



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: April 16, 2018
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent review of Monroe Park – wayfinding signage at 719 W. Franklin St.; UDC No. 2018-15**

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 conceptual location, character, and extent review of wayfinding signage within Monroe Park.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This conceptual plan for wayfinding signage in Monroe Park is part of a larger restoration effort called out in the Master Plan for Monroe Park. The proposed signage incorporates various historic elements specific to the space such as the logo that echoes typography from 19th century maps of the park. The angular pathways influence the form of the primary and secondary signs which will speak to significant points of interest within the park such as the Checkers House and other landscape details. The proposed design of the signage signifies the parks entry into a new, contemporary chapter of its life as a unique public space. The UDC raised concern over the amount and size of signage proposed for wayfinding.

Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the conceptual design with the following conditions:

- That the applicant investigate alternative location and form for the donor sign that was proposed for the masonry on the Checkers house, that would not be affixed to the Checkers House
- That the primary, secondary, and tertiary sign typefaces support the logo and be provided in a signage package to better understand the proposed typefaces
- That the applicant consider a 'less is more' approach to signage, overall, and that the location and quantity of signs be provided and minimized to the extent possible and appropriate
- Minimize the impact of signage on the Checkers House

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed components of the project are located within Monroe Park which 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 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. Only one statue and the fountain are related to the plan of the park.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as part of a “public structure” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

This project is part of the larger 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.

In 2017, various revisions and updates to the overall renovation of Monroe Park were submitted including:

- UDC 2017-08 Final review of Monroe Park Revisions
 - Permeable Pavers
 - Bio-filtration Planters
 - Planting Plan
 - Park Lighting-Interior
 - Park Lighting-Perimeter Streetscape
 - Checkers House Plaza – Wall Materials and Layout
 - Drinking Fountain
 - Bike Racks
 - Stage and Flagpoles
 - Games Court Design
 - Tree Removal Plan

- UDC 2017-12 Conceptual Review of Laurel Street Event Venue – Monroe Park Pavilion
- UDC 2017-17 Final Review of Laurel Street Event Venue – Monroe Park Pavilion
- UDC 2017-18 Final Review of Monroe Park Furnishings
- UDC 2017-19 Conceptual Review of Monroe Park Portland Loo
- UDC 2017-33 Final Review of Monroe Park Portland Loo
- UDC 2017-35 Final Review of modification to Checkers House Plaza (Monroe Park Revisions)

In 2018, revisions to the renovation of the Checkers House were approved by the Planning Commission.

d. Project Description

The Monroe Park Conservancy seeks conceptual review on wayfinding signs to be installed in the Park prior to the Park opening in late June 2018 (the exact opening date is subject to weather and grass coverage).

The Conservancy has researched wayfinding signs in other cities and urban parks to examine the importance of communication with the public. The Conservancy would like to elevate the visual experience of Monroe Park beyond the standard park aesthetic currently in Richmond. The Conservancy will pay for the cost of all sign fabrication and installation.

Location – An attached map of Monroe Park shows the location of primary and secondary signs. The tertiary signs will be movable.

Character – Monroe Park has created a contemporary brand rooted in design history. A new watermark and logo are directly inspired from 19th century maps of Monroe Park. These wayfinding signs are a continuation of that visual concept. Signs will be constructed of powder-coated steel, printed, and die cut.

Extent – Wayfinding for all seven entrances will include a map, key, legend, and park policies. The entrance signs will be installed in the permeable paver area of each entrance.

- Secondary signs will be installed at the Checkers House to acknowledge the history of the park, the environment, and Partners/Donors.
- Smaller Secondary signs will be installed specifically to call out areas for bicycles, games, and types of trees.
- Tertiary signs will call attention to non-permeant action “Grass is growing” “Please curb your dog” “Area is reserved for yoga this morning” “Café is Open,” etc.

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.”

Regarding existing parks Downtown and ways to enhance their accessibility and usage, the 2009 Downtown Plan suggests "... wayfinding elements such as lighting and signage should be provided" (page 3.10).

Furthermore, the plan states that the park receive "...a facelift with rehabilitated public facilities, new shade trees, improved lighting, and wireless Internet access" (page 3.11).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines contain several recommendations for signs, including that "a sign's message should be easy to read and direct" (page 24).

Generally, the Guidelines impart, "sign lettering should be 4" to 14" high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed. One inch should be added to the lettering height for each additional 50' between the sign and the viewer" (page 24). The Guidelines note that "signs should be placed so that they are sensitive to the signs of adjacent businesses" (page 23).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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