



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: February 1, 2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of a new RPS monument sign, 3501 Belt Boulevard; UDC 2021-02**

I. APPLICANT

Jarrell Coleman, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

3501 Belt Boulevard

Property Owner:

City of Richmond School Board

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a new RPS monument sign at the Department of Pupil Transportation and Fleet Management Building located at 3501 Belt Boulevard.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The project involves the construction of a freestanding monument road sign for Richmond Public School's Department of Pupil Transportation and Fleet Management Building.

The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the plan with the following condition:

- Instead of including landscaping around the base of the new sign, a native tree be planted on the property in a location that will not impact the new sign.

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject property, totaling approximately 19 acres, is located on Belt Boulevard in South Richmond. The property lies within the M-1 (Light Industrial) zoning district. The proposed signage will be installed on the west side of the property, adjacent to Belt Boulevard. Belt Boulevard in this location is four lanes: two north-bound lanes and two south-bound lanes divided by a painted median.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed signage is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a "public building or structure".

c. Project Description

City of Richmond Public School's Department of Pupil Transportation is proposing to install a new free-standing monument sign at their Belt Boulevard location to assist vendors, potential applicants, and other public school personnel in locating the Transportation department from the roadway. The sign will be 59 inches in height, 95 inches in width, and 10 inches deep. The sign will be painted aluminum with applied vinyl lettering.

No landscaping is being proposed in the scope of this project; however, the applicant has stated that they are open to including a landscaping plan. The proposed sign does not contain any digital graphics or lighting.

d. UDC Review History

The UDC has not previously reviewed projects at this location.

e. Master Plan

Richmond 300, the City of Richmond Master Plan, states that streets such as Hull Street and Belt Boulevard should become "Great Streets" which "create and preserve high-quality, distinctive, and well-designed neighborhoods and Nodes throughout the city featuring buildings addressing the street, underground utilities, street trees, lighting, enhanced transit, and other amenities (pg. 48)". Ensuring that new signage that is highly visible from the public realm is attractive, easy to read, and durable enhances the public realm and can enhance the overall design of a neighborhood.

Objective 1.4, k. of Richmond 300 proposes to "promote an attractive environment by minimizing visual clutter and confusion caused by a proliferation of signage, ensuring that public and private signage is appropriately scaled to the pedestrian experience (pg. 100)."

f. Urban Design Guidelines

Freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials.

Regarding placement and size, the Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations pertaining to signage, including that "freestanding signs should relate to the architecture of the building", and that the "the sign's base may be constructed of like building materials" (pg. 23). The message on a sign must be "easy to read and direct" and also "relate to the use of the building". A sign's "lettering should be 4-14 inches high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed" (pg. 23).

The Urban Design Guidelines state that the "sign color should relate to and compliment the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent highlights and trim colors" and that, "freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials" (pg. 24). The proposed sign will be white, a neutral color, which does not negatively impact the character of the site or main building. As submitted, the proposed design does not include any landscaping. Staff recommends that landscaping around the base of the sign be included in the design. The applicant is open to this recommendation.

Illuminated signs “are not appropriate in or adjacent to residential areas” (pg. 24). If a sign is illuminated, it “should have light lettering and dark, opaque backgrounds for improved readability and minimal glare” (pg. 24). For signs that are indirectly illuminated, “the spotlights should be shielded to minimize glare” and “all lighting and electrical parts should be concealed from view” (pg. 24). The guidelines also state that “Freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (pg. 24). No electrical elements are being proposed in the submitted design.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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