

Rebecca Howard park

Park development plan



Timeline

2018 - City of Olympia purchased the property for economic development purposes.

2020 - During the Black Lives Matters protests the focus for the site shifted from housing to healing to provide a safe place for community members to find peace, connection and belonging. A stakeholder committee of interested City staff and community members was formed to imagine what this space could be.

2021 - The property is transferred to the Olympia Parks Department to develop into a park. The stakeholder group develops the park purpose and goal statement.

2023 - The stakeholder group creates an early conceptual site layout with inspiration images to start bringing ideas together

2024 - The City embarks on a Park Development Plan process to guide future park development.





STEERING COMMITTEE

of Black Cultural Advocates met 9 times throughout the planning process to co-design public engagement, review engagement outcomes, and give feedback on design.



COMMUNITY DESIGN ADVOCATES (CDAs)

were hired into the project team to build relationships, lead activities like community events and event tabling, and help the project team remain responsive to community priorities.



OLYMPIA'S BLACK RESIDENTS

were invited into the project through a variety of community celebrations, workshops, tabling events, online surveys, and one-on-one conversations.

IN PHASE 2, WE ASKED...

How can we build on the vision of the previous stakeholder group? How can we invite more people into this process without discarding past work?

Who else do we need to reach?

What forms of transparency and commitment does the City need to demonstrate in order for new people to confidently join this process?

IN PHASE 3, WE ASKED...

What stories should be told about Black communities in Olympia + Thurston County? How could those stories be displayed?

What do you think about these design options? How can the park honor Black history, community, + culture?

IN PHASE 4, WE ASKED...

What would you change about this design?

What symbols represent Olympia's Black culture?

How can storytelling engage people of all ages?



Stakeholder Meeting Oct '24



Community Visioning Workshop April '25



Olympia Juneteenth June '25

HOW WE REACHED PEOPLE

We used a range of methods to reach people, working to meet people where they already were and gather community for special events. Community events particularly focused on activating the park site.

In-Person

- Public Workshop
- Focus Group
- Community Events
 - Juneteenth
 - Read the Park
 - Rebecca Howard Mural Unveiling
- Tabling at Community Meetings + Events
 - Summer of Soul Film Screening
 - Reparations Panel Discussion
 - Pop-up Black History Museum
 - NAACP of Thurston County Meetings
 - Growing Home Collective Meetings
- Paper Surveys
- Flyering in Black-owned Businesses + Community Spaces

Digital

- Surveys on Engage Olympia
- Online Meetings
- Storytelling Website
- Social Media

<https://engage.olympiawa.gov/rebecca-howard-park-plan>



Photos of Ancestors:



THE PURPOSE & GOALS OF REBECCA HOWARD PARK ARE ...

-  **To celebrate, honor, and recognize the local history and contributions** of our African American and Black community members.
-  **To find common ground with each other through storytelling, performance and art** - especially stories, performances, and art from, or promoted by and led by our African American and/or Black community members.
-  **To provide a safe place for peace and healing**, that honors representation and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion.
-  **To promote equity, respect, and learning** as we build community together.
-  **To build strong connections** with the surrounding neighbors and organizations.

Photos of present day community:



EMBRACED BY ANCESTORS



- **Circular forms** evoke connection between past, present and future, a welcoming embrace, gathering in community
- **Flexible spaces** support gathering at many scales: large celebrations, small group meetings, quiet solitude + reflection
- **Expansive design** extends beyond the site to the festival street + Downtown Olympia Timberland Library
- Many mediums + spaces to elevate **Black artists, histories, and live storytelling + performance**



1. **cafe + community hub** for indoor gathering + workshops
2. **porch + stage** for outdoor seating + performances
3. **lawn** for large gatherings + day-to-day relaxing
4. **garden** for quiet contemplation + reflection
5. **gathering circle** for smaller group meetings
6. **festival street** that can be closed off for special events
7. **reading nook** near the library for storytimes + workshops

IN THE PARK THERE IS A...

GATHERING CIRCLE

“[...]circular sitting spaces - being able to see everyone’s faces at once, it naturally builds community.”

“A circle connects us as a human community...[it] includes everyone and circles are historic gathering spaces.”

