



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: July 18, 2016
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent review of Maggie Walker Memorial Plaza; UDC No. 2016-28**

I. APPLICANT

Mark A. Olinger, Director, Department of Planning & Development Review

II. LOCATION

98 W Broad St, Richmond, VA, 23220

Property Owners:

City of Richmond Right of Way, Department of Public Works

III. PURPOSE

This application is for final review of a plaza and public open space around a statue commemorating Maggie L. Walker.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The UDC discussed a few items with the applicant, including the narrowness of the streetscape within the plaza and along N. Adams St. compared to Broad St. and whether Willow Oaks were an appropriate tree selection for the area. They recommended a more medium range tree to substitute for Willow Oak trees, and also encouraged that the Honeylocust tree plantings be large caliper. They also discussed the selection of the trashcan and benches as site furnishings, and whether they met their recommendation of being evocative of Jackson Ward. The artist, Toby Mendez, spoke about the granite colors proposed for different elements, and the Committee reviewed samples. The Committee and the Director of Planning & Development Review also discussed the desire for recycling containers within the plaza, and the Committee asked about establishing a recycling standard for street furnishings across the city. Public comment was focused on the color of granite, the selection of Willow Oak trees, and the desire for more information about Jackson Ward within the plaza.

The Urban Design Committee recommends the Planning Commission grant final approval with the staff conditions:

- That the applicant relocate trash cans so that there is an adequate buffer distance to seating areas.
- That the applicant consider other plantings within the beds to provide more seasonal color, variety, and contrast

As well as the following recommendations:

- That the Willow Oaks be replaced with a more medium-sized tree such as an Everclear or Box Elm
- That the Honeylocust be increased in size to a 4 inch caliper tree
- That recycling bins be included in the plan

- That the benches, trash cans, and recycling bin elements be more representative of the cast-iron style of Jackson Ward
- That the Hanover lantern streetlights have an opaque top for light cutoff purposes
- That the dedication and seating walls be changed to the grey granite instead of green

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site consists of a triangular parcel bounded by N. Adams St, W. Broad St, and Brook Rd. that is owned by the Department of Public Works as part of City right-of-way, as well as the road bed of Brook Rd between W. Broad St. and N. Adams St. In December 2015, the Planning Commission and then City Council passed Ord. 2015-251-245 to close the vehicular travel a portion of Brook Rd located between W. Broad St. and N. Adams St. for the purpose of creating an urban plaza as part of a public art project.

b. Scope of Review

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

At their February 16, 2016, meeting, the Planning Commission resolved that the Public Art Commission is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the design and location of the public art commemorating Maggie L. Walker and the Urban Design Committee is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the location, character, and extent of the public plaza surrounding the art. The motion carried unanimously.

c. UDC Review History

In 1992, the UDC approved the Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines which include the site and directly address it with recommendations.

At its April 2016 meeting, the UDC reviewed the conceptual design of the plaza and made the following recommendation to grant conceptual approval with staff recommendations that the applicant consider:

- Strategies to increase the size of the plaza space and expand hardscape, including re-orienting more seating towards the memorial and public art elements;
- Strategies other than bollards to delineate the plaza boundary along the West Broad St. curb
- Removing the street tree(s) which may be located within the Brook Road historic bed

As well as the following additional considerations:

- That the applicant investigate a species other than Everclear that create shade and enclosure for the trees on Adams St;
- Removal of the dedication wall that's a component of the plaza design;
- Recommend investigating locally or regionally-sourced granite materials for public art components;
- Recommend exploring ways to create more shade in the plaza;

- Recommend exploring ways to create a variety of seating and increased pedestrian opportunity for viewing and interacting with the statuary;
- Recommending that the curb lines of the historic Brook Rd right of way be maintained and that use of cobblestone or other local material on Brook Rd be utilized to bring Brook Road to plaza-grade;
- Recommend downlighting on the statuary to be 3000 color temperature;
- Recommend that the applicant provide schedule and cut-sheets for lighting, furniture, receptacles, and bicycle accommodations with materials that are referential to the culture of Jackson Ward;
- Recommend a future study of parking and loading requirements around the plaza;
- Recommend the addition of a crosswalk at Adams and Brook Road to facilitate safe pedestrian movement to plaza;
- Recommend maintaining and preserving sightlines to the Maggie Walker statue.
- Recommend that the applicant study further stormwater strategies.

At its April 18, 2016 meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed the conceptual design for the plaza as well as the public art component. The applicant proposed some changes at this time in response to the UDC recommendations, but the Commission voted 4-3 to continue the item for 30 days to allow the applicant to incorporate more changes into the conceptual design in response to the UDC review.

At its May 18, 2016, meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed an updated conceptual design that incorporated many changes in response to the UDC recommendation. The voted to approve the conceptual design with a condition that a crosswalk be provided at the northern section of the Brook Road and N Adams St intersection and also across Brook Rd west of the intersection with Brook and Adams. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

d. Project Description

This project involves the creation of a plaza and public open space at the intersection of W. Broad St., N. Adams St., and Brook Rd. as part of a larger commemoration of Maggie L. Walker, including a statue and interpretive elements.

The Public Art Commission and Planning Commission approved the conceptual design for the memorial and public art components in April 2016. The final art design will go before the Public Art Commission at their July 2016 meeting. The concept for the memorial revolves around a central 9-10' high sculpture of Maggie Walker on a green granite pedestal roughly 40" high and 5' diameter.

Surrounding the sculpture will be a green granite apron and radiating up to five 12" accent bands of darker granite flush with the pavement. Ten 4' x 2' granite benches encircle the back and sides of the sculpture. An 18' long by 2' wide granite dedication wall with Maggie Walker's name inscribed on it will mark the entrance to the memorial, facing Broad St. Two granite seat walls arc behind the memorial plaza. Granite elements, including the dedication wall and/or benches, may include more inscriptions or quotes about Maggie Walker and her accomplishments.

