



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Planning Commission

UDC 2022-17	Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent Review Meeting Date: 10/03/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Dana Fox, Richmond Public School
Project Description	Conceptual location, character, and extent review of the demolition of an existing and construction of a new high school, sports fields, and site improvements.
Project Location	
Address: 4314 Crutchfield Street	
Property Owner: City of Richmond School Board	
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes to build a new 1800 student high school to replace the existing George Wythe high school. The project will provide parking for buses and staff as well as an athletic field complex. The existing George Wythe high school will be demolished and replaced with athletic field complex once the new high school has been built and occupied.	
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	The Richmond City School Board approved the concept design in August of 2022.
Recommended Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. 2. Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. 3. Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible. 4. Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces. 5. Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible. 6. Staff recommends that the Applicant further improve the architectural façade facing Midlothian Turnpike to reflect the high traffic carried by that right-of-way, for submission of the final Architectural Plans.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Staff recommends that the Applicant show proposed screen wall that shields maintenance areas from view off Midlothian Turnpike on Final Site Plan submission. 8. Staff recommends that the Applicant increase visibility from the street to the proposed basketball court for the submission of the Final Site Plan. 9. Staff recommends that the applicant provide appropriate pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive isles and the parking lot for the submission of the Final Site Plan. 10. Staff recommends that the applicant improve sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area facing Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan. 11. Staff recommends that Applicant improve pedestrian access to the street to the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan. 12. Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to provide and coordinate improvements to the bus stops located adjacent to the site. 13. Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to relocate the existing bus stop locations to better reflect the proposed site layout to avoid vehicle/pedestrian conflicts as well as increased pedestrian connectivity to the site. 14. Applicant to show bike parking located near the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan. 15. Staff recommends that the Applicant consider and detail extreme weather response for final submission.
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Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Northrop neighborhood between Crutchfield Street and Midlothian Turnpike. The site is zoned R-4 - Residential (Single Family), and consists of roughly 27.80 acres. The property currently consists of the existing George Wythe High School and associated sports fields. Residential multi-family uses are located along Crutchfield Road and Midlothian Turnpike, single family is located to the east of the property, and commercial uses are located to the west. In the greater neighborhood, the Midlothian Turnpike Commercial Corridor begins to the west of the site.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to conceptual location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter
Project Description and Analysis	<p>The purpose of the project is to develop a conceptual plan for the construction of a new high school and associated sports fields and site improvements.</p> <p>The project site currently consists of the existing George Wythe High School with a soccer, track, tennis, basketball, and baseball field. The new school is intended to house 1800 students with the potential to increase capacity to 2,000 students. The proposed building will be constructed primarily over the existing sports fields and the existing school will be demolished once that construction is completed. A new tennis, basketball, football, soccer, and baseball field are proposed to be roughly the location of the existing school building. The primary entrance to the proposed building will face Crutchfield, similar to the current building orientation. Bus drop off will be facilitated on the Midlothian Turnpike façade although will be accessed from Crutchfield Road. Vehicle access will occur primarily from Crutchfield Street but a secondary entrance will provide access from Midlothian Turnpike. The primary student drop off and pickup location will be the main entrance along Crutchfield Street during school hours. Afterhours sport drop-off/pickup will be facilitated along the west side of the building, a location near the gym and outdoor sports fields. Visitor parking will be provided near the main entrance.</p> <p>The architecture of the proposed building is adapted from a prototypical school design previously constructed in Chesapeake, VA. The architecture uses red brick, architectural precast concrete,</p>

architectural metal wall panels, and prefinished metal trim as primary materials. The windows will be high performance insulated glazed glass with thermally broken aluminum storefront framing. Massing is spread among several wings of the building, which also increases the exterior wall space for allowing light into the interior. Windows and architectural features such as trim and material changes also reduce large monotonous expanses on the facade. The architecture reflects and highlights the primary entrance on Crutchfield Street and the applicant has added architectural features and landscaping to improve the quality of the façade facing Midlothian Turnpike. Enhanced landscaping is also proposed along Midlothian Turnpike to acknowledge the important nature of that frontage which will also partially soften the view of the proposed building façade. That stated, Staff recommends the applicant provide further improvement to the Midlothian Turnpike façade, to be reviewed during the final review stage. Midlothian Turnpike carries a high traffic volume and even though the building fronts on Crutchfield Street, the building should still present a façade with visual interest and high quality to Midlothian Turnpike.

Staff recommends that the Applicant further improve the architectural façade facing Midlothian Turnpike to reflect the high traffic carried by that right-of-way, for submission of the final Architectural Plans.

