



To: Urban Design Committee
From: Planning and Preservation Division
Date: December 10th, 2020
RE: **Final location, character and extent review of Richmond Public Library - Westover Hills Branch Interpretive Signage; UDC 2020-22**

I. APPLICANT

Scott Firestine, Director, Richmond Public Libraries

II. LOCATION

1408 Westover Hills Blvd, Richmond, VA, 23225

Property Owner:

City of Richmond General Services

III. PURPOSE

The application is for the final location, character and extent review of a new interpretive sign at the Richmond Library - Westover Hills Branch.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant proposes to install new signage at the Richmond Public Library -Westover Hills Branch, which will feature information on the local watershed and serve as an interpretive, educational resource.

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the plan as submitted.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The library is located one block south of the intersection of Forest Hill Avenue and Westover Hills Boulevard and fronts Westover Hills Boulevard. It is part of a small RO-2 zoned district that serves as a buffer between the commercial corridor and the single-family neighborhood. The site's landscaping was redesigned in 2016 to implement green infrastructure in the form of retention basins, rain gardens, swales, and native plantings.

b. Scope of Review

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a "public building" in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

In 2016, the UDC reviewed the conceptual & final location, character and extent review of the Westover Hills Public Library Sustainable Campus Initiative. The UDC recommended approval of the project.

The UDC has reviewed a number of library renovation projects, many of which include landscaping, over the last few years. In 2009, the UDC reviewed improvements to this Branch Library, and followed up with review of a new roof in 2010.

d. Project Description

The site is located on Westover Hills Boulevard, one property north of the intersection with Forest Hill Avenue. There is heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic on these roads and in the adjacent alley, while the northern boundaries of the site are defined by a private residence and Devonshire Road.

The site has already been improved with retention basins and native plantings.

The proposed project includes the installation of a new interpretive sign on the east side of the library, in front of the main façade of the building. The new interpretive sign will be 32" tall. The panel will be mounted on a three-inch aluminum post. The panel will be 24.50 inches wide and have smoothed edges for safety.

As originally submitted, the interpretive signage was proposed to be located directly in front of the main façade of the library building. Staff noted that the interpretive signage would best serve its purpose located closer to the sidewalk, and facing the rain gardens and conveyance channels, rather than the face of the building.

The applicant has confirmed that the original location was requested by project stakeholders, however those stakeholders are fine with placing it elsewhere. The applicant has revised the proposed location of the sign to be closer to the sidewalk in a location that maximizes exposure to the public and captures a view of all rain gardens on the site.

This project is funded by a 319H grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and supported by staff hours from The James River Association. Site improvements funded by the above, The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Westover Hills Library Advisory Group, and a private donor. Construction is scheduled to begin as soon as approved by the UDC. Installation by JRA.

All maintenance will be performed by RPL staff.

e. Master Plan

The 2001 Master Plan's recommendations for the Old South Planning District recognize that Forest Hill Avenue and Westover Hills Boulevard is an important intersection, but also speaks to the need to successfully buffer residential neighborhoods from commercial uses, and ensure well-maintained street presence in older commercial areas (pages 274, 280).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The guidelines state that, *“On-site signage should be consistent in style and convenient to visitors, but should be inconspicuously integrated into the overall landscape.”* (pg. 9) The proposed signage is located within the front garden of the library building and will be easily accessible from an existing stone pathway.

Regarding design of signage, the guidelines state that, *“A sign should fit the architecture of the building. A sign should not be too large for a building or overwhelm its architecture. Signs should not obstruct architectural elements and details that define a building’s design. Signs should be placed so that they are sensitive to the signs of adjacent businesses. Freestanding signs should also relate to the architecture of the building. The sign’s base may be constructed of like building materials. Additional traffic signs should be coordinated with existing or new poles to avoid additional clutter.”* (23) Staff finds that the new sign is small in size and a simple design. The signage is located to the side of the main building, instead of the originally proposed location in front of the main façade of the library building, reducing the signs impact on the architectural character of the building.

The guidelines state that *“A sign’s message should be easy to read and direct. It should not contain too much information. The message should clearly relate to the use of the building.”* (pg. 23) The information on the proposed interpretive signage is easy to understand, containing pictures and maps. The proposed signage will be used for educational purposes, relating to the overall function and purpose of a library.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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