



**City of Richmond, Virginia**  
**Department of Planning and Development Review**  
City Hall, Richmond, Virginia 23219  
804.646.6335 (f) 804.646.5789 [www.richmondgov.com](http://www.richmondgov.com)

---

To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: June 8, 2017  
RE: **Zoning Ordinance Sec. 30-440.3(1)d final review of The Doorways' Garden, 612 E. Marshall St.; UDC No. 2017-16**

---

**I. APPLICANT**

Ralph Higgins

**II. LOCATION**

612 E. Marshall St.

**Property Owner:**

HOSPITAL HOSPITALITY HOUSE OF RICHMOND INC

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for review of a proposed healing garden at 612 E. Marshall St., as set forth in Section 30-440.3(1)d of the City's Zoning Ordinance. The Urban Design Committee is making a recommendation to the Director of Planning and Development Review as part of the Plan of Development review process for the overall building.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The Doorways' Garden will be an amenity and provide an improved outdoor space for patients and their loved ones who are staying at the Doorways. Opening the space to the outside will enable guests to have fresh air in a nearby setting that has been designed for meditation and reflection.

Staff finds the interior design of the garden serves its purpose as a respite however, the stark contrast on the exterior side of the garden, a proposed six-foot tall wall, largely unadorned with the exception of a two foot ornamental fencing atop, does not uphold any principles from the Urban Design Guidelines. It has been recommended that the wall not be completely opaque, allowing sightlines in and out of the garden, however, this was a major concern of the applicant as it may detract from the meditative aspect of the garden and the security of the space. It has since been suggested that simple landscaping be provided on the exterior of the wall to enhance the public realm.

Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Director of Planning and Development Review grant approval of the plaza with the following recommendations:

- To provide more landscaping along the exterior of the six foot wall if it is to remain opaque.

**Staff Contact:**

Josh Son // (804) 646-3741 // [joshua.son@richmondgov.com](mailto:joshua.son@richmondgov.com)

## **V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The site is located on a single parcel that is part of a larger development, bounded by E. Marshall St. to the south, Market Alley to the west, N. 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, and existing commercial development to the north and is located in a B-4 (Central Business) zoning district. E. Marshall St. is a one-way street that carries vehicular traffic east and into the abutting city center.

The site is adjacent to the vacant Blues Armory, a brick structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places that consists of over 40,000 SF of space. The armory was once home to the Light Infantry Blues and the 6<sup>th</sup> Street Market Place.

The applicant proposes to create an approximately 1,274 SF healing garden on a site that, in the 1960's, was a pool. The outdoor pool has since been covered and enclosed as a two-story storage space for The Doorways. This project will involve removing the existing undifferentiated two-story wall and roof structure, replacing it with a much shorter garden wall.

At the E. Marshall St. property line, the applicant proposes to install a 6' wall that will be opaque and rise above sight level.

### **b. Scope of Review**

Sec. 30-440.3 of the City's Zoning Ordinance sets forth the yard regulations in the B-5 district. Subsection (1) d. states, a front yard with a depth greater than permitted by application of the provisions of paragraphs "a" through "c" of this subsection may be provided when such front yard is improved for purposes of a pedestrian plaza or outdoor dining area as permitted by section 30-440.1 of this division and is approved subject to a plan of development as set forth in article X of this chapter. Except where the property is within an old and historic district, the city urban design committee shall review the application and plans and submit a recommendation to the director of planning and development review prior to approval of such plan of development by the director. The Director of Planning and Development Review has sole authority to approve the Plan of Development.

### **c. Project Description**

This project is part of a larger project to update The Doorways, an eleemosynary 112 room guest house for patients and their loved ones who travel to Richmond for specialized medical treatment.

Originally built as a 140 room motor inn in the 1960s, it currently serves almost 10,000 guests per year and provides over 50,000 nights of lodging annually. The building is currently undergoing renovations to better meet the needs of guests.

The healing garden will provide guests and their loved ones an outdoor space for fresh air and will be paved in ceramic tile. The perimeter of the garden will consist of 2' high seat walls that will be topped with a limestone cap.

A 4' masonry wall topped with a 2' ornamental fence will encapsulate the garden for privacy. The masonry wall will be capped with similar limestone used for the seating wall.

The interior of the wall will include planting beds with small canopy trees such as Burford Holly or Japanese Red Maples, shrubbery and ground cover, providing greenery and shade.

