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# Explorer Park Design Proposal To Improve Neighborhood Parks

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By  
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# **Explorer Park Design Proposal To Promote Neighborhood Use**

A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT APPROVED FOR THE  
**URBAN DESIGN STUDIO**  
CHRISTOPHER C. GIBBS  
**COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Redesigning Explorer Park is important to me because it will enrich lives by enhancing the community that I live in. This project attempts to achieve that by providing a design that incorporates placemaking principals that *renovate a deteriorating, underutilized neighborhood park and create a neighborhood space that can be shared with the community.* This design effort in rejuvenating a neighborhood park is very different from the original research project, I planned to analyze the struggles of a housing epidemic and provide a potential solution to those seeking shelter. The purpose was to ensure that they achieve the bare necessities and have a basis of improving their lives. Though this could have become a valuable research project, it was not practical and had little potential for improving the community. Initially, this placemaking effort at Explorer Park was a personal, hypothetical project, where I considered dedicating space in my front yard as a place for students to stop and play along their route to school. As this progressed, there was little to design, it brought up challenges with utilizing my personal property, and it would only offer a slight improvement to a small community. The nearby Explorer Park provided potential for similar benefits and addressed each of the shortcomings. The site's current conditions offer plenty to consider in a redesign effort. It is public property and it has the potential of impacting the neighborhood community as a

whole. This project studies the existing physical and communal characteristics relative to the park and establishes a design that encourages neighborhood enjoyment. If this project is successful, this strategy could be applied to various neighborhoods in a way to eventually improve all of Tulsa's neighborhood parks.

## Problems and Goals

Explorer Park has few features that identify it as a place and consequently, it often remains underutilized. Some of the park's current features have deteriorated. There is very little to inspire neighbors to use the park. The park is hidden from the street and neighbors a very active field, so it is easily be overlooked when passing through the neighborhood. At the park, there is a challenging landscape with little encouragement to enter. The topography directs a lot of water to Explorer Park, which also creates some issues on the site that must be considered in the redesign. Currently, the site is molded in a manner for water to flow around the park's attractions and off of the site very well, but this creates difficult terrain for those navigating the park. Additionally, the parking lot creates an obstruction between those traveling on the street or walking the sidewalk by separating them from Explorer Park. This puts the park's biggest attraction, the tennis courts, about half of a football field from the sidewalk down a narrow, potentially dangerous sidewalk that crosses uneven terrain. The tall fence

surrounding these tennis courts creates a visual barrier to the back of the park, where the park offers immense green space and its natural beauty thrives. When meeting with the City of Tulsa's Parks Department, it was made clear that the city wants to provide attractive parks that people can utilize, but it can be challenging to determine what is needed in an area. This challenge, along with the physical aspects of the site, define the goals of this project.

The main goal of this project is to utilize several placemaking principals to create a practical design that encourages the neighbors to utilize Explorer Park. According to Project for Public Spaces, the eleven placemaking principals are as follows:

1. *The community is the expert*
2. *Create a Place, Not a Design*
3. *Look for Partners*
4. *You can See a lot Just by Observing*
5. *Have a vision*
6. *Start with the Petunias: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper*
7. *Triangulate*
8. *They Always Say "It Can't Be Done"*
9. *Form Supports Function*
10. *Money Is Not the Issue*
11. *You are Never Finished*

Each of these is considered throughout this design effort. As their first principal indicates, when designing something that

will benefit the community, it is very important to fully understand the site and audience whom will utilize it. This should not only include a solution for the physical site, but also provide for the users' intentions. Knowing the importance of this task, studying the community is a major aspect of the design process. To do so, stakeholders and community members were consulted throughout the design for their guidance, input, and analyses. Looking at a larger scope, the intent of this design effort is to exemplify a method of applying placemaking principals by understanding the neighborhood, analyzing and solving the site's physical challenges, and providing amenities that encourage neighborhood use so similar studies can be implemented in additional neighborhood parks.

### **Identifying the Site**

Though there are many similar neighborhood parks throughout Tulsa, Explorer Park at 7807 East 58<sup>th</sup> Street is exemplified in this project, so it is important to familiarize with the neighborhood. The park sits near Memorial Junior High along 58<sup>th</sup> street between Sheridan and Memorial. This is a moderate density residential area in a mixed-use community with some office, commercial, and light industrial areas nearby.



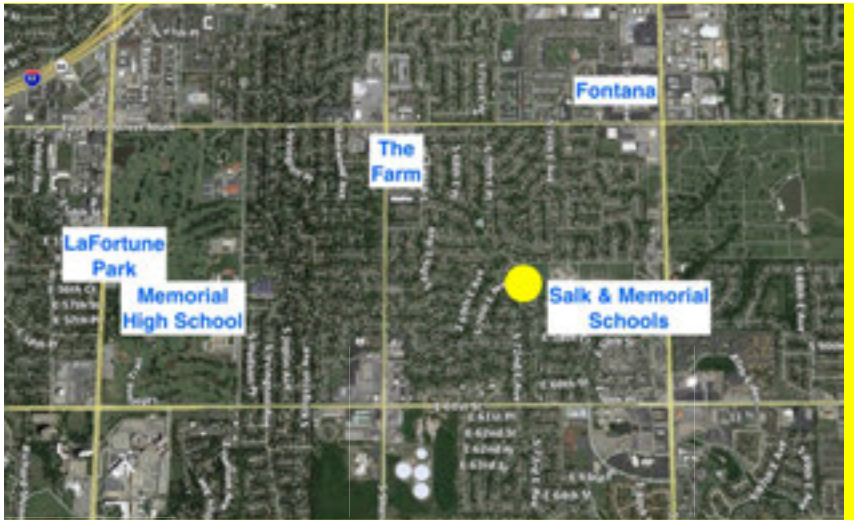


Figure 1: This image shows the nearby attractions in relation to Explorer Park, which is marked with the yellow dot.

### Advisors and Stakeholders

A handful of stakeholders and advisors provided their opinions and guidance throughout this proposal. During an initial meeting with Anna America, Director of the City of Tulsa’s Parks Department, the project was discussed, goals and problems were identified, the project’s framework was set and the project was approved. The advisors at the University, including Shawn Schaefer, Mia Kile, and Chan Hellman, who greatly through the project by consistently offering direction, guidance, motivation, and even technical

support. Stakeholders that were identified within this scope include Memorial Junior High, where the staff communicated the school’s use of and history with the park, and the neighbors, whom were represented by the Sungate neighbor’s association and surveyed directly through Nextdoor.com. This project *could not be so successful without including these partners. Their knowledge and experience of exemplary projects, the city’s public parks, and the neighborhood community provided incomparable direction and information* to promote neighborhood usage in Explorer Park with this design proposal.

### Methodology

There are various methodologies that were used in the completion of this design proposal. These were typically applied to either direct the project, complete research on the neighborhood community, or design the park. The project was approved in initial meetings with advisors at The University of Oklahoma and the City of Tulsa, where it developed the goals and direction to proceed. The site was visited many times to assess its various conditions, studying its uses and physical characteristics. To identify the characteristics of the community, various maps were analyzed, and census data was reviewed. The community’s needs were then determined by reaching out directly to some of the stakeholders and surveying community members so that a design could be tailored to those within

the neighborhood. Once the community needs were determined, a redesign could be developed to consider an address them. Developing the design featured in this report required applying modeling and rendering skills in Autodesk Revit, Trimble Sketchup, and Lumion software. Ideally, this would go through many design iterations, involving reviews from the various advisors, stakeholders, and community members. However, time limitations of this project only allowed for a design that was reviewed and revised with the advisors, then presented to and reviewed by the community, with little additional redesign. This is the design that is included in this report and *it shall continue to be analyzed, discussed, and developed into something that improves this community and the next.*

## SITE OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

### Neighborhood Analysis

There are many aspects of the neighborhood that bring potential visitors near Explorer Park. Traffic primarily passing through the neighborhood in the mornings and afternoon while parents pick up their kids from Salk Elementary and Memorial Junior High Schools, which are shown in Figure 2.

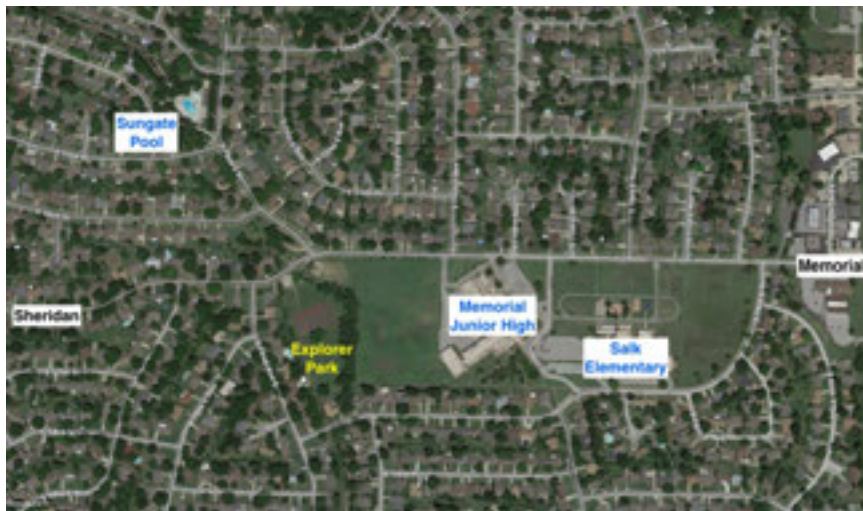


Figure 2: This image highlights the park and some neighborhood amenities.

