




Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Urban Design Committee



UDC 2022-08	Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent Review Meeting Date: 8/4/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	L. Dexter Goode, Capital Projects Manager, Sr.
Project Description	Conceptual location, character, and extent review of renovations to the existing Richmond Public Library – Downtown Branch
Project Location	
Address: 101 E. Franklin Street	
Property Owner: City of Richmond	
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes a concept to demolish a portion of the existing library and construct a new and modernized addition. The new addition is designed to be a welcoming and accessible space for patrons with space to become an important community resource. Accessibility, health, efficiency and evolving community needs are taken into account by the design. Improvements to the site include public space improvements and the addition of underground parking, along with internal and external improvements to the existing building.	
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov
Previous Reviews	<p>A long term plan for the Richmond Public Main Library was completed in 2021, with input from both the public and the City Library Committee, to guide development over the next 40+ years. The plan calls for an updated main branch library to overcome numerous deficiencies of the existing building, including structural safety problems and functionality issues.</p> <p><i>The project was previously heard at the May 5, 2022 UDC Meeting.</i></p> <p><i>The UDC provided comments on the proposed architecture and site improvements, comments details in “Findings” section.</i></p>

Staff Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff encourages the proposed sustainability concepts and recommends inclusion of sustainable stormwater practices. • Staff recommends that disaster sustainability features be included. • Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. • Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. • Staff recommends that site design acknowledge the existing GRTC stop and include improvements, as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. (Condition removed, bus stop no longer active) • Staff recommends that street trees be evaluated for health and adequacy and should be protected or replaced during the project. • Staff recommends that sustainability features be included for the proposed splash pad and pedestrian plaza, as detailed by the Urban Design Guidelines. • Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible. • Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces. • <i>Staff recommends that the final design include seating, landscaping, and stormwater elements in such a way as to encourage safe use of the proposed splash pad.</i>
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Findings of Fact

Site Description	<p>The site is located between Monroe Ward and the Downtown Central Business District at the intersection of East Franklin Street and North 2nd Street. The site is zoned B-4 - Business (Central Business), and is approximately 1.7 acres in size. The current building is located along the northern portion of the property facing East Franklin Avenue, with a parking area to the south facing East Main Street. Linden Row is located to the north, across East Franklin Avenue; the Richmond Fire Department Headquarters is located to the east, across North 2nd Street; and various City designated historic structures and historic districts are located in the near vicinity.</p>
Scope of Review	<p>The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter</p>
Project Description	<p>The purpose of the project is to develop a conceptual plan for the renovation of the City of Richmond Public Library Main Branch.</p> <p>The proposed concept was developed after the completion of a public master planning process undertaken by the library system that identified the site as having numerous structural deficiencies that could affect the safe and healthy use of the building. The current building design is also limiting of functionality to meet modern and changing usage requirements and the need to act as a welcoming and accessible space for the general public.</p> <p>The concept narrative declares that the goal of the project is to create “a bold vision of solving problems; welcoming more patrons; providing a healthy and efficient building to operate; and being a community resource for every member of the population; no matter the age, ethnicity, gender, or income of the patrons.”</p> <p><i>The applicant has revised the concept site plan to better meet UDC comments. The Applicant has removed the proposed architecture renderings from the application so that it can be considered in a fully flushed out form at the final application stage. The applicant acknowledges the UDC’s comments on the previous architecture and Staff has provided a</i></p>

thorough detail of what Urban Design Guidelines are applicable to the project and how they will be applied to the architecture during the final review application.

The site plan indicates the same extent of demolition of the existing library building and a general footprint of the new addition as in the previous version. The applicant states that the addition will remain a similar modern architectural style with the significant use of glass, metal, and colorful stone. The new version of the site plan also shows that stormwater facilities will take up the space between the building and the street that might have previously been shown as lawn. It is also shown that an existing elevated portion of the building pedestal will be maintained along 2nd Street and create an elevated outdoor area accessed from the interior. It should be noted that the provided site plan is of conceptual level of detail and shows general themes and locations and not specifics or fine grained site improvements.

The Applicant has heard comments from the UDC that the architectural design should take into account the rhythm of the surrounding neighborhood of primarily townhouse buildings. Also that the modern addition should harmoniously co-exist with the remaining (old) portion of the library and that bird safe glass be included. Walls lacking significant visual interest were also identified along the 1st Street façade and should be addressed.

Staff suggests that, in the final design, the applicant take into account that the rhythm of the existing building is reflected in the strong vertical columns along the front façade, but once those columns are removed, that rhythm will need to be replaced on the new building design in some way. Staff also sees that the windows on other sides of the building include a raised border that adds some interest and contributes to reinforcing rhythm. This raised border should be maintained along the front façade where the columns are removed. Further, with the “porch” structure removed, a strong cornice and ground border will be lacking in the new design and should be introduced with some new feature on all sides of the old part of the building. There should also be some repetition of materials between the old and new part of the building to relate the two halves in a cohesive manner.

