



City of Richmond

900 East Broad Street
2nd Floor of City Hall
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov

Meeting Minutes Urban Design Committee

Thursday, March 4, 2021

10:00 AM

This meeting will be held through electronic communication means.

This meeting will be held through electronic communication means pursuant to and in compliance with Ordinance No. 2020-093, adopted April 9, 2020. This meeting will be open to participation through electronic communication means by the public and closed to in-person participation by the public.

Committee members and other staff will participate by teleconference/videoconference via Microsoft Teams.

Special Guidelines for Public Access and Citizen Participation:

Audio of the meeting will be streamed live online at the following web address:

<https://richmondva.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.

To listen to the meeting's live stream at the web address provided, find and click the link that reads, "In Progress" in the farthest right hand column entitled, "Video".

Interested citizens who wish to speak will be given an opportunity to do so by following the instructions below.

[PDRPRES](#) Public Access and Participation Instructions - Urban Design Committee
[2021.092](#)

Attachments: [Public Access and Participation Instructions - Urban Design Committee](#)

Acting Committee Secretary Alex Dandridge read the Virtual Meeting and Public Access/Participation Disclosure Statement:

This meeting of the Urban Design Committee will be held as an electronic meeting pursuant to and in compliance with Ordinance 2020-093. The public has been notified of this meeting and how to participate by a notice via email, and an instruction sheet posted with the agenda on the Legistar website. The public may participate in the meeting by calling *67-804-316-9457 and entering 860 851 961# Public comment will be heard for each item on the agenda after the applicant has responded to staff recommendations. Members of the public will be limited to 3 minutes for their comments.

Committee members are electronically present, none are physically present in City Hall.

We will be conducting a roll call vote with each member stating their name prior to voting.

If you are not speaking, it is asked that you keep your microphone muted to prevent any background noises.

Attendees of this meeting should not utilize the Microsoft Teams chat function, as any conversation within that function is not recorded and cannot become part of the public record of this meeting.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Andrea Almond at 10:00 AM.

Roll Call

Present -- 8 - * Andrew P. Gould, * Emily Smith , * Chair Andrea Almond, * John Reyna, * Charles Woodson, * Andrea Quilici, * Justin Doyle and * Eva Clarke
Absent -- 2 - * Jill Nolt and * Max Hepp-Buchanan

Approval of Minutes

February 4, 2021

The minutes were not reviewed at this time.

Secretary's Report

The Secretary's Report was delivered by Committee Secretary Alex Dandridge.

New Appointments to the Urban Design Committee:

- o Eva Clark – Urban Forestry
- o Justin Doyle – Community Based Organization

The new appointees introduced themselves:

Eva Clark stated that she is a 30-year Richmond resident, and a master gardener with a focus on ecological sustainability, and is excited about many of the changes called for in the new Richmond 300 Master Plan, including increasing pocket parks and the tree canopy and making it a more pedestrian- and bike-friendly city.

Justin Doyle stated that his academic and professional background is in urban and regional planning; he was employed in Henrico County's Department of Community Revitalization and Planning Departments, and currently works for the James River Association and has participated in numerous planning efforts in Richmond, including Richmond Riverfront Plan, James River Park System Master Plan, and the Richmond 300 Master Plan; and is currently involved with the environmental working group for the RVA Green 20/50 planning effort.

Planning Commission Approvals

The Planning Commission approved UDC 2021-03, Conceptual location, character, and extent of the new fire station #12 located at 2223 W. Cary Street.

Gillie's Creek Subcommittee Update

The UDC Gillie's Creek Subcommittee Members Hepp-Buchanan and Nolt met on February 24, 2021, for an informal review with the project team for the Gillie's Creek trail project.

The trail project plans include a pedestrian beacon to enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists at the intersection of the trail with Williamsburg Road.

At UDC members' suggestion, this trail section was revised and moved slightly northward in order to be more convenient for cyclists, improving their access to the beacon and the crosswalk.

UDC members also recommended switching out some of the proposed plants for native species, and the project team was supportive of this.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Dandridge stated that both applications before the Committee at the present meeting were for signs; the first of these had been placed on the Consent Agenda due to staff having no changes to recommend.

Committee Chair Almond asked if any Committee members had objections to the first item remaining on the Consent Agenda.

Mr. Gould asked about the additional sign mentioned in the application, and whether the plan was to replace an existing sign or to modify the original sign and also install an additional sign.

Mr. Dandridge stated that there is an existing monument identification sign at the site, and that the applicants had received approval to add a scrolling LED banner at the bottom this sign, but had changed their plans and were now instead proposing the installation of an additional sign which would be identical to the existing but with an LED message board.

Committee Chair Almond asked if there was any public comment. There was none.

A motion was made by Gould, seconded by Quilici, that the Consent Agenda be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye -- 8 - Andrew P. Gould, Emily Smith, Chair Andrea Almond, John Reyna, Charles Woodson, Andrea Quilici, Justin Doyle and Eva Clarke

1. [UDC 2021-05](#) Final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at River City Middle School; 6300 Hull Street.

