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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: May 5, 2016  
RE: **Final Location, Character, and Extent Review of Improvements to Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range; UDC 2016-08(2)**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Dr. Norman Merrifield, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities  
The First Tee of Richmond & Chesterfield

**II. LOCATION**

Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range, 400 School St, Richmond, VA 23222

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Public Works  
City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character and extent review of improvements to the Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This project continues an existing public-private partnership between the City of Richmond and First Tee to provide recreational amenities at the Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range. Staff finds that the site improvements, which increase accessibility to the site and provide for more gathering spaces, will create a better public space. Staff also finds the plans to replant the Golf Course to be well-considered, and clearly address the Urban Design Committee's recommendations from conceptual review where possible. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval as submitted.

**Staff Contact:**

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The First Tee has a long-term lease dating to 2002 with the City Department of Parks & Recreation to operate the Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range, which includes a six-hole par three course and a driving range.

The driving range abuts residential areas to the south, east, and northeast; including single-family areas zoned R5 as well as the Brookfield Gardens apartment complex, zoned R53. The former Albert V. Norrel Elementary School site (now closed) is to the north, with commercial areas along Chamberlayne Ave to the west.

**b. Scope of Review**

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

**c. UDC Review History**

The UDC reviewed conceptual design at their March 2016 meeting, and discussed the need for the site furnishings to have a common language, and that the benches should fit into the more modern other site furnishings. The Committee also wanted the final plans to include more information about connections between the existing structure and the additions, including whether courtyard areas needed to be asphalt, and what the stormwater control measures and irrigation systems were on site. Planning Commission granted conceptual approval with the UDC recommendation, including considerations:

- That the final plans show locations of site amenities, including fixed signage, benches, and lighting.
- That the final plans include a landscape plan and schedule showing tree species, quantity, location and size at the time of installation.
- That the final plans submit photographs and more in-depth drawings
- That the park benches represent the contemporary design of the structure and surroundings.
- To consider installing rainwater containment systems for irrigation.
- To consider alternate materials for the surface treatment for the proposed asphalt courtyard.

The First Tee Golf Course new construction was first reviewed by the UDC conceptually in September 2001. In November 2002, the UDC recommended approval of a plan that included construction the clubhouse, covered hitting bays, and maintenance bays on the property.

**d. Project Description**

The First Tee is a youth development organization that uses the platform of golf to teach life skills and healthy habits to young people from all economic circumstances. The First Tee leases from the city certain property located at 400 School Street for the operation of the Elson Redmond Memorial Driving Range. The First Tee and the City first entered into this long-term lease agreement in 2002, and the agreement has been subsequently renewed over the last 14 years. The First Tee operates the driving range for use by the general public and also for their own programs. As the organization is seeking approval for the renovations under review, they are also working to extend the terms of their lease. If renovations are approved and the lease is renewed on acceptable terms, the First Tee will construct the proposed renovations at its own cost and expense.

The proposed renovations to the existing Clubhouse will provide better accessibility, more inviting facilities, and an expanded pro shop for the public, while also providing more space for youth-centric facilities by creating a new space within an interactive classroom, golf simulator, and collaborative hangout space. While the interior renovations are not part of UDC review, more images are included in the final plans that show how the proposed site changes will address the existing building.

The site improvements will increase accessibility, demolishing an existing stair in order to accommodate an accessible ramp alongside a new set of stairs. A small existing building and trellis will be demolished to create a new pedestrian entry and courtyard. This courtyard was proposed in conceptual design to be asphalt, which the UDC recommended against; the final designs propose Hanover Asphalt Block pavers that balance a better aesthetic with needed durability and cost-efficiency for the project. The courtyard also now includes two seating walls to provide additional flexible seating. A row of 8 Littleleaf Linden trees will divide the parking lot and the courtyard & clubhouse facility. Sidewalks and steps are proposed to be concrete, while existing asphalt ramps are maintained in that material.

The plans also include the addition of site-unifying elements like signage, benches, railings, and lighting. The plans include samples of proposed elements, including fixed metal signage, benches, cable railings, and LED path-focused lighting. The lighting includes both bollard and ground lighting; the plans indicate their locations. The proposed bench now is a more contemporary aluminum and steel design, consistent with other site elements, in response to the UDC recommendation from conceptual review.

The proposed renovations to the Driving Range and the Course include: re-establishing the turf as 419 Bermuda grass, converting all putting surfaces to Champion Bermuda grass, renovating bunkers, installing 20 artificial tee boxes for all-weather use, enlarging the chipping green, adding landscaping for screening purposes, and adding a separate tee box. There is one area indicated where pavement will be modified.

One of the UDC recommendations from conceptual review was to consider storing rainwater containment systems for irrigation. The applicant has reviewed that consideration and found it unviable for their project. The Clubhouse and Driving Range is located on a former landfill site, and thus subject to limitations on what can be placed underground and at what depth, as well as the need to fortify walls of any surface rainwater ponds. The applicant estimates that pursuing one of these strategies would increase the costs of the project by as much as 50%, and thus is not feasible as part of their proposal.

The First Tee estimates that the renovations to the Clubhouse & Driving Range will cost \$1.1 million; they have obtained the funds for renovations from donations. The project timeline is set to begin in June 2016 and finish by the end of summer 2017.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located in the North Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan places the subject area in the Public and Open Space land use category, with primary uses including publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, and open spaces, among others. The VUU/Chamberlayne Plan, recently adopted as an amendment to the Master Plan, uses the project area as the boundary line of its study area, noting it as public park and open space. That plan recommends that the adjacent neighborhoods continue to be multi-family residential and encourages new development adjacent to the golf course, viewing it as an important amenity. The Master Plan, completed before the full development of the Golf Course, supported golfing as an appropriate use that met neighborhood and recreational needs.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines states that “public parks are integral to the quality of life found in any urban landscape”. In general the plan notes that “successful public parks, both small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort”. The guidelines note that “impacts to the natural landscape should be assessed and should generally be minimized when constructing man-made elements”

In general, the Urban Design Guidelines note that “the quality, design, and condition of all public facilities sets the image of the City, and sends a message about the values placed upon the services provided” (page 13). Building materials should also be “aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance” (page 17).

The subsection on materials continues to say that “building textures and their combinations should add continuity and not conflict or detract from each other” and that “textures should be appropriate for the size, proportion and architectural style of the building and its surroundings” (page 17). Referring to building colors, the Guidelines note that they “should be coordinated and compatible with each other and with adjacent buildings” (page 17).

The Guidelines note that landscape plans should “include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings” and that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10). The Guidelines go on to say that “site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture” (page 10). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to “mimic a site’s predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source” (page 11).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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