



City of Richmond

900 East Broad Street
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Richmond, VA 23219
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Meeting Minutes - Draft Urban Design Committee

Thursday, January 7, 2016

10:00 AM

5th Floor Conference Room of City Hall

Call to Order

Ms. Almond called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Roll Call

Present: 8 - Chair Andrea Almond, Chris Arias, Doug Cole, Andrew P. Gould, Giles Harnsberger, Vice Chair Andrea Levine, Jill Nolt and Robert Smith

Absent: 1 - Bryan Green

Staff Present

Mr. Jeff Eastman, PDR
Ms. Tara Ross, PDR
Mr. Mark Olinger, PDR

Others Present

Others Present

Mr. Jeff Lee, Superior Signs
Mr. Mike Sawyer, DPW
Ms. Diane Linderman, VHB
Mr. Paul Moyer, VHB
Mr. Jakob Helmboldt, City Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Coordinator
Dr. Norm Merrifield, DPRCF
Mr. Heywood Harrison, DPRCF
Mr. Ted Elmore
Ms. Emily Thomason
Mr. Nicholas Smith
Mr. Ned Oliver, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Ms. Kerri O'Brien, WRIC

Approval of Minutes

[ID 2016-01](#) Minutes of the Regular Meeting on December 10, 2015

Attachments: [Minutes of the Regular Meeting on December 10, 2015](#)

Secretary's Report

Mr. Eastman stated that at their meeting on December 21, the Planning Commission approved the Belmont/W. Belmont roundabout, Fire Station #20 addition, Screen and Grit building at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Albert Hill Middle School sign and Jones Elementary modular classrooms on the Consent agenda with UDC recommendations. Mr. Eastman also stated that Mr. Cole's second term on the Planning Commission, and thus also the UDC would be expiring in March, and that the

Planning Commission selected Mr. Vik Murthy to take his seat on the UDC. Mr. Eastman stated that Mr. Murthy would need to be formally appointed by City Council and until that time Mr. Cole would continue to serve.

Mr. Eastman noted that the applicant for the Albert Hill Middle School had made some alterations to the conceptual plans and had distributed them to the Committee. The Committee was pleased with the alterations to the plan and indicated to the applicant that he should proceed with the current design. Mr. Arias noted that on the school building the architect used different grouting methods on the brick and that utilizing the same method on the sign may be desirable.

Consideration of Continuances and Deletions from Agenda

There were no continuances or deletions.

CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items on the Consent Agenda.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. [UDC No. 2016-01](#) Conceptual Location, Character and Extent Review of the Kanawha Plaza Transportation and Pedestrian Access Study

Attachments: [UDC Report to CPC](#)

[Staff report to UDC](#)

[Location Map](#)

[Application & Plans](#)

[Notes and presentation from Emily Thomason](#)

Mr. Olinger stated that there was a lot of discussion about access earlier when they were talking about the Kanawha Plaza improvements and at the end of the budget year the Department of Planning and Development Review had some funding left. Mr. Olinger stated that he thought this would be a great opportunity for Planning and Development Review and Transportation Engineering to take a look at the access. Mr. Olinger stated that there are two items they can look at which are how they can improve the pedestrian and bicycle access to the park once it gets done and stated that second thing is to think a little bit about dragging or expanding the park across the street. Mr. Olinger stated what would be those elements that could be added on the abutting street so that they would have big urban buildings nestled more in a park like setting with transportation improvements that were done. Mr. Olinger stated that they worked with VHB to begin the process of taking a look at what that might be as it relates to pedestrian safety levels of service and urban design aspects. Mr. Olinger stated that they are a little out of sync and stated that they want to have a community meeting prior to coming the Committee which wasn't possible and stated that they are having a meeting on January 19th at the library to solicit comments from the larger community. Mr. Olinger stated that they have done a number of other things to try to get to at least a level of comfort of what they are going to show today and they had some stakeholders which were mostly the large owners around Kanawha Plaza invited to attend field observations and make notes. Mr. Olinger stated that they created a survey and got 233 responses and they have had individual meetings with both RMTA because of the ramping around the plaza and the Federal Reserve. Mr. Olinger stated what they are going to see today is the conceptualization of a series of improvements around the plaza that would go a very long way to drawing it into the larger life of the community

and greatly improvement pedestrian and bicycle access around the site and into the site and at the same time not diminishing peak hour traffic around the site.

