



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: September 10, 2015
RE: **VCU Streetscape Encroachments along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets; UDC No. 2015-18**

I. APPLICANT

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 for review of streetscape encroachments into the City right-of-way along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Virginia Commonwealth University is proposing to install brick sidewalks, a raised crosswalk, street trees, decorative street lights and bike racks along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets. The City owns the right-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments. A separate (Location, Character and Extent review) application is under consideration to provide a consistent curb-face to curb-face dimension on this section of N. 12th Street, which would narrow the street from its current dimensions to a uniform width of 26'.

Staff is not in favor of providing additional cobrahead fixtures, and finds that the provision of consistent pedestrian-scaled lighting could even allow for the removal of the existing cobrahead fixtures. In addition, Staff would recommend that the pedestrian-scaled fixtures be installed to a centered depth of 18" from the face of curb to maximize the usable sidewalk space for pedestrians. These concerns notwithstanding, Staff finds the proposed streetscape encroachments to be consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Design Guidelines and also with existing improvements in the VCU medical campus area. This proposal would provide additional pedestrian amenities in an area where there will be a high volume of pedestrian traffic. Staff further finds the proposal to be consistent with the recommendations of the Downtown Master Plan, noting that the streetscape encroachments, along with the proposed roadway narrowing under separate review, will allow for a "streetscape program that better connects the MCV campus". Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Department of Public Works grant approval, with the following conditions:

- That the applicant to work with the Department of Public Utilities to remove the existing cobrahead-style lights in favor of the proposed pedestrian-scaled lights.
- That the pedestrian-scaled fixtures be installed to a centered depth of 18" from the face of curb to maximize the usable sidewalk space for pedestrians.

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 project involves the provision of brick sidewalks, a raised crosswalk, street trees, decorative street lights and bike racks along the subject right-of-way. The City owns the rights-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments.

The encroachment process is administered through the Department of Public Works, which has requested that the Urban Design Committee (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 Department of Public Works. Due to the extensive nature of the encroachment requests, the Department of Public Works has requested that ultimate approval be granted by City Council.

c. Project Description

Virginia Commonwealth University is proposing to install brick sidewalks, a raised crosswalk, street trees, decorative street lights and bike racks along N. 12th Street between E. Broad and E. Marshall Streets. The City owns the right-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments. A separate Location, Character and Extent application is under review to provide a consistent curb-face to curb-face dimension on this section of N. 12th Street, which would narrow the street from its current variable dimensions to a consistent 26'.

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. VCU has also requested that the City alter the traffic pattern on this section of N. 12th Street so that it is one-way southbound, with right and left turn movements permitted at E. Broad Street. The resulting typical section would then include a 14' wide vehicle travel

lane, two 5' wide bike lanes, and an additional 2' striped separation zone for the northbound bike lane.

Narrowing the curb-face to curb-face dimension will allow for wider sidewalks than what currently exists, which will in turn allow for the provision of street trees and decorative lights. The sidewalk on the western side of the road will vary between 15'10" and 16'5" in width with the exception of alongside the Sanger Hall loading dock ramp, where the sidewalk is narrowed to 7'4" in width. On the eastern side of the block the sidewalk will vary between 14'11" and 16'11" in width. All sidewalks will be composed of brick laid in a herringbone pattern, and the existing granite curbs will be reused.

The applicant proposes removing the concrete wall that surrounds the Sanger Hall loading dock ramp and replacing it with a 3'6" tall black ornamental metal railing supported by steel obelisks. The proposal also includes covering over a portion of the loading dock ramp opening to create an outdoor plaza with tables with attached seating. Part of this plaza will encroach into the right-of-way, and part will be on VCU property. A 62'5" long raised brick paver speed table with a 12'6" ramp on either side is proposed in the center of the block to slow vehicular traffic and allow for pedestrians to cross the street. This pedestrian crossing is located adjacent to the plaza, and bollards, to match the obelisks supporting the fence, will be provided on either side to prevent vehicles from mounting the sidewalk.

The applicant proposes to plant thirteen street trees (Allee elms, 3.5" in caliper) in 6' square tree wells using the "suspended slab" detail which provides the tree roots with an increased soil volume. A total of twelve new pedestrian-oriented lights will be provided as well. The proposed light is the same fixture utilized in other areas of the VCU Medical Campus, including on N. 11th Street between E. Marshall and E. Clay Streets and on the 1100 and 1200 blocks of East Clay Street: an ornamental fixture 16' in height and black in color on a fluted base. The fixtures will contain an LED bulb with a color temperature of 3000k. There are two existing cobrahead light fixtures on this block, and the applicant proposed to install an additional fixture at the request of the City Department of Public Utilities.

The proposal also includes the provision of twelve new City-standard, 6' long ribbon-style black benches. These benches will be placed alongside the tree wells, as exists in front of the McGlothlin building. The applicant also proposes to install 4 City-standard inverted "U" shaped bike racks between the tree wells.

d. UDC Review History

VCU has received recommendations of approval for various streetscape encroachments in the Medical campus area in the past several years, including adjacent to the under-construction Children's Pavilion (block bounded by N. 10th, E. Broad, N. 11th and E. Marshall Streets, in front of Sanger Hall (on the east side of N. 11th Street just north of E. Broad Street) and on N. 11th Street between E. Marshall Street and E. Clay Street.

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 everyday" 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 contains several suggestions pertaining to the proposed encroachments. As to sidewalk paving material, the Guidelines state that "the color of brick should coordinate with building architecture and adjacent streetscape pavements" (page 20). To create a uniform tree-lined street, the Guidelines state that "generally no more than two species of street tree should be used along a single block face of a roadway" (page 21).

As to lighting, the Guidelines specify that "pedestrian light fixtures be between ten and fifteen feet above the ground and that they be spaced forty to sixty feet apart". The guidelines also note that "safe and comfortable circulation depends more upon the consistency of illumination than on the level or brightness of the lighting" (page 22). Further, the Guidelines state that "Lighting fixtures should be consistent with those existing in the surrounding area" (page 23). The Guidelines also note that "streetscape furnishings and streetlights should coordinate with each other in style, color and finish" and that "street furnishing should be consistent with existing street furnishing in the surrounding area (a three block radial area surrounding the proposed project)" (page 25).

The Transportation section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains a number of recommendations pertinent to the proposed improvements, including that "existing granite curbing should be retained" (page 4). This section also notes that "streetscape elements, such as street trees and street lighting, should be used to encourage pedestrian activity" (page 5).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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