The building is serviced by a delivery bay and maintenance area located along Midlothian Turnpike. The applicant has agreed to construct a screen wall and further landscaping to block view of the area from the right-of-way. The wall is shown in renderings but not on the site plan.

Staff recommends that the Applicant show proposed screen wall that shields maintenance areas from view off Midlothian Turnpike on Final Site Plan submission.

The proposed project will include sustainability considerations and the narrative states that the goal is to have the building qualify for LEED Silver. The narrative identifies a lack of space for surface stormwater improvements. Staff encourages the applicant to utilize pervious pavement where feasible, especially in parking spaces – as identified in the Urban Design Guidelines. Staff also encourages the use of solar panels or green roof (or any combination of the two) to meet LEED requirements. The applicant has stated that light colored materials will be used on the roof to reduce heating affect.

Landscaping will use primarily local species and will maintain several existing trees onsite, protected through construction - including a particularly large tree located along Midlothian Turnpike. Landscape buffers consistent with City parking requirements will screen parking areas from the street and surrounding properties. Plantings along the foundation of the building are proved to enhance the base of the building. The applicant has provided a number of trees and other landscaping materials throughout the site, many trees providing opportunities for shade adjacent to the various play fields. Plantings between the propose basketball court and Crutchfield Street may be too numerous and reduce visibility from the street to the court; visibility from the street helping to discourage bad actors and helps to prevent vandalism. Staff has discussed with the Applicant thinning out those plantings or changing species choices to maximize visibility and the Applicant has agreed to provide those changes for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

Staff recommends that the Applicant increase visibility from the street to the proposed basketball court for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

Site improvements will include paved walk paths connecting the proposed school building to the street, and providing circulation internal to the site between school and sports fields. The narrative states these paths will be ADA compliant. There are several instances where walkways cross internal drive isle and pedestrian markings are only shown in one instance on the proposed plans. Staff recommends that similar markings or other pedestrian safety improvements be provided on all crossings.

Staff recommends that the applicant provide appropriate pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross the internal drive isles and parking lot for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

The Applicant has provided landscaping trees for parking islands along the internal access lane most adjacent to the Crutchfield right-of-way. Staff has asked the Applicant to situate these trees within the wells to also double as street trees along the Crutchfield Street sidewalk, shown on the current drawn site plan.

Pedestrian access to the main entrance, which faces Crutchfield Street, is facilitated by paved walkways from Crutchfield, along interior driveway that facilitates student drop off and pick up. The front entrance includes outdoor seating and a canopy structure providing shade and weather cover for waiting students. The applicant has stated that student drop-off/pickup times and the times that teachers are primarily accessing the building do not overlap, so conflicts due to the potentially high

volumes of users, if that were the case, will be limited. The sidewalk for the drop off location, directly in front of the main entrance, is shown on the plans as being not particular deep. This could create crowding issues as walkers and drop-off/pickup users co-mingle at this location.

Staff recommends that the applicant improve sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area facing Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

The main entrance does not provide direct access from the Crutchfield right-of-way. Pedestrians from the street accessing the main entrance must travel toward the edges of the building before reaching the street. Staff would prefer more direct access to the street to further highlight the main entrance, but also to serve pedestrians who access the site from potential bus stop locations in front of the building (see next section). In discussion with the applicant, however, the Applicant has identified safety concerns as pedestrians would have to cross the drop-off/pickup line to reach the street. Staff would like to continue to work with the Applicant to find a solution that meets safety concerns, if a solution is possible.

Staff recommends that Applicant improve pedestrian access to the street from the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

There are three existing bus stops along the Crutchfield Street frontage of the project site. Currently, one of the stops is located directly in front of the entrance to the existing building, providing strong pedestrian access. The two remaining stops are located at the edge of the site and primarily serve sports fields and multifamily residential uses adjacent to the site. The Urban Design Guidelines suggest that improvements be included with ongoing projects such as providing shelters, benches, and sidewalk space and access. The Applicant should work with GRTC to see if any improvements may be included in this project or otherwise coordinated with GRTC. Also, the Applicant should discuss with GRTC relocation of bus stops to better reflect the proposed vehicle entrances and exits for safety reasons as well as pedestrian access to the site. If possible, the stop that currently serves the existing building entrance should be moved to better reflect the proposed new entrance.

Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to provide and coordinate improvements to the bus stops located adjacent to the site.

Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to relocate the existing bus stop locations to better reflect the proposed site layout to avoid vehicle/pedestrian conflicts as well as increased pedestrian connectivity to the site.

The Liaison for Councilmember Stephanie Lynch, 5th District, has asked the Applicant to work with the Department of Public Works to enhance pedestrian safety along the various access routes to the school, but are primarily located off the subject site. Staff strongly supports any efforts to enhance pedestrian safety, but those improvements are not a part of this application.

