



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: June 20, 2016
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent review of VCU Linden Street Narrowing;
UDC No. 2016-21**

I. APPLICANT

Mike Sawyer, Department of Public Works

II. LOCATION

Linden St between Floyd Ave & Grove Ave

Property Owner:

City of Richmond right-of-way

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the location, character, and extent review of the narrowing of the vehicular right-of-way on Linden St between Floyd Ave and Grove Ave. A companion project undergoing encroachment review will create and improved streetscape and pedestrian amenities within the additional pedestrian right-of-way created as a result of this narrowing.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Submitted as well as in person public comment advocated for the complete closure of the road to vehicular traffic to create a fully-pedestrianized space. The UDC had questions about the process, including about how the proposed project, particularly coupled with the streetscape encroachments also under review, matched the VCU Master Plan and what was the level of student engagement. On the narrowing, one member had concerns about the raised speed table at Floyd Ave and Linden St as creating too pedestrianized a space and not creating clear crossing points. The applicant clarified that the existing traffic signals would remain in the proposed project.

This project narrows one block of Linden St to provide better pedestrian and cyclist accommodation and streetscape in a highly multi-modal university setting, while still retaining vehicular access and an open street grid through the area. The project thus meets the extensive guidance of the Downtown Master Plan and Urban Design Guidelines for this area, which declare that the UDC should give priority to the pedestrian over other modes of travel and emphasizes the importance of the street grid to Richmond's urban environment. Additionally, the project has the support of the City's Transportation Engineer. The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval as submitted.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject right-of-way is along Linden Street between Floyd and Grove Avenue and is located in the R-53 (Residential High Density) zoning district in a prominent spot on the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University connecting Cabell Library, a dining hall, and residential, classroom, and cultural spaces. South of Floyd Ave, two blocks of Linden St have been converted to pedestrian areas and have been vacated as vehicular right-of-way; Floyd Ave and Main St still carry east-west traffic through the area.

Linden St in this block currently has one travel lane and two parking lanes, although travel and parking in the area were heavily restricted for over a year during the renovation and expansion of the Cabell Library.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed improvements are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “public way” under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

Over the years, the UDC has reviewed a number of streetscape encroachments for VCU in both campus areas. In 2015, the UDC reviewed a road narrowing & streetscape encroachments for N 12th St on the MCV Campus; this project also has a companion set of streetscape encroachments accompanying it.

d. Project Description

This project involves the narrowing of the curb to curb width of Linden Street as vehicular right of way in order to provide more pedestrian amenities and streetscape improvements.

The narrowing will change the existing curb-to-curb width of Linden St from 30' to 21', with a 14' travel lane, 2' protected area, and a 5' bike lane. The renderings show a concrete barrier at the beginnings of the contraflow bike lane at the speed table on Park Ave as well as on Linden St.

The sidewalks will be 9' minimum clear width on both sides of the street, with a 7' planting bed zone. In some areas they may be wider based on the configuration of the tree planters and the architecture of the Academic Learning Center. The existing sidewalks are 9' on the west side of the street, and

A raised brick paver speed table is proposed at the intersection of Linden and Floyd to help slow traffic consistent with the City's Bike Boulevard improvements on Floyd Ave. The raised brick paver area will consist of two concentric circles with bands of brick planters and concrete. To the north of the intersection, four bollards will delineate the corners; to the south, four planters will demarcate the corners. A landscape bump-out will be on either side of the Floyd Ave speed table.

Walking north on the narrowed Linden St, which in its narrowed form will consist of a one-way southbound vehicular lane, as well as a contraflow bike lane, there is a series of streetscape improvements and furnishings within the widened sidewalk area. These are part of the encroachment package accompanying this proposal.

Another speed table at the corner of Linden St & Grove Ave, consists of five banded concentric circles of brick pavers. Bollards and planters are once again used to prevent vehicular turning movements into pedestrian spaces.

Heading west, Park Avenue will be two-way; Grove Ave will be one way, with back-in 45 degree angle parking on the North side of the street and parallel parking on the Southside of the street. A sidewalk extension and lawn bump-out is proposed at the corner of Harrison and Grove.

e. Master Plan

The subject right-of-way is located in the VCU focus area, as defined in the Downtown Master Plan. A key recommendation in this section of the plan applicable to the proposed improvements is to protect “the pedestrian character, college atmosphere, and security of the campus” (page 4.15). This section further discusses the essential role of urban streets as public spaces, and contains strong language against the further closure of the City’s streets and alleys (page 4.17).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines’ Transportation Section states that “streetscape elements, such as street trees and street lighting, should be used to encourage pedestrian activity” (page 5).

The Guidelines do state that “on street parking, curb parking should be retained wherever possible” while also recognizing that “one of the major objectives stated in the City of Richmond’s Master Plan is to increase street-level pedestrian activity” and that “it is the priority of the UDC to give deference to pedestrians over other modes of travel “(page 4,5). The Guidelines are supportive of bikeways and the installation of bike racks, and state that “roadways with bike routes should be enhanced with street trees or appropriate landscaping” (page 5).

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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