

December 5, 2022

To: City of Richmond / Urban Design Committee (UDC)
900 East Broad Street – 5th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

From: Southside Joint Civic Association Team

RE: Fire Department Training Facility at Hickory Hill Community Center

The Hickory Hill Community Center is a registered historic site. The Center provides a visual representation of the cultural significance of the community. It is an important civic hub; and preserves the neighborhood's historical roots for generations of children and adults. The Hickory Hill Preservation Committee and stakeholders worked hard to preserve the site and remained involved. Its existence as an early African-American school is set apart from other sites and gives Southside its unique character and status that should not be infringed upon.

We would also like to make you aware of a wildlife sanctuary situated west to the proposed site and bordering the CSX railroad tracks existing with an active wildlife and conservation management plan. The sanctuary is considered a Streamside Management Zone and has a mission to exist for its year-round wildlife inhabitants and migratory birds. If the distance of the Fire training center is 2,000 feet from the sanctuary, this is problematic.

On December 1, 2022, approximately thirty (30) Southside residents representing civic associations met and part of the meeting agenda was devoted to discuss the feasibility of a training center at Hickory Hill Community Center. After the Fire Department's presentation, citizens expressed concerns such as noise and smoke pollution including synthetic smoke, repetitive metal on metal striking sounds, gasoline powered equipment and alert devices that would be used in training exercises. Planned exercise would be conducted in close proximity to residential neighborhoods and near children play areas, especially during summer day camps, as well as youth and adult activities including basketball, soccer, baseball, Double Dutch and walking trails.

The Fire training smoke and noise, would contribute to current smoke and noise levels emitting from current industrial operations close to the neighboring residents. A fire department training facility (including proposed fencing at the community center and a separate building) would be depletive of residential community spaces; and contrary to the neighborhood green spaces / zone [Southside Eco Corridor] supported by residents.

Please consider the historical significance of the Hickory Hill Community Center, the wildlife sanctuary and the neighborhoods need for reduced layers of pollution outputs.

Respectfully,

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