

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 22, 2010
TO: Parker-Gray BAR Members
FROM: BAR Staff
SUBJECT: Comments for Conceptual Review of James Bland Park

Summary timeline:

September 2008: Approval of Permit to Demolish and Concept Approval (BAR Case #s 2008-0150/0151)
May 2009: Approval of Certificate of Appropriateness and Waiver of Rooftop HVAC Screening Requirement for Phase I of James Bland (BAR Case #s 2009-0088/0089)
May 2010: Approval of Certificate of Appropriateness and Waiver of Rooftop HVAC Screening Requirement for Phase II of James Bland (BAR Case # 2010-0070)

Related BAR Condition:

As part of the concept approval, the Board made the following condition:

That the applicant work with Staff as the design of the park spaces evolves to ensure compatibility with the character of the district as relates to setting, landscape, the street grid and public space.

BAR Staff, in addition to other City Staff (P&Z Development and the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Staff), has met with the applicant to review the conceptual plan of the work and will continue to work with the applicant as the design is refined.

Overview:

The park will be located at the southwest corner of North Alfred and Montgomery streets and is currently proposed as part of Phase IV. The park will have open space for passive recreation and informal gatherings as well as an active children's play area. The proposed design has a central lawn with a small stage/gathering space at one end. The pavers, play equipment and other features have a musical theme, such as a climbable "base cleft" mound. The park is accessed from multiple walkways from the adjacent sidewalks. The park will be enclosed by a low metal fence and trees. While City-owned

and open to the public, the park and associated amenities will be maintained by the HOA. The actual details of the park will be reviewed administratively by Staff with the final site plan for that block, which likely will not be submitted until 2012.

At their September 23, 2010 meeting, the Park and Recreation Commission reviewed the conceptual design of the park and received public comments. On October 21, 2010, the Commission recommended approval of the conceptual plan with two conditions. First, the active play area of the park should be less of a focus and should be moved to a corner or side of the park; and, second, the Arts Commission should be made aware of the park design as it is further developed during the final site plan review. The park design must meet the requirements of the DSUP conditions and must be to the satisfaction of the Directors of P&Z and RP&CA.

BAR Review of Park Design:

The design of a public park, and particularly one such as this which contains artwork, typically requires the review and approval of several City commissions. The Park and Recreation Commission advises City Council on all matters relating to parkland, recreation, and culture. The Commission for the Arts supports the development and expansion of the arts in Alexandria and also serves as an advisory body to City Council. The members of both of these commissions are appointed because they offer specific expertise in fields which the BAR does not, however they often have overlapping authority with the BAR. Staff is, therefore, trying to identify the BAR's role in the review of this park to avoid confusion for the applicant.

BAR members are selected by City Council for their "demonstrated interest, experience, or education in history, architecture or historic preservation." The authority of the BAR under sec. 10-200 of the Zoning Ordinance is fairly broad but does not specifically address the design of a public park. The Board is asked in sec. 10-201(F) "To assure that new structures, additions, landscaping and related elements be in harmony with their historical and architectural settings and environs." A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for "exterior architectural features" but the *Design Guidelines* do not have a chapter explaining how the various elements of a park should relate to the "architectural character and scale of the district."

By past practice, plant materials, children's play equipment and paving (except where used for parking) are not reviewed by the BAR. However, permanent planters, fences, garden walls, street furniture and the exterior lighting of buildings are described in the *Design Guidelines* and require approval. Therefore, the detailed design of certain architectural elements of this park, such as fences and piers, the brick wall and the seating wall, and possibly the stage, will require approval by the BAR. Artwork and landscape features will not, though the BAR's comments are welcome if, in the Board's opinion, these features would conflict with the architectural character and scale of the district.

At this time, BAR Staff has asked the City's Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Staff to respond to the Board's comments on the overall design concept so that any major

concerns with historic compatibility or the use of specific materials may be addressed immediately and relayed back to the Parks Commission and Commission for the Arts.

The items that require approval by the BAR will be incorporated into the future request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for Phase IV. In addition, Staff will work with the applicant on the text and graphics of the historical marker and will also ensure that it conforms to the City's recently adopted Wayfinding Program.

