

These are answers to frequently asked questions either sent directly to our website after the posting of the Master Plan, or collected from the two transcripts of the Zoom meetings presenting the Master Plan for the Park at the end of 2020.

Filter Square Neighborhood Association (FSN) had the following four comments (edited for brevity but the bold text is as their comments were written):

1. **“There is no reason to expand the recreation center. If there is indeed a demand ...it should be done vertically by adding a second floor.”**

We heard loud and clear from so many people that the recreation center is substandard in many regards. With only one classroom (and only that room is air conditioned), and providing a full slate of after-school, and summer camp sessions, it is difficult to offer any programming that can serve the neighbors. From the Girl Scout troop to Tai-Chi classes, the recreation center is booked now. It is impractical to imagine adding on a second floor. The existing building is 3 different structural systems, none of which were designed to handle a second floor.

2. **“During winter month having an accessible rec center would be nice, but most of the year would not be a draw to the park.”**

This is not true. Our vision is for the recreation center to be the social hub for the neighborhood, providing programming for our children to their grandparents and everyone between. This could happen 12 months a year not just when the weather is nice. Not everyone has access to shore houses in the summer, gym memberships, and the other private resources that many people take advantage of to build a social network. The recreation center could be this “third place” in our greater Filter Square community which actually lacks much public indoor space.

3. **“The reconfiguration in the (long term vision) master plan would reduce the overall space allotted playgrounds.”**

This is not true. As the consultant pointed out, one of the values of the reconfiguration is that it allows for more exterior playground area.

4. **“..it omits solutions for O’Connor Pool...”**

O’Connor Pool is a difficult problem and we don’t omit solutions, though we have to continue to work with PP&R because we understand how valuable the pool is to the neighborhood. And yet the cost to repair, replace or refurbish it is very high.

General Community Questions

What is the mechanism to engage the community moving forward?

The Board will take all the feedback they received, not just from the Zoom calls, and consider how to move forward. Eventually the master plan will be finalized and used by the Board to plan for short and long term goals. As stated on the Zoom Calls, the long term goals are aspirational and may change as time goes on, as fund raising starts, or as programming changes or use of the Park changes. Long term aspirational goals, like a new recreation building could change in many ways: it could be a smaller building, a different building in a different location, or even an addition to the existing building. Something this significant would take many years (8-15 years in the future) to develop. And it would be with the full participation of PP&R who would return to the community to re-engage everyone in the process.

How did people access the survey, the QR codes?

The survey was sent out through as many email lists as possible: FSRP, MAC, FSN, CCRA as well as on Facebook pages like the dog runs. It was posted on the bulletin boards in the Park. And we did get over 400 responses.

What outreach actually happened?

- The survey was only one way the consultants reached out. So over 400 people responded to the survey.
- The consultant performed 68 on-site interviews with users in the Park—walking around and interviewing Park users.
- The consultant spent more than 30 hours of on-site observations in the Park.
- At the first draft, they had reached over 125 Park users at park events.
- They spent last year's Fall Festival with a pin up board talking to as many people as possible for hours.
- Besides the Board meetings that were specifically focused on the Master Plan with the consultants, they also ran stakeholder participant meetings that included the Boards, near neighbors and far neighbors who had worked with FSRP in the past, stakeholders like Greenfield parents, TPS representatives, Taney Baseball, community gardeners. . .etc. The stakeholder meetings also had PP&R liaison representatives, and we invited state and city representatives too (some of whom came).

Will the zoom presentations be posted?

Yes, it has been posted on our website.

Can a new recreation center be 2 stories tall?

Maybe. PP&R counseled us that they had not built a 2-story recreation center for a long time and probably would prefer not to do so in the future. Two story buildings can generally take up more room for the programmable space inside because they also require a minimum of two exit stairs, and an elevator. For the same reasons they can more expensive to build and maintain than a single story building. Our intent was not to over reach with a two story building but to plan a more modest one story building.

Can the new recreation center be a smaller footprint?

Yes, it can. Though the plan shows a specific footprint, the building could be smaller depending on the programming—and at some point the cost of the building or how it fits on the site will determine the size.

Could the new recreation center go against the railroad tracks?

The recreation center could go anywhere, but there were very good reasons why the consultants suggested where they did. See answers below.

Why is there so much focus on the recreation center on the Zoom call?

We think there might be a couple of reasons. The Master Plan got the short term goals right, so there was little concern about some obvious pragmatic issues. Yes we want to fix the drainage. Yes we want to get a fence around the landscape bed in the dog run. Yes we want more trees, but not near the community garden. While the long term goals, though a more aspirational and pie-in-the-sky vision, might have shocked some near neighbors for the physical changes across the street from where they live or how they presently experience the Park—this involves the new location proposed for the recreation center. Why so much focus?

1. Some neighbors may not want a new or larger recreation center because it will attract more people and traffic to the neighborhood. They presently do not use the recreation center and can't imagine why they would, so are not inclined to endorse a larger one.
2. Some near neighbors would look out their windows, or walk down their street, and the Park will look different than what it does now.

