



To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: February 19, 2019
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of the Richmond Slave Trail Renovation, 1500 Brander Street; UDC 2019-08**

I. APPLICANTS

George Bolos, Department of Economic Development

II. LOCATION

1500 Brander Street

Property Owner:

The City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities and the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character and extent review of the renovation of the Richmond Slave Trail.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The plan for improvements to the City of Richmond Slave Trail between Ancarrow's Landing and the Floodwall calls for the development of three major components to enhance the overall user experience. A new trailhead/orientation amphitheater will serve as the beginning of the trail and provide a deeper, referential context for guided tours. Improvements to the actual path will consist of the installation of new wooden fencing, the replacement of an existing pedestrian bridge, and a widened path intended to remain natural and authentic. In terms of connectivity to the surrounding community, the plan also proposes to develop a separated, 6' wide bike and pedestrian lane buffered by a 2' wide painted striping on Brander Street.

Staff finds that the proposed improvements are consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan and the Urban Design Guidelines. Therefore, it is Staff's position that the Urban Design Committee should recommend that the Planning Commission grant final approval with the following conditions:

- That the applicant consider using 3000k LED lighting for the LED solar bollards
- That the applicant consider the provision of a light under the I-95 overpass
- That the applicant consider using a more rigid, low maintenance material for the area atop the gabion baskets to prevent damage
- That the applicant utilize materials and detailing that will withstand abuse, maintenance, and weathering overtime

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The project is bordered to the north and east by the James River, Brander Street to the south, and I-95 and the floodwall to the west. The portion of the Slave Trail being reviewed begins at the Ancarrow's Landing Park parking lot and ends at the intersection of Brander Street and the I-95 overpass. The project site is zoned M-2 (Heavy Industrial).

Currently a compact dirt and wooded pathway, the Slave Trail meanders along the south bank of the James River and has several areas for viewing the river along with educational signage explaining the historical significance of the path. Several wooden pedestrian bridges exist along the trail, as well as a single-lane mountain bike trail running parallel to Brander Street. Granite blocks for seating have been placed along certain portions of the trail as well as trail heads displaying the Slave Trail Commission's logo for wayfinding. There are decommissioned train tracks overlaying the trail off and on, and erosion occurring around the site of the proposed amphitheater/trailhead.

Ancarrow's Landing is a segment of the City's James River Park system and is located at the terminus of Brander Street on the south side of the river. The parcels comprising Ancarrow's Landing total 23.7 acres and are located within the M-2 (Heavy Industrial) zoning district. The park is bracketed by the river on the east and the City's Wastewater Treatment Facility on the west. Ancarrow's Landing provides a boat launch, fishing areas, the trailhead for Richmond Slave Trail, open lawn space, and parking areas.

Ancarrow's Landing is named after Newton Ancarrow, an environmentalist who operated a boat yard on this site, the infrastructure of which remains today. Historically, this area provided a docking place for the landing of African slaves and British goods, and the loading of hogsheads of tobacco.

b. Scope of Review

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a "park" in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

Final location, character, and extent review of improvements to Ancarrow's Landing following soil remediation was reviewed at the regular May 2014 meeting of the Urban Design Committee (UDC 2014-17). It was approved at the following regular May 2014 meeting of the City Planning Commission with conditions:

- That, at such time as plans are finalized to locate the Winfree Cottage on the site, said plans will be presented for review by the Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission to ensure that the cottage can be safely located on site with regards to protection from flood.
- That the applicant considers lowering the color temperature of the proposed lights to 3500k or 4100k.

Final location, character, and extent of trail markers along the Richmond Slave Trail was reviewed at the regular March 2013 meeting of the Urban Design

Committee (UDC 2013-10). The UDC recommended that the trail markers be approved with the following conditions:

- That the markers mounted into city sidewalks or other hard surfaces be mounted flush to the walking surface.
- That the support material for the post-mounted markers be the natural patina steel utilized on the interpretive site markers.