Salk is much further and positioned away from Explorer Park. People going to the school are not required to pass by the park, which makes Memorial more of the focus for this study. The neighborhood is fortunate because the school's playground equipment is available to neighbors after school

hours. Memorial Junior High alone brings over 400 students, parents, and staff about 500 yards away from Explorer Park. Additionally, the school maintains a very large open field that is used for organized and recreational athletics, including baseball, soccer, football, and golf. This area is shown just to the right of Explorer Park in Figure 2, but it also is shown in Figure 3, where a team is seen playing soccer, as they frequently do on Saturday mornings.



Figure 3: School kids, and others, regularly use the adjacent field for various sports.



Another successful neighborhood amenity is Sungate Pool, which identifies as the best neighborhood pool in Tulsa. School traffic during the fall and spring are complemented by those traveling to the pool throughout the summer. The park has the ability to be a destination for those going to the school, field, or pool. With recreational amenities tailored to those communities, the design will be much more successful.

**Site Composition**

Explorer Park’s current conditions divide it into several distinctly different areas. These areas separate the park into various places for diverse functions. Unfortunately, only a couple of those areas are currently regularly utilized. Many remain in their cars or pass along on the sidewalks, with few coming to play tennis. Instead of only using the parking lot and narrow walkway to the worn tennis courts, and the courts themselves, Explorer Park has the potential of providing amenities that are enjoyable for many neighbors. In total, the park is 4.8 acres, or about 208,000 square feet. Divided as shown in Figure 4, the areas are available:

- 40,000 – parking, entry, and seating
- 23,500 – repurposed tennis courts
- 79,500 – green space behind the courts
- 37,500 – remote lot
- 27,500 – miscellaneous



Figure 4: This sketch shows an initial analysis of how the site is divided.

**Physical Site Analysis**

There are many challenging physical aspects of Explorer Park that the design addresses. The best way to fully understand this site is to visit it, but the pictures throughout this section attempt to summarize the site’s challenges and potential to correct these challenges. The images shown in the following figures were taken in the locations as indicated in Figure 5.



Figure 5: This map shows where the images in the following figures were taken during the physical site analysis.

One of the main problems is that the site discourages people to enter the park. As shown in Figures 6 and 7, there are barriers that prevent people from using the site easily.



Figure 6: A few obstacles, such as the barrier, topography, long walk, and tall fence, are visible from the parking lot separating visitors from the park.

Leaving the parking lot, users immediately encounter the aggressive parking blockade and a narrow sidewalk crossing over an exposed concrete pipe and steep ditch.





**Figure 7: The tall fence around the tennis courts creates visibility challenges across the site.**

As one continues down this long path, the tall chain-link fence around the tennis courts hides the back of the park. This leaves the large area behind it to easily become

forgotten. Along the neighborhood side of the courts, the topography continues to create obstacles for navigating the site.





**Figure 8: The topography between the tennis courts and adjacent houses makes the park very difficult to navigate in some areas.**

Figure 8 shows the difficult terrain between the neighboring houses and the tennis courts. The easiest way to the back of the park is the long walk around the courts, where there are few attractions, because this terrain between the tennis

courts and houses blocks access to the area behind the tennis courts. Moving towards the creek jagged rocks and overgrown plants, which are shown in Figure 9, separate people from the creek and hide the potential water features.





**Figure 9: Some areas of the creek have the tendency to become overgrown, creating unattractive and uninviting areas of the park.**



Much of the current design focuses to feature the tennis courts as the reason that many go to the park, but their

current conditions, as shown in Figure 10, are dangerous and badly need refinishing.



**Figure 10: The tennis court surface is deteriorating, creating a poor aesthetic that can become dangerous with high activity.**

This image of the courts and the one of the overgrown creek serve as metaphors for the park as a whole. These features that many used and enjoyed have deteriorated, but they still have great potential. Many aspects of Explorer Park have the ability to provide great spaces to the community, but their current conditions turn many away from the park.

It may seem like Explorer Park has a lot of challenges, but these are just opportunities for the design to improve the park. Fortunately, the park has many interesting qualities that are often overlooked. Making simple improvements to feature these qualities are very achievable. The vast green space in the front and rear of the park provides the neighborhood community with a large, open common area that the surrounding houses typically cannot achieve. As shown in Figures 11 and 12, the almost 2.8 acres of this park can feel massive within the relatively dense neighborhood. Many only notice the area on the street side of the tennis courts, but a space almost twice the size is available behind the tennis courts if it is made accessible.



**Figure 11: The park provides a relatively large open area between the tennis courts and parking lot.**



**Figure 12: Behind the tennis courts is a massive area that is often overlooked from the street or parking lot.**



Those who walk the neighborhood could add a path through Explorer Park to their route to enjoy the rest of its features. Though the creek was initially revealed as a negative, some

of the more maintained areas, like in Figure 13, give Explorer Park some hope and vision.



**Figure 13: Where the creek is maintained, it shows that it can be an attractive feature in the park.**

This area is clear of the large rocks, there is little overgrown vegetation, and water is flowing in the creek. This scale may not be exciting or appear to be any destination, but it

exemplifies a bit of what the creek can provide to the community. Park visitors could sit along the water and use it for recreational purposes and students can return to

collecting science specimens from the creek. Some upkeep could turn this creek into an aesthetically pleasing, enjoyable area of the park that benefits the community. Maintaining and developing this creek into a feature of Explorer Park

could make it the reason for someone to make it their destination. Potentially the most overlooked feature of Explorer Park is a very large, interesting tree that is hidden behind the tennis courts. This tree is shown in Figure 14.



**Figure 14: A very large, old tree that provides the park with a very interesting feature just behind the tennis courts.**

This tree demonstrates that Explorer Park has attractive features that can become exciting aspects of the park. The

design should build on the existing aesthetics throughout the site and emphasize on its natural qualities.

### Nearby Floodplain

Floodplains are near to streams and creeks in areas that typically flood and building in them may have special requirements. Nationally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) establishes mapping and regulations that determine the danger and likelihood of a flood in the area. FEMA’s zones that are documented in this region include Zones AE, AO, and A. FEMA reports Zones AE and AO to have regular flooding issues and impose different requirements for development, such as flood insurance and base flood elevations that structures must be built above. In Zone A, flooding is much less common and FEMA reports that only 26% of properties in this area have shallow flooding every thirty years. Fortunately, Explorer Park lies outside and upstream of FEMA’s zoning areas. Additionally, Tulsa has its own Regulatory Floodplain Standards which require development to be one foot higher than the regulatory flood elevation. As shown in FIGURE 15, where Explorer Park is highlighted in pink, is well within Tulsa’s Regulatory Floodplain, with FEMA Zones AE and AO downstream and to the west.

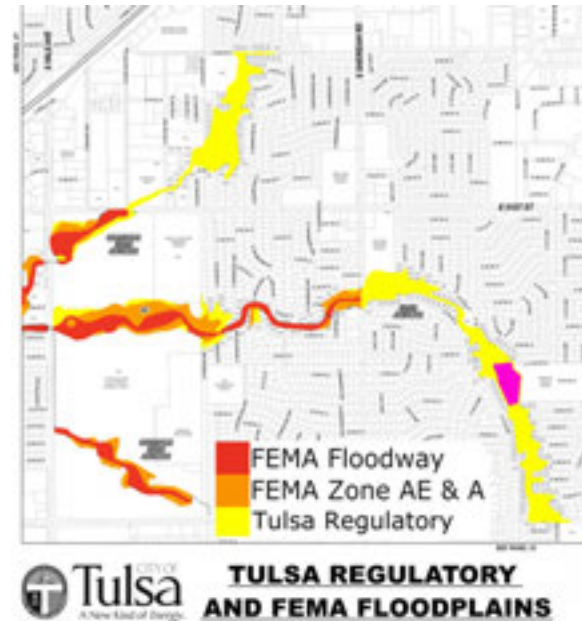


Figure 15: A modified version of The City of Tulsa’s Floodplain Map Atlas depicts the location of Explorer Park in relation to FEMA and Tulsa Regulatory floodplains.

These floodplain issues are important to consider for two reasons. Any permitted development will be required to abide by the standards and the design has the opportunity to utilize water as a feature in the park to encourage users and benefit the region’s downstream floodplain. The neighboring park downstream and to the west, LaFortune, has a large area that is documented in the FEMA zones, as shown in the figure above. If water were designed to collect at Explorer Park, it would lessen the downstream impact of flood events.



## COMMUNITY RESEARCH

### Guidance from Stakeholders

The stakeholders consulted in this project are experts on Tulsa's parks and the potential users in the area. When meeting with the director of Tulsa's Parks Department, she described the challenges that the city faces with revitalizing parks and discussed the conditions of the park. One of the concerns that the city's Parks and Recreation has is that it struggles to determine how its parks are being utilized. She also stressed the importance of communicating with the users to identify how the park may be used. She noted that this needs to be considered as a neighborhood park to avoid large amounts of increased traffic coming to the neighborhood and that the park has opportunity to provide uses for the neighboring school. Since many of the potential users go to Memorial Junior High School, their direction and current use is very valuable to this design. Their advice shows that the park was used historically in the school's academics and that it does get some use from current students during pick-up. When Explorer Park was flourishing, physical education classes used its courts and science classed collected lab specimens from the creek. Both of these activities are valuable in schools and if possible, the park should provide the opportunities again.

