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Good Afternoon, my name is Andrea Almond and I'm the current Chair of the Urban Design Committee. Our UDC subcommittee, which consisted of myself and Giles Harnsberger met with the Kanawha Plaza design team and City staff on Friday. We were shown progress drawings that were significantly different than the plans reviewed at our UDC meeting. The design team has obviously been working very hard to incorporate many of the UDC's conditions and suggestions that were put into our recommendation to you all. After reviewing and discussing the plans in great detail our subcommittee would like to report that it is our recommendation that the proposed final design for Kanawah Plaza should not be approved by the Planning Commission. I'd like to take a minute to outline our main concerns with the design and perhaps more importantly with the design process of this project.

Beginning with the design:

- 1) The future of the fountain (whether it is rebuilt, redesigned, or eliminated) is an integral and crucial component of the overall design of this space. The design of the park should not be approved with such a large component missing. The fountain should inform the design of the rest of the park if it's being kept. If it is repurposed or removed it will SIGNIFICANTLY impact the configuration of the park.
- 2) The furnishings palette, though improved since our initial review, is not cohesive. The selection of paving, seating, lighting, bike racks, etc. doesn't reflect a unique design theme for the park nor does it conform and complement existing City standard furnishings. It palette either needs to be conforming or be compelling enough on its own to justify being different.
- 3) The plant palette is lacking in native plants, species diversity, plants for pollinator insects and wildlife, and consideration for seasonal interest. It also does not take cues from the various projects that have been recently constructed, permitted, or exist in nearby areas of downtown such as Gateway Plaza, RMA Plaza, The Low Line, Capital Square, or the Federal Reserve property to name a few. Those projects have all elevated the quality of planting designs downtown and this design currently does not meet or continue to raise that bar.
- 4) No effort has been made to preserve the existing tree canopy internal to the site. The design team has cited grading as the reason for removing healthy and mature trees. However, the design could be altered to work with those trees, still create an open event lawn, and maintain accessible walkways if desired. A choice is being made to not modify the design to preserve those existing trees, it's not because it's impossible to achieve due to grading.
- 5) While we like the moveable seating options and look forward to seeing that sort of loose seating installed at a Richmond public park, permanent seating should be provided. If seatwalls are the only form of permanent seating than their design needs to be modified to

create conversation areas versus people sitting in straight lines. Also, the grading of the site makes some of the seatwall caps slope which inhibits people's ability to sit comfortably on them.

- 6) The grey/black exposed aggregate concrete will be hot and help contribute to the Urban Heat Island Effect. Also, the bold swirling pattern shown in previous designs was favored by the UDC but has been removed from the project.
- 7) The design doesn't enhance the downtown connection to the James River nor does it adequately address enhanced pedestrian connectivity to Kanawha Plaza, which is a HUGE issue for this park.
- 8) No real effort has been made to address sustainability or implement recommendations found in the City's sustainability plan particularly related to rainwater harvesting and protection of urban tree canopy.
- 9) Logistically we are not sure that the arrangement of spaces works for large events. For example the designated food truck area doesn't leave room for people to line up without disrupting the proposed seating areas. Where are trashcans located, water spigots, GFI's, imbedded tent pole bases, etc.?
- 10) The design for the Kanawha Plaza doesn't have a singular strong design concept. The design originally was trying to be everything to everyone with fitness stations, a splash pad, a dogpark, sculpture garden, event stages, etc. Now the design has totally lost any identity.

Maybe more importantly the process:

- 1) A public space, particularly one as large and important as Kanawha Plaza warrants that a serious effort must be made towards community engagement. There has been zero public involvement in this process. That is unacceptable to us as residents of this City and as members of the design community.
- 2) There are many related community design efforts and potential collaborative partners that are working downtown and around Kanawha Plaza. Capital Trees, Bridgepark, Venture Richmond, Enrichmond, CVGBC, JRA, etc. They should be brought to the table as stakeholders in this design process. The synergy between these like-minded groups will only improve this project.
- 3) This design project was an opportunity for the City to use the RFP process to find a innovative, award-winning, landscape architecture or architecture firm (whether local or from outside of town) with experience designing civic spaces in major cities. This was an opportunity to raise the bar on the design of civic spaces in Richmond. We are branded as the 'Capital of Creativity' and are striving to be a Tier One City. The design of this project doesn't reflect either of those designations.
- 4) This project (in similar fashion to Floyd Avenue and the Redskins Training Facility) has been brought to us with an unrealistic schedule, this time it's due to 'the bike race' and threats of loss of funding from corporate sponsors. This forces the design to be permitted in haste and in a piecemeal fashion. That is never the right way to design an important and valuable civic space and it usually doesn't result in a quality product. We know now that this site is not designated for any specific use related to the 2015 UCI Bike Race.
- 5) The Planning Department and Public Works were brought to the table very late in the design process. How this project relates to other City planning efforts downtown and how it connects to adjacent properties are not under Parks and Recreation's scope. All three of

these departments need to work together on this design to ensure that it is the right solution and that our financial resources are used most efficiently.

So in conclusion we simply feel that the concerns about the quality of this design and the various missteps in the design process are just too great to allow it to be approved today. The design of Kanawha Plaza should be seen as an unprecedented opportunity to do something innovative, beautiful, and inspirational that raises the bar on the design of our public spaces and reflects the creative culture of Richmond and its citizenry. The proposed design falls short of achieving that goal.

Thanks,

Andrea Almond  
UDC- Chair

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