



01/06/2021

Re: Vare Recreation Center

Philadelphia Art Commission
1515 Arch Street
13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Members of the Commission,

Please see the attached narrative for the Vare Recreation Center Project located in Grays Ferry at 2600 Morris Street, Philadelphia, PA 19145. Please direct all correspondence in regards to any questions about the project and the decision to:

Ken Tomczuk
Make the World Better Foundation
227 W. Thompson St.
Unit A
Philadelphia, PA 19122

ken.tomczuk@mtwb.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Tomczuk", written in a cursive style.

Ken Tomczuk
Make the World Better Foundation



Organization: Make the World Better (MTWB), in partnership with Rebuild and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR)
Project: Vare Recreation Center, Grays Ferry
Art Commission Cover Letter

Project Narrative

Among the first sites selected for Rebuild investment, Vare Recreation Center (2600 Morris St) is an active space at the heart of the Grays Ferry community. Vare Recreation Center sits on 3.6 acres, with a building that houses a basketball gym, gymnastic gym, teen center, art room, auditorium, computer lab, fitness center, and arcade room. In October 2017, Vare was forced to shut down due to serious concerns about the building's structural integrity. With temporary improvements and structural braces in place, the two story 100-year-old building was able to reopen the first floor, although the second floor remains closed. The site also hosts a baseball field, sports field, playground, basketball courts and swimming pool.

Planned renovations for the fully overhauled site include a new structure for indoor recreation programs, an artificial turf multipurpose field, new playground equipment, outdoor basketball courts, and pool renovations.

Rebuild selected Make the World Better (MTWB), as the Project User to completely renovate and modernize the Vare Recreation Center. Over the past 18 months, MTWB and team have worked alongside the recreation center's staff, Advisory Council, program leaders, and nearby residents to identify site-specific improvements and design a complete scope of work to modernize and transform this beloved community space. This year and a half engagement has included dozens of meetings, workshops, and community events, and the participation of dozens of community members, as well as a multi-disciplinary team of artists, architects, landscape designers, civil & structural engineers, and design-build nonprofit partners. Community developed themes of unity, education, family, accessibility, safety, life skills, and intergenerational activity became key drivers of site design and planning.

MTWB will continue to coordinate with city agencies and partners to take advantage of best practice design opportunities on site. In partnership with the Philadelphia Water Department, site stormwater will be tied into newly planned PWD stormwater infrastructure leading to a subsurface basin at a nearby recreation site.

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation and Rebuild have been integral in bringing this project to fruition. Rebuild is an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in neighborhood parks, recreation centers and libraries. Proposed in Mayor Jim Kenney's first budget as a part of his vision for a more equitable Philadelphia, Rebuild seeks to improve pivotal community spaces, empower and engage communities, and promote economic opportunity through diversity and inclusion. Rebuild is a public private partnership made possible by the Philadelphia Beverage Tax.



Organization: Make the World Better (MTWB), in partnership with Rebuild and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR)
Project: Vare Recreation Center, Grays Ferry
Art Commission Percent for Art Statement

From the early stages of the Vare Recreation Center Project, MTWB, partners, and community members have envisioned opportunity for dynamic public art as a complement to the planned site renovations. We are excited to work with Philadelphia's Percent for Art Program to bring innovative and engaging public art to Vare Recreation Center. Our team has been in contact with the Percent for Art Program for a number of months, and have held site visits to discuss process and planned renovations.

In the coming weeks, Percent for Art and MTWB will engage Vare community members directly about the process of selecting and working with an artist for this project.



Organization: Make the World Better (MTWB), in partnership with Rebuild and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR)
Project: Vare Recreation Center, Grays Ferry
Art Commission Project Budget

Vare Project Budget

Funding Sources

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Rebuild funding	\$14,000,000.00
Total	\$14,000,000.00

Projected Expenditures

<u>Category</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Administrative/Project Management	\$1,260,000.00
Professional Services	\$1,328,110.00
Construction	\$10,360,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$1,051,890.00
Total	\$14,000,000

VARE

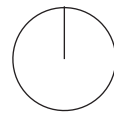
RECREATION CENTER
ART COMMISSION PACKAGE

Submitted by: Make the World Better Foundation

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- 1 Vare Recreation Center
- 2 Lanier Park
- 3 Baseball Fields
- 4 Smith Playground
- 5 Cemetery
- 6 Wharton Square Playground
- 7 D Finnegan Playground
- 8 Stinger Square Playground
- 9 Trolley Works Field
- 10 Baseball Fields
- 11 Grays Ferry Crescent Park
- 12 Chew Playground
- 13 Universal Audenriad School
- 14 James Alcorn School
- 15 The Fresh Grocer
- 16 St. Gabriel Parrish
- 17 St. John Neumann Place

- Community Organization
- Daycare
- School
- Religious Institution
- Park + Open Space
- Health Center
- Fire Station
- Senior Housing
- Supermarket



EXISTING CONDITIONS

site



1 Sports Field



2 Pool



3 Basketball Courts & Building



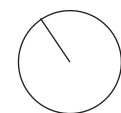
4 Playground



5 Playground & Building



6 Basketball Courts



EXISTING CONDITIONS

building

The current building, even with upgrades, will not deliver the recreation facility this community deserves

- The footprint is too small for community needs
- The building doesn't have HVAC or a kitchen and is not ADA accessible
- The layout does not suit community programmatic needs
- Extensive community engagement clarified desire for new building
- Community has deep connection with the site but not the building

Restoring the current building will not deliver the improvements the community wants

- Engineers (HAKS Engineering) completed a structural evaluation of Vare, and found that even after a \$6-10 million rehabilitation, the overall usability of the building would still be limited
- Structural & Soil issues - A geotechnical report prepared in 2018 found underlying, poorly consolidated soil fill and weak underlying soil layers are causing the building to be unsteady



SITE ANALYSIS

neighborhood context



1 Marco Manufacturing



2 Neumann Senior Center



3 Single Family Homes



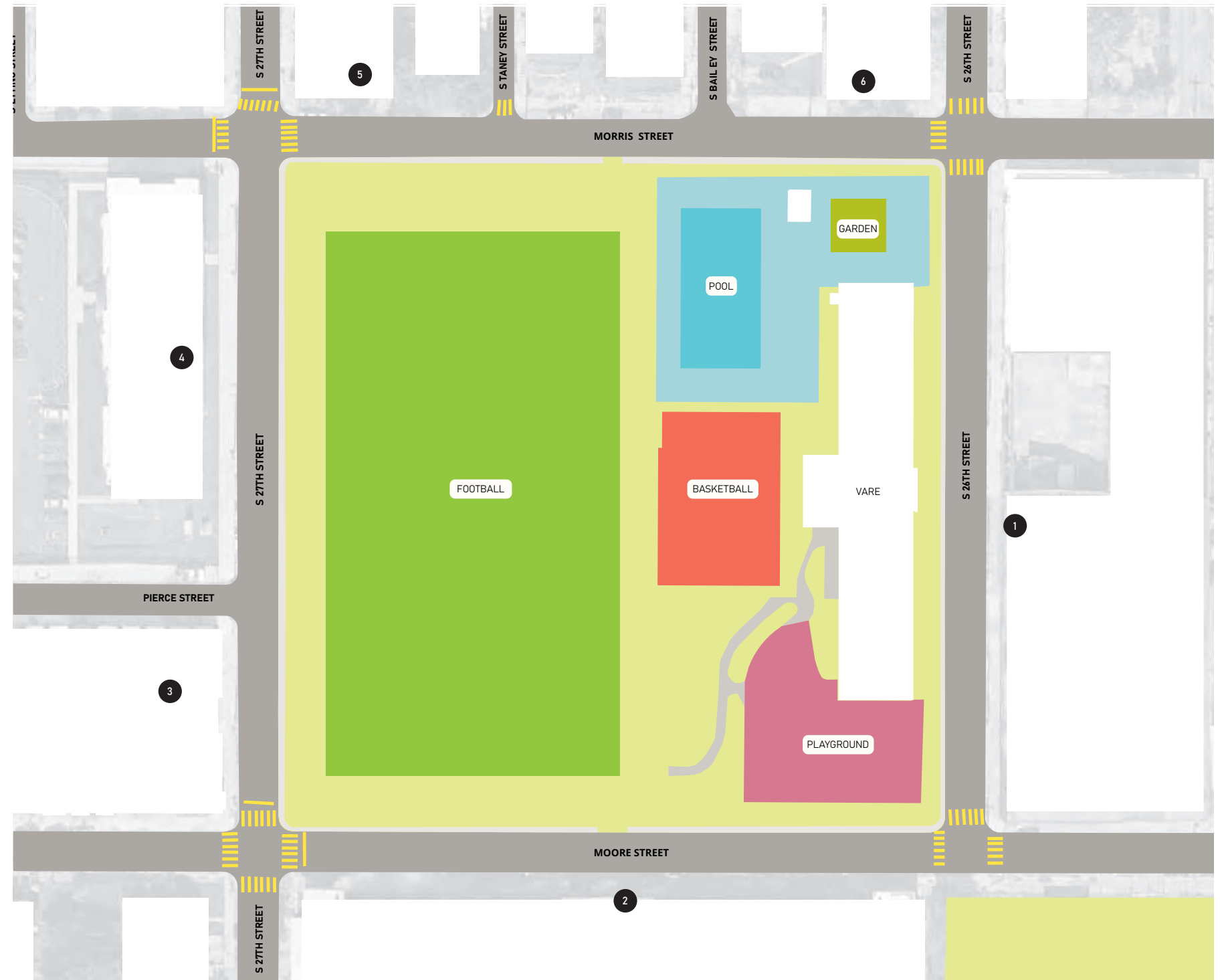
4 Anthony Wayne Senior Housing



5 Uncle Tomy's Pizza



6 Row Homes



ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

DESIGN PRACTICE

Engagement began with community members introducing the project team to existing site programming and building trust between community members and the project team.

