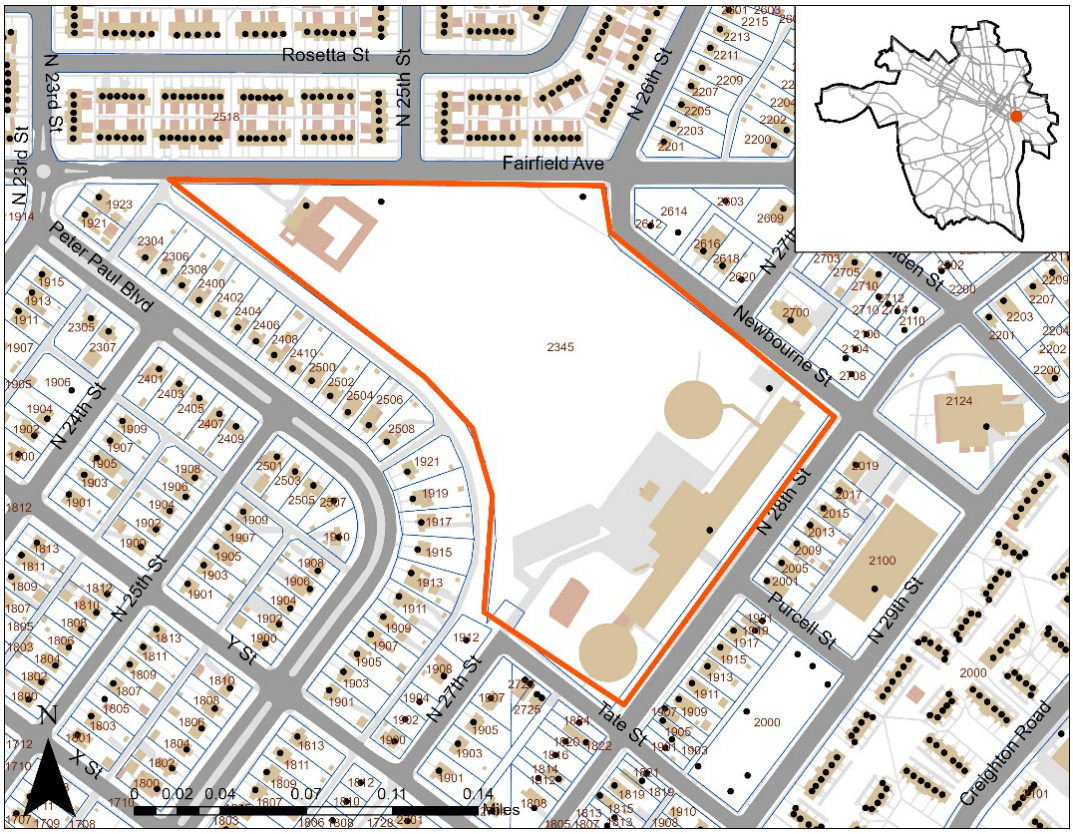
Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

Planning Commission

RICHMOND PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

UDC 2025-14	FINAL – Location, Character, and Extent	Meeting Date: 5/6/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Applicant: Jonathan Balasa / Kelly Callahan	
Project Description	UDC 2025-14 CONCEPT Location, Character, and Extent review for proposed Woodville Elementary School project.	
Project Location **Address:** 2345 Fairfield Ave, Richmond, VA 23223 **Property Owner: City of Richmond School Board** **High-Level Details:** This project proposes to replace the existing Woodville Elementary School. UDC 2025-07 CONCEPTUAL Woodville Elementary School– Approved April 1, 2025, by the Planning Commission. The project includes reconfigured site circulation, an off-street car drop-off lane, and a separate off-street bus loop. Site improvements include, perimeter walking and biking trails, outdoor recreational areas.		
UDC Recommendation	Approval	
	STAFF RECOMMENDS THIS ITEM BE APPROVED BY PLANNING COMMISSION AS SUBMITTED.	
Staff Contact	Kevin Costanzo - Kevin.Costanzo@rva.gov	
Public Outreach	Public Outreach detailed in applicant's submission package. Previously reviewed as UDC 2025-07 Conceptual Review.	
Conditions for Approval	Staff Recommends approval of application and proposed scope of work as submitted.	