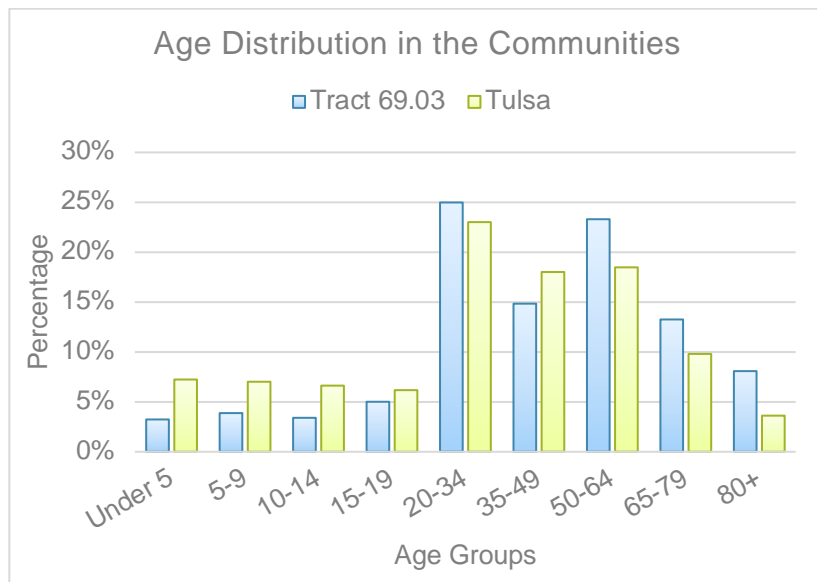
A representative of Sungate's neighborhood association noted that there are not any neighborhood events that take

place at the park, but she noted an area near the pool that is used as a neighborhood park and hosts events like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July bike and wagon decorating contest. This area provides the community with a grill, picnic table, and a sidewalk wandering through the site. The city maintains the creek in this area, but the neighborhood association performs the landscaping and trash maintenance. This area is a valuable feature to the neighborhood, and it is likely selected because it is located more central to Sungate. Explorer Park can mimic this small neighborhood park and provide similar amenities to the surrounding neighbors and those passing by on a slightly larger scale.

### Census Analysis

Census records are a common tool for reviewing a large amount of data within a specific area. These records are valuable because they offer insight on the community, which may imply what should be included at Explorer Park. For this study, only Census Tract 69.03 was reviewed in comparison with the city's records because the park sits almost directly in the center of the tract. There are many topics that are reported in the census, but the results on households, families, and age seem to be the most beneficial for retrieving the data on neighborhood community composition. Within this tract, the census reveals that households and families typically have an average of 2.23 people with only 18.5% having children. Within the population of Tulsa, the

census reports that there is a slightly higher average of 2.40 people in a household with as much as 24.9% having children. This data shows that this community is composed of more singles or couples owning homes and less families. Though there are less family households within this tract, young couples could be starting their families and older couples may entertain their children and grandchildren. Ages from Tulsa and Tract 69.03 are shown in Figure 16.



**Figure 16:** This chart describes the census age data from American FactFinder for the city and census tract nearest the park.

Showing the neighborhood's results in comparison with the city's makes it obvious that many of the households in this neighborhood have older couples. Since this census tract

has a much older population, that is who the park needs to consider in its placemaking efforts. This could include, various seating areas to enjoy the open landscape, some light recreational features, and a maintained path to walk through the park.

**Time-lapse Camera**

To determine the regular activity at Explorer Park, a time-lapse camera was utilized to monitor the park. This footage can be obtained by using the contact information in Appendix A. As one of the Project for Public Spaces' placemaking principal suggests, *observing a site can indicate a lot about how a location is used or where it has issues*. Regrettably, once the project was approved and a safe location for viewing the park was selected, it was already November 4 and the cold weather likely kept many from using the park. Still, the camera recorded large amounts of traffic passing by, with very few stopping at the park even momentarily. Those that come to the park are walking their dogs or spending several minutes in their cars in the morning, during lunch, or in the middle of the afternoon. Ideally, this study would extend into nicer weather to ensure a better representation, but ideal weather was not often available again until after the design had been created. If the park was to be analyzed during more popular weather conditions, it may have revealed more information on what activities, if any, currently happen at the park.

**Neighborhood Survey**

As described in the placemaking principals, neighborhood community is the expert on what their park should provide. Asking them about their use and what is desired may be the best way to understand what is needed. The survey in this project does just that. Initially, some description of the project and the survey questions were submitted to the University of Oklahoma’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to verify the project remains compliant with protecting human research participants. After many exasperating iterations, this study was determined to be exempt from the IRB review. Once survey questions were created and reviewed with a couple of the project’s advisors, the survey was administered to the neighbors using the Nextdoor.com platform, a social media website that exclusively targets neighborhoods. Though Explorer Park is closest to Sungate, neighbors from the surrounding neighborhoods are welcome potential visitors to consider. In Figure 17, the neighborhood’s selected for this study are depicted and they are as follows:

- Sungate
- Mid-town Village
- Park Plaza
- LaFortune Park Plaza
- Southern Plaza
- Woodland View
- Shadow Mountain Vistas

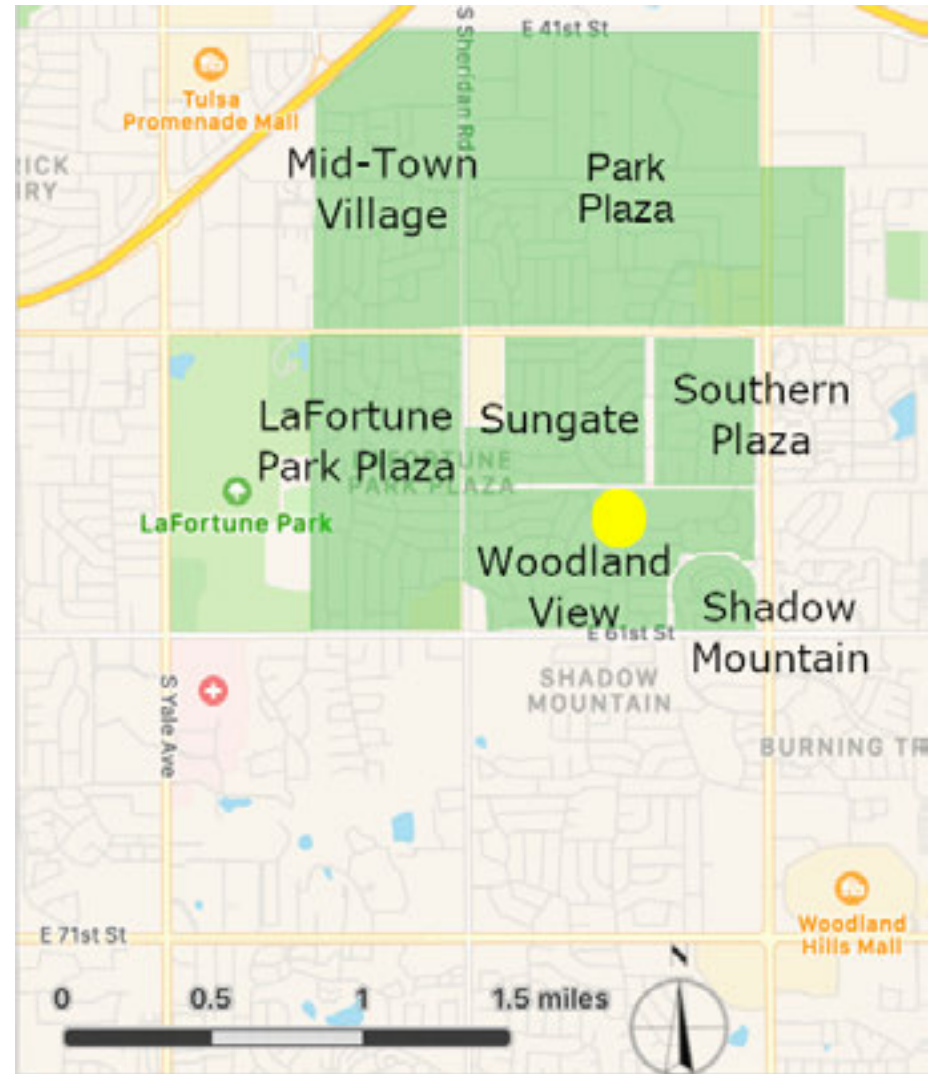


Figure 17: This map displays the location of Explorer Park and the neighborhoods that were included in the survey.

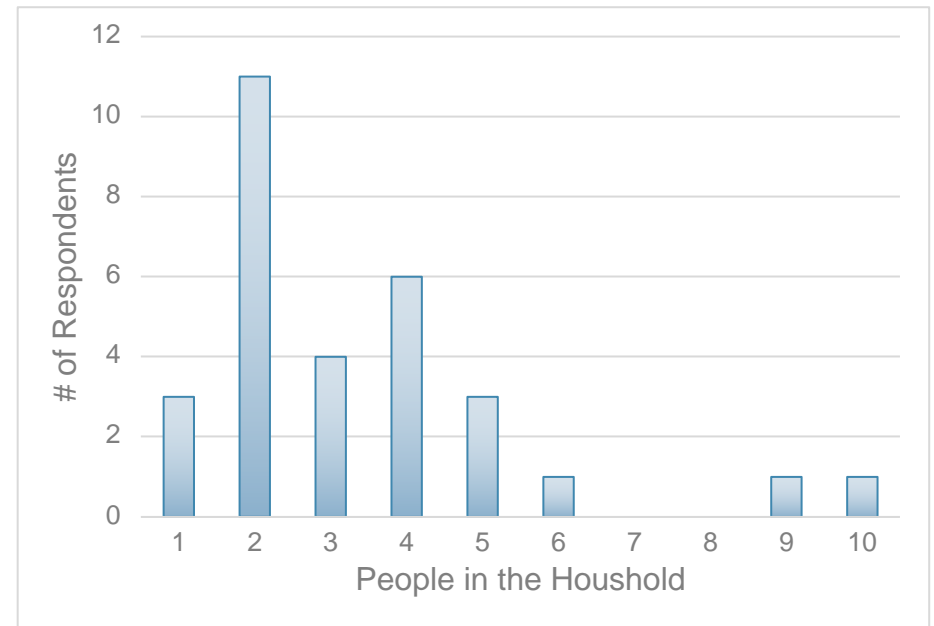


## Explorer Park Design Proposal

These neighborhoods were selected due to their vicinity and walkability to the park. As shown in the previous Figure 17, these areas tend to extend to the North and West of the park, instead of radially. This is due to the barriers that separate this community from other nearby residential areas, such as a Memorial Park Cemetery and the small commercial corridor along South 61<sup>st</sup> Street. Since those in the cemetery are not walking to the park and the commercial properties have many large parking lots, it is not likely that people would transverse these barriers to get to a neighborhood park.

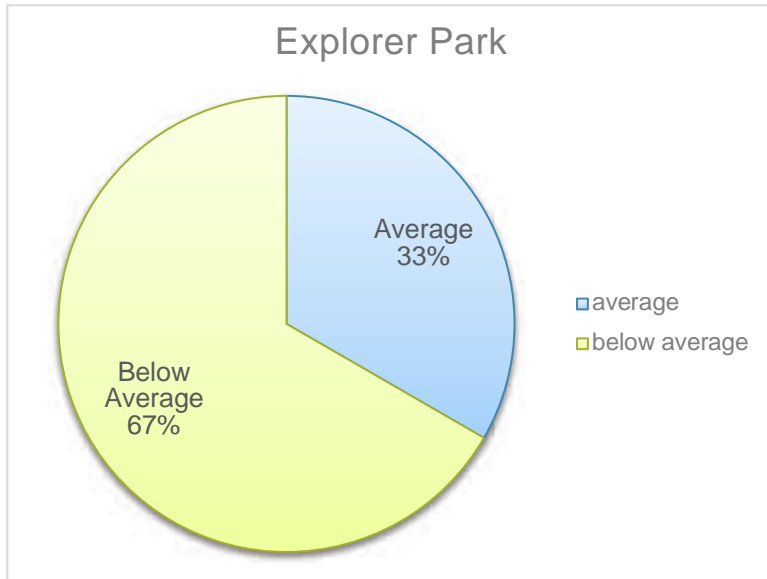
The results from this survey were extremely valuable for determining how neighbors use the park and what features would benefit the community. Even with 34 questions, 27 of the 43 neighbors that chose to take the survey completed it. These volunteers presented their household composition, opinions of Explorer Park and other Tulsa parks, and their use of and desire for neighborhood amenities. As shown in Figure 18, this survey reports an average near 3.37 people per household in this community. This is similar to the census results, confirming their accuracy, but not exactly the same because this survey is only a sampling of the census population and this data is much more current.

Powell



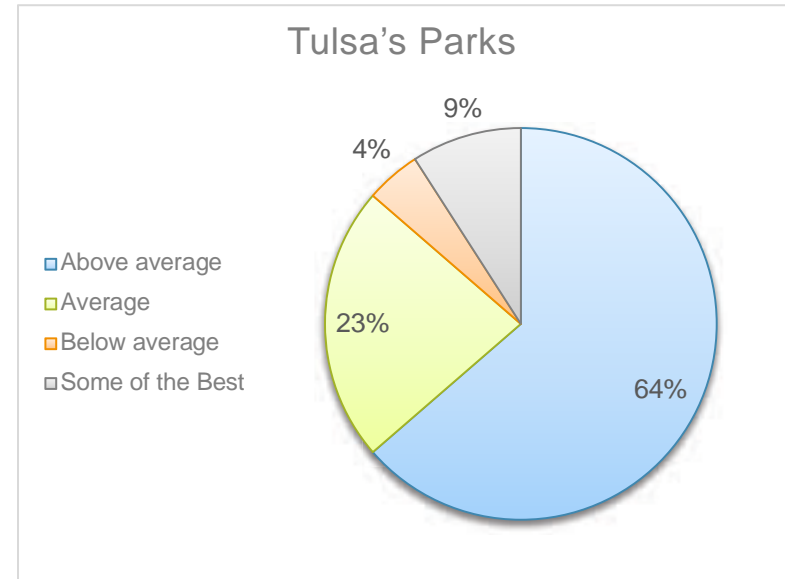
**Figure 18: This chart shows how household sizes are distributed throughout the surveyed neighborhoods.**

In the survey, respondents were asked to document their opinions of Explorer and other Tulsa parks to benchmark this park against the others. The following two figures, 19 and 20, show how these parks are viewed by the surveyed neighbors.



**Figure 19:** This pie chart indicates that the surveyed neighbors consider Explorer Park as a below average park.

This survey indicates that Explorer Park generally struggles in comparison to other city parks. Other parks are typically reported as above average, but this park is more commonly



**Figure 20:** Comparatively, this pie chart indicates that these neighbors think Tulsa's parks are above average.

reviewed as below average, indicating that it requires some attention from the Parks Department.

As this survey also attempts to document which activities are common or desired at the park. One activity that was noted from several visits to the park is that many walk their pets there. Since this was observed so frequently, the survey was planned to retrieve information on the neighborhood’s pet ownership and whether or not their dogs are walked. Findings from these questions are shown in the following Figures 21 and 22.

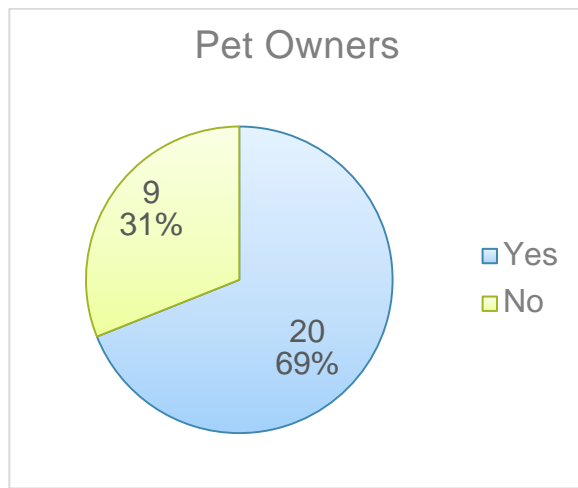


Figure 21: The surveyed neighbors indicate that many of them are pet owners.

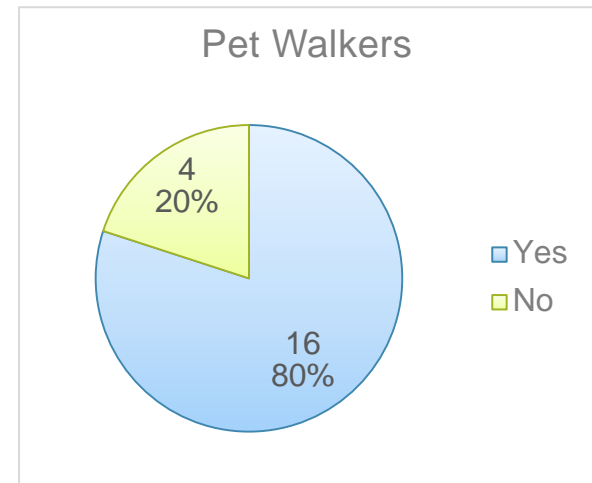


Figure 22: This pie chart shows that many of the neighbors that own pets walk them.

These simple pie charts show that many neighbors are pet owners and a large majority of those walk their pets. A few more detailed questions on this subject were asked to determine how long and far the neighbors were walking and if Explorer Park was included in their travels. On average, the neighbors surveyed noted that they were 5.6 blocks from the park and that they are willing to travel 6.9 blocks to a neighborhood park. Additional results are shown in the two following two figures, 23 and 24.

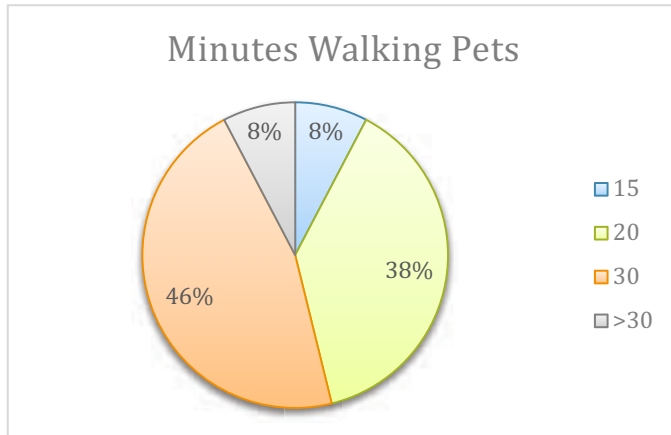


Figure 23: Many of the surveyed neighbors indicated that they walk for 20-30 minutes, equating to an estimated 0.38-0.56 miles.

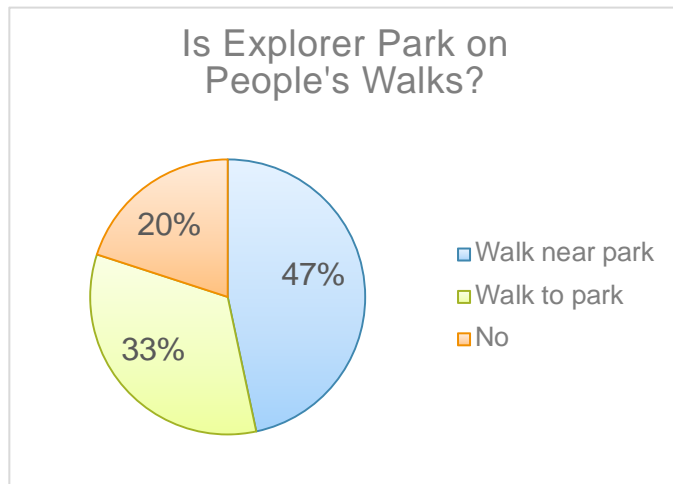


Figure 24: Most of the pet walkers walk to or near Explorer Park.

