



Staff Report City of Richmond, Virginia Planning Commission



UDC 2025-10	CONCEPT – Location, Character, and Extent	Meeting Date: 4/15/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Ronald Hathaway / Richmond Public Schools	
Project Description	UDC 2025-10 - CONCEPTUAL - Location, Character, and Extent review of the proposed plans for Amelia Street School located at 1821 Amelia Street.	
Project Location		
Address: 1821 Amelia Street		
Property Owner:		
High-Level Details: The Amelia Street School project proposes a comprehensive transformation of the school's outdoor environment to enhance accessibility, ecological function, and educational opportunities. Located in the historically underserved Randolph neighborhood, the school serves students ages 5 to 21 with a wide range of intellectual, behavioral, and physical disabilities. The proposed improvements include the creation of a universally accessible nature trail, installation of bioretention areas and other green stormwater infrastructure, expansion of native landscaping and tree canopy, and the development of outdoor classrooms and sensory-friendly play nodes. Additionally, the existing basketball court will be redesigned for flexible, multi-sport use. This collaborative initiative involves Richmond Public Schools, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Commonwealth University's Office of Sustainability, and the design firm Marvel.		
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
	The concept was approved April 10th, 2025. The Urban Design Committee recommended approval with the conditions listed below.	
Staff Contact	Kevin Costanzo - Kevin.Costanzo@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	Please see Applicant Narrative. Engagement included:	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder workshops with teachers, aides, therapists, and staff • Site walks with VCU and the Alliance • Community tabling at the Byrd House Market • Postcard and poster-based public feedback collection
Conditions for Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Staff recommends ensuring all trails are surfaced with ADA-compliant, durable, and permeable hardscape materials where feasible to promote pedestrian accessibility and minimize stormwater runoff impacts.</u> • <u>Staff recommends maintaining low-slope pathways throughout to support easy mobility for wheelchairs and other assistive devices.</u> • <u>Staff recommends continued prioritization of durable native species and the submission of a maintenance plan be included during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces.</u> • <u>Staff recommends submitting final specifications for site features and furnishings to ensure compatibility with the school environment, durability, and consistency with City standards.</u> • <u>Staff recommends that should any lighting be planned within the final design, that final details on said lighting plans be submitted to UDC for review and be scaled to the pedestrian, with minimal impact towards light pollution and be Dark-Sky Compliant where applicable.</u> • <u>Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</u> • <u>Staff recommends applicant explore opportunities for additional site features that would support micro-modal infrastructure like bike racks and bike tool / pump stations.</u>

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The 10-acre site includes a one-story school building, asphalt play courts, fenced playgrounds, and steep grades that limit accessibility. The surrounding land is a mix of residential and institutional uses. Existing features include a greenhouse, mature trees, and previously installed “tree islands” by VCU.
Scope of Review	This project is subject to Location, Character, and Extent review under Section 17.07 and design recommendation under Section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter.
Prior Approvals	N/A
Project Description	<p>This project proposes the transformation of the Amelia Street School grounds to include an ADA-accessible outdoor educational trail and green infrastructure that reflects inclusive, ecological, and community-informed design. Located in the historically underserved Randolph neighborhood, the school serves students ages 5–21 with intellectual, behavioral, and complex health needs.</p> <p>The project includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A universally accessible nature trail • Bioretention areas and stormwater BMPs • Native conservation landscaping and tree canopy enhancements • Outdoor classrooms and play/learning “nodes” with sensory-friendly design • Upgraded recreational elements including a redesigned multi-use court <p>The initiative is a collaboration between Richmond Public Schools, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, VCU’s Office of Sustainability, and Marvel design studio. The timeline of this project which started in June 2023, is forecast for completion by May of 2026.</p>

