



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: June 19, 2017
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of Monroe Park Furnishings, 719 W. Franklin St.; UDC No. 2017-18**

I. APPLICANT

Don Summers, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

719 W. Franklin St.

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final location, character, and extent review of Monroe Park Furnishings.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This final plan for Monroe Park furnishings is part of a larger restoration effort called out in the Master Plan for Monroe Park, a plan that was adopted by the Planning Commission in 2008 with subsequent design and construction plans approved in 2009 and later updated in 2017. After years of research and community input, the Monroe Park Advisory Committee and team identified 1904 as the historic period of significance to which the Park is to be restored.

The Committee discussed the Checkers House and the importance of repairing the original rail and restoring it in a way that respects the appearance and history of the building.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following recommendations:

- That, after repairing the first floor lintels, the brick railing of the Checkers House be replaced with a similar brick design and brought up to code with the installation of necessary safety measures. The National Register Nomination form for Monroe Park mentions the Checkers House and describes it as Modern (Art Deco), constructed in 1939. The brick railings define the Art Deco character of the Checkers House.
- To incorporate appropriate flashing and drainage as necessary when reconstructing the rail
- To mark or inscribe some gaming tables with a checkers or a chess board

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed project is located on Laurel Street, opposite from the Altria Theater, within Monroe Park which is bordered by Belvidere Street to the east, Main Street on the south, Laurel Street to the west, and Franklin Street on the north. The public urban park property is surrounded by a number of high-density zoning districts, including multi-family residential, institutional, and religious buildings.

In addition to the fountain, the park is embellished with two major statues and two smaller monuments, as well as the Checkers House, an octagonal pavilion which once held public toilets. Only one statue and the fountain are related to the plan of the park.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as part of a “public park” under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

This project is part of the larger Monroe Park Master Plan. The Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission reviewed the Monroe Park Master Plan conceptually in October 2007, and then approved a final version of the plan in February 2008. In 2009, the Urban Design Committee and the Planning Commission approved final construction plans for the renovation of Monroe Park without conditions.

The 2017 plans approved by the Planning Commission saw the location and design of a drinking fountain to be installed just to the west of Checkers House Plaza.

d. Project Description

This project provides final furnishing selections for the park.

Moveable tables and chairs in a variety of sizes are proposed to be used throughout the park. These pieces will primarily be arranged around the Central Fountain and the Checkers House but since they are not stationary, park users can ultimately move them to any location in the park. The pale green color was selected to be complimentary to the various earth tones throughout the parks landscape and hardscape.

In addition to the aforementioned drinking fountain in the previous section, this application proposes an additional drinking fountain near the intersection of Belvidere and Main. With this new fountain the park will now have two drinking fountains/water bottle fillers on opposite sides of the park.

Park benches are proposed along several of the main pathways in the park. The benches reflect the style of the traditional cast iron and wood park benches historically located in the park. Each bench is four feet long with no center arm. The benches will be permanently mounted with concrete footings along the edges of the crushed stone pathways.

Dual trash and recycling receptacles are proposed throughout the park. VCU has reviewed and approved the proposed locations and will be the partner responsible for trash and recycling pick-up in the park. The receptacles are black metal and similar to the City standard.

Four games tables (picnic tables) are proposed near the games area. One of the tables will have three seats (for accessibility) and the other three will have four seats. The design is complimentary to the bench design. Each table will be installed with a concrete footing in grass.

A concrete Henge ping pong table has been donated to the park by a VCU alumni. It is proposed to be installed just north of the Checkers House. The table will be installed on concrete to avoid the wearing of grass in the player areas. The table is polished concrete with a steel net.

Also included in this submittal is the design of new metal railings for the Checkers House porch. The existing brick railings are proposed to be replaced with custom black metal railings.

e. Master Plan

Following the adoption of the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan and the 2009 design of the park, the 2009 Downtown Plan contained recommendations for the surrounding neighborhoods and areas, as well as specific language about Monroe Park that “promote Monroe Park as the center of a campus and a community. With the growth of the Monroe Park Campus that surrounds the park on four sides, Monroe Park is becoming more important to the University as its primary green space, and as such has been endorsed as a central feature within the campus by the VCU 2020 Master Plan. The City and the Monroe Park Advisory Council have developed the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan that will guide future enhanced use of the park as a cultural and passive recreational center for the campus and the neighborhood. This park plan has been reflected in the illustrations in the Downtown Plan. Respect for the park’s historic integrity and increased maintenance and security are key to the park’s success.”

The 2009 Downtown Plan further suggests the park receive “...a facelift with rehabilitated public facilities, new shade trees, improved lighting, and wireless Internet access.”

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Environment section of the Urban Design Guidelines state that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements. A preference should be given toward materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. Lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (page 9). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to “mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source” (page 11).

The Public Facilities section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains relevant suggestions on site programming such as “connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered.” In regards to plazas, the section states “the design of...plazas should avoid large changes in grade from the street. Plazas should provide a pleasant transitional environment for pedestrians from the street to the building(s) it serves. Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces. Adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should also be provided in the design of plazas” (page 14).

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes “The color of brick and concrete pavers should coordinate with building architecture and adjacent streetscape pavements” (page 20). The section notes that “site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months.” (page 25).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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