



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia
Planning Commission



UDC 2022-29	Conceptual Location, Character, and Extent Review	Meeting Date: 12/19/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Nissa Dean, Deputy Director, Department of Parks and Recreation	
Project Description	Conceptual Location Character and Extent review of the proposed Whitcomb Community Park located at 2100 Sussex Street.	
Project Location		
Address: 2100 Sussex Street		
Property Owner: City of Richmond, City of Richmond Public Works		
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes a concept plan to improve the existing park adjacent to the Whitcomb Community Center to include a new dedicated food truck location, splash pad, playground, basketball court, community garden, dedicated drop off point, and improve the existing walking trail.		
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Previous Reviews	The concept was heard at the December 8 th , 2022 UDC meeting. The Committee recommended approval with the conditions listed below.	
Staff Recommendations	- UDC recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. - UDC recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. - UDC recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible. - UDC recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, and splash-pad. - UDC recommends the Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible. - UDC recommends that the Applicant work with Staff to revise the location and design of crosswalks and curb cut/driveways to DPW standards in preparation for the Final Application.	

	- UDC recommends that the Applicant work with Staff to identify locations for further tree plantings to DPW standards in preparation for the Final Application. - UDC recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC Staff to evaluate moving adjacent bus stop locations in surrounding blocks to be relocated to be directly adjacent to the proposed park and to improve any potential bus stop locations to GRTC standards.
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Findings of Fact

Site Description	The site is located in the Whitcomb neighborhood at the intersection of Sussex Street and Whitcomb Street. The site is zoned R-53 - Residential (Multi-Family) district. The property is roughly 263,400 square feet (approx. 6 acres) in size and currently includes a small stand of well establish trees and walking path, but is largely undeveloped otherwise. The project is surrounded largely by residential uses; the Whitcomb Court Community Center is located directly to the north and the Whitcomb Court housing development directly the east. In the greater neighborhood, the VCU "O" Parking lot is located to the west and interstate 64 to the north. The GRTC Bus Route #5 runs along Whitcomb Street directly adjacent to the property, with bus stops roughly 300 and 600 feet from the property.
Scope of Review	The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter
Project Description	The purpose of the project is to develop a conceptual plan for the improvement of an existing park adjacent to the Whitcomb Community Center. The project includes a new dedicated food truck location, splash pad, playground, basketball court, community garden, dedicated drop off point, and improvement to the existing walking trail. The concept narrative declares that the goal of the project is to create "The proposed Park will be a vibrant outdoor space in which residents of all ages can gather, play, and exercise." The site largely is undeveloped, flat, and planted with grass. The site currently includes a small stand of well-established trees that will be maintained. The site also includes a walk path that will be maintained and enhanced and enlarged. The adjacent Whitcomb Community Center is taken into account and acknowledge by the design which provides access to and additional outdoor amenities for the Center. New crosswalks are proposed, but will need to be coordinated with Public Works on design and location. These will change for the final application and Staff has provided a condition that will allow the Applicant to work with Staff to determine final location and design. A new street side drop off point is provided near the community center along Sussex Street. No direct parking is provided for the park due to the intention that the park will be for nearby community users more so than a destination. A new dedicated food truck location will be provided off of Whitcomb Street. Shaded seating is proposed adjacent to the Food Truck Plaza. Staff strongly supports shaded seating, but suggests that the final design should take into account queue lines to potential food trucks and provide an adequate number of seating areas. A playground and splash pad are proposed just north of the food truck area. This location will allow guardians to monitor kids from the shaded seating area. The splash pad is located sufficiently far away from the street to reduce potential of conflict between kids and vehicles. A further play area and community garden are proposed north of the splash pad. Water and shed storage will be provided for the garden taking into account public input from other community garden plans. An existing compost area on the adjacent property will be connected via path to the community garden for easier access. A new basketball court and existing football field are located to the northern most part of the site adjacent to the Community Center. Shaded seating and plantings will be provided adjacent to the fields, but will be planned in such a way as to not decrease visibility from the street in consideration for safety. An existing path will be maintained and expanded to connect the different uses throughout the park. The exiting stand of well-established trees will be maintained adjacent to the path. Pervious pavement will be considered for new sections of the path.

