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To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: June 4, 2015  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the landscaping and furnishings package associated with the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, 701 E. Canal Street; UDC No. 2015-03(3)**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Dr. Norman Merrifield, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**II. LOCATION**

701 E. Canal Street

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character and extent review of the landscaping and furnishings package associated with the renovation of Kanawha Plaza,

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This is the review of the landscaping and furnishings package associated with the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, following the approval of Phase 1A of the renovation plan at the Planning Commission's May 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. The site layout, grading and hardscaping were included in the approval, as was the removal of the existing pedestrian bridge over Canal Street.

Staff finds that the furnishings coordinate with each other in style, color and finish and does not object to the use of a unique light fixture to define the food truck area. Staff further finds that the proposal is consistent with the recommendations of both the Downtown 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 of the landscaping and furnishings package, with the following condition:

- That any future improvements are submitted to the UDC for separate review at such time as those plans are more defined.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property, Kanawha Plaza, is an urban park encompassing 2.8 acres on two city blocks, partially located over top of the Downtown Expressway (Interstate 195). Kanawha Plaza is located in the B-4 (Central Business) zoning district and is isolated by roadways: S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street to the east carries 10 lanes of two-direction traffic; E. Canal Street to the north carries five lanes of two-direction

traffic to the east of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street (a recent configuration due to the construction of the Gateway Plaza building and the closing of a portion of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street) and four lanes of one-way westbound traffic to the west of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street; S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the west carries four lanes of one-way northbound traffic, and E. Byrd Street to the south carries four lanes of one-way eastbound traffic. The posted speed limit on each of these streets is 25mph, and there is no on-street parking along of the street frontages of the park.

The former RMA parking deck and plaza (now owned by the City) and the WilliamsMullen law firm headquarters building are located to the east of Kanawha Plaza, the Federal Reserve Bank is located to the south, the Downtown Expressway emerges to the west, and on the north are the Dominion office tower and the under-construction Gateway Plaza, which will be home to the McGuireWoods law firm among other tenants.

Kanawha Plaza was designed by landscape architects Zion & Breen and completed in 1980. Zion & Breen also provided landscape design for the Philip Morris corporate offices and research center in Richmond and is best known for its design of Paley Park in New York City. The park contains open lawn space, small groves of trees, brick walkways, and a large sunken pool fed by a heptagonal stepped fountain that sits at the corner of S. 9<sup>th</sup> and E. Canal streets. Portions of the park to the east and west over the expressway have been “notched” out so that the expressway is exposed to pedestrians on the S. 7<sup>th</sup> and S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalks, however, walls in the park shield the view of traffic below, attenuate the sound from the expressway and until recently provided built-in seating. The plaza is open at street level but can also be accessed from the Dominion headquarters by way of a pedestrian bridge that crosses over E. Canal Street and terminates in a spiral ramp by the fountain.

**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**

At its meeting on May 18, 2015, the Planning Commission approved the final plans for Phase 1A of the Kanawha Plaza renovations, with the following conditions:

- That the details, including lighting, final plantings, the stage canopy, furnishings, and bike racks, be reviewed by the Urban Design Committee at one of their regular meetings.
- That the applicant work closely with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning & Development Review to design appropriate, pedestrian access that prioritizes pedestrian safety.
- That the Applicant is encouraged to approach phase 2 of the proposal in a more inclusive manner that includes broad public input and taking full advantage of Kanawha Plaza’s potential role as a hub park connecting Manchester, by way of the riverfront and especially the Dam Walk, to downtown, as well as a rare green oasis between the Western and more Eastern parts of the City.

**d. Project Description**

This is the review of the landscaping and furnishings package associated with the renovation of Kanawha Plaza, following the approval of Phase 1A of the renovation plan at the Planning Commission's May 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. The site layout, grading and hardscaping were included in the approval, as was the removal of the existing pedestrian bridge over Canal Street.

A stage with a canopy is proposed near the northwestern corner of the site. The canopy will be composed of a grey standing seam metal roof supported by tubular galvanized steel that is painted in a hammered silver color. The underside of the canopy will feature composite wood veneer panels. On the left side of the stage will be a large RVA logo created out of pre-oxidated corten steel with a superimposed stainless steel wave. The area adjacent to the stage will be landscaped primarily with shrubs and perennials.

