



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: October 20, 2014
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of modifications to Monument Avenue at its intersection with N. Allen Avenue**

I. APPLICANT

Tom Flynn, Department of Public Works, Traffic Engineering Division

II. LOCATION

Intersection of Monument Avenue and N. Allen Avenue

Property Owners:

City of Richmond

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of modifications to the intersection of Monument Avenue with N. Allen Avenue.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This project involves proposed modifications to the intersection of Monument Avenue and N. Allen Avenue to address traffic problems and pedestrian safety. The modifications are designed to provide a safe location for pedestrians to cross, to reduce the crossing distance, to slow vehicle speeds in the roundabout and to reduce driver confusion in terms of navigating the roundabout and staying in the correct travel lane. Over the last several months, the applicant has discussed the proposal with the Monument Avenue Preservation Society, the Fan District Association, and the West Grace Street Association, and the applicant's narrative indicates that the plans have the support of all three of these civic associations.

Overall, the Committee finds that the proposed modifications will ease the confusion in navigating the roundabout. The Committee notes that with the retention of the existing curb and gutter pan, the original design can be restored in the future should that be desired. The Committee is very supportive of the proposal to add pedestrian crosswalks and of the reduction in crossing distances, however, the Committee would prefer that all of the crosswalks are situated in the same orientation relative to the circle. The western crosswalk is set at an odd angle that throws off the symmetry of the roundabout.

The Committee is supportive of the proposal to plant no trees in the extended medians, and finds that this open space in the median extension will allow for sight lines to the Lee monument while simultaneously increasing visibility for vehicles entering into the traffic circulating in the roundabout. The Committee received recommendations from the Commission of Architectural Review (CAR) in their role as an advisory body to "the city council, the mayor, the chief administrative officer, the planning commission, the board of zoning appeals, property owners and individuals in matters involving historic resources relating to appropriate land use, zoning, and other issues", and took these recommendations into consideration.

The Committee finds the proposal consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan and the Urban Design Guidelines. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following conditions:

- That the Committee is not in favor, at the present time, of providing structured pedestrian access to the central island of the roundabout.
- That the innermost eastbound and westbound lanes on Monument Avenue are marked with the “fish hook” arrows on the approach to the roundabout.
- That the location and orientation of the proposed crosswalks respect the symmetry of the original plan and strong geometrical relationship to the central circle; specifically, that the applicant relocate the sidewalk in the northwestern curb extension island as far east as possible to provide symmetry.

Staff Contact:

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The intersection of Monument Avenue with N. Allen Avenue is located in the R-6 (Single-family attached residential) zoning district. Portions of Monument Avenue, including the subject intersection, are designated as being a part of a City Old & Historic District. Portions of Monument Avenue are also on the National Register of Historic Places as the Monument Avenue Historic District. The corridor from the 1200 block of W. Franklin Street to the 3300 block of Monument Avenue, which includes the subject intersection, is also designated as a National Historic Landmark District.

The Statement of Significance for the Landmark District notes that Monument Avenue was proposed in 1887 both to provide an appropriate setting for a major memorial to Robert E. Lee and to encourage residential development west of downtown Richmond. The Lee Monument found its home in the circle at the subject intersection in 1890. Created by French sculptor Antonin Mercié, this monument has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form notes that the monument features a 21’ tall bronze statue atop a granite pedestal 40’ in height. It was the first, and is also the largest of all the statues on Monument Avenue.

Monument Avenue's 130’ wide right-of-way contains a 40’ tree-lined median in the center with adjacent 36’ wide, two-lane streets and 10’ wide tree-lined sidewalks on each side. Interspersed at key cross streets are six memorials that pay tribute to the past (Civil War General Robert E. Lee and four of his Confederate contemporaries) and to the present (black Richmond native, humanitarian, and tennis champion Arthur Ashe). The land upon which the Lee monument sits is owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The posted speed limit on Monument Avenue is 30mph, with a speed limit of 15mph in the circle. The circle is 200’ in diameter, surrounded by two travel lanes and one on-street parking lane at the outer perimeter.

The properties surrounding the intersection are also located in the R-6 zoning district and are developed with a variety of single-family, two family, and multi-

family buildings. The Orchard House School, a private middle school for girls, is located just north of the intersection on N. Allen Avenue.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed modifications are subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter as a “narrowing of streets”.

c. UDC Review History

Staff was unable to identify any prior projects involving the subject intersection.

d. Project Description

This project involves proposed modifications to the intersection of Monument Avenue and N. Allen Avenue to address traffic problems and pedestrian safety. The modifications are designed to provide a safe location for pedestrians to cross to reduce the crossing distance, to slow vehicle speeds in the roundabout and to reduce driver confusion in terms of navigating the roundabout and staying in the correct travel lane.