These charts verify the original assumption that people are commonly walking their pets to or near to the park. Since

this is an activity already exists here, it is something that shall be emphasized with the design. Additionally, since the city's Parks Department has identified the tennis court's dangerous conditions, they wanted to determine the most effective improvement for the tennis courts. The responses from those that chose to answer that question are documented in Figure 25.

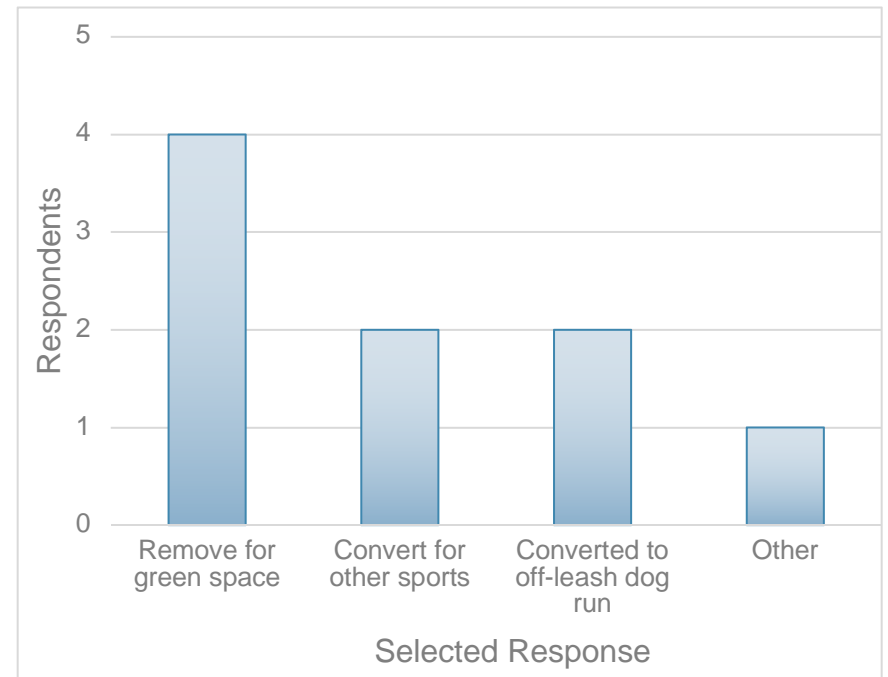


Figure 25: The results in this chart show how the surveyed neighbors would like to improve the tennis courts.

These results reveal two very important things about the tennis courts at Explorer Park. There is potential for other

sports activities or they could be removed for another amenity. Finding a balance between these will be a challenge that the redesign effort is sure to consider. These volunteers were also asked to report what is expected from a neighborhood park. Their responses are noted in Figure 26, where colors are assigned to indicate which were achievable in Explorer Park. In this figure, the colors indicate the following about the amenities at Explorer Park:

- Green – exists or very achievable
- Yellow – achievable with some to considerable effort
- Red – likely cannot be achieved

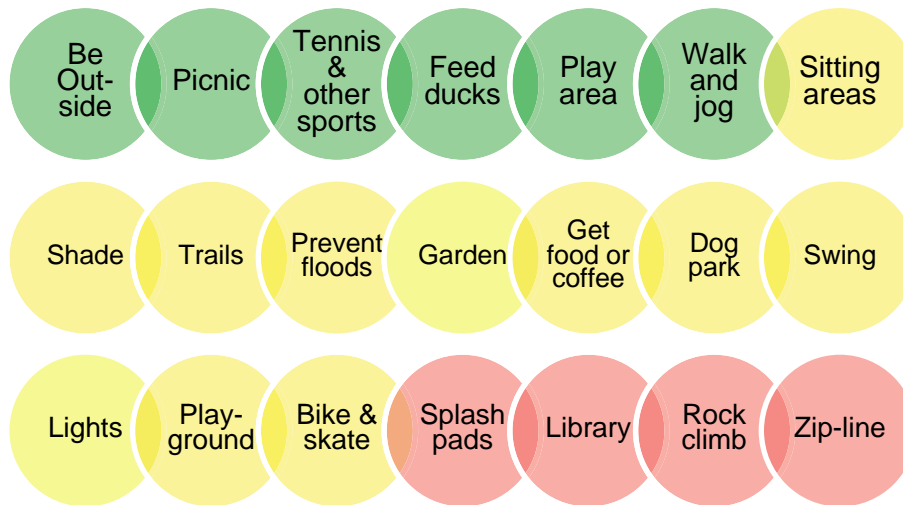


Figure 26: This image shows the communities suggested improvements that are color coded to indicate how achievable they are at Explorer Park.

Labeling the ideas in this manner make it easy to show which ideas can easily be implemented to those that will be a challenge. The very unlikely ideas are typically not a good fit at the park, so they are disregarded from the study. This figure serves as an excellent start for brainstorming what shall be designed for the park. Complementary to this brainstorming activity, the neighbors were asked to contribute to a PARK analysis, where they listed what shall be preserved, added, removed, or kept out of the park. These results are shown in the following Table 1.

Table 1: This table summarizes the results of the PARK analysis that the neighbors participated in through the survey.

Preserve	Add	Remove	Keep Out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tennis courts</li> <li>• Small parking area</li> <li>• Trash can</li> <li>• Stream</li> <li>• Large surface area</li> <li>• Trees and green space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small, beginner skate park</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Covered pavilion</li> <li>• Picnic tables</li> <li>• Places to sit in the shade</li> <li>• Dog park or run</li> <li>• Better courts</li> <li>• Stream interactions</li> <li>• Community garden</li> <li>• Outside classroom</li> <li>• Walking trail with lights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fencing</li> <li>• Drainage</li> <li>• Broken limbs</li> <li>• Debris</li> <li>• Large rocks from the creek</li> <li>• Tennis courts</li> <li>• LaFortune's are nearby</li> <li>• Rarely used at capacity</li> <li>• In disrepair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motorized vehicles</li> <li>• Dog park - comment left without reasoning, but the respondent does not have pets</li> </ul>

These analysis methods made it easy to create some direction and programming for the site, so that a design could be created and tailored to the community's desires.

## DESIGN PROPOSAL

### Design Program

After discussing with the stakeholders and reviewing what the park and community are composed of, *the design for Explorer Park can be produced in a way that creates the park as an extension of the neighborhood, where the community has a place with features and activities for the community to enjoy.* As representatives of their communities, the stakeholders guided this project by describing how their entities interact with the park. Their initial direction indicated that none of them really had much use for Explorer Park, either because other locations were preferred, or the park did not provide appealing features. As the site was reviewed in more detail, the inactivity that was observed at the neighborhood park identifies it as something that deserves

attention. Once the survey was distributed to nearby communities, it quickly proved what the initial analysis and correspondence had suggested. From that analysis, a concept was developed for Explorer Park. This analysis is what assists this study in *creating a place that benefits the community, instead of just a design.* Some concept sketches from this analysis are shown in Figures 27 and 28. These concepts were developed to accentuate and utilize the existing features in the park and propose features that the community indicates are beneficial. These sketches serve as the vision to ensure that the park's *form supports the neighborhood functions* and show several things, including the entrance to the park, establishing some seating areas, a proposal to redesign the tennis courts, and the addition of various recreational features. These concept sketches are shown in Figures 27 and 28.

