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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: November 8, 2018  
RE: **VCU Front Doors - Final review of Streetscape Encroachments; S. Linden Street and W. Main Street intersection; UDC 2018-41**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Keith Van Inwegen, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

**II. LOCATION**

City right-of-way at the intersection of S. Linden and W. Main Streets.

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for review of streetscape encroachments into the City right-of-way at the intersection of S. Linden and W. Main Streets.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed modifications at the intersection of S. Linden and W. Main Streets attempt to create a clear, visible pedestrian crossing using traffic calming techniques, and a larger queuing space for pedestrians as they wait to cross the street. The modifications will also include pedestrian amenities such as café tables, benches, seatwalls, trash receptacles, plantings, and campus signage.

This project further speaks to enhancements that align with the systems-based approach for the city's Vision Zero effort, an initiative to eliminate traffic fatalities for all travel modes.

Therefore, Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Department of Public Works approve the final design as submitted.

**Staff Contacts:**

Josh Son, (804) 646-3741 // [joshua.son@richmondgov.com](mailto:joshua.son@richmondgov.com)

Alex Dandridge, (804) 646-6569 // [alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com](mailto:alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com)

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject right-of-way is located at the intersection of S. Linden and W. Main Streets and is in the vicinity of the Virginia Commonwealth University Monroe Park Campus. The right-of-way is surrounded by Temple and Oliver Halls to the south, and Harris Hall and the University Student Commons to the north. The surrounding area lies within the R-53 (Multi-Family Residential) zoning district.

Within the project boundaries, S. Linden Street is a former vehicular road that has been bricked in as a pedestrian-only pathway running north/south through

the VCU Campus. W. Main Street at this location is a four lane, one-way, vehicular road running east/west. The outermost lanes on the north and south sides of W. Main Street are reserved for parking, which often goes unutilized. Parking is restricted in the intersection.

**b. Scope of Review**

The intersection at Main and Linden Streets is to be renovated to provide a clear, visible pedestrian crossing and connect the existing pedestrian corridor that runs to the north and south of the intersection. Traffic calming techniques will be implemented to slow approaching traffic and clearly communicate the pedestrian crossing to oncoming drivers. As part of the project, the areas on VCU property will also be renovated to create larger queuing spaces as pedestrians wait to cross the street, as well as social gathering spaces with pedestrian amenities such as café tables, benches, seatwalls, trash receptacles, plantings and campus signage. There will be no changes to existing street lights, vehicular traffic signals or pedestrian crossing signals. The City owns the rights-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of “encroachments.”

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**

Streetscape encroachments for Linden Street between Floyd and Grove Streets (UDC 2016-20) were reviewed at the regular June 2016 meeting of the UDC. The committee recommended that the project be approved by the Director of Public Works with the following conditions:

- If the project uses LEED lighting that it will be 3000k color temperature.

The Narrowing of Linden Street between Floyd and Grove Streets (UDC 2016-21) was reviewed for Location, Character, and Extent at the regular June 2016 meeting of the UDC. During this meeting the Committee raised questions about the level of student engagement in the planning process. In addition, one member had concerns about the raised traffic table at the intersection of Floyd and Linden Streets, claiming that it created a “too pedestrianized space, not creating clear crossing points.” The UDC recommended that the project be approved.

Streetscape encroachments at 601 W. Main Street (UDC 2018-22) were reviewed at the regular June 2018 meeting of the UDC. The project was moved to the consent agenda and the Committee recommended that the project be approved by the Director of Public Works with the following conditions:

- To retain the existing trees along Belvidere St.
- To increase the urban tree canopy where possible.

**d. Project Description**

As part of Virginia Commonwealth University’s (VCU) ONE VCU Master Plan Process, this project was identified as a “Front Door” to campus, meaning that

the listed modifications to this intersection that are being proposed will enhance campus identity and address the need for increased pedestrian safety and traffic calming.

The proposed design includes traffic calming elements to reduce the speed of westbound vehicular traffic on Main Street, while also providing visual cues to drivers to aid in recognizing the heavily-used pedestrian crossing. Currently, cars are restricted from parking in the north or south lanes at the intersection. As a result, pedestrians often step into the roadway to observe oncoming traffic whose line-of-sight is blocked by the adjacent parked cars. The design proposes the removal of the unused north and south lanes within the intersection, and to reclaim this space by extending the sidewalk and corresponding roadway curbing.

Brick paving is proposed to accent the ground plane and integrate with the adjacent plaza. Within the roadway, the existing asphalt is to be removed and replaced with heavy-duty brick pavers on concrete subbase within the enlarged crosswalk that aligns with the pedestrian corridors to the north and south.

On the edge of the crosswalk zone, streetscape chokers reduce the pedestrian crossing distance and alert approaching drivers of the pedestrian zone. The chokers will be planted to soften the intersection and clearly identify the pedestrian crossing zone. The plantings will be less than 30" in height to maintain important sightlines for oncoming traffic. At the western chokers where there are no sight-line restrictions, small columnar deciduous flowering trees are proposed to enhance the streetscape experience. New asphalt is proposed on either side of the brick crossing zone, between the chokers, where reflective thermoplastic striping will alert drivers with common visual cues indicating a pedestrian crosswalk.

The project team met with representatives from Public Works and the Traffic Engineering department, as well as the City's Bicycle Coordinator, to review the general approach to the project and understand the City's typical approach for streetscape improvements.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject right-of-way is located in the VCU & Downtown Neighborhoods Focus Area, as defined by the 2009 Downtown Master Plan, which designates the area as being part of the Urban Center area. Virginia Commonwealth University has a significant presence in Downtown. One of the recommendations specific to the project area is that, "The pedestrian character, college atmosphere, and security of the campus should be protected".

The subject right-of-way is in alignment with Vision Zero, a plan that was adopted by the City of Richmond in 2017 to reduce the number of fatal crashes on Richmond Streets. The plan identifies the street network around VCU as a "High Injury Street Network", meaning a high percentage of the Richmond's pedestrian related crashes since 2010 have occurred here. Vision Zero promotes the practice of "lead roadway design that prioritizes safety" (page 3). Vision Zero seeks to "implement safety treatments on the high injury street network" like applying "pedestrian crossing treatments" (page 16).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines states “curb cuts for handicapped accessibility should be located at intersections” (page 3) and that “the selection of appropriate paving materials should be based upon the desired visual image, compatibility with adjacent paving materials, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, and cost” (page 3). The Guidelines further note that “simpler paving designs are more compatible with diverse building styles and better unify the various design elements found on City streets” (page 3). The Guidelines also note that “existing granite curbing should be retained” and that “the number, size and location of curb cuts should be examined for potential conflicts with pedestrian and vehicular circulation” (page 4). Lastly, the Guidelines state that “entrances and pedestrian walkways should enhance the streetscape and delineate an edge between pedestrian walkways and the street” (page 20).

**VI. ATTACHMENTS**

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