

**Blackwell Park**  
**Conceptual Design: Urban Design Committee**  
**February 1, 2024**

**Project Purpose:**

The Blackwell Park project aims to transform the existing park area by adding functional site features that promote community-preferred recreation activities and site elements. Park improvements will feature several forms of stormwater best management practices (BMPs) to improve site drainage, enhance aesthetic and habitat value, and serve as an environmental education tool.

The proposed site master plan will:

- Renovate existing sports fields, accommodating a Junior/Senior baseball field measuring 90 ft. between bases and a full-size football field measuring 120 yds. Field renovations will include new fencing, seating, and dugouts. Dugouts will include low-maintenance, extensive green roofs.
- Create continuous fitness trail that connects all existing and proposed amenities.
- Add a new sports court with associated seating.
- Introduce a pedestrian plaza and fitness court at the southern entrance of the park.
- Install new landscaping and site furnishings throughout the park including seating, trash and recycling receptacles, and pet waste stations.
- Improve stormwater management through a series of demonstration BMPs
- Add a community garden with ten (10) garden beds. Water source for community garden will be a rain barrel attached to the existing restroom facility.
- Add a nature play space with five (5) new pieces of playground equipment and plantings for sensory stimulation.
- Introduce a seating area adjacent to the nature play space. This area will be shaded by three (3) triangular shade sails. In addition, five (5) tables and two (2) benches will be added underneath the shade structures for seating.
- Install outdoor ping pong table and seating area along walking trail in the southern area of the site.
- Construct new parking area on the eastern side of the park to access sports courts and fields.

- Introduce seeded meadow areas along the walking trails for visual and seasonal interest.
- Construct a pedestrian bridge to connect the southern area of the park to the northern area, which is currently separated by steep slopes.

The implementation of the master plan will be a phased approach. The Phase 1 development will include the pedestrian plaza and fitness court, stormwater management system with bioretention areas, fitness trail, new landscaping/site furnishings, meadow plantings, community garden, and multi-purpose sports field. All other proposed site amenities will be constructed in later phases.

### **Project Context:**

Currently known as Charlie Sydnor Playground, Blackwell Park lies just south of the James River, and is located in the Blackwell neighborhood adjacent to Manchester. Areas to the north and east of the park are industrial compared to residential areas to the south and west. Access is currently limited, with formal access only on the Maury Street side of the park. Parking is limited to on-street parking. Current facilities include two basketball courts, one football field, one baseball field, and one restroom facility.

### **Community-Driven Design:**

The proposed site improvements at Blackwell Park were selected through an extensive community engagement process. Public meetings were held with the Blackwell neighborhood at J.H. Blackwell Elementary School. Meetings were advertised online as well as by pamphlets. Pamphlets were distributed door-to-door in the neighborhood and posted at the park and school. An online poll was conducted concurrently, surveying neighborhood residents' priorities for new site features. The sports facilities and athletic trails, proposed for the project, were the highest ranked features in the poll.

### **Site Concerns:**

The major concern from the community is availability and enhancement of existing sports facilities. Existing sports fields are in disrepair and do not accommodate adequate parking and seating. Sports fields have been identified

as the highest value use for the park. It is therefore a priority that they be high quality and accessible.

Lack of accessibility is also a concern regarding walking and running around the park. Community members identified walking and running as high priority park uses but there are currently no formal trails around the park.

An additional site concern is safety for people accessing the site from J.H. Blackwell Elementary School. There is currently a crosswalk connecting the school to the park but there are no additional traffic calming measures to guarantee safe crossing. A traffic light is proposed at this location to resolve this concern.

Finally, poor soils are a concern for the site. Existing soils drain poorly and cause ponding and erosion during rain events. Soil improvements as well as stormwater best management practices are proposed to improve site drainage throughout the park.

### **Project Budget and Funding Sources:**

The City of Richmond has approximately \$861,000 allocated for construction. DPU will contribute \$800,000 for general site improvements such as the asphalt walking trails. The Office of Sustainability will contribute \$61,000 for a traffic calming measure, trees, and the community garden. An additional \$424,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will pay for the features that reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality. These include bioretention basins and permeable pavement. Altria will contribute an additional \$15,000 to be used as needed. Luck Stone and Riverside Brick will contribute material to the project.

### **Construction Timeline:**

Phase 1 improvements are expected to include sports fields, stormwater BMPs, fitness trails, a community garden, a pedestrian plaza, and fitness courts. Construction is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2024 with a 9–10-month construction timeline anticipated. Other proposed site improvements will follow in later phases. Anticipated project schedule is below:

<b>Task/Process</b>	<b>Target Completion Date</b>
Community Engagement and Conceptual Design	March 2023
Survey, Environmental, and Utility Location	May 2023 – July 2023
Schematic Design and Design Development	July 2023 – November 2023
Geotechnical Testing	November 2023 – January 2024
Construction Documents and Permit Drawings	December 2023- January 2024
Urban Design Committee Final Review Meeting	March 2024
Permitting; Procurement	February 2024 – April 2024
Final Design	April 2024
Bidding and Contractor Award	April 2024 – July 2024
Construction	August 2024 – May 2025