PLANTING TEXTURES

Small trees and shrubs create a soft, fragrant screen and provide shade while showcasing Black cultural and local native plants:

- Blue elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *cerulea*)
- Coral Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*)
- Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*)
- Anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)
- Oval-leaf blueberry (*Vaccinium ovalifolium*)

VISUALIZING THE GATHERING CIRCLE

IMAGINE... A cozy seating nook surrounded by shady trees and fragrant planting, with colorful artwork and local Black stories on every surface—this space invites conversation and storytelling, learning and connection, and quiet relaxation.



IN THE PARK THERE IS A...

GARDEN

“Spiritual connection to the land was + continues to be fundamental to Black communities.”

“I’d like to see a section for medicinal plants important to Black culture in the garden.”

PLANTING TEXTURES

Educational signage highlights Black land stewards and celebrates plants that embody Black memory, joy, and healing: vegetables, peppers, tubers, peas + grains, greens, fruit trees + vines, and herbs.

*For a complete list of plants recommended by a focus group of gardeners and farmers, see appendix.

VISUALIZING THE GARDEN

IMAGINE... A meditative walk surrounded by plants that honor the connections between Black people and the land—this garden invites visitors to explore, learn about the rich histories of Black land stewardship, and take a moment for rest and reflection among the plants.



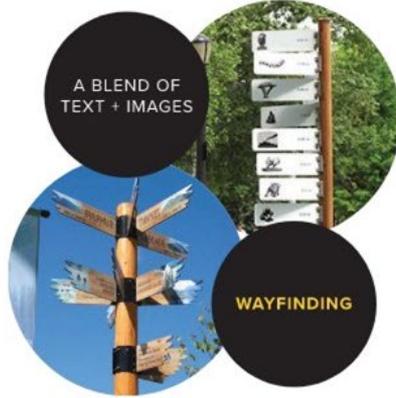
FESTIVAL STREET



SITE STORYTELLING + ART ACTIVATION



PATHWAYS



A BLEND OF
TEXT + IMAGES

WAYFINDING

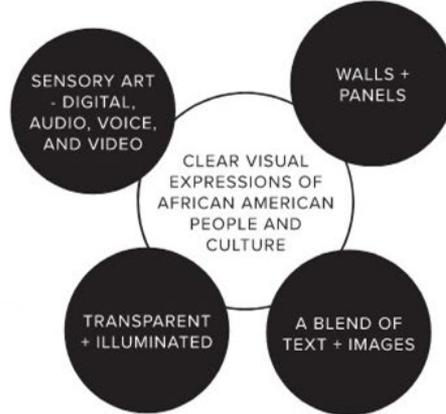


COLORFUL +
JOYFUL

SCULPTURE



PLANT ID

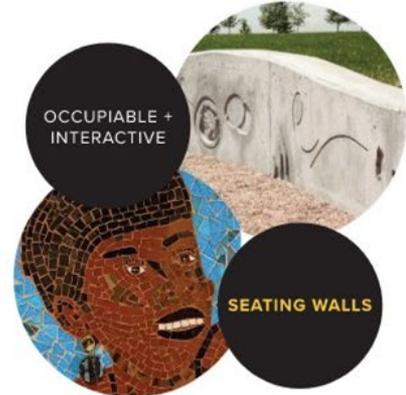


CLEAR VISUAL
EXPRESSIONS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN
PEOPLE AND
CULTURE

WALLS +
PANELS

TRANSPARENT
+ ILLUMINATED

A BLEND OF
TEXT + IMAGES



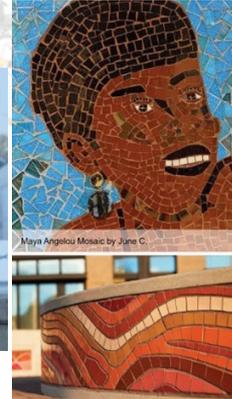
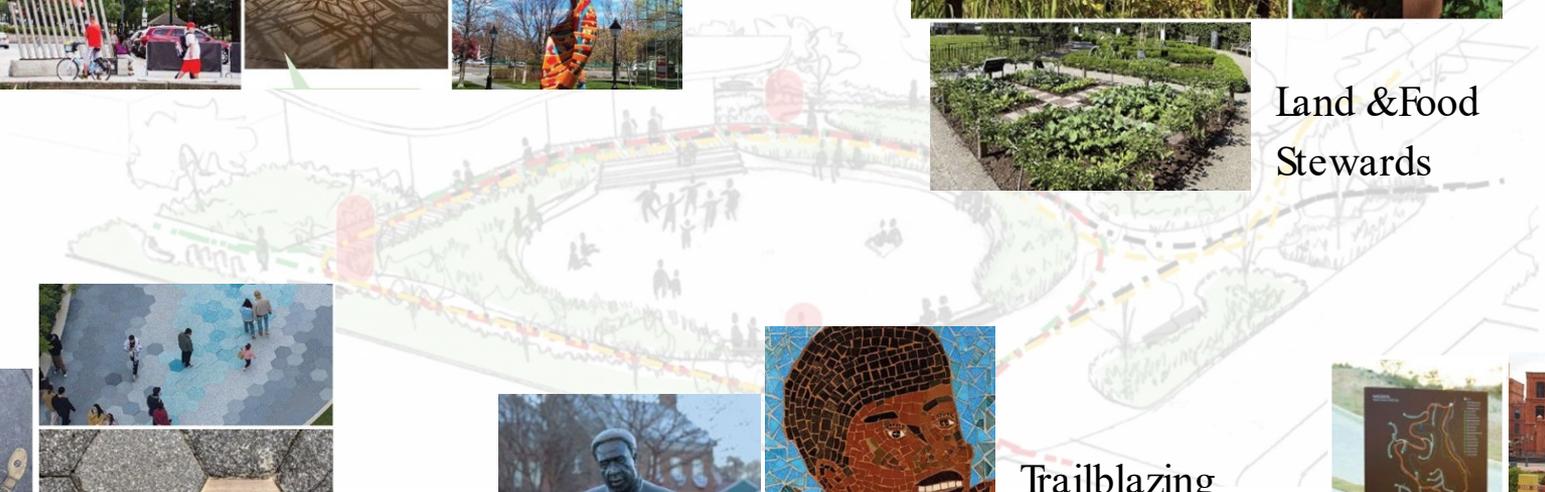
OCCUPIABLE +
INTERACTIVE