	Previously approved CONCEPT Conditions: • Staff recommends that the Applicant consider and detail extreme weather response consideration for final submission. • Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. • Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible. • Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces. • Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. • Staff recommends that the applicant provide increased infrastructure improvements to support micro-modal forms of transportation. • Staff recommends that traffic calming techniques be considered where appropriate. • Staff recommends including pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive aisles and parking lots. • Staff recommends expanding sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area. • Staff recommends increasing bike parking, bike racks, and bike maintenance stations near school entrances. • Staff recommends that final exterior materials be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require minimal maintenance to ensure long-term resilience. • Staff recommends that, where appropriate, anti-graffiti coatings be applied to exterior surfaces to reduce ongoing maintenance requirements. • Staff recommends that the applicant provide samples or product specification sheets of exterior building materials for Final Review. • Staff recommends that the applicant explore opportunities to incorporate additional windows, particularly along street-level elevations and the secondary southeastern façade. The color and reflective properties of windows should be carefully considered for both design coherence and environmental impact. • Staff recommends that the applicant consider filtering techniques for possible expansion or additions to learning spaces (i.e., potential learning cottages)

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The project address is 2345 Fairfield Avenue with the primary site area located along the northern side of the existing parcel along Fairfield Avenue and Newbourne Street and opposite of the existing school site. The site is zoned R-5 Residential, and the property consists of roughly 15.72 acres. The property currently contains Woodville Elementary School, operated by City of Richmond School Board.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 and 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

Prior Approvals	N/A
Summary Of Changes:	Extreme Weather Resilience • Project proposes features to address climate threats, including battery storage, rainwater harvesting, potable water storage, and Net Zero photovoltaic roof array. • Community shelter functions contingent on EPA grant award. Lighting • Full cut-off site lighting fixtures used, and the design meets LEED v4.0 credit standards for light pollution and dark sky compliant. Public Art • RPS exploring interactive sculpture or sculptural bench installations; The applicant is hesitant of exterior murals due to maintenance concerns. • Interior murals visible from outside will feature the James River. Stormwater & Permeable Features • Outdoor classroom incorporated into a rain garden with cistern irrigation. • Permeable pavers were not used due to performance concerns. Micro-mobility Infrastructure • Added widened sidewalks, perimeter path, and bike/pedestrian connection to N. 27th and Tate Streets. • Covered bike racks added near main entry and drop-off areas. Traffic Calming • Existing and new speed tables added to improve flow and reduce speeding near bus and car entrances. Sidewalk Width • Expanded sidewalks: 10ft at bus loop and 18.5ft at drop-off/pick-up. Graffiti Mitigation • Aluminum surfaces cleanable without coating; masonry coating deferred unless graffiti becomes a concern. Future Expansion Considerations • Space reserved for future portable classrooms to accommodate potential growth.
Project Description	Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is replacing the existing Woodville Elementary School. The new facility will be a 72,000-square-foot, three-story building designed to accommodate 500 students in Kindergarten through 5th grade, along with one Pre-K classroom. The existing school will remain operational during construction, with demolition occurring in the final phase, after which the site will be converted into a greenfield for future use. **<u>Staff Review:</u>** The proposed project will transform an underutilized and previously inaccessible site into a regional park destination, greatly expanding access to public green space. Located near Downtown, Manchester, and major regional trail systems, Mayo Island functions as both a physical and symbolic connector between historically divided neighborhoods. The reuse of city-owned land as a public green space aligns with the City's broader goals around climate resilience, equity, and community-focused investment. The proposal includes significant landscape improvements that support sustainability, stormwater management, and pedestrian comfort. Hardscape materials will be finalized in a later phase, and the application indicates a general intention to address compatibility and environmental impact. While stormwater strategies are not fully detailed in the current submission, future plans are expected to include low-impact design techniques integrated with landscaping to support an attractive and functional public realm. Landscaping throughout the site, including preservation of existing trees, will offer shade and visual interest for pedestrians. Signage and site circulation designs should prioritize non-motorized

transit, with designated bikeways and pedestrian pathways clearly separated from vehicular traffic, especially at intersections and other high-traffic areas.

The proposed school building is sited in the northern corner of the property with primary access from Fairfield Avenue and Newbourne Street. While the proposed setbacks are larger than those found in the surrounding R-5 residential district, they are consistent with the Urban Design Committee (UDC) Guidelines for institutional buildings such as schools. The building footprint is broken into several wings to reduce visual bulk, and landscaping along the perimeter helps soften the impact. Architectural strategies—including variations in façade planes, roof heights, and the use of high-quality materials—contribute to a more cohesive and engaging urban design. Exterior materials include red brick, composite and metal paneling, wood-alternative siding, and both clear and spandrel glass. The school entrance is designed to be accessible and prominent, with the site overall intended to meet ADA requirements.

