



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: September 21, 2015
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of a proposed data node in Forest Hill Park, 4001 Stonewall Avenue**

I. APPLICANTS

Barry Russell, Dept. of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities
Jennifer Mullen, Roth Doner Jackson, PLC

II. LOCATION

Forest Hill Park, 4001 Stonewall Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Dept. of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a proposed Verizon data node to be installed in Forest Hill Park.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project is one in a series of five requests from Verizon Wireless to install data nodes in City parks. The City park sites were determined based on the high number of users of the sites. Data nodes are small antennas designed to increase data capacity in areas where people gather. They work with traditional cell towers to improve data and voice capacity and enhance the overall network.

The Urban Design Committee finds that the proposal is consistent with the recommendation of the Urban Design Guidelines that “new telecommunication devices shall be located on existing infrastructure”, which is intended to reduce the proliferation of stand-alone telecommunications devices. The Committee finds the proposed faux chimney antenna enclosure to be poorly located on the structure, and instead proposed that the enclosure be removed and the antenna painted to blend in with the surroundings. The Committee would also prefer to see an evergreen vegetative screen around the equipment enclosure to minimize its disruption to the landscape. The City’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities have reviewed and approved the location and design. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval, with the following conditions:

- That the applicant works with staff from the Departments of Planning & Development Review and Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities prior to permitting to provide evergreen vegetative screening around the equipment enclosure, where appropriate.
- That the applicant does not pursue the brick faux chimney and leaves the antenna exposed and painted a dark green to blend with the surrounding vegetation.

Staff Contact:

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Forest Hill Park is roughly bounded by Forest Hill Avenue to the south, W. 41st and 42nd Streets to the west, Riverside Drive to the north and W. 32nd Street to the east. The 100 acre park is zoned R-5 (Single-family residential) 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 surrounding areas to the west, north and east are developed with single-family detached residential dwellings zoned R-3, R-4 (both Single-family residential) R-5 and R-6 (Single-family attached residential). There are also areas across Forest Hill Avenue to the south that are zoned R-53 (Multifamily residential) and B-1 (Neighborhood business) that are improved with apartments and small, local businesses, respectively.

b. Scope of Review

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

c. UDC Review History

In 1998 the Urban Design Committee reviewed and the Planning Commission approved plans for a playground in the park.

d. Project Description

This project is one in a series of five requests from Verizon Wireless to install data nodes in City parks. The City park sites were determined based on the high number of users of the sites. Data nodes are small antennas designed to increase data capacity in areas where people gather. Per the applicant's report, data demand has increased exponentially over the last few years, doubling from 2012 to 2013; and is expected to increase 650% by 2018 as the number of uses for mobile devices and the number of devices increases. Data nodes work with traditional cell towers to improve data and voice capacity and enhance the overall network.

The proposed data node in Forest Hill Park is to be located on the top of shelter 2 at the end of New Kent Avenue, enclosed in a faux chimney. The roof peak on the shelter is 16' above grade, and there is an existing chimney at the eastern end of the shelter, the top of which is 18' above grade. The top of the faux chimney, which will be made of brick matched with the existing chimney for consistency, will be at 21' 6" above grade. The 10' wide x 10' deep x 6' tall equipment enclosure is proposed to be located in the wooded area to the east of the shelter, out of the way of the trail. It will be fully enclosed with a chain link fence and screened with green vinyl slats. Placement of the equipment enclosure will require the removal of undergrowth but no mature trees. No landscaping is proposed. An easement would need to be granted from the enclosure back to W.

42nd Street (approximately 1400') to allow for underground utilities and access. Wires from the enclosure to the shelter will be placed underground in a hand-dug trench. The wires will then be run up the inside of the shelter and through the roof to the antenna.

All improvements will be paid for by Verizon Wireless, which will enter into a lease agreement with the City, to be approved by Council. Verizon will also provide a one-time fee of \$5,000 per site to the City Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities.

e. Master Plan

The park is located in the Old South Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan places the subject area in the Public and Open Space use category, with primary uses including publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, open spaces, schools, libraries and other government facilities. There is no language in the Plan specific to the subject area.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines note that “whenever possible, new telecommunication devices shall be located on existing infrastructure” and that “telecommunication devices that are able to be co-located on existing towers are encouraged” (page 16). The Guidelines also state that “Impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements” (page 9). The Guidelines also note that “active parks should have adequate facilities (i.e. sports fields, trash receptacles, benches, running paths, etc.) to accommodate intended users” (page 9).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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