- 18 months of connection between design team & community

CONCEPT DESIGN WORKSHOPS

MTWB led project-focused community workshops, meetings, and events at Vare and other sites in the neighborhood. These workshops discussed neighborhood priorities, programs, needs, potential solutions, and site layouts based on priorities and surrounding neighborhood context.

- 20 plus project-focused community workshops, meetings, and events

COMMUNITY ARCHIVING

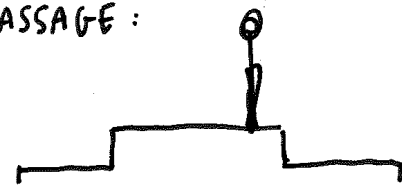
The monument lab and Philadelphia Photo Arts led The Vare Studio; a photo and oral history lab created to collect, preserve, and share the history of the Vare Recreation Center. The materials gathered at the Studio will be made available for future use in a potential Vare History Library. All Vare Studio participants will receive a free yearbook in 2021.

- 250 yearbooks printed and distributed to community members



DESIGN PROCESS

PASSAGE :



CONVERSATION :



SURVEILL/WATZH



SIT/RELAX



GATHER



VARE DESIGN DRIVERS



UNITY

People have expressed that Vare Rec has potential to increase feelings of unity within the community between different ages and user groups, as a place people can safely gather.



EDUCATION

Vare has a history of successful programming that focuses on more than just sports activities. Community members feel these educational programs are important for youth development.



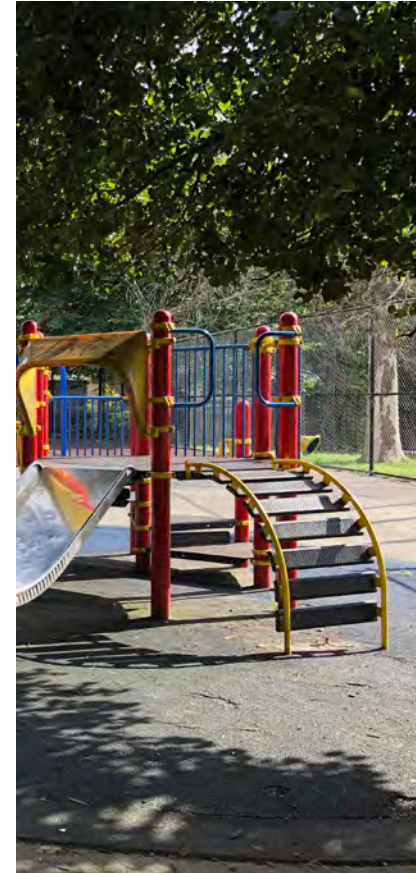
FAMILY + COMMUNITY

For many people, Vare evokes a feeling of family. People who use the rec center get to know and take care of each other. This is a feeling people would like to see continue through the renovations.



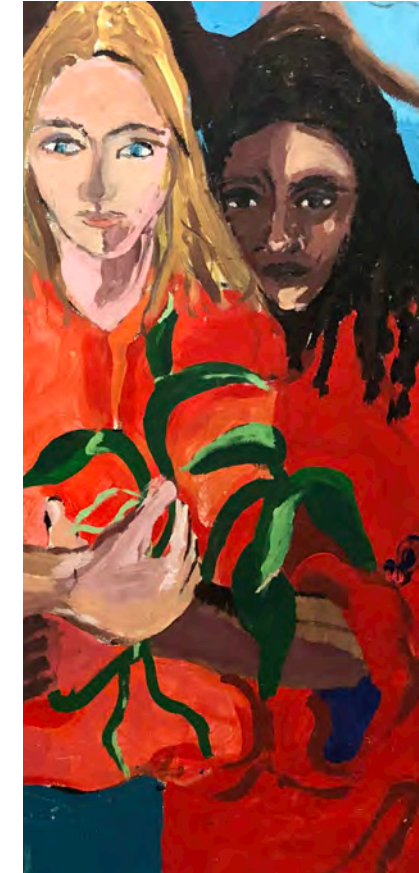
ACCESSIBILITY

Improved accessibility has been requested in many forms, including accommodations for older adults, flexible seating options, and job and education opportunities.



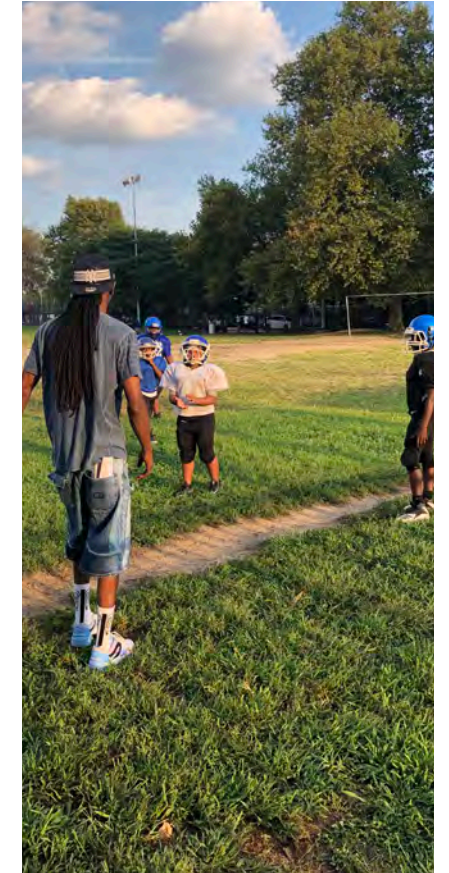
SAFETY

Community members have expressed that safety is a primary concern in the neighborhood. While there have been past incidents at Vare, they believe it to be a safe space for all ages.



LIFE SKILLS

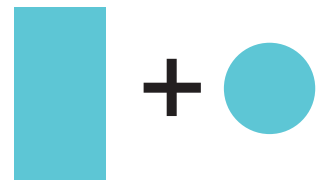
Vare is viewed by many as more of a community center than a recreation center. Residents value the programs that teach life skills, and see the potential for these programs to grow.



INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

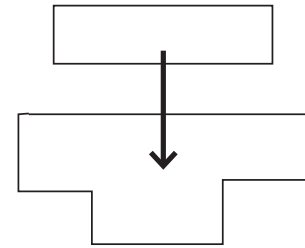
Recreation centers can be thought of as a place for children, but the Vare community wants to encourage the use of space by all ages as a way to build stronger intergenerational relationships.

