



City of Richmond, Virginia
Department of Planning and Development Review
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To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
File ID: UDC-090680-2021
Date: May 17th, 2021
RE: **Final location, character, and extent review of Gillies Creek Park Picnic Shelters; 4425 Williamsburg Avenue; UDC 2021-20**

I. APPLICANT

Kathryn Giles Garrison, Department of Parks and Recreation and Community Facilities - Community Engagement & Workforce Development

II. LOCATION

Gillies Creek Park; 4425 Williamsburg Avenue

Property Owner:

City of Richmond

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of new picnic shelters located in Gillies Creek Park.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Currently, Gillies Creek Park's picnic area does not have adequate public amenities to serve the surrounding community. The parking lot and access drive is in poor condition, and the area is not marked by signage or by other means that may delineate picnic, play, and driving areas.

The scope of work includes delineating access drives and safe, orderly parking; designating specific picnic spots with shelters and grill stations; providing universal/ADA-compliant access to the shelters; and to revegetating and beautifying disturbed areas.

The Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the final design with the following conditions:

- Applicant include the installation of bike racks in the project area; design and location to be reviewed by staff.
- Final landscaping plan be submitted to staff showing tree removal and location of new plantings.
- Pending financial resources, the Department of Parks Recreation and Community Facilities consider additional accessible picnic and parking amenities on site.

Staff Contact:

Alex Dandridge, (804) 646-6569 // alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Gillies Creek Park is located at 4425 Williamsburg Avenue, and the picnic area is located on the easternmost side of the park along Government Road, between Stony Run Road and Admiral Gravelly Boulevard. The park's BMX track and playground are located just to the west of the project area. The primary entrance to this area of the park is from Government Road via an access road that connects through the park to Hobbs Lane. The park is located in the 7th Council District and in a residential part of the Fulton neighborhood. Gillies Creek is located just to the north.

b. Scope of Review

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review as part of a "public structure" in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

The Urban Design Committee has not previously reviewed any projects for this specific location.

d. Project Description

The Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities (DPRCF) and the Gillies Creek Park Foundation have identified a need to improve upon and formalize a popular picnic area in Gillies Creek Park. The area currently has picnic tables scattered around a gravel lot surrounded by woods. There are no shelters or grill stations for visitors. There is also no access and circulation pattern for vehicles and pedestrians, and the ground is denuded from heavy use, especially from vehicles.

The main vision for site improvements is to delineate access drives and safe, orderly parking, designate specific picnic spots with shelters and grill stations, provide universal/ADA-compliant access to the shelters, and revegetate and beautify disturbed areas. DPRCF engaged with Timmons Group for design services in winter 2021. The project began with an initial site visit and a separate project kickoff meeting with DPRCF staff. The design was developed in consultation with DPRCF staff and the Gillies Creek Park Foundation, which has also consulted other partner groups. DPRCF staff visited the site to talk with park users/visitors on April 8 and 14; staff shared the schematic site plan during those visits. All park users present on each visit approved of the concept and provided comments. The project team incorporated the feedback received into the design.

Site Plan Features

The site program includes the following:

- Resurfaced gravel lot with drive aisles and parking delineated, with two-way and one-way traffic designated with signage and the gravel edged with 8 in. x 8 in. timbers
- Eight (8) picnic shelters with picnic tables and charcoal-style barbecue grills. Of these:
 - Six (6) shelters are 8 ft. x 9 ft. and can accommodate one (1) built-in picnic table.

- Two (2) shelters are ADA-accessible. ADA accessibility includes one (1) parking space, sidewalk access, the picnic table, and the grill station.
- Two (2) shelters are 12 ft. x 12 ft. and can accommodate two (2) free-standing picnic tables
- Tree planting, reseeding, and mulching the site including existing wooded areas within and adjacent to the picnic areas

Project Timeline

After receiving UDC and Planning Commission approvals, DPRCF hopes to begin construction as soon as June 2021. The project will be phased as necessary to minimize the amount of site and user disturbance.

Landscaping Plan and Maintenance Analysis

Landscaping on the site will focus primarily on revegetating/reseeding the ground plane where it is currently exposed or paved in gravel. All healthy, existing trees will be preserved. Three dead trees within the project area will be removed. The ground plane of the existing wooded areas will be seeded and/or mulched and some additional trees will be planted around the site. New plantings will be opportunities for community engagement and education in the fall of 2021. Specific trees for the new plantings will be selected in consultation with the City's arborists, but may include some of the following recommended native species:

- Red maple
- Serviceberry
- River birch
- Redbud
- Flowering dogwood
- Tulip poplar
- Southern red oak
- Pin oak
- Willow oak
- American sycamore

Landscape maintenance will primarily belong to DPRCF as the property owner. Care of trees on City-owned property is the responsibility of the Urban Forestry division of the Department of Public Works.

e. Master Plan

The City of Richmond's Master Plan, Richmond 300, speaks to the improvement of Public Parks in vision #4, stating that the City should encourage the creation of a balance of natural rather than hard landscape in creating and improving parks (4.3.k) and that the city should strengthen the streetscape connections by installing pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, pathways, and trails where such infrastructure is missing (4.4.b) (pg. 104).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Guidelines note that *“site furnishings, such as benches and trash receptacles, should be appropriately styled and scaled to complement building architecture”* (page 24). The Guidelines also note that *“site furnishings should be durable, both in construction and finish, and be easy to maintain and to install”* (page 25). The proposed site furnishings will be constructed of durable material, and will be a color that complements the surrounding environment. Staff notes the a teal color is being used for the metal tubing elements on the proposed picnic tables, and recommends that the picnic tables’ metal elements match those of the picnic shelters, being either a dark green or black color.

The Guidelines also note that, *“Site furnishings should be conveniently located for the pedestrian, but should not obstruct pedestrian circulation. Furnishings should be located where people congregate, such as at bus stops, in front of major attractions, and in parks and plazas. The placement of furnishings should not create visual clutter on the streetscape. Furnishings may be grouped together, where appropriate. However, trash receptacles should be placed in the vicinity of bench groupings, but not directly adjacent, because of wasps and other insects in summer months”* (pg. 25). The proposed site furnishings are conveniently located off of the access drive through the park, and will not obstruct pedestrian circulation. The furnishings will be placed in an area that is currently frequented by groups for picnicking, and will continue to serve this purpose. Staff notes that there are bike recreational facilities on site, and a bike lane on Government Road, and recommends that bike racks be incorporated into the design of the site.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

- a. Vicinity Map**
- b. Application**
- c. Plans**