



Staff Report  
City of Richmond, Virginia  
**Planning Commission**



<b>UDC 2024-10</b>	<b>CONCEPT Location, Character, Extent Review</b>	Meeting Date: 4/16/2024
<b>Applicant/Petitioner</b>	Alix Warren, Whitman, Requardt and Associates Adel Edward, City of Richmond Public Works	
<b>Project Description</b>	UDC 2024-10 CONCEPT Location, Character, and Extent review for the proposed James River Branch Trail segment running between Westover Hills Boulevard and North Hopkins Road.	
<b>Project Location</b>		
<b>Address:</b> between Westover Hills Boulevard and North Hopkins Road		
<b>Property Owner:</b> CITY OF RICHMOND RECREATION & PARKS		
<p><b>High-Level Details:</b></p> <p>The James River Branch Trail project will construct an approx. 2-mile long, 10-ft wide paved multi-use trail, which will connect local neighborhoods, schools, and businesses. The trail is proposed in an old CSX railway bed spanning from Westover Hills Boulevard to Hopkins Road. Traffic control and calming will be proposed on road crossings.</p>		
<b>UDC Recommendation</b>	Approval, with Conditions	
<b>Staff Contact</b>	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
<b>Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews</b>	NA	
<b>Conditions for Approval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UDC recommends that outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</li> <li>• UDC recommends the Applicant show in the FINAL Plan, a minimum 5ft width for sidewalks crossing the proposed path at street crossings.</li> <li>• UDC recommends the Applicant show in the FINAL Plan, locations for future signage that labels for drivers the trail crossing, and for trail users the upcoming cross street.</li> <li>• UDC recommends the Applicant show in the FINAL Plan, space for future small scale landscaping, such as flower and shrubs, at intersections.</li> <li>• UDC recommends the Applicant provide in the FINAL application, a letter from the Department of Public Works stating an intent to repave and otherwise provide necessary minimum improvements to sections of the street where the path branches off.</li> </ul>	

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## Findings of Fact

Site Description	The location of the proposed was previously CSX railroad property. It has been obtained by the City for the construction of the path and will be maintained by the City of Richmond Parks and Recreation.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 and 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.
Prior Approvals	NA
Project Description	<p><u>The Applicant states:</u>  “James River Branch Trail is a proposed shared-use path that will connect neighborhoods, schools, &amp; businesses, and will provide areas of recreation for walkers, runners, cyclists, and other trail users.”</p> <p>“The project will construct an approx. 2-mile long, 10-ft wide paved multi-use trail, which will connect local neighborhoods, schools, and businesses. The trail is proposed within a pre-existing CSX railway bed spanning from Westover Hills Boulevard to Hopkins Road. The trail will cross five existing roadways: Westover Hills Boulevard, Midlothian Turnpike, Hull Street Road, E. Broad Rock Road, and Hopkins Road. At each crossing, either a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon or a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon will be installed to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety. Several traffic calming measures in addition to the pedestrian signals are also proposed, a raised crosswalk at E. Broad Rock Road, and a lane reduction and choke island on Midlothian Turnpike. The project will also install lighting, landscaping, benches, trash cans, and bicycle racks at each trail crossing. Additionally, and where feasible, connections to the trail are proposed directly into neighborhood streets that abut the linear property now owned by Parks and Recreation.”</p> <p>“A public information meeting is being held on Monday, March 25th, 2024. The City will gather public input and comment for considerations of the location and design elements of the trail. The meeting materials are being submitted as supporting documents for this application, which include display boards to be presented at the meeting, and brochures, which are to be distributed at the meeting and also ahead of time to the adjacent property owners. “</p> <p>“Additionally, this project has been accepted into Virginia’s DEQ’s Voluntary Remediation Program (VRP) to mitigate environmental concerns, including any pre-existing hazardous materials on site. As part of this VRP program, an additional public meeting will be held in Summer 2024 to satisfy the VRP’s requirements for environmental due diligence.”</p> <p><u>Staff Review</u>  Planning Staff’s primary concern is safety where the path crosses streets. We have worked closely with the engineering team to ensure that safety is adequately address. A pedestrian hybrid beacon is proposed on Midlothian and Hull Streets. A hybrid beacon is similar to a stop light, requiring traffic to stop to permit pedestrians to cross – an example is located on Broad Street between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 16<sup>th</sup> Street. A raised crosswalk is proposed on Broad Rock Avenue. Flashing beacon is proposed on Hopkins Road. Lane reconfiguration is proposed on Midlothian Turnpike, as well, that will bring the street up to current City Standards and be much safer for pedestrians.</p> <p>Landscaping is proposed throughout the project, replacing and providing new landscaping trees as well as smaller landscaping. Seating is provided in several locations and lighting provided nearest streets. Site distances have been taken into account at all crossings. Staff has recommended a condition that the design at FINAL application allow future landscaping at crossings. Staff believes of the provision of high quality landscaping at these locations, as a general character, will draw the attention of drivers and communicate that an important crossing is coming up and pedestrians will need to be expected.</p> <p>A number of off branches are included to surrounding neighborhood streets. Staff has provided a condition that DPW communicate intent to pave and improve neighborhood streets the path connects to. Many of these streets are in extremely poor condition and are not appropriate general character for a pedestrian path link to.</p>