Attachments: [UDC Report to CPC](#)
[Staff Report to UDC](#)
[Location & Plans](#)

This Location, Character and Extent Item was recommended for approval to the Planning Commission with the following conditions:

- That the proposed sign does not change messages, produce animations, or flash any more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye -- 8 - Andrew P. Gould, Emily Smith, Chair Andrea Almond, John Reyna, Charles Woodson, Andrea Quilici, Justin Doyle and Eva Clarke

REGULAR AGENDA

2. [UDC 2021-04](#) Final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at Cardinal Elementary School; 1745 Catalina Drive.

Attachments: [UDC Report to CPC](#)
[Staff Report to UDC](#)
[Location & Plans](#)

The application was presented by Mr. Dandridge.

Mr. Dandridge: The subject property, totaling approximately 15 acres, is bound by Cranford Avenue on the south, a residential area to the north, Catalina Drive on the west, and Broad Rock Boulevard on the east.

The property is within a residential neighborhood and mostly surrounded by detached single-family homes. A buffer of trees separates the parcel from properties fronting along Broad Rock Boulevard.

The project involves the construction of a freestanding monument sign with an LED message board at the newly constructed Cardinal Elementary School.

At the January 10th, 2019 meeting of the Urban Design Committee, the Committee reviewed and approved the Final location, character, and extent of the new Cardinal Elementary School to replace the former Greene Elementary school.

Subsequently, the Planning Commission approved the final design with UDC's recommended conditions of approval.

The approved design included the review of a new identification monument sign for the new school. The monument sign being reviewed with this submission is for an additional monument sign that will include an electronic, LED message board.

The monument sign will match the existing monument sign in material and design and will be compatible with the main school building, utilizing the same brick and cast concrete.

The sign, as proposed will be located at the entrance to the parking lot of the school building off of Catalina Drive and will be 5'8" tall, 1'7" wide, and will feature an electronic LED message board and address numbering on each face.

No landscaping is being proposed around the base of the new signage.

Regarding placement and size of signage, the Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations, including that "The message on a sign must be "easy to read and direct" and also "relate to the use of the building" (pg. 23).

The proposed sign will utilize an electronic message board that will have information on upcoming school events and important dates, and will relate to the use of the building.

The Urban Design Guidelines state that the "sign color should relate to and complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent highlights and trim colors" and that, "freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials" (pg. 24).

The proposed monument sign will be constructed using the same color brick and brick pattern as the existing monument sign, and as the newly constructed school building.

The guidelines also state that, illuminated signs "are not appropriate in or adjacent to residential areas" (pg. 24). " While the new proposed sign is located on Richmond Public School's property, the property is surrounded by single-family homes.

Staff finds that the placement of an electronic sign in close proximity to the residential buildings is not compatible with the Urban Design Guidelines, and recommends that the sign be located closer to the main building, set back from the street and far away from the residences on Catalina Drive.

Staff also recommends that the brightness of the electronic sign be programmed to shut off past a certain hour, in order to further reduce potential impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

The monument sign will match the existing monument sign in material and design and will be compatible with the main school building, utilizing the same brick and cast concrete.

The new monument sign will be located at the entrance to the parking lot of the school building off of Catalina Drive. This is a residential area surrounded by single-family detached homes.

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the plan with the following conditions:

The applicant locate the new monument sign and associated LED message board closer to the main school building, further away from the residences along Catalina Drive;

The applicant consider programming a shut-off after a time late in the evening so that the LED message board's illumination does not impact the surrounding residences;

The proposed signs do not change messages, produce animations, or flash any more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Quilici asked for clarification regarding the application's graphic of a sign with a small LED at the bottom.

Mr. Dandridge stated that this was the first design submitted, for the existing sign to have a small LED band added; this approved addition to the existing sign was not in fact added. The currently submitted design is for a separate, additional sign with a full LED display.

Mr. Quilici asked if a sign location had been specified in staff recommendations. Mr. Dandridge stated that he had recommended the sign be closer to the main building, but had not been more specific than that.

Mr. Dandridge stated that there is a fair amount of yard in front of the new building, and that the applicants had expressed willingness to find a location closer to the building, as suggested.

Mr. Michael McIntyre, Project Manager with AECOM, introduced himself and stated that he was representing the City of Richmond and Richmond Public Schools. Mr. McIntyre

stated that some sign locations had been considered but that the applicants would appreciate more guidance.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the applicants would prefer to keep the sign somewhere in the large green area and not the parking lot. Mr. McIntyre stated that, if one of the small islands in the parking area were used, this would necessitate breaking up the existing parking lot in order to provide power to the sign.

Mr. Dandridge asked if Mr. McIntyre was referring to the green area in front of the parking lot, or the green area in front of the main school building.

Mr. McIntyre stated that there is a larger island in front of the main building, where a small traffic loop is located, and that that location is a possibility but that using it would require substantial disruption of existing grounds, including breaking up asphalt in order to bring power to the sign.

