



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: January 4th, 2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of Richmond Public Library – West End Branch Site Improvements; 5420 Patterson Avenue; UDC 2020-21**

I. APPLICANT

Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries

II. LOCATION

5420 Patterson Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Public Libraries

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final approval of site improvements to Richmond Public Library – West End Branch including new landscaping, hardscape, and signage.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant proposes to alter the landscape and hardscape at the Richmond Public Library – West End Branch. Alterations include the removal of non-native plant species and dead or diseased plantings. New native trees, shrubs, and grasses will be planted in place of the removed plantings, and in addition to the existing plants.

The existing landscape beds will be altered with the installation of retention basins and conveyance channels containing ornamental stone to capture storm water runoff. Retention basins will be installed within the existing parking lot islands to capture stormwater runoff from the parking lot.

The project reduces the amount of impervious surface and non-native species on site, implements low-impact design to manage stormwater runoff and serves as an educational resource available at this library branch. The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- To ensure compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines, the applicant confirm with staff that the mature height and spacing of proposed plantings will not interfere with overhead wires and existing lighting.

Staff Contact:

Alex Dandridge, (804) 646-6569 // alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site is located in the West End of Richmond and is bordered by Patterson Avenue to the south and Glen Burnie Drive to the north, and backs up to the

United States Post office and a residential area. The property is zoned R-5, single-family residential. The library sits in the center of the parcel and is surrounded by a parking lot on three sides. There is a rear patio and seating area off the building, and an existing landscaping retaining wall along the sidewalk adjacent to Patterson Avenue, terracing the steep grade of the property.

b. Scope of Review

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “public building or structure” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

In 2016, the UDC undertook conceptual & final location, character and extent review of the Westover Hills Public Library Sustainable Campus Initiative. The UDC recommended approval of the project.

The UDC has reviewed a number of library renovation projects, many of which include landscaping, over the last few years.

d. Project Description

The applicant proposes to develop a series of bioretention basins designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from the roof, sidewalks, and parking lot; as well as develop an ecologically responsible landscape that can be used as an educational tool.

This project is funded by a 319H grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities – Stormwater Utility; and supported by staff hours from The James River Association and RVAH2O with service donations from Four Winds Design.

The site is the largest library branch in the City. Soil infiltration values are poor and the site has had many former uses, leaving the soil with significant debris. There are several stormwater runoff issues on the property, particularly the flooding of parking stalls near the back entrance. Despite these challenges, this location creates the opportunity to detain, filter, and absorb very large volumes of runoff.

Specific improvements at the Richmond Public Library – West End Branch include:

Northwest side of the site

- Removal of diseased, non-native tree next to the building, which will be replaced with a native species
- Removal of gravel and soil in existing raised planter to a depth of 12 inches, which will be replaced with engineered soil and native plantings

Southwest side of the site

- Removal of nandinas and liriopie in the landscape bed next to the building
- Planting of native shrubs and grasses

Northeast side of the site

- Removal of invasive plants such as ivy, privet, and Japanese honeysuckle to the greatest degree possible along the rear hedge
- Removal concrete surface in an existing parking lot island, and installation of soil and a retention basin with native plantings. Creation of a curb cut to allow stormwater to enter the new basin.
- Installation of a retention basin and associated curb cut next to the existing rear patio
- Planting of native trees, shrubs, and grasses

Southeast side of the site

- Installation of retention basins
- Installation of a concrete retaining wall within the landscape bed around the retention basins. Removal of three existing crape myrtle trees that will likely be damaged due to the regrading of the site
- Planting of native trees, shrubs, and grasses
- Creation of a leaf composting area
- Installation of a conveyance channel across the parking lot, covered by a metal grate. This conveyance channel will direct water from across the parking lot and into a proposed retention basin.

An interpretive sign will be installed on the west side of the library building and will be 32" tall. The panel will be mounted on a three-inch aluminum post. The panel will be 24.50" wide and have smoothed edges for safety.

An irrigation system is proposed and mister heads will be used in all areas, with no throws reaching masonry surfaces. The control is to be located inside of the Library Building.

All trees and shrubs shall conform to the most recent edition of The American Standards for Nursery Stock. No plants are to be stored on site for longer than 48 hours, and all stored plants will be kept in full shade and watered daily.

All planting beds shall be treated with three to four inches of hardwood double shredded mulch dyed brown. Compost or a bedding mix shall be tilled into the soil a depth of 4" in all planting areas except where soil is to be removed. Finished grade of all topsoil shall be 3" below hardscape elevations.

Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in March and April of 2021. Demolition and site infrastructure, large tree plantings, proposed parking lot curbs, arrival court and associated features, and retention basins will all be accomplished with an independent contractor. Volunteers will be used for shrub and perennial planting, mulching, and clean-up.

All maintenance of RPL properties is performed by an independent contractor managed by RPL staff. The site improvements at Westover Hills Branch Library, which were completed in phases from 2014-2019, has served as maintenance testing grounds and pilot project.

e. Master Plan

The project site is located in the Far West Planning District, which is identified by the City of Richmond's current Master Plan. The Master Plan states that the Far West End library branch should be considered a key destination point for the Libbie/ Patterson service center, and that renovation or expansion of the branch should be considered a key component of the redevelopment of the area.

Regarding Richmond Public Libraries in general, the Master Plan states that the City will retain its eight library branches and focus on internal improvements in regard to current technologies to serve the needs of the surrounding communities, and that the library branches should include special programming, exhibits, and lectures to increase its role as a community resource.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state 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. Shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting."* (pg. 10). The plan proposes a variety of native species including large trees, shrubs and bushes, and ground covers. The "Bee Zones" will include a variety of herbaceous perennial plantings.

The guidelines recommend that *"Plant materials should be adaptable to existing soils, climatic and lighting conditions, and be disease resistant. Native plant species are encouraged, but not required."* (pg. 10) The project proposes a variety of native species. The applicant has stated that the soil at each site has been studied to determine type and quality, which has informed the selection of native plantings at each project site.

The guidelines state that *"Maintenance should be considered when selecting landscaping materials. Significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained. Trees on public and private property should be appropriately trimmed around utility lines. Hazardous dead or dying trees on City-owned property should be removed and replaced."* (pg. 10) The project has located dead or dying trees on the site, and is proposing the removal of any dead or dying trees. The disturbance of any healthy trees is not being proposed in the scope of this project.

Regarding green infrastructure, the guidelines state that *"Site development should take measures towards conservation of natural resources. Where feasible, developments should also promote impact minimization techniques through alternative storm water management practices."* (pg. 11) The purpose of the project is to re-engineer the landscaping of the Richmond Public Library - Broad Rock Branch to include green infrastructure such as retention basins, rain gardens, swales, and native plantings, as means of managing stormwater runoff on site.

The guidelines state that, *“Street tree species should be selected for performance in urban situations. For example, the root structure should be conducive to urban conditions. The height of the tree at maturity should respect any overhead utility lines. The tree's branching tendency and leaf size should be considered. Tree species that drop berries or fruit or have thorns are generally not recommended.”* (pg.21) Staff finds that there are native trees that produce acorns/ fruits, and that grow to a mature height that could impact existing lighting and overhead utility wires being proposed within the scope of this project. Staff recommends that the applicant submit a final planting plan that replaces any acorn/ fruit bearing trees located in parking lots and along the sidewalk and street with native trees that are not acorn/ fruit bearing, and are spaced appropriately as to not impact existing lighting.

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