	<p>Decorative and informational signage is not included with the current application and will be completed when the project is assumed by the Parks Department, as a future phase. Safety and traffic signage is provided with the current application. Staff has provided a condition that space for such signage be provided and detailed in the FINAL Application. Specifically identification of the path to drivers, along with the identification of roads for path users as they come up to a crossing. It is Staffs intent that signage help to communicate to drivers that an important crossing is coming up and pedestrians will need to be expected. Similarly, communication to path users of a street coming to both be aware of the need to stop as well as for wayfinding.</p> <p>Staff also has provided a condition requiring the design to maintain a minimum of 5ft sidewalk width at crossings where existing street sidewalk is crossed. Sidewalk is not uniformly provided to a high quality in the location of the project and Staff wants to anticipate future projects and needs.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval with the listed conditions.</u></p> <p>The path is shown in the Maste Plan as a shared use path.</p> <p>Staff strongly supports the increase in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Specifically, as it will increase the safety of pedestrians as the access the School for the Arts located on Midlothian Turnpike. The project area is also underinvested historically and lacks significant pedestrian infrastructure. Effort has also been undertaken to provide adequate safety as the path crosses existing streets, many of which see heavy traffic often to a high speed. The path is also shown in the Maste Plan as a shared use path.</p> <hr/> <p><u>UDC recommends approval with Staff recommended conditions.</u></p> <p>The UDC discussed feedback from the Applicant’s public meeting. The Applicant stated the following as highlights: landscaping, safety at intersection and at night, and the provision of fixtures and amenities.</p> <p>The UDC discussed broader connectivity to surrounding locations of interest for users, parking at off shoot areas, provisions for art, bike rack locations, trash separation from benches, provision of bike tool stands, removal of scrub to increase visibility, provision of trashcan fixtures that included a lid, and protection from tree roots cleaving the path surface. The UDC was concerned with tree removals.</p>
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## Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
<b>Master Plan</b>		
	The path is shown on the Richmond 300 Future Connections map as being a shared use path.	
	<b>Objective 17.2</b> Increase city-wide tree canopy from 42% to 60%	Construction is planned to preserve maximum level of existing tree specimens, as well as replace and add new.
<b>Urban Design Guidelines</b>		
	<i>(P.7) Pedestrian Crossings: Pedestrian crossings should generally be confined to intersections. Midblock crosswalks should be</i>	Signalized crossings are provided on Hull and Midlothian, the most traveled streets. Raised crosswalk is also provided on Broad Rock.

	<p><i>discouraged, except for instances of extremely long distances between intersections. In these instances, a signalized crossing is preferred. Pedestrian crossings should be clearly marked and refuge islands should be provided where necessary.</i></p>	<p>Staff has provided a condition of approval that increased visibility of intersections.</p>
	<p><i>(P.10) <u>Landscaping, Species Diversity:</u> Landscape plans should include a diverse palette of plant species that include evergreen trees, flowering and shade tree species, shrubs, ground cover, and annual and perennial plantings.</i></p>	<p>Landscaping is proposed and adequately meets this guideline.</p>