

City of Richmond

*900 East Broad Street
2nd Floor of City Hall
Richmond, VA 23219
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Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 10, 2022

10:00 AM

5th Floor Conference Room of City Hall

Urban Design Committee

Attachments: 11_10_2022_Public Access and Participation Instructions - Urban Design Committee

Call to Order

Roll Call

Approval of Minutes

These minutes could not be approved because Committee Members could not access the minutes file online.

These Minutes were introduced, but was deferred to a further meeting due to technical difficulties.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Roakes provided the Committee with a report on items that were forwarded to the Planning Commission. UDC 2022-19 Greening Richmond Public Libraries project, UDC 2022-20 Leigh Street Streetscape Improvement project, and 2022-21 Calhoun Recreation Center Park Renovation project were approved by the Planning Commission as recommended by the UDC.

Consideration of Continuances and Deletions from Agenda

CONSENT AGENDA

REGULAR AGENDA

Attachments: [UDC 2022-24 UDC Report to CPC](#)
[UDC 2022-24 Staff Report to UDC](#)
[UDC 2022-24 Application](#)
[UDC 2022-24 Narrative](#)
[UDC 2022-24 Site and Landscape Plan](#)
[UDC 2022-24 Full Plan Set](#)
[CPC UDC 2022-24- STAFF APPROVAL LETTER](#)
[STAFF APPROVED Greening Greater Fulton Comment Response Letter](#)
[STAFF APPROVED Greening Greater Fulton Site Plans](#)

Planner Roakes presented the application.

The applicant, Jenn Clarke from RVAH20, provided context on this partner project, part of the RVAH20 Collaborative with Stormwater Utility.

Applicant David Newton from VHB spoke about how the project has changed since the conceptual stage. The project has attracted additional collaborators and community organizations. He pointed out the historical disinvestment within the Fulton neighborhood and the large amount of impervious pavement. The addition of the landscaping and plaza will better add to the placemaking element of the project. The project will also help improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff, and enhance pedestrian infrastructure. He also detailed the community outreach and engagement

efforts which informed the final design. Nine trees will be removed, all crepe myrtles, but city arborists have been consulted about plantings.

Committee Member Gemmer asked about the ADA improvements.

Applicant Newton said that they are working to address ADA recommendations at several points including altering curbing and separating pedestrian and vehicular traffic through elevation changes. Sidewalks may need to be widened and existing ADA ramps may be replaced.

Committee Member Gemmer asked if the project includes enough trashcans.

Applicant Newton said that there could be opportunities for additional trash receptacles or altered locations.

Committee Member Pearson asked if the artwork is part of the application.

Applicant Tim Harper, the artist for the project, said yes.

Committee Member Clarke said that seating is desirable and without it, people will not be drawn to the space.

Applicant Harper said that nearby business owners are concerned about loitering. A ledge may be most feasible.

Committee Member Clarke asked about the project maintenance.

Applicant Newton said that the project funding includes maintenance paid for two years with Groundwork RVA. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay is in discussions about the longevity of the maintenance.

Committee Member Clarke asked who takes care of the maintenance after those two years.

Applicant Jenn Clarke said the City will take care of maintenance but that the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay is working on other options. She described other similar projects that have successful public-private relationships where the City is not taking sole responsibility for maintenance.

Committee Member Clarke says she is very impressed with the plant selection. She noted that the Daylilies are the only non-native plants and asked why they were chosen.

Applicant Philip Mayer spoke about the plant selection. They tried to minimize non-native plant selection, but some non-native plants are adaptive and easier to maintain.

Chair Quilici suggested a better solution for seating. He asked about the potential for bike racks for those using the nearby bike path.

Applicant Newton said that the community hasn't presented bike racks as a priority but that there are opportunities for them.

Applicant Harper said sculpture lighting is on the agenda, but the details have not been specified.

Committee Member Gemmer said it would be great to see a larger plaza and seating.

Committee Member Woodson asked if there is a bus stop nearby.

Applicant Newton said yes, there are two.

Chair Quilici opened the floor for public comment.

