

Lee Center

History and Character

In 1839, Philip Hamilton, a former slave who had purchased his freedom by 1827, purchased two-acres within the current Lee Center property (Jefferson, S Henry, Greene, and Fayette) for an African American Cemetery. It has yet to be determined whether anyone was interred at this location. If the property was used as a cemetery, it would be the earliest African American Cemetery in Alexandria.

A Civil War Union camp for the 18th New York regiment is under what is now the eastern wing of the Center and its playground to the north. A Union camp, Greene's Artillery, is to the immediate west of the Center.

In the early 1900's Washington Florist Company owned over 12 acres of property including portions of the Lee Center. By 1907, they had over 100,000 feet of glass greenhouses around the property. By 1935 the property was part of the Mt. Vernon Floral Company and included two greenhouses and two sheds. The northeastern corner also had three small structures. In 1935 there was a wood working business at the corner of Franklin and North Patrick, a filling station and two other structures southward.

By 1961 the Robert E. Lee Elementary School was built south of Jefferson Street in nearly the same footprint as the Lee Center Building. All other buildings on the property South and North of Jefferson Street were gone by 1961.

Today, the Lee Center building serves as the administrative offices for the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. Space is available for rentals including meetings and events. The Center also houses the Alexandria Fire Department's training facility, an adult day care center, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension offices. The adjacent Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center features a Gymnasium, Kitchen, Fitness Room, Multi-Purpose



Room, and Game and Crafts Room. It offers summer and after school care and is the center for the City's year-round therapeutic recreation programs.

The Lee Center site includes nine acres of outdoor recreational features including two tennis courts, a playground with standard playground equipment and a new inclusionary playground (built in 2015), a lit basketball court, two grass fields and the Miracle

Field. The Miracle Field (image below) was built in 2012 for children and adults with special needs to have a safe environment to play baseball and other sports.



The 1,800 square foot swimming pool opened in 1969 and closed in 2008 due to fiscal constraints. An Aquatics Facilities Study in 2012 recommended that the pool re-open as a therapeutic pool. A therapy pool, in combination with the Miracle Field and inclusive playground would make the



Nannie J. Lee Center the City's hub for therapeutic recreational programming.

The outdoor spaces are mainly used for programs offered through the Nannie J. Lee Center, such as the summer camp and Miracle League. The natural grass field along Franklin Street is frequently used for tot soccer practice. Many of the nearby residents use this part of the park for dog walking and exercise. All of the outdoor facilities are also open to the public to use, however, the tennis courts, playgrounds, and basketball court are in the back of the Lee Center and must be accessed by going through the building or around the parking lot.

The City's K-9 unit trains their dogs in the southwest section of the park, west of the basketball court. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) maintains the sound wall along the eastern side of the site.

Existing Conditions



Community Feedback

In Fall 2014, staff collected community feedback to understand how the Park is used and how it could be improved in the future. The following information summarizes what we heard through an online survey, community workshop, and “graffiti board” in the park. Over 270 people responded to the survey in total, sixteen of which were specific to the Lee Center. Staff used the collected information to develop draft park plans.

In 10 years I would like this Park to...

(Top 3 rankings shown; based on a weighted score)

1. Provide organized recreational opportunities
2. Be a place to create social connections with neighbors
3. Be a space to go exercise on my own

What would you like done with the basketball court?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	5	83%
Enhance it	1	17%
Transform it	0	0%

What would you like done with the Miracle Field?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	8	100%
Enhance it	0	0%
Transform it	0	0%

What would you like done with the open lawn?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	5	83%
Enhance it	1	17%
Transform it	0	0%

What would you like done with the open play field?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	3	38%
Enhance it	4	50%
Transform it	1	13%

Explain

Add lights

It would be great if the city could add this field as an option for little league games or practices. Benches and picnic tables here would be great too. I'm most interested in seeing the pen play field updated for use as an actual baseball field. Most of the kids in the area are in the NJL district for rec, but we need to travel all over Alexandria for practices and games. It would be ideal if this space was at least useable for baseball practices. It's a great location that is under utilized.

The open play field is currently in disrepair. A little work could go a long way to improve the infrastructure at this park and all it to be used as additional field for baseball.

What would you like done with the picnic tables?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	5	71%
Enhance it	2	29%
Transform it	0	0%

What would you like done with the playground?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	6	75%
Enhance it	2	25%
Transform it	0	0%

What would you like done with the tennis courts?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	6	75%
Enhance it	2	25%
Transform it	0	0%

Explain

Line them for pickleball

What is currently NOT in the Park that you would like to see there?

Response

A lit baseball field.