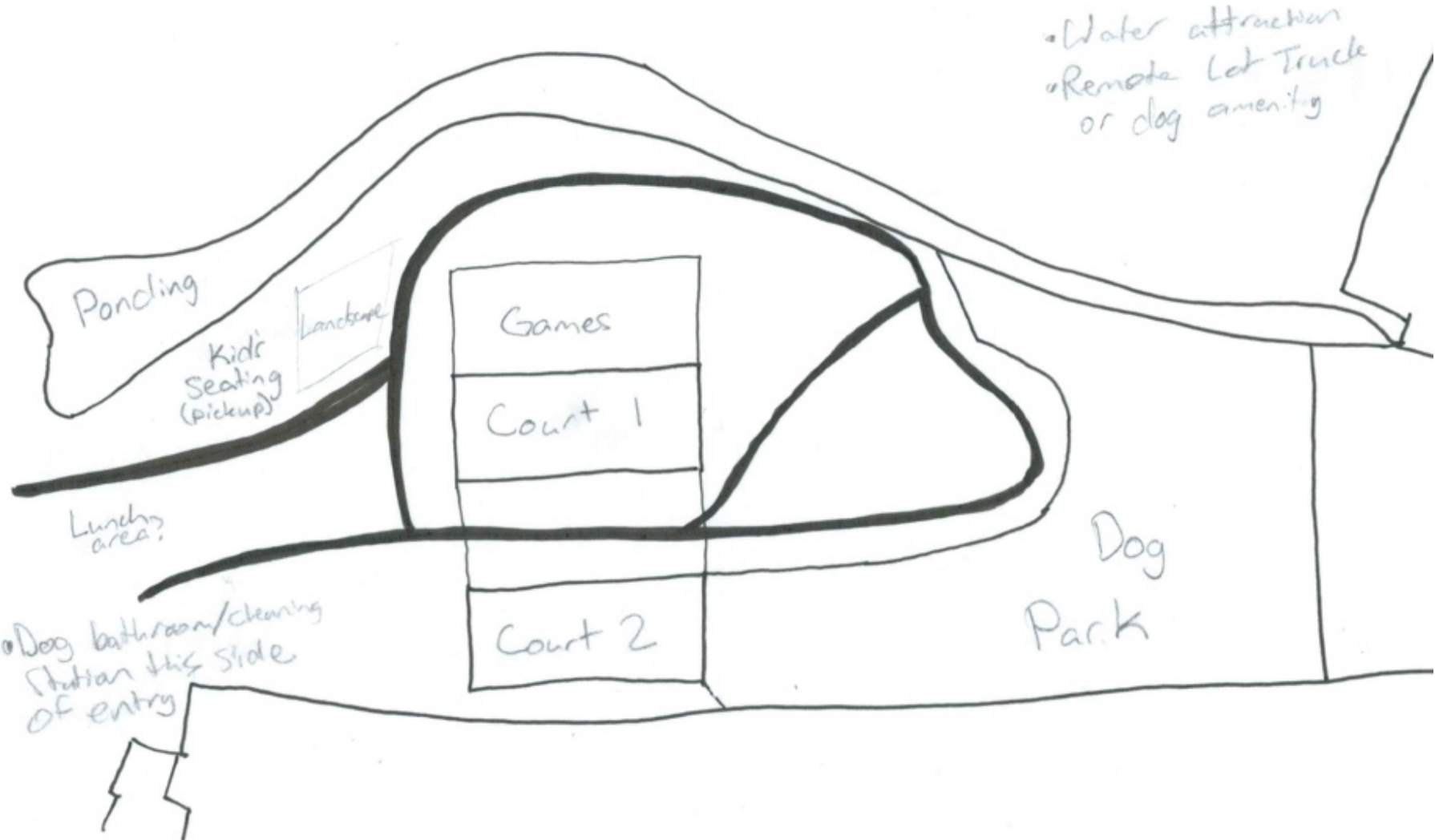


Figure 27: This image shows a developing concept of the park in the design process.



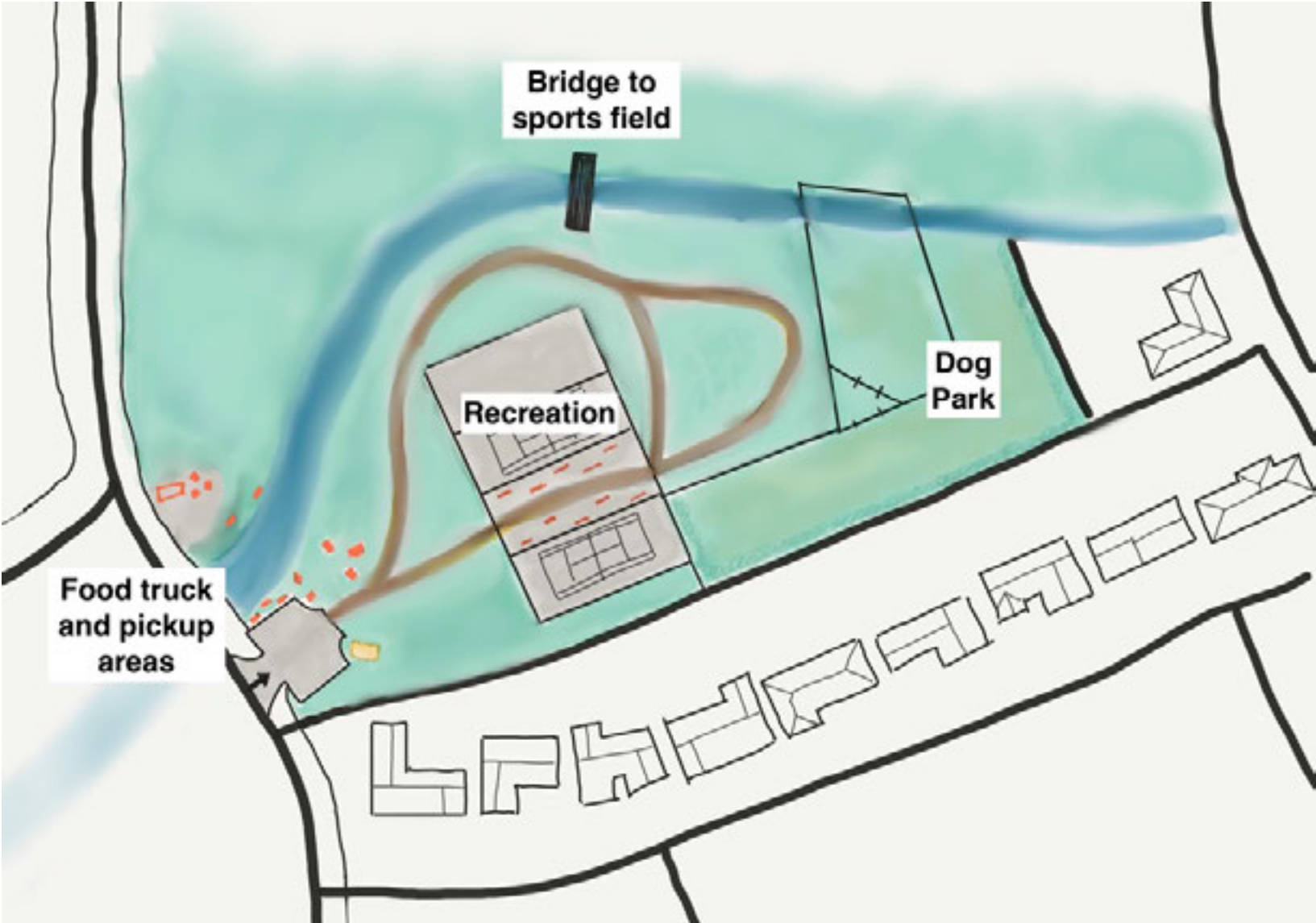


Figure 28: Fully developed concept for designing amenities for Explorer Park.



### Entering the Park

One of the worst aspects of Explorer Park is its approach from the street because of its lack of identity. The field of concrete and metal barriers separate the park from the street, hinder the park's aesthetic, and likely discourage many from the park. Once someone enters the front of the park, the topography is challenging, and tall fences separate the visitors from seeing the entirety of the park. If the park has enjoyable amenities, people will return in passing or be more likely to make Explorer Park their destination. This design effort considers those that travel along the road or sidewalk and offers visible amenities that attract them to the park. From the street, as shown in Figure 29, potential visitors are encouraged to redirect their route through Explorer Park by the fountains, seating, and the open landscape.



**Figure 29:** This rendering shows the newly designed park where the creek meets the street.

This example utilizes the existing topography and a few strategically placed dams to retain water on the site and allow it to collect at the entry, which is marked with a fountain to create a dramatic feature that is very noticeable from the street. Though a large fountain would likely draw a lot of attraction, a similar affect is achievable by *quickly adding cheap landscaping to create a light, attractive entry*. From the street, many of the park's amenities can be seen, such as a potential food truck lining the street, a couple of seating areas, or the stream that flows through the park. From the parking lot, as pictured in Figure 30, the barriers have been removed and the other amenities encourage visitors into the park.

