


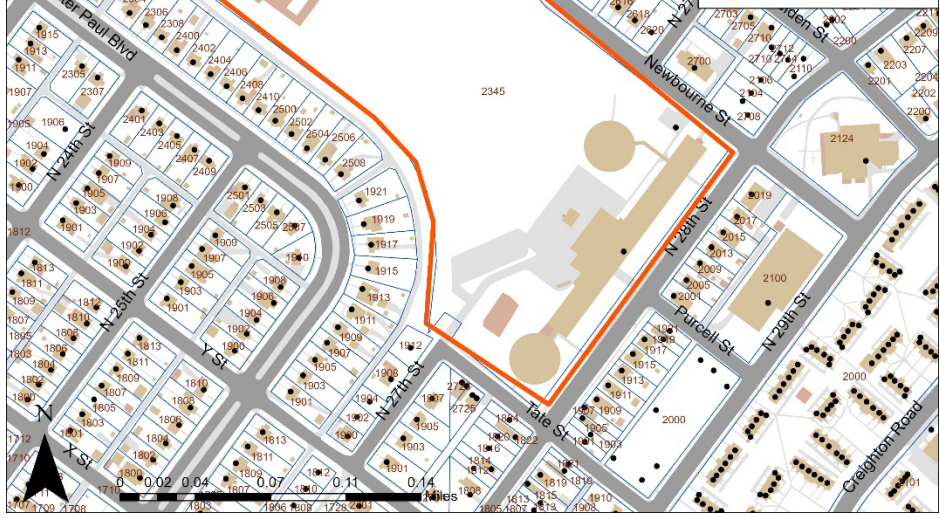




Urban Design Committee

UDC 2025-07	Conceptual Review Meeting Date: 3/13/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Applicant: Jonathan Balasa / Kelly Callahan
Project Description	UDC 2025-07 - CONCEPTUAL - Location, Character, and Extent review for proposed Woodville Elementary School project .
Project Location	
Address: 2345 Fairfield Ave, Richmond, VA 23223	
Property Owner: City of Richmond School Board	
<p>High Level Details:</p> <p>Richmond Public Schools plans to replace the existing Woodville Elementary School with a new three-story, 72,000-square-foot facility on the northern portion of the current site. The new building will be located at the corner of Fairfield Avenue and Newbourne Street.</p> <p>The site design includes an entry plaza, covered walkways, and landscaping with shade trees. Parking areas for staff and visitors, an off-street car drop-off lane, and a separate off-street bus loop are incorporated to improve traffic circulation. Stormwater management strategies are planned to address site drainage.</p> <p>Outdoor amenities will include playgrounds, recreational fields, and courts. A perimeter walking and biking trail will provide connectivity to the city's sidewalk network.</p> <p>The project aims to enhance educational facilities while improving site functionality, safety, and accessibility for students, staff, and the surrounding community.</p>	
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Kevin Costanzo - Kevin.Costanzo@rva.gov
Previous Reviews	N/A

Conditions for Approval

- Staff recommends that the Applicant consider and detail extreme weather response consideration for final submission.
- Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.
- Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.
- Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, and public spaces.
- Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials and sustainable stormwater features, where appropriate, and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.
- Staff recommends that the applicant provide increased infrastructure improvements to support micro-modal forms of transportation.
- Staff recommends that traffic calming techniques be considered where appropriate.
- Staff recommends including pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive aisles and parking lots.
- Staff recommends expanding sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area.
- Staff recommends increasing bike parking, bike racks, and bike maintenance stations near school entrances.
- Staff recommends that final exterior materials be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require minimal maintenance to ensure long-term resilience.
- Staff recommends that, where appropriate, anti-graffiti coatings be applied to exterior surfaces to reduce ongoing maintenance requirements.
- Staff recommends that the applicant provide samples or product specification sheets of exterior building materials for Final Review.
- Staff recommends that the applicant explore opportunities to incorporate additional windows, particularly along street-level elevations and the secondary southeastern façade. The color and reflective properties of windows should be carefully considered for both design coherence and environmental impact.
- Staff recommends that the applicant consider filtering techniques for possible expansion or additions to learning spaces (i.e., potential learning cottages)

