

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: Southside Works East Lawn Sport Court (Tunnel Boulevard)	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): South Side Community Council (RCO) Local Review Committee Area residents Applicant team DCP staff
Parcel Number(s): 29-J-205	
ZDR Application Number: DCP-ZDR-2022-00002	
Meeting Location: Zoom	
Date: Thursday, May 19th	
Meeting Start Time: 6:00pm	
Applicant: Somera Road (Teresa Bucco, Chris McCune), AE7 (Nathan Lutz)	Approx. Number of Attendees: 18
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Planning Commission, ZBA	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

The proposal aims to activate the green space on Tunnel Boulevard with a sports court for pickleball and basketball, for use by the general public. It is being created as part of continued investment in the South Side and in SouthSide Works, which has included the recently completed conversion of the movie theater and tenanting ground floor retail spaces with entertainment and food/beverage options. We've been active with construction of the old town square and have been working on creation of a new public dog park.

A public sport court would be a way to repurpose an underutilized space and it would align with other efforts like the park that broke ground last week, and the summer concert lot and the ice rink.

The team showed aerial and street-level views of the site and with a rendering. The lot is currently vacant. The project will have a light impact on the parcel. The intent is to not disrupt much of the lawn or trees. Sport court area is to be <500 sq ft, and will not protrude into public ROW, but will instead stay within the boundaries of the property lines. In addition to pickleball and basketball, it might be usable for other games like four square. The team showed existing photos of S. Water Street and the four corners of that area. Trees will remain, as there is no need to remove any of those – they are mature and want to preserve. They will not disturb landscaping and do not plan to change the existing pedestrian/sidewalk network conditions nearby as part of this project.

A 10-foot-tall fence will surround the court, so that basketball hoops can be set at regulation height, and for safety too as it will keep balls contained within the park and off the street. They are applying for a zoning variance since it exceeds allowable fence height.

There will be an entrance on S. Water Street where the gates are, to access the fenced in area.

They are considering context and height of building – transparency, openness. Keeping open the corridor of Tunnel Blvd and not obstructions to view. It will be a daytime operation, as they are not planning on adding lighting. Lighting along park will remain and is adequate and keeps area safe. The night environment would remain as it is now. The idea

is to provide an amenity for multi-use space, with access and connection with riverfront and town center and dog park. The general plan is to open this summer. [Precedent imagery was shown.]

They are hoping to be at the Planning Commission on June 14, with approval by end of June, as the targeted dates. It will not be a lot of construction – rather the simple preparation of the earth and the installation of the sport court surface.

They will be going to ZBA for the fencing variance.

Construction would take approximately 2 weeks. It would be slab on grade with sport court surface on top of that. The space would be for public use. They heard from the head of facilities in American Eagle, who is excited about it given there are not many pickleball courts in Pittsburgh. They are confident this adds value to the South Side and to existing and future residents and to the riverfront area.

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
There is a 30-day review period by the public. How will you meet that, if going to Planning Commission on 6/14?	
Only the briefing is on 6/14, the Planning Commission hearing is scheduled for 6/28. But going to ZBA first or after?	We are doing concurrently.
There is a 30-day period after the DAM. And then Zoning does not make a decision at the hearing, but rather takes 45 days to make their decision, so you should factor that in.	We were projecting that schedule since we would love to have it open by mid-July, but there are other sequencing things we're working through. We'll make sure have timeline ironed out in accordance with City Planning requirements.
I am curious if Planning Commission will require just one meeting or rather the two meetings.	Yes, we had initially thought this would just be an administrative staff review process over the counter and then they came back and said they'd like us to go through full FLDP process. We had thought that since we had presented the full plan previously and Somera has been doing this development, that this might just be administrative process.
I'd hate to hear process get in the way of people playing pickleball.	I could share about it.
So you're going to ZBA only for the fence variance because the fence is to be 10 feet and not the limit that is at 6 feet?	Correct, that is for ZBA. But for Planning Commission, Zoning has asked us to go through pre meeting as well as full meeting.
Pre-meeting is June 14?	Correct.
And meeting to provide decision would be June 28?	Correct.

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June 28 would be the hearing and would allow for public testimony but June 14 does not allow public testimony.	
Since the court would be for daytime only, what are the hours? Is there a lock to the fence? How will you regulate the use of it?	It will be dawn to dusk activities. There will just be the street lights, not lights on the court. SouthSide Works has 24 hours security. The night-time security for SouthSide Works may do a round/check where they put a lock on the fence.
People can just go as they will and wait their turn? I'm asking just to understand potential things that might come up.	Typically sport courts have been first come first serve in Pittsburgh, but if it becomes super popular, we may create a reservation system. That is definitely a consideration.
Since it's a public court and public courts can get fairly rough around here, I'm curious how will you monitor that, being that this is private property and not public property? I see it is away from the residential units but directly across from the hotel. People tend to play their butts off at our courts, but don't be surprised if smells like weed and people drinking at same time. Due to location and that it is public, you may need to increase your security capacity or at some point your programming may have to change.	It's a great thought. We weigh that conception of an urban sport/basketball court or any sport court and potential to attract nuisances or loitering activity against the fact that it would be a great amenity people do use and as you said people playing their butts off. We're looking at potential security in consideration of the context of the South Side. We're also looking at in the context of programming and other tenanting like Pins Mechanical Co. We want to make sure it is for everyone and is also a safe environment. We're weighing those things and thinking about the area's programming overall and not just this space on its own.
Down at 12 th street at Armstrong, the basketball court has always had leagues playing down there. Once leagues take over no one else gets to use them. You should monitor that so that leagues don't start up. You guys aren't going to supply balls or equipment?	No, users will bring own equipment, but nets and hoops will be there. We may actually want to find leagues to coordinate when they play – we may partner with a group and have people come down and use as dedicated time, and that prevents them from taking over court outside of their times.
Yeah just make sure it doesn't get out of hand.	
Will there be a net for pickleball?	Pickleball might be Tuesday mornings and basketball Thursday nights, but we still need to think about how to manage that. We have to figure out how to manage. Operations are not one size fits all, and it could be a little trial and error. Our activation partner may assist. The reservation system as I mentioned may also be an option. A lot depends on how successful court is. We hope it will be a draw and to manage appropriately.
In Armstrong Park, there is a tennis court that has no net and is not used except for kids running around it. We have petitioned City to make it a pickleball court and so far that has been unsuccessful but we plan to pursue it further. Therefore, an outdoor pickleball court on the South Side is appreciated. I've been told the Market House has indoor pickleball courts but I can't speak to where they'd be. I	

