



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Urban Design Committee
to Planning Commission

UDC 2022-01	Final Location, Character, and Extent Review Meeting Date: 1/18/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries
Project Description	Final location, character, and extent review of North Avenue Branch Public Library site improvements.
Project Location	
Address: 2901 North Avenue	
Property Owner: City of Richmond	
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes to alter the landscape and hardscape at the North Avenue Branch Public Library.</p> <p>Alterations include the removal of invasive plant species and dead or diseased plantings. New trees, shrubs and grasses will be planted</p> <p>Installation of retention basins and conveyance channels containing ornamental stone to capture stormwater runoff.</p>	
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com , (804) 646-6569
Previous Reviews	<p>This application was previously reviewed and approved by the Urban Design Committee and the Planning Commission in December 2020, with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Eastern Redbud proposed for removal at the north end of the parking lot be reassessed for overall health, and if the tree is found to be healthy it be retained, along with the other existing redbuds in this location, or safely moved to another location on the site using the proper techniques for transplanting. - To ensure compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines, the applicant confirm with staff that the mature height and spacing of proposed plantings will not interfere with overhead wires and existing lighting.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If funding is available, the applicant coordinate the reconfiguration of the existing city sidewalk along Essex Street with the City of Richmond's Department of Public Works. <p>The application is being resubmitted for review due to several changes to the plan that were made since the last submission. Changes made include the elimination of the concrete retaining wall around the main bioretention basin for cost reduction purposes, addition of another funding source, and the addition of an RVA Bike Share Station.</p>
Conditions for Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The maintenance manual for the site be revised to specify that only organic, chemical-free pesticides and weed control be utilized on the entire site, and not just the Bee Zones. -

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in North Richmond just south of the North Avenue and Brookland Park Boulevard intersection. The site is bordered by North Avenue to the west, Essex Street to the south, and a public alley to the east. The property is zoned UB-PE7, Urban Business District-Parking Exempt. The site is approximately 0.60 acres.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter
Project Description	<p>The purpose of the project is to develop a series of bio retention basins designed to Virginia Department of Environmental Quality standards to infiltrate storm water discharge from the roof of the library, and develop an ecologically responsible landscape that can be used as an educational tool.</p> <p>Impervious area and invasive species will be removed with native plants added as safety and space allow. The project strives to be become a model of sustainable site development with educational components accomplished through the use of interpretive signage, special library programs, and community involvement and support. The design was informed by public charrettes and the collaborative project management effort of Richmond Public Library staff, RVAH2O, The Office of Equitable Transit and Mobility, The James River Association, and Four Winds Design.</p> <p>This project is funded by a 319H grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (\$34,356.00), the City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities - Stormwater Utility (\$50,000.00), Virginia Department of Forestry (trees and shrubs), the City of Richmond Department of Public Works Office of Equitable Transit and Mobility (bike share station); and supported by staff hours from The James River Association and RVAH2O with service donations from Four Winds Design.</p> <p>Construction is scheduled to begin in January of 2022. Demolition and site infrastructure, bike share station, and bio retention basins will all be accomplished with independent contractors. Volunteers will be used for planting, mulching, and clean-up.</p> <p>A Landscape Operations & Maintenance Manual approved by approved by City Council for all library branches under redevelopment has been included as part of the submitted application. This manual will be made more site specific to include treatment of specific plant species after installation.</p>

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan	<p><i>Implement green infrastructure measures and other measures outlined in RVA H2O Plan and in the Clean Water Goal of Richmond 300 to improve water quality and reduce stormwater runoff (Goal 16)</i></p> <p><i>Objective 16.4 Increase green stormwater infrastructure throughout the city, prioritizing areas with a high heat vulnerability index score.</i></p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way; explore creating green infrastructure guidelines within the Better Streets manual.</i></p> <p><i>c. Continue funding programs to plant trees and educate public on importance of trees.</i></p>	<p>The scope of this project speaks to many of the goals of the Richmond 300 Master Plan pertaining to green stormwater infrastructure. This plan will implement green infrastructure in the form of swales and rain gardens in the public right-of-way and public property.</p>
Urban Design Guidelines		
Environment, Species Diversity, Pg.10	<p><i>Landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings. Shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting.</i></p>	<p>The plan proposes a variety of species including large trees, shrubs and bushes, and ground covers. Large trees are proposed to be planted in the existing tree wells will produce shade, especially once mature.</p>
Environment, Plant Selection Pg.10	<p><i>Plant materials should be adaptable to existing soils, climatic and lighting conditions, and be disease resistant. Native plant species are encouraged, but not required.</i></p>	<p>The project proposes a variety of species. The Applicant has stated that the soil at each site has been studied to determine type and quality, which has informed the selection of plantings at each project site.</p>
Environment, Maintenance, Pg. 10	<p><i>Maintenance should be considered when selecting landscaping materials. Significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained. Trees on public and private property should be</i></p>	<p>There are existing trees on the site that are not being proposed for removal, but instead will be preserved. In the previous review in December 2020, there was an existing Eastern Redbud at the north end of the parking lot</p>

	<i>appropriately trimmed around utility lines. Hazardous dead or dying trees on City-owned property should be removed and replaced. .</i>	that proposed for removal. However, that tree is now proposed to be retained. Invasive and diseased plantings will be removed.
Environment, Design, pg. 11	<i>Regarding green infrastructure, the guidelines state that “Site development should take measures towards conservation of natural resources. Where feasible, developments should also promote impact minimization techniques through alternative storm water management practices.</i>	The purpose of the project is to re-engineer the landscaping of the Richmond Public Library -North Avenue Branch to include green infrastructure such as retention basins, rain gardens, swales, and native plantings, as means of managing stormwater runoff on site.
Community Character, Plant Selection, pg. 21	<i>Street tree species should be selected for performance in urban situations. For example, the root structure should be conducive to urban conditions. The height of the tree at maturity should respect any overhead utility lines. The tree’s branching tendency and leaf size should be considered. Tree species that drop berries or fruit or have thorns are generally not recommended.</i>	There are six Sweet Bay Magnolias being proposed within the existing tree wells, which should not grow to a mature height that will impact existing overhead utilities.