



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: July 18, 2016
RE: **Conceptual & Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the Westover Hills Public Library Sustainable Campus Initiative; UDC No. 2016-27**

I. APPLICANT

Nancy Buck, Branch Director, Richmond Public Libraries

II. LOCATION

1408 Westover Hills Blvd, Richmond, VA, 23225

Property Owner:

City of Richmond General Services

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the conceptual location, character and extent review of a master plan for the renovation of the parking lot and exterior landscaping of the Westover Hills Branch Library, as well as final review of Phase 1 of the project, which includes the installation of bioretention basins, stepping stone replacement, vehicular protection strip, streetscape, replacement plantings, and benches.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The Committee finds the project to be well-considered project that reflects an impressive amount of stakeholder collaboration to achieve a design that addresses many different parts of the Urban Design Guidelines, particularly sustainability, but also safety, beautification, and education. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends grant conceptual approval for the entire project, and final approval for Phase 1, as submitted. This recommendation was by a 4-0 vote on the consent agenda, due to absences and a recusal.

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The library is located one block off the major intersection of Forest Hill Ave and Westover Hills Blvd and fronts Westover Hills Blvd. It is part of a small RO-2 zoned district that serves a buffer between the commercial corridor and the single-family neighborhood.

b. Scope of Review

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

c. UDC Review History

The UDC has reviewed a number of library renovation projects, many of which include landscaping, over the last few years. In 2009, the UDC reviewed improvements to this Branch Library, and followed up with review of a new roof in 2010.

d. Project Description

The project is focuses on improving the sustainability of the library branch site, particularly through stormwater discharge, while also beautifying the site with place-making elements, including outdoor seating, interpretive signage, and special library programs.

The applicants are seeking final approval for Phase One, which includes: three bioretention basins, a living streetscape with infiltration value, stepping stone replacement, vehicular protection strip, benches, and plantings throughout.

They are seeking conceptual approval for Phase Two, which includes: interpretive signage, replacement of impervious paving with pervious pavers, reordering the current configuration of the parking lot, an urban bioretention basin, rainwater harvesting tank, additional outdoor seating, trash screening, and plantings throughout. Currently, 58% of the property is impervious surface; full implementation of the project would result in only 4% of the property being impervious surface. The submittal packet has detailed information about the funding of the phases, and the collaboration process thus far.

The Phase 1 bioretention basins are certified at DCR Level One treatment.

Pervious pavement is proposed for the alley and parking lot. The new lot layout provides additional parking spaces, and adds islands with trees. The shade from trees as well as lighter paving materials will reduce reflected heat. Behind the parking lot, buffering the neighboring property, there will be an outdoor classroom and reading room as part of a green corridor and gathering spaces. Low berms will frame the spaces, which use reclaimed granite slabs as benches. Small native understory trees are proposed in the plantings, and additional pole lights provide illumination under the tree canopy.

Additional features include gutter replacement, sunken filter strips, decorative weirs, rainwater harvesting, and evergreen plantings to conceal the utility area. Educational signage is proposed for the corner of Devonshire and Westover Hills Blvd.

A detailed planting plan is included in the packets, utilizing almost 30 species.

e. Master Plan

The 2001 Master Plan's recommendations for the Old South Planning District recognize that Forest Hill Ave and Westover Hills Blvd is an important intersection, but also speak to the need successfully buffer residential neighborhoods from commercial uses, and ensure well-maintained street presence in older commercial areas (274, 280).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

"The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users. Circulation within the site

should be geared toward pedestrian movements, not vehicular. Connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered during the design phase. The use of materials and the creation of features that increase sustainability by improving air and water quality and energy efficiency are encouraged.” (page 14).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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