

Calhoun Recreation Area Phase 1 Narrative

436 Calhoun St, Richmond, VA 23220

UDC Final Review - July 6, 2023



image: Gilpin Court housing and Calhoun Recreation Area

Project Purpose

The Calhoun Recreation Area Phase 1 project is the first phase of enhancing existing features in the park and improving access to recreational resources within the Gilpin Court community. Through public meetings, surveys, and events on site, the community has had the opportunity to engage in the planning and design process. The Calhoun Recreation Center and associated outdoor recreation space have the potential to become a civic commons for its surrounding communities.

The Phase 1 development focuses on improvements in the western portion of the site that includes:

- Replacing playground fence with decorative aluminum fencing
- Demolishing unused asphalt and concrete areas and replacing with seeded lawn
- Demolishing all existing chain link fences except at the softball/baseball field
- Installing new basketball court fencing
- Demolishing existing bathroom building
- Installing a splash pad and plaza (proposed Early Action Activity based on the Jackson Ward Community Plan)
- Installing new landscaping and site furnishings
- Installing a new shade structure (dependent on available budget)

Project Context

Calhoun Recreation Area is located within the Gilpin Court Community, the oldest public housing site in the City of Richmond and the largest between The District of Columbia and Atlanta. The existing outdoor recreational resources include newly paved basketball courts, a playground, a sports field, and the Charles Gilpin Community Farm.

The master plan and improvements for this park have been completed in parallel to the larger Jackson Ward Community Plan (JWCP). While this park master plan is managed by the City of Richmond Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities (PRCF), collaboration took place with partners from the Jackson Ward Community Plan project including the City of Richmond Office of Equitable Development (OED), the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA), the Richmond City Health District (part of VDH), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Storefront for Community Design, and Looney Ricks Kiss (LRK).

Jackson Ward Community Plan

The planning process for this project is made possible by a HUD Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. The Jackson Ward Community Plan planning process is for the residents of Gilpin Court/ Jackson Ward to engage with each other and community stakeholders, uplift community assets, identify areas of improvement that will sustain the longevity of the community, and envision a future where they can thrive. This planning process has been an act of healing that is necessary to mend the physical, social, and economic harm that more than a century of policy has perpetrated on the neighborhood.

As part of this planning process, planning grantees are expected to implement an Early Action Activity (EAA). As part of the grant, \$100,000 of the \$450,000 Planning grant funds will be used to implement these activities. Early Action Activity funding must be used for physical neighborhood improvements, specifically community development or economic development projects that enhance and accelerate the transformation of the neighborhood. The selected project must be community-driven, be responsive to neighborhood needs, and foster social cohesion and capacity-building.

Site Concerns

Safety, visibility, shade, and senior appropriate navigation/accessibility are major concerns for residents in the Gilpin Court community. Partners of this project acknowledge that despite the hours of operation, from sunrise to sunset, residents will likely still use the park facilities after the sun sets. Additional concerns voiced by the community and stakeholder groups aim to address the lack of storage on site (particularly for garden activities and pop-up events), disorganized placement of fencing, and proper screening of the dumpsters near the playground. Phase 1 improvements begin to create new opportunities for shade, multi-generational access and interaction, and safety.

Community-Driven Design

PRCF conducted a survey available both online and in paper format distributed by PRCF Recreation Staff and the Brothers Concerned for Gilpin Court support group to residents of Gilpin and visitors to the Calhoun Center. The survey was open from April to May 2022 and received a total of 122 unique responses. The highest priority amenity for outdoor improvement for residents was a splash pad.

These results were utilized to inform conceptual designs that were then put in front of community members at four in-person meetings held by the Jackson Ward Community Plan's project team. Residents were again asked to prioritize their favorite features and designs. The splash pad element remained the highest priority and was selected, further emphasized by the previous survey work conducted by PRCF. Table 1 summarizes the community engagement of the Jackson Ward Community Plan for the Early Action Activity. PRCF deployed a temporary mobile splash pad on-site on Saturday, August 27th, during the Brothers Concerned for Gilpin Court's "Back to School Event," where the feature was a main draw for youth at the event.

PRCF currently maintains three splash pads in the city and maintenance and safety teams are practiced in keeping these amenities clean and in proper working order. The splash pad at the Calhoun Recreation Center will be prefabricated packaged system (AQUASMART™ Package F) by Aquatix/Landscape Structures that includes ground water spray to reduce vandalism. The design team and city are working toward an innovative design that could allow for the graywater from the splash pad to be routed via a drainage/irrigation system to adjacent trees and landscaping as water will not be recirculating in the proposed system. This option is dependent on available funding and may not be feasible.