Covered seating, swings, sandbox, more equipment for smaller kids

Dugouts. Stands for visitors to watch baseball games. More parking available on Franklin St.

Pretty and well kept sitting and walking areas.

Early morning exercise classes for adults ala Chinquapin

Resurfaced tennis courts

More trash containers (properly placed). Better bathroom signage/education.

Better parking signage/enforcement.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Park?

Response

A leisure walking trail around and through the grounds.

No one knows it's there and there's no signage

Over focus on children

It's great that there are pull up bars (part of fire station). Every park should have at least one set outdoors!

It would be nice if the fence near Franklin could have gates that closed so balls aren't able to roll into the street.

It's a great park that is underused but could attract a lot of use if it were improved slightly. It's a neighborhood ballpark that is currently not used but could be a bright spot for organized activities in an upcoming neighborhood. I live in the neighborhood and have caught people taking advantage of the play field at the center using my condos trash bins as well as using the enclosed trashbin area as a bathroom. Additionally, when there are events, people often take up neighborhood parking as opposed to using the parking at the lee center. Better signage and education to the groups using the parks might help. Perhaps having a city representative on site to help enforce rules would be useful.

Improvement Recommendations

1 Provide standard wayfinding signage

The existing sign at the corner of Jefferson and Fayette Streets is outdated and does not provide directional information to guide visitors to different uses on the site. A new sign would meet the City's wayfinding standards and help avoid confusion. New directional signs from Route One and throughout the neighborhood will also provide guidance to the Lee Center.

2 Develop landscape plan, including seating and vegetation, in front of the building

The existing foundation planting of shrubs and trees along the north side of the building is overgrown and impacts building repairs including windows and utilities. Remove overgrown shrubs and remove trees, as needed, to allow site surveillance and replace with low native species perennial grasses and/or shrubs. Install two benches facing the grassy area.

3 Install pathway to connect the outdoor facilities in the front and back of the building

Access is the biggest challenge to the Lee Center site. To access the playgrounds and courts, park users must either walk through the site parking lot or through the building (when its open). A four foot path on the east side of the site will provide a safe way to reach all park features. For the path to run along the south side of the building, the tennis court fence will need to be cut at a 45 degree angle (known as a "California Corner"). The pool fence will also need to be moved inward.

4 Repurpose the pool in both the long and short term

The Nannie J. Lee Center Pool has been closed since 2009. The 2012 Aquatics Facility Feasibility Study recommends the Lee Center pool be repurposed as a therapeutic pool. Given the high cost of this recommendation, the pool is not likely to be re-purposed for many years.

Short-term use: Hold design competition to determine interim use for the closed pool

This plan suggests holding a design competition to determine an innovative and inexpensive interim use. Some ideas include a greenhouse, play surface, or skateboard park. Any interim use must be American with Disabilities Act compliant and may not preclude the long-term use plans.

Long-term use: Renovate the pool for indoor therapy programming and senior use

The therapeutic pool would be between 84-88 degrees, allowing for gentle exercise. Programming would concentrate on therapy associated with a medical provider.

5 Install new path to connect the Lee Center back entrance to the Courts and Playgrounds

A new path will provide a clear way for visitors to access the recreational features in the back of the center.

6 Install new path to connect the Miracle Field to the northwest corner of the park

A new path would connect the field to the existing western pathway. This would create walking loop around the site.

7 Install fitness equipment

There is an increased need for outdoor adult fitness equipment throughout the City. This is an ideal location because the Alexandria Fire Department (AFD) uses the area for fitness training, often bringing their own portable equipment to the site. Permanent equipment would allow a shared use between the public and AFD.

8 Renovate the parking lot, including new a path and landscape tree islands

The City of Alexandria Landscape Guidelines require planted tree islands for every ten spaces. New trees will provide shade and help green the asphalt area. A new walking path through the lot will safely guide pedestrians to the building. The lot also needs to be re-paved and re-stripped to meet City standards.

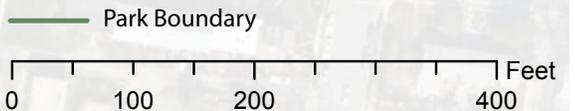
9 Irrigate field and, if possible, use condensation from the building's HVAC system

Using condensation from the Lee Center's HVAC system for irrigation can be an energy-efficient water management strategy. It can also serve as a demonstration on LEED design for the entire City.



ALFRED

A Construct new accessible playground - Complete as of June 2015



Implementation Strategy

This plan uses citizen input and considers other external considerations to determine how to address park improvements incrementally over time. Most of the recommendations in the plan can be implemented independent of other projects as funding is available, whether through city or non-city funds. The cost estimates (in 2015 dollars) do not include operating costs. Prior to the implementation of any recommendation, operating costs, if any, must be considered.