Obviously the Park is special to many of us, so any significant physical changes should be improvements that are in the best interest of the Park and make it better for as many people as possible—not just the ones who live across, or down the street, from the Park.

Is there really a need for a larger building?

We believe so after listening to everyone. We think the building is small for the number of city residents who live within a 10-15 minute walk. With the after school programs and summer camps PP&R runs out of it now, there is very little time and no space available to program more neighborhood services. We heard from a host of people (expectant/new Moms, parents of teenagers, young professionals, and retired people) who thought more programming would be great. The building is at, or close to, its life expectancy. It has one real classroom with air conditioning. The rest of the center is not air conditioned. .

Could a second floor be built on the existing building?

No, not inexpensively or easily. The existing building is really three different buildings, some of which were past additions. They each have different structural systems, none of which were designed to handle a second floor.

Could an addition be built on the existing building?

Yes it could. One was built back toward the tot lot a while ago.

What might be the anticipated sources of funding?

PP&R has told us they don't envision having in their budget a new building or addition at our Park. As such, the funding would need to come from fundraising, grant proposals, and whatever other sources of monies.

What if we got rid of the pool and built a multi-story recreation center at the pool site?

That was suggested. There is concern about building a recreation center that was not contiguous to the Park, as it makes it more difficult for some of the children programs to easily access the playgrounds and outdoor courts. And the pool site really isn't large enough to hold a new recreation center and a pool. There is some concern about getting rid of the pool as it serves such a diverse set of city residents, and everyone who uses it really likes it.

Could we add a tennis wall someplace on the site?

Yes.

Were local schools and daycare centers consulted?

Yes, a representative from TPS and Greenfield were at the initial stakeholder meetings. We did reach out to some of the nearby day care centers as well through the survey and parents.

What about drainage and storm water management at problem areas?

We recognize this is a short term problem we would like to address as noted in the Plan.

Could you talk about the issue of the basketball courts not being functional?

Many survey responses talked about how the back boards and rims were in bad shape and the surfacing was also in need of repairs. The consultants also received feedback that players on the courts didn't always feel welcome in the Park.

If we did everything in the plan, how much would it cost?

We did not place dollar figures on everything.

How much would a new building cost?

One might imagine a new building might cost anywhere from \$250-300/sf, so a recreation center of 12,000sf might be anywhere from \$3M to \$3.6M. That might be significantly higher in 8-12 years.

Are DEI goals included in the future outreach plans?

Yes they will be.

Is seems the second Zoom call was a repeat of the first call, is this right?

Yes. We unfortunately could not accommodate everyone on the first call so our intent was to present the Plan again.

Why can't there be a town hall meeting where everyone can speak?

Many web based town hall meetings do not let everyone speak. Given the limited amount of time, and our desire to make sure everyone had a chance to participate, we kept the chat open and voices muted—so multiple people could be typing at one time. There is ample evidence that web based calls that allow anyone to talk have a tendency to bias those with the loudest or most stringent voice, and exclude others who might offer alternative viewpoints or might be intimidated by the majority of other comments. See this link [which points to the research that many community meetings are “. . . really more of a forum for empowering, typically, the most privileged segments who are often disproportionately opposed to the thing that's getting proposed.”](#) We wanted to present first. We wanted to insure everyone could equally respond with comments and questions. And we knew we would try to answer as many comments and questions as possible, and could continue the discussion on our website.

How was the space program for the recreation center developed?

The consultant made it up. If and when the funds were raised, programming of the building would need to happen.

I am curious about how we can continue providing feedback?

Become a member of FSRP. See details on our website.

What criteria will be used to determine the needs of the recreation center besides budget?

At that point in the far future that money was raised, PP&R would hire a consultant who would work with their in-house program staff, FSRP, and whomever else to determine a program aligned with the budget that could be used to design a building. The process would engage the community too, to insure that it aligns with our vision.

At what point is this final? Who owns the decision?

A master plan is probably never final, but at some point we publish the plan and start to work to address the goals.

What do we think the impact on parking and traffic will be?

We don't know. Our intention is not to increase the vehicle traffic to the Park.

Why can't the recreation center be expanded into right field?

Because it would impact the soccer field, and right field.

Will we see a new draft after the Zoom meetings?

It depends. We will take everything we heard at the Zoom meetings, and that we heard from all the other stakeholder comments, and determine what to change, edit, or revise in the Plan.

Do we have an example of a rec center in a public park that's used how we want the one in this plan to be used?

Most recreation centers work as we envision ours could. The limitations are typically set by the number of classrooms and facilities available in the building. Markward has a great afterschool program and summer program, but with only one classroom, this limits what else can be offered to the community. PP&R has older adult centers dedicated to +55 years old <https://www.phila.gov/parks-rec-finder/#/locations/older-adult-centers>, though our sense is with additional programming space there could be a need for a whole wide range of folks—from adult-focused to even teenagers. For example, a new mom's group was looking for a place they could meet up outside of their homes—because they could not find a free publicly accessible space, they ended up at a bar—it wasn't their first choice.

