



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: June 9, 2016
RE: **Final Encroachment review of VCU Linden Street Pedestrian Commons; UDC No. 2016-20**

I. APPLICANT

Keith Van Inwegen, VCU Planning & Design

II. LOCATION

Linden St between Floyd Ave & Grove Ave

Property Owner:

City of Richmond right-of-way; VCU will retain ownership of the improvements

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final encroachment review streetscape modifications along Linden St between Floyd Ave & Grove Ave as a result of a road narrowing put forward by VCU.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Overall, Staff finds the encroachments to beautify the streetscape, add to pedestrian safety and comfort in the area, and to further consider streets as an essential element of public space and urban vitality. Staff is appreciative of the efforts made to make this a functional urban streetscape as well as a campus environment, and the mix of previously-used and nearby VCU standards mixed with elements like seat walls that help contribute to place-making in the area. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Director of Public Works grant approval of the encroachment request.

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject right-of-way is along Linden Street between Floyd and Grove Avenue and is located in the R-53 (Residential High Density) zoning district in a prominent spot on the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University connecting Cabell Library, a dining hall, and residential, classroom, and cultural spaces. South of Floyd Ave, two blocks of Linden St have been converted to pedestrian areas and have been vacated as vehicular right-of-way; Floyd Ave and Main St still carry east-west traffic through the area.

Linden St in this block currently has one travel lane and two parking lanes, although all parking in the area has been heavily restricted for over a year during the renovation and expansion of the Cabell Library.

b. Scope of Review

The project involves the provision of brick sidewalks, a raised speed table and crosswalk, street trees and other plantings, decorative street lights and bike racks along the subject right-of-way. The City owns the rights-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments. The UDC has reviewed a number of streetscape encroachments for VCU over the last few years, including one in 2015 on N 12th St that combined a road narrowing with streetscape encroachments.

The encroachment process is administered through the Department of Public Works, which has requested that the Urban Design Committee (UDC) provide design advice on certain types of encroachments. The UDC does not have the authority to approve encroachments, but rather provides advice to the Department of Public Works.

c. UDC Review History

Over the years, the UDC has reviewed a number of streetscape encroachments for VCU in both campus areas. In 2015, the UDC reviewed a road narrowing & streetscape encroachments for N 12th St on the MCV Campus; this project also involves a road narrowing to create more pedestrian space and provide streetscape improvements.

d. Project Description

This project involves the provision of streetscape improvements, to be owned and maintained by VCU, as encroachments within the area created by the narrowing of Linden St between Floyd Ave and Grove Ave. The narrowing will change the existing curb-to-curb width of Linden St from 30 feet to 21 feet.

The narrowing will change the existing curb-to-curb width of Linden St from 30' to 21', with a 14' travel lane, 2' protected area, and a 5' contraflow bike lane. The renderings show a concrete barrier at the beginnings of the contraflow bike lane at the speed table on Park Ave as well as on Linden St.

A raised brick paver speed table is proposed at the intersection of Linden and Floyd to help slow traffic consistent with the City's Bike Boulevard improvements on Floyd Ave. The raised brick paver area will consist of two concentric circles with bands of brick planters and concrete bands. To the north of the intersection, four bollards will delineate the corners; to the south, four planters will demarcate the corners. A landscape bum-pout will be on either side of the Floyd Ave speed table.

16 black staple standard bike racks are installed in a line on each side of the Linden St sidewalk near the intersection with Floyd Ave. The 9' clear sidewalk will have 7' wide exterior planting beds with street trees and other plantings; a palette is included in the packets. It appears from the renderings and the specifications that no planting bed fences are proposed.

The existing alleyway to the north of the Academic Learning Commons will be improved with a band of alley cobblestones and an alley brick apron that stretches across the pedestrian right of way. In this area, one 7' wide planting

bed is shown tight against the Moseley House structure, creating a diversion of pedestrian movement toward to outside of the sidewalk area. The applicant is proposing this change to prevent trucks that service the trash compactor in the library from hitting trees when they maneuver into place to remove the compactors. Further north, the plan returns to interior pedestrian sidewalk with exterior planting bed with streets. To the east, alongside Cabell Library, there will be plinth seated stairs with planting beds.

Another speed table at the corner of Linden St & Grove Ave consists of five banded concentric circles of brick pavers. Bollards and planters are once again used to prevent vehicular turning movements into pedestrian spaces. A lawn with seat walls are designated to the north and south of Grove Ave, with bike racks on the perimeter. A space is designated in this area for campus art.

Heading west, Park Avenue will be two-way. Grove Ave will be one way, with back-in 45 degree angle parking on the North side of the street and parallel parking on the Southside of the street. A sidewalk extension and lawn bump-out is proposed at the corner of Harrison and Grove.

New lighting throughout the project will consist of the VCU standard fixture, the black Windsor model, using LED as the light source with a proposed color temperature of 4000k, which is the standard VCU has been proposing around their campus facilities. The lights will be post top mounted on 14' black poles and placed 2.5' inset from the curb in line with DPU standards. Three existing cobra head lights on wooden poles will be removed as part of the project.

Proposed plantings include Serviceberry, Thornloess Honeylocust, Saucer Magnolia, London Planetree, and Little Leaf Linden trees, as well as a series of ornamental grasses, shrubs, groundcovers, and perennials detailed in the planning schedule. The concrete planters are proposed as a sand buff vase shape.

Benches will be a standard 6' ribbon bench in black; the proposed list includes three makes with a center arm.

e. Master Plan

- f. The subject right-of-way is located in the VCU focus area, as defined in the Downtown Master Plan. A key recommendation in this section of the plan applicable to the proposed improvements is to protect “the pedestrian character, college atmosphere, and security of the campus” (page 4.15). This section further discusses the essential role of urban streets as public spaces, and contains strong language against the further closure of the City’s streets and alleys (page 4.17).

g. Urban Design Guidelines

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains several suggestions on having streetscape elements, including furnishings, paving, and lighting, reflect their surroundings and match existing context. The Guidelines state that “lighting fixtures should be consistent with the existing fixtures in the surrounding area. The finish on street lights and site furnishings should coordinate. The replacement of cobra head light fixtures is encouraged by

the UDC” (p. 23). Additionally, the Guidelines state that “appropriate landscaping should be used to clearly define entrances and pedestrian walkways (p. 20)”.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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