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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
File ID: UDC-088944-2021  
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at Blackwell  
Preschool; 238 E. 14<sup>th</sup> Street**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Bobby Hathaway, Richmond Public Schools

**II. LOCATION**

238 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond School Board

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at Blackwell Preschool located at 238 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

Currently, Blackwell Preschool does not have an identification monument sign, which can make the school difficult to locate. The project involves the construction of a freestanding monument sign for Blackwell Preschool. The new monument sign will be internally illuminated and located adjacent to the main school building.

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

- The applicant consider adding landscaping around the proposed monument sign that complements the sign and grows to a mature height that will not impact the visibility of the signage. If landscaping is feasible in this location, final plant selection to be reviewed and approved by staff.
- Any electrical equipment associated with the new monument sign be concealed within the sign and not be located on the exterior.

**Staff Contact:**

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property is located in South Richmond in the Blackwell State and National Register Historic District, and is bounded by Maury and E. 16<sup>th</sup> Street to the south and Stockton Street to the north. The parcel is 10.6 acres and is zoned residential. The site is surrounded by single-family detached homes and Charlie Sydnor Playground across Maury Street to the south. The new monument sign will be located at the north end of the site abutting Stockton Street.

**b. Scope of Review**

The proposed signage is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “public building or structure”

**c. Project Description**

Currently, Blackwell Preschool does not have an identification sign, which can make it difficult to locate the building. Richmond Public Schools is proposing to install an internally illuminated monument sign consistent with other RPS schools.

The monument sign will be an aluminum cabinet sign, painted and internally illuminated, situated on a brick base. The inside of the cabinet will have a clear track for the manual installation and removal of letters for creating and changing messages within the sign. The interchangeable letters will be 8” in height.

The sign will be 8’4” in length, 7’3” in height, 14” in width, and double faced. The sign will be painted red and have white lettering; the message box will be clear so that the message letters inside are visible. The name of the school on the identification sign will be applied vinyl letters that are 5.5” in height and the address identification located on the base of the sign will be 4” in height.

No landscaping is being proposed in the scope of this project; however, the applicant has expressed that landscaping could be considered.

**d. UDC Review History**

The UDC has not previously reviewed projects at this location.

**e. Master Plan**

Objective 1.4, k. of Richmond 300 proposes to “promote an attractive environment by minimizing visual clutter and confusion caused by a proliferation of signage, ensuring that public and private signage is appropriately scaled to the pedestrian experience (pg. 100).” The proposed signage is appropriately scaled and is the same design as other Richmond Public School identification signage, further establishing a uniform design associated with the City’s public schools.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

Regarding placement and size, the Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations pertaining to signage:

*“Freestanding signs should relate to the architecture of the building” and “The sign’s base may be constructed of like building materials” (pg. 23).* The new monument sign will have a brick base which relates to the main brick material of the school building.

*“Lettering should be 4-14 inches high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed” (pg. 23).* All lettering on the new sign will be larger than 4” and smaller than 14” and is proportionate to the overall area of the faces of the sign.

*“Sign color should relate to and complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent highlights and trim colors” (pg. 24).* The sign will be

painted a red color similar to the red accents found in the metal support poles of the sidewalk canopy connecting the older school building and the newer school building.

*“Illuminated signs are not appropriate in or adjacent to residential areas” (pg. 24).* While the proposed sign will be located in a residential area, staff finds the brightness will not affect the adjacent residences and the sign’s orientation is facing away from the adjacent residences.

If a sign is illuminated, it *“should have light lettering and dark, opaque backgrounds for improved readability and minimal glare” (pg. 24).* Staff finds that there is adequate contrast between the lettering and the sign color for improved readability.

*“Freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (pg. 24).* Landscaping is not being proposed within the scope of this project. Staff recommends that the applicant consider adding landscaping at the base of the new monument sign. If it is found that landscaping is feasible in this location, final plant selections should be submitted to staff for review.

## **VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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