Applicant Christina Bonini from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay emphasized that the two-year project has involved close communication and work with community members. Their feedback has directly influenced the final project.

A motion was made by Committee Member Gemmer, seconded by Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan, to approve the application with staff recommendations.

Chair Quilici questioned if additional recommendations could be made about lighting and/or seating.

Committee Member Clarke said that a large tree in the area should be planted to add to canopy coverage.

Committee Member Woodson said seating may be requested in the future as the neighborhood changes but that right now may not be the time to add some.

A motion was made by Committee Member Gemmer, seconded by Committee Member Hepp-Buchanan, that this Location, Character and Extent Item be recommended for approval with conditions to the Planning Commission, due back on 12/5/2022.

The recommended conditions are as follows:

- 1. The UDC recommends that the existing pedestrian scale lighting and other existing pedestrian furnishings within the project area be maintained and re-used with the proposed project.**
- 2. The UDC recommends that the Applicant revise plans to make minor adjustments to meet ADA requirements and widen the sidewalk width to 6ft in the northern half of the project area.**
- 3. The UDC recommends that the Applicant revise plans to provide a large tree to act as a focal point adjacent to the public art plaza, to be approve by Staff.**
- 4. The UDC recommends that the Applicant revise plans to list only native plant species to be used in plantings, to be approved by Staff.**
- 5. The UDC recommends that the Applicant revise plans to provide enough space in the Public Art Plaza for future potential seating, to be approved by Staff.**
- 6. The UDC recommends that the Applicant revise plans to show adequate lighting for the Public Art Plaza, to be approved by Staff.**

The motion carried by the following vote:

Attachments: [Applicant Letter to Withdraw Application](#)
[Application](#)
[\(CURRENT\) Version 2 CONCEPT Plan \(December\)](#)

Planner Roakes presented the application.

The applicant, Allen Shue, noted that this is the beginning of a greater effort to address Southside neighborhoods that have historically been affected by flooding and poor stormwater management. The water within the tributary flows to this location already along open dirt channels. Oftentimes, these unimproved stormwater channels overflow in heavy rains into the street and surrounding private yards.

Committee Member Wehunt asked about the pollutant levels removed.

Shue said that pond is a level 2 pond, but he doesn't recall more specifics. The applicant offered to provide that to Staff and the UDC.

Bill Boston from DPU said the upstream portion of the project will better mitigate repetitive flooding and get ahead of climate change. The primary purpose of the pond is not necessarily geared toward water quality but for retention. The project involves purchasing the property from a private owner. The path is an addition to provide access for residents. It won't be necessarily aesthetically pleasing so lighting may not be provided or desired. The size of the property keeps a majority of the design from being more than utilitarian. A majority of the BMPs in the City include fences to promote safety.

Doyle asked how the community reached out and received updates about the project.

Boston said the project has been considered for around 2 years. Residents received project fliers. DPU has had many previous complaints about flooding and staff were available for additional communications both online and in-person.

Woodson asked about the metrics for improvements.

Boston said the primary driver is addressing the flooding in the neighborhood. The pond will mitigate the stormwater runoff rather than dumping it on some other private land. Planting trees citywide is a metric for stormwater mitigation so any trees removed will be added somewhere else.

Woodson asked for further detail on how this site already acts as a natural stormwater location.

Boston stated that the neighborhood was constructed at a time when stormwater improvements were not included. As such, the existing condition makes it difficult to address the stormwater issues without significant changes and the proposed project is the best that can be done without completely redesigning the area. He also confirmed that the project includes replacing open dirt channels with structured pipes to channel water to the pond, although those improvements are outside the scope of the UDC review.

Woodson said there is a strong tree canopy coverage in the existing site which will naturally mitigate some stormwater drainage. He asked if there were metrics measuring the difference between the natural current condition and the proposed condition.

Boston said that stormwater currently stands in private yards and open ditches as it moves through this area. The water then pools onto the subject property in its current natural condition and overflows into surrounding right-of-ways. He further stated that the private property has received approval to be developed with several single family homes, so if the proposed project were not completed, the flooding situation will be worsened due to further development. The City has undertaken a number of tree planting projects, partly to reduce overall stormwater runoff. These tree plantings will more than compensate for any lost in the proposed project.

