Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

UDC Staff Report

UDC 2023-11	FINAL Location, Character, and Extent Review	Meeting Date: 6/8/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Nissa Dean, Deputy Director, Department of Parks and Recreation	
Project Description	FINAL location, character, and extent review of the construction of a new community center and related landscape and site improvements	
Project Location **Address: 1925 U Street and 1501 North 20th Street** **Property Owner: CITY OF RICHMOND RECREATION & PARKS** **High-Level Details:** The Application proposes to construct a new community center; outdoor playgrounds, outdoor sports fields, and other site improvements.		
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	CONCEPT Approval was received in September of 2022. Significant public outreach has been completed to inform the proposed goals and features of the design, including surveys and neighborhood meetings.	
Conditions for Approval	Staff recommends that outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant, as shown on plans. Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible. Staff recommends the Applicant incorporate public art, as shown on plans. Staff recommends the Applicant incorporate street pedestrian improvements, as shown on plans, incorporated with the construction of the parking area. Future amendments to enhance such street pedestrian improvements may be approved by Staff.	

Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Brauers neighborhood on the East End at the intersection of T street and North 20th Street. The site is zoned R-6 – single-family attached residential district, and consists a 4.5 acre property currently populated by sports fields and open green space. The project is surrounded largely by residential uses. In the greater neighborhood, Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School is located to the southwest and Mosby Court is located to the northwest.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter
Project Description	This is the FINAL Application to construct a new community center and associated site and landscape improvements. The future community center parcel currently consists of sports fields and a playground. The existing baseball field will be maintained and improved, other existing fields and the playground will be moved or removed to facilitate the new community center building and parking lot. A new promenade trail, outdoor fitness area, and new play area will be added. Several large existing trees will be maintained. There are currently no bus stops adjacent to this site, although GRTC routes 5 and 12 are within a block of the subject site. The proposed parking lot on the north of the community center parcel will facilitate a connection between North 19th Street and North 20th Street that currently does not exist. A pedestrian way is oriented between U Street and T Street to extend a connection along North 19th Street that currently does not exist. Both of these connections facilitates that re-establishment of the street grid in this area – a goal of the Richmond 300 Master Plan Land Use Designation (Neighborhood Mixed Use). The architecture is meant to be a recognizable landmark within the neighborhood by utilizing differing materials uses, cantilevered forms, and differing massing. A “stepdown” of massing of the building helps to re-enforce neighborhood scale and the façade is broken up into different sections by using different materials, textures, and architectural features. Outdoor rooftop verandas will facilitate further outdoor use and provide excellent views of the city skyline. A rooftop basketball court is proposed. The proposed community center will include net zero design goals and receive LEED Silver designation, as required by City Policy. The building will also be designed to facilitate disaster response and emergency shelter during inclement weather. The site will be prepared for electric vehicle charging stations but the actual stations will need to be installed as a future project. Site improvements to landscaping will use local or adaptive species and will maintain several well established trees, protected through construction. Rooftop gardens on the community building are dedicated as a teach site for urban horticulture. Site improvements to hardscape will provide enhanced pedestrian paths (a request from the community), and enhanced surfaces for playground areas. Seating, picnic tables, trash receptacles, and bike parking will be provided throughout the site. Basketball courts will be maintained and the existing baseball field will be renovated, a major goal mentioned by the community. Outdoor exercise equipment and a children play area will also be included. Not all improvements that were shown in the previously approved CONEPT plan could be made with the current stage of the project due to budget and inflation related constraints. However, future stages of the project are shown on the plans to a full final build out that reflects the CONCEPT. Pedestrian safety improvements are included with this project to the north side of the intersection of U Street and North 20th Street. The current improvements include an ADA ramp and crossing markings. Future improvements are being worked out with the Department of Public Works, depending on a needs study, and could include “bumpouts.” DPW has provided a letter stating their intent to undertake these future improvements, if warranted, and these improvements are a priority for Planning Staff. _____ Staff recommends approval of the FINAL Application for community center and associated site improvements. The proposal creates a high-quality community center, public space, and both passive and active park space in a previously underinvested neighborhood. The proposal includes pedestrian and bicycle improvements and a number of sustainability considerations.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	*Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty* *Sustainability - City facilities can help showcase green building features.* *Beauty – Oftentimes, City facilities serve as beautiful landmarks that anchor a neighborhood and create a distinctive place through architecture and site design.* *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.*	**Big Moves: Realign City Facilities** The project includes the stated goal of designing a new public facility with equity and beauty in mind. The programing of the new community facility will include educationally minded assets such as a multimedia library, community garden and food forest, indoor play area, and youth/teen center. A number of sustainability and environmentally friendly features are included. The building will be design as LEED Silver and environmental resiliency is a goal of the plans for landscaping.
	Objective 2.1 *- Align new facilities and improve existing City owned facilities.* *f. Implement programs to improve the energy efficiency of City-owned buildings* ***Objective 4.2*** *– Integrate pubic are into the built environment.* *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.* ***Objective 10.4*** *- Increase the number of low-emission vehicles.* *b. Seek opportunities to install electric charging stations on publicly owned land, balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.* ***Objective 15.4*** *- Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.* *f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.* ***Objective 16.3*** *- Reduce water consumption by 10% per capita.* *b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.* ***Objective 16.4*** *- Increase green stormwater infrastructure*	**Master Plan Objectives** 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. Sustainability features that are planned to be included: energy efficiency, rooftop gardens and green site improvements. Project makes the site ready for electric vehicle charging stations. Richmond 300 establishes that City facilities should be considered in larger resiliency efforts. Community Centers are traditionally considered in municipal resiliency plans as they operate as community centers and conveniently placed municipally owned spaces. Lighting will be dark sky compliant.