The priority for each recommendation is shown as “low,” “medium,” or “high.” RPCA determined these rankings based upon (1) park user safety, (2) community prioritization feedback and the results of the 2011 and 2013 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, (3) life span of the existing conditions, (4) potential for non-city funding sources, (5) level of user impact, (6) relationship to other projects.

Lee Center					
#	Recommendation	Priority	Estimated Cost	Associated Recommendations	Dept Lead
1	Provide standard wayfinding signage	High	10,000-11,000		RPCA
2	Develop landscape plan, including seating and vegetation, in front of the building	Low	30,000-40,000	May be impacted by construction staging for HVAC and window replacement to the Lee Center	RPCA
3	Install pathway to connect the outdoor facilities in the front and back of the building	High	25,000-35,000		RPCA
4	Repurpose the pool in both the short and long term	Medium			RPCA
4a	Short-term: Hold design competition to determine interim use for the closed pool		250,000 allowance		
4b	Long-term: Renovate the pool for an indoor therapy program and senior use		4,300,000		
5	Install new path to connect the Lee Center back entrance to the courts and playgrounds	Currently underway			RPCA
6	Install new path to connect the miracle field to the northwest corner of the park	Low	25,000-30,000		RPCA
7	Install fitness equipment	Medium	10,000-15,000		RPCA/AFD
8	Renovate the parking lot, including a new path and landscape tree islands	Low	60,000-80,000		RPCA/TES
9	Irrigate field and, if possible, use condensation from the building's HVAC system	Low	35,000-50,000	Should be evaluated as part of the HVAC and window replacement project at the Lee Center	RPCA/GS

2015 Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plan: Appendix



Neighborhood Parks Plan

Lee Center

Community Feedback, Fall 2014



The Division of Park Planning, Design, and Capital Development is currently planning for the City's existing Neighborhood Parks, which we characterize as being 0.5 - 10 acres with a service area of up to 0.5 miles. The results of this plan will help determine budgeting priorities and recommendations for both short and long-term incremental improvements, ensuring that neighborhood parks serve Alexandria's needs now and into the future.

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Explain

Line them for pickleball



Lee Center

Improvement Recommendations

Draft (Spring 2015)

1 Provide standard wayfinding signage

The existing sign at the corner of Jefferson and Fayette Streets is outdated and does not provide directional information to guide visitors to different uses on the site. A new sign would meet the City's wayfinding standards and help avoid confusion. New directional signs from Route One and throughout the neighborhood will also provide guidance to the Lee Center.

2 Develop landscape plan and replace trees in front of the building

The existing foundation planting of shrubs and trees along the north side of the building is overgrown and impacts building repairs including windows and utilities. Remove overgrown shrubs to allow site surveillance and replace with low native species perennial grasses and/or shrubs. Remove approximately 5 trees and reestablish in locations closer to the parking area/away from building foundation.

3 Install pathway to connect the outdoor facilities in the front and back of the building

Access is the biggest challenge to the Lee Center site. To access the playgrounds and courts, park users must either walk through the site parking lot or through the building (when its open). A four foot path on the east side of the site will provide a safe way to reach all park features. For the path to run along the south side of the building, the tennis court fence will need to be cut at a 45 degree angle (known as a "California Corner"). The pool fence will also need to be moved inward.

4 Hold design competition to determine interim use for the closed pool

The Lee Center Pool has been closed since 2009. The 2012 Aquatics Facility Feasibility Study recommends the Lee Center pool be re-purposed as a therapeutic pool. Given the high cost of this recommendation, the pool is not likely to be re-purposed for many years. This plan suggests holding a design competition to determine an innovative and inexpensive interim use. Some ideas include a greenhouse, play surface, or skateboard park. Any interim use must be American with Disabilities Act compliant.

5 Install new path to connect the Lee Center back entrance to the Courts and Playgrounds

A new path will provide a clear way for visitors to access the recreational features in the back of the center.

6 Plant a meadow between the building and new pathway

A meadow will help beautify the site, which currently lacks any plantings.

7 Construct new accessible playground

The Miracle League of Alexandria is currently working with staff to install a new playground with accessible play features. The site will be open to the public but the primary users will be the therapeutic recreation programs, based in the Nannie J. Lee Center. The playground will have a music theme and be named for Ruthanne Lodato. The playground plan also calls for trees to be planted along the playground.

