



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: January 4th, 2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of Richmond Public Library – Broad Rock Branch Site Improvements; 4820 Old Warwick Road; UDC 2020-19**

I. APPLICANT

Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries

II. LOCATION

4820 Old Warwick Road

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Public Works

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final approval of site improvements to Richmond Public Library – Broad Rock Branch including new landscaping, hardscape, and signage.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant proposes to alter the landscape and hardscape at the Richmond Public Library - Broad Rock Branch. Alterations include the removal of non-native plant species and dead or diseased plantings. New native trees, shrubs, and grasses will be planted in place of the removed plantings, and in addition to the existing plants.

The existing landscape beds will be altered with the installation of retention basins and conveyance channels containing ornamental stone to capture storm water runoff. Retention basins will be installed within the existing parking lot islands to capture stormwater runoff from the parking lot. A new, circular entry plaza will be constructed with pervious pavers and will contain seating.

The project reduces the amount of impervious surface and non-native species on site, implements low-impact design to manage stormwater runoff and serves as an educational resource available at this library branch. The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- To ensure compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines, the applicant confirm with staff that the mature height and spacing of proposed plantings will not interfere with overhead wires and existing lighting.

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site is located in South Richmond at the intersection of Broad Rock Boulevard and Warwick Road. The site is zoned R-4 Residential, and

approximately 1.2 acres in size. Fire station #22 is located to the northeast of the project site across Warwick Road, and the Broad Rock Sports Complex is located to the northwest of the site.

b. Scope of Review

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “public building or structure” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

In 2016, the UDC reviewed the conceptual & final location, character and extent review of the Westover Hills Public Library Sustainable Campus Initiative. The UDC recommended approval of the project.

The UDC has reviewed a number of library renovation projects, many of which include landscaping, over the last few years.

d. Project Description

The applicant proposes to develop a series of retention basins designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from the roof, sidewalks, and parking lot; as well as develop an ecologically responsible landscape that can be used as an educational tool and gathering space.

This project is funded by a 319H grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and by the City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities – Storm water Utility; and supported by staff hours from The James River Association and RVAH2O, with service donations from Four Winds Design. The arrival court, seat walls, seating areas, and granite benches are funded by a private donor.

Impervious area and non-native species will be removed and native plants added for shade, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystem services. The project will include the installation of interpretive signage which can be used for special library programs and community involvement. An arrival court and nearby seating area for multifunctional community use and outdoor gatherings will be composed of pervious pavers and seat walls. The design was informed by public charrettes and the collaborative project management effort of Richmond Public Library staff, RVAH2O, The James River Association, and Four Winds Design.

Specific improvements at the Richmond Public Library – Broad Rock Branch include:

Northwest side of the site

- Remove fallen, dead tree
- Remove and repurpose existing granite slabs in existing circular seating area
- Grinding and removal of a stump in the existing landscaping bed
- Removal of non-native shrubs in landscaping bed
- Installation of retention basins and conveyance channels to direct water from downspouts. The conveyance channels will contain ornamental stone

- Creation of a leaf composting area
- Planting of new native trees, shrubs, and grasses

Northeast side of the site

- Existing landscaping to remain

Southwest side of the site

- Removal of non-native shrubs in the existing landscape bed
- Installation of retention basins
- Installation of new conveyance channels to direct stormwater from downspouts into the retention basins on the northwestern side of the building. Conveyance channels will contain ornamental stone
- Installation of city-standard curbs with small curb cuts that allow storm water to drain into the new retention basins installed within the existing parking lot islands
- Construction of a circular entry plaza with pervious pavers surrounded by a retaining wall. The new seating area will utilize the repurposed granite slabs that are currently in front of the northwest entrance
- Planting of new native trees, shrubs, and grasses

Southeast side of the building

- Creation of a leaf composting area
- New native plantings
- Retention of existing plantings

An interpretive sign will be installed on the west side of the library building and will be 32" tall. The panel will be mounted on a three inch-aluminum post. The panel will be 24.50" wide and have smoothed edges for safety.

An irrigation system will be installed throughout the Bee Zone and arrival court/seating areas and within the bed west of the bike rack. Mister heads are proposed in all areas with no throws reaching masonry surfaces. The control will be located inside of the Library Building.

All trees and shrubs shall conform to the most recent edition of The American Standards for Nursery Stock. No plants are to be stored on site for longer than 48 hours, and all stored plants will be kept in full shade and watered daily.

All planting beds shall be treated with three to four inches of hardwood double shredded mulch dyed brown. Compost or a bedding mix shall be tilled into the soil a depth of 4" in all planting areas except where soil is to be removed (see below). Finished grade of all topsoil shall be 3" below hardscape elevations.

Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in March and April of 2021. Demolition and site infrastructure, large tree plantings, proposed parking lot curbs, arrival court and associated features, and retention basins will all be accomplished by an independent contractor. Volunteers will be used for shrub and perennial planting, mulching, and clean-up.

All maintenance of RPL properties is performed by an independent contractor managed by RPL staff. The site improvements at Westover Hills Branch Library,

which were completed in phases from 2014-2019, have served as maintenance testing grounds and a pilot project.

e. Master Plan

The project site is located in the Broad Rock Planning District, which is identified by the City of Richmond's current Master Plan. Although the Richmond Public Library – Broad Rock Branch is not specifically mentioned in the Master Plan, the plan states that the City will retain its eight library branches and focus on internal improvements in regard to current technologies to serve the needs of the surrounding communities.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state that *“Landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings. Shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting.”* (pg. 10). The plan proposes a variety of native species including large trees, shrubs and bushes, and ground covers. The “Bee Zones” will include a variety of herbaceous perennial plantings.

The guidelines recommend that *“Plant materials should be adaptable to existing soils, climatic and lighting conditions, and be disease resistant. Native plant species are encouraged, but not required.”* (pg. 10) The project proposes a variety of native species. The Applicant has stated that the soil at each site has been studied to determine type and quality, which has informed the selection of native plantings at each project site.

The guidelines state that *“Maintenance should be considered when selecting landscaping materials. Significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained. Trees on public and private property should be appropriately trimmed around utility lines. Hazardous dead or dying trees on City-owned property should be removed and replaced.”* (pg. 10) The project has located dead or dying trees on the site, and is proposing the removal of any dead or dying trees. The disturbance of any healthy trees is not being proposed in the scope of this project.

Regarding green infrastructure, the guidelines state that *“Site development should take measures towards conservation of natural resources. Where feasible, developments should also promote impact minimization techniques through alternative storm water management practices.”* (pg. 11) The purpose of the project is to re-engineer the landscaping of the Richmond Public Library - Broad Rock Branch to include green infrastructure such as retention basins, rain gardens, swales, and native plantings, as means of managing stormwater runoff on site.

The guidelines state that, *“Street tree species should be selected for performance in urban situations. For example, the root structure should be conducive to urban conditions. The height of the tree at maturity should respect any overhead utility lines. The tree's branching tendency and leaf size should be considered. Tree species that drop berries or fruit or have thorns are generally not recommended.”* (pg.21) Staff finds that there are native trees that produce acorns/ fruits, and that grow to a mature height that could impact existing lighting

and overhead utility wires being proposed within the scope of this project. Staff recommends that the applicant submit a final planting plan that replaces any acorn/ fruit bearing trees located in parking lots and along the sidewalk and street with native trees that are not acorn/ fruit bearing, and are spaced appropriately as to not impact existing lighting.

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