KEY FEEDBACK + SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS



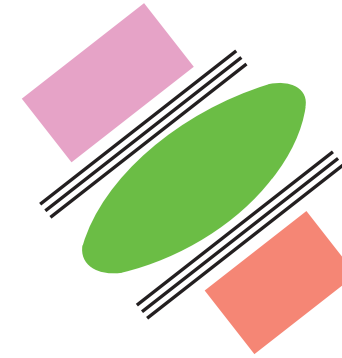
KEEP POOL, ADD SPLASHPAD

SCHEMES A + C



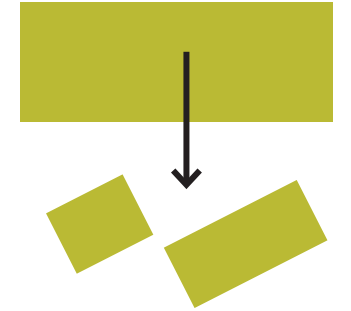
EXPAND THE BUILDING FOOTPRINT

SCHEMES A + B + C + D



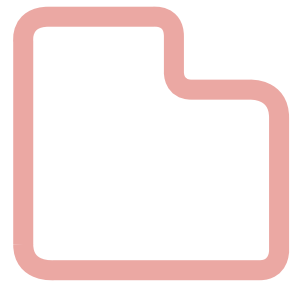
NATURAL SPACE PRIVACY + DELINEATION OF SPACE

SCHEMES B + C



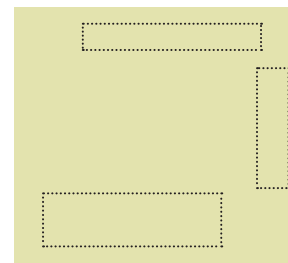
DECENTRALIZE / ADD SPORTS FIELDS

SCHEMES A + B + C + D



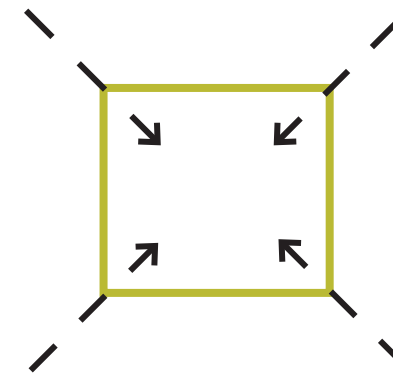
IMPLEMENT AN EXERCISE TRACK

SCHEME A



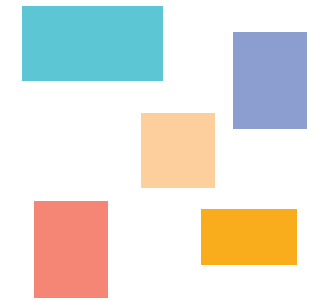
EXPLORE ALTERNATE BUILDING LOCATIONS

SCHEMES A + B + C + D



ACTIVATED THRESHOLDS AT STREET CORNERS

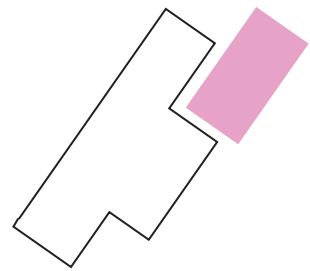
SCHEMES A + B + C



MORE DIVERSE OUTDOOR PROGRAMS

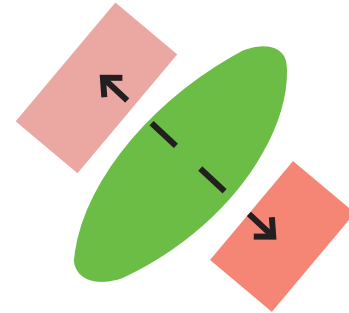
SCHEMES A + B + C + D

KEY FEEDBACK + SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS



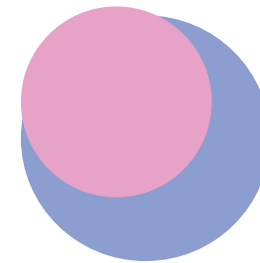
WEIGHT PLAYGROUND CLOSE TO BUILDING

SCHEMES A + B + C + D



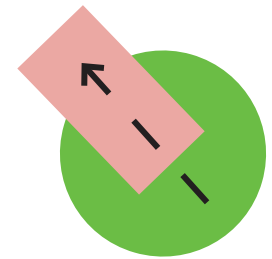
PASSIVE SPACE AS BUFFERS

SCHEMES B + C



USE PLAYGROUNDS AS LEARNING GROUNDS

SCHEMES A + B



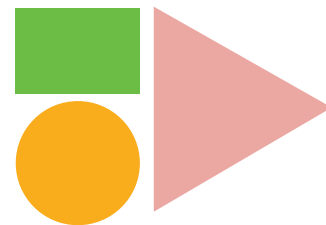
INCORPORATE NATURE INTO PLAYGROUNDS

SCHEMES A + B + C



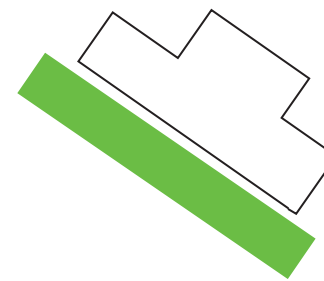
WEIGHT ACTIVE SPACES TOGETHER

SCHEME B



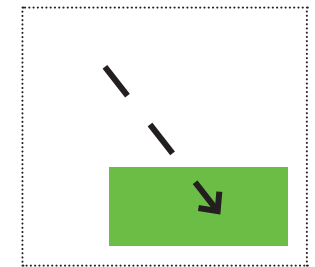
GROUP MARKET + NATURAL + PASSIVE SPACE

SCHEMES B + C



ACTIVATED BUILDING EDGES WITH VEGETABLE GARDENS

SCHEME B + C



MOVE ACTIVE AREAS TO SOUTHEASTERN EDGE

SCHEMES B + C + D

LANDSCAPE



STOOP LOVE

+



FOREGROUNDING COMMUNITY

=



SOCIAL COHESION

OVERALL SITE PLAN

Active Recreation Field: 7,100 SF

- Artificial turf field
- Bleachers / other seating elements for game viewing

Shaded Gathering Space: 1,250 SF

- Requested by community members so that outdoor gatherings could take place during rainy weather or to provide shade in the summer

Pool (inclusive of pool deck): 10,700 SF

- Listed as the utmost priority of community members to include a new pool facility

Basketball Courts + Performance Venue: 13,500 SF

- 2 full courts included at the request of PPR and community members so that league play or multiple games could occur
- Angled courts allow for more interstitial seating space for game viewing and lounging
- Community emphasized the ability to use this space for performances beyond active recreational programming

Relaxation + Multi-Generational Space: 6,600 SF

- Includes passive seating areas and gaming areas, such as ping pong and chess tables
- Combination of planters surrounded by seat walls (northern side) and lower planted areas, depending on the adjacent use and anticipated pedestrian activity, to be further developed in DD

Inclusive Playground: 8,300 SF

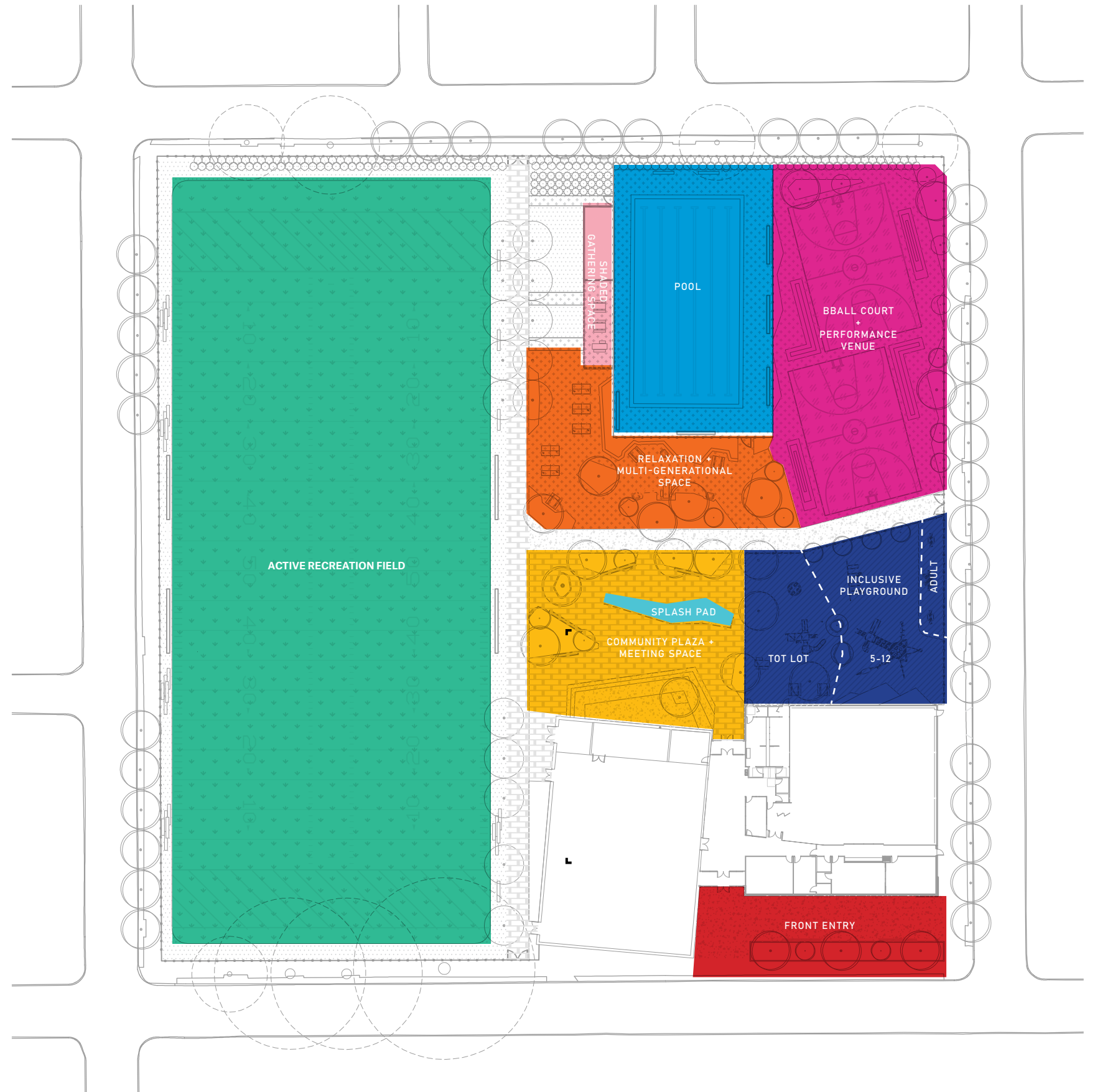
- Includes dedicated 3,100 SF tot lot, 4,500 SF for young people ages 5-12, and 700 SF for adult fitness
- Equipment will be further refined in coordination with community during DD, but currently holds space for 4 swings, two large play structures, and a climbing wall at minimum; three pieces of adult athletic equipment are included
- Young people in the community have noted they would particularly like spaces to jump/bounce, climb, slide, and lounge