Ms. Almond asked who the intended audience for the sign would be, and whether it was intended to be read by passing motorists, or if it was more for students and parents to read as they arrive at and leave the school.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the target audience would include parents and students going to and from school on foot as well as by bus and car, and that the optimal location would be visible to the majority of the population.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the sign would be bilingual, in English and Spanish, which is part of the reason for its large size, that it would be ideal so as to have as much visibility for the sign messages as possible, and that situating the sign too close to the school would tend to decrease the quantity of people seeing it.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the school has learned that paper notifications distributed to students do not tend to be effective.

Ms. Almond asked where parents walking their children to school typically leave them at the building. Mr. McIntyre stated that students are typically walked as far as the school driveway, and that some parents walk them all the way in and some do not.

Ms. Almond asked if the existing sign is on the opposite driveway entrance from the yellow square on the site map. Mr. McIntyre confirmed this.

Mr. Gould asked if the traffic circle was a one-way loop, or could accommodate two-way traffic. Mr. McIntyre stated that it is a one-way loop.

Mr. Gould suggested that the sign could be located on the entrance drive, at the corner of the basketball court, as that would capture all of the vehicles entering the parking lot, and also be a little further from the residences across the street. Mr. Gould stated that this would miss the students dropped off in the bus loop, but those students use a different building entrance.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the LED panel of the sign would be in line with Catalina Drive and thus not facing the houses across the street, and that the sign is equipped with a timer, so that the luminosity can be set to be lower at times as desired.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the location suggested by Mr. Gould would probably work, and would be situated so as to be visible to much of the pedestrian traffic.

Mr. McIntyre stated that moving the sign back 20 feet would be helpful, but that the desired objectives can also be achieved by having the sign not directing light straight at the houses on Catalina Drive, and by using the timer to reduce the lumens.

Mr. Doyle asked what residents on Catalina Drive had said about the project. Mr. Dandridge stated that he had not received any public input from them, but that public notice for projects is sent out to the closest civic association, which in this case does not encompass the residences on Catalina Drive.

Mr. Dandridge did not know what outreach had been done by RPS. Mr. McIntyre stated that he did not know of any specific outreach by RPS to the community.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the school had been operational for a while, with security lighting in the parking lot, and there had been no negative feedback from residents regarding the lighting from the parking area.

Mr. Quilici suggested that existing trees and vegetation in front of the houses could perhaps be helpful in determining a sign location, since the vegetation could be used as screening.

Ms. Almond stated that that section of Catalina Drive has nicely developed trees and vegetation, and that, as long as the sign is turned off at night and the lumens while in operation are not too overwhelming, this would assuage her concerns regarding the sign location.

Mr. Quilici asked if trees on site in the application aerial photo are still extant.

Mr. McIntyre stated that the old-growth trees on the site are slated to remain, but that the dropoff area would be altered as part of the demolition of the old school and remodeling of the site. Where there was a loop behind the old school there is now a playground and green space; and the former location of trailers is now a parking lot; part of the parking lot has been converted to green space and an exit area for the traffic loop.

Committee Chair Almond asked if there was any public comment. There was none.

A motion was made by Committee Member Woodson that this item be approved with staff recommendations.

Mr. Quilici asked if the Committee were suggesting a specific sign location. Mr. Gould stated that, if the Committee is recommending the sign location be changed, the Committee should then provide specific guidance.

Mr. Gould stated that he was not necessarily opposed to the location proposed by the applicants, given that it would capture traffic driving by the site as well as entering the site, and the illumination would not be directly facing the residences on Catalina Drive.

Committee Member Woodson withdrew the motion.

A motion was made by Committee Member Gould that this item be approved as submitted with the addition of the second and third of the staff conditions: that the applicant program a shutoff for the illumination after a certain time in the evening; and that the proposed signs do not change messages, produce animations, or flash any more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye -- 8 - Andrew P. Gould, Emily Smith , Chair Andrea Almond, John Reyna, Charles Woodson, Andrea Quilici, Justin Doyle and Eva Clarke

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Dandridge stated that he had scheduled a meeting with the acting Director of Planning, Development, and Review, Kevin Vonck, to discuss the revised UDC guidelines, to determine what steps to take in order to move forward in light of the many revisions requested by Department of Public Works.

Mr. Dandridge stated that he hoped in the coming months to resume bringing the guidelines revision project before the Committee.

Ms. Almond stated that she was aware that staff is very busy at this time.

Mr. Quilici suggested that the current Guidelines draft be shared with new Committee members Ms. Clark and Mr. Doyle.

Ms. Almond asked if there was any news about applications for the remaining vacant UDC positions. Mr. Dandridge stated that he had not heard any updates, but that he would reach out to the Clerk's office for any news.

Mr. Gould stated this meeting would be his last with the Committee, as his term ends at the end of April 2021, and he would unfortunately have to miss the April meeting. Mr. Gould stated that he had enjoyed his 6 years of service with the Committee. Ms. Almond expressed appreciation for Mr. Gould's service.

Ms. Almond mentioned that Ms. Nolt's last meeting as a UDC member would be the April 2021 meeting, and that one of Committee Member Gould's colleagues was a possible appropriate candidate to replace Mr. Gould's membership.

Adjournment

Committee Chair Andrea Almond adjourned the meeting at 10:44 AM.