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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: May 18, 2015  
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent Review of a new Animal Care building, a new classroom building and associated site improvements in the vicinity of the Maymont Children's Farm, 800 Swan Lake Drive**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Dr. Norman Merrifield, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities  
Norman Burns, Maymont Foundation

**II. LOCATION**

Maymont, 800 Swan Lake Drive

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for conceptual location, character and extent review of a new Animal Care building, a new classroom building and associated site improvements in the vicinity of the Maymont Children's Farm.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The Maymont Foundation has launched a fundraising campaign with the goals of "expanding and improving Maymont's aging facilities and programs and achieving sustainability (via growth of operating endowment funds) so that future generations of residents and visitors can enjoy and explore Maymont". One of the projects associated with this campaign is to improve and expand the area near the Children's Farm to include barn renovation, a new Animal Care facility, a new classroom building, restroom expansion and improvement, an expanded parking lot and roadway realignment and a future welcome plaza. The proposal was put forth by the Maymont Foundation Board after review and evaluation by the Maymont staff with input from neighbors and consultants.

Overall, the Committee is supportive of the grouping of buildings on the park site to allow for preservation of larger open spaces on the interior. The Committee finds the location of the buildings on the site to be well considered, though they ask for the landscape plans to endeavor to minimize the impact of the structures on the park viewshed. The Committee finds the building materials to be compatible with each other and with adjacent buildings, aesthetically and structurally durable and low maintenance. The Committee further finds that the proposal is consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval, with the following conditions:

- That the applicant completes the Spottswood Road closing and new access drive land dedication process prior to final consideration of the entrance road portion of the project.

- That the final plans include detailed architectural plans and renderings for each building, indicating dimensions, building materials and finishes.
- That the applicant considers providing windows in the north façade of the new classroom building instead of the current blank façade.
- That the final plans include a landscaping plan and schedule showing plant species, quantity, location and size at the time of installation.
- That the landscaping plan seeks to utilize native, non-invasive species where possible.
- That the final plans include a lighting plan, showing make, model and finish for any light pole and fixture, as well as fixture light source and color temperature.
- That the applicant considers providing prominent bicycle parking in the vicinity of the vehicle parking lot.
- That the applicant considers the provision of an electric vehicle charging station in the parking lot.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

Maymont is a 100 acre City park property located north of the James River and Kanawha Canal and south of Shield Lake Drive between Hampton Street and Park Drive, which in turn becomes the Boulevard Bridge over the James River. Maymont is a National Register Historic Place and a Virginia Historic Landmark. Since 1975, the nonprofit Maymont Foundation has maintained and operated the park and has carried out extensive preservation and restoration of the original estate buildings including the Dooley Mansion, a Romanesque-style dwelling completed in 1893, and a number of other period outbuildings.

The property lies within the R-2 (Single-Family Residential) zoning district and besides the Dooley Mansion is improved several newer buildings reflecting the mission of the Maymont Foundation, including the Nature Center and Children's Farm. In addition to these structures are formal and informal gardens, open spaces and wildlife habitats. Today Maymont is visited by over 500,000 people annually.

To the south of the park is the James River, to the east of the park is an area zoned R-5 and improved with single-family detached dwellings. To the north of the park is a group of single-family detached dwellings in the R-2 district, and both to the north and the west is the City's Byrd Park with Shields and Swan Lakes, the Carillon and Dogwood Dell amphitheater.

**b. Scope of Review**

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as a "park" under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

**c. UDC Review History**

The UDC has reviewed a number of projects related to various buildings at Maymont over the years, most recently accessibility improvements to the Carriage House in 2012.

**d. Project Description**

The Maymont Foundation has launched the Spirit of Generosity Campaign seeking to raise \$35 million with the goals of “expanding and improving Maymont’s aging facilities and programs and achieving sustainability (via growth of operating endowment funds) so that future generations of residents and visitors can enjoy and explore Maymont”. One of the projects associated with this campaign is to improve and expand the area near the Children’s Farm to include barn renovation, a new Animal Care facility, a new classroom building, restroom expansion and improvement, an expanded parking lot and roadway realignment and a future welcome plaza. Another project associated with this campaign is to construct a new building to serve the Horticulture, Maintenance and Public Safety Departments. That project is being considered under separate application.

In addition to the work under review in this proposal, the Maymont Foundation has also applied for a Special Use Permit for 1000 Westover Road and 1001 Spottswood Road to allow for an expansion to the Westover Road structure and to permit office use and accessory event space on that property, which is used as the headquarters for the Foundation. While the building at 1000 Westover Road will be expanded, the building at 1001 Spottswood Road will be demolished.