The stage opens to a large lawn area that will be planted with Bermuda grass. Around the lawn area will be a number of raised planting beds edged with 2' tall granite block seat walls and landscaped with trees, shrubs and perennials. Two sun shelters will also be provided around the perimeter of the lawn, though no details have been submitted on those at this date. There are other portions of the site that will received a landscaping treatment; the largest of these are around the Downtown Expressway openings. All landscaped areas will be irrigated. In addition to trees planted interior to the site, the plans call for the replacement of all of the street trees surrounding the park in 6' by 8' wells, except those along Byrd Street. In all, the landscaping plans include eight species of trees (144 specimens total), five species of shrubs (665 specimens total) and ten species of perennials and groundcovers (2,990 specimens total).

Several types of lights are employed throughout the site. The primary light is the KIM lighting Era PicoEmitter LED fixture, painted silver, on an angled neck atop either a 14' or 20' tall round pole, also painted silver. These fixtures are full cut-off and have a color temperature of 3000k. The poles around the perimeter of the lawn area will also hold silver ERCO Gecko Floodlight fixtures to throw light onto the lawn. The food truck area will be lit by the URBIS Boreal cast aluminum LED fixture (color temperature of 3100k) with acrylic diffuser in the foliage drum pattern atop a 12' round aluminum pole, both with a silver finish. The stage area will be lit by Illumina LED fixtures mounted to the underside of the canopy. In-ground lights will also be used around the site and to light some trees from below.

Sixteen 6" tubular steel bollards in a silver finish will be located in several areas, primarily at the terminus of 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Four bike racks will be placed on-site, two each along the Byrd and Canal Street edges of the park. The bike racks, which are one of the City-standard racks, are a grouping of five silver finish metal circles mounted in concrete. A total of thirteen City standard ribbon-style trash cans, in a silver finish, will also be located throughout the site.

Thirteen sets of lime green, metal bistro tables and chairs (four chairs per one table) will be provided near the food truck area, but these tables and chairs are not in a fixed location and are intended to be moved around as users see fit. Two water fountains will be provided in the park, one under each of the sun shelters.

The fountains will be silver, are wheelchair accessible, and also contain a dog bowl.

**e. Master Plan**

The Downtown Master Plan notes that the plaza “is surrounded by walls, limiting visibility from the street and pedestrian accessibility. As a result, the plaza is vacant most of the time. The park should be cleaned and repaired as necessary and the walls should be removed where structurally feasible to increase the visibility and pedestrian access to the park. Access can also be improved with the use of clearly defined crosswalks and pedestrian signals on the roads adjacent to the park, and by reducing the speed of traffic on the adjacent roadways. Another way to improve accessibility and increase the use of Kanawha Plaza is to develop a portion of the four-acre open space with active uses, such as a civic or office building. Additional foot traffic will improve safety by providing “eyes on the plaza.” The size and character of this proposed building should be determined by the load capacity of the plaza’s platform, as was the case with the RMA parking deck between Ninth and Tenth Streets that spans the Downtown Expressway (page 4.29).

Though not specific to the property, the Plan advocates for the planting of street trees to create desirable addresses and enhance the pedestrian environment (page 4.21).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines notes that “successful public parks, 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” (page 9). As to landscaping, the Guidelines state it should “provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest” and should “include diverse plant species, including evergreen, flowering and shade tree species combined with shrubs, ground covers and annual and perennial plantings”. The Guidelines note that “shade trees for pedestrian comfort should be the predominant plant material in an urban setting” (page 10) and that “significant healthy trees should be preserved and maintained”. Lastly, the Guidelines note that “all park projects should include a maintenance plan which addresses all phases of the project, including both landscaping and facilities” (page 9). The Guidelines express support for low-impact development, the goal of which is to “mimic a site’s predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source” (page 11).

The Guidelines note that “Public plazas should use landscaping, public art, and historic preservation to create inviting spaces”. Also, “adequate seating, lighting and trash receptacles should be provided in the design of plazas” (page 14). The Guidelines go on to say that “exterior lighting should also avoid light pollution by directing light downward (page 22). The Guidelines also note that “furnishings and streetlights should coordinate with each other in style, color and finish” (page 24).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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