Community Plaza + Meeting Space: 9,300 SF

- Includes 525 SF splash pad, and 1,700 SF community seating place / "stoop" (to be further refined in DD)
- The community seating space allows for views over the site, with the plaza serving as the main space for community gatherings outdoors

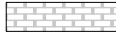







Front Entry: 4,400 SF

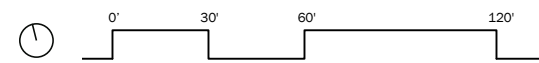
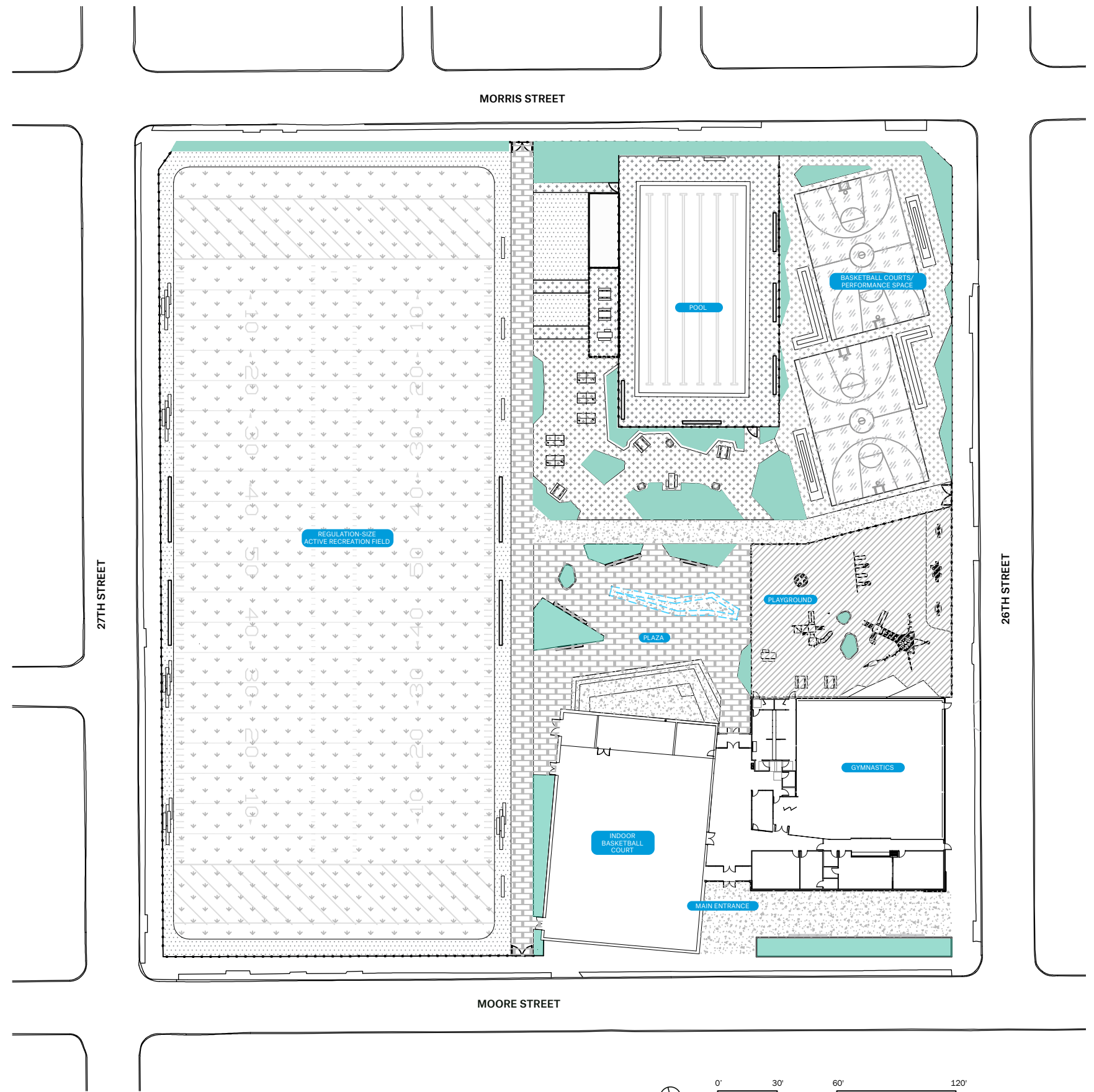
- Minimal seating spaces and at-grade planted areas will allow for a welcoming entrance while maintaining clear site lines
- Community members expressed that this space should be vibrant, but should not be treated as a gathering space



*see pg 23 for updated building layout

MATERIALS

-  BRICK PAVING
-  CONCRETE PAVING - APPLICATION ONE
-  CONCRETE PAVING - APPLICATION TWO
-  GRAVEL FINES
-  POURED IN PLACE RUBBER
-  ASPHALT
-  PLANTING AREA
-  ARTIFICIAL TURF



*see pg 23 for updated building layout

MATERIALS

proposed palette

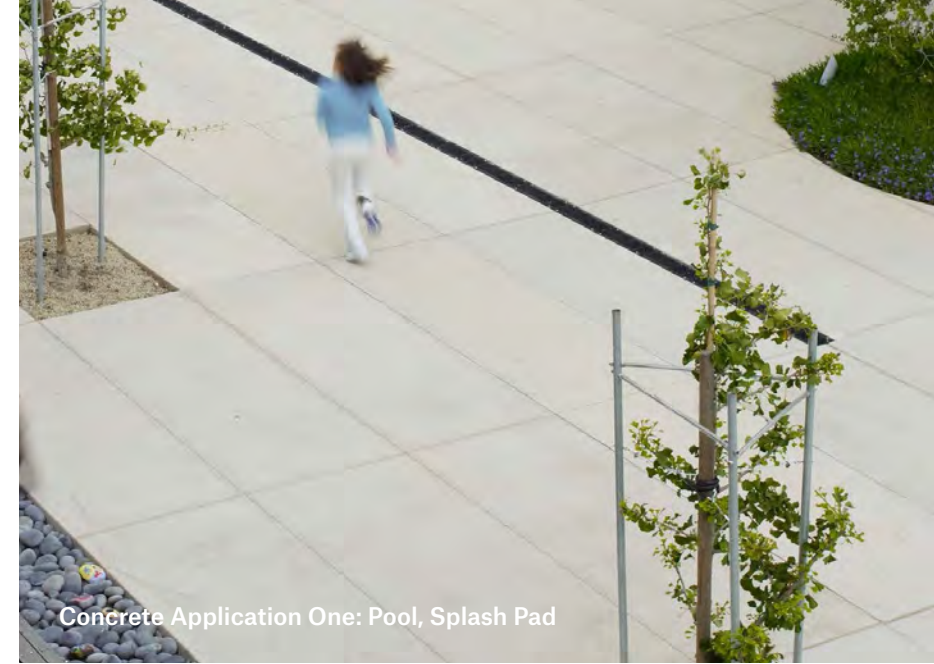
We propose a simple, familiar, and low-maintenance materials palette for the Vare Recreation site. This set of materials was formulated to pay homage to the current building and local vernacular while still updating the feel of the space to be more intentional in delineation between ground materials. Special consideration was taken to ensure universal accessibility throughout the site, and materials that will wear well and be easily maintained.

