

AIA Richmond Chapter 2006 Design Awards

Honor Award Winner

Project: Virginia Commonwealth University Master Plan

Owner: Virginia Commonwealth University; Richmond, Virginia
Architect: BCWH Architects, Richmond, VA
Location: Richmond, VA
Completion: 2005

Jury Comments:

- Clear and concise presentation – graphically accessible.
- Two distinct sites – MCV medical campus / Monroe Park academic campus.
- MCV works with the tight city grid around the capitol – helping to rejuvenate a strategic downtown site.
- The Academic campus is helping to rebuild a neglected part of the city while establishing a defined (and refined) campus precinct within the urban context.
- One very positive aspect of these plans – they build on and advance previous plans – it is not part of a cycle of starting over every five years.
- Analytical drawings were beautifully rendered and informative.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE:

Virginia Commonwealth University's previous Master Site Plan was adopted in May, 1996. In the years since the plan's inception, VCU has largely followed and implemented this master plan, operating within its flexible framework with occasional deviations where warranted by changing circumstances and opportunities. By 2003, most of the future development identified for the University in the plan had been completed. As a result, the planning contexts of both campuses had literally been transformed. In the same time period, the University's programs and enrollments grew substantially, simultaneously changing the institutional context for planning. As the University looked forward to the next planning window, other issues including projected growth, scarcity of land, enhancements to the quality of the campus environment, and traffic, parking and pedestrian circulation issues, made it clear that it was time to revisit the University's existing Master Site Plan. The 2004 Master Plan is evolutionary, rather than revolutionary in approach, building upon the values and directions established in the 1996 plan, and continuing to endorse the urban and architectural design principles from the "General Plan and Guidelines" adopted by the Board of Visitors in 1995.

The Master Site Plan summarizes and coordinates recent planning and development and illustrates the University's planned growth and development through the year 2020. It fulfills three primary University goals:

- Provides a comprehensive document for the Board of Visitors which articulates the University's vision for its campuses.
- Provides program direction and physical guidelines for future development of campus structures and campus open spaces.
- Continues to articulate VCU's relationship with neighboring communities by identifying districts and areas of future consideration.

SCOPE OF THE MASTER PLAN:

The plan focuses on the University's two main Campuses: the newly re-named Monroe Park Campus (formerly known as the Academic Campus) along with the substantial initiative of the Monroe Park Campus Addition; and the MCV Campus, including the integrated current master site plan and development initiatives of the VCU Health System and the Virginia Biotechnology Research Park.

PROCESS OUTLINE AND PARTICIPATION:

The seven-step, fifteen-month long process was broad and inclusive. To solicit qualitative and programmatic input, the data gathering and programming phases included over 66 interviews with groups and individuals at VCU. As part of the development and refinement of the design solutions, the proposed master site plan was presented to over 72 groups including University governance bodies and administrative advisory committees, community advisory boards, neighborhood associations, and city and state agencies and commissions.

Virginia Commonwealth University is a public, urban, doctoral-granting research institution, supported by the Commonwealth of Virginia to serve the people of the Commonwealth and the nation. Virginia Commonwealth University is located in the heart of Richmond, Virginia, the center of a dynamic metropolitan area nearing a population of one-million citizens. With two major campuses in downtown Richmond, VCU is one of the largest employers in the metropolitan area, is the second largest real estate holder in Richmond, after government, with more than 126 acres in the central city and occupies more than 7.3 million gross square feet of space. In the past decade VCU contributed significantly to the economic development of the City and region, in part through \$589 million in real estate development. The impact of the institution has grown through strong and proactive leadership and a commitment to working with, rather than acting upon, the community. VCU is a leading partner in the education and development of metropolitan Richmond.

BROAD THEMES OF THE MASTER SITE PLAN:

The programming phase of the Master Site Plan process relied heavily on input from the University community. The synthesis of this large volume of institutional planning knowledge and foresight is summarized into nine Broad Themes. With very few exceptions, every campus development initiative in the Master Site Plan is an outgrowth of one or more of these broad themes. Together they embody the forces, ambitions and overall context that will shape the direction of VCU's facilities development for the next decade or more.

