



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: February 1, 2021
RE: **Final location, character and extent review of Powhatan Community Center
Addition and Site Improvements, 5051 Northampton Street; UDC 2021-01**

I. APPLICANTS

Heywood Harrison, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

II. LOCATION

Powhatan Hill Community Center, 5051 Northampton Street

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of an addition and site improvements at Powhatan Hill Community Center.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities have engaged Timmons Groups and Worley and Associates Architects to add a 1,200 square foot addition to the Powhatan Hill Community Center. Various other site improvements including the renovation of the existing basketball court and tennis court, the addition of a small skate park and a pickleball court, and new asphalt walking paths and site furnishings are planned as well

The new addition to the community center will match the existing building in design, using the same cladding, fenestration, and roof form, and will not negatively impact the character of the building. The site improvements will create more attractive courts and walking paths, and will respond to the wants of the community by installing amenities that were specifically asked for during the project team's community engagement process.

While there is no landscaping proposed in the scope of this project, all disturbed areas will be reseeded, and existing healthy trees will be preserved, and pruned.

The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following conditions:

- The proposed seating wall between the basketball court and the skate park include metal coping along the edges, enabling the wall to withstand impact from skateboards.
- The applicant consider ways to break up the expanse of blank wall on the east side of the new addition, which is visible from Williamsburg Road.
- The installation of bike racks next to the basketball and tennis courts be included in the scope of work

- The scope of work include the planting of street trees along the southern end of Northampton Street on the east side to complete the existing row of trees

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Powhatan Community Center is bounded by Goddin Street to the north, Union Street to the east, Williamsburg Road to the south, and Northampton Street to the west. The community center is adjacent to a 10 acre park zoned R-5 (Single-family residential) and contains open spaces, tennis and basketball courts, a baseball field and gathering spaces. The Powhatan pool is located north of the community center.

The surrounding areas to the east and south are developed primarily with single-family detached dwellings in the R-5 and R-6 (Single-family attached residential) districts. A mixed-use development consisting of two six-story buildings with approximately 204 residential units is located north. The area to the west of Williamsburg Avenue is located in Henrico County and is developed with manufacturing/warehouse uses.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as a “park or other public way, ground, open space, public building or structure”.

c. UDC Review History

At the February 2019 meeting of the Urban Design Committee, the committee reviewed the final location, character and extent review of A.D.A. improvements at the Powhatan Hill Community Center. The Urban Design Committee recommended approval of the project with the following condition:

- That the proposed curb cut ramp on the west side of Northampton Street be removed from the final project design.

Subsequently, the Planning Commission approved the project with the Urban Design Committee’s recommendations at their February 19th, 2019 meeting.

At the September 2015 meeting of the Urban Design Committee, the placement of a data node top the Powhatan Community Center was reviewed for Final Location, Character and Extent (UDC 2015-25).

The Urban Design Committee reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the plans for the construction of the community center in 1989.

d. Project Description

Building Addition and Renovation

This project includes a building addition and renovations to all existing spaces, except the gymnasium. Approximately 1,200 square feet of the existing facility will be reconfigured for improved ADA accessibility, increased staff visibility, and

better egress conditions. An additional 2,100 square feet will be renovated with new finish updates such as flooring, paint, acoustical ceilings, and LED lighting.

The 1,200-square-foot addition will provide a multi-purpose space for programmed functions, a new single-occupant restroom and reconfigured storage. The exterior of the new addition will be clad in a scored, CMU masonry veneer with decorative bands of brick, matching that of the existing building. Windows on the new addition will be aluminum, non-operable, full-light windows. The addition will utilize a flat roof form, matching that of the existing building.

Site Improvements

Site improvements will combine the existing features, which will be maintained and renovated, with new additions. Planned additions include a small skate park, with a seat wall between the basketball and tennis courts, and site furnishings. Because the proposed seating wall is in close proximity to the skate park, it is likely that it will be utilized as an informal skate feature. Staff would recommend that a protective, metal coping be added to the edges of the seating wall so that the wall can withstand the impacts of skateboards. The applicant is supportive of this recommendation.

New painted markings will be applied to the existing tennis and basketball courts as well as new basketball hoops and tennis court net. The skate park equipment will be repurposed and relocated from Southside Community Center, which is receiving new skate park equipment. Site furnishings, including benches, bike racks, and waste receptacles will be located adjacent to the athletic courts and in front of the community center building. The tennis courts will be reconfigured to accommodate sole-use pickleball courts and a combined tennis-pickleball court. Sidewalk improvements leading to and around the athletic courts and along Northampton Street are also planned. Asphalt walkways will be installed around the tennis court, skate park, and basketball court as part of the scope of this project; however, the sidewalk construction from Northampton Street to the courts will be excluded from the initial bid package for the project, as DPRCF will be working with DPW on this component of the project.

