



City of Richmond, Virginia
Department of Planning and Development Review
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To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: July 15, 2019
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of streetscape improvements on the north and south sides of West Broad Street from North Hamilton to North Laurel Streets; UDC 2019-20**

I. APPLICANT

Yongping Wang, City of Richmond, Department of Public Works, Capital Projects

II. LOCATION

The streetscape public right-of-way along the north and south sides of West Broad Street from North Hamilton to North Laurel Streets.

Property Owner:

City of Richmond right-of-way

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final review of streetscape improvements

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Considering the variety of constraints, Staff finds that the project accomplishes the goal of improving the two mile stretch of West Broad Street. The plan calls for delineating spaces for Amenity, Pedestrian, and Building zones, allotting a six foot minimum clearance for the Pedestrian Zone, which is one foot more than current practice. In terms of paving, the project calls for new, simplified sidewalk finishes (in areas that are unimproved by VCU or other private property owners) which will help unify the aesthetic along the corridor. Lighting will be enhanced through additional acorn light fixtures on existing metal. Street trees are planned along the route and will vary depending on the width of the sidewalk and overhead utilities. Root path structures will not be part of this project as research has not proven these actually assist in enhancing or directing the growth/path of roots. Curb extensions, street furnishings, and driveway closures further speak 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, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant approval with the following conditions:

- That the applicant demonstrate there was consideration for additional bike parking in areas of higher activity
- That the three (3) trees in the northeast quadrant at Hermitage and West Broad Street remain
- That the applicant include a cap on light fixtures to address Dark Sky requirements
- That the applicant coordinate locations of power poles and guide wires so that pedestrian amenities and plantings are fully coordinated prior to construction
- That the applicant work with the city arborists to:

- refine the plant pallet utilizing more native species
- refine the plant pallet utilizing tree species that will provide as much shade canopy as possible
- select the best applicable trees for the conditions of the streetscape
- demonstrate there was consideration for utilizing larger caliper trees to achieve the desired streetscape as quickly as possible

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The proposed project spans just over two miles along West Broad Street, with termini located at North Hamilton Street on the west and North Laurel Street on the east. Improvements are planned on both the north and south sides of West Broad Street. As expected with a route of this length, the adjacent land uses vary greatly and include suburban office complexes, drive-through fast food restaurants, car dealerships, office buildings, museums, college campuses and residence halls, multi-family housing, retail shops, etc.

Accordingly, there are many zoning designations represented along the corridor, with the adjacent properties zoned B-3 (General Business), B-4 (Central Business), UB-PO4 (Urban Business with a Parking Overlay), M-1 (Light Industrial), and TOD-1 (Transit-Oriented Nodal District). This project serves to complement new mixed-use developments and the overall multi-modal nature of the evolving Pulse transit corridor.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed improvements are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “public way” under Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. Project Description

A. Project Purpose

The project is intended to leverage committed funding to implement limited streetscape improvements within the project area to enhance the overall character, complement the Pulse corridor, and establish a more unified design vocabulary for one of the City’s primary gateway corridors.

B. Project Background and Surrounding Area

The project limits of work, as defined in the Smart Scale funding documents, is from Hamilton St. to Laurel St, north and south sides of West Broad Street. Furthermore, the limits of work are restricted to the area within the public right-of-way, from the back of curb to the right-of-way. In many cases, this includes sidewalk from back of curb to the face of existing buildings. In other cases, the right-of-way abuts open space or parking areas on private property. In addition, there are some unique conditions where the right-of-way limits do not extend to a building face, resulting in areas that are visually and physically extensions of the work area, but outside of the project limits. The project site is impacted by many adjacent development projects in planning or construction. Where possible, this

project will reference plans for proposed projects when those plans are available. Key adjacent property owners have been included in planning efforts, including representatives from VCU. Conceptual plans for integrating the residual City-owned green space near Wayne Street and Belmont Avenue are being considered relative to impacts on sidewalk improvements, but design or implementation of green space improvements are not part of the funded scope of work.

C. Project Funding and Budget Sources

This project is being funded by Virginia's SMART SCALE (§33.2-214.1) program, the method of scoring planned projects included in VTrans that are funded by House Bill 1887. Funds for this project were awarded through SMART SCALE, Round 1 including Construction funds in the amount of \$5,410,000, VDOT Fiscal Year 2020. Funding was adopted by the CTB (Commonwealth Transportation Board) on July 1, 2016 (FY 2017).