SEATING WALLS

Creators



Land & Food Stewards



Trailblazing Pioneers

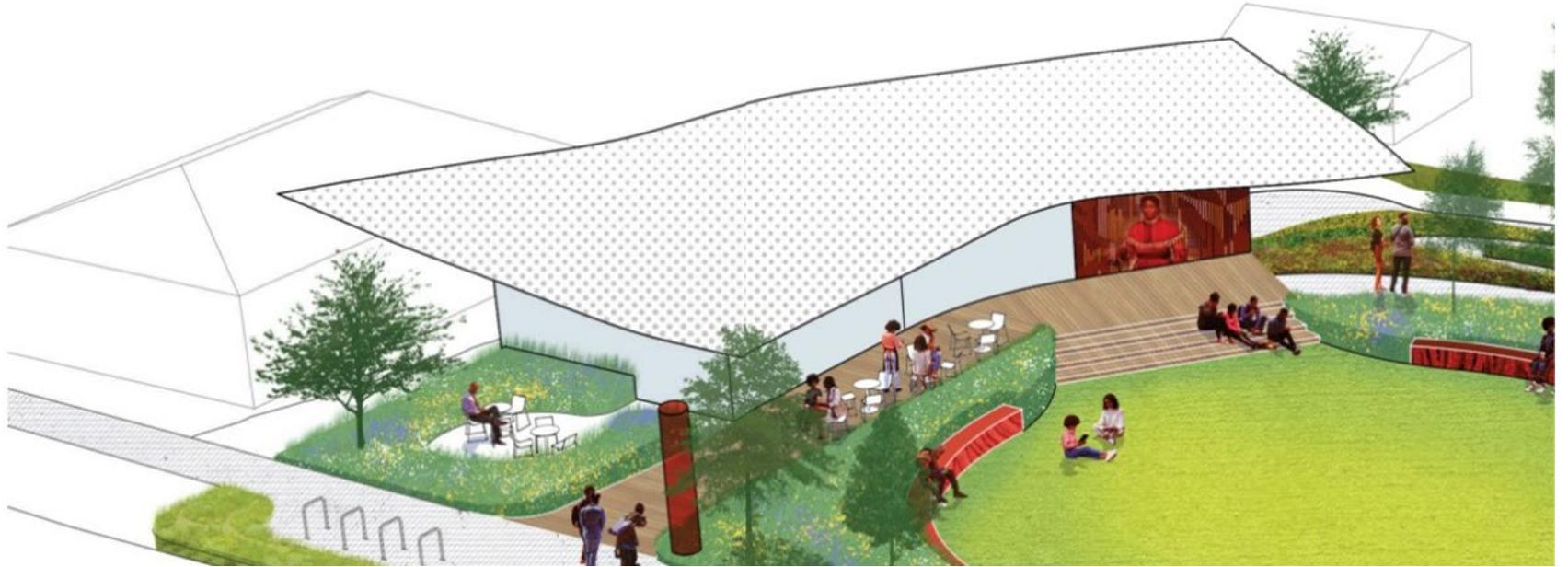


Community Builders

Entrepreneurs

IN REBECCA HOWARD PARK, THERE IS A...

COMMUNITY HUB



IN THE COMMUNITY HUB THERE IS A...

CAFE

“Cafe could host pop-up events and vendors, incubate small businesses”



IN THE COMMUNITY HUB THERE IS A...

MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

“Imagine a Cultural Center that is both indoor and outdoor... A community space for gathering, programming, and education.”

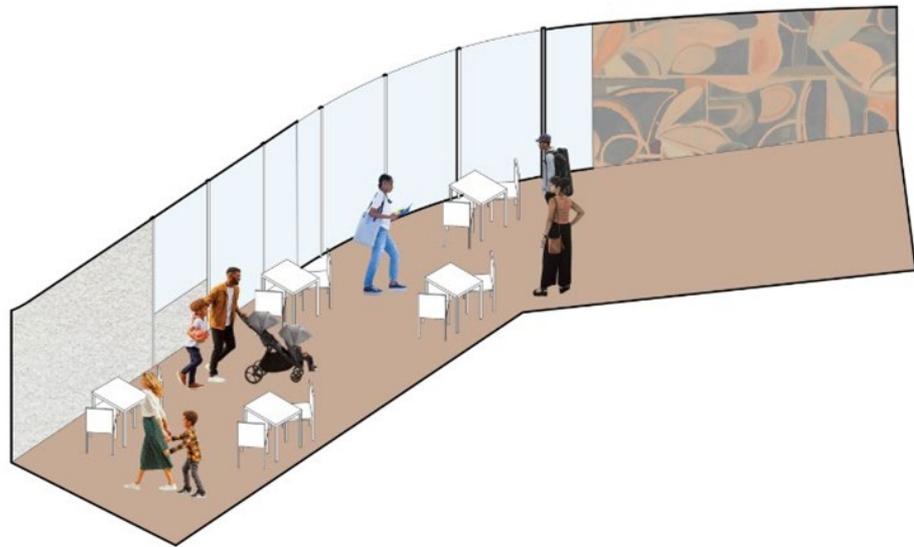


IN THE PARK THERE IS A...

PORCH + STAGE

“[...] sitting out on the stoop people watching/
listening to music vibes”

“[...] shelter on [...] hot sunny days”



