



**City of Richmond, Virginia**  
**Department of Planning and Development Review**  
**Planning and Preservation Division**  
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To: Planning Commission  
From: Planning & Preservation Division  
Date: November 7, 2016  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of renewal of existing modular classroom at Patrick Henry Charter School, 3411 Semmes Avenue; UDC #2016-46**

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**I. APPLICANTS**

Tommy Kranz, Richmond Public Schools

**II. LOCATION**

Patrick Henry Charter School, 3411 Semmes Avenue

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond School Board

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of the renewal of three existing modular classroom building at Patrick Henry Charter School.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This is a request to renew the certificate of occupancy for existing modular classrooms on the site of Patrick Henry Charter School, which were first reviewed and approved by the Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission in 2013. The applicant complied with all of the conditions for the location, character, and extent of the modular school buildings at that time, but failed to apply for renewal until now. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the project as submitted.

**Staff Contact:** Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The Patrick Henry Charter School is located at 3411 Semmes Avenue, on the north side of the convergence of Forest Hill Avenue and Semmes Avenue. Portions of what are considered school grounds (the playground, gardens, and parking area to the rear of the building) are on the southern tip of the parcel comprising Forest Hill Park. Both the school and the park are located within the R-5 (Single-family Residential) zoning district.

The 46,410 square foot school building with two floors above ground and a partially elevated basement dates to 1921 and is located in the Woodland Heights National Register Historic District. The building originally served as a public elementary school until 2007 when it was closed after failing to comply with Federal disability laws.

**b. Scope of Review**

The modular classrooms are subject to location character, and extent review as “public buildings or structures” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the City Charter. The Planning Commission in an October 17 resolution exempted modular classrooms from Urban Design Committee review for location, character, and extent to expedite the review process.

**c. UDC Review History**

At its June 3, 2013 meeting, the Planning Commission approved the location, character, and extent of the modular classrooms with the following conditions:

- That the Certificate of Occupancy for the modular classrooms contains an expiration date of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.
- That if the modular classrooms are needed beyond the December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 expiration date, the applicant must obtain an extension from the Planning Commission.
- That the applicant installs small planters, located at the front corners and visible side corners (i.e. all but those facing the park) of the classrooms to soften the edges. These planters should contain upright evergreen foliage to provide year-round interest.
- That metal ramps be used to access the modular classrooms instead of pressure-treated lumber.

As part of that application, the applicant detailed their plans for a Phase 3 renovation that would remove the need for the modular classrooms.

**d. Project Description**

This is a request to renew the approval of three already-existing temporary modular classrooms on the Patrick Henry School site, that were approved by the Planning Commission in 2013 for a two year period. The charter school opened in the current building in January 2012; prior to that they were located in the basement of the Woodland Heights Baptist Church while Phase 1 renovation of the old school building was underway. Renovation of the school is being phased as funding is available and as the student body increases in size. Per an operating agreement with Richmond Public Schools, the charter school cannot use any portion of the building that is not ADA compliant.

One of the classrooms, 24' in depth and 60' long, is installed behind the school on a portion of the parking lot that overlooks a steep hill that descends into Forest Hill Park. This classroom covers six parking spaces, but the school currently provides more parking spaces than is required by the Zoning Ordinance. The other two modular classrooms, each 34' in depth and 24' wide, are mounted side by side and located to the west of the school building on a portion of the existing paved playground.

All modular classrooms are clad in hardi-panel, contain windows and a door, and are conditioned. The lower portion of the modular classroom will be skirted in hardi-panel down to the grade to account for changes in topography. All of the modular units are served by ADA compliant ramps and stairs. The classrooms do not have restroom facilities, so when needed the students would have to return to the main building. These units are used by 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, who will continue to use the main building for lunch, art & music classes, library, etc.

The applicant has complied with the conditions of the 2013 approval, and small planters containing evergreen vegetation are visible at the side corners, as well as rainwater capture barrels. Metal ramps are present for access to the classrooms.

Per the applicant's report, the goal is to retain the modular units as classrooms until Phase 3 of the renovations of the main school building are complete. In discussions with staff, the applicant explained that Phase 2 of renovations to the school building had cost overruns, and so additional time for fundraising is needed before Phase 3 can begin and the modular classrooms are no longer needed.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located within the Old South Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan recommends Public and Open Space uses for this property, a designation that includes publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas and open spaces (page 135).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines state that the "Committee is strongly opposed to the use of temporary modular classroom units by Richmond Public Schools to meet ongoing educational needs". (page 16).

**VI. ATTACHMENTS**

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