D. Construction Program

Layout:

- There are generally four to five typical conditions within the project area, based upon the overall width from back of curb to building face or ROW. Concept development plans are organized around these typical sections.
- Each typical section is divided into three functional zones
 - Amenity Zone (curbside)
 - Pedestrian Zone
 - Building Zone
- The overall goal is to provide a minimum clear pedestrian zone of six feet in width, and a five foot minimum building zone for entry ingress/egress and furnishings. When width is constrained, providing the minimum 6' wide pedestrian zone will take precedence. With previous guidance from UDC, and City staff, selected tree planting areas have been reduced to five foot in width to maintain the desired pedestrian clearances.
- Café seating: where possible, the goal is to preserve five to six feet of depth for café areas, while maintaining the minimum six foot pedestrian clear zone.
- Clear zones of five feet are desired, where possible, around site furnishings, trees, railings and above ground utility features.
- A typical six foot scored concrete grid pattern is planned for the hardscape.

Paving:

- Sidewalk Pavement Finish: Direction from Planning and Development Review was for simple design detailing, scored concrete, no troweled edges.
- VCU brick/concrete pattern: Existing pavement and brick will remain in place. The project includes plans to enlarge existing tree pits, to be consistent with the proposed typical for spacing and size within the project limits. Brick collars around the existing trees will be removed and replaced with low plantings.
- Unique conditions exist where buildings setbacks create areas of existing sidewalk pavement outside of the ROW and thus outside the limits of work. The project scope does not propose improvements outside of the ROW (examples include 3600 W Broad Street). The City will discuss specific issues with individual property owners to determine if improvements could

extend on to their property, however funding for temporary or permanent right-of-way and/or easement acquisitions was not allocated for this project and improvements beyond the right-of-way are not planned.

Street Trees:

- Tree Pit Dimensions: Typical 6'x12' tree planting area, with exception that in areas with limited sidewalk width the pits vary in width, with the minimum width being 4'-7", to provide a min. six feet (6') clear pedestrian zone. Low groundcovers, perennials, and shrubs will be planted in the tree pits that are low-maintenance and water efficient selections.
- Tree selection will be informed by several factors:
 - Species form and proven hardiness in urban conditions
 - the presence of overhead power lines
 - adjacent parking conditions (i.e. on-street vs no on-street parking conditions)
 - existing tree species

Kimley-Horn has coordinated with City arborist for proper tree selection.

Tree Selection: Large shade trees are proposed at roughly 42' foot spacing. Smaller trees are proposed under existing OHE lines, from Hamilton to Sheppard Street, at 30' o.c.. In all tree pits the landscape rhythm is reinforced with understory plant material.

Curb Extensions: Proposed curb chokers and parking-delineation islands have been shown in locations that meet the following criteria:

- Create no change in existing drainage pattern;
- Would provide safer pedestrian crossing;
- Don't cause major impacts to curb ramps constructed with BRT project; and,
- Allow for truck movements appropriate to intersection.

Street Furnishings:

- Bike Share: plans maintain existing locations; no new locations are proposed at this time
- Bike Racks: Bike racks, including Bike Share facilities, will be set on an angle to the curb to reduce overall depth impact on pedestrian zone.
- Trash Receptacles: Final plans will reflect filed locating locations of trash receptacles within each block for ease of maintenance and aligned with anticipated use patterns
- Bench Orientation: City standard benches have been located and grouped in appropriate areas, such as bus stop locations. Benches are perpendicular to the street, facing each other against tree pits.

Driveway Closures:

- Proposed locations for closure of existing driveways have been coordinated with City staff and are shown based upon traffic safety, site layout, and adequate site access from other driveway locations. All closures would be tentative pending final City review and appropriate property owner input.

Lighting Program:

- Addition of new acorn light fixtures on existing metal poles within project limits, where there is currently no fixture today.
- Painting of existing steel poles between Laurel Street and Sheppard Street
- Festoon Lights: City is interested in providing for overhead string lighting in selected areas, but the project program does not include design details for this element.

Utilities:

- Overhead utilities exist along the western portion of the project corridor, from Sheppard Street to Hamilton Street, the western most limits of the project.. Due to budget constraints, overhead utilities will remain.

