



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2023-02	FINAL Location, Character, and Extent Review	Meeting Date: 3/20/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Dexter Goode, Capital Projects Manager, Sr., Department of Parks and Recreation	
Project Description	FINAL Location, Character, and Extent review of the proposed Fire Department Training Facility located at 3000 East Belt Boulevard.	
Project Location		
Address: 3000 East Belt Boulevard		
Property Owner: CITY OF RICHMOND RECREATION & PARKS		
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes to construct a Fire Department Training Facility, a three story temporary structure designed to provide hands on training with real fire and smoke response. The area around the building will be paved to facilitate fire truck access and a fence and landscaping will screen view from the road.		
UDC Recommendation		
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	<p>The CONCEPT was heard at the December 8th, 2022 UDC meeting and Approved at the December 19th, 2022 Planning Commission meeting with conditions.</p> <p>The FINAL Application was recommended for denial by the UDC at the March 09, 2023 UDC Meeting.</p>	
Conditions for Approval	<p>The UDC recommended DENIAL of the application.</p> <p>FOR REFERENCE: Below are listed conditions that were recommended by Staff to the UDC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outdoor lighting shall be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. 2. The Applicant shall continue to work with Forestry Staff to relocate any recently planted trees from the work area and to plant any required remediation for removed trees. 3. Provision of temporary storage containers similar in size to shipping containers will require amendment of the Final plan. 	

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Cherry Gardens neighborhood on the South Side at the intersection of Belt Boulevard and Terminal Street. The site is zoned R-4 - Residential (Single Family) district, and of a property roughly 7 acres, or 304,048 square feet in size. The property is currently a community center operated by Richmond Parks and Recreation with the specific location of the project area is an unused ball field. Residential uses and wooded area are primary uses located in the adjacent neighborhood to the project. Industrial uses can be found in industrial parks further to the north and south. CSX/AMTRAK railroad are located to the west.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 and 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter
Prior Approvals	The CONCEPT application for this project was approved by the UDC on 12/8/2022 and the CPC on 12/19/2022. The FINAL Application was recommended for denial by the UDC at the March 09, 2023 UDC Meeting.
Project Description	<p><u>UDC RECOMMENDATION AT END OF THIS SECTION</u></p> <p><u>Project Background</u></p> <p>The applicant proposes to construct a Fire Department Training Facility at 3000 Belt Boulevard with a three story temporary structure designed to provide hands on training with realistic fire and smoke effects. The area around the building will be paved to facilitate fire truck access and a fence and landscaping will screen view of the facility from the road.</p> <p>The Applicant states that: The Fire Training Facility will consist of an approximately 1.17-acre concrete apron for fire trucks to maneuver, a small training building, ornamental fence surrounding the site, site lighting, landscaping that includes tree and shrub planting, and required stormwater facilities. The proposed facility is intended to replace a similar, but now defunct facility located in Henrico County.</p> <p>Details of the site are as follow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a part-time training facility • The site will be secured with an ornamental fence and gate. • The site will be buffered by existing wooded area and new landscape trees. • Primary operations are stated to take place between 8am and 5pm weekdays. • A majority of the training will have minimal noise impact on surrounding neighbors, however some training will involve alarms, metal on metal striking, and gas powered engines for tools. • Training that involves live training burns and theatrical smoke also will take place. This training is currently scheduled on limited basis, but may change as needs evolve or other jurisdictions utilize the site. The Fire Department states the theatrical smoke is non-toxic. • Sirens will not be used in relation to the training on this site. <p>A relatively recent community tree planting has taken place on this site and in a portion of the work area. The Applicant has agreed to relocate any recently planted trees onsite and plant remediation as needed in coordination with the Forestry Division.</p> <p><u>Previous Concept Review Summary</u></p> <p>During CONCEPT review, members of the public expressed concern for how the proposed project would affect their property nearby. One community member expressed heightened concern because their property was under some level of environmental protection in conjunction with State level programs, as stated by the community member. Staff was unable to locate any programs or official designations from the State that would legally protect that property to a greater degree than other properties. Staff believes a private environmental easement or deed restriction protects the neighboring property in question so that activities by current and future owners are restricted for the purpose of conservation. That stated, Staff was unable to locate any such provisions but has limited access to such records.</p>

Previously Approved CONCEPT Conditions:

1. *Final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.*
2. *The Applicant shall include permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.*
3. *Re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.*
4. *A maintenance plan shall be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping for Final Submission.*
5. *The Applicant shall work with Forestry Staff to finalize Landscaping plans to relocate any recently planted trees from the work area and to plant any required remediation for removed trees for Final Submission.*
6. *The Applicant shall provide further landscape plantings to include evergreen and deciduous trees for Final Submission.*
7. *That the applicant work with the community to determine what impacts to the adjacent wildlife sanctuary may be anticipated, if any, and how they may be mitigated; enumerate and mitigate environmental impacts to the community, including noise and pollutants; and clarify the specific mutual benefits that the project can provide to the community in preparation for the Final Location, Character, and Extent application.*
8. *Applicant shall provide a list of the top five to seven alternative properties considered for this project and why they were not suitable, for Final Submission.*

Staff Report to UDC

The Applicant has provided for this FINAL application details requested by the UDC and Planning Commission during the CONCEPT review.

