



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: February 6, 2020
RE: **Review of a pedestrian bridge encroachment for VCU Health System Children's Hospital, 1001 East Marshall Street; UDC 2020-02**

I. APPLICANT

Ashby Ayers, JLL representing VCU Health System (VCU HS)

II. LOCATION

The public right-of-way over N. 11th Street

Property Owner:

City of Richmond right-of-way (ROW)

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the review of a pedestrian bridge encroachment

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

While the Guidelines are not supportive of pedestrian bridges, they do contain design criteria for when a pedestrian bridge is proposed: that a bridge should span no more than the width of the right-of-way, be level, and be made of transparent and non-reflective glass. Most importantly, the bridge will provide a safe and secure passage for patients and sensitive materials in between buildings.

Although the proposed design meets some of the criteria, Staff is concerned with the aesthetics. Specifically the expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall created by masking the trusses between the columns and the numerous materials proposed for the bridge and associated structures. Staff believes the bridge, as submitted, perpetuates disharmonious design elements when considered in the larger context of the area.

Due to the nature of the project and its impact on health and quality of life, Staff is supportive of the project in general but has reservations regarding the aesthetics of certain design elements.

Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Director of Public Works grant approval of the encroachment request with the following conditions:

- Demonstrate that consideration was given to addressing the expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall
- Demonstrate that consideration was given to unifying the design of the support columns with those columns already part of the existing children's hospital building

Staff Contact:

Josh Son // (804) 646-3741 // joshua.son@richmondgov.com

Alex Dandridge // (804) 646-6569 // alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject ROW spans the width of the diagonal of the intersection of N. 11th and E. Marshall Streets, from the northeast to the southwest corners. It is located within an area zoned B-4, Central Business District. The proposed pedestrian bridge will connect level P2 of the newly constructed Children's Hospital to level 3 of the Gateway building. South of E. Marshall Street, N. 11th Street is a one-way, four-lane road that consists of two lanes of thru-traffic flanked by a parking lane on either side. North of E. Marshall Street, N. 11th Street is a one-way, two-lane road with through traffic and curb bump-outs to accommodate street parking on either side. The posted speed limit is 25 MPH. E. Marshall Street is a two-way, four-lane road with two lanes of thru-traffic each way.

b. Scope of Review

The City owns the ROW, but VCU HS will perform all of the work, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments. The UDC has reviewed a number of streetscape encroachments for similar projects, such as the pedestrian bridge for the neighboring VCU Health System Adult Outpatient Facility at 1001 E. Leigh Street and farther south at the Dominion Workplace Tower I, in the last few years.

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.

c. UDC Review History

Throughout the history of reviewing pedestrian bridges, it has always been remarked that the UDC Guidelines do not support these structures; however, exceptions have been made:

In 2018, the UDC reviewed a pedestrian bridge encroachment associated with the VCU Health System Adult Outpatient Facility. Staff recommended approval as the proposed design met the following criteria: that a bridge should span no more than the width of the right-of-way, be level, and be made of transparent and non-reflective glass. Furthermore, the bridge was critical to provide a safe and secure passage for patients and sensitive materials in between buildings. (UDC 2018-35)

In 2016, the UDC reviewed a pedestrian bridge encroachment associated with the Dominion Workplace Tower I. Staff recommended approval as they found the proposal to comply with the treatment suggested of such a structure, with the additional benefit of offering additional, open-air crossing space at the rooftop garden level. (UDC 2016-36)

In 2009, the UDC reviewed a pedestrian bridge encroachment associated with 1202 E. Marshall Street, what is now the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Medical Education Center, designed by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners. Staff recommended approval as they found the proposal would allow for the removal

of three (3) existing pedestrian bridges that did not comply with the treatments suggested by the Guidelines. (UDC 2009-23)

In 2005, the UDC reviewed a pedestrian bridge encroachment associated with the 500 and 600 block of E. Jackson Street. The Richmond Downtown Plan, approved by City Council in November of 2004, was referenced as stating “pedestrian bridges should not be allowed.” The Plan noted that pedestrian bridges inhibit street level activity and can potentially block Downtown vistas. It further placed specific emphasis on “street level activity and the pedestrian environment” in the Biotech Park. The recommendation of conceptual approval by the UDC noted that Jackson Street is not an important Downtown vista. (UDC 2005-24)

d. Project Description

The project is being built on the former Children’s Eye and Ear Hospital and will physically connect to the existing outpatient Children’s Pavilion at 1000 E. Broad Street. Due to the tight site footprint, the applicant will be utilizing the existing patient access entrance points in order to allow for an Emergency Department entrance on the Ground Floor. The new building will include sixteen (16) stories of clinical and support space above grade with four (4) levels of below grade parking. The budget for the overall project is estimated at \$364M and is funded by VCU Health System. The Children’s Hospital of Richmond is a service line of and wholly owned by VCU Health System.

The bridge design approach was to connect the Children’s Hospital with the rest of the VCU Health campus while ensuring that privacy was maintained. This connection is critical to support the patient movement and access flows required by VCU Health. This proposed walkway will connect the new CH building to the existing Gateway building to the east and is essential for the safe, secure transport of patients and supplies between locations. The new CH will be a Level 1 Trauma Center with four levels of inpatient beds and the necessary services to support the hospital. There will be scenarios in which patients will need to be transported between buildings, frequently with timing being a life or death variable. For the purposes of patient safety and continuity of care for pediatric patients, an elevated pedestrian walkway connecting buildings is integral to the future of the Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU.

The proposed Pedestrian Bridge will extend from the north east corner of the horizontal expansion of the Children’s Hospital across the intersection at 11th and East Marshall Streets, run along Marshall Street on the south side of the Nelson building. The bridge will cross over the existing pedestrian bridge between the Sanger and Nelson buildings, and will turn 90 degrees at the Gateway building to make a connection to the existing stair tower.

e. Master Plan

The subject property is located in the City Center Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, and is placed in the Urban Core character area. The Plan contains very specific language about integrating the VCU HS Campus into Downtown’s urban fabric. The plan further states “Streetscape programs should continue to better connect the campus. New and existing parking garages should be lined with habitable space.” (p.4.22).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines do “not support the use of pedestrian bridges. If they are used, the bridge should span no more than the width of the right-of-way. Pedestrian bridges should be level, with little to no incline. The materials used for the construction of pedestrian bridges should not be opaque or made of reflective material, so as to minimize the obstruction across the public right of-way.” (p. 28).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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