8 Install fitness equipment

There is an increased need for outdoor adult fitness equipment throughout the city. This is an ideal location because the Alexandria Fire Department (AFD) uses the area for fitness training, often bringing their own portable equipment to the site. Permanent equipment would allow a shared use between the public and AFD.

9 Plant new trees in the parking lot

The parking lot does not meet the City of Alexandria Landscape Guidelines which requires planted tree islands for every ten spaces. New trees will provide shade and help green the asphalt area.

10 Add picnic tables and grill

A picnic area could be rented for outdoor gatherings or be used by the Nannie J. Lee Center after-school and summer camp programs.

11 Irrigate field using condensation from the building's HVAC system

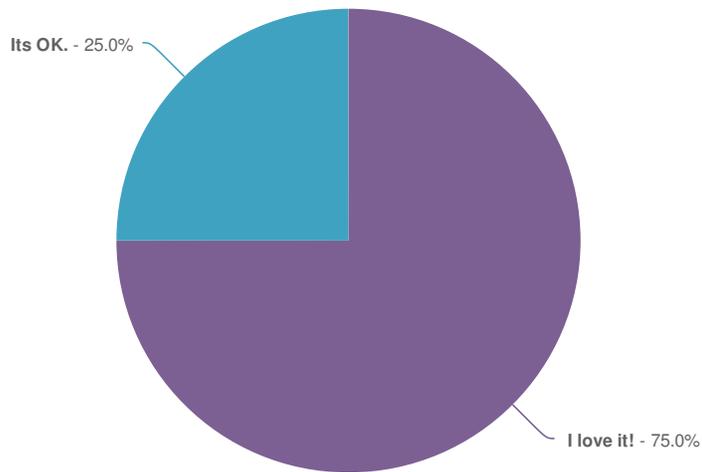
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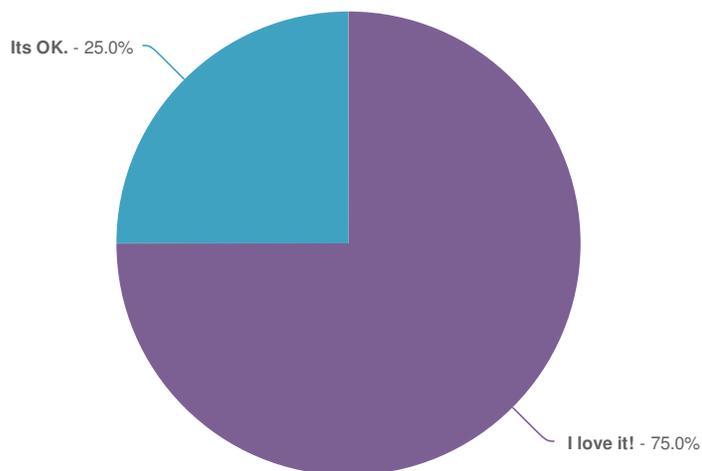
Lee Center Park Draft Improvement Plan Survey Results, July 2015

What do you think of the following recommendations?- Install new path to connect the Lee Center back entrance to the courts and playgrounds



Value	Percent	Count
I love it!	75.0%	3
Its OK.	25.0%	1
Total		4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Add picnic tables and grill

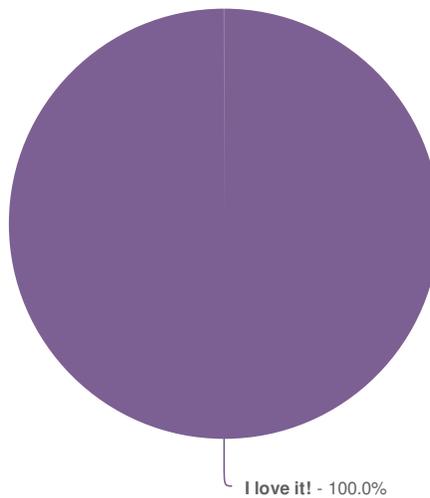


Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	75.0%		3
Its OK.	25.0%		1
Total			4

Explain-Add picnic tables and grill

Count	Response
1	expand the cooking area away out from under the awning.