Bike parking is provided along the Midlothian Turnpike façade near the bus parking area and the Applicant has stated that bike parking will also be provided near the main entrance along Crutchfield Street.

Applicant to show bike parking located near the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.

Outdoor seating is provided between classroom wings, the location providing some shade and protection from wind for users being shielded by the building on three sides. Landscaping is provided adjacent to outdoor seating to enhance user comfort.

Basketball, tennis, track, baseball, soccer, and football fields will be constructed. Bleachers will face the track/soccer/football field, one home and one away. Restrooms, refreshment stand, ticket booth (marked as “T” on the site plan) and maintenance storage are also proposed to service the sports fields. The basketball court will be accessible for community usage and primarily accessed from the Crutchfield Street right-of-way.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	<p><i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i></p> <p><i>Sustainability - City facilities can help showcase green building features.</i></p> <p><i>Thriving Environment: City-owned buildings and land are opportunities for energy retrofits and green infrastructure to further Goals 15 and 16, as well as locations for new parks, urban agriculture, and resiliency hubs to further Goal 17.</i></p>	<p>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</p> <p>The building will be designed to qualify for LEED Silver. Staff recommends the inclusion of solar panels, green roof, and pervious pavement where possible.</p>
	<p>Objective 2.1 - Align new facilities and improve existing City owned facilities.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>f. Implement programs to improve the energy efficiency of City-owned buildings</i></p> <p>Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>c. Link public art with major public facility initiatives (e.g., plazas, buildings, parks, bridges) and expand the definition of public art to include architectural embellishments of buildings, or landscape features.</i></p> <p>Objective 10.4 - Increase the number of low-emission vehicles.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>b. Seek opportunities to install electric charging stations on publicly owned land, balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.</i></p> <p>Objective 15.4 - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.3 - Reduce water consumption by 10% per capita.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.</i></p> <p>Objective 16.4 - Increase green stormwater infrastructure</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way</i></p>	<p>Master Plan Objectives</p> <p>Richmond 300 includes a number of sustainability objectives specifically relating to public facilities and City owned properties. Renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable stormwater management, and sustainable construction should be considered.</p> <p>Zero emission charging stations could be considered for this site.</p> <p>Richmond 300 establishes that City facilities should be considered in larger resiliency efforts. Schools are traditionally considered in municipal resiliency plans as they operate as community centers and conveniently placed municipally owned spaces.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant consider and detail extreme weather response consideration for final submission.</u></p> <p>Landscaping and lighting details will be established at final, but should include sustainability considerations.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</u></p>

	<p>Objective 17.3 Reduce urban heat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight. b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities <p>Objective 17.6 Increase the resiliency of infrastructure and community assets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Increase local renewable energy generation (see Goal 16). h. Identify community facilities to serve as resilience hubs and update systems to be more resilient. <p>Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023. g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife. <p>Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species. 	
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<p>Urban Design Guidelines</p>		
<p>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3</p>	<p><i>The design guidelines suggest compatibility, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, cost, and sustainability be considered when designing pavement areas. Impervious areas should be limited and pervious pavement materials should be introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i></p> <p><i>The design guidelines also require GRTC transit stops to be considered during design and construction and maintained as comfortable, safe, and of quality design.</i></p>	<p>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS</p> <p>Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage; sustainability and compatibility considerations should be included. Significant improvements to the site landscape include stormwater and sustainability considerations.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p> <p>GRTC Transit Stops</p> <p>Three bus stops are located along the Crutchfield Street frontage of the subject site. These stops serve the site as well as surrounding multi-family residential uses.</p>

		<p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to provide and coordinate improvements to the bus stops located adjacent to the site.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC to relocate the existing bus stop locations to better reflect the proposed site layout to avoid vehicle/pedestrian conflicts as well as increased pedestrian connectivity to the site.</u></p>
<p>STREET DESIGN – P.6</p>	<p><i>Intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner.</i></p>	<p>Street Design</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant provide appropriate pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross the internal drive isles and parking lot for the submission of the Final Site Plan.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that Applicant improve pedestrian access to the street from the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.</u></p>
<p>LANDSCAPING – Page 10</p>	<p><i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long term maintenance should be considered.</i></p>	<p>LANDSCAPING</p> <p>Several established trees will be maintained and protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and shade for pedestrians throughout the site.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces.</u></p>
<p>STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT – Page 11</p>	<p><i>Design guidelines encourage use of Low Impact Development design elements that that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, minimize, and detain stormwater runoff are applied to not only open space, but also rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, and sidewalks.</i></p>	<p>STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Information on stormwater strategies is not provided within the application. Stormwater specifics will be finalized at a later stage, but should include low-impact design combined with landscaping to compliment an attractive and accessible outdoor space and public realm. The applicant should consider opportunities for permeable paving in the proposed parking areas and pedestrian paths for the final plan design.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p>
<p>GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES – Page 13</p>	<p><i>Guidelines suggest that buildings should be oriented toward the primary street that borders the site and architecturally acknowledge all adjacent public right-of-ways. A building's entrance should be easily recognizable, at ground level, and appropriately design to accommodate persons of differing mobility levels. Efficiency should be considered when deciding building location and orientation</i></p>	<p>GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES</p> <p>The building is located toward the center of the property between Crutchfield Street and Midlothian Turnpike. Pedestrian and Vehicle access is primarily provided from Crutchfield due to the volumn of traffic along Midlothian Turnpike. The main building entrance faces Cruthfield Street. Requirements for drop-off/pickup circulation makes it difficult to have the building directly front on the right-of-way for Crutchfield</p>