Ms. Nolt inquired if they can explain what is happening north of the Federal Reserve kind of midblock south side the street where they are expanding the sidewalk and Mr. Eastman stated that they have a little pull off entry drive and the plans call for the creation of the bump-out and then it will have to continue to allow them access to their entry drive. Ms. Nolt inquired if they had an entrance and exit and Mr. Eastman stated yes. Ms. Nolt inquired what happens between the two and asked if it was all sidewalk or is there a drive lane behind the sidewalk. Ms. Diane Linderman, with VHB, stated that there is a driveway and a narrow concrete sidewalk probably 5' or 6' right on the curve and then a concrete drive which people use as the sidewalk. Ms. Linderman stated that they met with the Federal Reserve and Mr. Olinger participated and they seem interested in working with the city. Ms. Linderman stated that it is not used too often for cars and maybe there is some opportunity for them to work with the City. Ms. Nolt inquired if the driveway was on their property and Ms. Linderman stated yes.

Mr. Cole inquired about 9th and Byrd and stated that they did a really good job eliminating some of the channelized turn lanes but some of them are still there. Mr. Cole stated that the channelized turn lanes are there to get cars through quicker and inquired why they didn't make that straight with right angle turn. Mr. Mike Sawyer, City Transportation Engineer, stated that what they are trying to prevent there because of the buffered bike lane because there are a lot of people making right hand turns and stated that if they eliminate that those right hand turns will be in conflict with the buffered bike lanes. Mr. Sawyer stated that they are trying to get those people out of the way first and stated that the other maneuver that has come up is getting into the parking deck. Mr. Sawyer stated that sometimes they are turning from the actual bike lane and sometimes they are turning from the right most and stated that this lines up so that it happens smoother. Mr. Cole stated that on 7th and Canal it seems dangerous to him because a car can't see a pedestrian crossing and it needs to be safer for pedestrians. Mr. Cole stated that at the tree planting on 9th off of the bridge is beautifully done and then it fizzles out and inquired if they could continue that with smaller trees. Mr. Olinger stated that it is a part of this project and stated that he even mentioned that at the meeting whether there was a way to maintain and express that strong access to open it up it would be nice to carry it through there.

Ms. Almond inquired about the west bound lane headed toward the downtown expressway and stated that it is one lane there where it starts and then it widens to two then crosses the next street and narrows to one to get on the expressway. Ms. Almond inquired why not just have one lane the whole way is and allow more space on the park for parking, access or other things. Mr. Sawyer stated that the with the phasing of the signals it allows for the storage for those people to get on the on ramp and stated that if they didn't have that dual lane right there it would back up traffic. Mr. Sawyer stated that they did a little experiment and they restriped that section between 7th and 8th Street and so people started using that one lane and stated that the traffic actually backed up on 8th Street up to Cary so that is why an additional lane is there.

Mr. Gould inquired about the illumination of Kanawha Plaza and Mr. Eastman stated that the most recent update and stated that the project had been redirected from a Parks project to DPW Capital projects. Mr. Eastman stated that the update from them is that they have an intent to award for a company and that they actually anticipate that construction will begin in January on Phase I and they are continuing to do fundraising so they will do more site grading and do construction on the parts of the plan that has already been approved. Mr. Eastman stated that they still have the stage and the sun shelters to work through and as the funding becomes available they will come in with those extra parts.

Ms. Almond inquired if anything in the plans has changed for value engineering purposes as far as the materials or designs and Mr. Eastman stated not to his knowledge and stated that it has been months since he has approved the plans.

Mr. Gould stated that he knows that a funding request had been made for this project and inquired that they don't know the response or if it will be successful and Mr. Eastman stated yes because the Capital budget process hasn't begun yet. Mr. Gould inquired if the design process will continue to come back for final approval regardless of funding and Mr. Eastman stated yes. Mr. Gould stated that there are a lot of things going on in this area like the park implementation that is being phased and this project the pedestrian improvements and private improvements and stated that it would be nice if they were all coordinated and they could them all in one. Mr. Eastman stated that it could come back for final when it is closer to implementation.

