

**HEFFNER PARK COMMUNITY CENTER (M:37-61)
42 OSWEGO AVENUE, SILVER SPRING, MD 20910**



**MASTER PLAN FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DESIGNATION FORM
MAY 2023**

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. NAME OF PROPERTY | 3 |
| 2. LOCATION OF PROPERTY | 3 |
| 3. ZONING OF PROPERTY | 3 |
| 4. TYPE OF PROPERTY | 3 |
| 5. FUNCTION OR USE | 4 |
| 6. DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY..... | 4 |
| 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE..... | 5 |
| A. Applicable Designation Criteria..... | 5 |
| B. Statement of Significance: | 5 |
| Period of Significance..... | 5 |
| C. Significant Dates..... | 5 |
| D. Significant Persons..... | 6 |
| E. Areas of Significance | 6 |
| F. Architect/Builder:..... | 6 |
| G. Narrative: | 6 |
| Historic Context: The Development of Takoma Park’s Black Communities | 6 |
| Historic Context: Lee Jordan (1909 – 1988)..... | 8 |
| Historic Context: Racial Segregation of Parks & Recreational Facilities in Takoma Park (1927-1950).... | 9 |
| Historic Context: Development of the Original Heffner Park (31 Oswego Avenue) 1950 – 1957 | 12 |
| Historic Context: Closure and Relocation of Heffner Park (1954-1959) | 13 |
| Historic Context: Design, Construction, & Use of the Heffner Park Community Center (1957-1960) .. | 16 |
| Historic Context: City of Takoma Park Councilmember Herman C. Heffner (1870 – 1952) | 19 |
| Historic Context: Philip A. Mason, AIA (1922 – 1996)..... | 19 |
| H. Areas Exempt from Designation | 19 |
| I. Designation Criteria: | 20 |
| J. Conclusion:..... | 21 |
| 8. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/GEOGRAPHICAL DATA..... | 22 |
| 9. PROPERTY OWNERS..... | 22 |
| 10. FORM PREPARED BY | 22 |
| 11. MAJOR SOURCES CONSULTED | 22 |
| APPENDIX ONE: ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/GEOGRAPHICAL DATA | 23 |

APPENDIX TWO: DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION 25

APPENDIX THREE: HISTORIC MAPS..... 26

APPENDIX FOUR: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS 29

APPENDIX FIVE: EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE HEFFNER PARK COMMUNITY CENTER 33

APPENDIX SIX: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS 40

APPENDIX SEVEN: CHAIN OF TITLE 44

APPENDIX EIGHT: VISUAL TIMELINE OF HEFFNER PARK LOCATIONS 46

APPENDIX NINE: MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES (MIHP) FORM..... 48

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Heffner Park Community Center

Current Name:

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties #: M 37-61

2. LOCATION OF PROPERTY

Address Number and Street: 42 Oswego Avenue, Silver Spring
County, State, ZIP: Montgomery County, Maryland, 20910

3. ZONING OF PROPERTY

R-60: The intent of the R-60 zone is to provide designated areas of the County for moderate density residential uses. The predominant use is residential in a detached house. A limited number of other building types may be allowed under the optional method of development.

4. TYPE OF PROPERTY

A. Ownership of Property

- Private
- Public
- Local
- State
- Federal

B. Category of Property

- Private
- Public
- Local
- State
- Federal

C. Number of Resources within the Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> Buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sites | <input type="checkbox"/> Sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structures | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Objects | <input type="checkbox"/> Objects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological Sites | <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological Sites |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Total | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Total |

D. **Listing in the National Register of Historic Places:** The property has not been evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places.

5. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic Function(s): Recreation/Culture; Social

Current Function(s): Recreation/Culture; Social

6. DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

Site Description: The Heffner Park Community Center is located at 42 Oswego Avenue in Takoma Park, Maryland (App.1, Figure 1). The building retains its historic function as a multipurpose public recreation center operated by the City of Takoma Park’s Department of Recreation. The .74-acre trapezoidal parcel includes the community center and an approximately half-acre recreation area. The parcel slopes to the south, east, and steeply to the west. The property is bound by Oswego Avenue to the east; a single-family dwelling to the south; additional City-owned parkland – now used as a dog park – separated by a steep slope to the west; and a single-family home to the north.

The community center is located in the southeast corner of the site and is set back approximately 50 feet from Oswego Avenue. The façade is oriented to the north, perpendicular to the street. It is accessed by an asphalt drive leading to a parking area along the northern extent of the property. The parcel is fenced on the south, west, and north sides, with only the east side accessible to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. An asphalt path provides access to the recreation area to the west of the building, which includes several non-contributing features: a half basketball court, two playground sets, and a picnic shelter.

Architectural Description: The City of Takoma Park built the Heffner Park Community Center in 1959. The community center is a one-story, cross-gable-roofed building with a utilitarian appearance and general lack of ornamentation that reflects the modest budget allotted for the construction of this facility. The building’s façade faces north, perpendicular to Oswego Avenue. The center consists of the main block and a projecting gable-roofed front porch, recently enclosed, which shelters the double-leaf front door leading to the main multi-purpose room.

The masonry building rests on a continuous parged cinderblock foundation. The painted white cinderblock walls support a cross-gable roof clad in architectural asphalt shingles. Fenestration consists primarily of metal doors and two types of windows: single and paired one-over-one, vinyl-sash, double-hung windows with six-over-six, simulated divided lights and wood sills. Alterations have been made to the fenestration on the north, west, and south elevations. The community center’s projecting front porch was enclosed between 2019 and 2022 using non-historic materials.

See Appendix Two: Detailed Architectural Description for a detailed description of each elevation.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A. Applicable Designation Criteria

The Heffner Park Community Center meets three of the nine designation criteria as described in Chapter 24A: Historic Resources Preservation, Section 24A-3, Montgomery County Code. Section J of this report includes a detailed analysis.

B. Statement of Significance:

The Heffner Park Community Center and recreation area are the results of decades of advocacy by the city's African American residents to demand recreational outlets for Black children in the years preceding the county's public accommodation law, which prohibited discrimination in public facilities in 1962. Takoma Park's Black residents began seeking the City's support for recreation facilities by 1941, at which time the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) operated a growing but segregated recreation program in Montgomery County. Recreational options for Black residents were limited and sub-standard. This discrimination especially impacted children, who were prohibited from public parks and playgrounds and left without suitable places to play.

In the late 1940s to early 1950s, M-NCPPC constructed the segregated Takoma Park Recreation Center—for the City's white residents—as African American residents campaigned for equal access to recreation facilities. The new park provided modern indoor and outdoor recreational amenities on an approximately 13-acre site. In contrast, the Heffner Park Community Center was not built until 1959, after years of upheaval and a change in the park's location. The building's small scale and lack of ornamentation reflect the limited resources set aside in the city budget for a facility primarily intended to serve Black residents.

The Heffner Park Community Center reflects years of activism by Takoma Park's Colored Citizens Association and by community leader Lee Jordan. As President of the Colored Citizens Association (CCA) in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jordan spearheaded the CCA's work and advocacy for the provision of public services to Black communities, including the construction of Heffner Park. Jordan is recognized as one of Takoma Park's most influential figures for his central role in the integration of recreational sports and for his persistent advocacy for the city's Black communities.

Heffner Park Community Center served as a central meeting place for African American residents of Takoma Park and surrounding communities. In particular, the brief but impactful Teen Club offered local Black children their first opportunity to attend dances, play records, and socialize in public facilities like their white peers.

The site's period of significance extends from 1959, the community center's year of construction, through 1962, when Montgomery County adopted its public accommodation law.

Period of Significance

1959 – 1962

C. Significant Dates

1954 (purchase of property), 1959 (construction)

D. Significant Persons

Lee Jordan

E. Areas of Significance

African American Heritage; Recreation

F. Architect/Builder:

Philip W. Mason, AIA/Charles Bang

G. Narrative:

Historic Context: The Development of Takoma Park's Black Communities

Neighborhood Growth

Developer Benjamin Franklin Gilbert founded Takoma Park in 1883 as one of the first railway commuter suburbs of Washington, D.C. Gilbert promoted the community's natural environment and healthy setting with its fresh spring water and rolling topography and its proximity to a new train station on the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad that opened in 1886.¹ That same year, Gilbert expanded the size of the community by 120 acres when he platted "Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park." The opening of streetcar lines furthered the expansion of Takoma Park in the early 20th century. The inexpensive transportation options and the availability of low-cost housing plans in combination with smaller lot sizes made homeownership in Takoma Park possible for white families with more modest income levels than during the previous era.² In 1900, 756 residents lived in Takoma Park.³

Black families started to settle in Takoma Park shortly after the community's founding. In 1896, Louis W. and Grace B. Thomas, the first known Black homeowners in the city, purchased the property at 15 Montgomery Avenue.⁴ The 1900 United States Census listed the Thomas family and seven other Black families who rented property in the community. There were approximately 40 Black residents at that time, who accounted for 5.2 percent of the overall population. Louis and Grace Thomas worked as a caterer and nurse, respectively, and the other adults enumerated in the census primarily worked as day laborers and servants.⁵

By 1920, Takoma Park had increased to 3,168 residents with 644 dwellings and 721 families.⁶ The Black population had grown to 41 households and 221 residents, who accounted for 6.97 percent of the overall population.⁷ African American homeownership increased to 14 families, but most Black residents continued to rent their homes. Records suggest that the Black community known as "the Hill" formed around this time. This neighborhood consisted of an elevated, hilly portion of Takoma Park on Ritchie (formerly Ridge), Geneva, and Oswego Avenues. The eight families (one owner and seven renters,

¹ EHT Traceries, "Takoma Park African American Survey [Draft Report]," September 2022: 11-12.

² National Register of Historic Places, "Takoma Park Historic District," <http://www.mht.maryland.gov>.

³ Department of Commerce, "1900 Census: Volume 1. Population, Part I, Cities, Towns and Boroughs, Tables 6-8," (1901): 455, <http://www.census.gov>.

⁴ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Annie E. Barbour to Louis W. Thomas," December 7, 1896, Liber 55, Folio 325, <http://www.mdlandrec.net>.

⁵ United States Federal Census.

⁶ In 1910, the overall population was 1,242. Department of Commerce, "Population: Maryland, Number of Inhabitants, by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions," (1921): 8, <http://www.census.gov>; Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, State Compendium: Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 26, <http://www.google.com>.

⁷ The number of residents included domestic servants living in white households. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, State Compendium: Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 26, <http://www.google.com>.

totaling approximately 53 residents) who lived on these streets were primarily born in Washington, D.C., Maryland, or Virginia. Their occupations included barbers, laborers, domestic laborers, cooks, and laundresses.

In the 1920s, homeownership in “the Hill” expanded with the acquisition of property by 10 Black families and the establishment of two community institutions. In 1922, Robert E. and Alice E. Dove conveyed present-day 111 Geneva Avenue to trustees William A. Parker, Eva Washington, and Thomas Stewart for the benefit of the First Baptist Church of Takoma Park.⁸ The congregants constructed a wood-frame church which they later renamed “Parker Memorial Baptist Church” in honor of a former minister.⁹

In 1928, the Montgomery County Board of Education purchased a lot across the street from the church on Geneva Avenue within “the Hill.”¹⁰ The Great Migration, changing educational theorems, and efforts of Sears, Roebuck and Company founder Julius Rosenwald’s school building program led to the construction of 4,977 schools for Black students, primarily in southern states, in the early 20th century. The Rosenwald Fund provided money and architectural plans to boards of education which were contingent on a matching investment by local Black communities. The two-classroom Takoma Park Rosenwald Elementary School cost \$4,200 to construct (App. 6, Fig. 2). Montgomery County contributed \$3,200, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$500, and the local Black community paid \$500. While the requirement for local participation placed a heavy burden on individuals who could least afford it, these grassroots efforts helped organize and galvanize communities. The Rosenwald school served the community until the 1955-1956 school year when the Montgomery County Board of Education closed the four substandard downcounty segregated Black elementary schools (Takoma Park, Ken Gar, Linden, and River Road) and integrated the students into schools within their respective districts.