	b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way ***Objective 17.3*** *Reduce urban heat* *a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight.* *b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities* ***Objective 17.6*** *Increase the resiliency of infrastructure and community assets.* *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.* ***Objective 17.7*** *Increase and enhance biodiversity* *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.* ***Objective 17.8*** *Reduce light pollution.* *b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.*	
Urban Design Guidelines		
PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3	*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.*	***PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS*** Bio-swales will be included to reduce stormwater runoff.
STREET DESIGN – P.6	*Intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner.*	**Street Design** Improvements are planned for the intersection of U Street and North 20th Street.

LANDSCAPING – Page 10	*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.*	**LANDSCAPING** A significant portion of the site will be green space. Several well established trees will be maintained and protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and natural connections for pedestrians throughout the site.
STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT – Page 11	*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.*	**STORM WATER MANAGEMENT AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT** Bio-swale is provided to reduce stormwater runoff.
GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES – Page 13	*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 such as passive solar heating design and maximization of natural light.*	***GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES*** The building is located on the northwest corner of the site, at the corner of U Street and Rogers Street. While T Street could be considered a primary street, the applicant stated that "Through the community engagement process (Dec 2021 – June 2022) community members expressed the importance of keeping the baseball field (which gives the park its name) intact and in its current location. This was expressed in response to initial site options proposed (along T Street)." The proposed siting allows for the existing baseball field to remain, for new basketball courts to be maintained, and several well established trees to be maintained. The proposed siting also facilitates the main pedestrian axis as an extension of North 19th Street and a new connection extension of U Street, further enforcing the street grid of the area. The southern exposure of the building will facilitate seasonal changes in natural lighting and warming.
BUILDING SETBACK – Page 14	*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.*	The proposed addition will largely meet the established minimum setback trends along both U Street and Rogers Street and further enforces the creation of the "streetwall" along that corner of the site. The proposed building is also a vertical orientation of usable space which maximized the outdoor greenspace on the site by limiting the footprint of the building.
SITE FEATURES – Page 14	*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*	The primary façade and surrounding site circulation is oriented to pedestrian users in both massing and design.

	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.	A number of outdoor spaces add interest and usable space for pedestrians. This diversity of uses will enhance pedestrian activity throughout the site.
BUILDING PROPORTION – Page 15	*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.*	A "stepdown" of massing of the building helps to re-enforce neighborhood scale and the façade is broken up into different sections by using different materials, textures, and architectural features. Rooftop outdoor verandas will facilitate further outdoor use and provide excellent views of the city skyline. The building will be three stories, slightly larger than surrounding uses, but greater height can be reserved for important civic uses.
FAÇADE DESIGN. – Page 18	*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. 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.*	Materials are planned to be locally sourced and recycled where possible. The proposed façade of the addition introduces a modern, bright, and inviting glass, wood, and stone materials. The façade uses a number architectural features and changes in rhythm and setback to break up the design to more adequately fit the surrounding single family detached neighborhood feel.