Pearson asked if the property is under contract and if the private property owner has been approached to gauge interest in selling this property to the City.

Boston said they have to go to City Council before they can purchase the property or have any agreements thereof and that the private owner has been approached and

signaled willingness to sell.

Woodson requested the project costs.

Shue said the upstream improvements are \$4 million but the design phase has not been priced out yet.

Wehunt asked if the existing property has wetlands or jurisdictional features on it.

Shue said not according to the City's map.

Wehunt asked if a jurisdictional determination has been made or if they are just following the map.

Boston said they are following the map but that a future determination will be made before permitting.

Wehunt asked if a potential path will be solely for maintenance purposes or for public use.

Shue confirmed that the path must be there for maintenance, but the project would like to go above and beyond to provide community benefit.

Wehunt stated that the path would be beneficial for public use.

Boston stated that even with public access along the path, the surrounding roads to access the path do not include sidewalks.

Gemmer asked if other sites are being considered, what the detention pond and landscaping will look like for residents, and why the path was requested.

Boston said this is the only solution being considered because the neighborhood is already constructed, and this is the only option that addresses the issue--especially since this property is already where the stormwater ends up.

Gemmer asked for further detail on landscaping and if mosquitos were an issue with such ponds.

Shue said the plantings will be native grasses following Virginia Clearing House BMP standards and that proposed plantings will naturally discourage pedestrians from accessing the pond water area. The plantings will also be chosen to not disrupt the structural integrity of pond embankments. The path is needed for clearance and maintenance aspects.

Planner Roakes asked how often there will be standing water in the pond.

Shue said it's not intended to be a consistently full pond and there is a drawdown period.

Wehunt said a level 2 pond would be wet all of the time. The extended detention pond design would be a marsh.

Shue said that his intention is not for a consistently wet pond, and offered to get a rough estimate of depth and other calculations

Gemmer asked if there is a health risk if people swim in the pond when it's full.

Shue said the team will investigate that.

Kyle Logue from the project team said grasses planted around the perimeter will prevent swimming, nuisance pests, and burrowing. There will be safety and aquatic benching to prevent safety hazards.

Clarke said the landscaping can be altered so the pond is inaccessible.

Wehunt stated that having the metrics and technical background will help the Committee assess the design of the project.

Danese asked how the problem would be mitigated if the property was unavailable.

Boston said every other option has led back to this one. Others would have been unable to mitigate the problem and would have to reroute the water further downstream, which was the least desirable outcome. There are no other locations within this community to handle the stormwater.

Shue stated that peak flows through this area are very high and if the pond were not constructed, the stormwater would have to be pumped downstream which would overwhelm existing infrastructure and require further investment.

Danese asked if there were examples of other developments that include a similar stormwater facility.

Planner Roakes stated that all new large developments, such as townhouse communities, would include exactly the same design.

Danese asked about the Fan neighborhood and how stormwater was handled for that.

Planner Roakes stated that the Fan was built before these requirements and the designs did not include facilities like the proposed detention pond.

Pearson asked if staff considers the proposed pond as desirable.

Planner Roakes said yes. The neighborhood is existing and locked into the poor design that is currently creating flooding issues. The proposed project is the improvement. Building piping down to the river is not the best practice in stormwater management. Having water detained throughout the system is the current best practice.

Woodson asked if there is any federal money involved.

Boston said no, funding would be provided by the City. He further stated that the City has a process for determining the appropriate price for real estate which will keep the City from paying an illogical price. To fully fix stormwater in the Southside of the City, the cost could be in the half-billion-dollar range, weighing the cost of this project against the total price tag of what maybe should be spent. This condition is common throughout the Southside and there are not a lot of solutions to address this flooding.

Shue stated that development on this site by private owners will be challenging because of the flooding issue.

Woodson said that the project will remove significant amount of habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Planner Roakes said City DPW Staff have reviewed the plans and determined that adjacent roads support the addition of a public use path. In the future projects a

sidewalk might be provided.

