

# Hotchkiss Park – Capital Trees Green Space – Project Narrative

## ***Purpose of the Project***

Capital Trees' mission is to create more public green space, an essential for community health and well-being. As a public-private partnership, the organization brings together the City, corporations, non-profits, and community stakeholders to implement these spaces through the urban fabric and to develop management plans to ensure their long-term viability. As evidenced through their work on The Low Line, Great Shiplock Park, the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Initiative, and other projects, Capital Trees has a proven track record for success. The project at Hotchkiss Community Center is another great opportunity to improve public green space in the City of Richmond through a close partnership with the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities.

Through multiple community engagement sessions, six primary project goals emerged to guide the work of this project:

1. CONNECT people and communities to nature
2. TRANSFORM underutilized space in the City of Richmond
3. MANAGE the project through community stewardship and City partnerships
4. COLLABORATE with the City, Capital Trees, and community as part of placemaking
5. EDUCATE the community about environmental stewardship and ecological design
6. ADAPT to climate change through urban tree planting and responsible stormwater management strategies

## ***Project Background***

Hotchkiss Community Center and Park is located at 715 E. Brookland Park Boulevard in the Green Park section of Highland Park and is surrounded by a residential neighborhood. The facility consists of a single parcel owned by DPRCF. The primary access to the park is from East Brookland Park Boulevard via a small parking lot—the sole vehicular entrance to the park—and a separate sidewalk across from Letcher Ave. that leads to the front entrance of the building. There are secondary pedestrian access points through the perimeter chain link fencing along Dunn Ave. and from the rear alley near the tennis courts. Additional parking is available along East Brookland Park Boulevard and Dunn Avenue.

The existing facilities include the community center building, a small parking lot located adjacent to the west side of the building, four basketball courts (three full-size at the front of the building and one small court on the side), a horseshoes court, a blacktop, a playground, one tennis court, multiple pickleball courts, a community garden, two baseball fields, a multipurpose field, and a pool and pavilion.

Timmons Group and Worley Associates Architects completed a series of engagement and planning sessions for the City of Richmond in 2021 and developed a vision for future improvement and investment in the park and Community Center. Interior renovations to the Community Center are now under way as a result of that study and additional exterior park renovations have been done with more planned for the future.

The rear portion of the site consists of an open lawn space with little programming, overgrown vegetation, and chain link fencing. This area is unsafe, does not allow access to the park, and is a barrier to activity. This is the portion of the site that Capital Trees has chosen to focus the efforts of this project on.

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

Timmons Group prepared preliminary cost estimates for the planned site improvements which amounted to approximately \$360,000. The City of Richmond PRCF has agreed to assist with some portions of this project, including removal of the chain-link fences in the rear of the site, vegetation removal in this same area, and erection of their park-standard split rail fencing. This will offset some of these costs from the estimate. Capital Trees is funding the remainder of the project through a fund-raising campaign with private investment. A portion of the funding is secured to date but additional funds must be raised before construction can begin. Additional volunteer labor, material donations, and other strategies may be employed to complete this project without fully funding the construction program.

### ***Description of Construction Program***

As shown in the illustrative materials package as part of this UDC submittal, planned improvements include:

- Removal of chain link fences and vegetation in the rear of the park along the alleyway
- New split rail fence with pedestrian access points where appropriate
- New walkway connecting the whole back portion of the park that is not walkable today
- Play and landscape berms creating topographic interest and play opportunity
- Stormwater management demonstration area with interpretation signage
- Edible landscape area with food forest loop for growing fruiting trees and shrub level fruiting vegetation
- Seating area near pickleball and tennis courts for enhanced recreational opportunity
- Primary gathering and community space with felled timber play elements and engineered wood fiber surfacing where future public art installation is envisioned
- Public art installation is likely in a few years as funding is available and preliminary discussions with the Public Art Commission have confirmed this possibility. Public art goals are to create a piece for play, sculpture, community conversation, community identity considering the Hotchkiss Eagle mascot, and more. In the interim, the space will be an open play opportunity.
- Lighting is not anticipated as part of this project due to budgetary limitations and primary operation of the park from dawn to dusk.

## ***Maintenance***

Maintenance for the project is intended to change from the current state in which the City of Richmond maintains the area. Today, maintenance is simple but costly, mowing vast areas of open lawn in the rear of the park, using copious amounts of gasoline to power mowers and trimmers and substantial time performing the work, despite the limited usage and programmatic elements located in the project area. After the project is constructed, the City will mow a reduced amount of lawn area and other stakeholders and neighborhood groups will champion the maintenance of the remaining items as follows:

1. Meadow establishment and care – during the initial 3-year meadow establishment, hand removal of noxious weeds, watering during extreme drought, mowing up to 3 times per year, and other minor needs will be the responsibility of Capital Trees and the community stewards. Capital Trees will advise PRCF staff and the community stewards on meadow establishment care through up to four on site engagement or education events/year during the establishment period. After the initial 3-year period, maintenance is mostly limited to mowing 3 times per year. The meadow is intended to look like the one established and maintained in the park area behind the Bon Secours Training Facility in the City.
2. Edible landscape and food forest – maintenance involves hand watering during the initial year long establishment period, annual pruning, and harvesting of fruit which will be the responsibility of Capital Trees and the community stewards. Capital Trees will advise PRCF staff and the community stewards on edible landscape and food forest maintenance through up to four on site engagement or education events/year during establishment period.
3. Stormwater bioretention area – maintenance involves weeding and pruning annually for the small stormwater areas.
4. Other – additional maintenance requirements are limited and are envisioned to be the responsibility of the City of Richmond PRCF to keep up the facility appearance like they do today.

As part of the goal for community empowerment, the hope is that a neighborhood group will organize to care for the routine maintenance that the City is not trained to perform and in the interim, Capital Trees and its volunteers may be involved to keep the project successful.

## ***Estimated Construction Start Date and Project Phasing***

Assuming the design and permitting process continues as planned and funding for the project is secured in the coming months, construction will begin in spring 2024 with completion by spring 2025.