As in many of Montgomery County’s kinship-based African American communities, the local church and school provided essential social support. The Parker Memorial Baptist Church and Takoma Park Rosenwald School provided services to the Black community that extended beyond their basic purposes. Because segregation restricted access to social venues, community leaders organized events at the church and school, including regular movie nights and dances. In addition, the Parker Memorial Baptist Church organized trips to amusement parks, beaches, and other nearby locations that welcomed Black patronage.

Takoma Park continued to experience substantial growth. In 1940, the city had an overall population of 8,938 residents, an increase of 182 percent from 1920. Real estate developers, property owners, and other parties used racial restrictive covenants and other discriminatory housing practices to channel the Black population into three distinct areas of Takoma Park. Nevertheless, “the Hill,” the largest of the Black neighborhoods, experienced similar growth compared to the rest of the city as the population increased to 143 residents. The neighborhood consisted of at least 13 families (65 residents) who owned property and 14 families (78 residents) who rented their homes. In some cases, members of the community subdivided their property and assisted with the construction of new homes.

⁸ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber PBR 314, Folio 477, 1922.

⁹ In 1975, a fire caused substantial damage to the building and may have contributed to the construction of a new church c. 1981. The congregation, however, remained at this location until the 1990s. In 2011, Parker Memorial Baptist Church reorganized as the Covenant Community Baptist Church and relocated to Silver Spring.

¹⁰ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 454, Folio 282, 1928.

In 1950, Black homeownership in Takoma Park increased to its highest levels. There were 56 owners compared to 27 renters. Approximately 67% of Black households owned their property, a dramatic increase from the 12.5% who owned land at the start of the century. The Black population continued to increase with 445 total residents, but the use of racial restrictive covenants in the previous decade continued to isolate and concentrate the community. “The Hill” had a population of at least 227 residents. The neighborhood consisted of approximately 35 families who owned property and 6 families who rented their homes. The residents’ occupations consisted of government employees; healthcare workers; and domestic, construction, and general laborers.

The Colored Citizens Association

The Colored Citizens Association (CCA) formed in the 1920s to advocate on behalf of Takoma Park’s African American communities.¹¹ As the city expanded civil services and began providing street lights, paved roads, and public utilities, such as electricity, water and sewage, to white communities, Black residents saw that their neighborhoods were consistently placed “on the bottom of the list.”¹² Many African American households in Takoma Park continued to rely on kerosene lamps for lighting and accessed springs and wells for water. In the 1930s, the CCA petitioned the City to pave Ritchie Avenue and extend electric service to “the Hill” and other African American neighborhoods in Takoma Park.¹³ The organization’s meeting minutes and records from the City Council from the 1940s and 1950s reflect consistent advocacy for community concerns. The issues raised included dumping of trash in the neighborhood and irregular garbage pickups, gambling, speeding, and disorderly conduct. The CCA requested street lighting, street repairs, and sewer hookups, and regularly fundraised to offset insufficient funding of the Takoma Park Rosenwald School, which needed their aid to provide a school lunch program.¹⁴ These records also reflect an at-times strained relationship with the local police department. Community members petitioned the City Council to request that “the Police be instructed to use their guns with precaution.”¹⁵ In 1948, the CCA elected Lee Jordan as President. Jordan spearheaded the organization’s work through the late 1940s and 1950s, including the campaign for the construction of Heffner Park.

Historic Context: Lee Jordan (1909 – 1988)

Lee Jordan was among the influx of African Americans who came to Maryland during the Great Migration. Born in Mississippi in 1909, Jordan’s family moved north in 1918. Lee’s father, William Jordan, acquired the house at 28 Ritchie Avenue in 1923, where Lee grew up.

After a stint playing baseball for the Homestead Grays in the segregated Negro League, Lee Jordan returned to the Hill and began working as a custodian at the all-white Montgomery Blair High School (1935-1946) and then at Takoma Park Junior High until his retirement in 1973.¹⁶ Through these jobs and his community service, including his role as a deacon at the First Baptist Church, he became a mentor

¹¹ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 6.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Susan Schreiber, Historic Takoma, Interviewed by Eric Griffiths, August 8, 2022.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, 1940 – 1954, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.

¹⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, April 1-30, 1950, 254. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1950-04.pdf>

¹⁶ Resolution 2021-3: Establishing February 23 as Lee Jordan Day in Takoma Park, City of Takoma Park, Resolution, February 17, 2021. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/resolutions/2021/resolution-2021-3.pdf>

and coach to Black and white boys and girls who joined his football, baseball, and basketball teams.¹⁷ Jordan worked to bridge racial divides and welcomed white and Latino players to join the teams he founded for Black children who lacked the same access to organized sports.¹⁸ His welcoming attitude was notable in a time of steep racial divisions. As noted by a former Mayor of Takoma Park, unlike many others, “he just assumed that blacks and whites were supposed to play together.”¹⁹ The City of Takoma Park’s recognition of his legacy as “one of the most influential citizens” in the history of the city stemmed from his leadership in local youth sports and recreation.²⁰ His efforts to integrate youth athletics and provide recreational outlets are seen as a key factor in the peaceful racial integration of Takoma Park’s public schools following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling.²¹

Historic Context: Racial Segregation of Parks and Recreational Facilities in Takoma Park (1927-1950)

Parks and recreation have played an important historical role in American community life. The ideal of the “neighborhood park” which took root in the early 20th century led to the proliferation of local playgrounds, swimming pools, ballfields, and indoor recreation facilities.²² The initial development of these resources occurred in a period of legalized racial segregation that denied access to recreation and leisure opportunities for African Americans across the country.²³ Public recreation facilities for Black communities were sub-standard, when provided at all.²⁴ Other non-dominant groups, including Jews, were likewise excluded from places for recreation and leisure.²⁵ Dr. William E. O’Brien notes in *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South*, the ways in which Black communities relied on “self-help and advocacy [to obtain] their own quality recreational facilities” in the Jim Crow era.²⁶ This pattern is reflected in the decades-long advocacy of Takoma Park’s Black residents for access to park and recreation facilities.

The segregated recreation facilities in Takoma Park were in keeping with practices across Montgomery County, which did not begin to integrate its recreation activities until 1955.²⁷ The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) held primary responsibility for the county’s recreational facilities and programs from its inception in 1927 to the adoption of Montgomery County’s home rule charter in 1948. Through this era, M-NCPPC established parks, playgrounds, and recreational

¹⁷ McGuckian, 11.

¹⁸ Lee Jordan’s former mentees recall playing for Jordan’s teams as they racially integrated in “Lee Jordan Day 2023: A Celebration,” Takoma Park City TV, YouTube, April 7, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7RNp200JdA>

¹⁹ Former Mayor of Takoma Park, Sam Abbott, quoted in “A Farewell to Lee Jordan, Who Made Lives Better,” *The Washington Post*, Tracey A. Reeves, March 3, 1988.

²⁰ Resolution 2013-30: Rededication of Lee Jordan Field, City of Takoma Park, Resolution, May 28, 2013. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/resolutions/2013/resolution-2013-30.pdf>

²¹ Resolution 2021-3.

²² “Parks and Recreation in the United States: Local Park Systems,” Margaret Walls, Resources for the Future Backgrounder, 2009, 2, https://media.rff.org/documents/RFF-BCK-ORRG_Local20Parks.pdf

²³ “Observing from a Lens of Equity,” Kristine M. Fleming, Ed.D., Parks & Recreation Magazine, National Recreation and Parks Association, August 2021, <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2021/september/observing-from-a-lens-of-equity/>.

²⁴ “Separate but Unequal: The History of Racial Exclusion in Southern Parks,” Glenn LaRue Smith, FASLA, The Dirt (Blog), American Society of Landscape Architects, <https://dirt.asla.org/2022/07/26/separate-but-unequal-the-history-of-racial-exclusion-in-southern-parks/>

²⁵ “Discrimination and Quotas,” *Antisemitism in American History*, Anti-Defamation League, 2023. <https://antisemitism.adl.org/antisemitism-in-american-history/>

²⁶ “Separate but Unequal,” Smith.

²⁷ “From Little League to the Big Leagues: The Takoma Tigers.” Eileen McGuckian, *Montgomery County Story*, 55 (Summer 2012): 11.

facilities for white residents in heavily populated areas, primarily in downcounty communities that paid a special recreation tax for the provision of these services.²⁸

M-NCPPC built one such facility for the white residents of Takoma Park while the city's Black residents were actively seeking access to parks and recreation facilities. M-NCPPC, with the support of the City Council, purchased 12.7 acres in 1947 that comprises present-day Takoma-Piney Branch Local Park. The Commission soon thereafter constructed the Takoma Park Recreation Center, which was completed by 1953 when it appeared on local maps.²⁹ The facility had a community room, kitchen, heating, indoor plumbing, and a fireplace, with park grounds that included football, baseball, and softball fields, a playground, and picnic area.³⁰

The 1948 county charter led to the reorganization of county government and the formation of new departments to provide better services to residents.³¹ Montgomery County's Department of Recreation officially began operations on June 1, 1953, when it assumed responsibility for recreation from M-NCPPC.³² In its first year of operation, the department led year-round recreational activities and summer programs throughout the county which were segregated by race.³³ Forest V. Gustafson served as the department's first director and led a staff of six employees. Gustafson initiated the desegregation of the department's activities with the opening of the 1955 playground season.³⁴ Prior to desegregation, limited summer recreation programs for Black children were offered at Montgomery County's segregated schools for African Americans. In the mid-1940s, these programs were available in the Lincoln Valley High School in Rockville, Scotland, Emory Grove, and the River Road community, as well as in the Takoma Park Rosenwald School on Geneva Avenue.³⁵

Community Advocacy: 1941-1950

African American residents advocated for nearly two decades for places for Black children to play before the construction of the Heffner Park Community Center. In February of 1941, the Parent-Teachers Association of the Takoma Park Colored School (Takoma Park's Rosenwald School) requested that the City donate playground equipment for the school.³⁶ The PTA sought the playground equipment from the decommissioned Seventh-day Adventist Takoma Park Church School at 8 Columbia Avenue, which the City had recently purchased for use as a municipal facility.³⁷ Given the poor conditions at the Takoma

²⁸ McGuckian, 11; "Guide to the Records of the Department of Recreation, 1954-2000." Montgomery County Archives, Gaithersburg, MD: 2.

²⁹ This building is no longer extant. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1947, 44.

<https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1947-05.pdf>; Montgomery County Land Records, Liber CKW 1129, Folio 320, 1948.

³⁰ "Park Guide," The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, April 1954, Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Archives.

³¹ McGuckian, 11.

³² Guide to the Records of the Dept. of Rec., 2.

³³ Guide to the Records of the Dept. of Rec., 2; McGuckian, 11.

³⁴ McGuckian, 11.