	<p><i>such as passive solar heating design and maximization of natural light.</i></p>	<p>Street. However, the applicant has limited the amount of parking located between the building and street. The architecture acknowledges Crutchfield and Midlothian, but Staff recommends further improvements be completed on the Midlothian façade.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant further improve the architectural façade facing Midlothian Turnpike to reflect the high traffic carried by that right-of-way, for submission of the final Architectural Plans.</u></p>
<p>BUILDING SETBACK – Page 14</p>	<p><i>The guidelines state that new buildings should have the same or similar setback as existing buildings on the same street. There will be situations, however, where a different setback would be appropriate for the type of building and the desired environment. Examples would include larger public buildings, such as schools and recreation centers, located within urban residential areas. In certain cases, a new building should be constructed with a minimal setback to reinforce the traditional street wall.</i></p>	<p>The site is located in an auto-oriented neighborhood and surrounding buildings are primarily multi-family and often include large setbacks from the street. The existing building includes a large setback from the street, where the proposed building will create a better connection to the street with landscaping and pedestrian improvements.</p>
<p>SITE FEATURES – Page 14</p>	<p><i>The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users. Operational features and parking should be screened from view.</i></p>	<p>Parking areas include landscaping and screening to the requirements listed in the City Code. Pedestrian circulation throughout the site is provided.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant provide appropriate pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross the internal drive isles and parking lot for the submission of the Final Site Plan.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant improve sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area facing Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that Applicant improve pedestrian access to the street from the main entrance along Crutchfield Street for the submission of the Final Site Plan.</u></p>
<p>BUILDING PROPORTION – Page 15</p>	<p><i>Building massing should be compatible with the surrounding uses; although, important public buildings may require larger sizes. Visual impact can be minimized via design techniques such as setbacks or varying surface and roof planes. Height and roof design should be sensitive to surrounding uses, but may be taller on corners to frame access to the block.</i></p>	<p>The surrounding neighborhood is largely auto-oriented and includes large buildings setback from the street. That stated, the proposed building begins to introduce a more conscious effort toward urban design by using quality materials and architectural design. The large foot print of the proposed building is broken up by splitting the building into several wings. Landscaping along the street as well as adjacent to the building is used to soften the impact of the building. Different materials and architectural features are utilized to further break up large facades. Differing roof heights and façade planes create visual interest.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant further</u></p>

		<p><u>improve the architectural façade facing Midlothian Turnpike to reflect the high traffic carried by that right-of-way, for submission of the final Architectural Plans.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant show proposed screen wall that shields maintenance areas from view off Midlothian Turnpike on Final Site Plan submission.</u></p>
<p>FAÇADE DESIGN. – Page 18</p>	<p><i>Building materials should be compatible with surrounding uses and not cause visual confusion by using numerous different materials on a single façade. Material quality and design should complement those on the existing building and be sufficiently durable and sustainable.</i></p> <p><i>Building design should take cues from the surrounding area. An easily recognizable, inviting and accessible entrance should be included and ground level design should be comfortable for the pedestrian. Large expanses of blank or undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Access for users of differing mobilities should be included; handicap ramps or other handicap considerations should be incorporated into the façade design and to a high design quality.</i></p>	<p>Materials include uses red brick, architectural precast concrete, architectural metal wall panels, and prefinished metal trim as primary materials.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</u></p> <p>The design uses a number of strategies to reduce the impact of large facades and provide a quality architectural design. The main entrance is highlighted and accessible. The site will be designed to meet ADA requirements.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the Applicant further improve the architectural façade facing Midlothian Turnpike to reflect the high traffic carried by that right-of-way, for submission of the final Architectural Plans.</u></p>