To achieve the goals of the project, the plans propose to extend the four intersection medians towards the roundabout. The north and south (N. Allen) medians will be extended 15' from their existing location, and the east and west (Monument) medians will be extended 35' feet from their existing location. The existing curbs and gutter pans on all of the medians will be retained for historical reference, and new concrete curbs will be provided on the extended medians that will blend into the existing curb. The existing curb tops will remain exposed and the existing gutter pans will be covered with soil. The extended medians will be planted with grass and the surface of the extended area will be level with the top of the existing curb and existing grass surface. A 7" wide trench frame with solid black cover will be installed in the extended portion of the median to properly drain the intersection.

The existing intersection has two entry lanes and two exit lanes for both directions along Monument Avenue, and one entry lane and one exit lane for both directions along Allen Avenue. This traffic arrangement will remain unchanged. However, the existing intersection also has two travel lanes striped within the intersection itself by all four medians. This will be modified to a single travel lane at the east and west ends of the roundabout. The north and south ends of the roundabout will remain unchanged with two travel lanes. With the addition of lane arrows that will clearly indicate which lanes to use for through travel or for effecting left turns, this configuration will eliminate existing conflict points.

The extended medians will provide space for the new pedestrian crossings, which will begin at the outer perimeter in curb extension islands that will be installed in the existing parking lane, shortening the crossing distance. All of the islands will have a concrete curb, similar to the medians. The islands will be landscaped with lirioppe (Big Blue variety) and mulched. To maintain the water drainage, the islands will be separated from the existing curb line by 18". Pedestrian access from the existing sidewalk to the island will be flush at-grade via a solid black cover plate over the 18" gutter pan. Each island will contain an ADA-compliant curb ramp with a Colonial Red (maroon) detectable warning surface, which matches existing ramp colors. The pedestrian crosswalks will be

striped on the street surface, and the sidewalk across the islands and extended medians will be composed of concrete. Due to location of the new islands, the existing curb ramps will be demolished and those areas will be replaced with new sidewalk and curb to match the existing. The provision of the curb extension islands will remove a total of 15 on-street parking spaces.

All of the existing cobblestone block in the street surface impacted by the construction work at the extended medians and islands will be salvaged and stored for future use. There is existing ornamental lighting in the area, and no new lighting is proposed as part of this project. As part of the project, the median irrigation lines will be extended on the north, west, and east medians. A new irrigation line will also be installed on the south median to allow for future expansion of the irrigation line to the south.

Signage proposed for the intersection includes yield signs, pedestrian crossing signs, one-way right signs, and keep right chevrons. In an effort to reduce sign clutter, some of the existing signs will be removed, both at the intersection and along all four of the approach legs. The existing surface markings will be removed, and new surface markings at the intersection will include yellow and white lane edge lines, white parallel crosswalk lines, white dashed yield lines, white dashed lane lines in the circulatory portion of the roundabout, and lane designation arrows.

The estimated cost of the project is \$450,000 (\$50,000 for study/design and \$400,000 for construction), with funding provided by the Capital Improvements Program budget and a revenue-sharing stream. Pending all approvals, construction is scheduled to begin in February 2015 and be complete by April 2015.

e. Master Plan

The subject intersection is located in the Near West District as defined by the city-wide 2000-2020 Master Plan, which recommends “Single-family (medium density)” uses for the surrounding properties. The Plan designates Monument Avenue as a Principal Arterial Image Corridor, and states that “Image corridors are key transportation corridors that have the ability to form an impression on travelers passing through the City” (page 110). The Plan goes on to say that “Enhancement of the City’s image corridors conveys a positive impression of the City to encourage visitation and investment” (page 110).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines are very supportive of on-street parking, noting that it “is important for not only providing for some of the parking needs of adjacent uses, but also as a means of defining the character of a corridor or neighborhood” (page 6). The Guidelines go on to say that “on-street parking creates pedestrian activity and provides a buffer between those pedestrians and moving traffic” (page 6).

The Guidelines note that “intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists” (page 7). The Guidelines are supportive of traffic management techniques that slow traffic (page 7) and that add “an aesthetic contribution to the urban character of the neighborhoods in which they are placed” (page 8). In regards to landscaping, the Guidelines note that

“landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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