



**City of Richmond, Virginia**  
**Department of Planning and Development Review**  
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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
RE: **Review Landscape and Hardscape Encroachments on East Marshall Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 1001 East Marshall Street; UDC 2020-18**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Brenton Barefoot, JLL representing VCU Health System (VCUHS)

**II. LOCATION**

The public right-of-way along East Clay Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond right-of-way (ROW)

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for the review of Landscape and Hardscape Encroachments.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The Valentine Museum and the VCU Health System (VCUHS) will be making enhancements to the landscape and hardscape along E. Clay Street from 10<sup>th</sup> Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Street. These enhancements include the addition of new trees and tree wells, a new mid-block pedestrian crosswalk, designated bus parking, new site furnishings, and the addition of recessed brick crosswalks across E. Clay Street at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Director of Public Works grant approval of the encroachment request with the following conditions:

- The applicant remove the mid-block crosswalk and associated curb-cuts from the scope of the project.
- All existing granite curbing be preserved, and if removed, be put back in place, or replaced with new granite curbing that matches the original.
- The applicant consider ways to delineate bus parking on the north side of the street in a way that is less conspicuous within the historic context of this block than the proposed diagonal striping.
- The new benches proposed match the simple design of the existing benches, or the existing benches be replaced with the proposed, ornate design upon installation of the new site furnishings.
- The applicant coordinate the relocation of any historic markers with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

**Staff Contact:**

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**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject ROW spans the length of E. Clay Street between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. This section of E. Clay Street is one-way, traveling from east to west. This

block is defined by its historic character, being a preserved block of Richmond's Court End neighborhood, featuring an intact collection of Italianate and Greek revival buildings in a mostly redeveloped city center. The block is tree-lined with a wider than average sidewalk on the south side of the street with site furnishings.

**b. Scope of Review**

The City owns the ROW, but VCUHS will perform all of the work, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments.

The encroachment approval process is administered through the Department of Public Works, which has requested that the UDC provide design advice on certain types of encroachments. The UDC does not have the authority to approve encroachments, but rather provides advice to the Director of the Department of Public Works.

**c. UDC Review History**

The UDC reviewed streetscape improvements along the 1200 Block of E. Clay Street in 2008.

**d. Project Description**

As part of the project and in coordination with The Valentine Museum, VCUHS will be making enhancements to the landscape and hardscape along E. Clay Street from 10th Street to 11th Street. These enhancements include the replacement of trees, the addition of new trees where trees have been removed, a new mid-block pedestrian crosswalk, and the addition of recessed pavers within the crosswalks across Clay Street at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11th street. The existing lighting along E. Clay Street will remain unchanged.

There are three pedestrian crosswalks being proposed: two 12-foot wide, recessed brick crosswalks at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, which match the recessed brick crosswalks present at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and E. Clay Street; and one 10-foot wide, striped, mid-block crosswalk proposed on E. Clay Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

There are four bus parking areas being proposed along the north side of E. Clay Street. The bus parking areas will be marked by new, city-standard signage, and will be delineated from one another by diagonally striped pavement.

There are two historic markers within the project boundaries. One marker will remain in place and be protected during the construction phase of the project, and the other will be relocated closer to the entrance to the Valentine Museum.

The scope of the project includes the removal of one Willow Oak tree on the south side of E. Clay Street in front of the entrance to the Valentine Museum. The applicant has clarified that the Valentine Museum has requested that this tree be removed, as it creates problems for gathering groups of school children when entering, and its roots have up-lifted the brick pavers on the sidewalk, creating a tripping hazard. In place of this tree, a new brick paving design in the

existing sidewalk is being proposed, marking the entrance to the Valentine Museum.

The applicant is proposing to add six new Willow Oaks along this block of E. Clay Street, one on the north side of the street and five on the south side of the street. In addition to these new street trees, new tree wells will be installed, and the existing tree wells will be enlarged. The new tree wells will be six feet by six feet on the south side of the street closest to the façades of the existing buildings, and twelve feet by six feet for the tree wells that are closest to the curb of the street on both sides of E. Clay Street.