In addition to the prioritized splash pad, several design interventions will be addressed in Phase 1. A metal fabricated shade structure is proposed above the preserved columns of the raised bathroom building to provide shade and comfortable access to the splash pad and plaza. If bids for the metal shade structure come back cost prohibitive, a community-build project is proposed to create a temporary wooden trellis on the preserved columns. Site furnishings are proposed for seating adjacent to the splash pad and below the shade structure. Shade trees will be preserved and planted within the site, providing an opportunity to partner with the Richmond Urban Forestry Division (UFD). Landscape design will include low maintenance native plantings, as to minimize maintenance requirements. Existing concrete and asphalt areas will be removed and replaced with seeded lawn for temporary open space. The existing extensive fencing will be removed and strategically replaced along the existing basketball courts, the existing playground, and the community farm. Additionally, a gravel walking trail will be implemented along the perimeter of the park. Overall, Calhoun Recreation Area will be maintained by PRCF.

Phase 1 elements will continue to focus on the goals of the park master plan to create flexible spaces that are multi-generational and high in impact to the community. The design objectives aim to remove as little existing vegetation as possible. Selective clearing of potentially hazardous trees and invasive species is necessary along the northern edge of the site, but no individual specimen trees are planned for removal at this stage in the design process.

Meeting Name	Date	Time	Location	Estimated Attendees	Notes
JWCP Working Group Meeting #1	4/12/2022	5:30 PM	Zoom	37	Collect Early Action Activity ideas
JWCP – Gilpin Resident Information Exchange	5/10/2022	6:00 PM	Fay Towers	23	Collect Early Action Activity ideas
JWCP Community Expo	5/12/2022	6:00 PM	Hippodrome Theater	36	Collect Early Action Activity ideas
JWCP Steering Committee #2	5/24/2022	5:30 PM	Online	23	Narrow the list of Action Activity to five
JWCP - Gilpin Resident Listening Workshop	6/14/2022	6:00 PM	Fay Towers	42	JW community Vote for prefer Action Activity/share the first draft layout of the Calhoun Park. Plaza and Splash Pad got 42 votes (highest number)
JWCP Community Listening Workshop	6/16/2022	6:00 PM	Gallery5	20	Gilpin Residents Vote for prefer Action Activity/share the first draft layout of the Calhoun Park. Plaza and Splash Pad got 14 votes (highest number)
JWCP Working Groups Meeting	7/26/2022	5:30PM	Richmond Public Library	30	Included comments of first draft and Show draft 2 of the park layout to get comments
JWCP - Gilpin ResidentPlan Workshop	8/6/2022	10:00AM	Calhoun Center	15	Included comments from first draft and Show draft 2 of the park layout to get comments
JWCP Community Plan Meeting	8/18/2022	5:00PM	Third Street Bethel AME Church	20	Included comments from second draft and Show draft 3 of the park layout to get comments
Brothers Concerned for Gilpin Back to School Event	8/27/2022	noon	Calhoun Park		Included comments from second draft and Show draft 3 of the park layout to get comments
Jackson Ward Plan Alternatives Workshop	11/01/2022	10:00am, 1:00pm, 4:00pm	Calhoun Center	20	Included comments from second draft and Showed drafts of overall plan and splash pad area

Table 1. Jackson Ward Community Plan community engagement summary and EAA discovery.

Project Budget and Funding Sources

The estimate for the Phase 1 construction budget is \$597,170.00. Funding (not including the EAA) is anticipated to be funded through the PRCF CIP or possible local, state, and/or federal grant opportunities.

The estimate for the Early Action Activity construction budget is \$227,812.50. The Early Action Activity is currently funded with a budget of \$100,000 by the HUD Choice Neighborhoods grant and \$100,000 by the Housing and Community Development City of Richmond for a combined budget of \$200,000. Additional construction funds will be achieved through ARPA funding by PRCF.

Construction Timeline

Phase 1 improvements, including the EAA, are expected to remove haphazard fencing, clean up the park, and to construct a splash park and associated plaza space. As part of the HUD Choice Neighborhoods Grant requirements, the EAA must be implemented in the first 24 months of the planning process (December 2023 deadline). Since the construction timeline extends past this 24-month timeframe, the Jackson Ward Community Plan project team received approval from HUD to extend the construction and grand opening of the EAA in 2024.

Task/Process	Target Completion Date
Community Engagement and Conceptual Design	November 2022 – April 2023
Survey, Environmental, and Utility Location	May 2023
Schematic Design and Design Development	June 2023
Urban Design Committee Meeting	July 2023
Construction Documents and Permit Drawings	July – October 2023
Permitting; Procurement, Bidding, Contractor Award	October – November 2023
Construction	April 2024
Grand Opening	May 2024

Table 2. Phase 1 Construction Timeline