Staff Conditions:

- Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.
- Staff recommends that the applicant provide increased infrastructure improvements to support non-motorized forms of transportation.
- Staff recommends that traffic calming techniques be considered where appropriate.
- Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces.
- Staff recommends including pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive aisles and parking lots.
- Staff recommends expanding sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area.
- Staff recommends increasing bike parking, bike racks, and bike maintenance stations near school entrances.
- Staff recommends that final exterior materials be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require minimal maintenance to ensure long-term resilience.
- Staff recommends that, where appropriate, anti-graffiti coatings be applied to exterior surfaces to reduce ongoing maintenance requirements.
- Staff recommends that the applicant provide samples or product specification sheets of exterior building materials for Final Review.
- Staff recommends that the applicant explore opportunities to incorporate additional windows, particularly along street-level elevations and the secondary southeastern façade. The color and reflective properties of windows should be carefully considered for both design coherence and environmental impact.
- Staff recommends that the applicant consider filtering techniques for possible expansion or additions to learning spaces (i.e., potential learning cottages).

Staff supports the project as it aligns closely with vision and goals of both the R300 Masterplan and the UDC Guidelines. Additionally, it is substantially similar to the approved CONCEPT plans.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval with the no conditions.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: ***iv. Provide Greenways & Parks for All (R300, p.197)*** ***v. Reconnect the City (R300, p.199)*** ***vi. Realign City Facilities (R300, p.201)***	***Provide Greenways & Parks for All:*** *Develop parks and greenways so that by 2037 100% of Richmonders live within a 10-minute walk of a park.* ***Reconnect the City:*** *Cap highways to reknit neighborhoods destroyed by interstates, build/ improve bridges, introduce street grids, and make the city easier to access by foot, bike, and transit.* ***Realign City Facilities:*** *Improve City buildings (schools, libraries, fire stations, police stations, etc.) to provide better services in efficient, shared-use, accessible facilities to better match and serve the growing city.*	The project will transform an underutilized and inaccessible site into a regional park destination, significantly expanding access to public green space. With proximity to Downtown, Manchester, and major trail systems, Mayo Island serves as a physical and symbolic connector between historically divided neighborhoods. The reuse of city-owned land as public green space supports the City's goals for climate resilience, equity, and community-centered investment.
Urban Design Guidelines		
Transportation*: Paving Surface Materials - Provision of New Sidewalk: pg. 4*	*The design guidelines suggest compatibility, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, cost, and sustainability be considered when designing pavement areas. Impervious areas should be limited, and pervious pavement materials should be introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.*	Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage; sustainability and compatibility considerations should be included. Significant improvements to the site landscape include stormwater and sustainability considerations. *Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.* *This condition is met.*
Transportation: *Multimodal Transportation: pg. 6*	*Two of the major objectives stated in the City of Richmond's Master Plan are to increase street-level pedestrian activity while safely and efficiently moving people and goods into and out of the City, and to promote a multimodal transportation system. In order to have a safe and efficient multimodal transportation network, it is integral to design with all modes of transportation in mind. These modes include walking, biking, public transit, as well as motor vehicles. It is the priority of the UDC to support all modes of transportation, giving deference to pedestrians and vulnerable transportation users. For projects involving elements of transportation, both public transit and non-motorized transportation*	Appropriate signage and streetscape design should demarcate designated bikeways and pedestrian walkways separate from vehicular traffic and should prioritize the comfort, convenience, and safety of the non-motorized forms of transit particularly surrounding intersections and or other high traffic areas. *Staff recommends that the applicant provide increased infrastructure improvements to support non-motorized forms of transportation.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends that traffic calming techniques be considered where appropriate.* *This condition is met.*