The UDC and Planning Commission expressed several concerns with the project and how it interfaces with surrounding residential uses and pending further community outreach. The Planning Commission also requested that the Applicant provide a list of alternative properties that were considered for location of the facility and why the proposed location is superior to alternatives. The request for alternative properties is not under the purview of the UDC, only the CPC.

It is Staff's recommendation that the UDC and Planning Commission, in conjunction with the City of Richmond Fire Department, weigh the need for this facility to provide high quality fire protection service to the residents of this City and the region with the Location, Character, and Extent of the proposed project. The essential question being - are the protections, mitigations, operating arrangements, and proposed screening appropriate to make this use compatible with the surrounding neighborhood without undue disruptions.

The Applicant has shown a strong desire to be respectable neighbors to surrounding residential uses in how the facility will be operated, including times and frequency and restrictions on certain training activities that generate noise. Further landscaping provided by this project will also further attenuate any disruption and sound.

Summary of Discussion at UDC

The Applicant undertook further outreach to the community between when the Planning Commission approved the Concept Application and the current scheduled hearing date. In the Applicant's presentation to the UDC, the Applicant addressed concerns provided by the UDC and Planning Commission at previous meetings. Eleven (11) members of the public spoke at the meeting and others submitted letters for consideration, largely opposed to the project. The UDC discussed how the existing sports field is currently used that is proposed to be replaced with the training facility, use of an alternative open space that is available across the street from the subject site, how stormwater drainage will occur with the proposed project, how the

	<p>project site was selected, how many days a year that the facility will utilize smoke and health/environmental impacts of smoke proposed to be used onsite, how proposed operations and trainings will occur on the site, and how a delay on the project would affect any grant money current assigned to the project.</p> <p>Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities stated activities at the current community center will not be negatively affected by the project. The Applicant (Department of Fire & Emergency Services) stated that a live burn will be utilized only six (6) days a year. The Fire Department stated that they intend to provide classes to the community for health and fire related topics such as CPR training and youth classes located at the existing community center in conjunction with the proposed project.</p> <p>UDC Recommendation to CPC</p> <p>The UDC suggested that the project design takes steps to buffer and lessen impacts the use might provide to the neighborhood through landscaping and fencing. However, the UDC stated that it recommended denial of this application because the proposed use and proposed aesthetics are inconsistent with the neighborhood, existing open space, and existing community center. The UDC further recommended denial because the proposal will remove existing greenspace in a historically marginalized neighborhood; removal of a greenspace is counter to the Master Plan (Richmond 300) and RVA Green 2050 statements of increasing and protecting green and open space, especially in historically marginalized communities. The UDC noted strong opposition from the community itself, many speakers referencing loss of greenspace and the appearance of a lack of community representation in the process that chose the proposed site.</p> <p>Staff advised the UDC to consider specifically design and aesthetics. The CPC may wish to include considerations on location or use, as well as UDC recommendations on design. The Applicant will address location and use in the presentation to the CPC, but did not address those items to the UDC, under Staff’s recommendation.</p> <p><i>The UDC recommended denial of this application.</i></p>
--	--

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
	<p><i>P.70: Future Land Use Designation: Public Open Space</i></p> <p><i>Primary Uses: Open space.</i></p> <p><i>Secondary Uses: Cultural, institutional, and governmental.</i></p>	<p>Staff finds that the proposed use of Fire Training Facility falls under the secondary use of “Government,” as listed in the Master Plan.</p>
	<p><i>Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity</i></p> <p><i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i></p> <p><i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in</i></p>	<p>Master Plan Objectives</p> <p>Final landscaping and lighting details will be established at a later stage.</p> <p><u>Outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</u></p>

	<p><i>new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i></p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.8 <i>Reduce light pollution.</i></p> <p><i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i></p>	
<p>Urban Design Guidelines</p>		
<p>LANDSCAPING – Page 10</p>	<p><i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long term maintenance should be considered.</i></p>	<p>LANDSCAPING</p> <p>A significant portion of the site is currently green space. Minimal impact is proposed to existing stands of trees. Further trees will be planted in conjunction with this project.</p> <p>A relatively recent community tree planting has taken place on this site and in a portion of the work area. The Applicant has agreed to relocate any recently planted trees onsite and plant remediation as needed by the Forestry Division.</p> <p><u>The Applicant shall continue to work with Forestry Staff to relocate any recently planted trees from the work area and to plant any required remediation for removed trees.</u></p>
<p>Building Design Modular Units P.14</p>	<p><i>All other uses of modular units that will remain stationary beyond two years should be reviewed by the Urban Design Committee as a permanent building.</i></p>	<p>Modular units are not proposed with this application, but needs may change in the future. This condition will require structures of significant size that are not “permanent,” I.E. do not include a footer, come back for review.</p> <p><u>Provision of temporary storage containers similar in size to shipping containers will require amendment of the Final plan.</u></p>