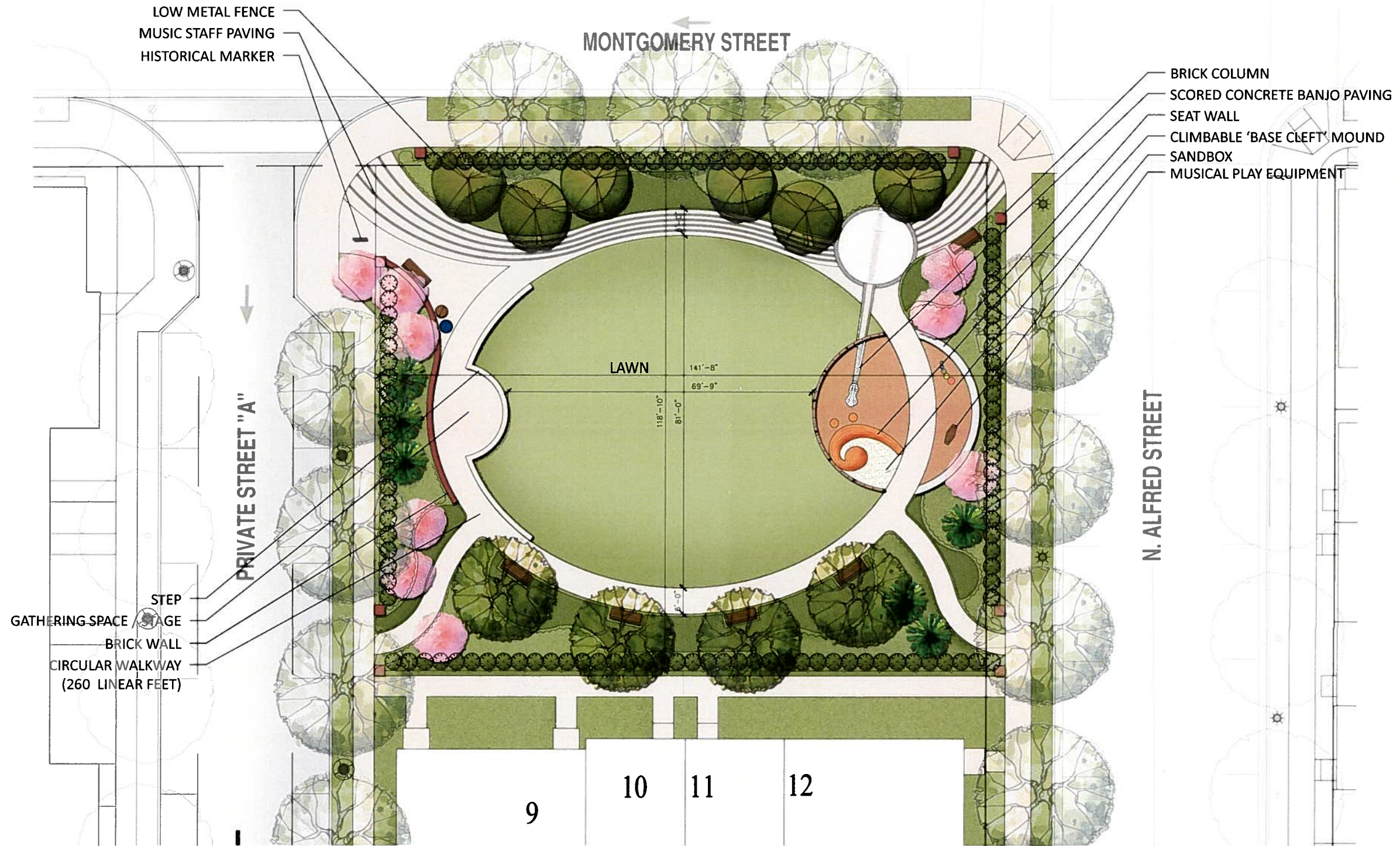
Staff supports the conceptual design of the park and believes that the choice of a musically themed park is appropriate as a reference to James Bland, a popular songwriter and musician who was noted for breaking racial barriers in the music industry.¹ Staff recommends that the applicant continue with this theme and utilize materials and designs that are compatible with the character of the Parker-Gray district and consistent with the *Design Guidelines*.

¹ *Documentary Study and Archaeological Resource Assessment for the James Bland Homes, City of Alexandria, VA*. Prepared by Boyd Sipe and Kimberly Snyder (Thunderbird Archaeology) in consultation with History Matters, LLC. February 2010.



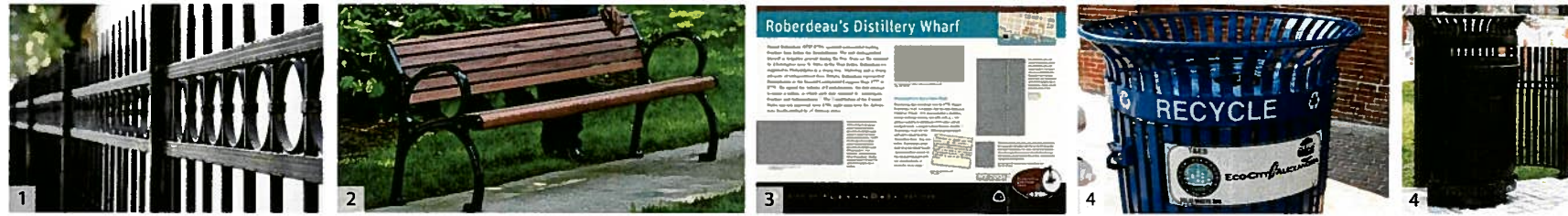
RECEIVED
OCT 20 2010
PLANNING & ZONING

*Construction is anticipated to begin in the 4th quarter of 2013 or 1st quarter of 2014, and be complete in the 1st or 2nd quarter of 2014.