	(walking, biking, etc.) should be considered in the design and planning of all projects.	
***Environment**: Landscaping - Design: pg. 10*	*Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long-term maintenance should be considered.*	Several established trees will be maintained and protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and shade for pedestrians throughout the site. Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces. *This condition is met.*
***Environment:** Stormwater Management and Low Impact Development: pg. 11*	*Design guidelines encourage use of Low Impact Development design elements that that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, minimize, and detain stormwater runoff are applied to not only open space, but also rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, and sidewalks.*	Information on stormwater strategies is not provided within the application. Stormwater specifics will be finalized at a later stage but should include low-impact design combined with landscaping to compliment an attractive and accessible outdoor space and public realm. The applicant should consider opportunities for permeable paving in the proposed parking areas and pedestrian paths for the final plan design. Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. *This condition is met.*
***Public Facilities:** General Site Design - Building Orientation: pg. 13*	*Guidelines suggest that buildings should be oriented toward the primary street that borders the site and architecturally acknowledge all adjacent public right-of-way. A building's entrance should be easily recognizable, at ground level, and appropriately design to accommodate persons of differing mobility levels. Efficiency should be considered when deciding building location and orientation such as passive solar heating design and maximization of natural light.*	The building is to be located towards the northern corner of the existing site with vehicle and pedestrian access provided primarily from Fairfield Ave. and Newbourne St. The school's entrance to face the corner of the Fairfield Ave and Newbourne St. intersection.
***Public Facilities:** General Site Design - Building Setback: pg. 13*	*A new building should have the same or similar setback as existing buildings on the same street. When a design includes balconies, awnings, or door swings that extend beyond the building's setback, the design should minimize or avoid elements that encroach into the public right-of-way.* *There will be situations, however, where a different setback would be appropriate for the type of building and the desired environment. Examples would include larger public buildings, such as schools and recreation centers, located within urban residential areas. The Urban Design Committee encourages setbacks that allow for the development of usable public space and streetscape enhancing landscaping.*	The site is located within a R-5 Residential district with a mixture of single-family and multi-family units with various degrees of setbacks. The proposed building will have generally larger setbacks than typical of the surrounding neighborhood; however, Staff finds the proposal consistent with UDC Guidelines for setbacks with regard to larger public buildings such as schools.

Public Facilities: *General Site Design - Site Features: pg. 13*	*The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users. Operational features and parking should be screened from view.* *Connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered during the design phase and include accommodations for non-motorized means of transit and other micro-modal transportation, such as bicycle parking, bike racks, showers, restrooms, and air pumps.*	Parking areas include landscaping and screening to the requirements listed in the City Code. Pedestrian circulation throughout the site is provided. *Staff recommends including pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive aisles and parking lots.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends expanding sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends increasing bike parking, bike racks, and bike maintenance stations near school entrances.* *This condition is met.*
Public Facilities: *Building Design - Building Proportion: pg. 14*	*Building massing should be compatible with the surrounding uses; although, important public buildings may require larger sizes. Visual impact can be minimized via design techniques such as setbacks or varying surface and roof planes. Height and roof design should be sensitive to surrounding uses but may be taller on corners to frame access to the block.*	The proposed building introduces a more conscious effort toward urban design by using quality materials and architectural design that have been selected in part through community engagement. The large footprint of the proposed building is broken up by splitting the building into several wings. Landscaping along the street as well as adjacent to the building is used to soften the impact of the building. Different materials and architectural features are utilized to further break up large facades. Differing roof heights and façade planes create visual interest. *This condition is met.*
Public Facilities: *Building Design - Building Detail: pg. 14*	*Building materials should be compatible with surrounding uses and not cause visual confusion by using numerous different materials on a single façade. Material quality and design should complement those on the existing building and be sufficiently durable and sustainable.* *Building design should take cues from the surrounding area. An easily recognizable, inviting, and accessible entrance should be included, and ground level design should be comfortable for the pedestrian. Large expanses of blank or undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Access for users of differing mobilities should be included; handicap ramps or other handicap considerations should be incorporated into the façade design and to a high design quality.*	Building materials reflected in the elevation drawings include red brick, aluminum composite paneling (gray and blue), formed metal paneling, UHPC paneling, wood-alternative siding, clear glass, and spandrel glass. The design incorporates various strategies to minimize the visual impact of large façades and ensure a high-quality architectural design. The main entrance is clearly defined, inviting, and accessible. The site will be designed to meet ADA requirements. *Staff recommends that final exterior materials be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require minimal maintenance to ensure long-term resilience.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends that, where appropriate, anti-graffiti coatings be applied to exterior surfaces to reduce ongoing maintenance requirements.*

	Building materials should be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance. Where appropriate, substances that resist graffiti should be applied to building materials to reduce maintenance requirements. *The number, size, style, and type of windows should be appropriate for the architecture of the building and appear intentional in terms of rhythm, patterns, and ratio of walls to windows. Bird safe glass should be considered when a building is greater than 45 feet tall or is located next to a park, streetscape, or highly vegetated or landscaped area. Large expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Windows, projecting cornices, and architectural details, such as decorative masonry bands in an accent color, may be used to break up flat building planes.*	*This condition is met.* *Staff recommends that the applicant provide samples or product specification sheets of exterior building materials for Final Review.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends that the applicant explore opportunities to incorporate additional windows, particularly along street-level elevations and the secondary southeastern façade. The color and reflective properties of windows should be carefully considered for both design coherence and environmental impact.* *This condition is met.* *Staff recommends that the applicant consider filtering techniques for possible expansion or additions to learning spaces (i.e., potential learning cottages)* *This condition is met.*