



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: March 8, 2018
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent review of 'The Mill' sculpture relocation on Brown's Island; UDC No. 2018-13**

I. APPLICANT

Mark A. Olinger, Department of Planning and Development Review

II. LOCATION

1 Browns Island

Property Owner:

City Of Richmond Recreation & Parks

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of the relocation of the Mill sculpture to make space for the future Emancipation Monument being planned by the state Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The proposed Mill Sculpture relocation farther west, near the foot of the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge will help to activate the intersection and provide an area of rest and reflection for passersby. Furthermore, the replacement of hardscape with improved landscaping will provide enhanced amenities for users of the park.

Staff finds the proposal is in conformance with, and in direct support of, the City's Downtown Master Plan and Riverfront Plan, and finds the proposal in conformance with the Urban Design Guidelines. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval as submitted.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed project is located on Brown's Island. It is believed the island began as a sandbar that was eventually shaped into an island by a combination of pilings, alluvial deposits, and fill. By 1835, the island was attached to Johnson's Island and formed the south bank of the Haxall Canal. Various industries occupied the island over the years, and the owners of the last one, the Albemarle Paper Company, donated the island to the City for use as a park. Its central location allows year round use for large festivals and community programming.

The James River borders the south of the island, while the Haxall Canal borders the north of the island and converges with the James River to the west. To the east, Brown's Island is connected to Johnson Island, the site of a Dominion Substation, and other mixed uses such as office space, apartments, and restaurants. The Canal Walk runs along the perimeter of both islands and connects to the Virginia Capital Trail to the east.

The propose project area is located at the convergence of several paths and bridges: the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial bridge to the south which connects the island to Manchester, a bridge to the west that connects the island to Tredegar Street, and the bridge to the north which connects the island to the southern terminus of 5th Street.

Brown's Island proper and the Canal Walk are both currently zoned DCC (Downtown Civic and Cultural District) which is applied to sites containing or adjacent to a major public space of building intended for public assembly.

b. Scope of Review

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a "park or other public way" in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

Staff was unable to identify any prior projects involving or relevant to this property.

d. Project Description

"The Mill," a sculpture by Richmond artist Bradley Robinson, is located at the southern end of the Fifth Street Bridge to Brown's Island. Intended to reflect the shimmering waters of the river, it stands 16 feet tall and is made of brushed aluminum with bronze edging. The sculpture has a crescent-shaped bench around it, which creates a nice viewing spot. The sculpture was installed as part of the Brent Halsey Bridge project which created a new pedestrian bridge to Brown's Island at the terminus of 5th Street. The project was completed in December of 2011. Below is a quote by the artist, Bradley Robinson:

"When designing the sculpture and benches, I was trying to maintain a tension with both the past and present of Richmond. The piece was situated facing a very modern city, yet one could turn around and be enveloped by a wild river that bore the remnants of an earlier industrial age. In the final design, I chose to reference the island's industrial past but used a material (aluminum) that would relate to the contemporary buildings just across the canal. I also incorporated large granite boulders to acknowledge the natural setting of the island and its roles in powering the mill that once stood there. I wanted to create a simple, elegant form that harmonizes with the surrounding beauty, both natural and architectural. I hoped to create a 'place' where people could meet and interact. I wanted to honor all the men and women who labored on and around Brown's Island, particularly those who worked in the paper mill, which this sculpture directly references."

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (MLK Commission) was established by the 1992 Virginia General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 997. The Commission initiates year-round events that reinforce the Kingian principles, specifically, the Beloved Community, and collaborates with various state and local groups to promote the principles and legacy of Dr. King throughout the Commonwealth. As part of its commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and abolition of slavery in the United States, the Virginia Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission will construct the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument on Brown's Island.

The monument, designed by Thomas Jay Warren of Oregon, will feature a 12-foot bronze statue representing newly freed slaves. Dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the centuries-long fight for emancipation and freedom, the monument also will highlight notable African American Virginians who have made significant contributions to the emancipation and freedom of formerly enslaved persons or descendants. The base of the monument will feature the names, images, and brief biographical information about eight African American Virginians whose lives were dedicated to Emancipation and freedom — five individuals from the period before Emancipation through 1865, and five who continued to work for freedom from 1866 to 1970.

The MLK Commission has selected the current site of The Mill statue on Brown's Island as the location for their new Emancipation Monument. The Mill statue must be relocated to another location on the island before the Emancipation Monument planning and construction can be completed. Venture Richmond has been tasked with helping the City and State facilitate that move. This proposal is for the relocation of The Mill statue to a central location further west on the island near the foot of the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge. This location was chosen because of the potential of the sculpture to activate that intersection for pedestrians and because it is highly visible from multiple directions. The sculpture, benches, and hardscape will be installed in the same arrangement as they are now with the addition of some plantings. The existing site's hardscape will be cleanly removed and any disturbed areas reseeded with grass.

e. Master Plan

The proposed project area is located in the James River Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, which designates the properties as being in the Natural character area. The Plan notes that the nearby James River is “an invaluable natural resource that adds to the overall health and livelihood of Richmond's residents, visitors, and workers. It provides open space and scenery to the urban landscape, it creates both passive and active recreational opportunities in the water and along its banks, and it helps to cool the city during hot summer months” (page 4.43).

The area is adjacent to the heliport, which is called out in the Riverfront Plan: “A new arrival plaza would extend from Tredegar Street across the adjustable dam span to the existing “3 Days in April 1865” installation. This new, permeable paver-clad plaza would expand into the lawn, allowing for a café and/or concessions. A small restroom facility would be integrated into the structure, with

café vendor responsible for maintenance and security. The existing heliport would be reconfigured as a children’s water play space” (page 32).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Environment section of the Urban Design Guidelines states that “public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape”. In general the plan notes that “successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort”. The guidelines note that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements” The guidelines also recommend that facilities in parks should have the ability to “attract and entertain visitors” and provide for the comfort of visitors. It also states that “quality open space can be created through landscaping, public art, and historic preservation or interpretation” (page 9).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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