- Impact of Growth in Student Enrollment
- Impact of Changes in Student Profile
- Impact of Growth of On-Campus Housing
- Impact of Growth in Funded Research
- Academic Spaces on the Health Sciences Campus
- "Collegiate Community"-Student Engagement
- Monroe Park
- Coordination of Major Initiatives
 - Monroe Park Campus addition
 - Health System Master Plan
- Strategic Growth Issues
 - Boundaries, Surrounding Neighborhoods
 - Areas of Future Consideration
 - Coordination with the City of Richmond
 - Coordination with the Virginia Biotechnology Research Park Master Plan

THE EVOLUTION OF VCU: 1990 TO 2004:

VCU's campuses have been in a state of transformation since 1990. The catalysts for the dynamic changes over the last 14 years were Board of Visitor leadership and the arrival of Dr. Eugene P. Trani to take leadership of the institution in 1990. VCU's overall growth in the last fourteen years has been significant: a twenty-nine percent increase in gross square footage of the campuses, with a corresponding growth in full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment of twenty-eight percent over the same period. The construction of facilities only slightly exceeded the pace of enrollment growth, but the physical and qualitative improvements to the campuses are readily evident.

In 1990, the MCV Campus was a dense medical complex whose newest building was the Smith Building constructed for the School of Pharmacy in 1984. No other University building was newer than 1971 and no new patient care facilities had been constructed since the Massey Cancer Center in 1983 and Main Hospital in 1982. MCV's programs carried national reputations which excelled, at times in spite of their facilities. The Virginia Biotechnology Research Park did not exist. In its place were acres of surface parking lots.

The MCV Campus is now a contemporary academic medical and research center. The Virginia Biotechnology Research Park has developed seven buildings with plans for two more in the immediate future- transforming a sea of asphalt into an active research center. Since the early 1990's, the VCU Health System has added two new structures to create an attractive entrance and an integrated network of facilities - The Ambulatory Care Center and The Gateway Building. The Massey Cancer Center's new addition expands the research capacity of the Center and provides infrastructure for significant future growth. Most academic facilities have seen an enormous investment in on-going renovation. The Dr. Hermes A. Kontos Medical Sciences Building I provided a state-of-the-art laboratory building with an extraordinary new lecture hall- all with a new public plaza complementing the historic Egyptian Building. Additional parking, infrastructure (new steam plant) and recreational facilities have been constructed. New acquisitions have expanded the real estate holdings of the campus and provided space for potential development within the dense urban fabric of the campus. The campus remains dense, but it is more accommodating, of a higher quality, and is more contemporary in spirit.

THE EVOLUTION OF VCU: 1990 TO 2004

The Monroe Park Campus of 1990 was a relatively small and fragmented assembly of buildings, many of which had been converted from residential or commercial uses to educational functions. The campus had little identity or presence and very few amenities for students, staff or faculty. The campus reinforced the common preconception that VCU was largely a local Richmond, part-time, undergraduate student, commuter school.

THE MONROE PARK CAMPUS

The Monroe Park Campus of 2004 represents a significant amount of development progress. Franklin Street, once the only identifiable district of the Campus, is now matched by the quality and critical mass of both the Academic Core and Broad Street districts. The Academic Core has been reinforced by significant new construction of the Shafer Court Dining Center, additions to the Student Commons and the Trani Center for Life Sciences. Open space improvements and street closings in this area have significantly established a high-quality pedestrian-centered campus environment in this district. The entire length of Broad Street from Bowe Street to Belvidere Street has been touched by VCU, transforming a series of vacant auto dealerships into a unique campus district. The construction of the School of Engineering on the southeast corner of Monroe Park brought the Park within the academic circle of university activity. Acquisitions on Grace Street create the opportunity to fill in the area connecting the larger body of the campus to Broad Street. Landscape and streetscape development has begun to knit the varied parts of the campus into a more recognizable whole. Additional housing, parking, and student life facilities have been developed, effectively identifying the Monroe Park Campus as a resident campus environment, a place of learning and research for a diverse range of full-time and part-time students, and a destination in its own right.

Credits:

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Monroe Park Campus Detail



Monroe Park Campus Plan



MCV Medical Campus Plan