	Staff has asked the Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if it is feasible to combine the two adjacent bus stops into one new stop that is directly adjacent to the proposed park. Doing so will facilitate easier access to the destination, but primarily the ability to provide appropriate bus stop features such as benches and shelters in conjunction with this project. Moving to this location will also allow parks staff to maintenance the area surround the bus stop. Any new crosswalk near this location in conjunction with the park will advantage the new stop as well. Native plantings are proposed for the project; final plantings will be coordinated with Forestry Staff. Staff supports the improvement of public space in an area of the City that has historically been underinvested. The location is also adjacent to an existing Community Center that will greatly benefit from the improvements. Provision of a food truck plaza, community garden, and splash pad are great amenities for the neighborhood.
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Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
Master Plan		
Big Moves: Realign City Facilities	<i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i> <i>Thriving Environment: City-owned buildings and land are opportunities for energy retrofits and green infrastructure to further Goals 15 and 16, as well as locations for new parks, urban agriculture, and resiliency hubs to further Goal 17.</i>	Big Moves: Realign City Facilities The programming of the new community park will include a community garden and newly utilized green space.
	Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment. <i>c. Link public art with major public facility initiatives (e.g., plazas, buildings, parks, bridges) and expand the definition of public art to include architectural embellishments of buildings, or landscape features.</i> Objective 15.4 - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills. <i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i> Objective 17.7 Increase and enhance biodiversity <i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i> <i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i>	Master Plan Objectives Landscaping and lighting details will be established at a later stage, but should include sustainability considerations. <u>Staff recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</u> <u>Staff recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</u> <u>Staff recommends the applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</u>

	<i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i> Objective 17.8 Reduce light pollution. <i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i>	
Urban Design Guidelines		
GRTC Transit Stops - Page 6	<i>A comfortable, safe, and quality environment should be created at transit stops.... Standard bus shelters and other bus stop furniture that have been approved by the UDC, the City Planning Commission, and GRTC should be used at GRTC transit stops with high ridership and must be installed in a way that doesn't obstruct the public right-of-way or accessibility. Benches installed at transit stops should have arm rests in the middle of the bench for the comfort of riders and to discourage its use for activities other than a short-term wait for the bus.</i>	<u>Staff recommends that the Applicant work with GRTC Staff to evaluate moving adjacent bus stop locations in surrounding blocks to be relocated to be directly adjacent to the proposed park and to improve any potential bus stop locations to GRTC standards.</u>
PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3	<i>The design guidelines suggest compatibility, performance, durability, maintenance requirements, cost, and sustainability be considered when designing pavement areas. Impervious areas should be limited and pervious pavement materials should be introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i>	PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage. <u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u> <u>Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, and splash-pad.</u>
STREET DESIGN – P.6	<i>Intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner.</i>	Street Design Minor intersection and new street crossing improvements are proposed and will be finalized for the FINAL Application. <u>Staff recommends that the Applicant work with Staff to revise the location and design of crosswalks and curb cut/driveways to DPW standards in preparation for the Final Application.</u>
LANDSCAPING – Page 10	<i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften</i>	LANDSCAPING A significant portion of the site will be green space. Several well established trees will be maintained and

	<i>new construction and building architecture. Plant materials should create spaces by providing walls and canopies in outdoor areas. In addition, landscaping should provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest. Species diversity, plant selection, and long term maintenance should be considered.</i>	protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and natural connections for pedestrians throughout the site. <u>Staff recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, and splash-pad.</u> <u>Staff recommends that the Applicant work with Staff to identify locations for further tree plantings to DPW standards in preparation for the Final Application.</u>
SITE FEATURES – Page 14	<i>The site should respond to its users through its design and by providing an appropriate array of amenities to serve those users and should incorporate sustainable design aspects. Plazas are encouraged and should provide pleasant transition from street to building while being designed in inviting and accommodating ways for a diversity of users.</i>	A number of outdoor spaces and amenities add interest and usable space for pedestrians. This diversity of uses will enhance pedestrian activity throughout the site. These spaces include a splash pad and playground as an amenity for families, food truck locations and shaded seating for adults, basketball courts and walk paths for all ages.