Ms. Harnsberger inquired about the 9th Street Bridge and the median in the center and stated that it seems like the emphasis is obviously on the center of the bridge and inquired why are they putting more pedestrian improvements in the middle of the bridge when the sides could be a more functional way to get runners and cyclist across the bridge. Ms. Linderman introduced Mr. Paul Moyer, Planner with VHB, and stated that they looked at both and stated that they had some options that looked at putting the sidewalk and of course the bike lanes are on the sides and stated that they looked at putting the pedestrians on the sides of the bridge and decided to enhance the center. Ms. Linderman stated that the challenges on the south end of the bridge for the pedestrians and if you put them on the outside crossing the Semmes ramp and stated that they thought this plan makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Moyer stated that they did look at both and stated that normally why you not put the pedestrians on the side of the bridge because people don't want to be in the middle with traffic on both sides. Mr. Moyer stated that bridge because of the connectivity issue on the Southside they decided that it may be best to keep it in the middle and put in some streetscape on both sides of that and really enhance it and make it a gateway and stated that functionally it works better that way. Mr. Harnsberger stated that they did it like that because of the existing condition on the south side and Mr. Moyer stated yes.

Ms. Linderman stated that they did meet with the BridgePark folks and they are here today and their vision for the BridgePark talks about having something on the west side and their plans enhances the side of the bridge for pedestrians and extending the sidewalk along this way could support the vision. Ms. Linderman stated that when they met with the Federal Reserve and Mr. Olinger they talked about seeing if it was a way of getting access from this level down to the river front area and stated that there will be more conversation with them about that. Ms. Linderman stated that they are creating the sidewalk there which will allow for future plans to happen and stated that it enhances the gateway and at least allows the pedestrian to continue to cross the bridge. Ms. Harnsberger inquired if they knew what the functional history of that raised pedestrian and why would it have been raised from an engineering standpoint and Ms. Linderman stated that she suspects that it is about the ramps and stated that somebody thought they could get the pedestrians out of the movements of traffic and it was designed as a highway and they don't want it to be that any longer. Ms. Linderman stated that they have discussed removing those sign structures as well to help the gateway image and whatever the reason was when VDOT designed the bridge back in the 60's or 70's that wanted to create this high volume, high speed bridge and putting the pedestrians in the middle was the safest place for them.

Mr. Moyer stated that in talking about continuing the gateway north of here is an interesting comment they were struggling with the fact that they can't really put big trees next to the park and with the width of the sidewalks and stated that they will take a closer look at that and see if there is a way to continue the feel of the gateway. Mr.

Moyer stated that they would recommend to encourage them to take down the overhead signs and stated that their goal is to shift the balance because it is a car dominated place and trying to raise the profile of the pedestrian environment.

Mr. Olinger stated that the idea has been that it feels like a highway interchange in the middle of the City and they would like to push the interchange out and make this feel more like a city and not a highway.

Ms. Linderman stated that they have added sidewalks along the edges and stated that they struggled with the width they had and the reduction of lanes and stated that they wanted to accommodate the pedestrian traffic along that edge as priority.

Ms. Almond stated that the math behind this from an engineer perspective support further lane reduction and Ms. Linderman stated that they counted traffic and did sensitivity testing when they were working on the plan and they maintained an acceptable levels of service with a five year projection of traffic and they are very comfortable with the recommendations that they have made and it is a good balance for the improvements for pedestrians and bicycles as well as maintaining positive circulation for vehicles. Ms. Linderman stated that they don't want to create congestion which is only going to make drivers behave badly and they tried to do a really good balance between accommodating vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Ms. Levine stated that another thing that she would like to see in the study is existing lighting and proposed lighting because this is going to be pedestrian friendly and she wants cohesiveness of how they are going to be handling the tree wells and trash cans and anything else that might come into play with this plan. Ms. Levine stated that this also goes into connectivity with possibly Bridge Park and other areas as well.

Ms. Nolt stated that the section along Byrd Street between the entry and the exit has a really wide broad sidewalk and stated that she is wondering while dialoging with the Federal Reserve and if they don't want a high volume of pedestrian traffic on their side of the block if they could encourage the pedestrians to get over to Kanawha Plaza they could have a wide sidewalk on the north side and do some additional plantings. Ms. Linderman stated that they are open to suggestions.

