



CITY OF RICHMOND

PLANNING COMMISSION

May 21, 2013

To the Honorable Council of the  
City of Richmond, Virginia

At its meeting of May 20, 2013, the Planning Commission voted (4-2-1, Mr. Law and Mr. Hutchins against and Mr. Poole abstain) to APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS the following:

**Final Location, Character and Extent Review:**  
**Streetscape improvements to Forest Hill Avenue between Hathaway Road and  
Powhite Parkway Council District 4**

**Summary & Recommendation:**

This is a request to widen and improve Forest Hill Avenue from Hathaway Road to the Powhite Parkway, a distance of 0.74 miles. The existing right-of-way contains two travel lanes in each direction separated by a double-yellow line, with a narrow shoulder on the edge of the road. The subject roadway does not contain sidewalks or curb and gutter for the majority of the corridor except in the vicinity of the office/commercial area near Hathaway Road. The current speed limit on this section of Forest Hill Avenue is 40 mph, but the plans include reducing the speed limit to 35 mph.

Along the entire project corridor, the proposed right-of-way width varies from between 77'6" to 95'6" wide. In each of the four typical sections provided in the plans the right-of-way includes a minimum 10' width landscaped or painted median, two 11' wide travel lanes in each direction, a 5' bike lane in each direction, curb and gutter, a 4' planting strip on each side, and a 4' wide concrete sidewalk on each side. The variations in width account for turning lanes in the median and from the outside lanes. As part of the improvements, all private properties will get a formalized, curbed entrance to the driveway.

The proposed improvements do not include any dedicated right-turn lanes off of Forest Hill Avenue onto the neighborhood streets; however, dedicated right-turn lanes will be provided from westbound Forest Hill Avenue into the Willow Oaks Country Club and onto Hathaway Road. Heading west on Forest Hill Avenue, left turn lanes will be provided into the adjacent neighborhoods at Rettig Road and Woodberry Lane; and into the commercial establishments at the project's western edge. A proposed traffic signal at Melbourne Drive, to be synchronized with the Hathaway Road signal, will ease the latter turning movements.

Heading east on Forest Hill Avenue, left turn lanes will be provided into the adjacent neighborhoods at Windsorview Drive and Rettig Road; and into the Willow Oaks Country Club. Due to the proposed median, vehicles exiting Norcross Road, Heartwood Road and Glyndon Lane, all on the south side of Forest Hill Avenue, will be unable to turn left (west). As these roads all connect to either Rettig Road or Melbourne Drive, these movements can be accommodated at other intersections or through u-turns on Forest Hill Avenue. The improvements will increase the existing curb radii at each intersection.

Five pedestrian crosswalks will be provided across Forest Hill Avenue in four locations: on the east side of the intersection with Melbourne Drive, on the east side of the intersection with Windsorview Drive, on both sides of the intersection with Rettig Road, and at the intersection with

relocation assistance, and utility relocation; and construction accounts for the remaining \$8.5 million.

The subject right-of-way is located in the Huguenot Planning District as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The majority of the properties located adjacent to the corridor are designated in the Single-family (low density) land use category, with the exception of the Willow Oaks Country Club, for which the Plan recommends Institutional Uses, and the commercial area near Hathaway Road, for which the Plan recommends Transitional Office and Community Commercial uses.

In the 'Significant Issues' section for this district, the Plan acknowledges that "increasing traffic along Forest Hill Avenue threatens the long-term viability of owner-occupied single-family residences fronting on Forest Hill Avenue between the Forest Hill and Stratford Hills Shopping Centers and the Powhite Parkway" (page 195). The Plan also recommends that "recent streetscape improvements along Forest Hill Avenue should be expanded in order to encourage a stronger pedestrian presence along what has traditionally been a corridor catering to the commuting motorist" (page 199). In the 'Transportation' subsection for this district, the Plan recommends widening Forest Hill Avenue from four to five lanes between the Powhite Parkway and Hathaway Road (page 202).