Findings of Fact

Site Description	<p>The project address is 2345 Fairfield Avenue with the primary site area located along the northern side of the existing parcel along Fairfield Avenue and Newbourne Street and opposite of the existing school site. The site is zoned R-5 Residential, and the property consists of roughly 15.72 acres. The property currently contains Woodville Elementary School, operated by City of Richmond School Board.</p>
Scope of Review	<p>The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 and 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.</p>
Project Description	<p>Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is replacing the existing Woodville Elementary School, originally constructed in 1954, due to its aging infrastructure and functional limitations. The new facility will be a 72,000-square-foot, three-story building designed to accommodate 500 students in Kindergarten through 5th grade, along with one Pre-K classroom. The project prioritizes accessibility, safety, and sustainability, incorporating native landscaping, perimeter walking paths, playgrounds, recreational fields, covered outdoor spaces, staff and visitor parking, a designated car drop-off loop, a bus loop, and an entry plaza. The existing school will remain operational during construction, with demolition occurring in the final phase, after which the site will be converted into a greenfield for future use.</p> <p>The need for a new Woodville Elementary School has been identified in multiple Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs) over the years. However, previous funding allocations were insufficient for full project approval. To supplement funding, RPS has applied for the Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program. In 2024, RPS selected VMDO and its team of engineers and consultants to lead the Net-Zero Energy design effort. Community engagement and programming began in August 2024, and the project is currently in the Design Development phase.</p> <p>Woodville Elementary is located in Richmond’s East End, serving the Creighton Court neighborhood, which is undergoing redevelopment into a mixed-income residential area. The 16.5-acre site includes the existing school, a community pool, and a greenfield area at the intersection of Fairfield Avenue and Newbourne Street. The surrounding context consists of single-story and multi-story residential buildings. An arborist assessment determined that a significant Willow Oak on Fairfield Avenue will be replaced with a line of street trees, while another at the corner of Fairfield and Newbourne Street will be preserved.</p> <p>RPS and its partners have collaborated to apply for an EPA Community Change Grant to integrate climate action and pollution reduction strategies into the project. If awarded, the grant will support initiatives in partnership with the YMCA, including services that provide potable water, shelter, and power to the community during extreme weather events.</p> <p>RPS has facilitated a design process involving district leadership, school staff, parents, and students. Community engagement events, including participation at the school’s Harvest Festival and Winter Concert, provided feedback on building materials, playground features, and site connections.</p> <p>RPS initially budgeted \$37 million for construction, but a December 2024 cost estimate based on schematic design documents projects a total cost of \$52.7 million. If awarded, the EPA grant could contribute up to \$20 million toward project funding.</p> <p>The project will be competitively bid to qualified general contractors, with construction scheduled to begin in September 2025. The anticipated completion and occupancy date is June 2027.</p>

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>The Conceptual Review of this project's application generally aligns with the priority objectives as outlined within Richmond 300</p>
	<p>Objective 2.1 - Align new facilities and improve existing City owned facilities.</p> <p><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><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><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><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><i>b. Encourage on-site graywater uses in public and private facilities.</i></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>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 the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</u></p>

	<p>Objective 16.4 - Increase green stormwater infrastructure</p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green infrastructure on public lands and rights-of-way</i></p> <p>Objective 17.3 Reduce urban heat</p> <p><i>a. Encourage lighter-colored surfaces for roads and roofs to reflect sunlight.</i></p> <p><i>b. Identify opportunities for green roofs on public facilities</i></p> <p>Objective 17.6 Increase the resiliency of infrastructure and community assets.</p> <p><i>h. Increase local renewable energy generation (see Goal 16).</i></p> <p><i>h. Identify community facilities to serve as resilience hubs and update systems to be more resilient.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity</p> <p><i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i></p> <p><i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i></p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution.</p> <p><i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i></p>	
<p>Urban Design Guidelines</p>		
<p>Transportation: <i>Paving Surface Materials - Provision of New Sidewalk: pg. 4</i></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</i></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>introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</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>Transportation: Multimodal Transportation: pg. 6</p>	<p>Two of the major objectives stated in the City of Richmond’s Master Plan are to increase street-level pedestrian activity while safely and efficiently moving people and goods into and out of the City, and to promote a multimodal transportation system. In order to have a safe and efficient multimodal transportation network, it is integral to design with all modes of transportation in mind. These modes include walking, biking, public transit, as well as motor vehicles. It is the priority of the UDC to support all modes of transportation, giving deference to pedestrians and vulnerable transportation users. For projects involving elements of transportation, both public transit and non-motorized transportation (walking, biking, etc.) should be considered in the design and planning of all projects.</p>	<p>Appropriate signage and streetscape design should demarcate designated bikeways and pedestrian walkways separate from vehicular traffic and should prioritize the comfort, convenience, and safety of the non-motorized forms of transit particularly surrounding intersections and or other high traffic areas.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant provide increased infrastructure improvements to support non-motorized forms of transportation.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that traffic calming techniques be considered where appropriate.</u></p>
<p>Environment: Landscaping - Design: pg. 10</p>	<p>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.</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>Environment: Stormwater Management and Low Impact Development: pg. 11</p>	<p>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.</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>Public Facilities: General Site Design -</p>	<p>Guidelines suggest that buildings should be oriented toward the primary street that</p>	<p>The building is to be located towards the northern corner of the existing site with vehicle</p>