The area of disturbance for the building addition portion of the project falls below the necessary threshold of land disturbance that would require stormwater management; the athletic courts renovation and addition of the skate park, however, exceed the threshold, and underground detention is planned for the northern end of the tennis courts to meet stormwater management requirements.

Landscaping Plan and Maintenance Analysis

Landscaping on the site will focus primarily on maintenance and preservation of existing landscaped areas, namely in front of the building entrance, and pruning of existing vegetation as necessary for the building and site improvements.

Existing healthy trees will be preserved, all disturbed areas will be seeded, and any damaged lawn will be renovated. Landscape maintenance will primarily belong to DPRCF as the property owner. Care of trees on City-owned property is the responsibility of the Urban Forestry division of the DPW.

e. Master Plan

The Richmond 300 Master Plan states that *“public parks serve a vital role to the health and well-being of Richmond’s residents and its environment. As more residents live closer to the city’s center in either multi-family apartment buildings or in houses with very small yards, greater importance has been given to the City’s public parks system”* (pg. 99). It is important to maintain and update the City’s public parks and community centers so that residents have access to high quality resources that respond to the current needs of a community.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

To minimize the visual impact on a neighborhood with smaller scaled structures, the public building should incorporate design techniques which strengthen its design relationship to adjacent buildings. Techniques may include: stepping back the building as it increases in height, varying the surface planes of the building, and breaking up the roof line to create smaller components” (pg. 15).

“Building’s roof form should be proportional to the building and its façade. A corner building may use its roof form to define an entry point location to the block. Larger scaled buildings should have varied roof forms and roof lines in order to minimize monolithic visual impacts. Roof materials and colors should blend with building materials and colors.” As submitted, the design of the new addition has a flat roof form, mimicking that of the existing building. Staff finds that the current design does not negatively impact the surrounding structures or neighborhood. While this new addition is located on corner lot, the applicant has clarified that the intent of the new addition is to blend into the existing building as seamlessly as possible, and that this addition is not meant to be emphasized as it will not serve as an entry point.

“New building materials should be compatible with and complement adjacent buildings” (pg. 17). The new addition will be clad in scored CMU, masonry veneer with decorative soldier brick design which will match the existing building in design and in color.

“The number, size, style and type of windows should be appropriate for the architecture of the building. The rhythm, patterns, and ratio of walls to windows should be proportional and be compatible with adjacent buildings. Too many different window variations on a building can lead to visual confusion and should be avoided. Window design is also influenced by and should be compatible with details such as sills, sashes, lintels, depth of reveal, decorative caps and shutters. If shutters are proposed, they should fit the window opening. The color of the window glass and its reflective quality should be carefully considered for its overall effect on the design. Highly reflective glass is not appropriate at street level” (pg. 18). The new addition will utilize the same design of window and fenestration pattern as the existing building.

The design of new buildings should take design clues from neighboring buildings. (Pg. 18). The proposed addition mimics the design of the existing community center building. On a site visit, staff noticed that the other building on site, the pool facility, has a steep, stepped, triangular roof form. The new addition will have a flat roof, and is not proposed to utilize any of the architectural characteristics of the pool facility.

“Large expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level” (pg. 19). The new addition to the community center is proposed to have a fenestration pattern on the south facing façade that will reduce the amount of blank, monotonous wall space. There are no windows being proposed on the new addition’s east facing façade. While this façade will be minimally visible, and not located on the main road, Staff finds that as submitted, this will create an expanse of monotonous wall. On a site visit, staff noticed that the community center has broken up monotonous wall space on the existing building along Williamsburg using a mural. Staff sees any wall space on the new addition as an opportunity to implement other creative design elements like murals, green walls, or other landscaping.

The Public Park section of the Urban Design Guidelines notes *that “a preference should be given towards materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality”* (pg. 9). The applicant has clarified that green infrastructure such as green roofs, green walls, and rain barrels are not feasible due to the small size of the addition and limited funds that are available.

The Guidelines note that landscape plans should “include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10), and that “lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (page 9). While no additional landscaping or lighting is planned within the scope of this project, all existing shrubs and trees will remain and will be appropriately pruned. All disturbed areas will be re-seeded.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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