The site surrounding the building will be improved with plaza gathering spaces, new landscaping, public art, and a splash pad for children. An existing library garden on the southern portion of the site will be maintained with no existing tree removal. Existing parking along the southwestern portion of the site will also be maintained.

The UDC provided a comment asking if the splashpad being located so close to the intersection of Franklin Street and 1st Street would create a conflict of children possibly running into the street. Staff and the Applicant point to other examples of splashpads similarly situated near intersections that use seating walls, landscaping, and stormwater infrastructure to indicate users into the proper area. These elements are not included in the Concept plan due to the level of detailed required and will be fully detailed in the Final Application. Staff recommends that the final design include these elements for safety considerations.



Example: City of Gaithersburg – Olde Town Plaza Splash Pad – Google StreetView 2018

	<p>The project has not reached a point in development where funding has been dedicated to construction. Specifics, especially on exterior plantings and plaza design, are subject to change as development plans are drafted and finalized. The themes, goals, and generalized assets proposed in the current draft concept plan will guide those efforts.</p> <p><i>It should be noted that the provided site plan is of conceptual level of detail and shows general themes and general locations and not specifics or fine grained site improvements. The final submission will contain fully worked out site design and architecture.</i></p>
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Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	<p><i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i></p> <p><i>Sustainability - City facilities can help showcase green building features.</i></p> <p><i>Beauty – Oftentimes, City facilities serve as beautiful landmarks that anchor a neighborhood and create a distinctive place through architecture and site design.</i></p> <p><i>Thriving Environment: City-owned buildings and land are opportunities for energy retrofits and green infrastructure to further Goals 15 and 16, as well as locations for new parks, urban agriculture, and resiliency hubs to further Goal 17.</i></p>	<p>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</p> <p>The project includes the stated goal of designing a new public space specifically with equity and beauty in mind – equity and beauty being goals for City facilities. The programming of the new library will include equity minded assets such as a small business incubator and teaching kitchen. The entrance and interior public spaces are also designed to be welcoming to all citizens as well as creating an important landmark and civic minded façade through quality architecture. A number of sustainability and environmentally friendly features are included.</p>
	<p>Objective 2.1 - Align new facilities and improve existing City owned facilities.</p> <p><i>d. Finish implementing the Libraries Master Plan by renovating the Main Library.</i></p> <p><i>f. Implement programs to improve the energy efficiency of City-owned buildings</i></p> <p>Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment.</p> <p><i>c. Link public art with major public facility initiatives (e.g., plazas, buildings, parks, bridges) and expand the definition of public art to include architectural embellishments of buildings, or landscape features.</i></p> <p>Objective 10.4 - Increase the number of low-emission vehicles.</p> <p><i>b. Seek opportunities to install electric charging stations on publicly owned land, balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.</i></p> <p>Objective 15.4 - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.</p>	<p>Master Plan Objectives</p> <p>This project is the culmination of the objective to implement the Libraries Master Plan and renovate the Main Library.</p> <p>The application includes several instances of public art, although details will be worked out at a later stage.</p> <p>Richmond 300 includes a number of sustainability objectives specifically relating to public facilities and City owned properties. Renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable stormwater management, and sustainable construction should be considered. Sustainability features that are planned to be included: NetZero energy (combine energy efficiency and renewable energy generation to consume only as much energy as can be produced onsite), photovoltaic roof panels, green roof, water use reduction with eco-friendly plumbing fixtures, low emission materials, recycled or locally sourced building materials, LED lighting, and provision of sustainable learning opportunities in final library programming.</p> <p><u>Staff encourages the proposed sustainability concepts and recommends inclusion of sustainable stormwater practices.</u></p>

	<p><i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.3 - Reduce water consumption by 10% per capita.</p> <p><i>b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.4 - Increase green stormwater infrastructure</p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way</i></p> <p>Objective 17.3 Reduce urban heat</p> <p><i>a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight.</i></p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities</i></p> <p>Objective 17.6 Increase the resiliency of infrastructure and community assets.</p> <p><i>h. Increase local renewable energy generation (see Goal 16).</i></p> <p><i>h. Identify community facilities to serve as resilience hubs and update systems to be more resilient.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity</p> <p><i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i></p> <p><i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i></p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution.</p> <p><i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i></p>	<p>Richmond 300 establishes that City facilities should be considered in larger resiliency efforts. Libraries are traditionally considered in municipal resiliency plans as they operate as community centers and conveniently placed municipally owned spaces. Libraries can serve as important pieces of a disaster response if appropriate resiliency equipment is included such as alternative power sources, backup power storage, and storage of emergency supplies.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that disaster sustainability features be included.</u></p> <p>Landscaping and lighting details will be established at a later stage, but should include sustainability considerations.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</u></p>
Urban Design Guidelines		

PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3	<p><i>The design guidelines suggest compatibility, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, cost, and sustainability be considered when designing pavement areas. Impervious areas should be limited and pervious pavement materials should be introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i></p>	<p>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS</p> <p>Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage; sustainability and compatibility considerations should be included. A green roof is planned, which will reduce stormwater runoff from the building footprint.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p>
LANDSCAPING – Page 10	<p><i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long term maintenance should be considered.</i></p>	<p>LANDSCAPING</p> <p>A significant portion of the site will be green space. Conceptually, three (3) pollinator trees and two planter boxes are proposed along East Franklin Street and lawn is proposed in the remaining open space along East Franklin and North First Street. Existing mature green space to the south of the property will be maintained.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that street trees be evaluated for health and adequacy and should be protected or replaced during the project.</u></p>
STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT – Page 11	<p><i>Design guidelines encourage use of Low Impact Development design elements that that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, minimize, and detain stormwater runoff are applied to not only open space, but also rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, and sidewalks.</i></p>	<p>STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Information on stormwater strategies is not provided within the application. Stormwater specifics will be finalized at a later stage, but should include low-impact design combined with landscaping to compliment an attractive and accessible outdoor space and public realm. A green roof is proposed, which will help to reduce stormwater runoff from the building footprint.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that sustainable stormwater features be included, as detailed by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p>
GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES – Page 13	<p><i>Guidelines suggest that buildings should be oriented toward the primary street that borders the site and architecturally acknowledge all adjacent public right-of-ways. A building's entrance should be easily recognizable, at ground level, and appropriately design to accommodate persons of differing mobility levels. Efficiency should be considered when deciding building location and orientation such as passive solar heating design and maximization of natural light.</i></p>	<p>GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES</p> <p>The new design for the building is oriented to East Franklin Street, as the main right-of-way, and “turns the corner” toward North 1st Street. The main entrance is at ground level, easily accessible to patrons with varied access requirements, and is welcoming and significant to aid in site navigation. New construction is primarily proposed along the north face of the building, precluding strong design consideration for south facing solar heating, but the interior layout is designed to allow light to penetrate far into the building with atrium style high ceilings along the south wall.</p>
BUILDING SETBACK – Page 14	<p><i>The guidelines state that new buildings should have the same or similar setback as existing buildings on the same street. There will be situations, however, where</i></p>	<p>The proposed addition will largely meet the established minimum setback trends along both East Franklin Street and North 1st Street.</p>

	<i>a different setback would be appropriate for the type of building and the desired environment. Examples would include larger public buildings, such as schools and recreation centers, located within urban residential areas. In certain cases, a new building should be constructed with a minimal setback to reinforce the traditional street wall.</i>	However, the building is further set back from the street to facilitate attractive public spaces.
SITE FEATURES – Page 14	<i>The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users. Operational features and parking should be screened from view.</i>	<p>The primary façade and surrounding site circulation is oriented to pedestrian users in both massing and design.</p> <p>A plaza is proposed at the northwest corner of the property at the intersection of East Franklin Street and North First Street. The plaza is at grade with the surrounding public sidewalk, and includes a splash pad as an amenity for families. Final design for the plaza will be decided at a later stage but should include adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles. Sustainability considerations are not established at this stage.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that sustainability features be included for the proposed splash pad and pedestrian plaza, as detailed by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the final design include seating, landscaping, and stormwater elements in such a way as to encourage safe use of the proposed splash pad.</u></p> <p>Deliveries will be facilitated on the rear of the building or internally within the structured parking. Operations design elements such as HVAC and other equipment will be appropriately screened from the public right-of-way. Surface parking will also need to be appropriately screened.</p>
BUILDING PROPORTION – Page 15	<i>Building massing should be compatible with the surrounding uses; although, important public buildings may require larger sizes. Visual impact can be minimized via design techniques such as setbacks or varying surface and roof planes. Height and roof design should be sensitive to surrounding uses, but may be taller on corners to frame access to the block.</i>	<p>Building proportions are similar to the existing library, with architectural interest and building undulation added for the new addition. The proportions are similar to the surrounding neighborhood, specifically three stories is a common height. Few buildings within the surrounding area span an entire block, public buildings should be sensitive to their surroundings even as they may be larger in size. As such, the existing building will maintain vertical window elements that are sensitive the historic building pattern. The roof form will be the same as what is existing already onsite, with the addition adding an element of height and visual interest on the corner of the block along with a rooftop deck.</p> <p><i>Staff has provided detailed comments to the applicant to update architecture for the final submission.</i></p>

<p>FAÇADE DESIGN. – Page 18</p>	<p><i>Building materials should be compatible with surrounding uses and not cause visual confusion by using numerous different materials on a single façade. Material quality and design should complement those on the existing building and be sufficiently durable and sustainable.</i></p> <p><i>Building design should take cues from the surrounding area. An easily recognizable, inviting and accessible entrance should be included and ground level design should be comfortable for the pedestrian. Large expanses of blank or undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Access for users of differing mobilities should be included; handicap ramps or other handicap considerations should be incorporated into the façade design and to a high design quality.</i></p>	<p>Materials are planned to be locally sourced and recycled where possible. Final material selection will be finalized at a later stage of design.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</u></p> <p><i>Staff has provided detailed comments to the applicant to update architecture for the final submission.</i></p>
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