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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: January 10, 2019  
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of construction of a new middle school (formerly Elkhardt Middle School), 6300 Hull Street; UDC 2019-01**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Bob Stone, Department of Public Works – Capital Projects

**II. LOCATION**

6300 Hull Street

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond School Board

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a new middle school on the previous site of Elkhardt Middle School.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The project involves the construction of a new middle school to accommodate 1500 students. The proposed building will replace a demolished school and accommodate a growing student population. Richmond Public Schools (RPS) selected four school design prototypes and presented them to the School board and community. The intention of the project is to reduce the design timeline in order to have the new school operational by 2020. The topography of the parcel makes siting the school difficult and will not allow for existing trees to remain, which is unfortunate. The programming of the surrounding area will allow flexibility and the space in between the “wings” of the school may allow for future outdoor facilities to enhance the educational programming, which is desirable. Additionally, existing utility lines onsite will be buried.

Staff is supportive of the overall design of the school building, which is required to meet LEED Silver. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval of this project.

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property, totaling approximately 19 acres, is bounded by Hull Street on the south, a forested area on the northeastern side, and Elkhardt Road on the west. The property lies within the R-3 (Single-Family Residential) zoning district and is currently not improved. It is bordered to the west by an area zoned B-3 (General Business) and R-43 (Multifamily Residential).

The property is surrounded mainly by a mix of detached, single-family residential and attached, multi-family residential. Along Hull Street to the east are a few stand-alone buildings that house three business. On the western side of the subject property is Chippenham Plaza, a commercial strip mall.

**b. Scope of Review**

The proposed project is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “public building or structure”.

**c. Project Description**

In early 2018, The City of Richmond Public Schools issued an RFP for the design of a new 1500-student middle school. The intent of the RFP was to provide a prototype design that would allow for a reduced design timeline in order to have the new school operational by September 2020. Under a previous RPS term contract, the existing school building at 6300 Hull Street was demolished, and the site was selected to be the home of the new 1500-student middle school. Four prototypes were presented to the School Board and to the community, and the plans presented here represent the selected prototype.

The selected site is approximately 19 acres, with a major grade change between the building area and the football field. Improvements will be provided to allow ADA access to all areas of the site. A secondary entrance will be provided at the northern end of the property, where one exists today, but this access will be gated and will be emergency access only. Parking for 25 buses and 150 staff/visitors has been provided based on conversations with RPS staff. Asphalt roadways and concrete curb are provided for all vehicular areas. Pedestrian areas will be concrete. Buffers consistent with the city’s requirements will be provided as shown to screen the parking areas from adjacent properties and roadways. Landscaping within the parking areas will also be provided, consistent with the City’s requirements. Additional foundation plantings will be provided along the building face to enhance those areas. All plantings will be based on native or adaptive species to minimize the watering requirements. It is anticipated that the new school will be designed to meet LEED Silver certification.

Access to the property from Hull Street and Elkhardt Road is limited, and it is important to separate access between buses and cars. Therefore, the access points shown on the plan represent the continued discussions and coordination with both DPW and RPS. In addition, the plan includes the improvements that are proposed with Hull Street (by others), as we understand this work is underway as well. Based on our understanding, Hull Street will be widened to accommodate a shared-use path on the north side of the road. As such, we are not proposing sidewalk along Hull Street, but we are including a sidewalk extension along Elkhardt Road.

**d. UDC Review History**

Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent review of the new middle school (formerly Elkhardt) (UDC 2018-47) was reviewed at the regular November 2018 meeting of the Urban Design Committee. The Urban Design Committee recommended that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval with Staff recommendations, as well as the following commission recommendations for a final review:

- Provide a site plan 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 set of floor plans and elevations, as detailed as possible.
- 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.
  - Landscaped spaces are enhanced
- Provide the location of all lighting units (this should be noted on a site plan), 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.
- Samples of all proposed exterior building materials, including but not limited to brick, mortar, shingles, siding, glass, paint and stain colors. When an actual sample cannot be provided, a product information sheet that shows the item or a photo of an existing item may be substituted.
- Consideration of enhanced architecture especially on the back bays of the building (north elevation) and the second entrance (west elevation).
- Consideration of outdoor learning and engagement opportunities in the courtyards between the back bays of the proposed structure.

In addition, Staff has reviewed UDC projects for the subject property; however, in June 2018, the UDC reviewed Final Hull Street Streetscape Improvements that abut the subject property (UDC 2018-28). These plans call for a 9' wide green space and a 10' wide shared-use path along the west bound side of Hull Street. Additionally, landscaping, pedestrian and street lighting will be provided as part of the plan to enhance motorist, pedestrian, and bicycle usage, visibility and safety.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located within the Midlothian 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, open spaces, schools, and other government and public service facilities (pages 135, 213). The Public Facilities section of the Plan notes that “Richmond Public Schools has an ongoing policy of maximizing the use of facilities for both school and non-school related activities” (page 75). One of the “policies and strategies” intended to address specific school facilities deficiencies is “to enhance learning environments for all students, and to promote the use of all existing and planned facilities by the community-at-large by sharing facilities wherever practical and economically advantageous among public schools and other community institutions, organizations, programs and City agencies” (page 77). The “policies and strategies” section solidifies this desire by stating support for “designing buildings to allow for maximum flexibility in the use of the space, and multiple-use facilities that accommodate both students and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods” (page 77).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations pertaining to new building construction, including that “the height of a new building should be

compatible with neighboring buildings” and that “a building's roof form should relate to neighboring buildings” (page 16). The Guidelines go on to say that “new building materials should be compatible with and complement adjacent buildings” and also that they “should be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance” (page 17). The Guidelines note that “the number, size, style and type of windows should be appropriate for the architecture of the building” and that “the rhythm, patterns, and ratio of walls to windows should be proportional and be compatible with adjacent buildings” (page 18).

As to site layout, the Guidelines advocate for parking areas being “relegated to remote areas of the site so that the orientation of buildings can be given a direct connection to the public right-of-way” (page 4). “Circulation within the site”, the Guidelines note, “should be geared toward pedestrian movements, not vehicular” (page 14). The Guidelines also encourage landscaped islands in the parking areas with well-maintained shade trees to soften large paved parking areas and break large expanses of asphalt (page 4). The Guidelines also call for screening the parking areas from the public right-of-way and neighboring properties. They note that “appropriate screening may include landscaping, walls, fences or berms” (page 5).

The Guidelines call for site landscaping to soften new construction and building architecture, and notes that “landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings” (page 10). The Guidelines further state that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines also advocate for Low Impact Development, the goal of which is to mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source (page 11).

## **VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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