There are new trash receptacles and benches being proposed, in addition to the few site furnishings that currently exist on the south side of E. Clay Street.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located in the City Center Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, and is placed in the Urban Core character area. The Plan contains very specific language about integrating the VCUHS Campus into Downtown's urban fabric. The plan further states "Streetscape programs should continue to better connect the campus. New and existing parking garages should be lined with habitable space (p.4.22)."

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines recommend that, "*the selection of appropriate paving materials be based on compatibility with adjacent paving materials*" (pg. 3). The brick pavers being proposed within the scope of this project match the existing paving found in the area in material and design.

The Guidelines state that, "*curb-cuts for accessibility should be located at intersections. Mid-block curb-cuts are strongly discouraged. Curb-cuts should include tactile warning surfaces as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act*" (pg. 8). All proposed accessible ramps within the scope of this project include tactile warning surfaces and are located at corners, with the exception of one mid-block, striped crosswalk. Staff finds that the length of this block does not constitute a mid-block crosswalk, and recommends against its inclusion in the scope of this project.

In regard to landscaping, the Urban Design Guidelines state, "*Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes*" (pg. 10). In addition, the Guidelines recommend that "*hardy ground covers, such as lirioppe, should be planted under street trees, where appropriate*" (pg. 21). There are six new Willow Oak trees being proposed within the scope of this project, which match the existing Willow Oak trees on site. New tree wells will match the existing in overall design, but will be enlarged, adding more room for root growth. Staff recommends that if there is adequate room for ground cover and other companion plantings in the enlarged tree wells, they be added for interest and erosion control, and to discourage pedestrian cut-through over the tree wells.

Regarding street trees, the guidelines state that *“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 should be removed and replaced”* (pg. 10). The scope of this project includes the removal of one mature Willow Oak tree in front of the Valentine Museum entrance. On a site visit, staff determined that the tree contributes to the fullness of the current tree canopy, and observed minimal up-lifting of brick pavers due to the root growth of this tree. In addition to the removal of this tree, the addition of six new Willow Oak trees is being proposed.

The Guidelines recommend that, *“site furnishings, such as benches and trash receptacles, should be appropriately styled and scaled to complement building architecture and to reinforce the character of the streetscape”* (pg. 24). The scope of this project includes the addition of new benches and trash receptacles. During a site visit, staff noted that the design of the benches being proposed does not match that of the existing benches, being a more ornate design. Staff recommends that the applicant either match the style of the existing benches, or replace the existing benches with the proposed, ornate design upon the installation of the new furnishings.

The guidelines state that *“Existing granite curbing and storm water inlets should be retained. Any new granite curbing should match existing curbs. Curbing should not be painted or striped. Other traffic control measures, such as signs, should be considered instead”* (pg. 4). The scope of the project includes the disturbance of the existing granite curbing. Staff recommends that all granite curbing be preserved, restored, or replaced in-kind. There will be new signage marking the areas designated for bus parking, as well as the areas that are not designated for parking.

In regard to paving materials, the guidelines state that, *“Materials that have an uneven surface should be avoided in pedestrian areas. However, historic features, such as existing cobblestone streets and alleys and stone crosswalks, shall be preserved”* (pg.3). Staff has noted that this recessed brick design has been implemented in other crosswalk designs in the area, specifically at the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and E. Cay Street, and would recommend keeping crosswalk designs consistent along this stretch of E. Clay Street.

The guidelines recommend that *“On-site signage should be consistent in style and convenient to visitors, but should be inconspicuously integrated into the overall landscape”* (pg.9). The applicant has confirmed that the new signage designating bus parking areas and no-parking areas will be consistent with the city standards; however, staff believes that there is an opportunity to design this signage to be more inconspicuous within the historic character of this block.

*“The design of parking and internal circulation should give deference to existing historic and natural features in and around the site”* (pg.4) Staff finds that the amount of striping being used on the street to delineate bus parking adds a new visual component that could distract from the historic character of the block. Staff recommends delineating this area in a way that is more sensitive to the look and feel of the block.

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