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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: June 17, 2019  
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent review of improvements in Shockoe Valley spanning Oliver Hill Way and North 18th Street between East Grace Street and Balding Street; the intersections and tangential streets of Mosby Street at Venable and O Streets; UDC 2019-18**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Adel Edwards, City of Richmond, Department of Public Works

**II. LOCATION**

Oliver Hill Way and North 18th Street between East Grace Street and Balding Street; and the intersections and tangential streets of Mosby Street at Venable and O Streets

**Majority Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Public Works

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for the conceptual location, character, and extent review of improvements in Shockoe Valley to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation and connectivity spanning Oliver Hill Way and North 18th Street between East Grace Street and Balding Street; and the intersections and tangential streets of Mosby Street at Venable and O Streets.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The conceptual plan seeks to improve the public realm for those who walk, bike, and drive in Shockoe Valley. It is fully funded by the Smartscale program (HB2) with federal and state funds. The project team has devised five key goals that speak to the objectives of the project: Improve Safety; Improve Multi-Modal Transportation; Environmental Sustainability; Economic Development; and Land Use.

The major objectives of the plan are increasing neighborhood access and connectivity; the conversion of streets from one way to two way; operational improvements at major intersections; installation of traffic calming techniques; upgrading of bicycle and pedestrian facilities; and ensuring traffic does not back up on the interstate.

Landscaping and other streetscaping are not part of the plan at this phase of the project, however there is opportunity to elevate the experiences for pedestrians and people on bikes as they move through the proposed improvements. Installing shade trees where possible, maintaining existing sidewalks for easier movement among severe topography, and maintaining wide sidewalks are a few ways to encourage permeability.

Staff is supportive of the proposed conceptual designs. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends the Planning Commission approve the conceptual design with the following conditions for final review:

- Provide plans for the project indicating site characteristics which include: building footprints, parking areas, pedestrian routes, recreation areas, open areas and areas of future expansion.
- Provide a landscaping plan that includes a complete plant schedule, the precise location of all plant materials, and a landscape maintenance analysis. The plant schedule must show number, size and type of each planting proposed. If existing trees are to be removed, their size, type and location must be noted on the landscape plan.
- Provide the location of all lighting units, including wall-mounted, site and parking lot lighting. Other site details, such as benches, trash containers and special paving materials, should also be located. Include specification sheets for each item.
- Provide samples of all proposed exterior materials such as sidewalk and multi-use path materials, if samples cannot be provided, photos or specification sheets will suffice
- Demonstrate there was consideration for street tree enhancing technology (i.e. silva cell, structure soils, etc.) and why they may or may not be included in the project
- Provide locations for the installation of shade trees and tree lawns when space allows
- Maintain existing sidewalks/paths along sections of Venable and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets that are segmented by the new roundabouts to allow for enhanced permeability until future development takes place or until the land becomes privatized
- Provide a study on the purpose and design of the residual land created by the roundabouts

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

Improvements are proposed on 17th Street from E. Grace Street to E. Broad Street, along Oliver Hill Way from approximately E. Broad Street to Balding Street; Balding Street between 18th Street and Oliver Hill Way; 18th Street from E. Grace Street to Balding Street; E. Broad Street from approximately the easternmost railroad overpass to just east of 18th Street; Marshall Street from Oliver Hill Way to 18th Street; Clay Street from Oliver Hill Way to 18th Street; Venable Street from Oliver Hill Way to Mosby Street; Mosby Street from Venable Street to O Street; and Leigh Street from approximately 200 feet west of Mosby to the Mosby Street intersection.

**b. Scope of Review**

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

**c. UDC Review History**

Staff was unable to find any existing records related to projects involving this site.

**d. Project Description**

The Shockoe Valley Street Improvements project seeks to improve the environment for those who walk, bike, and drive through the project area and access surrounding neighborhoods and to improve the access off of Interstate 95 into the area. To do this, the project has set five key goals:

Improve Safety in accordance with the Better Streets guidelines and the City's Vision Zero Policy, to further a priority of establishing bicycle and pedestrian routes

Improve Multi-Modal Transportation through developing a sense of place for all users including implementing traffic calming and speed reduction techniques to promote access into the Church Hill and Union Hill neighborhoods. Feedback from citizens at a May 2018 Public Information Meeting showed there was a desire to include enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities within the project area.