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Construct new accessible playground

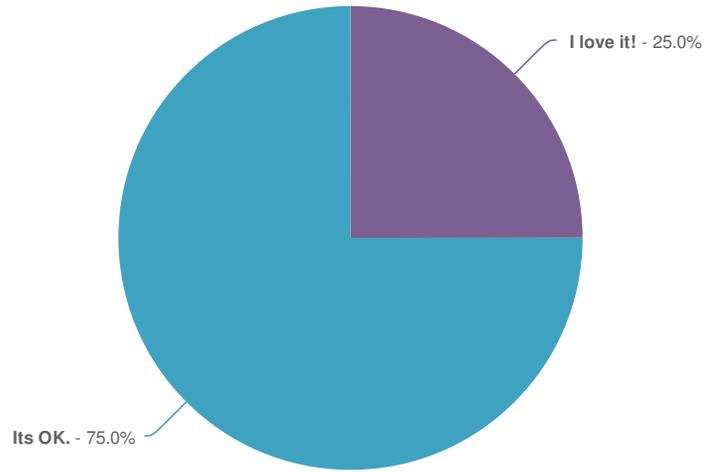


Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	100.0%		5
Total			5

Explain-Construct new accessible playground

Count	Response
1	Great idea!

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Develop landscape plan and replace trees in front of the building

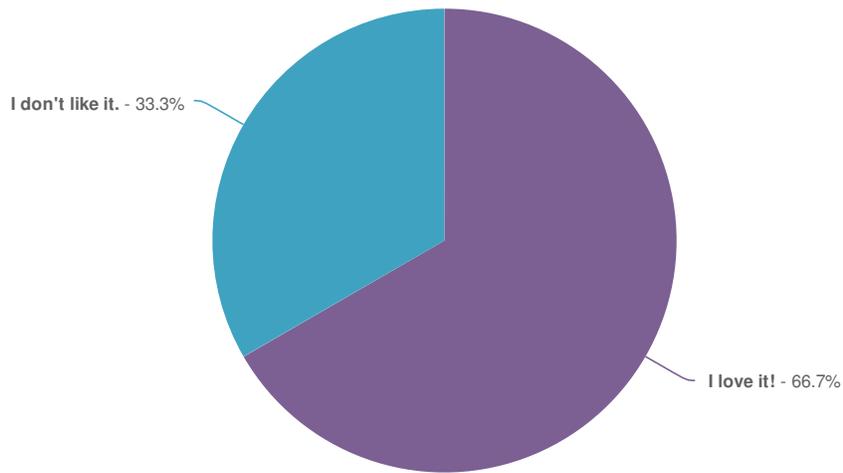


Value	Percent	Count
I love it!	25.0%	1
Its OK.	75.0%	3
Total		4

Explain-Develop landscape plan and replace trees in front of the building

Count	Response
1	need shade to be in the design if replacing full grown trees

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Hold design competition to determine interim use for the closed pool



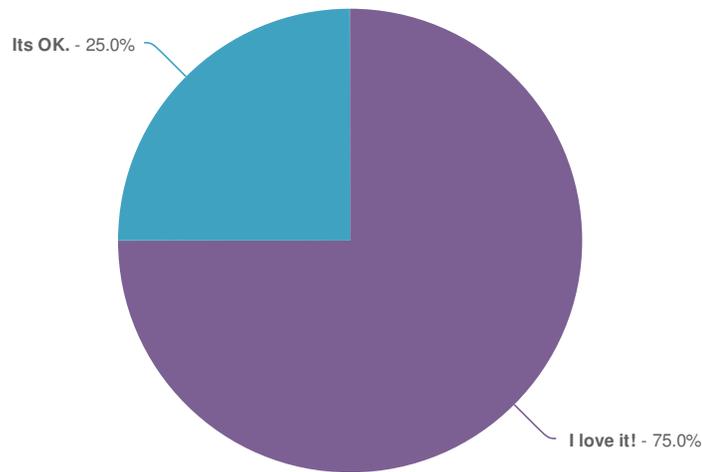
Value	Percent	Count
Total		6

Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	66.7%		4
I don't like it.	33.3%		2
Total			6

Explain-Hold design competition to determine interim use for the closed pool

Count	Response
1	Add a recommendation that explains the therapeutic pool for the long-term with cost estimates.
1	Possible options: Water Spray park. out door box theater
1	I like the idea of an interim use. However I would personally recommend a spray ground in the future with particular focus on the special needs community. It would have a lower capital cost than a standard pool with lower maintenance costs. The special needs swimming classes could be held in conjunction with Arlington County's proposed new therapy pool at the Long Bridge Aquatic Center (or at Chinguapin once the existing pool is re-purposed for more recreation activities).

