



---

To: Urban Design Committee  
From: Planning and Preservation Division  
Date: November 8, 2018  
RE: **VCU Front Doors - Final review of Streetscape Encroachments; W. Franklin Street and Shafer Street intersection; UDC 2018-42**

---

**I. APPLICANT**

Keith Van Inwegen, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

**II. LOCATION**

City right-of-way at the intersection of W. Franklin and Shafer Streets.

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for review of streetscape encroachments into the City right-of-way at the intersection of W. Franklin and Shafer Streets.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed modifications at the intersection of W. Franklin and Shafer Streets attempt to provide a clear, visible pedestrian crossing and to connect the existing pedestrian corridor that runs through campus to the south with the Shafer Street sidewalks to the north. Traffic calming techniques will be implemented to slow approaching traffic and clearly communicate the pedestrian crossing to oncoming drivers.

This project further speaks to enhancements that align with the systems-based approach for the city's Vision Zero effort, an initiative to eliminate traffic fatalities for all travel modes.

Therefore, Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommend that the Department of Public Works approve the final design as submitted.

**Staff Contact:**

Josh Son, (804) 646-3741 // [joshua.son@richmondgov.com](mailto:joshua.son@richmondgov.com)

Alex Dandridge, (804) 646-6569 // [alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com](mailto:alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com)

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject right-of-way is located at the intersection of W. Franklin and Shafer Streets and is in the vicinity of the Virginia Commonwealth University Monroe Park Campus. The right-of-way is surrounded by the Ginter House and Founders Hall to the south, and the Blanton House and a residential Apartment Building with ground floor commercial to the north. The surrounding area lies within the R-53 (Multi-Family Residential) zoning district.

Within the project boundaries, Shafer Street is a former vehicular road south of W. Franklin Street that has been bricked in as a pedestrian only pathway running north/south through the VCU Campus. Shafer Street Continues north of W. Franklin Street as a one way vehicular street for northbound traffic. W. Franklin Street is a four lane, one-way vehicular street for east bound traffic. The outermost lanes on the north and south sides of W. Franklin Street are reserved for parking, which often goes unutilized. Parking is restricted in the intersection.

**b. Scope of Review**

The intersection at Franklin and Shafer Streets is to be renovated to provide a clear, visible pedestrian crossing and connect the existing pedestrian corridor that runs through campus to the south with the Shafer Street sidewalks to the north. Traffic calming techniques will be implemented to slow approaching traffic and clearly communicate the pedestrian crossing to oncoming drivers. As part of the project, the areas on VCU property will also be renovated to create larger queuing spaces as pedestrians wait to cross the street, as well as social gathering spaces with pedestrian amenities such as café tables, benches, seatwalls, trash receptacles, plantings and campus signage. There will be no changes to existing street lights, vehicular traffic signals or pedestrian crossing signals. The City owns the rights-of-way, but VCU will perform all of the work and will be responsible for all of the maintenance, which puts the improvements in the category of encroachments.

The encroachment process is administered through the Department of Public Works, which has requested that the Urban Design Committee (UDC) provide design advice on certain types of encroachments. The UDC does not have the authority to approve encroachments, but rather provides advice to the Department of Public Works.

**c. UDC Review History**

Streetscape encroachments at the intersection of W. Grace and Shafer Streets were reviewed at the regular November 2013 meeting of the UDC (UDC 2013-46). The proposed streetscape encroachments for this project were continuations of ones installed in the blocks of W. Grace Street to the east of the subject intersection, which were reviewed as several proposals from 2010 to 2012. The committee recommended that the project be approved by the Director of Public Works with the following conditions:

- That the applicant works with the Department of Public Utilities to have the cobra head fixture in front of 910 W. Grace Street permanently removed, if possible.
- That the ornamental light fixtures are located at the same setback from the curb as the lights in the adjacent blocks to the east
- That the tactile warning strip in the crosswalk match the color of those used in adjacent blocks.

**d. Project Description**

As part of Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) ONE VCU Master Plan Process, this project was identified as a "Front Door" to campus, meaning that the listed modifications to this intersection that are being proposed will enhance campus identity and address the need for increased pedestrian safety and traffic calming.

The proposed design includes traffic calming elements to reduce the speed of eastbound vehicular traffic on W. Franklin Street, while providing common visual cues to help drivers recognize the heavily-used pedestrian crossing. Currently, cars are restricted from parking along the south lane within the intersection. As a result, pedestrians often step into the roadway to observe oncoming traffic whose line-of-sight is blocked by the adjacent parked cars. The design proposes to remove the unused southern lane within the intersection, and to reclaim this space for pedestrians by extending the sidewalk and corresponding roadway curbing.

Brick paving is proposed to accent the ground plane and integrate with the adjacent sidewalks. Within crosswalk areas, the existing asphalt is to be removed and replaced with heavy-duty brick pavers on concrete subbase that aligns with the north-south pedestrian flows. The center of the intersection will be new asphalt or dark color heavy duty clay brick pavers, depending on construction costs.

Beside the crosswalks, streetscape chokers reduce the pedestrian crossing distance and alert approaching drivers of the pedestrian zone. The chokers will be planted to soften the intersection and clearly identify the pedestrian crossing zone. The plantings will be less than 30" in height (no trees) to maintain important sightlines for oncoming traffic. New asphalt is proposed on either side of the brick crossing zone on Franklin Street, between the chokers, where reflective thermoplastic striping will alert drivers with common visual cues indicating the pedestrian crosswalks.

On the east side Shafer Street, the worn brick pavers will be replaced with brick pavers on concrete subbase. Additionally, three existing trees which are heaving the sidewalk will be removed and replaced with new trees in locations and species that coordinate with the rest of the Shafer Street streetscape.

The project team met with representatives from Public Works and the Traffic Engineering Department, as well as the City's Bicycle Coordinator, to review the general approach to the project and understand the City's typical approach for streetscape improvements.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject right-of-way is located in the VCU & Downtown Neighborhoods Focus Area, as defined by the 2009 Downtown Master Plan, which designates the area as being part of the Urban Center area. Virginia Commonwealth University has a significant presence in Downtown. One of the recommendations specific to the project area is that, "The pedestrian character, college atmosphere, and security of the campus should be protected".

The subject right-of-way is in alignment with Vision Zero, a plan that was adopted by the City of Richmond in 2017 to reduce the number of fatal crashes on Richmond Streets. The plan identifies the street network around VCU as a "High Injury Street Network", meaning a high percentage of the Richmond's pedestrian related crashes since 2010 have occurred here. Vision Zero promotes the practice of "lead roadway design that prioritizes safety" (page 3). Vision Zero

seeks to “implement safety treatments on the high injury street network” like applying “pedestrian crossing treatments” (page 16).

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines states “curb cuts for handicapped accessibility should be located at intersections” (page 3) and that “the selection of appropriate paving materials should be based upon the desired visual image, compatibility with adjacent paving materials, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, and cost” (page 3). The Guidelines further note that “simpler paving designs are more compatible with diverse building styles and better unify the various design elements found on City streets” (page 3). The Guidelines also note that “existing granite curbing should be retained” and that “the number, size and location of curb cuts should be examined for potential conflicts with pedestrian and vehicular circulation” (page 4). Lastly, the Guidelines state that “entrances and pedestrian walkways should enhance the streetscape and delineate an edge between pedestrian walkways and the street” (page 20).

**VI. ATTACHMENTS**

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