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: <i>iv. Provide Greenways & Parks for All (R300, p.197)</i> <i>v. Reconnect the City (R300, p.199)</i> <i>vi. Realign City Facilities (R300, p.201)</i>	<i>iv. Develop parks and greenways so that by 2037 100% of Richmonders live within a 10-minute walk of a park.</i> <i>v. Cap highways to reknit neighborhoods destroyed by interstates, build/ improve bridges, introduce street grids, and make the city easier to access by foot, bike, and transit.</i> <i>vi. Improve City buildings (schools, libraries, fire stations, police stations, etc.) to provide better services in efficient, shared-use, accessible facilities to better match and serve the growing city.</i>	<p>Provide Greenways and Parks for All: Increases access to quality green space for the surrounding area, and to a community that has been historically underserved.</p> <p>Realign City Facilities: Improves school infrastructure to better meet community and student needs, efficiently using city land R300</p> <p>Reconnect the City: Encourages physical and social connectivity within the Randolph neighborhood by overcoming physical barriers like steep grades R300.</p>
Urban Design Guidelines		
Transportation: <i>Paving Surface Materials – Provision of New Sidewalks (UDC Guidelines, pg. 4)</i>	<i>"Where there are currently no sidewalks or where improvements are needed, new development should provide sidewalks, trees, and other amenities to improve pedestrian connectivity and safety along both sides of streets."</i>	<p>The proposal incorporates an ADA-accessible nature trail using durable, low-maintenance, and permeable materials, aligning with the guideline to limit impervious areas and introduce pervious pavement to improve environmental performance and sustainability.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends ensuring all trails are surfaced with ADA-compliant, durable, and permeable hardscape materials where feasible to promote pedestrian accessibility and minimize stormwater runoff impacts.</u></p>
Transportation: <i>Multimodal Transportation (UDC Guidelines, pg. 6)</i>	<i>"It is the priority of the UDC to support all modes of transportation, giving deference to pedestrians and vulnerable transportation users."</i>	<p>The design prioritizes pedestrian access throughout the site with safe, separate pedestrian pathways, seating nodes, and an accessible trail network, aligning with UDC recommendations to design for walking, biking, and micro-mobility users.</p> <p>The applicant has demonstrated a intentional focus in prioritizing pedestrian movement for students with disabilities. Staff's recommendation is simply a means of encouraging the continued and comprehensive application of universal access and inclusion.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends maintaining low-slope pathways throughout to support easy mobility for wheelchairs and other assistive devices.</u></p>

<p>Environment: Public Parks – Universal Design (UDC Guidelines, pg. 9)</p>	<p><i>"Public park design should incorporate design elements that ensure equal access to all users. Site limitations should be evaluated, and access to all sites and site features should be universal."</i></p>	<p>Applicant already plans to provide full access to all areas of the site for students with mobility devices.</p>
<p>Environment: Landscaping - Design (UDC Guidelines, pg. 10)</p>	<p><i>"Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Designs that include conservation landscaping, strategically minimize the urban heat island effect, or decrease stormwater runoff are strongly encouraged."</i></p>	<p>Native landscaping strategies — including new trees, shrubs, and conservation areas — support UDC recommendations to use landscaping to create outdoor spaces with scale, seasonal interest, species diversity, and environmental resilience.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends continued prioritization of durable native species and the submission of a maintenance plan be included during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces.</u></p>
<p>Environment: Stormwater Management and Low Impact Development (UDC Guidelines, pg. 11)</p>	<p><i>"Developments should promote impact minimization techniques through alternative stormwater management practices."</i></p>	<p>The addition of a bioswale, bioretention areas, and permeable trail surfaces aligns directly with UDC guidelines encouraging low-impact development to infiltrate, store, and minimize stormwater runoff.</p>
<p>Public Facilities: General Site Design - Site Features (UDC Guidelines, pg. 13)</p>	<p><i>"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 and include accommodations for non-motorized means of transit and other micro-modal transportation, such as bicycle parking, bike racks, showers, restrooms, and air pumps.</i></p> <p><i>The provision of plazas adjacent to buildings serving the public is encouraged. 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. The incorporation of Low Impact Design (LID) or sustainable design is highly encouraged."</i></p>	<p>The plan includes accessible nodes, seating areas, and outdoor classrooms that respond to user needs by creating engaging outdoor environments tailored for students with disabilities. Additionally, native plantings will help soften and define the outdoor spaces while creating visual and ecological interest.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends submitting final specifications for site features and furnishings to ensure compatibility with the school environment, durability, and consistency with City standards.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that should any lighting be planned within the final design, that final details on said lighting plans be submitted to UDC for review and be scaled to the pedestrian, with minimal impact towards light pollution and be Dark-Sky Compliant where applicable.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</u></p>

<p>Public Facilities: General Site Design(UDC Guidelines pg. 13-14)</p>	<p><i>“The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users. Operational features and parking should be screened from view.</i></p> <p><i>Connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered during the design phase and include accommodations for non-motorized means of transit and other micro-modal transportation, such as bicycle parking, bike racks, showers, restrooms, and air pumps.”</i></p>	<p>The redesigned basketball court and accessible outdoor learning spaces are oriented toward key student access points and prioritize visibility and supervision across the site, consistent with UDC guidelines encouraging clear, accessible entrances and transitions between indoor and outdoor learning environment.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends applicant explore opportunities for additional site features that would support micro-modal infrastructure like bike racks and bike tool / pump stations.</u></p>
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