E. Estimated Construction Start Date

Advertising Date is planned for 2019, completion by end of 2021

d. UDC Review History

At the regular November 2018 meeting, the Urban Design Committee conducted a conceptual review of streetscape improvements for West Broad Street, the conceptual review of this application, (UDC 2018-44). Staff found that the project accomplished the goal of improving the two mile stretch of West Broad Street. The plan called for delineating spaces for Amenity, Pedestrian, and Building zones, allotting a six foot minimum clearance for the Pedestrian Zone, one foot more than current practice. In terms of paving, the project called for new, simplified sidewalk finishes (in areas that are unimproved by VCU) which will help unify the aesthetic along the corridor. Lighting was proposed to be enhanced through additional acorn light fixtures where none currently exist with a provision for festoon lighting in selected areas. Street trees were planned along the route and varied depending on the width of the sidewalk and overhead utilities. The addition of including root path structures to promote tree longevity was commendable. Curb extensions, street furnishings, and driveway closures further spoke 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.

Thus, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant approval with the following conditions:

- That a professional arborist review existing street trees to advise on those that are viable to remain
- That the applicant study best practices for root zone expansion around planting wells and street trees
- That granite curbs are installed when curbs are disturbed
- That the new pedestrian scale light fixtures are LED with a color temperature of 3000k or less

At their regular September 2018 meeting the Urban Design Committee conducted a final review of a similar project that focused on streetscape encroachments and improvements for the Sauer Center, located at 2000-2220 West Broad Street (UDC 2018-36) and recommended that the Department of Public Works approve the application.

Staff found that the project did a commendable job of improving this section of streetscape while maintaining a balance of existing and new landscaping while

maintaining effective sidewalk width for both movement and programming. The use of hardscape materials to denote commercial entrances, outdoor seating, and streetscape furnishings further illustrated the thoughtful consideration that went into the design to further provide visual interest and overall enhancement of the public realm.

Staff discussed using this project to serve as a model for future streetscape improvements along West Broad Street, with certain modifications such as a simplified hardscape plan and pattern, and retaining trees whenever possible.

e. Master Plan

This project falls within the Near West District of the Master Plan. It mentions expected changes and trends will occur specifically on major transportation and commercial corridors, particularly Broad Street, where there will be more of a focus on retailing and commercial services (page 228).

Regarding W. Broad St. between Belvidere St. and Boulevard, the plan does not mention streetscapes improvements specifically but does state that “Community commercial, institutional, governmental, and office uses are all appropriate and should continue. Vacant buildings on the corridor should be encouraged to develop first floor commercial uses with office and/or residential uses for upper floors. Ideally, Broad Street should be a dense urban development that is oriented to the pedestrian and compatible with adjacent residential development. Therefore, any new development along this section of Broad Street needs to be oriented to the street with no setbacks, and to complement the prevailing urban storefront character. Additional off-street parking should be developed with minimal visual impact on the corridor. Vehicle-oriented land uses and driveways that could impede the flow of pedestrian traffic should be discouraged. Existing auto-related...uses should be gradually phased out along the corridor.” (page 239).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Community Character section of the Urban Design Guidelines contains several suggestions on landscaping, noting that “generally, new street trees should be located a minimum of 35’ from each other and three feet from the curb” and that “generally, a street tree should be no closer than 12 feet from a streetlight” (page 21). “Entrances and pedestrian walkways should enhance the streetscape and delineate an edge between pedestrian walkways and the street. Appropriate landscaping should be used to clearly define entrances and pedestrian walkways” (page 20).

In terms of fixture design, the guidelines note that “New light fixtures may be affixed to existing metal or concrete utility poles, for cost effectiveness and to reduce clutter on the sidewalk...Lighting fixtures should be consistent with existing fixtures in the surrounding area.” (page 23). It also states that “Site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months.” (page 25).

The Guidelines also encourage alternatives to metal tree grates, unless a precedent has been established in the area (page 21). Finally, the Guidelines state that lighting and street fixtures should be consistent with the existing fixtures in the surrounding area and that pedestrian light poles should be placed 40 to 60 feet apart (page 22, 25).

Regarding door swings, the Guidelines state “The Urban Design Committee does not support the encroachment of door swings into the public right-of-way. Recessed entries are encouraged. When a recessed entry is not feasible, the encroachment of the door swing into the public right-of-way should be minimized as much as possible” (page 28).

The Guidelines have this to say about outdoor dining: “Outdoor dining facilities that encroach into the public right-of-way should only be considered when there is adequate sidewalk width to accommodate both the dining facilities and the pedestrian.” Also, “the outdoor dining furnishings should reflect the character of the restaurant while respecting the spirit of the street design” (page 29).

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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