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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: September 10, 2015  
RE: **Neighborhood Sign Encroachments at the intersections of Forest Hill Avenue with Brookside Road and Cedar Lane; UDC No. 2015-27**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Carolyn Paulette, Forest Hill Neighborhood Association

**II. LOCATION**

Public right-of-way along Forest Hill Avenue at the intersections with Brookside Road and Cedar Lane

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for review of two proposed sign encroachments identifying the Forest Hill Historic District.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This is a request to place two encroaching neighborhood identifying signs in the Forest Hill Avenue right-of-way at the intersections with Brookside Road and Cedar Lane identifying the Forest Hill Historic District. The Forest Hill neighborhood was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2012.

Staff finds the proposed signs to be composed of high quality, durable and low maintenance materials. Staff also finds that the proposed signs will serve to enhance Forest Hill Avenue, consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan, which designates the road as a Principal Arterial Image Corridor. Staff finds the signs to be appropriate encroachments and finds the proposal to be consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Department of Public Works grant approval as submitted.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The affected right-of-way is along Forest Hill Avenue at the intersections with Brookside Road and Cedar Lane. The properties adjacent to the site at Brookside Road are zoned R-5 (Single-family residential), with areas zoned B-1 (Neighborhood Business) and R-53 (multi-family residential) nearby. Cedar Lane is the dividing line between areas zoned R-4 (Single-family residential) and R-5. The surrounding areas are primarily developed with single-family detached dwellings, with a small pocket of commercial uses at the intersection of Forest

Hill and Semmes Avenues, and a section of multi-family uses on the south side of Forest Hill Avenue across from the park.

Forest Hill Park comprises 100 acres and contains open spaces, a lake fed by Reedy Creek, walking trails, tennis courts, gathering spaces and a playground. The park is also home to the South of the James Market, a farmer's market held on Saturdays typically from May through November. Forest Hill Park, which was in succession once a quarry, an estate and then an amusement park, was deeded to the City in 1933 and is listed on the Virginia and National Historic Registers.

The Forest Hill neighborhood, roughly bounded by Riverside Drive on the north, Forest Hill Park and Reedy Creek on the east, Reedy Creek and Bassett Avenue on the south, and Southcliff Road, Cedar Lane, and Westover Hills Boulevard on the west, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2012.

**b. Scope of Review**

The project is for two sign encroachments identifying the Forest Hill Neighborhood Historic District. 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**

Staff was unable to find any similar projects along the subject length of Forest Hill Avenue.

**d. Project Description**

This is a request to place two encroaching neighborhood identifying signs in the Forest Hill Avenue right-of-way at the intersections with Brookside Road and Cedar Lane identifying the Forest Hill Historic District. The Forest Hill neighborhood, roughly bounded by Riverside Drive on the north, Forest Hill Park and Reedy Creek on the east, Reedy Creek and Bassett Avenue on the south, and Southcliff Road, Cedar Lane, and Westover Hills Boulevard on the west, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2012. The sign at Brookside Road will be located in the grassy area to the north of the intersection, adjacent to Forest Hill Park. The sign at Cedar Lane will be installed in the grassy median to the south of the intersection. The signs will be set back approximately 5' from the curb edge.

Each two-sided sign will consist of a 32" tall by 24" wide aluminum plaque mounted atop a 48" aluminum pole with a decorative base. The plaque is 1 ½" thick and features the text "Forest Hill Historic District" in white with black shading to give the appearance of the letters being raised (3.7" tall for upper case letters and 3" for lower case). The sign also contains an 8" circular insignia on the top and the logo for the neighborhood association on the bottom, all on a green background. The base of the sign post will be mounted in concrete to a 24" depth. The signs will not be illuminated, and no landscaping is proposed.

The encroaching signs will be constructed by the Forest Hill Neighborhood Association, which has set aside \$4500 for the purchase and installation of the

signs. The association plans to have the signs installed as soon as all approvals are in place.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject sites are located in the Old South Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan places the Brookside Road site in the Public and Open Space use category with Forest Hill Park, with primary uses including publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, open spaces, schools, libraries and other government facilities. The Cedar Lane site is located in the Single-family (low density) category, with primary uses including single-family detached dwellings at densities of up to 7 units per acre (page 133). The area surrounding the subject sites is almost exclusively in the same designated categories, with the exception of two areas specified for single-family (medium density) uses.

The Community Character section of the Plan designates Forest Hill Avenue as a Principal Arterial Image Corridor, and states that “image corridors are key transportation corridors that have the ability to form an impression on travelers passing through the City” (page 110). The Plan goes on to say that “enhancement of the City’s image corridors conveys a positive impression of the City to encourage visitation and investment” (page 110).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines notes that a sign’s message should be “easy to read and direct” (page 23). The Guidelines also state that “freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and perennials” (page 24).

Generally, the Guidelines impart, “sign lettering should be 4” to 14” high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed. One inch should be added to the lettering height for each additional 50’ between the sign and the viewer” (page 24).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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