Enhance Environmental Sustainability by minimizing environmental impacts and provide innovative, healthful, and clean solutions. As part of the federal funding requirements, the project team has begun architectural and archeological surveys as part of the Section 106 process, a portion of the National Historic Preservation Act that requires federal agencies and/or projects to take into account the effects of their projects on historic properties.

Improve Economic Development through increased access and accessibility to the neighborhoods in and adjacent to the project to increase private sector investment throughout the project area and adjacent neighborhoods

Foster Land Uses that will complement the previous goals and provide open space for public use. The connectivity to the open space will be provided by use of the multi-modal travel improvements.

The project is \$28,042,650 and is fully funded from the Smartscale program (HB2) with federal and state funds. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) UPC is 109310. The breakdown of project costs is as follows:

- PE (Survey, Environmental, Design) = \$2,584,530
- RW (Right of Way and Easement Acquisition, Utility Relocation) = \$7,738,120
- CN (Construction, Oversight, Inspection, Contingencies) = \$17,720,000
- Total = \$28,042,650

**e. Master Plan**

A majority of the area in which the proposed improvements are located, are within the Shockoe Bottom downtown district as defined by the Downtown Plan. The plan references several aspects of the area and provides several recommendations:

It is important that the historic character of Shockoe Bottom be preserved. (P.4.56)

In the area proposed for improvements, general recommendations indicate a parking garage to provide needed parking, lined with habitable spaces to create a pedestrian-friendly street frontage. (P. 4.57)

Removing the clutter of overhead utility lines and equipment from the visible public right-of-way will enhance the streetscape in Shockoe. This can be achieved by burying utility lines, requiring utility boxes to be located off the public right-of-way, and ensuring that utility companies maintain their rights-of-way. It is important that the vacant lots and parking lots in Shockoe be developed responsibly, in a manner that enhances and reinforces the district's historic, urban character... East Broad Street through the Shockoe Valley, from I-95 to 21st Street, serves as a gateway to Downtown and an important linkage to Church Hill. Infill development with streetscape improvements can transform this portion of district currently characterized by sporadic development and vacant lots. (P 4.58)

A key element in improving the pedestrian experience in the Bottom is to provide comfortable, clean, and safe streets. The brick sidewalks that exist today should be restored, maintained, and where possible, widened. Existing concrete sidewalks should be replaced with brick, where possible and in conjunction with new private development. Street trees should be planted regularly along the edge of the sidewalk at no more than 30' apart. Historic, pedestrian-scaled lighting and signage should be installed along all streets to enhance the safety and character of the district. (P 4.59)

Controlling traffic speeds in the district will increase pedestrian comfort and will allow vibrant street life to develop. Traffic speeds can be lowered by better defining the streets with closely-spaced street trees, and by restoring the cobblestone streets, particularly those on Oliver Hill Way. Pedestrian comfort can also be enhanced by marking clear, generous crosswalks. Bringing back two-way traffic to Shockoe's Streets will improve access to area businesses, simplify way-finding, slow traffic, and create a more comfortable pedestrian environment. (P. 4.64)

Conventional engineering practices evaluate a street network based upon its traffic capacity and speed rather than its balance of vehicular access and pedestrian comfort. If the street network is going to support Downtown in becoming a vibrant urban destination, pedestrian comfort must share equal priority with vehicular access. Any effort to improve vehicular movement should be carefully balanced with pedestrian needs. In all cases, the physical design of the street must be optimized to control traffic speed. The primary methods of controlling traffic speed in Downtown Richmond include reducing lane widths, examining curb radii, recovering the two-way street system, and adjusting traffic signal timing. (P 5.6)

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines are supportive of traffic management techniques that slow traffic (page 7) and that add "an aesthetic contribution to the urban character of the neighborhoods in which they are placed" (page 8). The Guidelines note that "intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner" and that circles "should be considered in certain situations as an alternative to the traditional intersection" (page 7).

The Guidelines are supportive of on street parking, noting that it "creates pedestrian activity and provides a buffer between those pedestrians and moving traffic" (page 6). In regards to landscaping, the Guidelines note that "landscaping

should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines also note that “existing granite curbing and stormwater inlets should be retained” and that “any new granite curbing should match existing curbs” (page 4).

**VI. ATTACHMENTS**

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