



Staff Report

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UDC Design Guidelines Update

Meeting Date: 4/16/2026

UDC Guidelines Update – Sustainability Section

High-Level Details:

The UDC is updating its Design Guidelines, reviewing one section at a time throughout the year.

This report will consider the “Sustainability Section.”



Staff Contact

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Additional Departmental Input

The City’s Office of Sustainability and Division of Urban Forestry have reviewed the proposed document and provided comments, which have been incorporated.

UDC Action

Staff is looking for input, edits, and revisions from the Committee.

The Committee has the option of

- approving the section as Staff has provided,
- approving with recommended edits, or
- request edits and to see the section again at the following meeting for approval.

If approved, the UDC will review an entire finalized Guideline document consisting of all approved sections at the end of the process for a FINAL approval. (its possible additional items may come up as other sections are reviewed)

Sustainability Section

Proposed Revision:

The proposed document includes statements from the RVA300 Master Plan in *blue italics* for reference. The proposed document attempts to offer priorities and strategies in reaching the Master Plan's goals. The document tries to balance specificity with flexibility, while also keeping document length in mind. Emphasis is also placed on items specifically relevant to the UDC and items that have come up previously in UDC reviews.

The current guideline document does not include a stand-alone Sustainability section; sustainable items are throughout.

The proposed document includes a Sustainability section, while sustainable items are still found throughout as they relate to other sections

The proposed title headings are: Richmond Sustainable Design Standards (RSDS), Green Site Design, Stormwater Management and Low Impact Design, Urban Heat, Urban Tree Canopy, and Disaster Resilience.

1. **The Richmond Sustainable Design Standards (RSDS)** are of particular interest here as they help guide city projects as they are designed to include sustainable items. The Richmond City Council requires that the RSDS be applied to all new City projects that meet a certain threshold. The RSDS only applies to City projects and not private development.

The RSDS is designed to be flexible enough to allow projects of many different sizes, budgets, and types to maximize opportunities for sustainability. The RSDS gives goals for projects, with several possible paths to achieving them. However, certain things are prioritized and some of these may be important for the UDC's Location, Character, Extent review.

The proposed Sustainability Section includes highlights from the RSDS for reference.

2. **Green Site Design** was included in the previous UDC guidelines - and has been expanded in the proposed. The section speaks to preservation and re-establishment of existing natural areas, reduction of impervious surfaces, and renewable energy.

3. **Stormwater Management and Low Impact Design** was previously included in the guidelines, which the proposed section updates and expands. The section speaks to green approaches to stormwater, permeable pavers, and reducing pollution in stormwater runoff.

4. **Urban Heat** is a new section in the proposed guidelines. It references the City of Richmond Office of Sustainability "Richmond Cool Kit" to help develop strategies. The section speaks to shade, landscaping, smart surfaces, and depaving. Of particular note, it recommends that landscaping be the priority to providing shade and reducing heat, since landscaping can be provided many other benefits and is often the most cost effective.

5. **Urban Tree Canopy** is a new section in the proposed guidelines. It speaks to native species use and the effects of global warming. It should be noted that the Division of Urban Forestry is working on an Urban Forestry Master Plan. Also, that the RVA300 Master Plan sets a goal of 60% Citywide coverage and 30% canopy coverage in neighborhoods.

6. The **Disaster Resilience** section is greatly expanded in the proposed guidelines. It helps define what resilience means in this instance and speaks to facilities having multiple purposes, utility resilience, and energy generation. The RVA300 Master Plan includes many references to resiliency.

The RVA300 Master Plan and the proposed guidelines prioritize lower income neighborhoods in all of the topics.

There are many different options and opportunities to apply sustainability to a wide array of project types - solutions should be targeted to fit the specific project goals while still providing the most benefit per investment. Not all sustainability options may be applicable or appropriate for each project.