³⁵ "24 Recreation Centers Will Open Monday," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, Rockville, MD, June 21, 1945. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress; "Recreation Program Opens This Week," *Montgomery County Sentinel* Rockville, MD, June 27, 1946. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress.

³⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1 – March 31, 1941, 156. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1941-02.pdf>; note that the school is often addressed as Geneva Avenue

³⁷ "Takoma Park Serves Early Adventists with Christian Education," Beth Michaels, *Visitor Magazine*, Columbia Union Conference, 2007, 18. <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/CSV/CSV20070301-V112-03.pdf>; Montgomery County Land Records, March 15, 1939, Liber CKW 728, Folio 385.

Park Rosenwald School, which in the 1940s lacked basic amenities such as sanitary drinking facilities, it is likely that the school lacked any playground equipment.³⁸

Councilmember Herman C. Heffner became the first elected official to take formal action in support of Black residents' request for access to recreation facilities.³⁹ At a Council meeting held November 24, 1947, Heffner raised the matter and led the Council to adopt a motion to request that M-NCPPC study the issue of establishing a recreation center in Takoma Park for Black residents.⁴⁰ Meeting minutes suggest no discussion of constructing an integrated recreation center or of integrating the new Takoma Park Recreation Center. While the African American community favored an integrated facility, the City consistently identified the new center as specifically for Black patrons.⁴¹

By the summer of 1948, the City Council heard consistent public demand for a playground or recreation center to serve Black residents.⁴² Mina E. Fischer, a white homeowner on New York Avenue, urged the Council to coordinate with M-NCPPC to "take immediate steps to make a playground for the colored children of Takoma Park."⁴³ Fischer later returned to the Council to introduce a petition signed by 95 African American families in the City calling for a playground for Black children. She reported that a copy of the petition had also been sent to M-NCPPC. At the same meeting, the Takoma Auxiliary to the Takoma Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, endorsed "the colored recreation center for the children of the colored residents of the Park."⁴⁴ Through early 1949, the City held discussions with community residents and M-NCPPC staff and debated the purchase of two lots on Ritchie Avenue for the playground, but determined that it was best not to act while waiting to see what the new County Council would do.⁴⁵

The Colored Citizens Association played an integral role in lobbying the City to provide recreation facilities for African Americans. Though the primary focus was to obtain a playground in "the Hill," this advocacy was supported by Black residents across the City, including Lucille Barry, who owned a home with her family on Colby Avenue in "the Bottom," another of Takoma Park's predominantly African American neighborhoods.⁴⁶ Representation from both communities reflects the recreation center as a priority for Black residents across the city.

In May 1949, Mayor John C. Post met with the CCA to report that the City would set aside \$2,000 or more to buy land for a recreation center, but that residents (presumably the Black residents for whom the facility was intended) would be responsible for clearing the land and fixing up the site.⁴⁷ The City's 1949-1950 budget officially set aside the purchase money: \$2,000 of a total \$8,000 approved for capital

³⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1942, 174. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1942-09.pdf>

⁴⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1 – December 31, 1947, 82. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1947-08.pdf>

⁴¹ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, April 1950, Courtesy of Historic Takoma.; "Houston Says 'Rights' Furor Gives Group Balance of Power," *The Atlanta Daily World*, October 17, 1948.

⁴² Records throughout this era alternately refer to the requested facility as a "playground" and a "recreation center."

⁴³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1948, 160. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1948-05.pdf>

⁴⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1948, 188. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1948-07.pdf>

⁴⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1 – 5, 1949, 239. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-01.pdf>

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, May 1949, Courtesy of Historic Takoma.; 1950 U.S. Federal Census.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

improvements to municipal parks was earmarked for a playground for the community around Ritchie Avenue.⁴⁸

The process by which the City selected a site for the playground is not well-documented, though it is clear they sought a location within the Ritchie Avenue neighborhood. Finally, on September 26, 1949, Councilmember H. Brooks Perring presented a proposed site for the playground and reported an offer from W.W.W. Parker to sell three lots on Oswego Avenue for \$4,400.⁴⁹ The purchase was finalized on April 25, 1950.⁵⁰

Nine years after Takoma Park's Black PTA began their call for a playground, land had finally been acquired. Nine further years of turmoil would follow before the park found a permanent home.

See Appendix 8 for a visual timeline of properties associated with the park and playground.

Historic Context: Development of the Original Heffner Park (31 Oswego Avenue) 1950 – 1957

The City failed to develop the park and playground once the land had been acquired. Residents spent the next two years seeking the City's assistance to clear the land of stumps and dumped trash, while the CCA carried out independent fundraisers to pay for the work of preparing and developing the site. As late as the spring of 1953, the City entertained the idea of using the land for a new library rather than its intended use.⁵¹

Eventually, the City acquiesced and established a playground and baseball diamond on the site by the mid-1950s. Finally, the Black residents of Takoma Park had a place to play and gather outdoors.⁵² The City named the park in honor of Councilman Heffner in August 1952. Heffner Park was a place where the community met to play well-attended baseball games, throw horseshoes, and listen to local musicians. Residents remember it as "the place to go," and a long-awaited venue for organized sports and athletic competition.⁵³ Baseball fields like this one were cornerstones of many of Montgomery County's African American communities, along with local schools and churches, through the 1960s. These ballfields provided entertainment and a place to socialize for Black residents who had few other options under legalized segregation.⁵⁴

Black residents continued to advocate for additional facilities for their communities. In particular, Lee Jordan and the CCA recognized that Black teens still lacked a place for club meetings or to socialize by holding dances and parties. Through 1958, Lee Jordan appeared consistently at the City Council and met separately with Council members to request that the City provide a recreation building for use by Black

⁴⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, June 1 – June 30, 1949, 84. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-07.pdf>

⁴⁹ This land is the site of the City's present-day Public Works facility. The lots are identified as lots 16, 17, and 18 in Block 60 of Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1- 30, 1949, 135. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-09.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Montgomery County Land Records, April 25, 1950, Liber CKW 1381, Folio 594.

⁵¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1-31, 1953, 111. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1953-03.pdf>

⁵² "Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center," Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 7.

⁵³ Historic Takoma, Inc. "They Called Him 'Mr. Lee,'" YouTube, October 27, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utOXiG8erXs>

⁵⁴ "The Black baseball leagues of Montgomery County," Bruce Adams, *Bethesda Magazine*, <https://bethesdamagazine.com/2022/06/12/the-black-baseball-leagues-of-montgomery-county/>

residents, specifically “his teenagers.”⁵⁵ Dolly Davis, a Takoma Park resident born in 1958, described her mother’s experience growing up without such a place to go:

There was a time she said that the [white] Rec Center wasn’t open to her. But she would go at night and watch the dancers from the parking lot, the bands that would come and play for the white kids... They would be in the darkness at the parking lot dancing in the parking lot, watching over the hill, unseen by those who were down below.⁵⁶

An existing, run-down building on the Heffner Park site, in which children liked to play, had been removed by the City by 1957 as a safety hazard.⁵⁷ Jordan repeatedly requested that an abandoned school building be repurposed as a recreation building, which presumably referred to the now-vacant Takoma Park Rosenwald School on Geneva Avenue that had been shuttered with school integration in 1955.

Historic Context: Closure and Relocation of Heffner Park (1954-1959)

Plans for Relocation of the Public Works Facility

By the early 1950s, major changes were underway just south of “The Hill” along Maple Avenue. Developers were interested in building large apartment buildings in the area, M-NCPPC had constructed the Takoma Park Recreation Center, and major flooding of Brashears Run (which ran beside and under Maple Avenue) was wreaking havoc on roadways and adjacent properties. In August 1950, heavy rain washed out the Maple Avenue bridge, prompting the City Council to consider longer term solutions. They wanted to straighten and channelize the stream as well as reorganize the roads to facilitate larger scale development.⁵⁸

City officials recognized that the enclosure of Brashear’s Run and the improvements to Maple Avenue would make the area between Philadelphia Avenue and Sligo Creek attractive for substantial new development.⁵⁹ Until this point, this stretch of Maple Avenue, subject as it was to flooding and drainage problems, was less desirable land and the site of “sub-standard homes,” per public testimony heard by the City Council.⁶⁰ The City’s Public Works facility was also situated on Maple Avenue between Philadelphia and Lee Avenues.⁶¹ Nearby Takoma Park residents complained about the facility’s terrible odor, unsightly garbage trucks, and the mess created when Public Works employees dumped collected leaves and ashes at various locations around town.⁶² It was clear that the Public Works facility was a

⁵⁵ Takoma Park City Council minutes, September 1-30, 1957, 148. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁵⁶ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Dolly Davis, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 2.

⁵⁷ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1957, 148. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁵⁸ Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes - June 18 - June 30, 1951, 230. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1951-07.pdf>

⁵⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1 – March 31, 1954, 59. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-03.pdf>

⁶⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-May 19, 1952, 174. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1952-06.pdf>

⁶¹ “Takoma Park Budget Requests Head,” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1956;

⁶² Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes - September 1 - September 30, 1951, 16.

<https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1951-10.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes, January 1 - January 31, 1953, 83-84. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1953-01.pdf>

nuisance to its immediate neighbors. In light of the anticipated development along Maple Avenue, city officials determined it was “mandatory that a new location for the Public Works Department be found.”⁶³

On March 22, 1954, without prior public debate, Councilman Klinck announced on behalf of the Public Works Committee that a contract had been signed to purchase Lot 3 in Block 62 of Gilbert’s Subdivision as the new site for the Public Works facility.⁶⁴ The proposed location was just north of the original Heffner Park site at 31 Oswego Avenue, in the midst of the predominantly Black neighborhood of “the Hill.” This lot is the present-day site of Heffner Park.

Residents and property owners in the vicinity of the proposed site quickly began to protest the decision. In addition to written objections by individual property owners, Black citizens coordinated an action at a July 12, 1954, executive meeting of the City Council. Opponents of the facility’s move to Oswego Avenue submitted a petition with over 120 signatures, and a large group of citizens appeared in person to voice their objections. Mayor Miller noted that citizens were not typically allowed to speak at this type of meeting, “but due to the number of citizens present there must be something of importance to be considered,” and gave them the opportunity to speak. Lee Jordan spoke on behalf of a citizens group, likely the CCA, to protest the move, followed by four other residents of Oswego and Ritchie Avenues.⁶⁵ The content of their objections was briefly reported the next day in the *Evening Star*: “the city trucks and other vehicles would be objectionable to look at and also would constitute a traffic hazard.”⁶⁶ No direct response to these concerns is evident in City Council minutes.

Land Swap of Heffner Park and the Public Works Facility

The exact chain of events leading to the City’s decision to use the original Heffner Park for the new public works facility is unclear. Plans for the new public works facility progressed gradually over the period of 1954-1957, with street repair, grading, and survey work underway on Oswego Avenue. Heffner Park was still in use through the summer of 1957, when new playground equipment was installed.⁶⁷

In the fall of 1957, the City began taking action towards the design and construction of the new public works facility.⁶⁸ The Council formally signed a contract with Silver Spring architect Philip W. Mason for plans and specifications for the new facility that November.⁶⁹ The timing of subsequent events suggests that behind-the-scenes conversations about an exchange of the sites may have already been underway. The Public Works Department reported on a discussion of the idea with E.W. Bucklin, Director of Montgomery County Department of Inspections and Licenses just two months later. Regarding “the use of the Heffner Park site for the new Public Works Department facilities,” Bucklin stated “that Municipalities are not bound by zoning regulations, and can use property belonging to the City in

⁶³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1 – March 31, 1954, 59-60. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-03.pdf>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1- 31, 1954, 109-110. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-07.pdf>

⁶⁶ “Takoma Park Plans Fight on Conditions Leading to Floods,” *The Evening Star*, July 13, 1954.