Spaces such as the courtyards, deck around the pool, front entry, and seating areas will be a combination of brick and colored concrete with exposed aggregate. The playground will be surfaced with either poured-in-place rubber, rubber mulch, or a similar material that meets Parks' requirements and safety concerns.

Where possible and appropriate, locally- and sustainably-sourced materials will be prioritized. The brick walkways will ideally be salvaged from the existing structure to both save cost and symbolize the continued life of the Vare Recreation Center, in its old and new forms.



Reclaimed brick: axial pathway + courtyard space



Concrete Application One: Pool, Splash Pad



Concrete Application Two: Pathways, Building Entrance



Poured-in-place rubber: play area



Painted Asphalt: basketball court

PLANTING

The overall planting strategy is one of promoting beautiful native plants while providing a low-maintenance landscape with a long lifespan. In general, the planting can be simplified to three main treatments or zones:

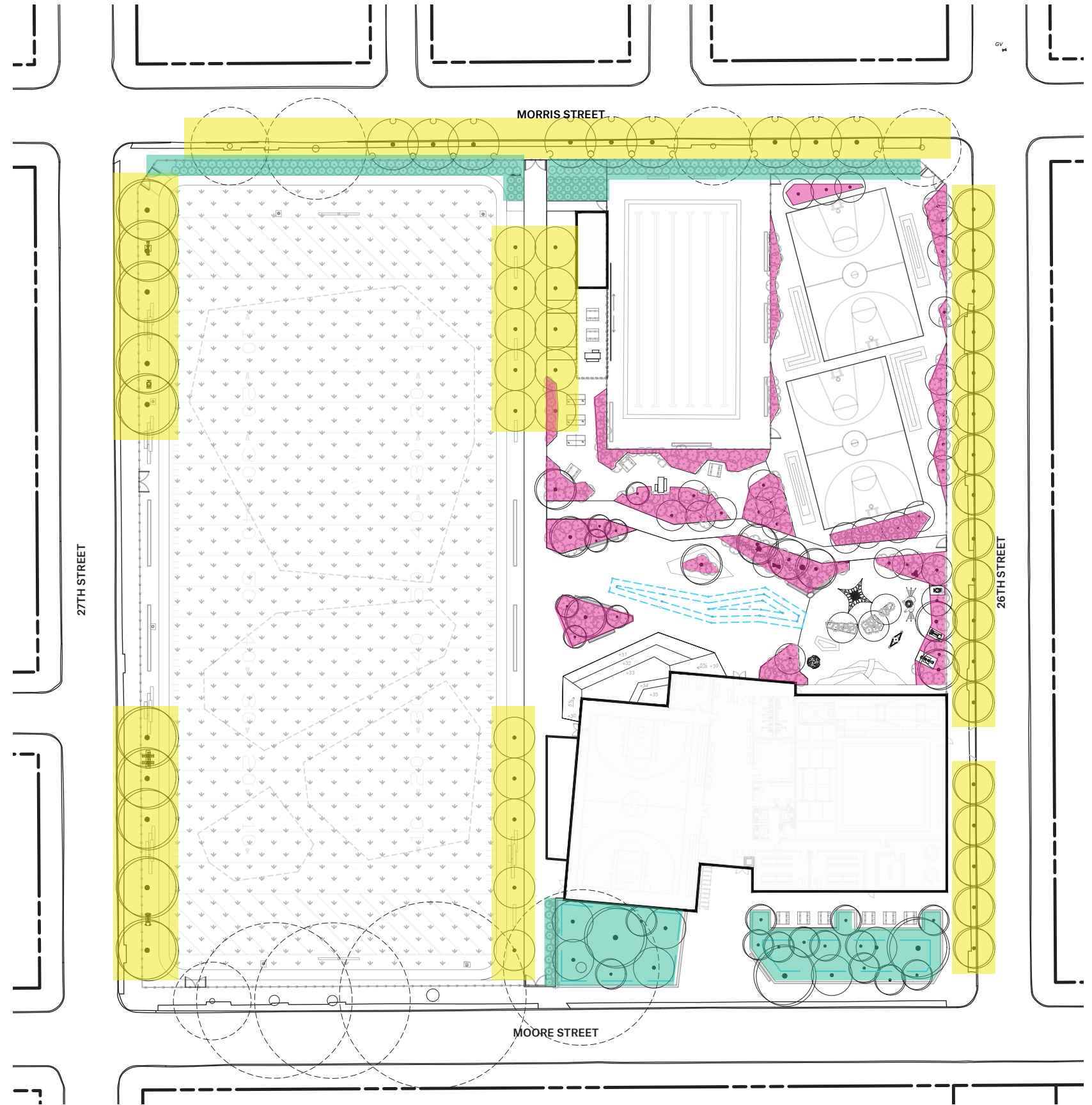
Zone 1: Stormwater Gardens
This zone is concentrated along the street and the sides of the building to maximize stormwater management and capture runoff from the building's roof. This zone will use techniques, planting palettes, and best practices developed through the Green City, Clean Waters initiative.

Zone 2: Seating and Play Spaces
This zone, interspersed throughout in the smaller, more human-scale portions of the site, will be focused on native species and beautiful, lush plantings. The planting around the playground provides sensory and tactile opportunities for environmental learning.

Zone 3: Allees and Street Adjacent Trees
Along the main north-south axis of the site, structural multi-stem trees will line the pathway to provide a visually unique and interesting space to relax. All shade trees along the perimeter of the football field will be selected from Philadelphia Parks and Recreation approved street tree list.

 Synthetic Turf

 Existing trees to be protected in place if the City Arborist deems them healthy.



