the new traffic circle. While I understand that many folks drive into the city on Williamsburg Ave. and E. Main street, it does not benefit traffic flow if cars can go 40mph instead of 25 for another 1/4 mile. I appreciate that your plan is to make the curve at Libby Hill Park a design speed of 25mph, though my hope is that there would be true traffic calming as well as a design aesthetic that makes clear that the base of Libby hill is part of the city, not just a 'divided facility' outside the city. Considering many people historically walked from Church Hill to work in Rockets landing Williamsburg Ave. is a modern intrusion in an area that used to be walkable and had an extensive street grid. It is clear from the excellent work done around the new traffic circle that the city is working to remedy these mistakes, but the culture of using this area as a quick way into and out of town is hard to change, as evidenced by the street light that was knocked down about a week after the new traffic circle opened. As of 7:00am this morning, that light is still laying on the grass waiting to be re-installed.

The work around the new traffic circle is outstanding and a real joy to walk, my concern would be that if the crossings of Main street and Williamsburg Ave at 27th, 28th, the base of Libby Hill, and S. 31st street are not done well all the nice streetscaping and pedestrian amenities near the future Stone Bistro will be a benefit to people driving and parking but not as much a benefit for anyone walking from Church Hill. The sidewalks on Main street near the future Stone bistro have trees close to the road to calm traffic and protect pedestrians. The sidewalks at the base of Libby Hill should have trees on the hill side of the sidewalks instead of the traffic side.

It is hard to comment further on this plan as I have a couple preliminary questions.

1. Is phase 1 for East Main/Williamsburg improvements and Phase II for Nicholson Street? I could understand the scope for Nicholson Street but not East Main/Williamsburg

2. I could not enlarge the .pdf files enough to discern if there is any noticeable restructuring of the intersection of East Main and Williamsburg beyond a small sidewalk bump-out on the south side of east Main Street. The 'typical sections' images give the impression that the median strip is being widened but the zoomed out .pdf of the East Main/Williamsburg intersection shows a 2' concrete median strip for pedestrians to stand on while crossing 4-5 lanes of traffic. The typical section showing a wider median strip on Williamsburg appears to simply show the wider grassier median strip further north of the intersection.

My apologies that this document is not easier to read, and thanks again for your diligent work to improve streets and sidewalks in our city!

Richard Rumrill

James River pedestrian access

You don't want to live with taking somebody's life. You don't. ...We need to take ownership of our city."

Valerie Parker on her sister's death at an unmarked crosswalkⁱ.

Richmond's riverfront plan and the capital trail have made the James river more accessible to cars, experienced bicyclists and some pedestrians, but because the riverfront plan envisions 'neighborhood connections' as a third priority, the river has not become more accessible to pedestrians in Church Hill from the land side of Main Street, Williamsburg Avenue and Government Avenueⁱⁱ. Without distinct and abundant pedestrian infrastructure our car-oriented culture of roads separating pedestrians from the river and each other is only growing stronger, as the March 17 2018 Richmond Times article about increased pedestrian deaths documented. This needed infrastructure is held up by delays building the BRT, the future Stone Bistro and many other in-fill and rehabilitation projects.

The new sidewalks and parking close to the future Stone bistro illustrate how hard it is to avoid putting river access to cars before pedestrians. Carefully designed lanes for parking and bikes, and sidewalk trees buffer the Main Street sidewalks near the future Stone Bistro. However, the new sidewalks West of the new Main Street traffic circle are half the width, without trees, without bike lanes and only connect to Church Hill if one walks across a very odd crosswalk at the intersection of Williamsburg Ave and E. Main or walks seven blocks to the first marked crossing at 25th street. In the stretch from the Williamsburg Avenue intersection to Poe's Pub there is only a sidewalk on one side of Main street, and it is narrow and overgrown with weeds. Crossing from the bottom of the Libby Terrace steps is dangerous given the high speeds at the intersection, and downright foolhardy at the unmarked crossing at Poe's not far from Pear Street. Pear Street completely lacks sidewalks.