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Install fitness equipment



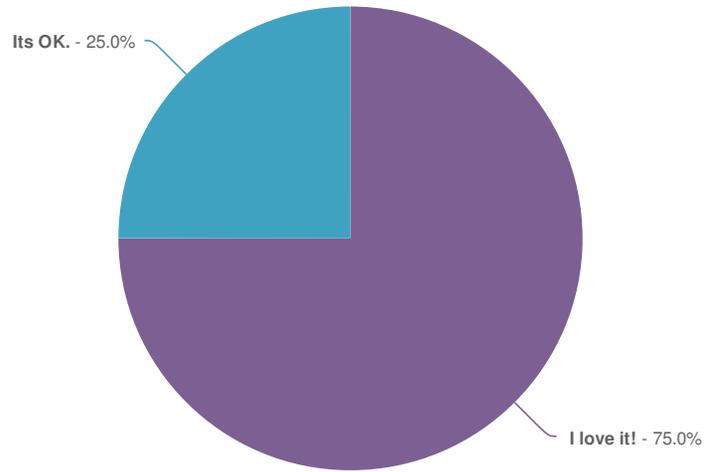
Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	75.0%		3
Its OK.	25.0%		1
Total			4

Explain-Install fitness equipment

Count	Response
1	like the public shared idea.

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Install pathway to connect the outdoor facilities in the front

and back of the building

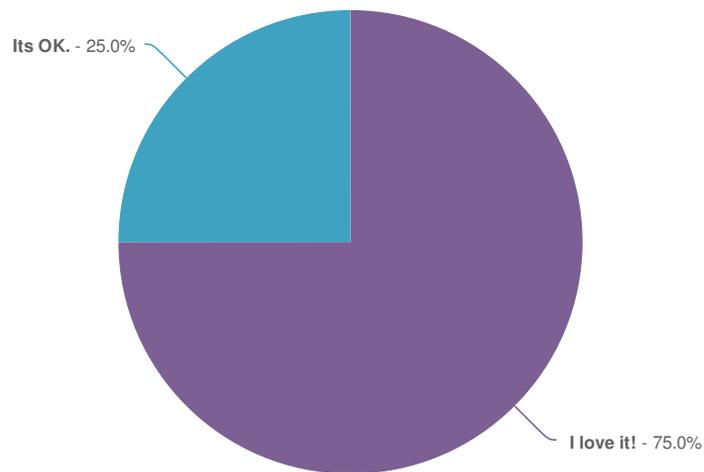


Value	Percent	Count
I love it!	75.0%	3
Its OK.	25.0%	1
Total		4

Explain-Install pathway to connect the outdoor facilities in the front and back of the building

Count	Response
1	But, don't like the corner cut into the tennis court fence or the decrease in the pool fence area.

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Irrigate field using condensation from the building's HVAC system

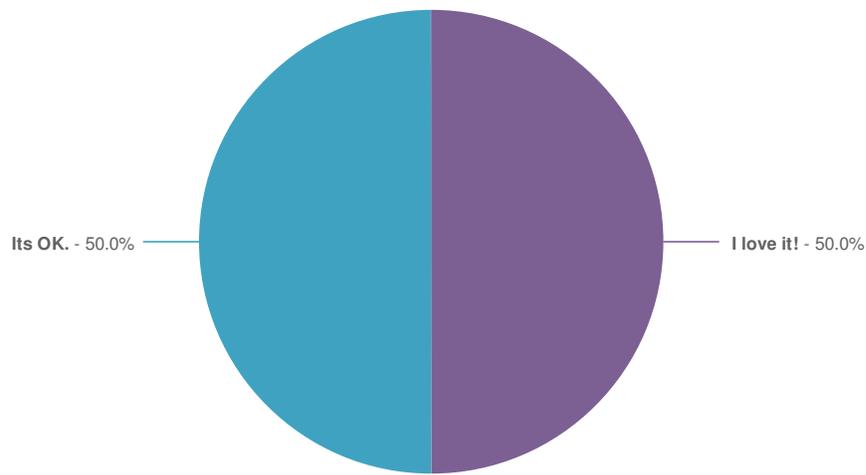


Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	75.0%		3
Its OK.	25.0%		1
Total			4

Explain-Irrigate field using condensation from the building's HVAC system

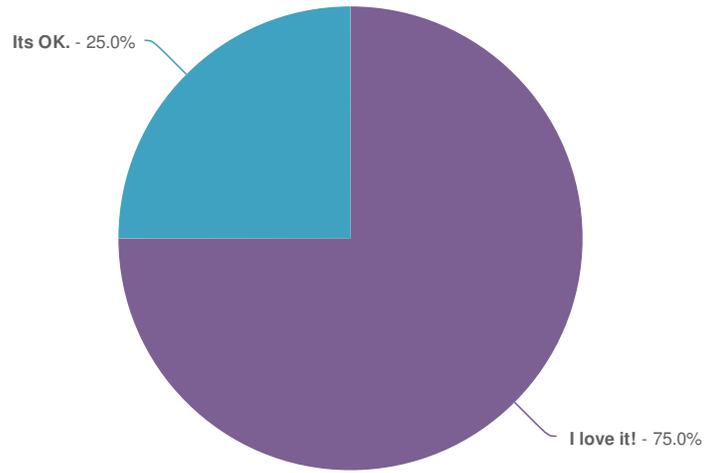
Count	Response
1	great idea

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Plant a meadow between the building and new pathway