PLANTING

proposed palette: seating and play spaces



PLANTING

proposed palette: stormwater
gardens

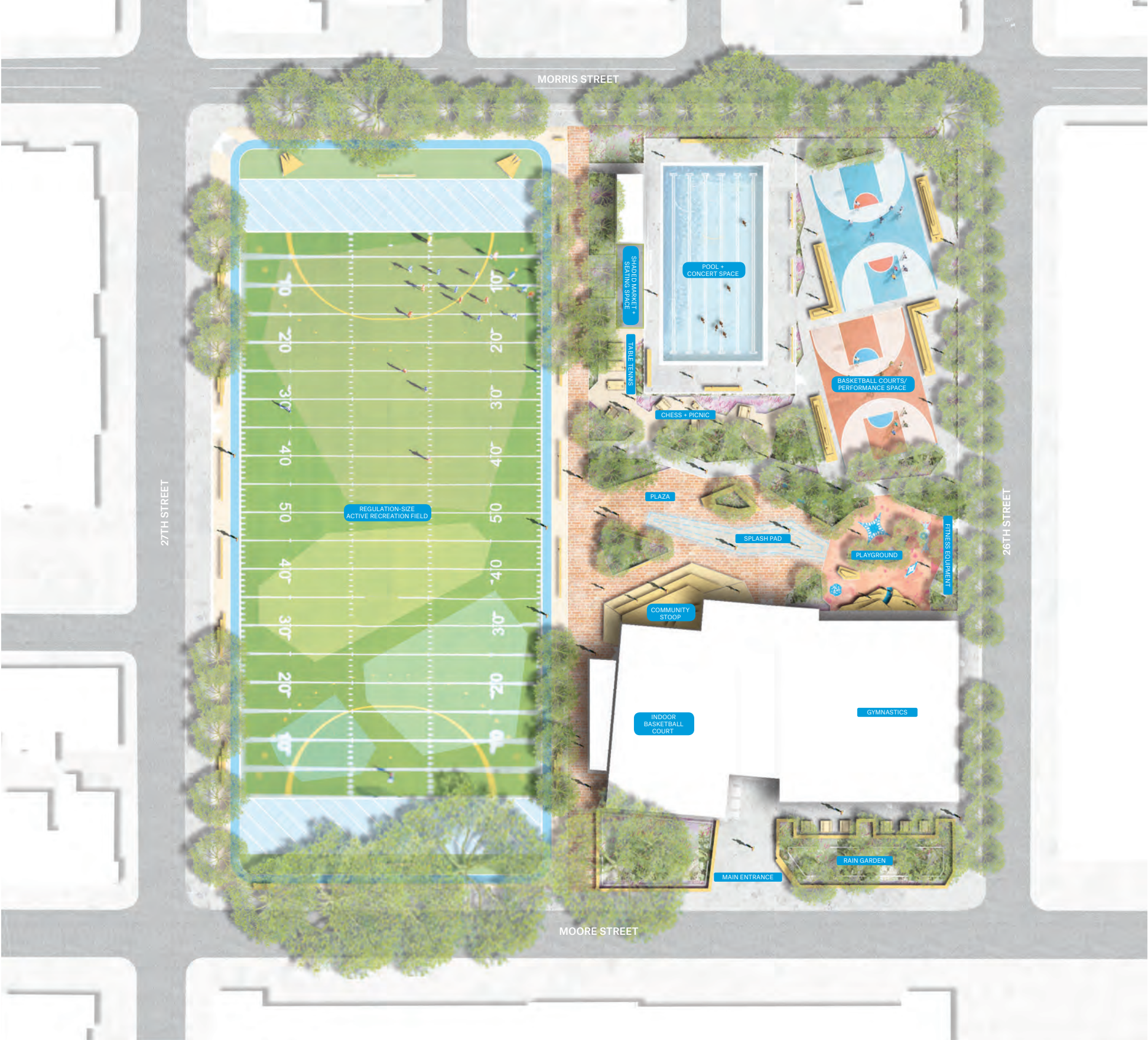


PLANTING

proposed palette: allees and street adjacent trees



ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN



*see pg 23 for updated building layout

PERSPECTIVES

the living street + play areas

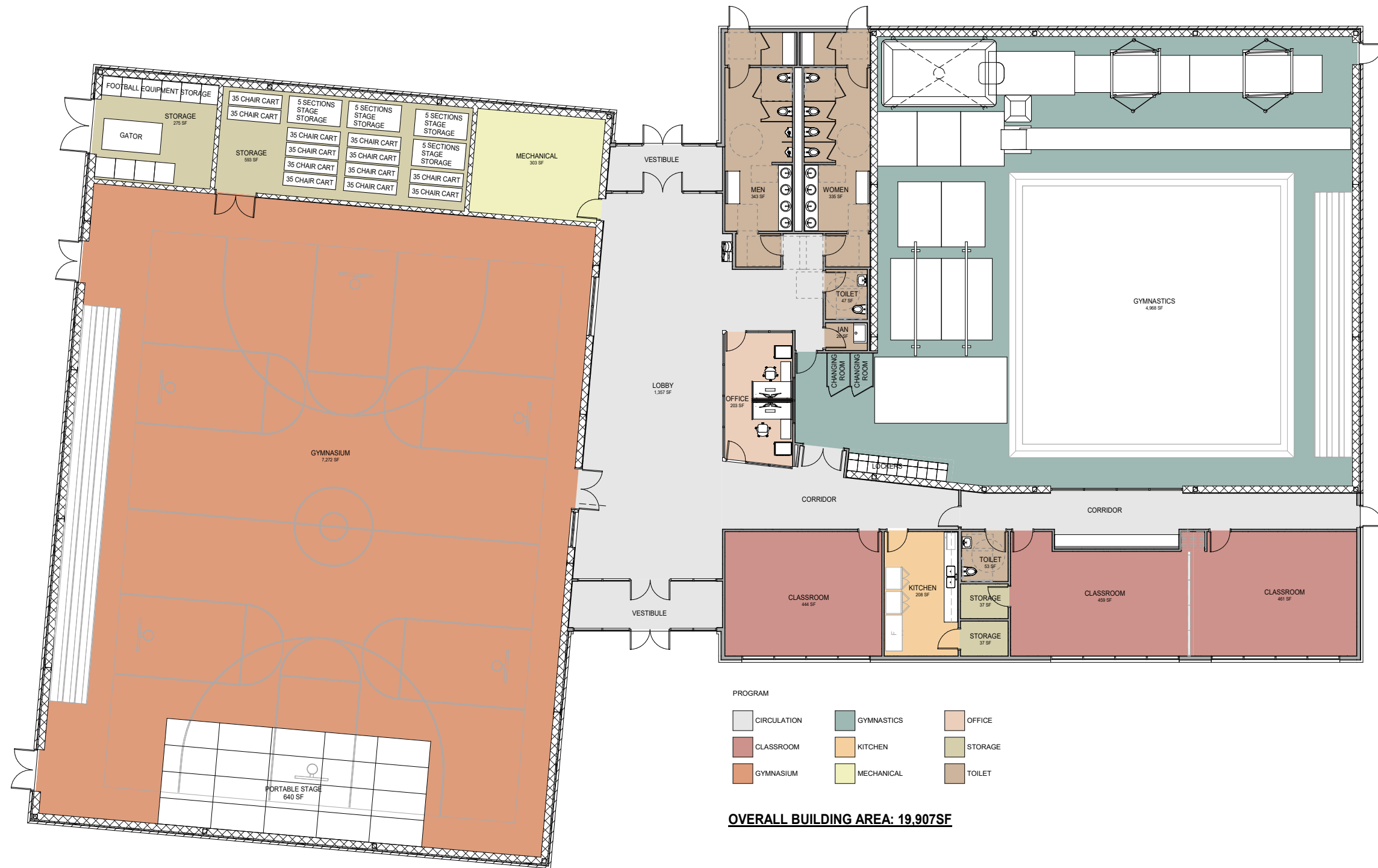


PERSPECTIVES

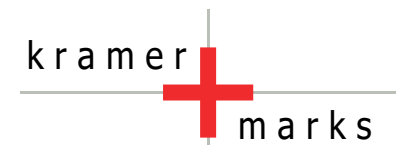
the basketball court + seating



BUILDING LAYOUT

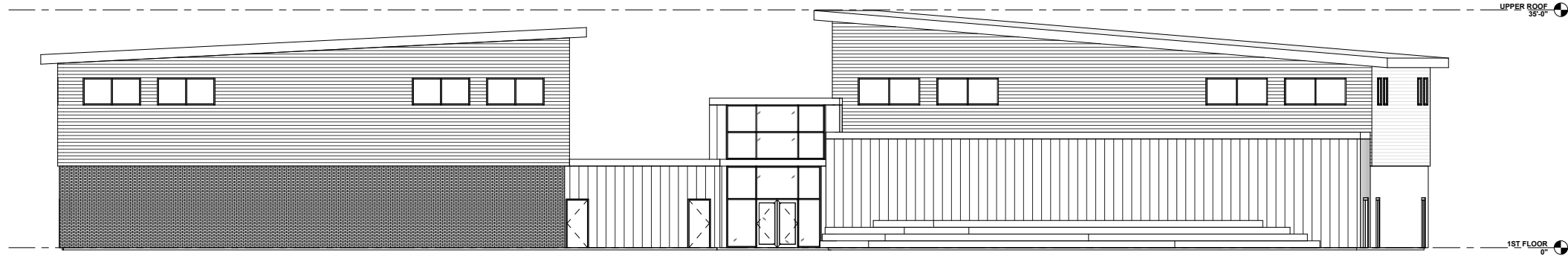


PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN - OPTION F VARE RECREATION CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

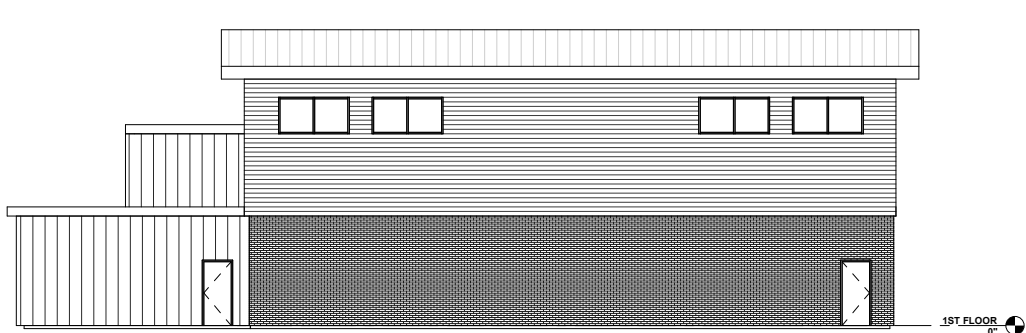


1/8" = 1'-0" 0" 4'-0" 8'-0" **ARCHITECTS**

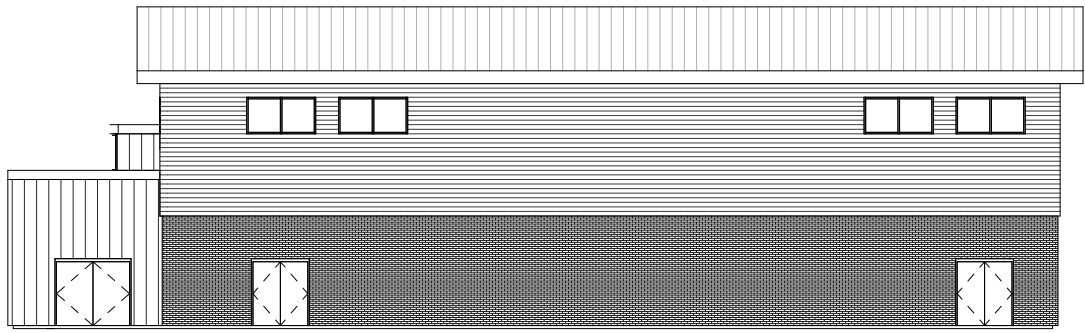
BUILDING ELEVATIONS



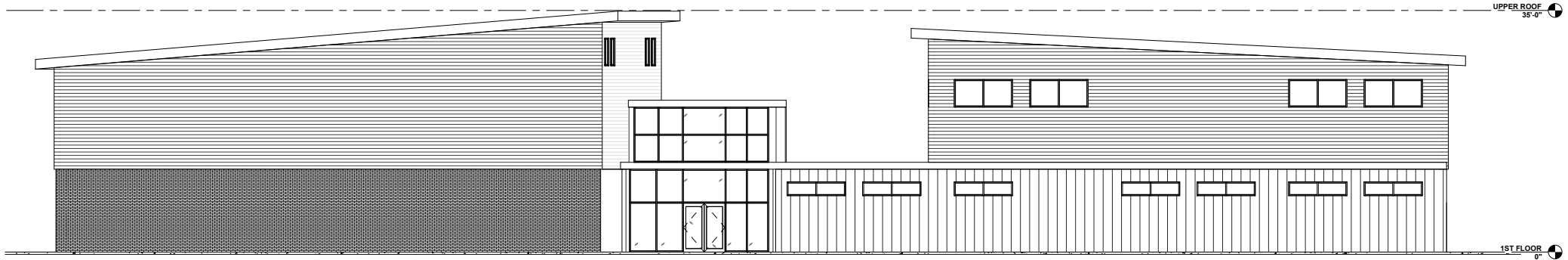
NORTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION

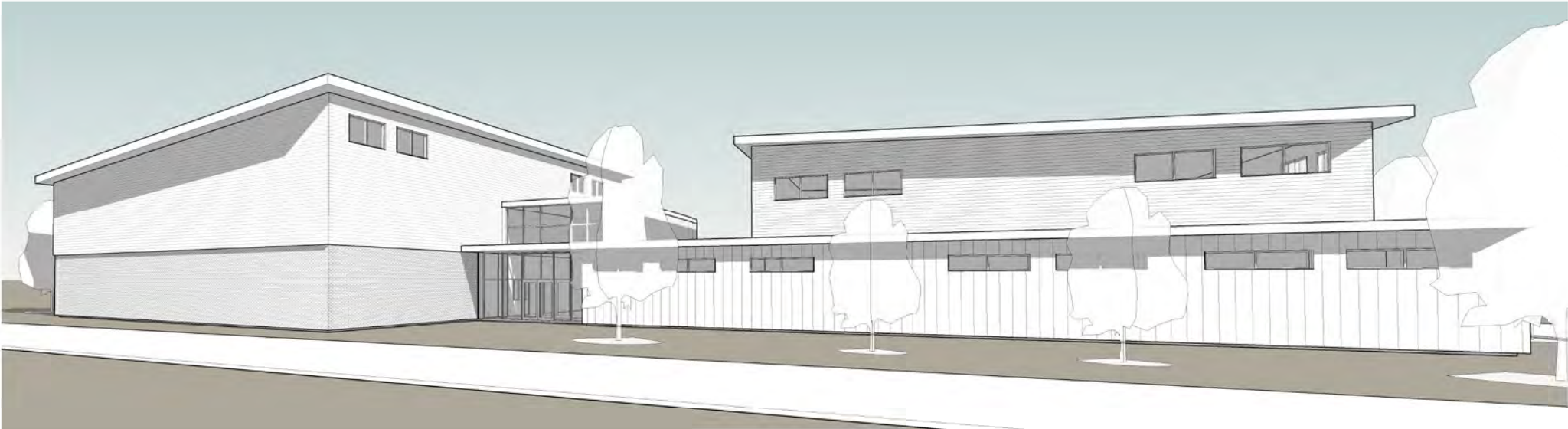


WEST ELEVATION

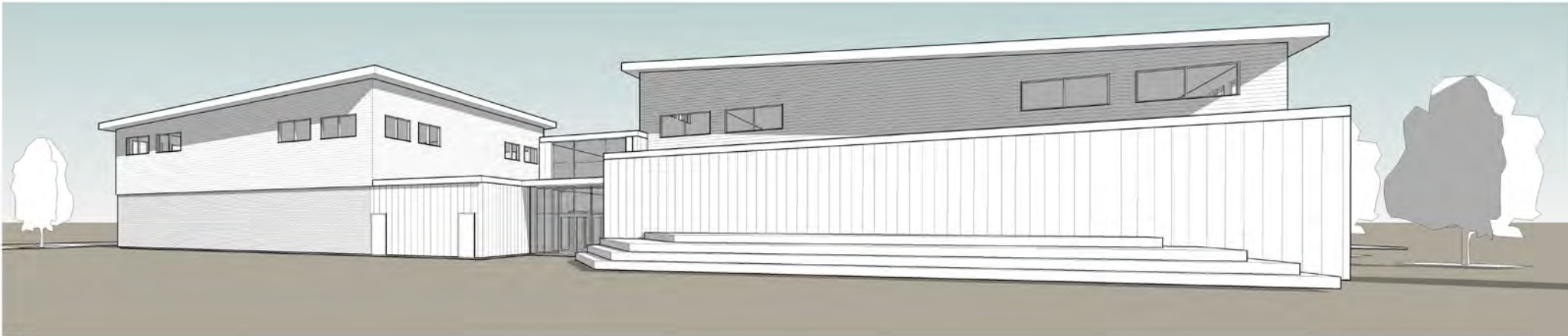


SOUTH ELEVATION

BUILDING PERSPECTIVES



FRONT APPROACH



REAR APPROACH

MATERIALS, INTERIORS

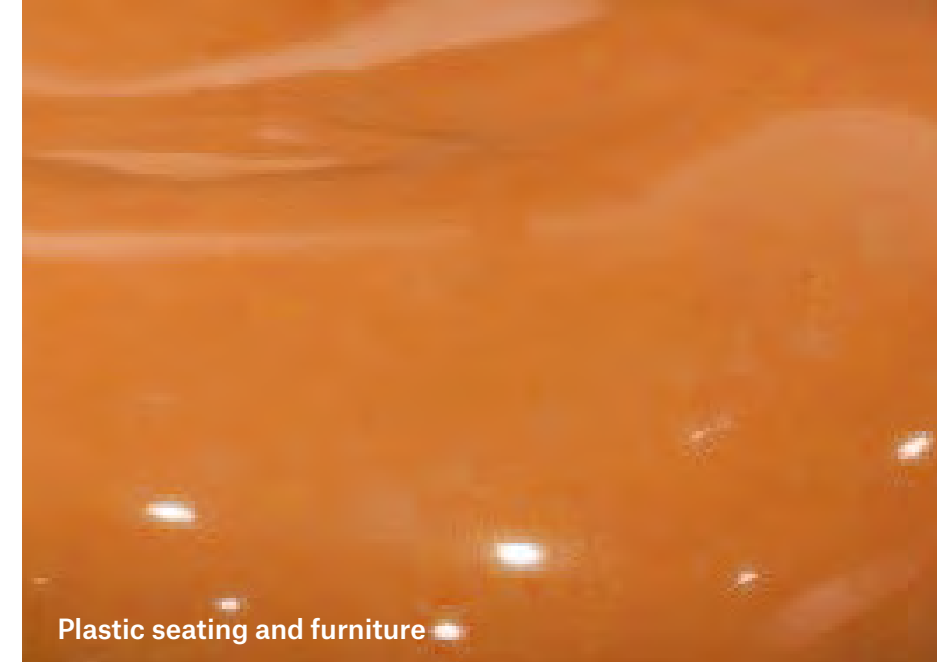
proposed palette

Interior

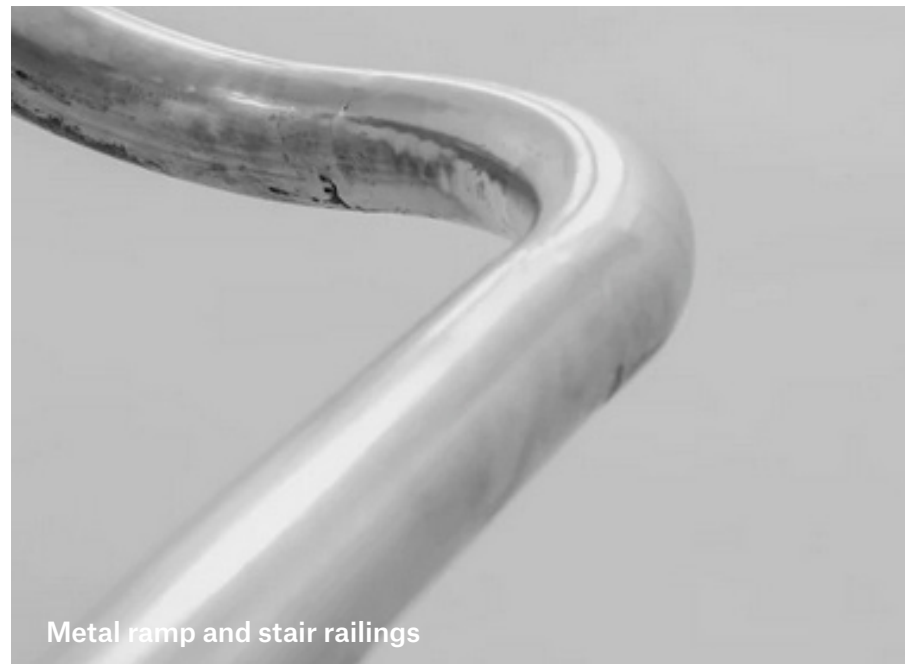
The materials selected for the interior of the building are chosen for maximum resilience and durability and ease of maintenance and cleaning. The wall finishes proposed throughout are a wainscot of polished block construction for the reachable / contact areas and a painted impact-resistant wall board above. Terrazzo tile flooring will serve as the lobby, and stair flooring. Floor finishes may be reduced to vinyl flooring in low visibility areas or areas of lower importance. Stair railings will be stainless steel, and exposed ceiling structure and decking will contain a pre-painted finish to reduce the need for repaints. Furniture selections will be from molded plastics or durable fabrics that resist damage from wear or vandalism.



Block wall and paint finish



Plastic seating and furniture



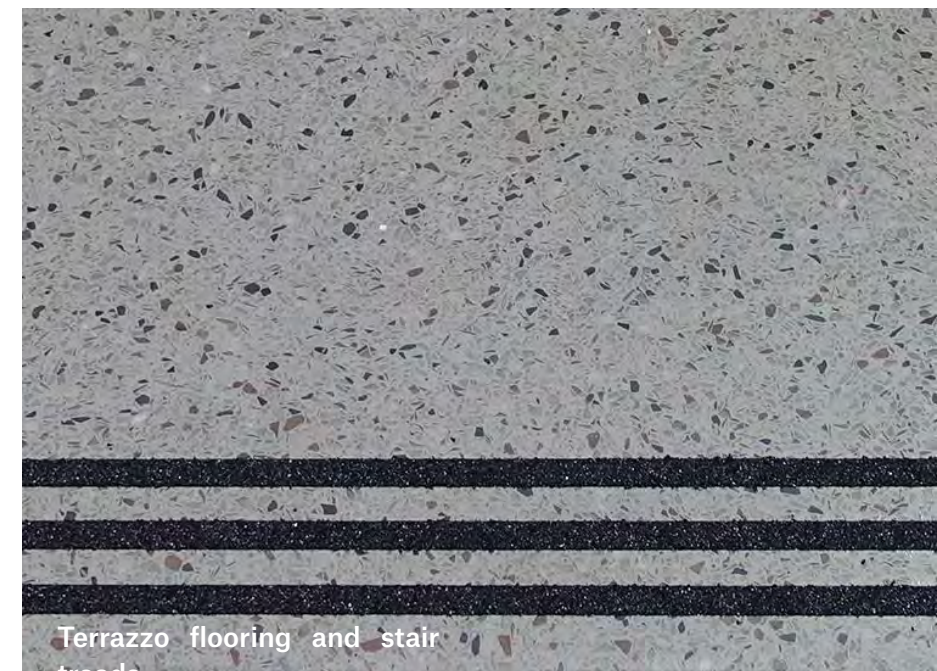
Metal ramp and stair railings



Painted metal ceiling and structure



Athletic flooring



Terrazzo flooring and stair treads

MATERIALS, EXTERIOR

proposed palette

Exterior

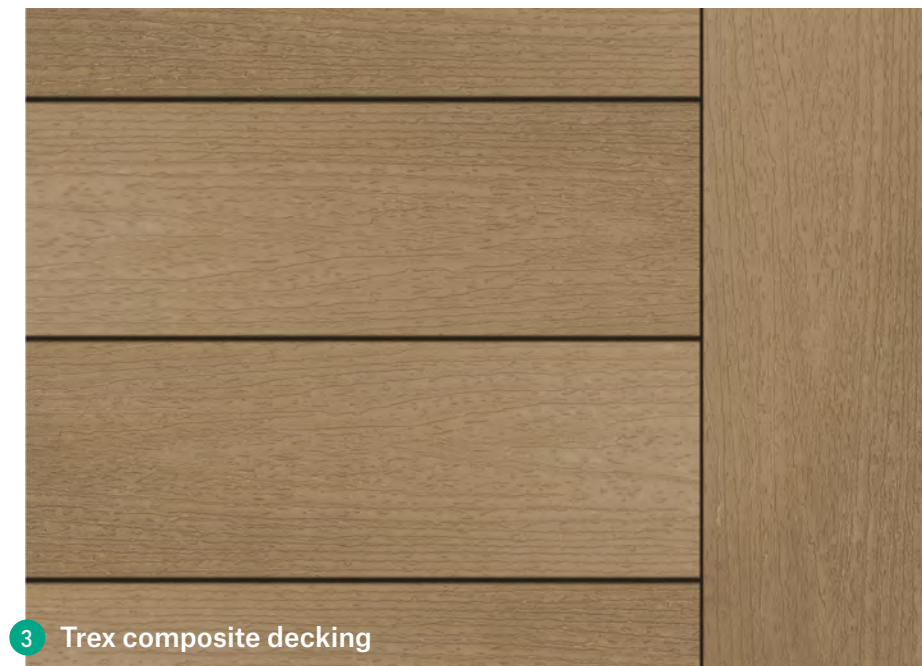
The materials selected for the exterior of the building are chosen for their ability to withstand natural elements as well as potential damage from vandals. Wrapping the perimeter of the building base is concrete masonry which creates a protective shell that is easy to maintain. Corrugated aluminum siding applied to the walls is proposed for the areas that are out of reach of impacts and graffiti. Much of the site-work will be done in poured concrete forms, and the proposed amphitheater on the rear of the structure will be built of a softer plastic composite wood-simulating material like Trex decking.



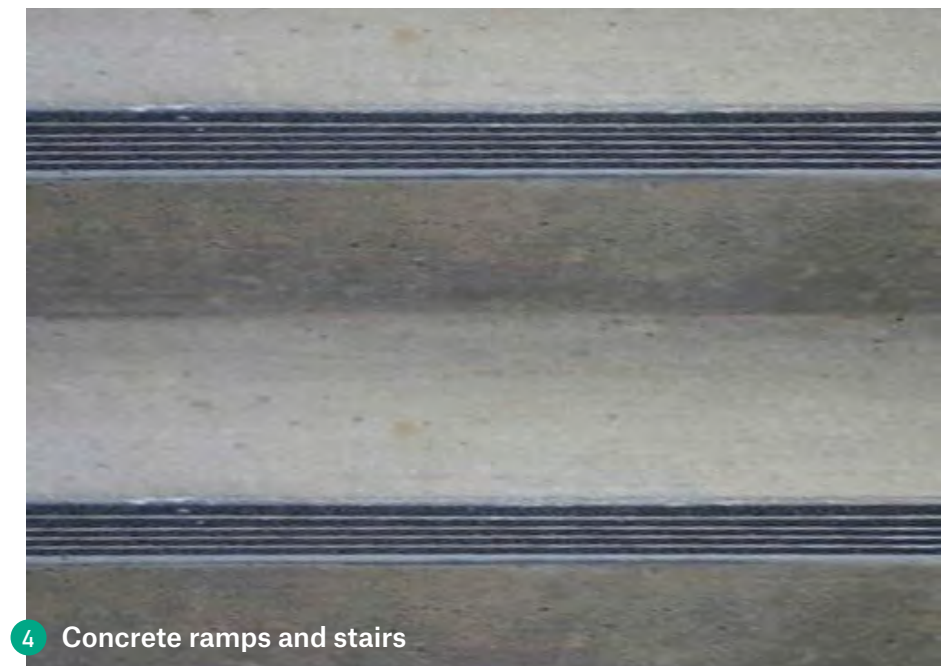
1 Concrete masonry



2 Aluminum siding



3 Trex composite decking



4 Concrete ramps and stairs



5 Graystone

PERSPECTIVES



PERSPECTIVES



FRANK 2020

PERSPECTIVES



FRAMA 2020

*see pg 23 for updated building layout

VARE

RECREATION CENTER
ART COMMISSION PACKAGE

Submitted by: Make the World Better Foundation