⁶⁷ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1957, 146. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁶⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1 – December 30, 1957, 178. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-10.pdf>

whatever way they choose.”⁷⁰ In late January 1958, City Council members met with Lee Jordan and Peter Remsen, Director of the Public Works Department, to discuss the possible location of a building to be used as a recreation center. They reached an agreement that Remsen would draw up plans for a “simple cinder block structure,” and submit a cost estimate to the Council.⁷¹

Planning for the two new facilities progressed through the spring of 1958. On March 10, 1958, the City Council approved the transmittal of plans for the new public works facility from Philip Mason, architect, to the construction contractor. More detailed coverage of the meeting in *The Washington Post* revealed that the final site had in fact been selected, noting that the council had “approved preliminary sketches for three new Public Works Department buildings...to be located on Oswego ave. [sic] at the site of the old Heffner Park.”⁷²

This decision was not formally announced by the Council until May, when Councilmember Robert W. Collison stated that “an agreement has been established with the people who use the [playground] to interchange, so that the playground portion could be used as part of the Public Works Project.”⁷³ Details of the discussions leading to this agreement, as well as the terms agreed to, were not recorded. However, the timing of these actions does show that the City did not take substantial action towards provision of a recreation building for Black residents until an agreement was reached to place the new public works facility at the site of the sole existing park and playground accessible to African Americans.

Regardless of ongoing discussions that may have been underway about the swap of these sites, the news that the existing Heffner Park would close came as a painful shock to the people who used the park. Lester Barry recalls the Saturday that Lee Jordan told him he could not play at the park anymore, because “they’re going to park the trash trucks there.”⁷⁴ Without Heffner Park, Black residents “didn’t have any place to go, nothing at all.”⁷⁵ Patricia Matthews remembers that when the City “decided to take that playground...that was the only place that we could go to play because all the other playgrounds were segregated. That was our playground, our recreation center, our picnic area, our park. But they decided to take the Public Works and build it in that area, which eliminated any place that we could have to go...”⁷⁶ Heffner Park’s Black patrons saw their long sought-after playground and ballfield, land which community members had cleared themselves, become home to collected leaves, garbage, and trash trucks.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 1958, 203. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-01.pdf>

⁷¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 208. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-01.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1-28, 1958, 225. This may be the point at which an agreement was made to switch the two sites.

⁷² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1-31, 1958, 243. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-03.pdf>; “Takoma Council Approves Plans,” *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1958.

⁷³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 22. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁷⁴ Lester Barry, in “They Called Him Mr. Lee,” Historic Takoma, Inc. YouTube, October 27, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utOXiG8erXs>

⁷⁵ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 5.

⁷⁶ Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, 7.

⁷⁷ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Lester Barry, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1.

Historic Context: Design, Construction, and Use of the Heffner Park Community Center (1957-1960)

Design and Construction of the Community Center (42 Oswego Avenue)

After finally agreeing to the construction of a new recreation building for Black residents, the City began planning for a simple building that would maximize economy. Officials began negotiating the details with architect Phillip Mason, who was under contract to design the new public works facilities. In May 1958, the Council asked Mason whether it would be possible to build a cinderblock recreation center “with the minimum of facilities” for approximately \$6,500. Mason projected that costs would be closer to \$10,000 and agreed to prepare preliminary plans for such a building.⁷⁸

Later that month, the Council reviewed Mason’s proposals for the recreation building at the new Heffner Park: “the building would cost approximately \$12,800 to complete... this would include the heating system, two restrooms, a kitchen space with roughed in plumbing, and electric wiring; also that the building would be constructed of cinder block, painted on the inside, so that there would be little in the building that could be damaged...” With this plan in hand, the City authorized Mason to draw up detailed plans and advertise construction bids.⁷⁹

On September 22, 1958, the City Council awarded a contract for construction of the public works facility to the Bethesda-based Robert W. Blake Company, Inc. for the sum of \$101,899 (App. 6, Fig. 3).⁸⁰ The City instructed the contractor to begin the project within ten days and started to plan for a groundbreaking ceremony.⁸¹

At the same meeting, the Council elected to award the construction contract for the “Heffner Park Community Building” to Bethesda builder Charles Bang for the sum of \$13,423. The contract was not signed as there were still “various points to be worked out,” but the builder was to be given three months to complete the project once the contract was executed.⁸²

Preparations for the paving of Niagara, Ritchie, and Oswego Avenues were also being made; these streets had been left unpaved to this point, but “the street will be much needed once [the] Public Works project is started.”⁸³ Work was underway on both facilities and the playground area for the new park by late October 1958.⁸⁴

Through the early months of 1959, small sums were authorized by the Council for items overlooked in the original community center plans: exit lights (\$46.67), gutters and downspouts (\$85.00), and

⁷⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 7. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁷⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 12. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁸⁰ The Council received eleven bids received for construction of the two new facilities. Bids for the public works facility ranged from \$101,899.00 to \$129,575.00; while bids for the community center ranged from \$13,423 to \$16,350. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1958, 97. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-09.pdf>

⁸¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1958, 98.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 108. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

⁸⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 118. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

installation of hardware (\$60.10).⁸⁵ Larger requested expenses including “auditorium seating” and “stage draperies” were set aside to be considered.⁸⁶

By June of 1959, the new park had playground equipment and was ready to host a summer recreation program, though construction would not be finished for several more months.⁸⁷ Both facilities were nearing completion by July, when the Council began planning for an open house to mark the opening of the new facilities.⁸⁸ The celebration was held September 13, 1959.⁸⁹

Programming and Use of the Heffner Park Community Center

The construction of the community center prompted planning for its programming and use. City officials envisioned that it would serve as “not only a Recreational building, but will be used for Civic purposes too.”⁹⁰

Soon after the community center opened in September 1959, Councilmember Emily Monitor, who served on the Parks and Recreation Committee, met with Lee Jordan, Public Works Director Earl Rhodes, and Forest Gustafson, Montgomery County’s Director of Recreation, to work out “a satisfactory recreation program at the Heffner Park Community Center.” The group agreed to a new “teenage recreation program, including games and dancing” to be held Friday evenings from 7:30 to 10:30 PM, beginning on October 16. The County agreed to provide someone to lead the program, but a record player and other items for the center were still needed. Monitor suggested that a community fundraiser, such as a bake sale, could offset the cost for these needs.⁹¹

Additional work would need to be done to the building to accommodate the teen program: when built, “only the necessary items were installed.” In October, the City approved additional funding, not to exceed \$1,100, for the necessary plumbing work, an electric stove, kitchen sink, birch cabinets, a water cooler, and electric hand driers.⁹² On October 30, a gathering was held at the new Heffner Park Recreation Center, for which Montgomery County provided the promised record player. This was likely the first meeting of the ‘teen club.’ Councilwoman Monitor attended and reported afterwards that there was a “good turnout, which definitely indicated that people are interested in having an organized

⁸⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 1959, 157, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-01.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1-28, 1959, 166, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-02.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1-31, 1959, 194, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-02.pdf>

⁸⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 106, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

⁸⁷ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, June 1-30, 1959, 246, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-06.pdf>

⁸⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1959, 261, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-07.pdf>

⁸⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1959, 15, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-09.pdf>

⁹⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1958, 57, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-07.pdf>

⁹¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1959, 30, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-09.pdf>

⁹² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1959, 36, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-10.pdf>

program for teenagers.” She stated that as she was leaving, she overheard the comment, “Our dream has come true after 15 years.”⁹³

Dale Jones, a Takoma Park resident born in 1945, described what the teen club meant to Black teenagers at the time:

Until we got the Teen Club we didn’t have much for youth to do for dances and things like that. We could go different places, but a lot of the places we could go you weren’t supposed to be there. For children 14, 15, and 16, there really wasn’t any place where we could go to be teenagers. Then when Heffner Park came and they put the building down there then that was where we all gathered. Teens from other neighborhoods came there like the teens from Linden, [they] came to do activities there.⁹⁴

The teen club was small, without space for a lot of people, but it provided a place for teenagers to host parties, play records, dance, and eat together. The Friday night gatherings were chaperoned by neighborhood mothers who made sure things “didn’t go off the deep end,” as well as police who “set out there because they didn’t want people to hang around and drink.”⁹⁵

Teen clubs had emerged as an important priority for the county’s Parks and Recreations departments in the mid-1950s. These agencies prioritized the establishment of indoor, evening gathering places for teenagers as “healthy and constructive” environments where young people could socialize, particularly with members of the opposite sex, without getting into trouble.⁹⁶ Though the Heffner Park Teen Club operated in a City facility, the program had at least some support from the county Department of Recreation.

It is unclear how long the Heffner Park Teen Club operated after the County’s public accommodations law (1962) began to make other social venues available. One Lyttonsville resident, Patricia Tyson, recalled that it lasted only through the early 1960s.⁹⁷

The new Heffner Park lacked the space for a baseball diamond, a significant amenity of the previous site, but the new Community Center gave Black residents of Takoma Park a place to gather for community and familial get-togethers, such as “Girl Scouts, birthday parties, [and] special events.”⁹⁸ Lee Jordan’s daughter, Patricia Matthews, recalled that Heffner Park was the site for her family’s annual Labor Day picnic, a large party that served as a de facto community picnic because the family was so well-known. The community center also hosted classes including a General Educational Development (GED) course.⁹⁹

⁹³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1–December 31, 1959, 58. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-11.pdf>

⁹⁴ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Dale Jones, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 3.

⁹⁵ Oral History of Lester Barry, 1.; Oral History of Dale Jones, 3.

⁹⁶ “Master Plan of Schools, Parks, and Recreation,” 1956. Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 26. Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Archives.

⁹⁷ Patricia Tyson, Interviewed by David Rotenstein in 2016, “Montgomery County Historical Society BOOM exhibit is a dud,” History Sidebar [Blog], June 6, 2018. <https://blog.historian4hire.net/2018/06/06/boom-exhibit-is-a-dud/>

⁹⁸ Black residents may have gained access to the nearby Takoma Recreation Center baseball fields after Montgomery County’s Department of Recreation began desegregating its program in 1955; Oral History of Dolly Davis, 2.

⁹⁹ Oral History of Patricia Matthews, 6.

Since the 1960s, Heffner Park has continued to operate as a community center and rental space operated by the City’s Recreation Department, offering drop-in programming and classes and hosting birthday parties and family gatherings.¹⁰⁰

Historic Context: City of Takoma Park Councilmember Herman C. Heffner (1870 – 1952)

Herman Claude Heffner was a popular civic leader who served for 10 years as a member of the Takoma Park City Council.¹⁰¹ After retiring as a railway postal clerk, he held community leadership positions as president of the Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department, secretary of the Community League, and member of the local Masonic lodge.¹⁰²

As a member of the City Council in the 1940s, he advocated for improvements to the Takoma Park Rosenwald School, such as clean drinking water and sewer hookups, prior to raising the matter of a recreation center for Black residents in 1947.

