

Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR

From: Jessie Gemmer <jessie@acmearchitecture.com>
Sent: Friday, September 16, 2022 5:44 PM
To: Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR
Subject: Re: UDC At Planning Commission Sept 19

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Hey Ray,
Here are my comments about the Lee Circle, thank you!

As a member of the Urban Design Committee, and a Fan resident, I have a few thoughts about the plan for Lee Circle. It needs to be a space of joy, community, and healing.

Although I think the landscape plan is well designed, it is not a responsible approach for this space. I appreciated many of the public comments submitted to the UDC on this issue, including one that asked, "Is this a park or is it a median?" Although technically a median, it is larger than many pocket parks in the neighborhood and should be available for citizens to use as such. I feel that the approach was driven by a desire not to offend either the people who do not want the space occupied as it was in the summer of 2020 or the people who resent that public space being taken away as a venue for gatherings, like those that occurred in the summer of 2020. By trying to avoid answering the calls of either group, this proposal is a very expensive non solution to the question at hand.

Regardless of whether this is a park or a median, it is public space. It is the city's responsibility to allow the community to determine the use of their public space. This design takes that agency away from the community.

I know many residents were disturbed by the protests at the circle, however, that context does not apply to this design. The use of the space for protest was based around the presence of the Lee Monument as well as the outrage and anger felt by thousands of people directed at a society that built and preserved the monument, a symbol of oppression. The space is free to live without that monument, reflecting the spirit of the community without ever again being the epicenter for social justice protest.

I was exhilarated to see the ways in which the circle was reclaimed by residents the summer of 2020, and I admired how citizens accomplished sophisticated urban design on their own. That summer, people used the circle for vegetable gardens, concerts, speeches, art installations, movie screenings, basketball, a library, a food pantry, a clothes concert, and many other expressions of love for one another. If I were designing a public space, I could only hope that it would inspire half as much creative use. Public space is a free amenity for all, and by fully landscaping the circle, we are removing that amenity. Instead, we should be adding more. As a designer, and a native Richmonder, this is a major loss.

Cities around the country are removing and have removed their Confederate Monuments. As the former capital of the Confederacy and the City of Monuments, we have the opportunity to set the national tone for how a city can reclaim those spaces and use them for the good of every resident. Not taking a stance misses that opportunity. I know there is a plan in the works to reimagine Monument Avenue and that this is a temporary

proposal, but it will be years until a final design is built. We can't wait that long to see this space reach its potential.

Every person has a different idea of what that potential should look like, and a final design should not be done without extensive public input. That being said, I feel confident that a space the size of a neighborhood park that is not available to use is nowhere close to the right response. The proposed plan has mulch paths, but it seems unlikely that people would cross to the median to walk through a path that leads nowhere. There is nowhere to sit, nowhere to observe the life of the city as it winds around this important location, and nowhere for people to gather.

A thousand city residents will present more creative and interesting solutions than a team of designers or a few city agencies. One of the things I learned in the summer of 2020 is that sometimes designers need to take a step back. I am an architect, and it is our job to come up with an idea that is the answer to a stated problem. However, I learned that we alone do not always have the right answer. By observing, listening, and leaving room for people to use a space as they wish, we will allow for collective problem solving.

In the years it takes for a final plan to be designed and installed, we can watch the circle and see how people want to use it. That observation is worth a hundred public input meetings and surveys because it allows us to evolve our ideas as citizens evolve the space. I think for now, the circle should stay grass without the fences along the perimeter. The other Monument Avenue medians are grass and are used for picnics, sunbathing, cornhole, dog walking, and other things that enhance the daily life of all residents. In an increasingly expensive world, those spaces are free and open to all for recreation and community building. I believe this space should be as well. I have no problem with adding irrigation and trees, which is the precedent we have from the other medians, but infilling this space with plants - though beautiful - actually decreases the quality of the space.

I think we all need to have faith in our city and our fellow residents and trust that creating a place for community can only inspire good, especially in a place that once symbolized a divide between us. I hope the Planning Commission considers this design in that spirit as the first step to moving forward with grace and love for our entire community.

Respectfully,
Jessie Gemmer

On Mon, Sep 12, 2022 at 5:16 PM Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR <Raymond.Roakes@rva.gov> wrote:

Good Afternoon UDC Members,

I think I mentioned previously,

We did not get a quorum on the last UDC meeting so the items have moved on to consideration by the Planning Commission on September 19th.