Soft lighting will be provided for evening use, including LED down-lighting on the building and LED lights in the toe space of the seat wall on the interior of the courtyard.

**d. UDC Review History**

The UDC reviewed an application for encroachments for this property on March 11, 1996. An ordinance, No. 96-99, for the authorization of existing encroachments into the sidewalk and alley areas adjacent to 612 E. Marshall St. were approved by the Planning Commission on April 16, 1996. The existing encroachments consisted of nine light fixtures, three canvas canopies, two bollards, a fire department connection, building walls and cornices.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located in the Urban Core Area as defined by the Downtown Plan, a 2009 update and supplement to the Master Plan.

The Downtown Plan contains specific language to this area, noting that “The Urban Core Area is the most urban Character Area. This area is characterized by high density, an intense mix of uses, and civic buildings of regional significance, distributed along urban blocks with wide sidewalks, regular street tree plantings, and buildings that front the street. City Center is an example of the urban core condition in Downtown Richmond, with tall buildings that contain a range of office, residential and retail space. Continued pedestrian-oriented development will support a vibrant street realm in City Center.” (page 3.27)

Although it does not address urban gardens or courtyards in detail, it promotes elements of urban design that will “serve to provide interest and activity along the sidewalk, thus enhancing the pedestrian realm. It is essential that this tradition of street-front activity be reinforced and maintained.” It further states that “Liner buildings should contain habitable space, so that the street scene is overseen by windows and doors and occupied spaces. This will provide a continuous, engaging street environment for pedestrians.” (page 3.17)

It goes on to say that in an Urban Core Area “the ground floor of buildings is an active frontage with doors and windows fronting the street,” and that “open space is dedicated to public plazas that are shaped by human-scaled building façades.” (page 3.27)

The plan also has this to say about bioclimactic design “Sustainable design conserves resources and optimizes human comfort through connections with the flows of a bioclimatic region, using place-based design to benefit from free energies—sun, wind, and water. In footprint, section, orientation, and massing, sustainable design responds to site, sun path, breezes, and seasonal and daily cycles.” (page 3.13)

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines do not specifically speak to wall design but has this to say about façade design, or aspects of the built environment that front the public realm “the design of new buildings should take design clues from neighboring buildings. There may be instances, however, when a building's facade design should not relate to neighboring buildings. This may be the case if there is no general design theme in the neighborhood or if neighboring buildings have been significantly or inappropriately altered over time.” (page 18)

The guidelines note that “Large expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. (page 19).

Regarding ground level space within a commercial district, the guidelines had this to say “a building's facade at ground level is paramount in establishing the vitality of a commercial district. Ground level design should be comfortable to the pedestrian. For example, there should be appropriate architectural detailing and windows at eye level.” (page 18).

When it comes to Community Character, the guidelines had this to say “High-quality urban design can also create streets and public spaces that are safe, accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale. The design of everyday details, such as lighting, signs, and site furnishings, is an integral part of what defines a community's character. According to the Master Plan, Richmond's urban character and cultural resources can be a strong incentive to retain existing residents and attract new residents, businesses, and visitors.” (page 20.)

The guidelines make a case for the importance of streetscape by noting “Streetscapes are the principal link between public and private spaces. It is important that streetscapes are designed to reflect the character of the neighborhood and to offer a safe, comfortable environment for pedestrians. The elements of a streetscape that can be used to create such environments include building facades, landscaping, sidewalks, street paving, street furniture, signs, awnings, and street lighting.” (page 20.)

In terms of lighting, the guidelines had this to say “Safe and comfortable circulation depends more on the consistency of illumination than on the level or brightness of the lighting. All light sources should be shielded to reduce glare, spill light, and wasted light.” (page 22)

The guidelines has this to say about the design of walls, fences, and screening “The design of walls or fences and screening should be consistent with the design, materials, colors and textures of the adjacent buildings.” It goes on to further state that “materials, colors and finishes should complement the materials, colors and finishes of the building. Masonry walls with iron gates are acceptable screening materials. Maintenance requirements should be considered when selecting fencing or screening materials.” (page 26).

The guidelines also mention “Evergreen tree and/or shrub plantings should be located adjacent to walls and fences to strengthen their screening ability. Evergreen trees and/or shrubs should also be planted adjacent to large screening enclosures to improve their appearance.” (page 26)

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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