Gemmer asked if the proposed project is sized to handle a greater amount of stormwater than what is currently existing because climate change will likely increase water loads in the future.

Boston agreed that climate change will make flooding worse in the neighborhood in the future. Most stormwater infrastructure currently being constructed in the city is designed to handle much smaller rain events than the proposed project. To provide a greater amount of stormwater treatment would require a much larger sized facility. The City not only needs to anticipate future increases from climate change but also a long backlog of failure to put in infrastructure from the past that needs to be put in now. The proposed project is for current stormwater requirements.

Wehunt requested information on project location within the greater tributary in the next submission.

Gemmer requested conceptual renderings of the proposed projects as well as example imaged of similar projects in the next submission.

Woodson re-stated that metrics would help, as well.

Danese requested opportunities to preserve trees on property. Numbers are also important, such as purchase price of the property and cost of the project.

Gemmer asked if funding details were within UDC purview.

Woodson stated that funding considerations would fall under appropriateness review as stated in the City code.

Planner Roakes clarified that the UDC is charged for policy in relation to urban design and how to design projects. The UDC does not provide policy input on what stormwater plans should be undertaken for the larger area. The UDC is not an engineering body and cannot substitute the UDC's determination over expert testimony and determination. The UDC may ask experts to substantiate to a point but should stay on the path of urban design.

Pearson asked if fiscal responsibility falls into considerations for appropriateness.

Planner Roakes clarified that fiscal responsibility does not fall under UDC's purview. The UDC may ask about maintenance as it related to urban design.

Danese said that review of appropriateness could include design considerations such as visibility, aesthetics, pedestrian access, and use.

Committee Chair Quilici opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

A motion was made by Woodson, seconded by Danese, to defer the project until more information is received.

Wehunt said she is satisfied with the site selection and understands that the site is already a destination for stormwater and therefore the correct location for a stormwater facility. For the project to move forward, the application should be approved so they can continue their work.

Woodson is concerned with replacing a wooded wetland area with a pond. How will that improve the site and what are the metrics for improvement?

Quilici reiterated that the applicant has confirmed the neighborhood is currently flooding. If nothing is done, conditions will get worse. The current condition does not provide enough stormwater treatment to handle the water loads.

Woodson questioned how complete the proposal is to provide pond and pipes to address the issue.

Quilici stated that the applicant is a professional engineer and has determined that the proposed design is the best option.

Pearson stated that a natural solution will likely require the City to appropriate neighboring properties to facilitate the required size. However, a natural solution might be a cheaper long-term solution.

Quilici suggested there might be a compromise that enhances the proposed utilitarian design of the pond to include more plantings.

Wehunt said the City is constrained because the property in the area is privately held and the City has identified the subject property as appropriate to purchase for this use. The property would be located in wetland areas which would limit anything a private or public development would consist of.

Gemmer suggested there is an equity issue, stating that perhaps residents who live in a flooding neighborhood cannot afford to live somewhere else. This project would improve quality of life of thousands of people who live here. Keeping in mind climate change will make things worse going on in time, the UDC should not stand in the way.

Danese suggested that the design simply maximize site usage rather than include design considerations such as buffers.

Gemmer requested clarification on the property purchasing process.

Shue said that City standards require conceptual approval by the Planning Commission before an offer can be made on a property. Full design of the project would be subsequent.

Planner Roakes stated that the Planning Commission has in its enabling legislation "location, character, and extent review." The Planning Commission created the UDC to advise on specifics related to urban design of public property projects.

Gemmer asked if the level of landscaping is appropriate for the conceptual review.

Planner Roakes confirmed that the landscaping within the plan is much more generalized than typically provided because of the pond needing to be fully designed before any specifics could be taken on landscaping. The UDC may put a condition within the conceptual approval to create more concrete and request exact metrics for final review.

A motion was made by Committee Member Woodson, seconded by Danese, that this Location, Character and Extent Item be recommended for continuance to the Planning Commission, due back on 12/5/2022.

Committee Members Max Hepp-Buchanan and Justin Doyle were excused from the meeting prior to voting on this item due to scheduling conflicts.

The motion carried by the following vote:

OTHER BUSINESS

Adjournment