



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: October 19, 2015
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of a proposed road narrowing along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets**

I. APPLICANT

Michael Sawyer, Department of Public Works
Keith van Inwegen, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

II. LOCATION

City right-of-way along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets

Property Owner:

City of Richmond

III. PURPOSE

The application is to review a proposed road narrowing along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project involves the narrowing of the curb-face to curb-face dimension of N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets. Virginia Commonwealth University is proposing to install streetscape encroachments along the subject right-of-way, including provision of wider sidewalks and a raised pedestrian crosswalk, and requests the narrowing to accommodate this. Those encroachments have been reviewed by the Urban Design Committee, and their recommendation for approval was forwarded to the Department of Public Works, which administers the encroachment process.

The existing curb-face to curb-face dimension varies between 26' and 38' wide. This proposal would bring the entire block to a uniform 26' width, allowing for a 14' wide vehicle travel lane, two 5' wide bike lanes, and an additional 2' striped separation zone for the northbound bike lane. The Committee finds the proposal to be generally consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines. The Guidelines advocate for narrower lane widths than the proposed 14' lane as a means to control vehicle speed, but it is the Committee's opinion that narrower lanes are not necessary on a one-block long street with a mid-block raised pedestrian crosswalk. The Committee finds the proposal to be consistent with the recommendations of the Downtown Master Plan, noting that the roadway narrowing will accommodate the proposed streetscape encroachments, and together, these projects will allow for a "streetscape program that better connects the campus". Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval, with the following condition:

- That the concrete crosswalk islands be relocated so as not to constrict the flow of pedestrians along the crosswalk.

Staff Contact:

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject right-of-way is located along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets in the heart of the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Campus. The right-of-way is adjacent to West Hospital and the McGlothlin Medical Education Center to the east and Sanger Hall and the Hunton Student Center to the west. To the north, across E. Marshall Street, is the main hospital building. To the south, across E. Broad Street, are several state government buildings. The surrounding area lies within the B-4 (Central Business) zoning district.

N. 12th Street carries two-way traffic for the subject block but terminates at E. Marshall Street, where the hospital building was constructed over top of the historic street grid. N. 12th Street physically continues to the south of Broad Street but is named Governor Street and is closed to through traffic.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed roundabout is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter as a “widening, extension, narrowing, enlargement, vacation or change of use of streets”.

c. UDC Review History

Staff was unable to identify any previously UDC reviewed projects along the subject right-of-way.

d. Project Description

This project involves the narrowing of the curb-face to curb-face dimension of N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets. Virginia Commonwealth University is proposing to install streetscape encroachments along the subject right-of-way, including provision of wider sidewalks and a raised pedestrian crosswalk, and requests the narrowing to accommodate this. Those encroachments are being reviewed under separate application, and will require Planning Commission review and City Council approval.

The subject section of N. 12th Street is currently designed for two-way traffic, but has been closed to traffic since 2010 when construction began for the McGlothlin Medical Education Center. The road is scheduled to reopen to traffic when the Children’s Pavilion on E. Broad Street opens in 2016, but VCU has also requested that the City alter the traffic pattern so that it is one-way southbound, with right and left turn movements permitted at E. Broad Street. Requests of that nature are granted by the Department of Public Works and are not subject to UDC or Planning Commission review.

The existing curb-face to curb-face dimension varies between 26’ and 38’ wide. There is a section of the roadway in front of West Hospital and the George Ben Johnson Auditorium that is widened to allow for short-term parking, and a section of the roadway that is widened to allow for a dedicated right-turn lane from N. 12th Street onto E. Broad Street. This proposal would eliminate those widened sections to bring the entire block to a uniform 26’ width. No on-street parking would be permitted, and the 26’ width would allow for a 14’ wide vehicle travel lane, two 5’ wide bike lanes, and an additional 2’ striped separation zone for the northbound bike lane. The existing granite curbing would be re-used for the new

curbing. Brick crosswalks 10' in width will be provided across N. 12th Street at both E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets. Small concrete crosswalk islands will be provided where the northbound bike lane intersects E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets.

e. Master Plan

The subject right-of-way is located in the City Center Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, and is placed in the Downtown Urban Core character area. One of the Plan's recommendations is to "Integrate the VCU Medical Center into Downtown's urban fabric" (page 4.22). The Plan continues to note that "the MCV campus is a special community within downtown, serving thousands of employees, visitors, and students every day" and that "streetscape programs should continue to better connect the campus" (page 4.22). The Plan later states that "public plazas and open spaces should continue to be included as development continues" (page 4.22).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines notes that "streetscape elements, such as street trees and street lighting, should be used to encourage pedestrian activity" (page 5) and that "on street parking creates pedestrian activity and provides a buffer between those pedestrians and moving traffic" (page 6). The Guidelines also advocate for lane widths on local and collector streets to be between 9' and 10' (page 6). The Guidelines note that existing granite curbing should be retained (page 4).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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