

Docket Item #16
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2006-0057

Planning Commission Meeting
September 7, 2006

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for a special use permit to install a playground at Ben Brenman Park.

APPLICANT: City of Alexandria
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

LOCATION: 4800 Brenman Park Drive

ZONE: CDD #9/Coordinated Development District

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the recommended permit conditions found in Section III of this report.

SITE GRAPHIC
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE

I. DISCUSSION

REQUEST

The applicant, City of Alexandria, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, requests special use permit approval to construct a playground at the southeast corner of Ben Brenman Park, 4800 Brenman Park Drive.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is one lot of record with 240 feet of frontage on Duke Street and a total lot area of approximately 60 acres. The site is occupied by Ben Brenman Park. The land was dedicated to the City in 1996 from the Federal government for park use when the Cameron Station military base closed. The park was completed in September 2001 and designed to have areas of active and passive recreation. The proposed playground will occupy 2,450 square feet at the southwest area of the park, adjacent to the Little League Field.



The surrounding area is occupied by a mix of residential and commercial uses. Immediately to the west is the Cameron Station community. To the south is the Norfolk Souther railroad tracks. To the north across Duke Street is All Veterans Park along Holmes Run. The Alexandria Public Library is in the near vicinity. To the east are the 4600 Duke Street condominiums and other residential and commercial uses.

BACKGROUND

On June 13, 1998, City Council approved SUP#98-0048, for Ben Brenman Park, known at the time as “East End Park”. The approved plan included one full size rectangle field, two ball fields, volleyball courts, a dog exercise area, a stormwater management pond, picnic areas, a gazebo, walking paths, restrooms, open lawn areas, an amphitheater, a park office and parking. A playground was not planned for the park at that time. Existing playgrounds in the area are Armistead Booth Park, near Samuel Tucker Elementary school and two playgrounds located on the other side of Holmes Run adjacent to the park.

In November 2005, the Department of Recreation received a petition from over 200 residents in support of building a playground for Ben Brenman Park. After receiving the petition, the Department met with a small group of community members to explain the process of obtaining approvals and funding for the new playground. Additional meetings were then scheduled.

PROPOSAL

The City of Alexandria, Department of Recreation, proposes a playground of approximately 2,450 square feet. The playground will incorporate ADA accessibility, a fenced perimeter, and rubberized pervious safety surfacing, and will be appropriate for children under six years of age. The proposed play equipment includes a modular structure and tot swings. The colors of the equipment will be green and tan to fit within the natural setting of the park. The specific style of the playground equipment and its layout have not been determined, and an additional community meeting will be held for public input. Funding for the playground has been approved in the FY2007 Capital Budget. Local businesses have expressed an interest in donating funds for the playground.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In response to citizen requests from past years, and in addition to the petition, the Department of Recreation held three public meetings to obtain public comment about constructing a new playground within the park. At each meeting, attendees were in support of a playground and responded positively to proposals. The main concerns from each public meeting were about the location of the playground.

LOCATION ALTERNATIVES

Several possible locations were presented at the three public meetings. These locations were selected by the Department of Recreation and Parks, with consideration to safety, views, surveillance, maintenance, access, utilities, and existing and future uses.

Along Somerville Street

A strong negative response was received to placing any playground along Somerville Street. Residents were concerned about the noise, traffic, views, and potential conflicts with existing open space in the two locations along Somerville Street.

At Picnic Areas Near Park Office

Another location considered was near the Park Office within the existing picnic areas. This location received a favorable response because of parking, restrooms, and large shade trees. However, the construction of the playground with its rubberized surfacing would affect the health of the mature shade trees. Several people preferred not to have large trees removed or to have any construction that would eventually contribute to the decline of the trees.

Adjacent to Little League Filed—PROPOSED

The last location considered and recommended by the Department of Recreation and Parks is located adjacent to the Little League Field approximately 200 feet from the picnic area. This location is accessible by two parking lots and located in the vicinity of the restrooms. There are no mature trees that will be affected by construction. The area is located outside the 50-foot Resource Protection Area (RPA), due to the proximity of the manmade pond which acts as a stormwater filter for the surrounding development. Any land disturbance will need to comply with stormwater management requirements. This location received support at the last public meeting held on May 6. The Park and Recreation Commission also provided input on the playground locations and approved this location.

CHARACTERISTICS

Operating hours for the playground will be consistent with the existing hours at the park which are 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily. Numbers of attendees are anticipated to vary between 20 and 60 children throughout the day. Four full-time employees are already assigned to the Ben Brenman Park, and no additional staff will be added for the playground. Minimum noise is expected. Existing trash receptacles are available throughout the park and maintained by RP&CA staff.

PARKING

The Zoning Ordinance does not specify a parking requirement for playground use. A total of 208 spaces are provided on the property. This parking will adequately serve the proposed playground.

ZONING/MASTER PLAN DESIGNATION

The subject property is located in the CDD#9/Coordinated development district zone, and the Landmark/Van Dorn Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, which identify the site for park use.

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

Ben Brenman Park was developed with both active and passive elements to serve a wide range of users. Over 200 residents petitioned the Department of Recreation to construct a playground at the park to serve young children. Three public meetings took place to discuss the location of the park. Of the three potential locations identified, the location adjacent to the Little League Field was preferred by the community as it was found to cause the least impact to residents, and will not threaten mature trees. The Park and Recreation Commission approved the location adjacent to the Little League Field. The proposed playground will occupy only 2,450 square feet at the existing 60-acre park. The park will provide a recreation opportunity for the numerous young children that live in the near vicinity.

Staff recommends approval of the special use permit, subject to the following conditions.

III. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the following conditions:

1. The hours of operation of the playground shall be consistent with those for Ben Brenman Park. (P&Z)
2. The location of the playground shall be consistent with what has been submitted with this application. (P&Z)
3. Submit a minor site plan revision to the approved Brenman Park site plan for staff review and approval. (T&ES)
4. Loudspeakers shall be prohibited, and no amplified sounds shall be audible at the property line. (T&ES)
5. No shrubbery or trees should be planted near the playground. If shrubbery must be added, any proposed shrubbery around the playground is to have a maximum height of 24 inches when they are fully mature. This will allow for an open environment around the area where children cannot easily be lost. (Police)
6. No shrubs higher than 2 feet should be planted within 6 feet of the playground. (Police)
7. All trees near the playground should be limbed up to a minimum of 6 feet as they mature, to allow for the greatest amount of natural surveillance. (Police)
8. It is recommended that the playground be enclosed with a chain link fence or similar transparent fencing. (Police)
9. Should park benches be located on the playground, the below pictured benches are recommended. (Police)
10. The Director of Planning and Zoning shall review the special use permit after it has been operational for one year, and shall docket the matter for consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council if (a) there have been documented violations

of the permit conditions which were not corrected immediately, constitute repeat violations or which create a direct and immediate adverse zoning impact on the surrounding community; (b) the director has received a request from any person to docket the permit for review as the result of a complaint that rises to the level of a violation of the permit conditions, (c) the director has determined that there are problems with the operation of the use and that new or revised conditions are needed. (P&Z)

STAFF: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;
Richard Josephson, Deputy Director;
Valerie Peterson, Urban Planner.

Staff Note: In accordance with section 11-506(c) of the zoning ordinance, construction or operation shall be commenced and diligently and substantially pursued within 18 months of the date of granting of a special use permit by City Council or the special use permit shall become void.

IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F - finding

Transportation & Environmental Services:

- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line.
- R-1 Submit a minor site plan revision to the approved Brenman Park site plan for staff review and approval.
- R-2 Loudspeakers shall be prohibited, and no amplified sounds shall be audible at the property line.

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 No comment.

Health Department:

- F-1 No comment.

Police Department:

Using the principles of CPTED (Crime prevention Through Environmental Design), Harrison Grierson Consultants advises when building a playground there are key factors that need to be considered:

1) LOCATION

Location is a fundamental issue that affects the amount of activity support and consequently natural surveillance that is provided to ensure the facility is safe. Children's public play areas should usually be prominently located in relation to a public road.

The close proximity of a public road (activity generator) provides a reasonable level of activity or at least the opportunity for a car to drive by and observe what is happening. Play areas should face the activity generator and visually open up towards it. Note where open play areas are positioned next to roads, consideration needs to be given to children's safety in relation to passing traffic and possible road accidents.

Relationships with other facilities should be considered in how activity generated by these different facilities might support one another.

By placing the playground adjacent to the Little League Field - the Park Office, the existing restrooms and the Little League Field will provide natural surveillance for the playground by people using those facilities and passers-by whether via foot traffic or vehicular traffic. This will aid in the deterrence of crime in the playground. Therefore, the following recommendation is made:

- F-1 Considering the above mentioned factors, the Police Department is in agreement with the Department of Recreation that the playground should be located adjacent to the Little League Field.

2) NATURAL SURVEILLANCE

The lack of natural surveillance is a common problem and one which can in some instances be easily remedied. For example, areas of dense planting once removed or replaced with more appropriate planting can open up the area substantially. An open area around the facility provides clear sightlines, which allow parents to watch over their children while removing the risk of creating areas of entrapment.



Surrounding properties can provide natural surveillance over play areas. If possible locate the facility where sightlines allow you to see windows of nearby buildings. Existing vegetation or other minor barriers could be cleared to allow direct views from windows over the play area.

This children's play area has been located in a very open area allowing for good visibility around the facility and ensuring areas of entrapment do not exist.

- R-1 No shrubbery or trees should be planted near the playground.
- R-2 If shrubbery must be added, any proposed shrubbery around the playground is to have a maximum height of 24 inches when they are fully mature. This will allow for an open environment around the area where children cannot easily be lost.
- R-3 No shrubs higher than 2 feet should be planted within 6 feet of the playground.
- R-4 All trees near the playground should be limbed up to a minimum of 6 feet as they mature, to allow for the greatest amount of natural surveillance.



This children's play area is not secluded by inappropriate shrubbery. The nonexistent shrubbery close to the playground allow for natural surveillance.

3) LIGHTING

Artificial Lighting is undesirable, in that it can encourage inappropriate use. Play areas are not designed to be used after dark and if lit will encourage vandalism and graffiti. Consideration particularly when placed next to a road should be given to light spill and how street lights might undesirably illuminate the play area.

4) BOUNDARY ENCLOSURE

A low transparent boundary fence should be erected around play areas with a single gated entry point. Seating and litter collection facilities can be positioned close to the gate to allow parents to control egress and observe access. This not only gives parents security that their child may not run off away from the play area, but also that an abductor cannot easily snatch a child. This also discourages inappropriate use of the playground.



Note the enclosure and gated entry gives an ideal opportunity to name the play area, which will help promote a sense of ownership. Raised play areas on a platform symbolically define boundaries which while not physically enforcing all the advantages listed above, does nonetheless, aid safety. **Access control is clear, and an adult entering the area will draw attention to themselves if not in direct supervision of a child.**

R-5 It is recommended that the playground be enclosed with a chain link fence or similar transparent fencing.

R-6 Should park benches be located on the playground, the below pictured benches are recommended.



This is a bench style that eliminates or discourages sleeping.

SUP2006-0057
4800 Brenman Park Drive

**REPORT ATTACHMENTS
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE**