

T.B. Smith Community Center Narrative

2015 Ruffin Rd, Richmond VA, 23234

May 17, 2023



Introduction:

The City of Richmond is building a community center for the Southside neighborhood off Ruffin Road that will engage, educate, and elevate the lives of its residents.

The neighborhood surrounding T.B. Smith is a mix between residential and industrial, surrounded by single family homes to the south, and industrial warehouses to the north and west. A vacant school facility parcel abuts the east and could be potential future expansion for the park. Community surveys found that approximately 29% of those who visit the park arrive by walking, while others arrive by biking (14%) or driving (57%). The site currently includes a community center facility, baseball field, basketball courts, outdoor shelter, tennis courts, large open space, and a playground.

The program for the project was conceived based on community responses received during an engagement process performed prior to design. The program highlights include a large multipurpose gymnasium, splash play, culinary learning center, teen center, a large multipurpose sports field, and the light renovation of an existing building on site. Program was a result of an ongoing discussion with the community.

Funding for the project is made in part by the American Rescue Plan, with \$20M in construction funds going towards a new community center at TB Smith. Out of this, a construction cost target of \$12,000,000 has been allocated for the building and of \$4,000,000 for site, with the remainder being used soft costs, permitting, etc.

The building is envisioned as IIB construction type of Assembly (A-3) classification, fully sprinklered.

Underlying Principals:

The building is engaging and inviting. The front yard basketball court is visible to passersby, as well as residents leaving the Davee Gardens neighborhood. The playful rooflines captivate imagination and outline the expansive translucent façade. The scale of the front façade architecturally alludes to a silhouette of homes, a nod to the surrounding neighborhood. The front plazas are inviting, creating a front porch of activity with gardens and areas for the residents to sit. Sports activities are the focal point of this community center, with basketball courts indoor and out, multipurpose sports fields, an indoor walking track, and long pathways and nature trails.

The community center is hub for the transmission of ideas. Programmatic spaces are designed to empower and educate residents. Flexible spaces such as Multimedia libraries and mixed media spaces are designed for the residents to share knowledge or learn new skills. Edible gardens next to the culinary learning center at the front façade of the building demonstrate a dedication to exchanging knowledge. The indoor multipurpose gym is a place for residents to have basketball and volleyball games or host larger events like a neighborhood party. The building will target LEED Silver, so it can be used as a teaching opportunity and model for buildings in the future.

The building is elevated, (aspire, inspire, uplift, dream, motivate)

The building operates as an extension of city hall, creating a gateway for the residents of southside to connect with City Services offered in Richmond. Through this engagement and education, the building is providing residents the tools to elevate themselves.

Landscape:

Community feedback resoundingly indicated the need for before and after school care, and residents strongly preferred a youth and teen center with a multipurpose gym, indoor and outdoor basketball, culinary learning center, playground, and a multipurpose field. This preference remains a core design driver. The multipurpose field anchors the west side of the site in the ideal north/south orientation to allow for optimal space for additional park amenities. An existing field to the east extending onto the Richmond Public School property is preserved for additional sporting events. An updated exterior basketball court is provided to the front of the site near the Davee Gardens neighborhood entrance to the Community Center, making it a focal point in the programming. Existing canopy trees are preserved along the front of the site and a sidewalk connection between the existing and proposed community building is provided.

Additional amenities include a playground, splash pad, native grass meadow planting, and open space with extensive tree planting contributing to the park-like setting. A walking trail fitness path meanders along the northern edge of the site linking the existing community center and the new in a seamless loop along the perimeter. The industrial park abutting the park is screened with a buffer. Green infrastructure and permeable pavement is proposed for onsite stormwater treatment. Together, these elements provide south Richmond with a vibrant community center, addressing a critical need for quality green space in the neighborhood.

Construction Program:

The 22,000-sf building will be 2 stories tall at 40 ft at the tallest peak with an average roof height of 28 ft. The site is large, and after mapping out the focal areas, a multipurpose sports field, and a basketball court, the building responds to the activities with a linear layout. Sidewalks and paths connect the program areas. Programmatically, and as requested by area residents, the community center will feature an indoor basketball court and walking track. The first level will also include offices for city administration services and a visiting health clinic, a culinary learning center, bathrooms (including two showers), and a community room. The second level will house the youth and teen center, a mixed media lounge, and a learning center. The site will include numerous upgrades including the renovation of the existing out-building to house active adult services, an upgraded multipurpose field and walking trails that will connect residents with nature and provide an improved backdrop to the community center.

Construction Timeline:

Construction is planned to be 16 months, set to begin in August of 2023 with a goal of completion by December 2024. As outlined by the American Rescue Plan, funds need to be encumbered by 2025.