Lee Jordan first raised the idea of naming the recreation center for Councilman Heffner, who had “been of great assistance,” at a meeting of the Colored Citizens Association in May of 1950, two years before Heffner’s death in July 1952.¹⁰³ Following his death, the CCA submitted a request to the City that the recreation center be named on his behalf, which the Council agreed to in August 1952. The formal resolution recognized Heffner as a community leader admired by people “irrespective of race, creed or color,” whose dedication to the provision of community park and recreation facilities spurred the City’s purchase of the park land for Black residents.¹⁰⁴

Historic Context: Philip A. Mason, AIA (1922 – 1996)

The City of Takoma Park hired local architect Philip W. Mason to design both the Public Works site and the new community center. Mason grew up in Montgomery County and opened his general-practice architecture firm in 1952.¹⁰⁵ In the mid-to-late 1950s, Mason did some residential architecture but primarily worked on institutional projects. His work in this period included regular contracts with Montgomery County Public Schools on the construction of new buildings and additions, Silver Spring fire station #19, and the Connecticut Belair Club, a private recreation center in Wheaton. By the late 1960s, Mason was elected to a series of leadership positions with the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, including serving as chapter President in 1968.

H. Areas Exempt from Designation

N/A

¹⁰⁰ Deborah Huffman, Acting Recreation Director, City of Takoma Park, Interviewed by Kacy Rohn, February 24, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1 – July 31, 1952, 2. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1952-10.pdf>

¹⁰² U.S. Register of Civil, Military, and Naval Service, 1863-1959, page 1610. Digitized by Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, USA.; “Heffner, Herman Claude,” Obituary, *The Evening Star*, July 14, 1952; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, April 1 – 30, 1940, 54.

<https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1940-03.pdf>

¹⁰³ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, May 1950, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, August 1952, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, Takoma Park City Council Minutes, August 1 – 31, 1952, 28.

¹⁰⁵ “Philip W. Mason, AIA,” Potomac Valley Architect, Jan./Feb. 1968, Volume 11, Number 3. <https://usmodernist.org/AIAPV/AIAPV-1968-01-02.pdf>

I. Designation Criteria:

The Heffner Park Community Center meets Designation Criteria 1A, 1C, and 1D as listed in Section 24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code.

1A. The historic resource has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the county, state, or nation.

The Heffner Park Community Center is associated with the development of the historically Black neighborhood of “the Hill” within the City of Takoma Park and the community-building efforts of its residents.

As the neighborhood coalesced in the 1920s, segregation limited residents’ access to social support systems and public spaces. Residents of “the Hill” built local social and community institutions to mitigate the effects of racial discrimination. The first two of these institutions, the Parker Memorial Baptist Church (est. 1922) and the Takoma Park Rosenwald School (est. 1928), provided community services that extended beyond their basic functions. Neighborhood leaders organized events at the church and school, including regular movie nights, dances, and trips to nearby leisure destinations that welcomed Black patronage.

In addition to organizing a church and school, residents of “the Hill” worked for decades to meet the community’s need for recreational outlets and outdoor gathering spaces. Like these two institutions, Heffner Park served social and community needs that were unmet due to racial segregation. As the product of dedicated community advocacy, the park is a reflection of local Black leaders’ commitment to providing resources and connections in a challenging, discriminatory environment. Taken together, these three institutions provided a critical support network brought about through local self-help. The former Takoma Park Rosenwald School and the original Parker Memorial Baptist Church are no longer extant, but the Heffner Park Community Center survives as a representation of these critical institutions and the development of the Black community in the mid-twentieth century.

1C. The historic resource is identified with a person or group of persons who influenced society.

The Heffner Park Community Center is associated with the leadership and advocacy of Lee Jordan, who is recognized by the City of Takoma Park as one of the most influential residents in the community’s history.¹⁰⁶ He is celebrated for supporting generations of Takoma Park children as a coach and mentor who bridged a stark racial divide to work for the integration of local youth sports. In addition to his advocacy for youth and sport, Jordan was a prominent leader of Takoma Park’s African American communities in a challenging time of racial segregation. As President of the Colored Citizens Association in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jordan spearheaded the CCA’s work and advocacy for the provision of public services to Black communities, including the construction of Heffner Park.

The Heffner Park Community Center provides a direct link to Jordan’s broad community leadership as well as his particular emphasis on the importance of recreation. While the baseball field at the nearby Takoma Park Middle School was named in his honor in 1981, there are currently no designated historic

¹⁰⁶ “Lee Jordan Day in Takoma Park (February 23),” City of Takoma Park, Mayoral Proclamation, February 22, 2023, https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/mayoral-proclamations/2023/pr20230222_lee-jordan.pdf.

sites that reflect his significant legacy. The site provides the opportunity to recognize Jordan's life and influence on the community in a place created through his leadership and persistence.

1D. The historic resource exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the county and its communities.

The Heffner Park Community Center stands as a reminder of racial segregation and discriminatory public policy in twentieth century Montgomery County. The center was one element in a landscape of segregated recreational facilities within the City of Takoma Park and the county at large. It was built as a separate facility for the city's Black residents, who were unable to use the Takoma Park Recreation Center built by M-NCPPC in the mid-twentieth century. Recreation programs in Montgomery County did not begin to desegregate until the Department of Recreation, established in 1953, began to desegregate the department's activities with the opening of the 1955 playground season. In contrast to the well-appointed Takoma Park Recreation Center, the Heffner Park Community Center was planned as a small, simple building with limited amenities. Its minimalist appearance and lack of ornamentation reflect the disparity in public resources dedicated to African American communities.

Heffner Park reflects the legacy of environmental racism which impacted Montgomery County's African American communities in the twentieth century. Environmental racism is characterized by policies or practices which disproportionately burden communities of color with noxious facilities and air, water, and waste problems.¹⁰⁷ The park exists in its current location due to the decision to move the city's Public Works facility, which had been identified by its neighbors as a nuisance, into a predominantly African American community in order to clear the way for lucrative new development along Maple Avenue. The City sited this facility within "the Hill" despite residents' protest of this decision and the associated hazards. Compounding this injustice, the public works facility was constructed at the site of Black residents' only playground and park, which they had tirelessly sought and finally attained. Heffner Park reopened at its current location in 1959, and remains in close proximity to its former site and the contemporaneous Public Works facility.

J. Conclusion:

The Heffner Park Community Center retains sufficient historic and physical integrity to convey its period of significance (1954 - 1962). The community center has integrity of location and setting as it remains in its original location on Oswego Avenue. It retains a spatial connection to the community of "the Hill," and to the nearby Public Works facility, which sits on the park's original location.

The community center also exhibits integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. Though the enclosure of the front porch and changes to fenestration patterns have altered aspects of the building's original appearance, the overall impression of a utilitarian recreation building remains. It continues operate as a recreation facility through the City of Takoma Park's Department of Recreation and sit in a park setting, and therefore retains its sense of feeling and association.

The Heffner Park Community Center is representative of recreational opportunities for Black residents in Montgomery County in the years preceding and immediately following desegregation of recreation programs, followed by desegregation of public facilities at large. It reflects the advocacy of African

¹⁰⁷ Bullard, Robert D. "The Threat of Environmental Racism," *Natural Resources & Environment*, 7, no. 3 (1993): 23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40923229>.

American residents of Takoma Park for recreational outlets for Black children when local parks and playgrounds were closed to them. Preservation of the community center celebrates this legacy while opening opportunities for education and dialogue about the legacies of racial discrimination and injustice.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Property Land Area: 32,275 SF

Account Number: 01060657

District: 13

Environmental Setting Description: The Heffner Park Community Center at 42 Oswego Avenue occupies Lot 3 in Block 62 of Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park in the City of Takoma Park, Maryland. The site consists of the entire 32,275 square feet of land identified as 01060657, District 13.

Environmental Setting Justification: The boundary includes the entire property historically associated with the park.

9. PROPERTY OWNERS

City of Takoma Park
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

10. FORM PREPARED BY

Kacy Rohn, Cultural Resources Planner II, and John Liebertz, Cultural Resources Planner III

11. MAJOR SOURCES CONSULTED

Ancestry.com [numerous].

Archival City Council Meeting Minutes, Takoma Park Archives, City of Takoma Park,
<https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-clerk/takoma-park-archives/>

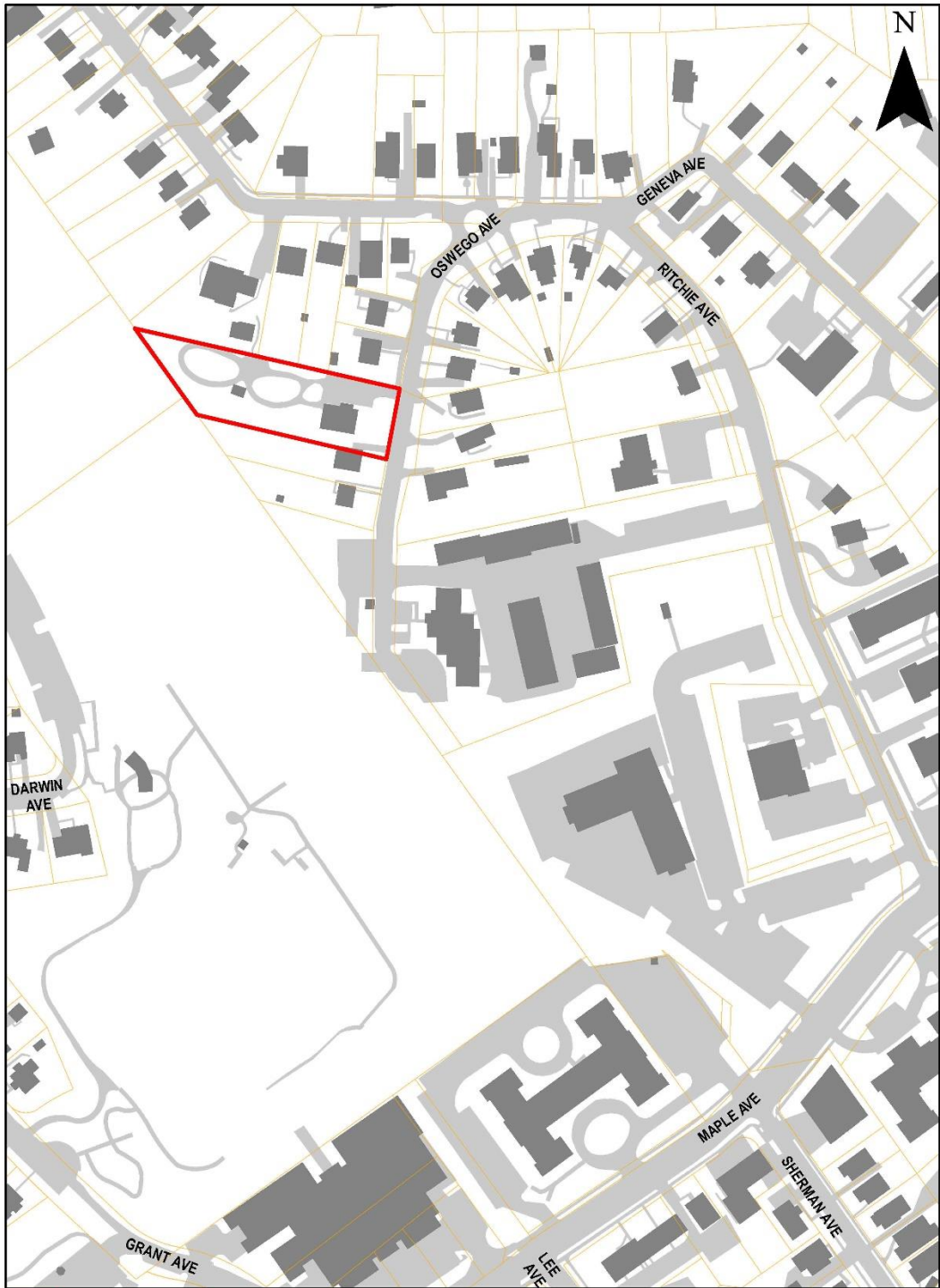
Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, 1940-1954, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.