The Maymont Foundation is also seeking to close a portion of Spottswood Road and dedicate to the City a 0.215 acre portion of the property at 1001 Spottswood Road for the purpose of relocating the main entrance drive. Spottswood Road, which runs parallel to Park Drive approximately 60’ to the east, is the existing entrance to the park. The proposal calls for a new access road, about 90’ to the east of Spottswood Road, resulting in a slow curved entry into the park through the existing granite pillars and metal gate. The applicant wishes to move the entrance to provide more room between Park Drive and the entrance so that vehicles can make the turn into the park without impeding the flow of traffic on Park Drive. It also creates a more open gateway and an opportunity for signage. The proposed entrance will carry two-way traffic, while Westover Road will remain a one-way exit. The road closing and dedication of land to the City would require an ordinance to be approved by City Council, and the applicant has begun that process.

In the parking lot, the four existing paved parking rows will remain, though the site will be regraded and repaved, and two more rows of parking will be added to the south in an area that is currently a grassy field. The parking lot expansion will require the removal of several trees, but the large cedar trees to the south will be preserved, and new trees will be provided in wells in the parking lot. Additional landscaping will be provided along the northern edge of the parking area. At a later date, it is the intention of the Foundation to provide a bio-retention area to the east of the parking area.

The new Animal Care facility will be located to the west of the existing barn in an area that currently is part grassy field and part work yard. The approximately 5,500 square foot building will contain treatment and surgery rooms, labs, offices and storage rooms, among others, to facilitate care of the park’s animals. The existing barn, classroom and restroom facilities, in separate buildings but located under the same roof, will all be renovated within the existing footprint. The restrooms will be expanded into what is currently used as an office. An area now used for storage will be converted to a family bathroom. The storage and office space will be relocated to the existing classroom facility. On the exterior of the buildings, repairs

will be made where necessary, and gutters will be added that will allow for rainwater to drain into an above-ground cistern. The rainwater will be filtered for reuse in the gardens and farm areas.

A new, approximately 2,700 square foot building, north of the existing restroom facility and alongside the main path from the parking area to the Children's Farm, will contain space for two new classrooms and a guest services desk. Though detailed plans are not provided at this point, a site rendering indicates that the building materials for the Animal Care facility and the new classroom building will match the materials used on the existing barn – board and batten siding and a red standing-seam metal roof with clerestory windows.

In addition to the aforementioned future bioretention area east of the parking area, the conceptual plans for stormwater management also include a Regenerative Step Pool Conveyance System (RSPCS), which will follow the natural contours of the hillside, ultimately draining to a created wetland basin. These practices will provide treatment to currently untreated impervious areas, provide a sustainable water quality practice, and will serve as a landscape amenity to a highly visible attraction and educational opportunity for the Children's Farm.

The plans also indicate that a welcome plaza is planned just to the south of the parking lot at the convergence of several paths. This project will be brought forward at a later date when plans are more refined, but the concept is to provide an initial point to welcome visitors and provide information.

The projects included in this proposal are privately funded through the Maymont Foundation. Construction will proceed when funding allows and after all approvals are granted.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located in the Near West Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan places the subject area in the Public and Open Space land use category, with primary uses including publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, and open spaces, among others. There is no language in the Plan specific to the site or the proposed improvements.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines states that “public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape”. In general the plan notes that “successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort”. The guidelines note that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements”

In general, the Urban Design Guidelines note that “the quality, design, and condition of all public facilities sets the image of the City, and sends a message about the values placed upon the services provided” (page 13). The Guidelines also note that building materials “should be appropriate for the size and architectural style of the building” and that “many different materials on a single building lead to visual confusion and should be avoided” (page 17). Building

materials should also be “aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance” (page 17).

The subsection on materials continues to say that “building textures and their combinations should add continuity and not conflict or detract from each other” and that “textures should be appropriate for the size, proportion and architectural style of the building and its surroundings” (page 17). Referring to building colors, the Guidelines note that they “should be coordinated and compatible with each other and with adjacent buildings” (page 17).

The Guidelines note 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” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines go on to say that “site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture” (page 10). The Guidelines express support 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).

The Guidelines recommend “landscaped islands with well-maintained shade trees to soften large paved parking areas and break large expanses of asphalt” (page 4). The Guidelines also encourages planning for multi-modal transportation in saying that “both public transit and non-motorized transportation (walking, biking, etc.) should be considered in the design and planning of all projects” (page 5).

## **VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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