The Planning Commission has the option to hear and decide on the items during that meeting or send back to the UDC for consideration.

I just sent a meeting invite to hold September 29th, 10am to 12:30pm, for the special meeting if the PC decides to the items go back to UDC.

This will be in addition to our October 6th Meeting.

You are welcome to submit a letter to the PC with your thoughts and comments on the applications in the chance that they do not send back to the UDC.

The George Wythe Application is a concept review, so that will come back for Final Review. Your letters would be very helpful for the applicant, especially as they finalize architecture.

The Lee Circle Interim Condition is a final approval.

You can email me your comments and I will place in the record as well as summarize in my own presentation before the PC.

Feel free to reach out if there are any questions.

Thanks,

Ray Roakes

Planner | Urban Design Committee Secretary

Land Use Administration | Department of Planning and Development Review

City of Richmond | 900 E Broad Street, Room 511 | Richmond, VA 23219 |

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Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR

From: Mignardi, Luigi <MignardiL@chesterfield.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, September 7, 2022 5:12 PM
To: Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR
Cc: Luigi Mignardi - Home
Subject: Comments for UDC meeting 09/08/2022

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Ray,

I really wish I could be there tomorrow but I have to head out of town. I did want to pass along some thoughts on the two projects being reviewed tomorrow.

With regards to George Wythe HS:

- I agree with staff recommendations especially the item addressing the facade facing Midlothian Turnpike
- I know the landscape plan is preliminary and specific plant material has not been called out but would like to see that
- I would like to see the location called out for the proposed planters they submitted
- Not sure if the proposed landscape is the minimum requirement but on the eastern part of the site by the bus drive there is a large lawn area adjacent to the 6' side yard setback. This would be a great area for large evergreen and deciduous trees since it most likely won't be walked on as much as other parts of the site. Also there are some mature trees being removed from that area and it would be nice to replace them.

With regards to Lee Circle:

- To put \$100,000 towards a 'temporary' solution is hard to justify when there are other areas of the city that can use the funds for permanent solutions
- The size and scale of this space compared to Maury, Davis, JEB Stuart etc. is not equitable. Those spaces are obviously smaller in scale and in line with the medians. Whereas Lee Circle is commanding and a focal point on Monument. The proposed design and planting scheme is going to look ridiculous in such a huge space.
- All along monument there are these wonderful oaks that create great canopy and an elegant simple design. This is how the Lee space should be approached a very simple but monumental tree, like an oak, should be placed there and create spaces for people to gather like what is occurring in the medians all along Monument
- This space should really be reclaimed for people to use, and if it takes longer to find a good solution then it should wait, instead of putting \$100,000 into it now and if it ever is removed the cost of that as well.

If you can share these with committee members I would appreciate it.

Thanks,

Luigi

Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR

From: Charles Woodson <candylandmusic@earthlink.net>
Sent: Monday, September 12, 2022 5:35 PM
To: Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR
Subject: Re: UDC At Planning Commission Sept 19

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Todd's comments on Lee Circle plan:

1. To me, it seems doubtful that with soft costs, soil amendments, irrigation repair, plants and labor could be done for 100,000. Are there contingency provisions?
2. Does Urban Forestry have the resources to maintain the plan? Their call on that.
3. There should be benches or other places for people to sit.
4. The Liriope and day lilies should be replaced. Liriope is too aggressive and day lilies look kind of messy when not blooming.
5. For context, a state highway marker with FULL history of the site should be dedicated and installed.

Thank you,

Charles Todd Woodson.

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 12, 2022, at 5:16 PM, Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR <Raymond.Roakes@rva.gov> wrote:

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Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR

From: Charles Woodson <candylandmusic@earthlink.net>
Sent: Monday, September 12, 2022 9:56 PM
To: Roakes, Raymond A. - PDR
Cc: Andrea Quilici; Eva Clarke; Jessie Gemmer
Subject: And one more thing!

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Good evening Ray. Could you please add the following to my comments on the Lee Circle planting plan for the CPC?
Thanks. Here goes:

It is essential that these plants be well maintained and that once a different plan is decided upon for this site, that these perennials be transplanted into appropriate sites in neighborhoods that have been traditionally underserved by these types of projects in the past. Libraries, Community Centers and schools should take precedence. The selection is good for transplanting for the most part and some species may even benefit from dividing and replanting the extras. This is most important that deserving communities reap benefits from this project down the road.

Thanks so much.

Todd.

Thanks.

Sent from my iPhone