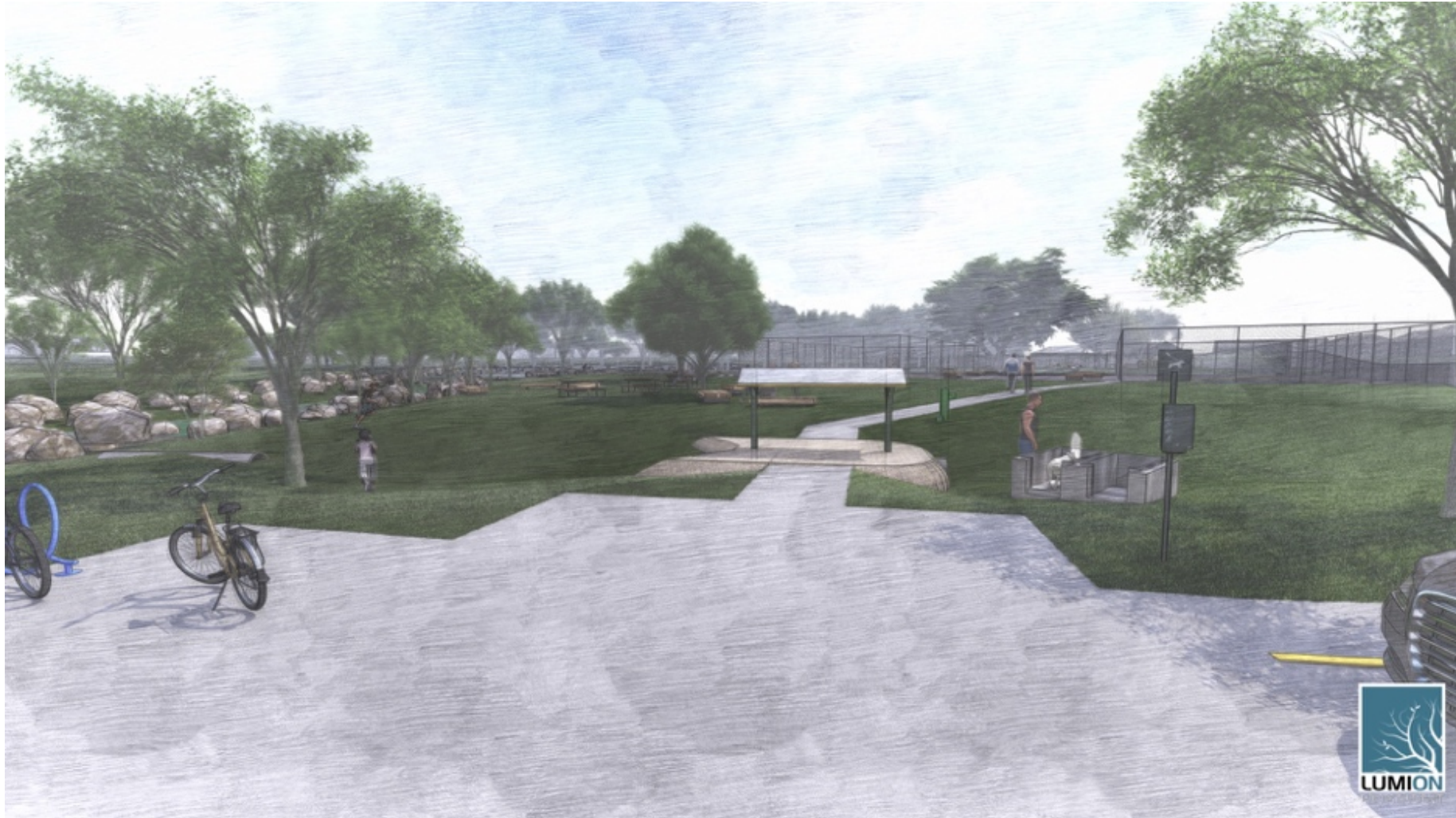


Figure 30: This rendering shows the design from the parking lot.

From here, the park’s natural beauty, newly designed tennis courts, and recreational area become the focus, with a dog

park tucked in the back. As these features become visible, those passing the park are more likely enter and enjoy it.

### Seating Area

Of the park's existing amenities, even though many appear to use the park for school pick-up and drop-off or their lunch breaks there is no seating available for any visitors. If anyone is expecting to stay at the park for any length of time, they will have to stand. Many that visit the park to stop and eat lunch remain in their car because it provides a place to sit. A seating area with some tables would give these people the opportunity to visit and enjoy the park while eating their meal. For the students that use the park as their remote pick-up location, they must stand to wait for their parent or chaperone. With the lack of seating, there is also no shelter to protect these young students from the weather or hot sun. Some seating and shelter can draw these who typically

come to Explorer Park further into the park. Doing so, they may see the potential that the park has and may choose to enjoy it more regularly.

Upon entering the newly designed park, it is easy to notice several benches and structures that provide visitors with seating, shade, and shelter. Simply adding seating shall *fill a void in the park's form to provide for its function* to make Explorer Park a much more enjoyable amenity for people stopping here to eat their lunch or wait on their chaperone. The fountains in Figure 29 are positioned near the seating areas and establish an appealing water feature that can be enjoyed while waiting, eating, or simply visiting. This large, open seating area is shown in Figure 31.





Figure 31: A seating area near the water is shown in this rendering.

### Water Features

Explorer Park’s topography and relation to floodplain is both a misfortune and opportunity for the site. The topography creates challenges where much of the site can be difficult to walk, but just adding some water creates a pleasant stream. As noted, this could be enjoyable for those seated around it,

but it could also have various other beneficial outcomes. Historically, this creek has provided lab specimens to Memorial Junior High’s science classes. Adding water to the creek, as shown in Figure 32, shall only increase the diversity in the wildlife and provide a greater educational experience at the park.



**Figure 32** This rendering shows a seating area near the water with the recreational area and courts in the background.

Being located in Tulsa’s Regional Floodplain, developing the creek as a retention pond keeps some water on the site, lessening the impact heavy storms have on downstream flood areas. Continuing its benefit to the school’s science program, it has potential to inspire students using this as a

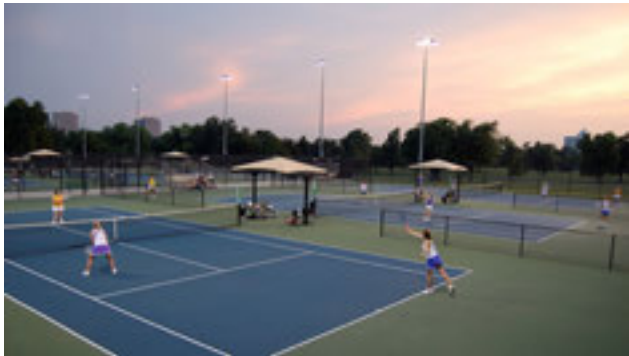
pickup location to become future civil or mechanical engineers. Accenting this creek with a stream is not only appealing, but its benefit to the downstream floodplain and natural educational and recreational features provide great value to the redesign of Explorer Park.

**Tennis Courts**

The tennis courts have been identified as a problem by almost everyone that has been included in this study and there are many reasons a new design is necessary. As illustrated during the physical site analysis, the court’s surface is dangerous in some areas and it needs refinishing. People that were seen using the courts mentioned that only one or two courts were used at a time. During the physical site analysis, the fence around the courts defined a barrier between the front and back of the park. The neighbors that volunteered for the survey indicated that there were much better uses for this area. Additionally, those who want to play tennis have Case Center Tennis at LaFortune Park less than a mile away, which offers 24 courts, seating, lighting and is featured in Figure 33.

This is an excellent facility, but being so close to Explorer Park, many are likely to choose it instead. The conditions of Explorer Park’s courts, how they are rarely used to capacity, and their locality to a great facility make the tennis courts a critical part of this redesign.

The tennis courts are surely one of the most necessary parts of the redesign effort. Their lack of utilization, the barrier they create, and the dangerous surface are all reasons that these courts need to be considered. Since these are not used near capacity and there are many great courts nearby, this park does not require all four courts. In Figure 34, the design has just two courts, refinished and restriped for other sports, and the fence is reconstructed to allow a path, visually and physically, through the center of the park.



**Figure 33: Image of the Case Tennis Center at LaFortune Park from the Tulsa County Parks Department’s the website.**





**Figure 34:** The design for the courts separates them down the middle to provide a path to the back of the park as shown in this rendering.

The courts exemplified in this design are striped for up to two games of tennis or pickleball, or four games of four square, but many options are available. Since the Versacourt estimate referenced in Appendix C shows that covering the four courts would be near \$75,000, covering just two courts may be closer to \$40,000, which leave funding for many additional proposed additions. The way that the courts split down the middle establishes a path and gateway framing the

old tree, which is one of the park’s biggest, most beautiful assets. Seating along either side of this path is available for those watching a game or just wanting to sit along this corridor. In this design, a fence with netted entries separate these benches from the courts to keep the activity on the court and create a seamless entry for those entering or exiting.

**Recreational Area**

Currently, there are few features that encourage people to come to Explorer Park. There is a lot of open space and some worn tennis courts, but the park does not offer much to the visitors. The neighborhood schools inadvertently provide two popular recreational amenities to the neighborhood, their playgrounds for many ages and the large open field typically used for sports. The initial objective for this project was to provide students with a *place to enjoy while walking to or from school*, but this park is more available to the community and serves as a location where some parents pick-up their children from school. If the park offers more amusing amenities, then those students and neighbors are more likely

to enjoy and appreciate their experience here. The design should consider what is already available to the community at nearby properties and carve out a recreational area for school aged children and neighborhood families to play with experiences that differ from what exists in the nearby community.

The proposed design for Explorer Park offers a place for activities different from typical playgrounds and sports fields. This design makes use of the existing concrete pad that is available for tennis and turns it into a place with a less active recreational amenity. This area of the design is shown in Figure 35.





**Figure 35:** This rendering highlights the recreational area that this design plans to add adjacent to the tennis courts.

Here, games can be provided that many may play in their own houses or yards. This example shows chess or checkers, cornhole, and Jenga, but this area just as easily could provide other games like tic-tac-toe, Connect Four, Yahtzee, ladder golf, or even darts. These are simple

recreational activities that could make the park a destination for some, while the low activity level prevents the surface of the tennis courts from becoming a danger and keeps these games as something that people from any age group can enjoy.

**Dog Park**

Dog parks are amenities that provide pets with a place for exercise and they play large rolls in building communities. Explorer Park is surrounded by houses on relatively small lots, so dogs have some, but minimal, space to run. Many neighbors walk their dogs along the sidewalks, but there is no large area for dogs to run off-leash to accommodate adequate exercise. In these settings, dogs are especially cherished for providing an enjoyable, relatable experience between owners. This is valuable for the community because the neighbors will interact more often and create a more connected community. With the data from the survey indicating that much of the community consists of pet owners that walk their pets, this is something that has been included in the design to improve their use of the park.

Designing dog parks for a community can become a challenge of its own. Fortunately, dog amenities were studied extensively by The University of Oklahoma's Urban Design Studio during the placemaking study for Chapman Green. During that study, dog parks were noted to require furniture for owners, drinking fountains, and equipment to engage with and maintain the dogs. The turf can become a major issue, but in this location, with little parking available, the park will be somewhat limited to neighborhood use and avoid excessive wear. This park has been designed to provide various amenities to stimulate and engage the dogs at this site so that they are entertained and remain active and many of these features can be seen in Figure 36.



Figure 36: This rendering shows the large areas where small and large dogs can run and get adequate exercise.

Owners have the space to throw a ball for their dogs or they can gather at the benches. Another dam is added downstream of this area so that water can collect in the dog park. This is done to provide the dogs with a place to play in the water or get a drink. Introducing water to the dog park,

other auxiliary features such as bathing stations becomes necessary, which have been added at the entry and are shown in the earlier figure. This addition to the community establishes place for dogs to become very active, benefitting the dogs, their owners, and the community in several ways.