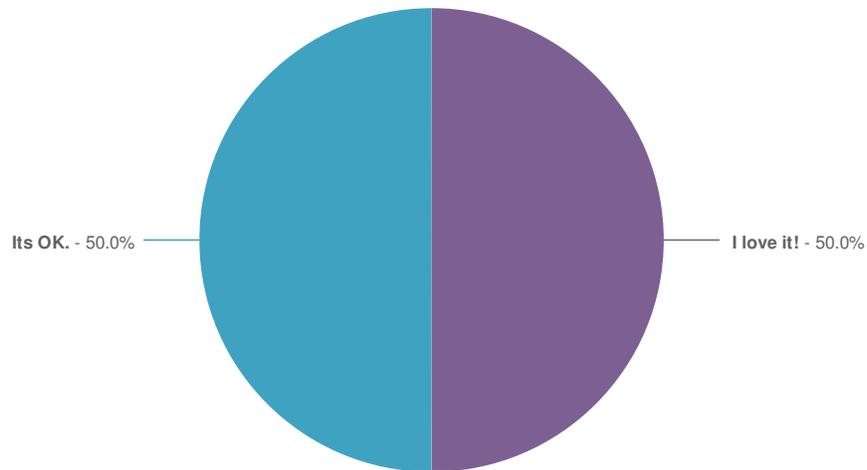
Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%		2
Its OK.	50.0%		2
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Plant new trees in the parking lot



Value	Percent	Count
I love it!	75.0%	3
Its OK.	25.0%	1
Total		4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Provide standard wayfinding signage



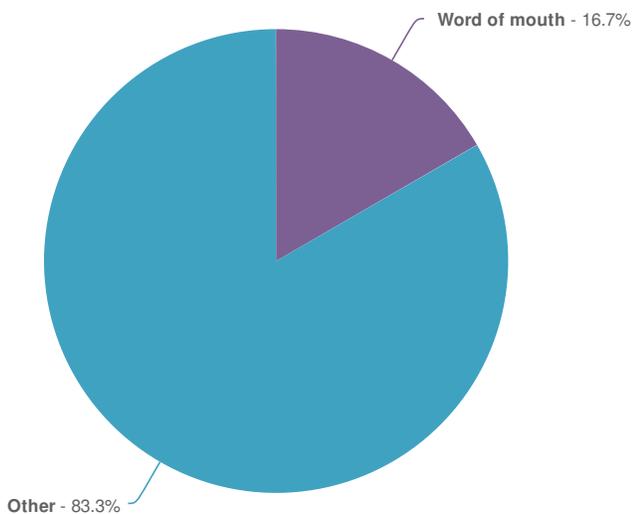
Value	Percent	Count
I love it!	50.0%	2
Its OK.	50.0%	2
Total		4

Do you feel all of the comments were heard and addressed in the draft Lee Center Park plan? If not, what is missing and how can we make the plan better?

Count Response

1	Yes
1	The rear of the building is VERY sunny. There is currently no shade in/around the basketball courts, playground, field, picnic table area. Any design should incorporate a custom shade structure or canopy over the playground, and a pavilion over the picnic area, with covered seating for parents to observe their children close by. Many of the disabled children for whom the ADA accessible playground is being made, take medications that make them highly susceptible to sun stroke, sun burn, and dehydration. Please incorporate sun protection and some sort of outdoor hydrating station (fountain) not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of all citizens. Thank you. Also, I am very strongly opposed to any other use for the swimming pool other than as a THERAPEUTIC pool. City of Alexandria is terrible about providing dedicated services or facilities to disabled residents. Although funding is not currently available, it should be sought ASAP. If you use this space for something "temporary", it will never be developed into a therapeutic pool. People who get their greenhouse, skate board park, etc. will be too vested and won't want to give it up. Please do something for the disabled members of our community.
1	Very important piece missing, parking is an issue for visitors coming to the Nannie J Lee center. Need expanded and better drop off for cars, vans and buses. Also, using the back parking lot is not an option for some visitors. Also needed is a connection space that can expand into the hallway between the two buildings structures.
1	I was disappointed there was no mention of improving the baseball/soccer field, which is one of the first things you see when approaching the Lee Center. An updated baseball/soccer field could draw more visitors to the Lee Center.

