



City of Richmond, Virginia
Department of Planning and Development Review
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To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: April 19th, 2021
File ID: UDC-088947-2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at John Marshall High School; 4225 Old Brook Road**

I. APPLICANT

Bobby Hathaway, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

4225 Old Brook Road

Property Owner:

City of Richmond School Board

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of a new monument sign at John Marshall High School

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Currently, John Marshall High School does not have an identification monument sign, which can make the building difficult to locate. The project involves the construction of a freestanding monument sign for John Marshall High School. The new monument sign will have an electronic message board located under an aluminum identification sign with applied vinyl lettering.

The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval of the plan with the following conditions:

- The applicant consider programming a late evening shut-off time so that the LED message board's illumination does not impact the surrounding residences
- Any electrical equipment associated with the new monument sign be concealed within the sign and not be located on the exterior.
- The proposed sign does not change messages, produce animations, or flash more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.
- The applicant consider adding landscaping around the proposed monument sign that complements the sign and grows to a mature height that will not impact the visibility of the signage. If landscaping is feasible at this location, the final plant selection should be submitted to staff for review.

Staff Contact:

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

The subject property is located in North Richmond, bound by Old Brook Road to the west, Forest Lawn Drive to the south and east, and Henderson Middle School to the north. The parcel is approximately 30 acres and is zoned residential. The site is surrounded by multi-family buildings and Forest Lawn Cemetery to the east. The new monument sign will be located on the west side of the property, abutting Old Brook Road.

b. Scope of Review

The proposed signage is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the City Charter as identification for a “public building or structure.

c. Project Description

Currently, John Marshall High School does not have an identification sign, which can make it difficult to locate the building. Richmond Public Schools is proposing to install an internally illuminated monument sign consistent with other RPS schools.

The monument sign will be an aluminum cabinet sign situated on a brick base, painted, and internally illuminated. The inside of the cabinet will have clear track for the manual installation and removal of letters for creating and changing messages within the sign.

The sign will be 8’4” in length, 6’3” in height, 14” in width, and double faced. The sign will be painted dark blue and have white lettering, with an electronic message board. The name of the school on the identification sign will be 5.5” applied vinyl letters, and the address characters on the base of the sign will be 4” tall.

No landscaping is being proposed in the scope of this project.

d. UDC Review History

The UDC has not previously reviewed projects at this location.

e. Master Plan

Objective 1.4, k. of Richmond 300 proposes to “promote an attractive environment by minimizing visual clutter and confusion caused by a proliferation of signage, ensuring that public and private signage is appropriately scaled to the pedestrian experience (pg. 100).” The proposed signage is appropriately scaled and is the same design as other Richmond Public School identification signage, further establishing a uniform design associated with the City’s public schools.

f. Urban Design Guidelines

Regarding placement and size, the Urban Design Guidelines have a number of recommendations pertaining to signage:

“Freestanding signs should relate to the architecture of the building” and “The sign’s base may be constructed of like building materials” (pg. 23). The new monument sign will have a brick base which relates to the main brick material of the school building.

“Lettering should be 4-14 inches high and should be in proportion to the area in which it will be displayed” (pg. 23). All lettering on the new sign will be larger than 4” and smaller than 14” and is proportionate to the overall area of the faces of the sign.

“Sign color should relate to and complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent highlights and trim colors” (pg. 24). The sign will be painted dark blue. There is not a precedent for any particular color on the main building at this location.

“Illuminated signs are not appropriate in or adjacent to residential areas” (pg. 24). The proposed sign will be located in a residential area. Staff recommends that the applicant consider a shut-off time for the electronic message board late in the evening to reduce potential impact on the neighboring residential buildings. In addition, Staff recommends any electrical equipment associated with the new monument sign be concealed within the sign and not be located on the exterior, and that the proposed sign does not change messages, produce animations, or flash any more than once every five seconds, per the zoning ordinance.

If a sign is illuminated, it *“should have light lettering and dark, opaque backgrounds for improved readability and minimal glare” (pg. 24).* Staff finds that there is adequate contrast between the lettering and the sign color for improved readability.

“Freestanding signs should be landscaped with appropriate deciduous evergreen shrubs, ground cover planting, annuals and/or perennials” (pg. 24). Landscaping is not being proposed within the scope of this project. Staff recommends that the applicant consider adding landscaping at the base of the new monument sign. If landscaping is feasible at this location, the final plant selection should be submitted to staff for review.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

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