

Calhoun Recreation Area Narrative

436 Calhoun St, Richmond, VA 23220

UDC Conceptual Review - September 15, 2022

Project Purpose:

The Calhoun Recreation Area project aims to enhance existing features in the park and revitalize 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. Strengthening amenities, such as the community farm, play areas and facilitating a space for pop up markets have all emerged as priority items for the neighbors of the Calhoun Center. The Calhoun Recreation Center and associated outdoor recreation space have the potential to become a civic commons for its surrounding communities.



Project Context:

Calhoun Recreation Area is located within the Gilpin Court Community, the oldest public housing sites 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 revitalization for this park is done 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 will be 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 Early Action Activities (EAC). 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. Pedestrian scale lighting is planned for safety, wayfinding, and navigation at night. While proposed lighting is not meant to encourage the use of the park outside of official hours, it will increase the perception of safety and discourage vandalism. 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.

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 Neighborhood Plan's team members. 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 Neighborhood 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. Based on sanitation concerns of water re-circulating and ground-based sprays, the design calls for water to enter the play area aerially to reduce risks of contamination. 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. Overall, Calhoun Recreation Area will be maintained by PRCF. Landscape design will include low maintenance native plantings, as to minimize maintenance requirements.

In addition to the prioritized splash pad, several design interventions will address accessibility for seniors, safety, visibility, and shade. The design includes linear walking paths that are easy for seniors and mothers with strollers to navigate. Shade sails and shade structures are proposed to provide comfortable access to the existing playground and proposed plazas. Shade trees will be preserved and planted within the site and along Calhoun Street, providing an opportunity to partner

with the Richmond Urban Forestry Division (UFD). The existing extensive fencing will be removed and strategically replaced along the existing basketball courts, the existing playground and the proposed splash play area. Street murals and crosswalks will be employed to provide safe pedestrian travel routes into the site via Calhoun Street and St. Peter Street. The master plan also includes a proposed sidewalk along St. Peter Street where sidewalk does not exist currently. The four main entrances into the site will have unique character and provide visibility into the site. These entrances will include focal elements with native landscape treatments, one with a skate friendly plaza with a stair/ramp feature, and another with the proposed public art gateway project. Additional amenities envisioned as part of the master plan include expanded play opportunities for children, teen areas with shade and social spaces, adult conversation areas, and walking paths and fitness equipment for all. The master plan focuses on creating 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

Table 1. JWCP community engagement summary and EAC discovery.

Project Budget and Funding Sources:

The overall master plan up for conceptual review by the UDC is not yet funded but anticipated to be funded in the future through the PRCF CIP or possible local, state, and/or federal grant opportunities. The Early Action Activity is currently funded with a budget of \$100,000 by the HUD Choice Neighborhoods grant and \$100,000 by the City of Richmond for a combined budget of \$200,000. This project will be fully designed and will come before the UDC for final approval later.

Construction Timeline:

Construction of the overall master plan is not known and tied to future funding opportunities. The early action project is expected to remove haphazard fencing, clean up the park, and to construct a splash park and associated plaza space, budget permitting. As part of the HUD Choice Neighborhoods Grant requirements, Early Action Activities must be implemented in the first 24 months of the planning process, which is scheduled for December 2023.