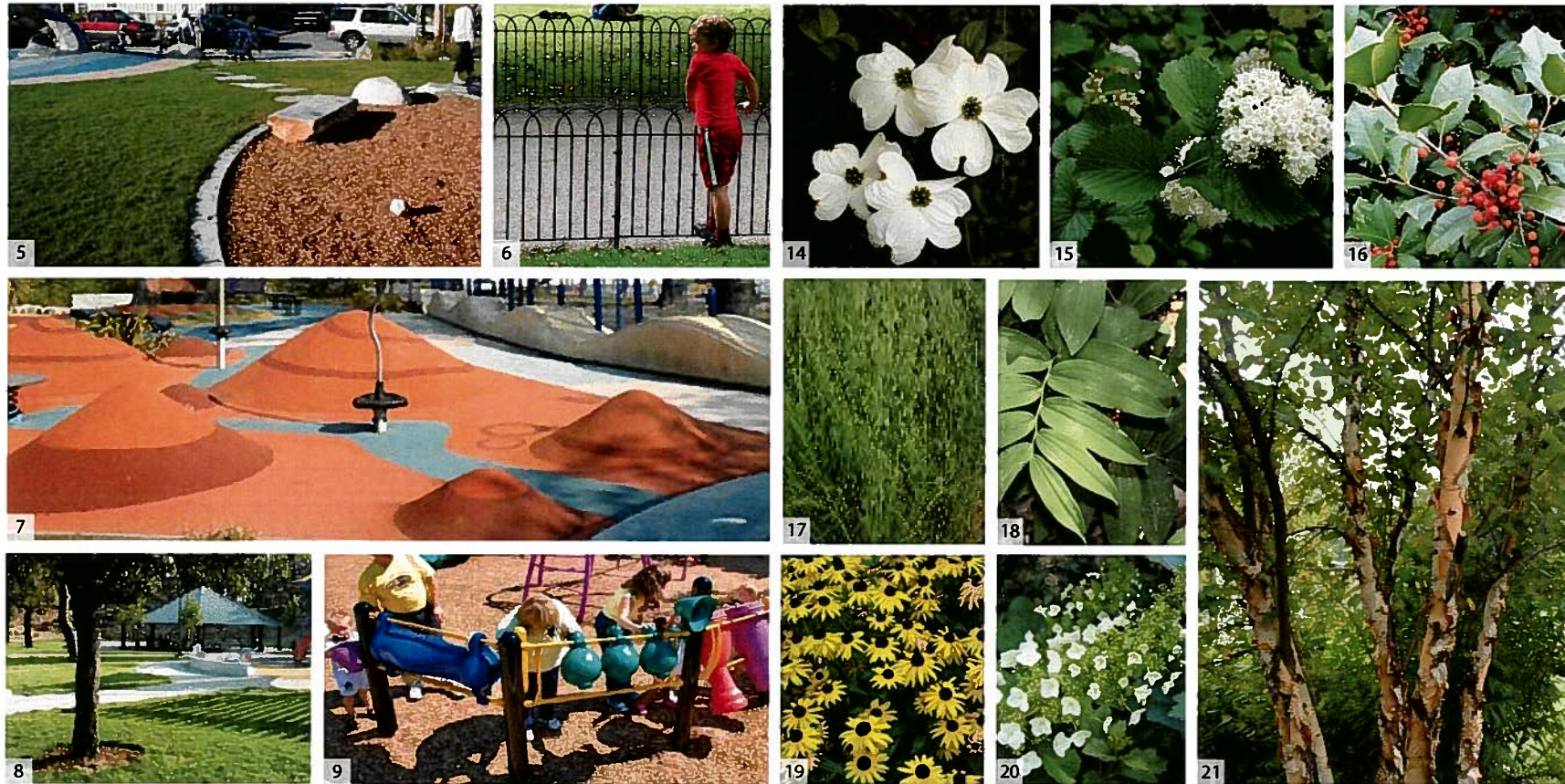
SITE FURNISHINGS

1. Ornamental metal fence
2. Bench
3. Historical marker
(location and content to be coordinated with City Staff)
4. Trash & Recycle Receptacle



PLAYGROUND

5. Concrete curb and mulch play surface
6. Low metal fence
7. Climbable 'base cleft' mound w/ rubberized surface
8. Seatwall
9. Musical play equipment



NATIVE PLANT PALETTE

LARGE DECIDUOUS TREES

- Acer rubrum
- 21. Betula nigra
- Platanus occidentalis
- Quercus rubra
- Quercus palustris

MEDIUM DECIDUOUS TREES

- 14. Cornus florida
- Chionanthus virginicus
- Hamamelis virginiana

EVERGREEN TREES

- 16. Ilex opaca
- Tsuga caroliniana

SHURBS, GRASSES, FORBES

- 17. Carex sp.
- Eragrostis spectabilis
- 15. Hydrangea spp.
- Ilex verticillata
- Polystichum acrostichoides
- 18. Polygonatum biflorum
- 19. Rudbeckia hirta
- 20. Viburnum spp.

*This plant palette is intended to convey the type of material anticipated. Additional species may be incorporated in the final design.

PAVING

10. Permeable pavers
11. Permeable paving (stone dust)
12. Gathering space / stage
13. Sandblasted / stained concrete



*The images above represent the type of materials, site furnishings and equipment to be used but are not the final product selections