<p><i>Building Orientation:</i> pg. 13</p>	<p><i>borders the site and architecturally acknowledge all adjacent public right-of-way. 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.</i></p>	<p>and pedestrian access provided primarily from Fairfield Ave. and Newbourne St. The school's entrance to face the corner of the Fairfield Ave and Newbourne St. intersection.</p>
<p>Public Facilities: <i>General Site Design - Building Setback:</i> pg. 13</p>	<p><i>A new building should have the same or similar setback as existing buildings on the same street. When a design includes balconies, awnings, or door swings that extend beyond the building's setback, the design should minimize or avoid elements that encroach into the public right-of-way.</i></p> <p><i>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. The Urban Design Committee encourages setbacks that allow for the development of usable public space and streetscape enhancing landscaping.</i></p>	<p>The site is located within a R-5 Residential district with a mixture of single-family and multi-family units with various degrees of setbacks. The proposed building will have generally larger setbacks than typical of the surrounding neighborhood; however, Staff finds the proposal consistent with UDC Guidelines for setbacks with regard to larger public buildings such as schools.</p>
<p>Public Facilities: <i>General Site Design - Site Features:</i> pg. 13</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><i>Connectivity from the site to adjacent areas should be considered during the design phase and include accommodations for non-motorized means of transit and other micro-modal transportation, such as bicycle parking, bike racks, showers, restrooms, and air pumps.</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><i>Staff recommends including pedestrian markings and signage where walkways cross internal drive aisles and parking lots.</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Staff recommends expanding sidewalk width along the main entrance and drop-off/pickup area.</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Staff recommends increasing bike parking, bike racks, and bike maintenance stations near school entrances.</i></u></p>
<p>Public Facilities: <i>Building Design - Building Proportion:</i> pg. 14</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 proposed building introduces a more conscious effort toward urban design by using quality materials and architectural design that have been selected in part through community engagement. The large footprint 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</p>

		<p>architectural features are utilized to further break up large facades. Differing roof heights and façade planes create visual interest.</p>
<p>Public Facilities: <i>Building Design - Building Detail: pg. 14</i></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><i>Building materials should be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require little maintenance. Where appropriate, substances that resist graffiti should be applied to building materials to reduce maintenance requirements.</i></p> <p><i>The number, size, style, and type of windows should be appropriate for the architecture of the building and appear intentional in terms of rhythm, patterns, and ratio of walls to windows. Bird safe glass should be considered when a building is greater than 45 feet tall or is located next to a park, streetscape, or highly vegetated or landscaped area. Large expanses of blank, undifferentiated wall are not appropriate building elevations, especially at the street level. Windows, projecting cornices, and architectural details, such as decorative masonry bands in an accent color, may be used to break up flat building planes.</i></p>	<p>Building materials reflected in the elevation drawings include red brick, aluminum composite paneling (gray and blue), formed metal paneling, UHPC paneling, wood-alternative siding, clear glass, and spandrel glass. The design incorporates various strategies to minimize the visual impact of large façades and ensure a high-quality architectural design. The main entrance is clearly defined, inviting, and accessible. The site will be designed to meet ADA requirements.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that final exterior materials be aesthetically and structurally durable, of high quality, and require minimal maintenance to ensure long-term resilience.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that, where appropriate, anti-graffiti coatings be applied to exterior surfaces to reduce ongoing maintenance requirements.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant provide samples or product specification sheets of exterior building materials for Final Review.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant explore opportunities to incorporate additional windows, particularly along street-level elevations and the secondary southeastern façade. The color and reflective properties of windows should be carefully considered for both design coherence and environmental impact.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the applicant consider filtering techniques for possible expansion or additions to learning spaces (i.e., potential learning cottages)</u></p>