Were various locations considered for the new recreation center?

Yes. The consultant ultimately suggested a location and massing that addressed the largest number of positive comments which were primarily, but not exclusively:

1. Make it more welcoming and visible.
2. Improve the access to the bathrooms.
3. Add more space for existing programs and potential for expanded programming.
4. Improve the physical and visual connection the outdoor space.
5. Improve accessibility.
6. Provide an opportunity for concessions.

Letter signed by many residents of the 2500 block of Pine...that expresses the concern that a building on the corner of 26th and Pine would destroy the “open vista of the park across the tennis courts and over the railroad tracks and Schuylkill River to the horizon over West Philadelphia.” They also point out that this open vista “...is vital to the security of the park because it allows community members to spot incipient trouble and call the police before trouble escalates.”

We understood their concern that relocating the building to the corner of 26th and Pine would change the experience of everyone approaching the Park from one direction on 26th or Pine Street as they “enjoy the open vista of the park across the tennis courts and over the railroad tracks and Schuylkill River to the horizon over West Philadelphia.” We also recognize, from most of their addresses on the letter that that is the way they experience the Park. As the consultant pointed out, most people enter the Park at Pine and Taney—not at 26th. Pine and Taney is the main entrance to the Park and people approach this main entrance by car on Taney and from both Taney and Pine. It also aligns with the pedestrian spine that links this south end of the Park with the north end. The consultant relocated the building at the corner of 26th and Pine in response to much of the feedback from the community. The reasons were:

1. Make it more welcoming, visible—by placing it on the street it could contribute to, and participate, in the neighborhood unlike a building “in” the Park. It would have a door on the sidewalk and windows on the streetscape.
2. Improve access to bathrooms—sort of obvious if you have ever been in the existing building.
3. Add more space for the potential for expanded programming—a new building would alleviate the trouble of trying to add on to an existing building that had already been added on to.
4. Improve better connections to the outdoor spaces and street—a front door that could be seen from the sidewalk and improved visible access to the outdoor spaces.
5. Improve accessibility and connection to the community—many people did not know the current building had programming in it or what it was used for.

There were also other site considerations too that we received as feedback from the community that reinforced this location:

1. Move tennis courts away from residents/street/sidewalk traffic. The tennis courts with its tall activity lights would be moved back to the train tracks along with the current tall lighted activities—moving these programmed spaces away from being directly across from homes.
2. Increase if possible the playground areas. The relocated building offered more opportunities to reconfigure and enlarge the surrounding play areas than any addition would.
3. Increase openness to the Park for safety. Relocating the building opens up the corner of Taney and Pine to provide visibility and openness where it is missing now—the Plaza, playground and tot lot.
4. Decrease congestion at corner of Taney and Pine. Relocating the building will stretch the activities that occur now in that corner of the Park—sometimes at cross purposes.
5. Eliminate the one piece of Park edge with the neighborhood that has an inhospitable tall chain link fence.
6. If the existing building is demolished and a new one built in its footprint, the recreation center would be out of service for probably a year or longer.

The beautiful vista that they describe—albeit through the chain link fence now—does move. It will happen at Taney and Pine, aligned to reinforce the major entrance into the Park. Everyone entering the Park from both directions will experience the open vista of the Park toward the river as they physically cross the threshold from sidewalk to Park. This familiar experience will just be a half block further down on Pine, past a modest one story building with a front door and inviting windows into community rooms.

And the sense of openness and security of the Park? The new vista at the corner of Taney and Pine will significantly open up areas of the Park that now have neither eyes from neighbors or the sidewalk/streetscape. We believe it will improve visibility into the Park measurably. Will the new building block the view from Pine Street for some of the Pine Street neighbors directly across the street from the tennis courts? Yes. But that same view will remain for residents on Delancey Street and 26th Streets, and the overall views into the Park will be enhanced. For anyone concerned about security, this should be reassuring.

But honestly, where the building is sited, whether it is new or added on to, how big or small it is, is really years away. Any decisions of such specificity will have a time and place for consideration. It will involve community buy-in and should address near neighbor concerns. We believe the neighborhood would be better served with a building that could provide more all-year round programming that serves the neighbors (from children, to teens, young adults, and retired ones). Though we believe in the location that the consultant suggested, we also recognize its exact size and location could change in the future.

We may have alienated many near neighbors whose familiar view of the Park would change significantly with our proposed plan, but we believe it most effectively provided added value across the Park. We believe the referendum on the final building location, size and programming can wait until we are far closer to actuality. Despite the specificity of the plan, this is all aspirational and years away. If it did happen, it would go through heavy community engagement with PP&R, neighbors, consultants, and anyone else with vested interests. At which point, could the outcome be an addition to the existing building? Yes. Could it be a new building elsewhere on the site? Yes. Could it be a smaller building? Yes. Could it be a two story building? Maybe.