



Richmond City Council

The Voice of the People

Richmond, Virginia

The Honorable Parker C. Agelasto

Councilman, Central 5th Voter District

February 9, 2017

To the Urban Design Committee,

First thank you for your service to the citizens of Richmond. The Urban Design Committee has an important role in the review of projects impacting public lands and buildings. Your review provides for an opportunity for citizens and professionals alike to engage in the approval process and offer input.

Monroe Park has received considerable attention from UDC and Planning Commission for nearly 10 years. City Council created the Monroe Park Advisory Council to further this work with citizen input. The Monroe Park Master Plan was the culmination of all this input.

When City Council approved the agreement with the Monroe Park Conservancy, it did so with the expectation that the Master Plan would be followed and that the City's review processes would be preserved. Over the last 3 years, I have been disappointed with the secrecy by which decisions affecting Monroe Park have been made. I have expended considerable time to get all parties to be transparent so trust can be established.

One recommendation I shared was to specifically mark which trees would be removed during the construction. This conforms with the City's policy to post signs on trees scheduled for removal by Urban Forestry Division. For whatever reasons, this recommendation was not followed.

It is sad to learn that UDC's previously approved tree plan was also disregarded without consultation. That is to say that UDC did not receive notice of the revised tree plan until January 2017 nearly two months after the plan was implemented and trees removed to accommodate the bio-retention plan.

Given UDC's authority to approve such plans, an authority exercised on several occasions in the past pertaining to Monroe Park, it is alarming that the City Administration acted unilaterally without providing notice or seeking input from UDC. The changes before UDC to approve the tree plan are now a retrospective act. This request has given UDC almost no flexibility but to approve.

At issue here is the Administration's failure to comply with procedures for adequate review of plans through City Council's board and commissions prior to execution. I therefore ask UDC to admonish the City Administration and require better cooperation in the future.

As such I encourage you to formally request an investigation into how the Administration acted, and under what authority, so that those individuals responsible may be held accountable.

Sincerely,

Parker C. Agelasto
Richmond City Council, 5th District