



Staff Report  
City of Richmond, Virginia



**Urban Design Committee**

UDC 2024-26	<b>Conceptual AMENDMENT Location, Character, and Extent Review</b>	Meeting Date: 6/6/2024
Applicant/Petitioner	Ryan Rinn, Department of Parks and Recreation	
Project Description	UDC 2024-26 CONCEPT AMENDMENT 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		
<b>High-Level Details:</b> The applicant proposes to AMEND the Whitcomb Community Park CONCEPT plan. Highlights include relocating components, revised landscaping and stormwater.		
UDC Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Planner, raymond.roakes@rva.gov	
Previous Reviews	The concept was approved December 2022. The Committee recommended approval with the conditions listed below.	
Staff Recommendations	<u>CURRENTLY PROPOSED CONDITIONS</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</li> <li>• Inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</li> <li>• The re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</li> <li>• A maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, and splash-pad.</li> <li>• The Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</li> <li>• The Applicant work with Staff to revise the location and design of crosswalks and curb cut/driveways to DPW standards in preparation for any Final Application that includes the splashpad or play area.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the Applicant work with GRTC Staff to evaluate moving adjacent bus stop locations in surrounding blocks to be relocated directly adjacent to the proposed park and to improve any potential bus stop locations to GRTC standards.</li> <li>• Applicant to consider safety and visibility through the park area from the street in landscape plantings and maintenance.</li> </ul> <p><u>PREVIOUSLY APPROVED CONDITIONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UDC recommends that final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.</li> <li>• UDC recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</li> <li>• UDC recommends that the re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.</li> <li>• UDC recommends that a maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces, and splash-pad.</li> <li>• UDC recommends the Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• UDC recommends that the Applicant work with Staff to identify locations for further tree plantings to DPW standards in preparation for the Final Application.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
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**Findings of Fact**

Site Description	<p>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.</p>
Scope of Review	<p>The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under section 17.07 and review and recommendation under section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter</p>
Project Description	<p>The site is largely 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.</p> <p>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 as well as the potential to provide public bathroom within the community center, for park users.</p> <p>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. 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. Parking is available along adjacent street.</p> <p>Seating nooks are proposed adjacent to Sussex Street. Construction of these locations will be light impact to help preserve the significant trees located adjacent. New plantings will be sensitive to the existing trees as well as views from the road into the site.</p>

	<p>A food truck plaza is no longer proposed. However, all of the previously proposed park items are included in the revision – just re-organized.</p> <p>A playground and splash pad are proposed nearest the community center. 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 basketball court is provided at this location as well.</p> <p>A community garden is proposed along Whitcomb Street on the southern perimeter. Water and shed storage will be provided for the garden taking into account public input from other community garden plans.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Due to the depth of the site, portions of the park will be a decent distance from surrounding streets and public view. Staff has provided a condition of approval to have the Applicant consider safety and views when planting and maintaining landscaping.</p> <p>Pervious pavement will be considered for new sections of walking path.</p> <p>Staff has asked the Applicant to work with GRTC to determine if it is feasible to combine the two adjacent bus stops near the park 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, but will need to be coordinated with DPW for safety and City Standards review.</p> <p>Native plantings are proposed for the project; final plantings will be coordinated with Forestry Staff.</p> <hr/> <p>Staff recommends approval with conditions.</p> <p>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. The park amenities will provide interest for a number of different users and high quality pedestrian spaces are being provided.</p>
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## Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

	Text	Staff Analysis
<b>Master Plan</b>		
<b>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</b>	<p><i>Vision: Equity, Sustainability, and Beauty</i></p> <p><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></p>	<p><b>Big Moves: Realign City Facilities</b></p> <p>The programming of the new community park will include a community garden and newly utilized green space.</p>
	<p><b>Objective 4.2 – Integrate public art into the built environment.</b></p> <p><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</i></p>	<p><b>Master Plan Objectives</b></p> <p>Landscaping and lighting details will be established at a later stage, but should include sustainability considerations.</p>

	<p><i>architectural embellishments of buildings, or landscape features.</i></p> <p><b>Objective 15.4</b> - Reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.</p> <p><i>f. Demonstrate sustainable consumption, sustainable building practices, and zero-waste behaviors in the design and expansion of City operations.</i></p> <p><b>Objective 17.7</b> Increase and enhance biodiversity</p> <p><i>b. Increase the prevalence of native plant species and plants for healthy pollinator communities at public facilities</i></p> <p><i>c. Implement the RVA Clean Water strategy to use 80% native plants in new landscaping at public facilities by 2023.</i></p> <p><i>g. Encourage bird houses, bat houses, and other structures that provide important and safe shelters for wildlife.</i></p> <p><b>Objective 17.8</b> Reduce light pollution.</p> <p><i>b. Install hooded light fixtures on public rights-of-way and buildings to reduce light pollution and reduce effect on nocturnal species.</i></p>	
<p><b>Urban Design Guidelines</b></p>		
<p><b>GRTC Transit Stops - Page 6</b></p>	<p><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></p>	<p><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></p>
<p><b>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS – Page 3</b></p>	<p><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</i></p>	<p><b>PAVING AND SURFACE MATERIALS</b></p> <p>Hardscape materials will be finalized at a later stage.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.</u></p>

	<i>introduced, especially in minimally used parking areas.</i>	<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>
<b>STREET DESIGN – P.6</b>	<i>Intersections should be designed to serve pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in a safe manner.</i>	<p><b>Street Design</b></p> <p>Minor intersection and new street crossing improvements are proposed and will be finalized for the FINAL Application.</p> <p><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></p>
<b>LANDSCAPING – Page 10</b>	<i>Plantings should be compatible with and relate to surrounding landscapes. Site landscaping should complement and soften 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>	<p><b>LANDSCAPING</b></p> <p>A significant portion of the site will be green space. Several well established trees will be maintained and protected throughout construction. Landscaping is used to create interest and natural connections for pedestrians throughout the site.</p> <p><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></p> <p><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></p>
<b>SITE FEATURES – Page 14</b>	<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.