Richmond Slave Trail Markers and Lumpkin's Jail Site Landscaping were reviewed at the regular November 2009 meeting of the Urban Design Committee (UDC 2009-33). The UDC recommended approval of the markers along the Slave Trail.

d. Project Description

The Slave Trail Commission was established by Richmond City Council in the 1990's in order to preserve the history of slavery in Richmond. Regarding educational signage, trail heads, and site improvements, the Urban Design Committee has reviewed Slave Trail project applications in 2009 and 2013. Trail heads and educational signage exists today as a response.

Three main components comprise the 2019 improvements to the City of Richmond Slave Trail between Ancarrow's Landing and the Floodwall enclosure at Brander Street west of the I-95/James River Bridge.

The first component will be a new trailhead/amphitheater between the James River and the Ancarrow's Landing parking lot, which will be designed to be the footprint of a transatlantic slave trading ship. It will be terraced on its west side using weathered steel retaining walls and gabion baskets to create seating. On the trailhead's east side will be a "ship-shaped" concrete slab with laser etched symbols on its surface. The weathered steel retaining wall of the terrace will frame the space, creating a gathering spot for visitors and guided tours. The trailhead will be ADA accessible and illuminated by 10 foot solar powered LED bollards.

The second component maintains the route of the Richmond Slave Trail but provides necessary improvements along the trail between Ancarrow's Landing and the I-95/James River Bridge. New wooden fences will be added in locations requested by the owner, and one of the deteriorated pedestrian bridges will be replaced to increase structural integrity. Natural wood mulch will continue as the trail's surface material to maintain the historic experience of walking the trail.

The third component provides directional clarity for multiple users at the area underneath the I-95 bridge overpass at the Brander Street floodwall closure. A 6'-0" wide, clearly marked bike and pedestrian lane buffered by a 2'-0" wide painted striped buffer separates trail users from vehicular traffic on Brander Street. The trail subdivides after the farthest west bridge column to bring pedestrian users onto the existing trail as it enters the wooded area east of the bridge, while pavement markings direct cyclists to the existing bike trail paralleling Brander Street.

e. Master Plan

The subject properties are located in the James River Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, and are designated as being in the Natural

Area, which refers to land “that is untouched by development, and whose ecological features are preserved” (page 3.20).

The Plan notes that the nearby James River is “an invaluable natural resource that adds to the overall health and livelihood of Richmond’s residents, visitors, and workers” (page 4.43). The Plan also states that “In order to draw more people to the riverfront, visual and physical access to the James River needs to be improved and emphasized” (page 4.45).

One of the recommendations of this section of the Plan is to improve wayfinding and accessibility at Ancarrow’s Landing. Specifically, the Plan states that “sufficient parking at the trailhead and a system of buses, trams, or ferries should be provided so that visitors can walk the entirety of the [Slave] trail and have means to return to their cars once finished” (4.51).

Richmond’s Riverfront Plan, adopted by City Council in November 2012, notes that during the planning process, there was discussion of various strategies for future use of Ancarrow’s Landing, including its potential for a boathouse, marina, and bridge to the north bank. “Ultimately,” the Plan notes, “there were few compelling programmatic recommendations beyond improved operations and maintenance” (page 90). The Riverfront Plan also “seeks to enhance those natural and recreational activities that exist” and to widen “the breadth of activities that could occur on the riverfront” (page 15).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines note 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”.

As to landscaping, the Guidelines note that “landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest”. In addition, “landscape plans should include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings” (page 10). The Guidelines also state that “plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas” (page 10).

The Urban Design Guidelines contain several recommendations for signs, at trailheads and elsewhere, including that “a sign’s message should be easy to read and direct” (page 24).

Generally, the Guidelines impart, “sign lettering should be 4” to 14” high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed. One inch should be added to the lettering height for each additional 50’ between the sign and the viewer” (page 24). Guidelines further note that “Maintenance should be considered when selecting landscaping materials” and that “significantly healthy trees should be preserved and maintained” (page 10).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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