




Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Urban Design Committee

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| UDC 2025-12 | Concept Location, Character, and Extent Review | Meeting Date: 05/15/2024 |
| Applicant/Petitioner | Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries | |
| Project Description | UDC 2025-12 CONCEPT Location, Character, and Extent review of the Greening Richmond Public Libraries: Hull Street Branch project, located at 1400 Hull Street. | |
| Project Location |  | |
| Address: 1400 Hull Street | | |
| Property Owner: Richmond Public Libraries | | |
| High-Level Details: <p>The applicant proposes sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.</p> <p>Improvements include removal of impervious area and non-native species; construction of bioretention basins and pervious pavers; construction of a tiny park with stone benches; installation of native plants and irrigation system; and interpretive signage.</p> | | |
| Staff Recommendation | Approval, with Conditions | |
| | STAFF RECOMMENDS THIS ITEM BE CONSIDERED BY THE URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE DUE TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK | |
| Staff Contact | Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov | |
| Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews | The design was informed by public questionnaires and the collaborative project management effort of Richmond Public Library staff, RVAH2O, The James River Association, and Four Winds Design. | |
| Recommended Conditions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be relocated or improved for the FINAL Application. 2. Applicant to revise plans to facilitate a 7ft clear space for the sidewalk along East 14th Street for the FINAL Application. 3. Applicant to match using the existing brick pavers if any sidewalk is altered or added. | |

Findings of Fact

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| Site Description | The site is located in the Blackwell neighborhood. The property is situated on the corner of Hull Street and East 14 th Street. The property currently consists of the Hull Street Branch Library and associated corner pedestrian plaza, landscaping, and parking lot. |
| Scope of Review | The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter and review and recommendation under 17.05. |
| Project Description | <p><u>The Applicant States:</u></p> <p><i>“The purpose of the project is to develop a series of bioretention basins and areas of pervious artificial turf and pavers designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from a portion of the roof, sidewalks, and parking lot; reduce the heat island effect as possible; enhance the existing streetside plaza; and create a small public park that features shaded reading/ seating areas, play space for young children, and opportunities for education about the importance of native plants and managing stormwater runoff. Some impervious area and all non-native species will be removed with native plants added. The project strives to be become a model of sustainable site development with educational components accomplished with an interpretive sign, special library programs, and community involvement and support.”</i></p> <p><i>“The design was informed by public questionnaires...Library users and residents identified the needs for shade, an outdoor gathering and children’s play spaces, and more seating. Per library leadership it was made clear that security and loitering are major issues at this branch and no free use outdoor seating can be added.”</i></p> <p><u>Staff Review:</u></p> <p>The purpose of the project is to develop a CONCEPT plan for the construction of sustainable stormwater and pedestrian infrastructure improvements to the exterior of the existing library and surrounding right-of-way.</p> <p>The narrative states that the goal of the project is to filter runoff while detaining stormwater so that excess volume can infiltrate to the ground and be recycled by landscaping plants.</p> <p>The site will provide greater landscaping, permeable pavers, and new public space. Native plants are proposed for added shade, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystems services.</p> <p>GRTC Bus Line 1B is located on the primary street frontage along Hull Street, a stop is located in front of the project site. Staff has provided a condition of approval that the Applicant work with GRTC to determine if the stop needs to be relocated or otherwise improved with a concrete pad, bench, shelter, etc.</p> <p>A small park space is also provided with the project, including a seating area and landscaping.</p> <p>Staff has recommended that the Applicant revise plans to facilitate a 7ft clear space for the sidewalk along East 14th Street. Some existing utilities create a pinch point, and it would be very easy to take 2ft from the adjacent planter bed as sidewalk space.</p> <p>Staff has also recommended that the Applicant match using the existing brick pavers if any sidewalk is altered or added.</p> <p>Staff strongly supports the enhancement of this space in terms of stormwater and landscaping, as well as the transformation of the space into a more usable location.</p> |

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| | <p><u>Staff Recommendation:</u></p> <p>Staff recommends approval with the following conditions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if the adjacent bus stop should be relocated or improved for the FINAL Application. 2. Applicant to revise plans to facilitate a 7ft clear space for the sidewalk along East 14th Street for the FINAL Application. 3. Applicant to match using the existing brick pavers if any sidewalk is altered or added. |
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Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

| | Text | Staff Analysis |
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| Master Plan | | |
| <i>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</i> | <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>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</p> <p>The project includes a number of sustainability green features that will be showcased for the community. The library will also facilitate learning opportunities to enhance knowledge of sustainability in the community.</p> <p>The addition of greater landscaping and site features will contribute to the beauty of the site and the ability of the library to anchor the neighborhood through distinctive place making.</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>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>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</i></p> | <p>Master Plan Objectives</p> <p>Richmond 300 includes a number of sustainability objectives specifically relating to public facilities and City owned properties. Sustainable stormwater management is a primary concern and will be enhanced by this project. ROW stormwater will also be treated by this project, furthering RVA 300 Goals.</p> <p>Further landscaping in parking areas and the street sidewalk will reduce heat island effects.</p> <p>Native, adaptive, and pollinator plantings will be utilized.</p> |

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| | <p>by 2023.</p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></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>The project will install pervious pavers in certain locations. The project will also install bio-retention facilities that will treat stormwater from both onsite and the ROW.</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>Landscaping is used to create interest and enhance the beauty of the existing site. Diverse species and long term maintenance is considered.</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>Low impact stormwater practices are included with bio-retention facilities and permeable pavers.</p> |