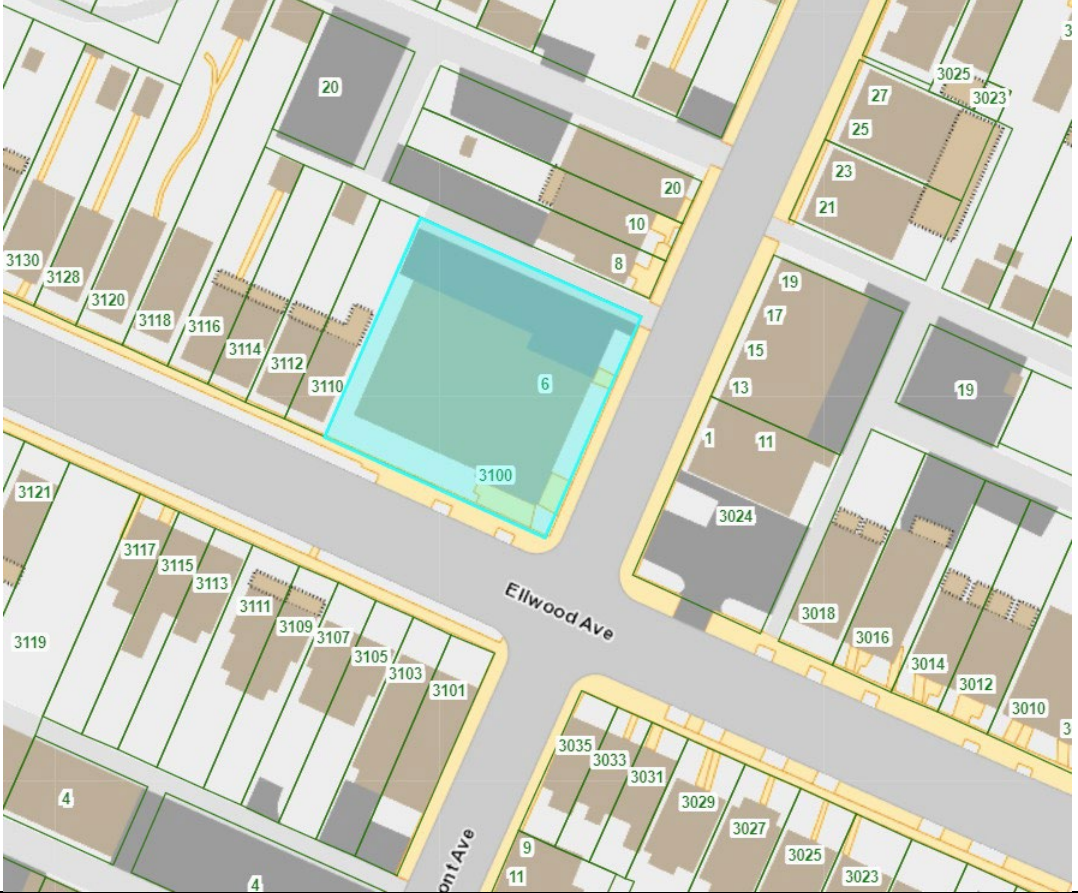




Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Urban Design Committee



UDC 2025-13	Concept Location, Character, and Extent Review	Meeting Date: 05/15/2024
Applicant/Petitioner	Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries	
Project Description	UDC 2025-13 CONCEPT Location, Character, and Extent review of the Greening Richmond Public Libraries: Belmont Branch project, located at 3100 Ellwood Avenue.	
Project Location		
Address: 3100 Ellwood Avenue		
Property Owner: Richmond Public Libraries		
High-Level Details: <p>The applicant proposes sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.</p> <p>Improvements include removal of impervious area and non-native species; construction of bioretention basins; installation of concrete terrace and seating; installation of native plants and irrigation system; and interpretive sign.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
	STAFF RECOMMENDS THIS ITEM BE CONSIDERED BY THE URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE DUE TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	The design was informed by public questionnaires and the collaborative project management effort of Richmond Public Library staff, RVAH2O, The James River Association, and Four Winds Design.	
Recommended Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be improved for the FINAL Application. 2. Applicant to revise plans to facilitate a 7ft clear space for the sidewalks along Ellwood Avenue and North Belmont Avenue for the FINAL Application. 3. Applicant to reconsider plaza layout to facilitate natural pedestrian movements and ADA requirements, for FINAL Application. 	

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Museum District neighborhood. The property is situated on the corner of Ellwood Avenue (Main Street in other parts of the City) and North Belmont Avenue. The property currently consists of the Belmont Branch Library and associated corner pedestrian plaza, landscaping, and parking lot.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter and review and recommendation under 17.05.
Project Description	<p><u>The Applicant States:</u></p> <p><i>“The purpose of the project is to develop a series of bioretention basins and areas of designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from a portion of the roof, sidewalks, and terrace; reduce the heat island effect as possible; enhance the existing streetside plaza; add seating; and create opportunities for education about the importance of native plants and managing stormwater runoff. Some impervious area and all non-native species will be removed – while additional impervious paving will be added these surfaces will all now flow into bioretention basins for onsite infiltration such that the net result is a reduction in the stormwater discharge from the property. The project strives to become a model of sustainable site development with educational components accomplished with an interpretive sign, special library programs, and community involvement and support.”</i></p> <p><i>“The design was informed by public questionnaires...Library users and residents identified the needs for visual and physical separation from the busy street and more seating.</i></p> <p><u>Staff Review:</u></p> <p>The purpose of the project is to develop a CONCEPT plan for the construction of sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.</p> <p>The narrative states that the goal of the project is to filter runoff while detaining stormwater so that excess volume can infiltrate to the ground and be recycled by landscaping plants.</p> <p>The site will provide greater landscaping and stormwater retention. Native plants are proposed for added shade, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystems services.</p> <p>GRTC Bus Line 5 and 78 are located on the primary street frontage along Ellwood Avenue, a stop is located in front of the project site. Staff has provided a condition of approval that the Applicant work with GRTC to determine if the stop needs to be relocated or otherwise improved with a concrete pad, bench, shelter, etc.</p> <p>Staff has recommended that the Applicant revise plans to facilitate a 7ft clear space for the sidewalk along Ellwood Avenue and North Belmont Avenue. Some existing utilities create a pinch point and it would be very easy to take 2ft from the adjacent planter bed as sidewalk space. Additionally, the sidewalk along Ellwood is only 5ft wide outside of tree wells, which 7ft width would be more standard – especially as Ellwood is very busy.</p> <p>Staff has also recommended that the Applicant re-look at the proposed layout of the pedestrian area at the corner of Ellwood and Belmont. It is generally good urban design to have a sort of plaza situation at a prominent corner especially in front of a public building. The plans propose to enlarge the planters redirect access from the corner.</p> <p>Additionally at the corner of Belmont and Ellwood, we need to ensure that the sidewalk meets ADA compliance and should be chamfered into the proposed planter. The sidewalk clear space should be a minimum of 5ft in depth but 7ft would be an ideal goal. The clear space should be measured with the ADA corner ramps in mind as well as the tendency of people to congregate at this location waiting to cross the street.</p> <p>Staff strongly supports the enhancement of this space in terms of stormwater and landscaping, as well as the transformation of the space into a more usable location.</p>