The Transportation chapter of the Plan designates Forest Hill Avenue as a Principal Arterial Roadway, defined as a "major route for carrying high traffic volumes originating in areas not conveniently served by interstates or freeways; generally with four to six moving lanes, sometimes with a median but not limited access" (page 40). The Transportation and Roadway Improvements map also designates the corridor as a bike route, and the accompanying text notes that those roads so identified on the map have been chosen "as the most efficient, safe and appropriate locations for shared motor vehicle/bicycle traffic. These routes are appropriate for designation either through signage or delineated bike lanes" (page 38). The Plan further states that "routing systems for both cycling and walking should be just as important to the City's transportation network as are the roadways that support motorized travel" (page 38). To that end, the Plan advocates a policy to "construct new roadway segments that include bikeways and sidewalks" (page 38).

The Community Character section of the Plan designates Forest Hill Avenue as a Principal Arterial Image Corridor, and states that "image corridors are key transportation corridors that have the ability to form an impression on travelers passing through the City" (page 110). The Plan goes on to say that "enhancement of the City's image corridors conveys a positive impression of the City to encourage visitation and investment" (page 110).

The plans being considered in this application are the result of nearly 5 years of planning and public hearings. It is the Urban Design Committee's opinion that the plans are much improved as a result of the public review process. The provision of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will make this section of Forest Hill Avenue multi-modal, which the Committee is supportive of. The Committee finds that this corridor will be aesthetically enhanced by the proposed improvements, which will help to provide a much more formalized appearance.

Department of Public Works staff has indicated that the left turn lane from eastbound Forest Hill Avenue into the Willow Oaks Country Club, which is currently 221' long, only needs to be 90' long. Reducing the turn lane length would allow for more landscaping in the median, and the Committee is supportive of this alteration to the plans. The Committee does have concern with the pedestrian crosswalks at Rettig Road, which do not have refuges. The Committee would request that the applicant look into the possibility of extending the 4' wide concrete median further into the crosswalk and perhaps moving the crosswalks further out to provide for refuges.

The Committee is also concerned with some of the proposed landscaping. In a corridor project such as this, there is an opportunity to create a plant palette that is unique to the neighborhood and helps to create a sense of place. The landscaping plans for shrubs and groundcovers, which

were chosen for durability and ease of maintenance, feature the same plants that are used throughout the City. In terms of the street trees, the Committee would prefer to see a larger shade tree selected than the Chinese Pistache, working within the constraints of the 4' planting strip.

The aforementioned concerns notwithstanding, at its meeting of May 20, 2013, the City Planning Commission concurred with the UDC's findings and found that the proposal is consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan. The Planning Commission voted (4-2-1, Mr. Law and Mr. Hutchins against and Mr. Poole abstain) to approve the project with the following conditions:

- That the applicant reduce the length of the left turn lane into Willow Oaks Country Club from the current 221' to the proposed 90'.
- That the applicant look into the possibility of extending the 4' wide concrete median further into the crosswalk and/or moving the crosswalks at Rettig Road further out to provide pedestrian refuges.
- That the applicant consider providing a larger canopy shade tree than the Chinese Pistache (for example Sourwood), working within the constraints of the 4' planting strip.
- That the applicant considers using red truncated domes in the ADA accessible ramps instead of the standard yellow.
- That the applicant considers a retaining wall material that is redder in color, specifically the "Auburn" color that was provided in the application package.
- To provide signage specific on the Powhite Parkway off-ramp to westbound Forest Hill Avenue alerting drivers to the presence of the bike lane.
- That the applicant considers substituting *Itea* for the *Nandina* plants in the landscape plans.
- That the applicant considers including appropriate locations for future gateway signs for the corridor or entrance features into the adjacent neighborhoods.
- That the applicant considers the ability to attach banners to the light poles in the median in the future.

Very Truly Yours,



Lory Markham  
Secretary, City Planning Commission

Cc: Jeff Eastman, Secretary to the Urban Design Committee  
Kevin Newcomb, Department of Public Works