### **Integrated Path**

The success of neighborhood parks like Explorer Park can almost be based on their abilities to provide a path to those walking through the neighborhood. As many commonly walk or run around the neighborhood, they do not seem to have any destination or interests along the way. The barriers at the park's edge keep people from entering the park, often limiting their path strictly to the sidewalk. If one does enter the park, their path is typically very direct and linear to and from the tennis courts or just one area of the park. Since the path is almost strictly from the parking lot to the tennis courts and the existing approach is so uninviting, the park needs to establish a path that invites people to travel in and through the park. This path will allow neighborhood walkers to extend their walk through the park to notice and enjoy its additional amenities.

This concept for Explorer Park has considered the path through the neighborhood and park in a way to encourage neighbors to extend their path. Removing the barriers and adding various destinations throughout the park encourages those to travel from one to another across the entirety of the park. With the existing tennis courts blocking the path to much of the park, there is not any natural progression through the park. Separating the courts into two allows the visitors to navigate through the courts to a large tree, the dog park, or a bench along the water. This area is featured in Figure 37. Once at any of these locations, those visitors can turn around and follow their original route back out of the park or travel around the east court and along the water or recreational area back to their starting point, where they can make their way around again or continue out of the park. For reference, an overview of the park showing how the pieces fit together is shown in Figure 38.





Figure 37: This image looks towards the park's entrance from the ground level, showing where splitting the courts allows for circulation and a path to the back of the park.



Figure 38: This overview of the design for Explorer Park looks north from behind the tennis courts.

## APPLYING AND RECREATING THIS EFFORT

### Funding

One problem that the Parks Department, like many others, struggles with is funding, so identifying a self-funding solution for the park would be incredibly valuable. The department has many assets that need consistent maintenance, but there is little that can be done to generate income with the property. In this case, it is exceptionally challenging because of the building restrictions caused by the floodplain requirements. To circumvent these requirements, temporary structures can be utilized to generate some funding. As the design shows in Figure 39, a food truck could rent the space to capture those traveling through the neighborhood during pick-up, drop-off, or the lunch hour. *This creates responsibility for both the Parks Department and the park users.* Park users shall use the truck's services to support the vendor using the park and the Parks Department shall create an enjoyable place for those using and operating the food truck. If improvements are made and the site is able to provide adequate traffic for the food truck, it becomes more reasonable to charge more significant rent. As rent is able to increase, the Parks Department has more funding to maintain Explorer Park.



**Figure 39:** This image shows tables and a food truck making use of the remote lot that lines the street as well as some structures for those waiting to be picked up after school.

This is an idea that has been discussed with a food truck vendor in town. Currently, a city ordinance prevents food trucks in public parks, so that policy would need to be revised to allow approved, scheduled vendors. She indicates that most owners prefer to pay a percentage of their sales, instead of a flat rate, so success depends on the number of people that come to use the food truck. Unfortunately, margins in food businesses are typically small, but parks do not require significant costs to operate either. Reviewing some estimates with her, she feels that the traffic generated by the school and the nearby street frontage could support a vendor in this location, but it is something that would need to be tested before implementing any long-term agreement.



Though this appears to be a promising source for a bit of revenue, the city's assets can be programmed for various events. At Explorer Park, a large area separated from main park is open for all sorts of programming. Since the community is active throughout the day and evening, activities could be provided for both. Possibly, the dog park could be operated by a third party charging a small fee for those using this portion of the park in a public-private partnership sort of manner. Doing such, a private provider would make improvements to and operate the asset until costs are recuperated, while it remains owned and governed by the public sector. Making improvements to the park and programming it with various businesses has potential financial benefits for the park, which could be used to further maintain the park and make it a more enjoyable place for those to operate and utilize.

### **Within the Neighborhood**

As indicated throughout this report, the neighbors are incredibly valuable for determining what the necessary improvements are for the park. They are the ones whom are most likely to use the park, so it should accommodate for their uses. Unfortunately, with many different neighborhoods having distinctive communities and requirements, it is hard for one entity to understand all of them. Neighbors should come together to determine and demonstrate what their communities require. Collecting and organizing these ideas

makes the communities needs more obvious to the city and educates them on what is needed at the park. Unfortunately, as communities evolve, these needs continue to change, which makes it difficult to provide a permanent design solution that provides timeless benefits. Communities should *continually analyze how their neighborhoods are changing and recommend improvements to the public assets that benefit their users.*

### **Within the City**

Though much of this project focuses on the neighbors, the Parks Department has a lot of responsibility and plays a major role in developing neighborhood parks. As the owners of these assets, they often organize and dictate what is done on the sites. The community and park users must be fully understood so that the public property can be maintained in ways that most benefit the community. The city is very fortunate to have these assets, but it comes with a lot of responsibility. Table 2 shows the 27 public parks that are near schools in residential neighborhoods that are very similar to Explorer Park.



Table 2: There are many public schools within walking distance of parks.

Neighborhood Park	School	Neighborhood Park	School
Benton	McKinley	Lloyd	Anderson
Berry	Monroe and Penn	Manion	Grimes and Eisenhower
Chamberlain	McLain (7 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	McCullough	Disney
Chittom (Clinton)	Celia Clenton	Mitchell	Zarrow
Clark	Kerr	Norvell	Mitchell
Dawson	Hamilton	Owen	TSAS and Roosevelt
Florence and Pratt	Lanier	Turner	Rogers High School
Fred Johnson	Collegiate Hall and Marshall	Ute	Unity
Graham	McClure	Veterans	Lee
Hawthorne	Hawthorne	Vining	Legacy
Henthorne	Eliot	West Tulsa	Eugene Field
Holiday Hills	Carnegie	Wheeling	KIPP College Preparatory
Johnson H.B.	Cooper and East Central	Whiteside (across 41 <sup>st</sup> )	Patrick Henry
Kendall-Whittier	Kendall-Whittier		

there, planners can select what is most feasible, and changes can be implemented to improve Tulsa’s parks.

This table is a reminder that placemaking *is an ongoing, continual process, that is never finished*. In this example, reaching out with a survey seemed to be very beneficial, but that may not be so successful in all neighborhoods. The Parks Department should identify an effective method of communicating for each neighborhood and use that platform to determine what is most required in that community. From



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## **APPENDIX A: TIME-LAPSE VIDEO**

A time-lapse video has been submitted with this proposal and can be obtained by contacting Ray Powell at [ray.powell93@gmail.com](mailto:ray.powell93@gmail.com).

a

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Household Composition

1. How many live in your household?
2. Do you have children?
3. Your children attend:
  - a. Memorial Junior High
  - b. Salk Elementary School
  - c. Other
4. Do you have pets?
5. Do you walk with your pets?
6. How far do you walk your pet(s)?
7. Do you walk your pet(s) to or near Explorer Park?

### Neighborhood Amenities

1. What should a neighborhood park provide to your community?
2. Please describe the availability of amenities in your neighborhood.
3. What amenities do you wish were available in your neighborhood?

### Explorer Park

1. How likely are you to use a neighborhood park?
2. How far are you willing to travel to a neighborhood park?
3. Do you know where Explorer Park is?

4. Had you heard of Explorer Park before this survey?
5. How often do you use the park?
6. Do you feel safe in Explorer Park?
7. How far do you live from the park?
8. How do you get to the park?
  - a. Walk or run
  - b. Bike
  - c. Drive
  - d. Other
9. If the park had more features, would you use it more frequently?
10. What would be the most effective improvement for the tennis courts?
  - a. Repairing the courts and keeping as tennis courts
  - b. Converting the courts for other sports (mini-soccer, basketball, pickleball, other)
  - c. Converted to a neighborhood, off-leash dog run
  - d. Removing the courts for open green space
  - e. Other
11. What do you do at the park?
12. If you brought anything, list it here.
13. What is your opinion of the park?
14. What would you preserve in or at the park?
15. What would you add to the park?

b

- 16. What would you remove from the park?
- 17. What would you keep out of the park?

Tulsa's Parks

- 1. Do you use other nearby parks?
  - a. I do not use other parks
  - b. Woodland View I
  - c. LaFortune
  - d. Hicks
  - e. Hunter
  - f. Whiteside
  - g. Zink
  - h. Woodward
  - i. Gathering Place
  - j. McClure

- k. Mohawk
  - l. Chandler
  - m. Other
- 2. What is your opinion of Tulsa's park(s)?
- 3. How do you travel to the park(s)?
  - a. Walk or run
  - b. Bike
  - c. Drive
  - d. Other
- 4. How often do you use the park(s)?
- 5. Do you feel safe in this/these park(s)?
- 6. What do you do at the other park(s)?
- 7. If you brought anything to those parks, list it here.

**APPENDIX C: VERSACOURT ESTIMATE**

<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Unit Price (\$)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Price (\$)</b>
31860	2.10	10" x 10" Outdoor Tiles	66,906.00
373	2.00	2" x 10" Outdoor Ramp Hook	746.00
373	2.00	2" x 10" Outdoor Ramp Receiver	746.00
4	5.00	2" x 2" Outdoor Corner	20.00
1	690.00	Full Court Basketball Game Lines	690.00
1	690.00	Type: Full Court Tennis Game Lines	690.00
1	550.00	Volleyball Game Lines	550.00
1	240.00	4-Square Game Lines	240.00
1	390.00	Pickle Ball Game Lines	390.00
Shipping			3,017.33
<b>Total</b>			<b>73,995.33</b>

d





