



City of Richmond, Virginia
Department of Planning and Development Review

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To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: February 9, 2017
RE: **Monroe Park Revisions to Final; UDC No. 2017-07**

I. APPLICANT

Don Summers, Department of Public Works, Division of Capital Projects

II. LOCATION

Monroe Park – 719 West Franklin Street

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for review of revisions to the final location, character, and extent of Monroe Park renovations, including a comprehensive set of improvements involving surface treatments, plantings, lighting, gateways, perimeter treatments and public amenities.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds the proposed modifications reasonable and attractive, and that they further the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines for public parks with regard to sustainability especially. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following considerations:

- That the LED lighting be 3000K color temperature

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site is bordered by Belvidere Street on the east, Main Street on the south, Laurel Street on the west, and Franklin Street on the north. The public urban park property is surrounded by a number of high-density zoning districts, including multi-family residential, institutional, and religious buildings.

b. Scope of Review

This project is reviewed under Section 17.07 for location, character, and extent as a public park. This is an update to the previously-approved 2009 plan for renovation.

c. Project Description

This project involves updates to the 2009 approved plan for the renovation of Monroe Park. As bid documents for the renovation were prepared, a number of

updates, changes, and modifications are proposed to respond to now-existing site conditions, improve the sustainability of the park, and improve operations.

Since the 2009 approvals, the City has adopted more stringent stormwater management regulation and goals, as well as adopted a Sustainability Plan. The updated designs propose permeable pavers at key gateways and gathering places, including the entrances to the park and the circular plaza surrounding the existing fountain, which is to be repaired and restored. A sample of the pavers is included in the plans. The designers have identified these areas as subject to the most traffic, and most in need of pavers, but would hope to extend the pavers as a path material throughout the park over time.

The 2009 plans included biofiltration planters, but the plans propose minor modifications, including: concrete instead of granite hardscape details, more native plantings, and concrete stepping pads for pedestrian cut-through traffic at regular intervals. In general, the overall planting plan has been revised to increase planting areas, lower maintenance, and provide more sustainable plant selections. The largest change is the removal of Periwinkle as a primary plant species, and the layouts are updated to reflect other modifications, including trees and existing cobra heads.

A set of tree removal diagrams is included in the packet that show the tree canopy at the time of the 2009 approval, trees present at 2016, trees identified by the City arborist at the commencement of the project to be in need of removal for health reasons, trees needed for removal in order to construct bio-filtration basins along the park perimeter, and subsequent adjustments to the tree plans to preserve trees originally slated for removal and add additional tree plantings to rebalance the canopy of the park as proposed.

Lighting, a subject of discussion at the time of the 2009 plans, is also updated. The interior park lighting is proposed as LED, utilizing a fixture that matches the City-standard, while still being pedestrian-scale. The exterior lighting of the park will be provided by retaining the existing cobra head fixtures as well as new pedestrian lighting. The new lighting on the perimeter will not be LED in order to meet DPU standards, and will match the VCU Monroe Park fixture in use in the surrounding area.

A new dual water bottle/drinking fountain with dog bowl that will be installed on a concrete base at the intersection of two pedestrian paths near the Laurel Street side of the park.

City standard bike racks have been relocated in the design. Previously they were at the perimeter of the park; this plan relocated 12 racks to the Checker's House plaza area and several more to the games area, with the intent of providing racks near destinations that cyclists would stop and utilize. The games area itself now is proposed with a low-maintenance granite curb, rather than previous timber ties.

The Checker's House plaza has been shifted in location and redesigned to do the following: protect the root zones of two existing trees, provide better ramping for accessibility on the House itself, substitute bluestone as the material to seat

walls to brick veneer with granite cap in keeping with surrounding materials, and add a stepped seating area and secondary path to connect the west of the plaza.

Finally, a designated event space that was planned for the eastern edge of the park, adjacent to Belvidere Street, is deleted from these plans. The space was to consist of a concrete stage, as well as flagpoles; the applicant proposes that this feature is not flexible enough for event purposes, as well as not well-located near a heavily-trafficked street.

d. UDC Review History

The Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission reviewed the Monroe Park Master Plan conceptually in October 2007, and then approved a final version of the plan in February 2008. In 2009, the Urban Design Committee and the Planning Commission approved final plans for the renovation of Monroe Park without conditions. One of the prime topics of discussion at the time was whether lighting in the park would be metal halide or sodium vapor.

e. Master Plan

Following the adoption of the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan and the 2009 design of the park, the 2009 Downtown Plan contained recommendations for the surrounding neighborhoods and areas, as well as specific language about Monroe Park that “promote Monroe Park as the center of a campus and a community. With the growth of the Monroe Park Campus that surrounds the park on four sides, Monroe Park is becoming more important to the University as its primary green space, and as such has been endorsed as a central feature within the campus by the VCU 2020 Master Plan. The City and the Monroe Park Advisory Council have developed the 2008 Monroe Park Master Plan that will guide future enhanced use of the park as a cultural and passive recreational center for the campus and the neighborhood. This park plan has been reflected in the illustrations in the Downtown Plan. Respect for the park’s historic integrity and increased maintenance and security are key to the park’s success.”

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state that “parks should respond to the environment in which they are located and should be designed in accordance with their intended use” (9). They continue: “Impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements. A preference should be given toward materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. Lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park.” (9).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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