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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: June 20, 2016  
RE: **Conceptual Location, Character and Extent Review of the Southside Community Center Master Plan, 6255 Old Warwick Road; UDC No. 2016-19**

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**I. APPLICANT**

Dr. Norman Merrifield, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**II. LOCATION**

6255 Old Warwick Road, Richmond, VA, 23225

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for the conceptual location, character and extent review of a long-range master plan for a regional park on 17.98 acres in the Midlothian Planning District.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The UDC asked about process, given the large scale of the review, and the condition for sustainability. Staff detailed how the Urban Design Guidelines emphasize the importance of sustainability in projects of this size and nature, and so as individual projects in the overall master plan come for final review, the UDC would like the applicant to provide information about how they will address sustainability in their final plans.

The UDC finds the project to be well-considered at a master plan level, re-using key structures as well as the existing parking area and arranging compatible indoor and outdoor activities and program next to each other. The UDC further finds that the public process and feedback improved the program for the site, providing for a better mix of active and passive uses as well as better cohesiveness overall. Therefore, Urban Design the Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant conceptual approval as submitted, with the following consideration:

- That the final plans for any projects show how the project will address sustainability as detailed in the Urban Design Guidelines.

**Staff Contact:**

Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

**V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

**a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The 17.98 acre site is the former campus of the Richmond Outreach Center, also known as the ROC Church. In addition to the Gymnasium and the former sanctuary building, an assortment of pre-existing buildings of various scale, condition, and utility are situated on site, including a small skate park, a multi-use field, three baseball fields, and expansive parking areas.

**b. Scope of Review**

The improvements associated with this project are subject to location, character, and extent review as a “park” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter.

**c. UDC Review History**

The UDC has not previously reviewed any projects at this site. Staff was unable to find any examples where the UDC had reviewed a long-term master plan at this scale.

**d. Project Description**

This conceptual review is as a much broader level of location, character, and extent, and much earlier in the process, than the Urban Design Committee usually provides feedback. Staffs commends the Department of Parks & Recreation for planning for incremental development of the site as funding becomes available. As projects are funded, designed, and implemented, they will come through final location, character, and extent review.

The master plan is based on an extensive site analysis of the existing facilities on site, which include a gymnasium, a series of school and community buildings, a small skate park, a multi-use field, three baseball fields, and expansive parking areas. An overhead power line crosses the site between two of the baseballs fields and the skate park and the complex of buildings. The East Coast Greenway alignment is proposed to the south of the facility along Warwick Road. The site analysis also looked at elevation and drainage issues.

The process then moved on to a series of two community meetings that sought to establish a vision and program for the proposed community center. The first meeting, in November 2015, also laid out a vision for the renovation of the gymnasium on site. The second phase of the process created schematic designs and diagrams of how indoor and outdoor programming could be accommodated on site. The most popular program elements from the 81 attendees of the meeting for outdoor activities were playground facilities, walking & jogging trails, football fields, soccer fields, and an outdoor track. For indoor activities, the most popular were dance/exercise studio, after school programs, indoor pool, and gymnasium. A series of schematic layouts are shown in the design packet.

The second community meeting in February 2016 to walk residents through the proposed master plan, including long-term possibilities for the existing buildings. An update was provided on the Phase 1 Gymnasium project and plans to relocate the existing baseball fields, with time for public comment and response. Following this public meeting as well as coordination with the Department of Parks & Recreation the master plan was revised to include a half-court basketball court with room for expansion, less orchard and more open space, moving the playground closer to the buildings, moving the splash pad and water play area adjacent to the pool, and a more linear skate park.

The final master plan contains parking arcing across the Warwick Road frontage of the site, with a trail along the perimeter. At the corner of Old Warwick and Warwick Road, the plan designates space for a community garden & orchard, a meadow, open play space and a trail head for the East Coast Greenway. The skate

park is relocated to the western edge of the site, adjacent to the outdoor pool and splash pad, which is next to the gymnasium. A roundabout off of Old Warwick Road is the organizing principle for the main entrance to the complex, and includes an open play space & playground on axis between the gymnasium and the banquet hall with possible building addition. On the northeast side of the roundabout, there is a half basketball court with space for expansion. The northern edge of the site contains the multi-purpose field and a small building designated for future use. There are two entrances/exits off of Old Warwick Road, and one off of Warwick Road that provide access to the parking areas that ring the main cluster of facilities.

**e. Master Plan**

The Master Plan for this area, adopted in , does not designate this as an area for parks & recreation due to the fact that it was private property at the time; it is designated in the existing land use map of that plan as an institutional/semi-public use to reflect its former use as a semi-private recreation area. The general recommendations for this area are supportive of more parks & recreation access provided they can be adequately maintained, secure and safe for surrounding neighborhoods, and take drainage concerns into account.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Urban Design Guidelines notes that “successful public parks, small and large, active or passive, share certain qualities, which include the ability to attract and entertain visitors, access and connectivity to surrounding areas, and safety and comfort” (page 9). Further, the Guidelines state that “a preference should be given towards materials and construction techniques which improve energy efficiency and water/soil quality. Lighting and landscaping should allow for surveillance and policing activities, but should be designed primarily to accommodate the intended use of the park” (p. 9).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

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