How did you learn about the Neighborhood Park Plan survey?

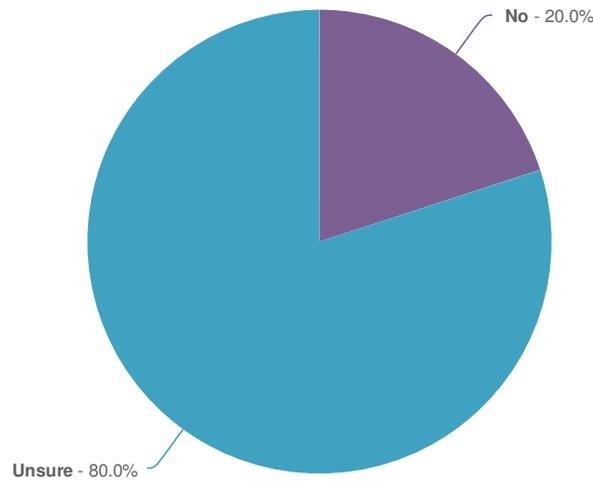


Value	Percent	Count
Word of mouth	16.7%	1
Other	83.3%	5
Total		6

Responses "Other"	Count
Left Blank	1
Recreation Department contacts	1
Staff member	1

Responses "Other"	Count
TR program staff	1
Telephone conversation with resident	1
recreation staff	1

Will you be attending the workshop on May 14 from 7pm-8:30pm at Charles Houston Recreation Center to discuss the draft park plans?

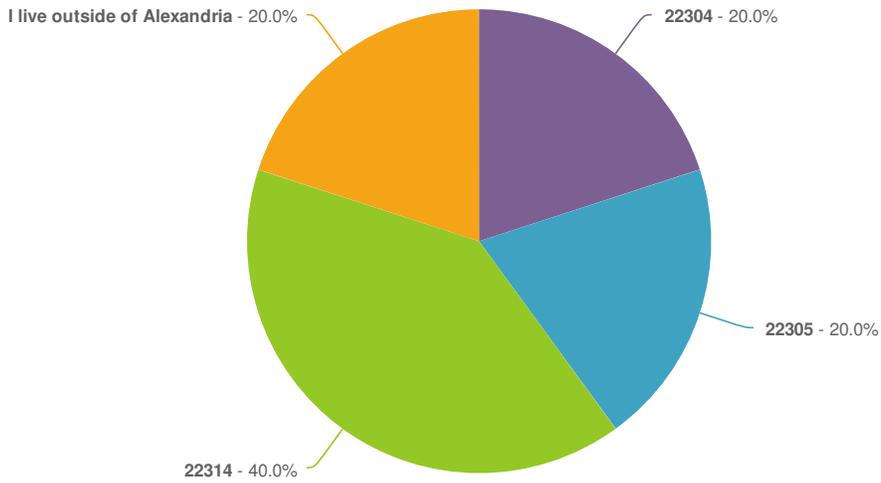


Value	Percent	Count
No	20.0%	1
Unsure	80.0%	4
Total		5

How many members of your household are in the following age groups?

	# in household	Responses
6-12	3 100.0%	3
13-18	1 100.0%	1
30-49	4 100.0%	4
50-69	2 100.0%	2

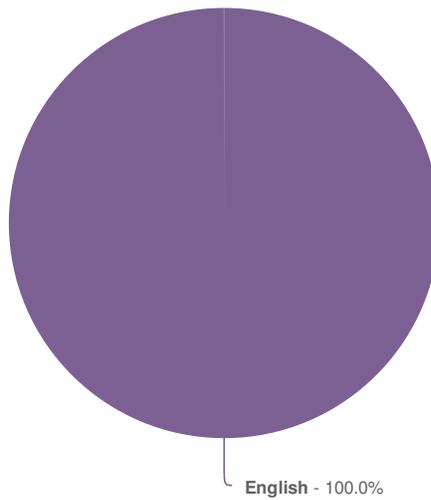
What is your zip code?



Value	Percent	Count	Statistics
22304	20.0%	1	Sum 89,237.0
22305	20.0%	1	Average 22,309.3
22314	40.0%	2	StdDev 4.8
I live outside of Alexandria	20.0%	1	Max 22,314.0
Total		5	

Responses "I live outside of Alexandria"	Count
Left Blank	6

What is the primary language spoken in your home?



Value	Percent	Count
Total		5

Value	Percent	Count
English	100.0%	5
Total		5

Responses "other"	Count
Left Blank	6