



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: May 16, 2016
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent Review of Signage for High Water Mark Initiative; UDC 2016-17**

I. APPLICANT

Jonet Prevost-White, Department of Public Utilities

II. LOCATION

Pony Pasture, 6700 Riverside Dr
Brown's Island, 1 Brown's Island
Great Shiplock Park, 2803 Dock St
Plant Zero, 320 Hull St

Property Owner:

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities
Plant Zero: Partners in Art, LLC

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of interpretive and educational signage in a number of locations about historic flooding and future flood risk.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The Urban Design Committee questioned the location of the sign installation at Great Shiplock Park, as the application materials did not clearly show the location. Upon viewing the site on Google Maps view and hearing a description of the site from the applicant, the Committee discussed its appropriateness. The proposed location on Brown's Island is already reserved for signage and circulation egress related to the Potterfield Memorial Bridge, currently under construction, and thus is not an appropriate location for this sign.

The Director raised questions about the design of the High Water Mark sign, which were echoed by the committee, as having too many lines and thus being unclear as a marker of high water. The Committee urged the applicant to simplify this sign, and to pursue backing colors on the signs that would allow them to blend in better with the natural surroundings of their installation locations.

More generally, the Committee wanted more guidance about signage in parks, what will be interpreted, and what the guidance will be on avoiding visual clutter in parks and natural areas. Some Committee members also thought the informational signs were over-crowded with non-specific content, and a template that did not reflect Richmond. The Committee was unclear whether the signs should follow National Park Service standards. The applicant clarified their desire to include information about flood risk immediately, and that the sign design came from FEMA. The applicant could not clarify the size of the type on the sign.

Therefore, Urban Design Committee recommended that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following condition:

- That the applicant work with the Department of Planning & Development Review and Venture Richmond to relocate the proposed sign on Brown's Island so that it does not interfere with signage or circulation for the Potterfield Memorial Bridge or regular event use of Brown's Island.
- And the recommendations: that the applicant use a color other than black or white on the backside of the sign so that they will blend in with their locations when viewed from the other side.
- That the applicant simplify the High Water Mark sign
- That the applicant confirm with Staff the attachment and mounting procedure for the sign

Staff Contact:

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

All of the sites but one are contained within the James River Park system and Richmond's Riverfront and are designated as open space in the Masterplan. The final one, in the Manchester neighborhood, is part of a community arts organization who is supportive of the project and is a prominent anchor in the neighborhood along Hull St.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as "signage" under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

In 2014, the UDC reviewed plans for the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge that include signage.

d. Project Description

This project seeks to install commemorative and interpretive signage at key locations with information about historic flooding in Richmond, specifically the June 1972 record flood as a result of rainfall Hurricane Agnes, including signage that physically represents the height of floodwaters. These signs will also have educational material on flood safety and prevention in the present day. This project, known as the High Water Mark Initiative, is a collaborative effort of many public agencies and non-profit organizations, including: Virginia Silver Jackets, Venture Richmond, the Department of Conservation & Recreation, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Federal Emergency Management Agency High Water Mark Initiative, FEMA Region III, National Weather Service Wakefield, US Geological Survey Water Science Center, and the US Army Corps of Engineers Norfolk District. If the project is approved, Richmond will be the pilot community program for the entire state of Virginia.

The set of signs before the UDC for approval are Phase 1 of the project; future signs in other locations in Richmond would use the same design language and formatting as the Phase 1 proposed signs in order to have a unified project.

Each installation will have three signs together. First, a 30” by 36” sign that commemorates and interprets the high water mark of Hurricane Agnes-drive flooding. The wording and proposed graphic design are included in your packets. This sign also has a series of partner logos and websites included. Second, a 24” by 36” sign that includes a map of Richmond’s Riverfront, designating other High Water Mark signs, and includes educational flood safety information. These two signs are meant to be readable and so will be installed at a human height.

Finally, a 30” by 9” sign with a red background, blue trim, and white lettering saying “HIGH WATER MARK” will be installed at the physical height of the floodwaters at three of the sites. At Pony Pasture, this sign will be installed 13’ high on an emergency call box pole in the parking lot. This site was chosen in collaboration with Nathan Burrell of James River Park System to allow safe pedestrian access to the sign, avoid harming vegetation, and avoid detracting or cluttering other park resources and information.

At the Plant Zero location, the high water mark sign will be 17’ high and mounted on the side of the privately-owned building, with the two interpretive signs stacked vertically below. A letter of permission and support from the property owner is included in the packet.

At Great Shiplock Park, the High Water Mark sign will be installed 17’ high, with the two interpretive signs arrayed horizontally on an existing pole. The packets include a letter of support from the VA Department of Environmental Quality, who have an existing historical staff gage and flood monument at the location.

At Brown’s Island, the applicant is not proposing this High Water Mark sign, just the interpretive signage, as the floodwaters in this area did not arise above sign height. The proposed location has been cleared by Venture Richmond; however, it is in conflict with approved plans for signage and egress to the Potterfield Memorial Bridge, currently under construction.

The sign material substrate will be 6mm Dibond with white surface, black back side, rounded $\frac{3}{4}$ ” corners, anti-graffiti laminate and UV inks.

The City Plans to unveil one of four signs at Pony Pasture on the anniversary date of Hurricane Agnes, Thursday June 23, 2016. Construction will begin immediately after CPC approval for this sign, and then move onto the other installations. The City will incur the estimated \$8,600 cost of the design, signs, and installation, to be reimbursed by FEMA. Later Phases would install more signs in more locations that experienced flooding. If approved, Richmond would be the pilot for this project across the State of Virginia.

e. Master Plan

The subject properties are part of the James River Park System and areas included in the Riverfront Plan and Downtown Plan. The history of flooding and the James River is identified as a character-shaping element in both these plans.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state that “on-site signage [in public parks] should be consistent in style and convenient to visitors, but should be inconspicuously integrated into the overall landscape” (page 8).

ATTACHMENTS

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