



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: October 2, 2017
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of the “Portland Loo,” to be installed as a public facility, 719 W. Franklin St.; UDC No. 2017-33**

I. APPLICANT

Don Summers, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

719 W. Franklin St.

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final location, character, and extent review of a Monroe Park facility.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This final plan is for a public facility, known as the Portland Loo. This will be a contemporary iteration of a public amenity that has existed in the park since 1905. The Keeper’s Lodge first provided a comfort station for visitors to Monroe Square (present day Monroe Park). In 1939, the City opted to replace the original Keeper’s Lodge with a new structure later known as the Checkers House – named for the regular games of checkers played there. The Checkers House originally housed four restrooms until years of neglect and budgetary constraints resulted in the halving of the number of operable facilities. This was followed by the closure of the facilities completely.

The Portland Loo, designed to be durable in an urban environment, pays homage to the history of providing a public restroom for the users of Monroe Park. The proposed location at the corner of Franklin and Laurel enables the facility to blend in with its surroundings and does not obscure sightlines. Furthermore, it will serve to promote more street activity as the location is believed to be at the entrance with the most foot traffic and will allow for easy access by maintenance crews.

The Urban Design Committee did not agree with the location of the Portland Loo as submitted for the September 2017 UDC meeting. It was believed that the location was inappropriate as it was located on one of five prominent entryways into the park and negatively impacted the character of the park. Considerations were made to place the Portland Loo farther into the park however concerns surrounding safety and underutilization arose, therefore it was agreed that a more prominent, heavily trafficked location would be necessary. The Urban Design Committee then determined a location on the sidewalk near the corner of Laurel and Franklin Streets to be more appropriate.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommended at its September 7, 2017 meeting that the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- That the revised location of the Loo is not closer than approximately 20'-30' to the fire hydrant located at the corner of Franklin and Laurel Streets.
- That the Urban Design Committee review a new layout in time for the Planning Commission on September 18, 2017

At the September 18, 2017 meeting of the Planning Commission, the Commission continued the item to its October 2, 2017 meeting to allow DPW the opportunity to review the location of the Portland Loo along East Franklin Street.

It should be noted that the Department of Public Works (DPW) strongly opposes the UDC recommendation of placing the Portland Loo on the sidewalk along East Franklin Street. DPW cites that the sidewalk location does not conform to the complete streets policy and decreases the amount of sidewalk where people can walk or bike safely.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed project is located at the corner of Laurel Street and Franklin Street, within Monroe Park. The Park is bordered by Belvidere Street to the east, Main Street on the south, Laurel Street to 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.

In addition to the central fountain, the park is embellished with two major statues and two smaller monuments, as well as the Checkers House, an octagonal pavilion which once held public toilets.

b. Scope of Review

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

c. UDC Review History

This project was recommended for conceptual approval by the UDC in June 2017 with the following recommendations:

- That alternative locations for the Portland Loo be considered on W. Main St. or on W. Franklin St.
- That an additional public restroom facility be considered within the Checkers House.

This project is part of Monroe Park which is currently undergoing a renovation based on the Monroe Park Master Plan. 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 construction plans for the renovation of Monroe Park without conditions.

d. Project Description

The Portland Loo is fabricated in Portland, Oregon by Madden Fabrication. The Portland Loos are simple, sturdy, flush toilet kiosks located on sidewalks in public areas. The Loos are free and accessible around the clock every day of the year.

Portland Loos give the community environmentally-friendly, clean, and safe restroom facilities. The Loo comes fully tested and assembled from the factory.

The Loo was designed to be durable in an urban setting:

- Heavy gauge stainless steel construction with a powder coating and graffiti-resistant finish.
- Louvered panels allow for community surveillance
- Hand sanitizer dispenser inside and wash station located on outside of unit
- Recessed interior and exterior LED lights
- Entry, railings, and fixtures are ADA-compliant
- Interior layout accommodates bikes and strollers

Louvers at the top and bottom of the wall create an interior environment that offers complete visual privacy, while remaining as connected with the outside as possible. The lower louvers are angled to provide law enforcement the opportunity to observe the number of users within the unit without compromising privacy. The unit's hand-washing station is mounted on the exterior to promote shorter use times and to serve the general pedestrian population. The restroom was designed with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by using high traffic areas and visibility to deter illegal activities and generate high usage rates. Each Loo is built to fully comply with ADA Standards.

The toilet uses minimum water and power; this is an energy saving option. The Monroe Park Conservancy will contract out the daily maintenance of The Loo. For a local company to provide regular/daily maintenance the Loo needs to be within a 30 foot reach of a service truck. This funding will come through donations made to the Monroe Park Conservancy.

The construction of this project will hopefully be rolled into the current construction/renovation schedule of Monroe Park's timeline. The intention is for construction to be completed in Spring 2018.

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."

The 2009 Downtown Plan further suggests the park receive "...a facelift with rehabilitated public facilities, new shade trees, improved lighting, and wireless Internet access."

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Environment section of the Urban Design Guidelines state that "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" (page 9). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to "mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source" (page 11).

The Public Facilities section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains relevant suggestions on sustainable practices when it comes to public facilities. "Green building practices, which minimize the environmental impact of buildings both in the construction phase and throughout the life of the building, should be considered in the construction of new public facilities as well as in the adaptation of existing public facilities. In general, public facilities should be designed to promote street activity and interaction with surrounding uses." (page 13).

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes "site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months." (page 25).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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