Public Comment

Ms. Emily Thomason stated that she really likes the improvements for pedestrians but she is a little concerned about the consideration given for bike access. Ms. Thomason made a presentation to the Committee.

Mr. Arias stated that it is worthwhile for them to reconsider the bike traffic and the plan and that he likes the idea of cars buffering traffic and balancing the safety for cars and bikes.

Ms. Almond inquired what bike advocacy people did they work with and Mr. Jake Helmboldt, City Pedestrian Bicycle and Trails Coordinator, stated that this is a conceptual plan and they did this as safety assessment and it was a multi-profession look at the issues. Mr. Helmboldt stated that speaking in terms of the bike/ped advocate they met with Mr. Hepp-Buchanan with Bike Walk RVA, who stated that he largely likes this and Mr. John Bolocek, the State Bike/Ped Coordinator and they are both on the Highway Safety Commission and they have both expressed their support with the improvements. Mr. Helmboldt stated that once they get into the fine details of the actual design process that is when they start getting into the detailed conversations. Mr. Helmboldt stated that they are aware of some of the issues that they have right now and they striped those buffered bike lanes on Manchester Bridge in September and they are seeing some of the driver behavior issues primarily during peak hours. Mr. Helmboldt

stated that they know there are some things they need to tweak at those intersections to improve and make sure people aren't driving in them. Mr. Helmboldt stated that with respect to some of the turning movements like at Byrd Street and stated that thing that they have to remember is that they are trading different conflict points and inquired where do they want the conflict to occur and stated that when you have a high volume of turning vehicles and a high volume of pedestrian's and bicycles moving through the intersection there will become conflict points. Mr. Helmboldt stated that they looked at the best way to mitigate for all of that and stated that the design there is actually better because you eliminate a lot of the conditions that are really detrimental and stated that now high speed vehicle at that turn lane now is over 20ft wide and is virtually 2 lanes with huge radius. Mr. Jake stated that where they are crossing now they can't even see vehicles approaching there squares everything up because it is signal controlled and stated are a lot of different details they have to weigh into and stated that they when the get into the specific details of planning they will take a close look at those details.

Mr. Gould stated that they should add a condition that talks about the presentation that they just saw and see if there is a way in which the design team could incorporate or consider that suggestion that were made.

Ms. Almond stated that they are saying that it seems like there is some consideration for north south bike access but there is no east west access considered in these plans to make that connection.

Ms. Harnsberger stated that she understands with Mr. Helmboldt was saying about this being a broad concept plan and she thinks Ms. Thomason's presentation does a lot to help do the leg work of fine tuning and coming up with some structural pieces that are going to better protect everybody and reduce those conflict points. Ms. Harnsberger stated that she is thrilled to see that the city is looking at lane reduction around Kanawha Plaza and it is going to do so much for this park and she applauds the overall effort and thinks it supports the longer term vision and aligns everything up really nicely.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Cole, that this Location, Character and Extent Item be recommended for conceptual approval, with the following conditions:

- That the final plans include a landscape plan and schedule indicating plant species, quantity, location and size at the time of installation.
- That every pedestrian crossing in the study area contains ladder-style crosswalks and a pedestrian countdown signal, the latter with an accessible pedestrian signal (audio component) if an orientation mobility specialist deems it to be necessary.
- That the applicant considers the presentation given by Ms. Emily Thomason considering better bicycle access throughout the project area.
- That the applicant consider elimination or reconfiguration of the channelized turn lanes at the intersections of S. 9th and E. Byrd Streets and S. 7th and E. Canal Streets.
- That the applicant considers plantings in the median of S. 9th Street between E. Byrd and E. Canal Streets.
- That the applicant includes a schedule for streetscape furnishings in the project area.
- That the applicant considers a better visual link between the Federal Reserve Bank and Kanawha Plaza.

The item was forwarded to the City Planning Commission for their meeting on January 19, 2016.

Aye: 8 - Almond, Arias, Cole, Gould, Harnsberger, Levine, Nolt and Smith

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Olinger had planned to make a presentation to the Committee on the Broad & E. Main Street Corridor Plan but was unable to do so due to a scheduling conflict.

[ID 2015-022](#) Discussion on revising the 1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines

Attachments: [1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines](#)

Adjournment

Ms. Almond adjourned the meeting at 11:22 p.m.