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know they have a basketball court and it may be at the same space and used at different times.	
You mentioned pickleball in the morning and basketball at night. But obviously nothing would be at night, activities go just until the sun goes down?	Yeah, evening time.
The court provides a large canvass. In the South Side, the graffiti often gets out of hand and no way to stop it, so your security should watch it.	Absolutely, yeah, sometimes that can be the unfortunate side effect of more people in the area, and we're really hoping to drive more people to come to the area as we come out of covid, but point taken that we have to keep our eye on it. The property management team has already been thinking about these matters as to how spaces are to be used over the summer. Pins Mechanical Co. is opening in August and September, and other ground-floor retailers will be creating additional draw.
No plans for winter? Once cold and snowy?	Not on this court, unless someone wants to play snow ball.
<p>My business partner has left for the day and is the author of the SouthSide Works design guidelines. We're familiar with the content of the document. I was reviewing the presentation relative to guidelines, and I commend you for preserving street trees at perimeter of what design guidelines call Tunnel Park (that long stretch of green space covering lid of CSX rail tunnel), and because of the nature of the construction and railroad, the only opportunity for large trees are at the very edge of it, where existing trees are planted, so that is wonderful you are preserving those trees and got a sports court to fit in those dimensions.</p> <p>One question: design guidelines aim to minimize impervious surface. I recognize most of Tunnel Park is lawn grass and pervious, but I'm curious if you've been investigating pervious sport court surfaces. Or would run-off go into other pervious areas around it?</p>	Thank you. We're glad to preserve street trees – we've been aware of that also with the dog park and town center and preserving streetscape. We're not trying to drastically alter those things. Regarding impervious vs. pervious coverage, we haven't studied a pervious surface in this application. The surface is commonly used in many high school and municipal parks. We have a local installer. It's a sport court surface that sits on top of an approximately 4" concrete slab to ensure it remains level. Intention is for it to be graded so that it would distribute evenly over onto remaining pervious coverage, which is about 4-6 feet of fill over train tunnel.
Eliminating run-off and surcharge is the goal.	Yeah, the intent is to manage run-off so it won't overload any one inlet.
You're not putting down drain...	Right. Also, our goal was to not exceed 5,000 square feet in area, ensuring under threshold to minimize impact to stormwater systems.
Excellent, thank you.	

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<p>Do you have images with the type of fence you're planning to install?</p>	<p>The rendering is the closest we can come to it. The idea would be to match it to the dog park fence that we intend to install, which is not a chain link fence but is a vertical grid wire fence.</p> <p>[Showed image of fence going up at dog park]. It won't be exactly like the fence at the dog park but it will be black. It won't be a galvanized gray, there will be a finish to it. Renderings shows how it will have a nice finish to it, so it stays transparent in its appearance and not a lot of density in fencing, so can see through it.</p>
<p>Hearing that it complements or will be similar to the dog park fence shows continuity in the different sites and sections of Tunnel Park, so I appreciate that.</p>	
<p>If you go back to the plan view of the site and zoom in, the actual playing area is colored orange and then 4' all around. Is that 4' for spectators to stand around and watch?</p>	<p>It's more of an over-play space, so that have extra space beyond sidelines for out of bounds etc. Not intended for spectators, who would likely need to be outside of fence.</p>
<p>The 4' part will be to perimeter of fence ?</p>	<p>Yes, the dotted black line shows the perimeter of fence.</p>
<p>Arrows are showing where will have access to courts?</p>	<p>Correct, one coming from each direction on South Water Street.</p>
<p>Maybe put a few benches around the outside so people can sit and watch.</p>	<p>That is a good idea. We have some benches we could put out there. We may have to relocate a bench to do this. When we get out there, if things shift and 4 ft becomes 3 ft to avoid interrupting trees, we'll make that adjustment. We're trying to lightly place this sport court on the parcel.</p> <p>In interests of clarity and transparency, we don't own this piece of property, the URA owns it. We'll do it under a license agreement with the URA. We have maintenance obligations for all of Tunnel Park and also 10 years of maintenance obligations for South Shore Riverfront Park, so this extends from South Shore Riverfront along river's edge up to the SouthSide Works campus proper. We maintain all of that as part of the property management effort at SouthSide Works and in those buildings that Somera Road owns.</p>
<p>Thanks for that info.</p>	<p>We work with URA very closely and so are in active discussions with them and we will have a licensed agreement formalized to do this, probably before we go to Planning Commission.</p>
<p>Thank you for the presentation about this nice public amenity. It's nice to see.</p>	

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
[SSCC contact shared how public comments and testimony could be shared]	

Other Notes

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Planner completing report: Thomas Scharff