Montgomery County Land Records, <http://mdlandrec.net>

Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission [Various], Montgomery County Archives, Gaithersburg, MD.

"Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center," Oral Histories conducted by Alison Kahn, 2020-2022, for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc.

APPENDIX ONE: ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/GEOGRAPHICAL DATA



-  Environmental Setting
-  Parcel Boundaries
-  Building Footprints

1 inch = 250 feet

APPENDIX TWO: DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

North Elevation (Appendix Four, Figures 1-2)

The façade (north elevation) is comprised of the main four-bay block of the building and a projecting gable-roofed front porch, now enclosed, which shelters the double front doors. The easternmost bay contains paired typical windows set within the original openings. In the next bay, the original entry porch was enclosed with synthetic composite walls between 2019 and 2022. The enclosed porch, now used as a vestibule, is approximately 8 feet deep and 12 feet wide. The east and west sides of the vestibule each feature two large, fixed single-light vinyl windows. The entrance is accessed via a double-leaf single-light metal door. In the next bay to the west is another paired typical window. The fenestration of the westernmost third of the façade has been altered. A large opening, which likely contained a door or tall window, has been infilled with cinderblock and brick, and a smaller typical window has been added to the right (west).

West Elevation (Appendix Four, Figures 2-4)

The three-bay west elevation has been altered from the original fenestration pattern. The northernmost bay houses a solid metal door, while the central and southernmost bays contain typical windows matching the replacement window on the façade. These windows sit behind metal security bars. Between them, two openings have been infilled with cinderblock and brick. Just north of the centerline of the building, an external brick chimney with a concrete cap projects above the roof. The upper gable end is clad in vinyl siding.

South Elevation (Appendix Four, Figures 4-5)

The south elevation consists of three bays located on the easternmost half of the building. Two sets of paired typical windows flank a slightly inset single-leaf metal replacement door. Either side of the door has been infilled to seal a space originally large enough to house a double-leaf metal door. The concrete path which abuts the building ends at this doorway.

East Elevation (Appendix Four, Figures 6-7)

The east elevation consists of the two-bay main block and the single-bay projecting vestibule set back from the face of the building. Fenestration includes two evenly spaced sets of paired typical windows. Above these, the upper gable end is clad in vinyl siding. A metal plate with the street number '42' is placed at the corner. The building is separated from Oswego Avenue on this side by a small lawn that drops off steeply to the street.

APPENDIX THREE: HISTORIC MAPS

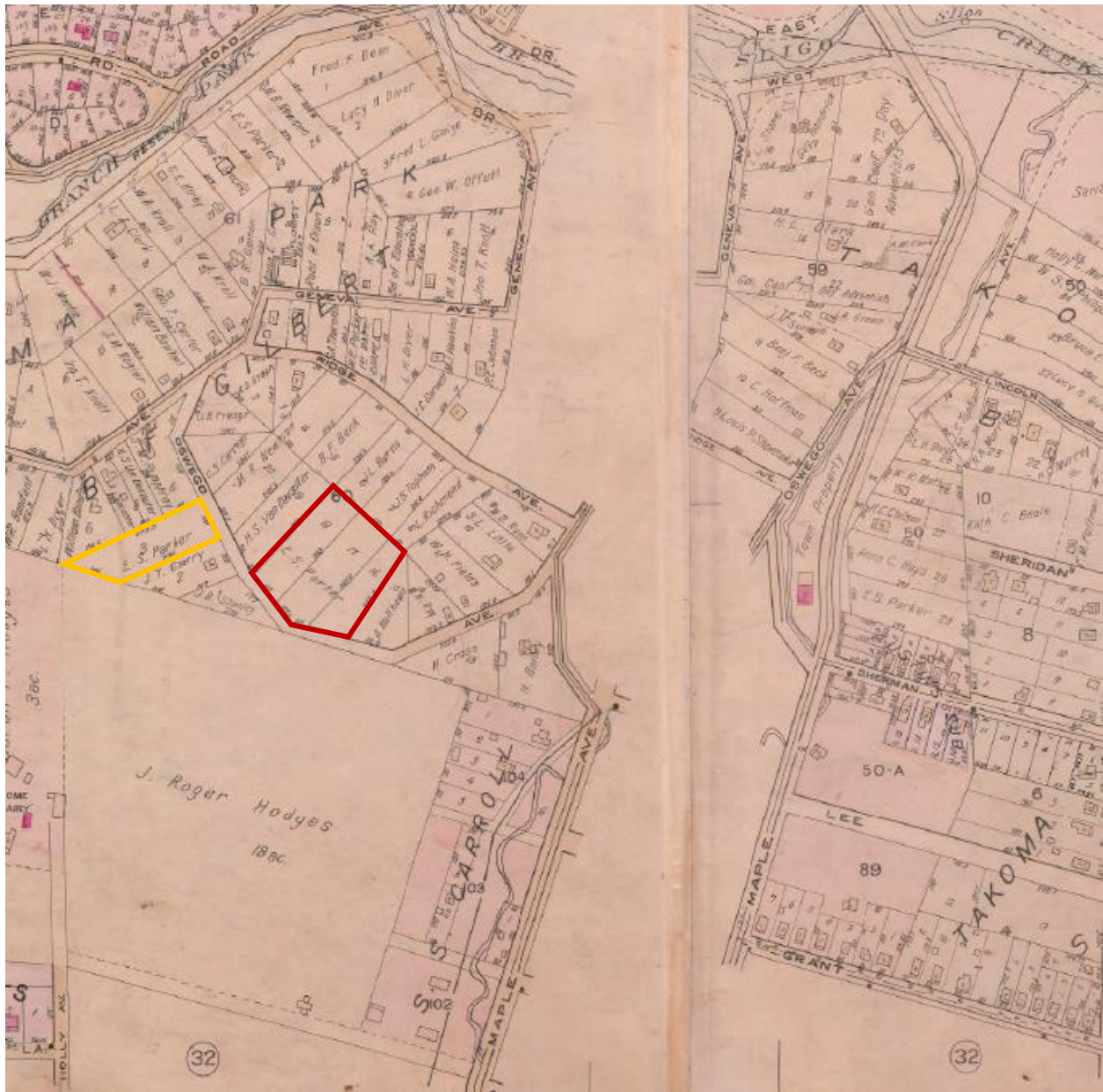


Figure 1: 1931 Klinge Property Atlas of Montgomery County, Volume 1, Sheet 33. The parcel outlined in yellow is the present-day location of Heffner Park; the parcels outlined in red are its original location and the site of the present-day Public Works facility. Note the limited development along Maple Avenue. Source: Historic Preservation Program Archives.

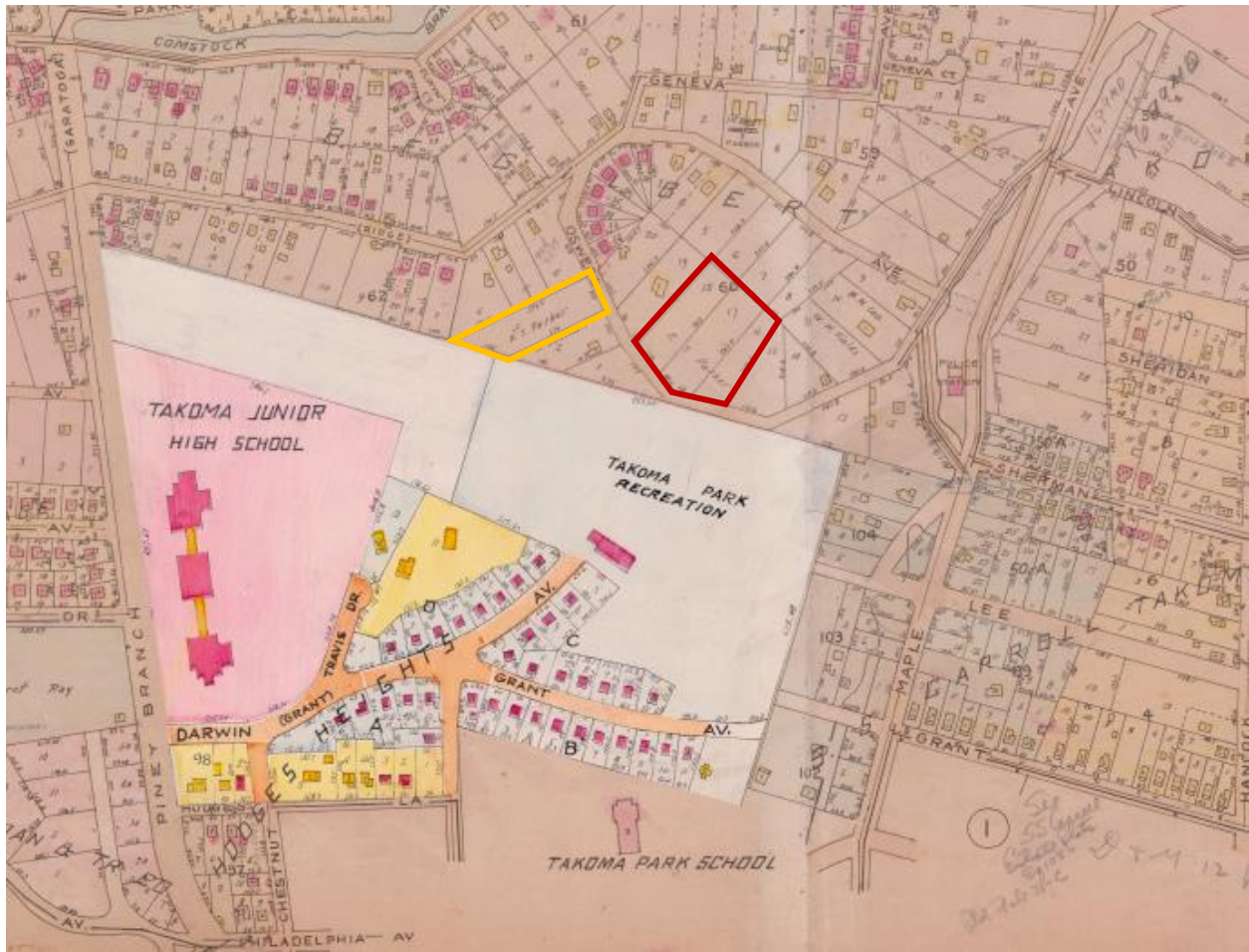


Figure 2: 1948-1953 Klinge Atlas of Montgomery County, Volume E, Sheet 07. The Takoma Park Recreation Center is evident. The parcel outlined in yellow is the present-day location of Heffner Park; the parcels outlined in red are the park's original location and the site of the present-day Public Works facility. Source: Historic Preservation Program Archives