There is contrast in materials within the plaza – with 24” x 24” grey granite for the memorial and brick pavers elsewhere. Care will be taken in the detailing of the memorial elements to include cuts or skateboard deterrents. Special lighting is being considered that will cast light down on the sculpture and may encircle the plaza with low-mounted LED lighting along an inset at the base of the benches.

The program for the plaza includes: a primary focus on the sculpture plaza with seating; an expanded hardscape area; continuing accommodation of loading, deliveries, and valet parking in support of the existing businesses that face the plaza; and offering flexible space for small events, school field trips, and a starting point for tours of the Jackson Ward neighborhood.

The new Pulse Adams St. station will be opposite the site in the median, further increasing pedestrian activity in the area. The design adds a new 12’ brick paver sidewalk along the east side of N. Adams St., where currently pedestrians crossing Broad St. have to divert from their path or walk into the roadway. Tree wells vary in size along this frontage, and are proposed as Honeylocust for the one tree within the memorial area and Willow Oak for the three to the north alongside Adams St. These Willow Oaks are all proposed to have cast-iron tree grates. On the west side of Adams St., three Willow Oaks will be in 4 x 8 planting beds with Liriope groundcover.

The 11.5’ existing diagonal sidewalk on the eastern side of Brook Road remains in the same location, but the current concrete material will be upgraded to City standard brick pavers, as will the new sidewalk on North Adams Street. The sidewalk along Broad St will remain at 17’ and be a consistent brick paver, with the exception of the Brook Road opening, where cobble pavers will come forward to the sidewalk edge to give a visual indication of the historic street. This condition will also occur in the new sidewalk where Brook Road crosses N Adams St.

A new 10’ crosswalk is shown across Brook Rd., as well as across Adams St. at the northern terminus of the plaza. Three new ADA ramps are indicated at the corners, and the relocation of no parking signage to allow for the crosswalk is indicated on the plans.

The existing granite curb lines of Brook R. will remain on each side of the plaza. Cobble pavers will be used to raise the Brook Rd. street bed so it is flush with the plaza; these pavers will be ADA-accessible. Along W. Broad St. and N. Adams St. the new curb lines will match the existing granite. The Department of Public Works has raised some concerns about whether it will be possible to install ADA curb ramps with a split brick and granite paver depth along the Broad St. frontage of the plaza, and so they would likely have to use a brick or concrete apron.

Planting beds have been made smaller, but retained in the design in order to provide a backdrop to the memorial. In the conceptual design, the planting beds were 663 square feet; they have been reduced to 482 square feet, in order to provide more hardscaped plaza area. The plant height will be maintained in the range of 6”-36” dependent on plant selection. Groundcovers are also included in the tree pits. Proposed plants include a line of Little Richard Abelia arcing with the seating walls and Dwarf Fountain Grass. The three trees in the memorial area –

including one on N Adams St and two within the planting beds alongside Brook Rd – are proposed as Honeylocust within plantings.

The entrance space between the two seating & dedication walls is 9' clear; between the tree well and wall is 7.5' clear, and the dedication wall is set back 17' from the Broad St. curb.

The packet includes information on proposed site furnishings, including cast iron tree grates, as well as a new model of metal trash receptacle; the renderings show a city standard. The applicant would like to proceed with a unique trashcan to differentiate the plaza from standard city streetscape furnishings. Three trashcan locations are identified in the plans, two that are directly next to bench seating areas. Benches are proposed as a metal and wood model, with backless and with back options. Three backless benches are arced around the northern planting bed, and three more are arrayed along the streetwall of Brook Rd; the placement avoids building entrances. Two lights are shown just offset from the Brook Rd curb.

e. Master Plan

The 2009 Downtown Plan identified this as part of an Urban Center Area. The Downtown Plan also contains a number of neighborhood-specific recommendations to “celebrate and showcase history with streetscape improvements and signage” (pg. 4.10). These include recommendations that “the historic African American flavor of Jackson Ward be maintained and celebrated...with monuments to important figures in Jackson Ward’s development” (pg. 4.10). Additionally, the plan recommends that “in order to promote Broad Street as a local and regional destination, it is essential that its history and cultural institutions be promoted and that a system of gateways and memorable intersections are created along the street” that make “clear-connections between Broad Street and its neighbors, particularly Jackson Ward (pg. 4.8)

The site is part a National Register Historic District as well as the Broad Street City Old & Historic District.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The 1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines, which were adopted by the UDC and have guided streetscape and public realm investment in the area over the last few decades, identify the site as an important Gateway/Key Intersection and have the following recommendations: “Adams Street Triangle – A similar opportunity exists at Adams and Broad with a view of the columns of the former Second Baptist Church to the south and another church on Marshall to the north. Although recently improved by the City with the addition of a live oak, the triangle represents a future opportunity for a small park, particularly if Brook Road between Adams and Broad was closed and restored as a pedestrian space along with the adjacent Northern triangle. This triangle is historically important as the intersection of a major north-south route (Brook Road) with Broad, and as such, historically had been considered as a natural location for statuary” (pg. 8).

The Urban Design Guidelines have this to say about public plazas: “The design of such plazas should avoid large changes in grade from the street. Plazas should provide a pleasant transitional environment for pedestrians from the street

to the building(s) it serves. Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces. Adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should also be provided in the design of plazas.” (pg. 14).

Additionally, “new development should provide sidewalks along streets where there are currently no sidewalks or sidewalks in disrepair” (page 4) and that “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).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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