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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning & Preservation Division  
Date: April 5, 2018  
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent review of the Huguenot Flatwater Accessible Ramp at 8536 Riverside Drive; UDC No. 2018-16**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Nathan Burrell, James River Park System Superintendent

**II. LOCATION**

8536 Riverside Drive

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Recreation & Parks

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for conceptual location, character, and extent review of a proposed ADA compliant ramp to the James River, adjacent to the existing boat slip.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The plan proposes to further increase access to the south bank of the James River through the construction of a ramp that will comply with ADA standards. This accessible ramp will complement the existing boat slide at the Huguenot Flatwater Park, which is maintained by the James River Park System. Creating a ramp at this location will help meet the needs of local programs that provide adaptive sports and recreation opportunities for those that may have a physical or visual disability. The designers worked closely with the coordinator of these programs to determine the spatial and tactile needs for the ramp.

Staff finds the proposed improvements creative, sustainable, and that they further the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines for environmental quality and public parks. Therefore, Staff recommends that the UDC recommend that the Planning Commission approve the project as submitted.

**Staff Contacts:**

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The site consists is within the Huguenot Flatwater Park, a part of the larger James River Park System. The proposed project is located at the access point to the James River, which lies to the north. It is directly adjacent to a gravel parking lot to the south and a stepped boat ramp to the east, surrounding trails from the east and west cross this access point.

The site is located within residential zone, R-2 (single-family residential). A side from a porta-jon, trash and recycling containers, boulders, bollards, and signage, the site is surrounded by large, mature trees and other vegetation.

**b. Scope of Review**

The proposed project is subject to general location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “park or other public way”.

**c. UDC Review History**

Staff was unable to identify any prior projects involving or relevant to this property.

**d. Project Description**

Huguenot Flatwater Park is part of the greater James River Park System, which eclipsed 1.8 million visitors in attendance for 2017. As the park attendance grows annually, so does the demand for accessible routes, amenities, and river access.

The park is used most by paddle sports and biking enthusiasts seeking adventure on the river, surrounding trails, and roads.

Several local organizations such as Sportable currently use the park for accessible kayaking programs. Sportable is a local organization that provides adaptive sports and recreation opportunities for those that may have a physical or visual disability.

The means for getting those with disabilities and their vessels down the 15' embankment and into the river poses a significant challenge. Creating a ramp here will meet the needs of these programs and also serve able bodied individuals with easier access to the river.

The design team worked closely with the coordinator for the accessible paddle sports program and defined the spatial and tactile needs for the ramp. The design submitted to the UDC is a direct result of the feedback received from those who will most benefit from the construction of this ramp.

The budget or construction estimate for this project has not yet been completed. Funding is anticipated to come from a variety of sources including private and corporate donors. Grant opportunities like the Virginia Land Conservation Fund or other accessibility related grants may be pursued to capture additional funding to construct the park if necessary.

To make way for the new ramp, four trees, thirteen shrubs, and various vines and scrub vegetation will need to be removed. The total tree diameter of the four trees removed equals 73". DEQ's Riparian Buffers Modification and Mitigation Manual dictates that projects replace every 4" of trees removed with 1" diameter of new trees. This equates to planting 18.25" diameter of trees to off-set what is removed. The landscape plan proposes to replace 7.5" of trees directly on site and will work with the park system to find the most suitable location for the additional 10.75" of trees within the riparian area nearby. All proposed plants are native and there are no invasive species specified.

Erosion and sediment control measures will ensure that the construction program does not impact downstream water quality and will comply with all know regulations. Disturbance will be limited to only the area necessary for the construction program. Due to the difficulty of installing treatment facilities within

the flood-prone portion of the river, credits for meeting stormwater management requirements will be purchased by the city.

Designing a facility along the riverfront intended to be frequently flooded also comes with challenges and added expense. The ramp and its sub-structure is being designed by a structural engineer to be tied down into the ground with a deep reinforced foundation, much like the accessible ramp that can be seen on Belle Isle. Materials for this project will consist of some standard concrete at the top of the entrance to the ramp, which will transition to exposed aggregate for the entirety of the ramp. Boulders stockpiled elsewhere throughout the James River Park System will be placed strategically along the ramp and anchored into the concrete below. A black aluminum handrail will be drilled and epoxied into the boulders to meet accessibility guidelines. Aluminum has been chosen for its affordability and ease of replacement should a flood damage part of the railing.

Assuming design is completed in May of 2018 and the project is funded by Fall of 2018, construction could start as soon as late Fall of 2018. This is dependent upon securing the proper funding.

**e. Master Plan**

This project falls within the Huguenot Planning District of the Master Plan. Regarding recreation and parks, the plan suggests the James River floodplain should remain undeveloped, particularly that portion north of Cherokee Road and Riverside Drive, unless such development is specifically water related (page 202).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Public Park section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes that “public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape. Parks should respond to the environment in which they are located and should be designed in accordance with their intended use” (page 9).

Additionally, “A preference should be given towards materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. (page 9). The Guidelines are also very supportive of low-impact development and green building practices (page 10, 11).

The Guidelines note 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” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10).

Lastly, the Guidelines state that “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).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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