



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: May 9, 2017
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent review of an amendment to the approved Maggie Walker Plaza, 98 W. Broad St.; UDC No. 2017-14**

I. APPLICANT

Mark A. Olinger, Department of Planning and Development Review

II. LOCATION

98 W. Broad St.

Property Owner:

CITY OF RICHMOND ROW – PUBLIC WORKS

III. PURPOSE

The application is for review of an amendment to the approved plaza and amenities commemorating Maggie L. Walker.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The proposed amendment to permit the removal of three (3) benches along Brook Rd. prevents potential maintenance and safety issues; allows for easier pedestrian flow; and will not impact the integrity of the design nor the function of the plaza.

Staff finds that the amendment will have a minimal effect on the overall character of the plaza. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend approval for the amendment with the following considerations:

- That the applicant review and study the use of the space within the plaza for six months to a year following the completion of the plaza to consider the feasibility of programming some, or all, of the benches back into the plaza.

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The site consists of a triangular parcel bounded by N. Adams St, W. Broad St, and Brook Rd. that is owned by the Department of Public Works as part of City right-of-way, as well as the road bed of Brook Rd between W. Broad St. and N. Adams St. In December 2015, the Planning Commission and then City Council passed Ord. 2015-251-245 to close the vehicular travel a portion of Brook Rd located between W. Broad St. and N. Adams St. for the purpose of creating an urban plaza as part of a public art project.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as a public square and park under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

At their February 16, 2016, meeting, the Planning Commission resolved that the Public Art Commission is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the design and location of the public art commemorating Maggie L. Walker and the Urban Design Committee is the appropriate body to advise the Commission on the location, character, and extent of the public plaza surrounding the art. The motion carried unanimously.

At their July 18, 2016, meeting, the Planning Commission granted final approval for the plaza with the following conditions:

- That the applicant relocate trash cans so that there is an adequate buffer distance to seating areas.
- That the applicant consider other plantings within the beds to provide more seasonal color, variety, and contrast

As well as the following recommendations suggested by the Urban Design Committee:

- That the Willow Oaks be replaced with a more medium-sized tree such as an Everclear or Box Elm
- That the Honeylocust be increased in size to a 4 inch caliper tree
- That recycling bins be included in the plan
- That the benches, trash cans, and recycling bin elements be more representative of the cast-iron style of Jackson Ward
- That the Hanover lantern streetlights have an opaque top for light cutoff purposes
- That the dedication and seating walls be changed to the grey granite instead of green

The motion carried unanimously.

In the early spring of 2017, upon final lay-out of three (3) benches against buildings along Brook Road, questions arose from the property owners about potential maintenance and safety concerns related to their placement.

A meeting was convened by Councilwoman Gray in mid-March to review the location of the benches and to see what the options might be to address those issues.

Following discussion with the building owners and after extensive site review, City staff have come to the following conclusions:

1. Keeping the benches where they are on the plans does create potential maintenance and safety issues
2. Moving the benches elsewhere on the site creates pedestrian flow issues as revised locations would negatively affect effective sidewalk width for walking around, and through, the site.
3. There was significant effort made to create a coherent design intent in the Plaza. Moving the benches into the larger plaza area affected the feel and function of the space

4. The three (3) benches would accommodate a relatively small number of users at any one time (6-9 at most). The seating areas within the Plaza will hold a significant number of people
5. The benches are not integral to the design or function of the larger plaza

c. UDC Review History

See **Scope of Review** (above).

d. Project Description

The intent of the amendment is for the permitted removal of three (3) benches from the approved plan.

e. Master Plan

The 2009 Downtown Plan identified this as part of an Urban Center Area. The Downtown Plan also contains a number of neighborhood-specific recommendations to “celebrate and showcase history with streetscape improvements and signage” (pg. 4.10). These include recommendations that “the historic African American flavor of Jackson Ward be maintained and celebrated...with monuments to important figures in Jackson Ward’s development” (pg. 4.10). Additionally, the plan recommends that “in order to promote Broad Street as a local and regional destination, it is essential that its history and cultural institutions be promoted and that a system of gateways and memorable intersections are created along the street” that make “clear-connections between Broad Street and its neighbors, particularly Jackson Ward (pg. 4.8)

The site is part a National Register Historic District as well as the Broad Street City Old & Historic District.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The 1992 Broad Street Streetscape Design Guidelines, which were adopted by the UDC and have guided streetscape and public realm investment in the area over the last few decades, identify the site as an important Gateway/Key Intersection and have the following recommendations: “Adams Street Triangle – A similar opportunity exists at Adams and Broad with a view of the columns of the former Second Baptist Church to the south and another church on Marshall to the north. Although recently improved by the City with the addition of a live oak, the triangle represents a future opportunity for a small park, particularly if Brook Road between Adams and Broad was closed and restored as a pedestrian space along with the adjacent Northern triangle. This triangle is historically important as the intersection of a major north-south route (Brook Road) with Broad, and as such, historically had been considered as a natural location for statuary” (pg. 8).

The Urban Design Guidelines have this to say about public plazas: “The design of such plazas should avoid large changes in grade from the street. Plazas should provide a pleasant transitional environment for pedestrians from the street to the building(s) it serves. Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces. Adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should also be provided in the design of plazas.” (pg. 14).

Additionally, “new development should provide sidewalks along streets where there are currently no sidewalks or sidewalks in disrepair” (page 4) and that “trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months” (page 25).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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