Sustainability + Climate Resilience Recommendations

Explore solar + rainwater reuse

Preserve existing trees where possible + add new shade trees

Prioritize natural, permeable, + reused materials

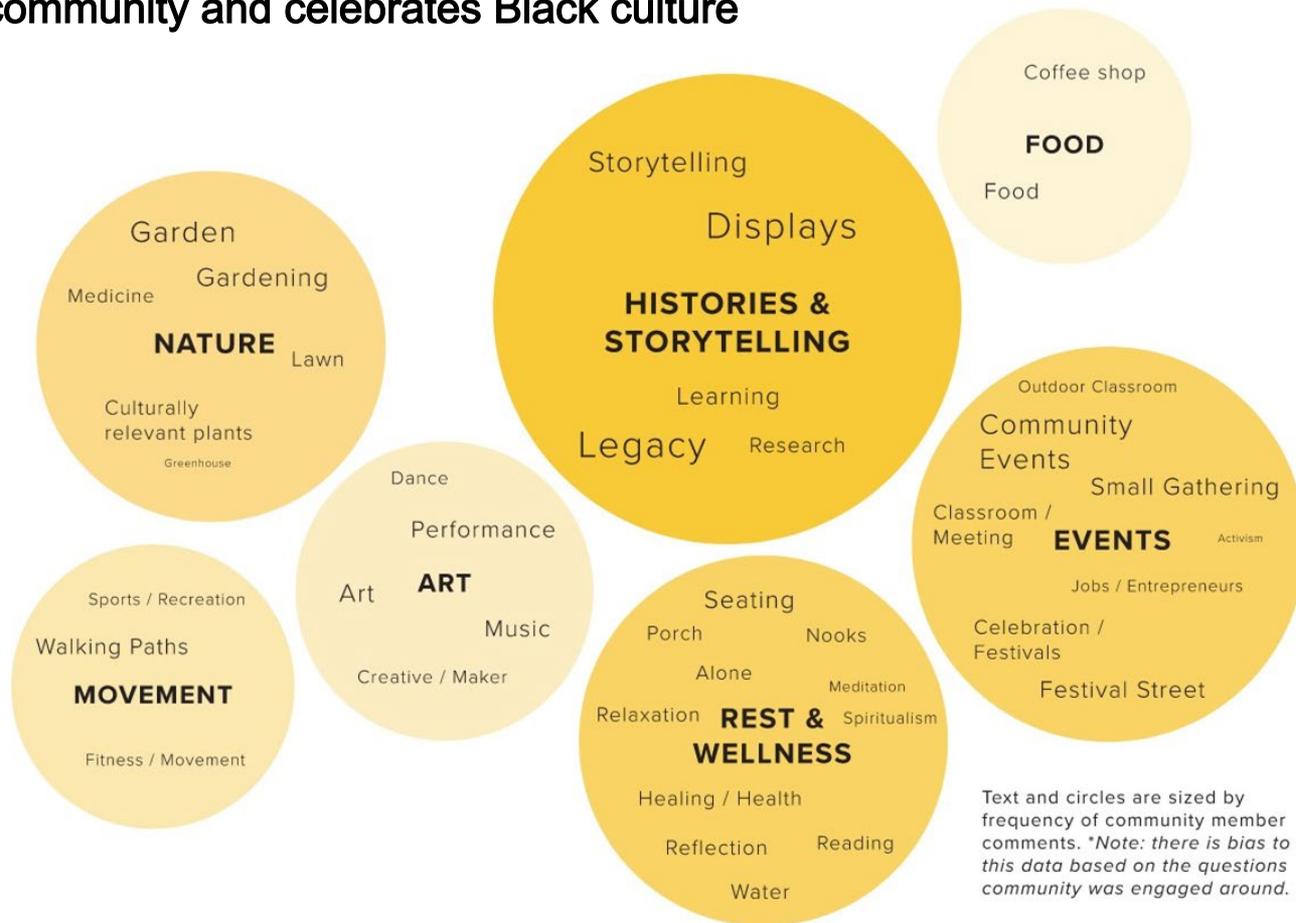
Select drought-tolerant, pollinator-friendly planting, featuring Black cultural plants

Include bike racks, traffic calming, + other bike and pedestrian infrastructure



POTENTIAL PROGRAMMING IDEAS

that builds community and celebrates Black culture



Text and circles are sized by frequency of community member comments. **Note: there is bias to this data based on the questions community was engaged around.*

Cost estimation by phase

PHASE	LOW BUDGET*	HIGH BUDGET*
BUILDING	\$2,437,000	\$2,622,800
PARK	\$1,822,500	\$2,438,200
FESTIVAL STREET	\$1,275,400	\$1,466,700
BUILDING ANNUAL O&M	\$34,500	\$39,700
PARK ANNUAL O&M	\$58,000	\$66,700

*in Jan 2027 dollars

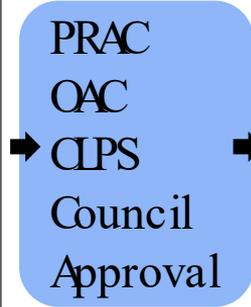
Park Planning Workflow (The Big Picture)



Park Development Plan

Goal: Understand Cost

- Develop design to a conceptual level with community stakeholders
- Understand basic traffic engineering, stormwater, and site grading.
- Obtain a cost estimate.



Apply for Grants

Goal: Obtain Funding for Design Engineering & Construction

Engineered Design

Goal: Construction Ready Drawings

Construction

Goal: Park Built

Identify Grant Opportunities →

Thank you!

Questions + Discussion