APPENDIX FOUR: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

1951 Aerial Photograph - Heffner Park and Vicinity

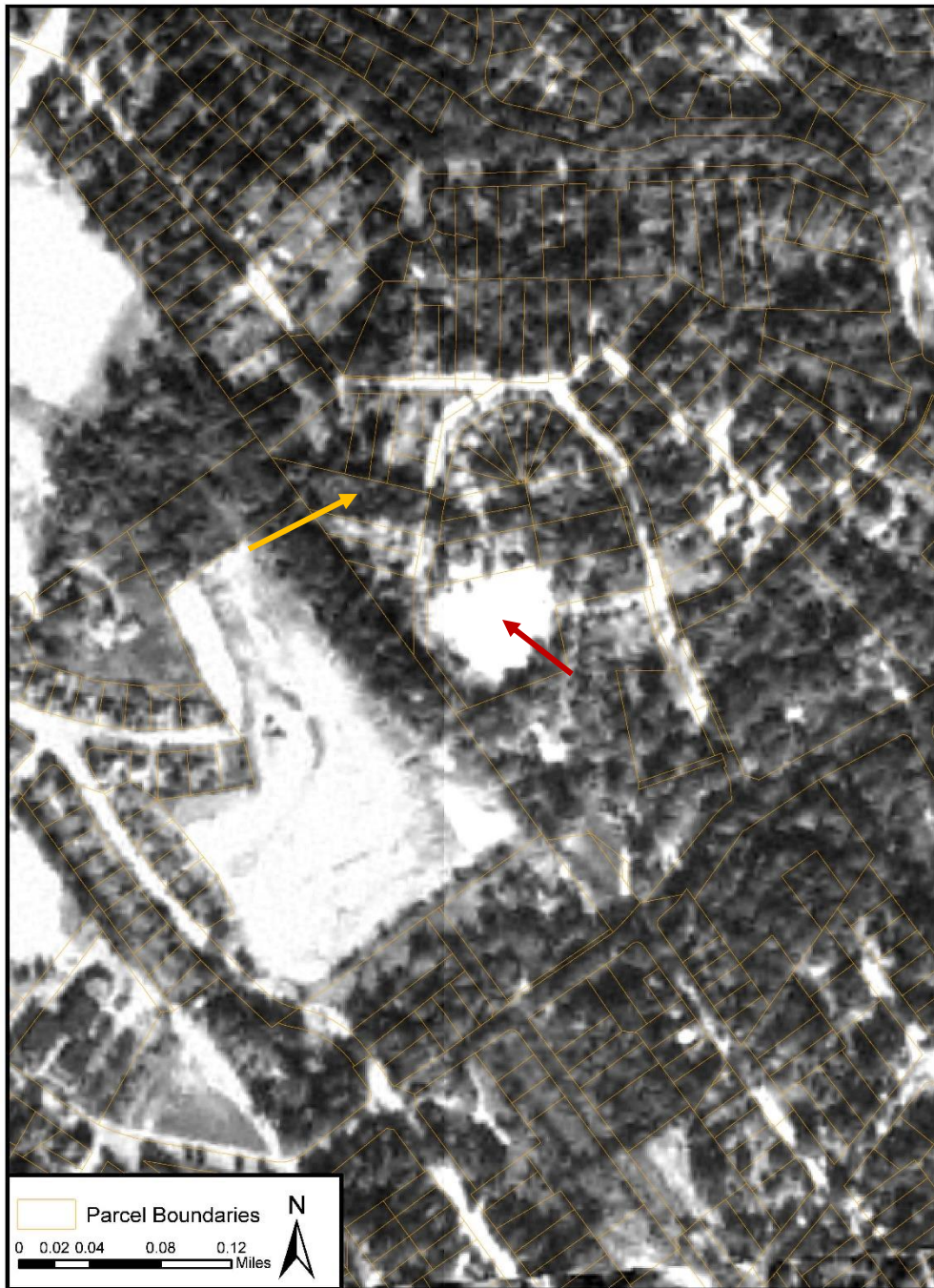


Figure 1: Aerial photograph, 1951. The yellow arrow indicates the present-day location of Heffner Park (42 Oswego Avenue), and the red arrow indicates the location of the Public Works facility (31 Oswego Avenue).

1970 Aerial Photograph - Heffner Park and Vicinity



Figure 2: Aerial photograph, 1970. The yellow arrow indicates the present-day location of Heffner Park (42 Oswego Avenue), and the red arrow indicates the location of the Public Works facility (31 Oswego Avenue).

2021 Aerial Photograph - Heffner Park and Vicinity

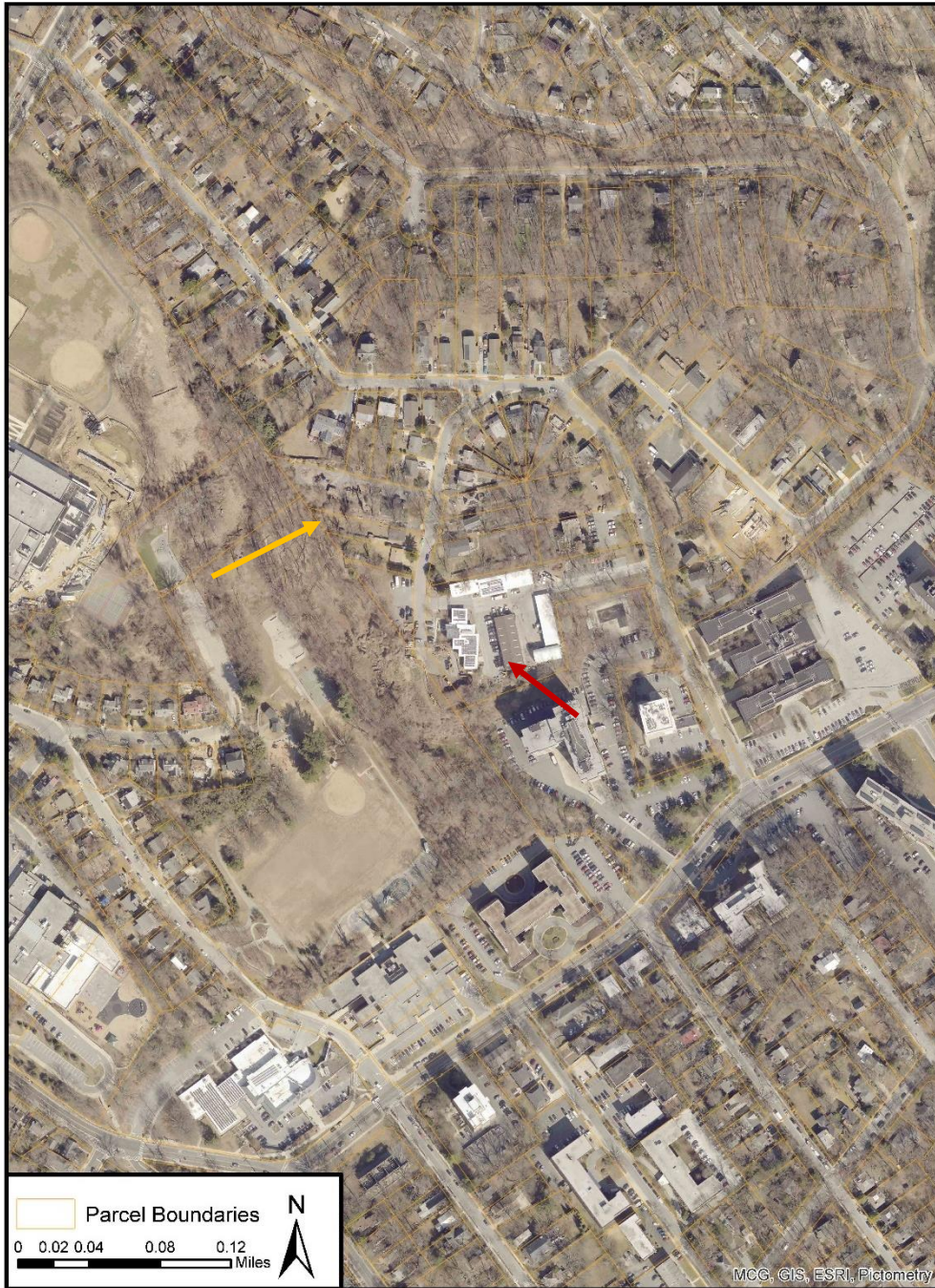


Figure 3: Aerial photograph, 2021. The yellow arrow indicates the present-day location of Heffner Park (42 Oswego Avenue), and the red arrow indicates the location of the Public Works facility (31 Oswego Avenue).

APPENDIX FIVE: EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE HEFFNER PARK
COMMUNITY CENTER



Figure 1: View of the façade (north elevation). Note: The majority of photos in this appendix were taken in December 2022, prior to the exterior painting evident in this photo from May 2023.



Figure 2: View of the northwest corner.



Figure 3: View of the west elevation.



Figure 4: View of the southwest corner.



Figure 5: View of the south elevation (rear) from the southeast corner.



Figure 6: View of the east elevation.



Figure 7: View of the northeast corner.



Figure 8: View of the park's outdoor recreation area from the edge of the parking lot, facing west.



Figure 9: View of the park's outdoor recreation area, facing east towards the community center building.



Figure 10: View of Heffner Park from Oswego Avenue, facing southwest.



Figure 11: The modern Public Works facility at 31 Oswego Avenue, the original site for Heffner Park.

APPENDIX SIX: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: Lee Jordan, undated. Source: Historic Takoma, Inc., www.historictakoma.org



Figure 2: Takoma Park Rosenwald School, undated. Source: Historic Takoma, Inc.



Three equipment repair bays (one is shown at left), a carpenter shop plus ample storage space provide the best in working conditions and facilities.

Takoma Park, Md., moves into a well planned public works center and finds that . . .



Personnel have not been forgotten; this part of the maintenance building houses separate shower and locker facilities for highway and sanitation divisions.

Better Facilities Mean Better Work

By HAYNES M. PRIDGEN
Clerk and Treasurer

When the City of Takoma Park occupied its new public works buildings last fall, it did more than make a simple physical move. The changeover from antiquated and inadequate housing facilities to new quarters designed to expedite the accomplishment of specific tasks did much toward making our employees contented and happy. There is probably no better morale booster than a hot cleansing shower after a day of slinging trash burlaps over shoulders or pouring hot asphalt on city streets.

This has been borne out by Public Works Director Earl K. Rhodes' statement that personnel problems have been greatly reduced since occupying the new quarters in September 1959.

To appreciate the new, a brief description of the old will be helpful. For many years the public works department struggled along with offices that were too small, poorly heated in winter and hot in summer. Also there was space for only one vehicle in an unheated re-

pair shop and the restrooms and shower facilities for the sanitation division and highway division employees were far from adequate.

The new facilities consist of three separate buildings; the administration building, approximately 36 feet by 58 feet in size; the maintenance building, 187 feet long and varying in depth from 25 feet for the personnel facilities portion to 40 feet for the repair shop portion; and a parks office, 18 feet by 25 feet in size, plus an attached greenhouse.

The administration building, containing some 1,900 square feet, includes a business office; storage

vault; office for the director of public works; conference room; office for the sanitation, streets and building supervisors; plus the necessary storage space and the restroom facilities.

The parks building includes an office plus storage for various park supplies. Parks Supervisor Vincent Powell considers the attached greenhouse as the prize package of the entire program, for now he can raise his own flowers during the winter for transplanting in the various parks in spring. Equipment includes a thermostatically controlled

(Continued on page 173)



All public works business in Takoma Park is now conducted in this modern, well equipped administration building.

Figure 3: The new Takoma Parks Public Works facility was constructed in 1959 at the original Heffner Park site (31 Oswego Avenue). Source: Haynes M. Pridgen, "Better Facilities Mean Better Work," *The American Citizen*, August 1960, 171.

