

Architectural Review Board Narrative

400 Rio Road West 17 October, 2025

General Description of the Proposed Work

The proposed project at 400 Rio Road West involves site and landscape improvements designed to enhance the appearance of the property and provide appropriate screening for the proposed use by the property owner. No new buildings or architectural modifications are proposed as part of this submission. The focus of this effort is to improve the site's frontage along the Rio Road Entrance Corridor through a combination of ornamental fencing, earthen berming, and a layered planting approach that integrates large canopy trees, ornamental flowering trees, evergreen screening, and foundation plantings.

The improvements have been designed by Timmons Group on behalf of the property owner. These enhancements are intended to mitigate the visual impact of outdoor pipe storage and associated operations while aligning with Albemarle County's Entrance Corridor Design Guidelines for compatible and high-quality frontage treatments.

Analysis of the Context and Surroundings

The property is located along Rio Road West (Route 631), an Entrance Corridor characterized by a mix of commercial, light industrial, and institutional uses. The corridor exhibits a range of conditions, from older commercial structures and warehouse buildings to newer redevelopments with enhanced streetscapes and coordinated landscape treatments. The site currently includes existing buildings and paved storage areas with limited vegetative screening and minimal frontage planting.

Because the property's use includes the outdoor storage of materials, the visual appearance from Rio Road is an important consideration. The proposed improvements aim to elevate the overall quality of the frontage and create a more cohesive transition between the property and adjacent developments along the corridor.

Compatibility with the Surrounding Area, Entrance Corridor, and Design Guidelines

The proposed improvements have been designed to achieve compatibility with the surrounding development patterns and the design objectives of the Entrance Corridor. The landscape design and site treatments are intended to soften the industrial character of the property and establish a more attractive and orderly frontage condition. Key strategies include:

- Installation of an 8-foot-tall black ornamental aluminum fence along the property frontage where storage is proposed and to provide a refined visual boundary between the site and the public right-of-way.

- Construction of a 3-foot-high earthen berm parallel to Rio Road where proposed storage is proposed to further reduce visibility of stored materials and create a natural base for the landscape screening.
- Introduction of layered plantings consisting of large deciduous street trees, medium and small flowering ornamental trees, and groupings of evergreen trees to provide year-round visual screening and seasonal interest for areas where proposed storage is proposed.
- Addition of foundation shrubs and small trees around the existing building, mechanical equipment and parking to provide visual relief, create a more defined edge, and improve the overall appearance of the building's frontage.

These elements together will create a varied and naturalistic planting scheme that effectively screens site operations, enhances the rhythm of street trees along the corridor, and improves the visual quality of the site.

Other Considerations

The proposed improvements have been carefully designed to balance functionality and aesthetics. The fence and berm align with sight-distance requirements and allow for continued operational access to the property. All proposed plant species are consistent with Albemarle County's Entrance Corridor Guidelines and include a mixture of native and adapted species to ensure long-term viability and low maintenance.

Existing mechanical equipment is located adjacent to the building and will be screened through the proposed plantings. No lighting changes or signage are included as part of this submission. Waste and recycling areas are internal to the site and screened from view.

Overall, the proposed improvements represent a significant enhancement to the existing site condition, transforming a largely utilitarian frontage into a visually cohesive and context-sensitive landscape that supports both the property's operational needs and the visual quality of the Rio Road Entrance Corridor.