Intentional or not, the effect is to discourage pedestrian traffic from Church Hill while encouraging driving to the parking spaces near the Stone Bistro or Great Shiplock park for a safe and pleasant walk. P. 48 of the Regional Rivers Planⁱⁱⁱ has a superb summary of needed traffic calming strategies and Riverfront connections in this area, though only Nicholson and Orleans streets near Rockets landing have been addressed. Here are some of the issues the Church Hill association transportation committee is concerned with:

- There is not an adequate pedestrian crossing of Williamsburg Avenue or Main Street at the bottom of the Libbie Terrace steps.
- There is no marked crossing or traffic calming at the bottom of S. 31st Street at Williamsburg Avenue next to the old warehouse.
- There is no marked crossing of Main Street near Poe's Pub heading to Pear street, and Pear street has no sidewalk.

- There is no marked crossing of Main Street at 26th and 27th street, and the historic steps down from Franklin Street at 27th street have been abandoned by the city.
- There are only two crossings of Dock Street from 17th street to 31st street.
- The two entrances to the Stone factory parking lot off Williamsburg Avenue have no marked crossings of Williamsburg Avenue.
- Walking from Stone Bistro to Church Hill on the sidewalk north of Main is not possible as there is actually no pedestrian crossing within the city and the sidewalk is collapsed near the gasometer.
- Cars entering the city From Williamsburg avenue, Rte 5, Nine Mile Road, and route 360 receive no messages that they are entering a city that prioritizes aesthetics or the safety/well-being of pedestrians. Signs indicating that Richmond is a vision zero city on Rte. 5, Williamsburg Avenue and Govt. Ave. would set expectations that drivers should look out for bicycles and pedestrians^{iv}.

The Main street area near Church Hill will soon be re-zoned to help add density near the BRT line. This means there will be many new residents in the area, seeking to live in an urban, pedestrian-friendly environment. It took more than 60 years for Richmond to become oriented towards vehicular traffic. Such a powerful cultural legacy needs to be addressed as the cultural legacy that it is, not as a simple technical stage after adding thousands of new residents, amenities, and car and bus infrastructure. The sooner the city can improve pedestrian access towards the James River the more attractive the city will be for current residents, and for future investment and residents.

ⁱ Rocket, Ali. There were more pedestrian fatalities in Richmond last year than in any other year on record. This is why. *Richmond Times Dispatch* 17 March, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Dock Street has little to no pedestrian crossings and is becoming busier as the riverfront plans and BRT are delayed.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://cdn.capitalregioncollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Regional-Rivers-Plan-FINAL-2-1-17.pdf>

^{iv} Presently one of the clearer pedestrian crossings in the area is across Dock Street next to 'La Diff'. There are ample crossing marks and signs reminding drivers of State crosswalk law. The only problem is that this crossing may be more for the La Diff parking lot than it is for bicycles or pedestrians arriving to the area on foot. Another great example of a nicely designed pedestrian crossing is in Henrico where the Capital Trail crosses Rte. 5. about a mile east of the city.

Draft

Son, Joshua L. - PDR

From: Richard <randerumrill@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 8, 2018 10:30 PM
To: Son, Joshua L. - PDR
Subject: W-burg ave to East main
Attachments: IMG_3555.JPG; ATT00001.txt

Josh, this may be late, but imagine crossing Williamsburg ave here with the crosswalk stopping on that skinny median. The improvements would only reduce the road width by about 2' but not widen the median. I cannot understand why the 3rd 'storage' lane is needed for left turns. Will try to send another picture in a second.

Richard Rumrill



Son, Joshua L. - PDR

From: Richard <randerumrill@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 8, 2018 10:39 PM
To: Son, Joshua L. - PDR
Subject: Safe median for cars, not people
Attachments: IMG_1708.JPG; ATT00001.txt

Josh,

Here is a picture of the median in the middle of Williamsburg ave where it meets East main, January 8, 2018.

