



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: December 18, 2017
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent review of Cannon Creek Greenway – Nature Trail; UDC No. 2017-39**

I. APPLICANT

Marlie Creasey-Smith, Parks Operations Manager

II. LOCATION

228 Dove St.

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Public Works

III. PURPOSE

The application is for conceptual location, character, and extent review of a proposed 2/3 mile long gravel and boardwalk nature trail in the Cannon Creek Greenway ravine, downhill from the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike, between E. Brookland Park Boulevard and Dove St.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The conceptual plan proposes to construct a passive recreational trail in a park-like setting through the use of several environmentally-conscious strategies. Low Impact Development (LID) such as storm water management through the use of permeable paver systems and the use of bioswales will both reduce pollutants in the water and slow runoff. Sediment control measures will reduce erosion with minimal grading. The trail has been oriented in a way to minimize removal of trees, those that are removed will be replaced according to caliper, 1 inch: 1 inch, and consist mostly of native understory trees. Lighting is not planned as the park is not intended for use at night. Final design will be accomplished through collaborating with the Richmond Community High School environmental studies program.

The Urban Design Committee finds the proposed improvements creative, sustainable, and that they further the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines for environmental quality and public parks. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the conceptual design with the following conditions for final review:

- That the wooden bollards and chains at all entrances are replaced with granite blocks as a physical and visual barricade between pedestrians and vehicles
- That if temporary bollards are necessary to prevent unauthorized vehicle entry, consider using a single bollard instead of two
- That the final location of the mid-point entry on the eastern side of the trail is placed farther south along the Richmond-Henrico to enhance sight lines
- That the final design of the mid-point entry take into account the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike Improvement project for improved pedestrian connectivity

- That the final planting schedule consist of a reduced amount of Acer rubrum, to be substituted with Liquidambar styraciflua or other comparable species
- Consider a narrower trail width wherever possible
- At the E. Brookland Park Boulevard entrance, consider how the system of stairs and ramps may better blend into the natural topography
- Consider additional east and west entrances, south of the proposed mid-point entrance, to connect the grid in the future
- Additional granite benches along the trail
- Additional bike parking at all entrances and trail heads
- Study and ensure adequate lighting at the trail heads for safety

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site consists of a ravine that parallels the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike and is between E. Brookland Park Boulevard and Dove St. The site spans across two different residential zones, R-5 (single-family residential) and R-6 (single-family attached residential) and abuts two sections zones R-48 (multifamily residential). Single family homes surround the site with new, denser development occurring near Dove St.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed project is subject to general location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “park or other public way”.

c. UDC Review History

The Cannon Creek Greenway, a more transportation-oriented project located adjacent to this proposed project, went before UDC review for location, character, and extent in four phases, between the Spring of 2011 and the Summer of 2014.

d. Project Description

The purpose of this project is to provide residents of the 3rd and 6th district with a passive recreation trail in a park-like setting surrounded by nature. Other city residents, students, cyclists, and tourists will also enjoy the unique experience that the park will offer. Key to the programming goals of the park, the Environmental Club at Richmond Community High School will help to develop the interpretive and educational components to the park.

Construction will include all proper erosion and sediment control measures, tree clearing and minimal grading. Tree removal is necessary to make way for the 12' wide trail and boardwalk. The trail has been painstakingly located to minimize removal of trees resulting in 40 trees to be removed totaling 405 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH). This number is subject to change as the final design progresses. Per the city's replacement ratio of 1" replaced per 1" removed, the project will include planting of more than 405" of native understory trees (2" caliper each) that will flourish beneath the mature canopy and provide seasonal interest.

This project encompasses approximately 2/3 of a mile of new gravel trail and boardwalk from Dove Street to E. Brookland Park Boulevard. Nearly 1,000 linear feet of the trail crosses through wetlands and requires a timber boardwalk construction and the rest will be comprised of gravel with a flush timber edge. Trail heads with permeable pavement, seating, trash receptacles, and bollards will be positioned at each end of the nature trail. Interpretive signage is tentatively located through the park but final design will be done in collaboration with the Richmond Community High School environmental studies program.

Signage will identify wildlife found within the ravine, plants native to the area, typical functions of wetlands, stormwater management best practices, and other concepts. Lighting is not planned for this project, as the trail is not intended for use at night and the department of parks, recreation and community facilities does not want to encourage use at night.

Treatment for stormwater quality is not required due to the location of the ravine in the combined sewer system. As a demonstration and education tool, some of the drainage in the area will be collected in detention under the trail surface, slowing the water prior to entering a bioretention basin and into the combined sewer system.

Councilwoman Ellen Robertson, Dr. Charles Price (Sierra Club/City Resident), Deborah Morton (DPRCF), Marlie Creasey-Smith (DPRCF) and John Harris (DPRCF) have all been integral in working with Timmons Group to develop the conceptual plans to date. These plans were presented to the surrounding communities on October 26, 2017 and met with resounding support. At least one additional community meeting and meetings with the Richmond Community High School are anticipated as the project moves from conceptual to final design.

Preliminary engineering estimates indicate that the project will cost approximately \$1.5 million dollars. Funding for this project is anticipated to come through capital improvement funding in FY18-19. If the project is not fully funded through capital improvement budgets, grant opportunities like the Virginia Land Conservation Fund will be pursued to capture additional funding to construct the park and phased if necessary.

Assuming design is completed in spring of 2018 and the project is funded in summer of 2018, construction could start as soon as fall of 2018. This all depends on securing the proper funding.

e. Master Plan

This project falls within the North Planning District of the Master Plan. Regarding recreation and parks, the plan suggests that additional parks and open space should be provided where appropriate, including lands adjacent to the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike between Brookland Park Boulevard and Dove St (page 261).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Public Park section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes that “public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape. Parks should respond to the environment in which they are located and should be designed in accordance with their intended use” (page 9).

Additionally, “A preference should be given towards materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. (page 9). The Guidelines are also very supportive of low-impact development and green building practices (page 10, 11).

The Guidelines note 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” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10).

Lastly, the Guidelines state that “lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (page 9).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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