APPENDIX SEVEN: CHAIN OF TITLE

| Date | Grantor | Grantee | Liber | Folio | Description | Notes |
|-----------|--|------------------------------|----------|-------|--|----------|
| 3/11/1954 | Heirs of Edmund S. Parker (William W.W. Parker, Ezra D. Parker, Brainard W. Parker, Irene W. Parker, Helen Parker Willard, Lucy Parker Hayes, Margaret Larner Wotherspoon, Alexander S. Wotherspoon, Isabella Larner Stott, Anna Southard Larner Cox, James S. Cox, Lucy Larner Banks, Ruth Larner Oliphant and A. Chambers Oliphant) | City of Takoma Park | CKW 1934 | 174 | Lot 3, Block 62, B.F. Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park | |
| 2/1/1901 | Brainard H. Warner, Assignee | Edmund S. Parker | TD 16 | 351 | Lot 3, Block 62, B.F. Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park (among multiple) | |
| 7/10/1890 | Benjamin F. Gilbert | Brainard H. Warner, Assignee | JA 20 | 133 | Lot 3, Block 62, B.F. Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park (among multiple) | |
| 2/1/1890 | Hamilton D. Coleman | Benjamin F. Gilbert | JA 20 | 131 | Lot 3, Block 62, B.F. Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park (among multiple) | Mortgage |

APPENDIX EIGHT: VISUAL TIMELINE OF HEFFNER PARK LOCATIONS



February 10, 1941

The Parent-Teachers Association of the Takoma Park Rosenwald School requests that the City provide equipment for the school playground on Geneva Avenue.

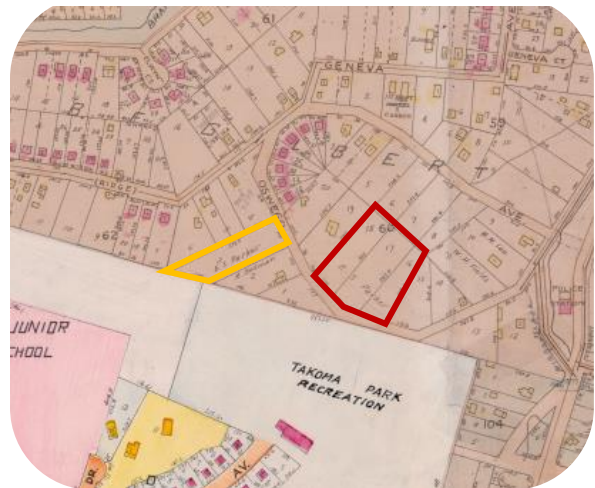


April 25, 1950

The City purchases three lots (in red) at 31 Oswego Ave. for use as a playground for African Americans.

August 25, 1952

The City adopts a resolution adopting the name "Heffner Park" for the park and playground.



March 11, 1954

The City purchases the lot at 42 Oswego Ave. (in yellow) for use as the new Public Works facility.

May 27, 1958

The City announces that an agreement has been reached to exchange the two sites.

September 13, 1959

Both new facilities are completed at their present-day locations.

APPENDIX NINE: MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
(MIHP) FORM

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. M:37-61

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Heffner Park Community Center

other Heffner Park

2. Location

street and number 42 Oswego Avenue ___ not for publication

city, town Takoma Park, MD ___ vicinity

county Montgomery County

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name City of Takoma Park

street and number 7500 Maple Avenue telephone (301) 891-7100

city, town Takoma Park state MD zip code 20912

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse liber CKW 1934 folio 174

city, town Rockville, MD tax map JPN42 tax parcel 0000 tax ID number 01060657

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
- Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Recorded by HABS/HAER
- Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- Other: _____

6. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Current Function | | Resource Count | |
|---|--|---|--|--|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture | 1 | _____ buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> defense | <input type="checkbox"/> religion | _____ | _____ sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | | <input type="checkbox"/> domestic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social | _____ | 2 structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation | _____ | _____ objects |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> funerary | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | 1 | 2 Total |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> unknown | | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> health care | <input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use | | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> other: | | |
| | | | | Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory | |
| | | | | 0 | |

7. Description

Inventory No.

Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SUMMARY:

Site Description: The Heffner Park Community Center is located at 42 Oswego Avenue in Takoma Park, Maryland. The building retains its historic function as a multipurpose public recreation center operated by the City of Takoma Park's Department of Recreation. The .74-acre trapezoidal parcel includes the community center and an approximately half-acre recreation area. The parcel slopes to the south, east, and steeply to the west. The property is bound by Oswego Avenue to the east; a single-family dwelling to the south; additional City-owned parkland – now used as a dog park – separated by a steep slope to the west; and a single-family home to the north.

The community center is located in the southeast corner of the site and is set back approximately 50 feet from Oswego Avenue. The façade is oriented to the north, perpendicular to the street. It is accessed by an asphalt drive leading to a parking area along the northern extent of the property. The parcel is fenced on the south, west, and north sides, with only the east side accessible to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. An asphalt path provides access to the recreation area to the west of the building, which includes several non-contributing features: a half basketball court, two playground sets, and a picnic shelter.

Architectural Description: The City of Takoma Park built the Heffner Park Community Center in 1959. The community center is a one-story, cross-gable-roofed building with a utilitarian appearance and general lack of ornamentation that reflects the modest budget allotted for the construction of this facility. The building's façade faces north, perpendicular to Oswego Avenue. The center consists of the main block and a projecting gable-roofed front porch, recently enclosed, which shelters the double-leaf front door leading to the main multi-purpose room.

The masonry building rests on a continuous parged cinderblock foundation. The painted white cinderblock walls support a cross-gable roof clad in architectural asphalt shingles. Fenestration consists primarily of metal doors and two types of windows: single and paired one-over-one, vinyl-sash, double-hung windows with six-over-six, simulated divided lights and wood sills. Alterations have been made to the fenestration on the north, west, and south elevations. The community center's projecting front porch was enclosed between 2019 and 2022 using non-historic materials.

DESCRIPTION:

North Elevation

The façade (north elevation) is comprised of the main four-bay block of the building and a projecting gable-roofed front porch, now enclosed, which shelters the double front doors. The easternmost bay contains paired typical windows set within the original openings. In the next bay, the original entry porch was enclosed with synthetic composite walls between 2019 and 2022. The enclosed porch, now used as a vestibule, is approximately 8 feet deep and 12 feet wide. The east and west sides of the vestibule each feature two large, fixed single-light vinyl windows. The entrance is accessed via a double-leaf single-light metal door. In the next bay to the west is another paired typical window. The fenestration of the westernmost third of the façade has been altered. A large opening, which likely contained a door or tall window, has been infilled with cinderblock and brick, and a smaller typical window has been added to the right (west).

West Elevation

The three-bay west elevation has been altered from the original fenestration pattern. The northernmost bay houses a solid metal door, while the central and southernmost bays contain typical windows matching the replacement window on the façade. These windows sit behind metal security bars. Between them, two openings have been infilled with cinderblock and brick. Just north of the centerline of the building, an external brick chimney with a concrete cap projects above the roof. The upper gable end is clad in vinyl siding.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

South Elevation

The south elevation consists of three bays located on the easternmost half of the building. Two sets of paired typical windows flank a slightly inset single-leaf metal replacement door. Either side of the door has been infilled to seal a space originally large enough to house a double-leaf metal door. The concrete path which abuts the building ends at this doorway.

East Elevation

The east elevation consists of the two-bay main block and the single-bay projecting vestibule set back from the face of the building. Fenestration includes two evenly spaced sets of paired typical windows. Above these, the upper gable end is clad in vinyl siding. A metal plate with the street number '42' is placed at the corner. The building is separated from Oswego Avenue on this side by a small lawn that drops off steeply to the street.

8. Significance

Inventory No.

| Period | Areas of Significance | Check and justify below | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine | <input type="checkbox"/> performing arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2000- | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social history |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning | | <input type="checkbox"/> maritime history | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ |

Specific dates 1959 -1962 **Architect/Builder** Philip A. Mason/Charles Bang

Construction dates 1959

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Summary:

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 2

The Heffner Park Community Center at 42 Oswego Avenue was built in 1959 by the City of Takoma Park.¹ The building and park are the results of decades of advocacy by the city's African American residents to demand recreational outlets for Black children in the years preceding the county's public accommodation law, which prohibited discrimination in public facilities in 1962. The building's small scale and lack of ornamentation reflect the limited resources set aside in the city budget for a facility primarily intended to serve Black residents.

The present site represents the second property known as Heffner Park. The park's original location, just south of this property at 31 Oswego Avenue, was repurposed by the City as a public works facility less than ten years after the land had been purchased for a segregated recreation site serving African Americans.

Narrative:

Historic Context: The Development of Takoma Park's Black Communities

Neighborhood Growth

Developer Benjamin Franklin Gilbert founded Takoma Park in 1883 as one of the first railway commuter suburbs of Washington, D.C. Gilbert promoted the community's natural environment and healthy setting with its fresh spring water and rolling topography and its proximity to a new train station on the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad that opened in 1886.² That same year, Gilbert expanded the size of the community by 120 acres when he platted "Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park." The opening of streetcar lines furthered the expansion of Takoma Park in the early 20th century. The inexpensive transportation options and the availability of low-cost housing plans in combination with smaller lot sizes made homeownership in Takoma Park possible for white families with more modest income levels than during the previous era.³ In 1900, 756 residents lived in Takoma Park.⁴

Black families started to settle in Takoma Park shortly after the community's founding. In 1896, Louis W. and Grace B. Thomas, the first known Black homeowners in the city, purchased the property at 15 Montgomery Avenue.⁵ The 1900 United States Census listed the Thomas family and seven other Black families who rented property in the community. There were approximately 40 Black residents at that time, who accounted for 5.2 percent of the overall population. Louis and Grace Thomas worked as a caterer and nurse, respectively, and the other adults enumerated in the census primarily worked as day laborers and servants.⁶

By 1920, Takoma Park had increased to 3,168 residents with 644 dwellings and 721 families.⁷ The Black population had

¹ Prior to April of 1947, the City of Takoma Park was named the Town of Takoma Park. "City" is used throughout this document for clarity.

² EHT Traceries, "Takoma Park African American Survey [Draft Report]," September 2022: 11-12.

³ National Register of Historic Places, "Takoma Park Historic District," <http://www.mht.maryland.gov>.

⁴ Department of Commerce, "1900 Census: Volume 1. Population, Part I, Cities, Towns and Boroughs, Tables 6-8," (1901): 455, <http://www.census.gov>.

⁵ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Annie E. Barbour to Louis W. Thomas," December 7, 1896, Liber 55, Folio 325, <http://www.mdlandrec.net>.

⁶ United States Federal Census.

⁷ In 1910, the overall population was 1,242. Department of Commerce, "Population: Maryland, Number of Inhabitants, by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions," (1921): 8, <http://www.census.gov>; Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, State Compendium: Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 26, <http://www.google.com>.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 3

grown to 41 households and 221 residents, who accounted for 6.97 percent of the overall population.⁸ African American homeownership increased to 14 families, but most Black residents continued to rent their homes. Records suggest that the Black community known as “the Hill” formed around this time. This neighborhood consisted of an elevated, hilly portion of Takoma Park on Ritchie (formerly Ridge), Geneva, and Oswego Avenues. The eight families (one owner and seven renters, totaling approximately 53 residents) who lived on these streets were primarily born in Washington, D.C., Maryland, or Virginia. Their occupations included barbers, laborers, domestic laborers, cooks, and laundresses.

In the 1920s, homeownership in “the Hill” expanded with the acquisition of property by 10 Black families and the establishment of two community institutions. In 1922, Robert E. and Alice E. Dove conveyed present-day 111 Geneva Avenue to trustees William A. Parker, Eva Washington, and Thomas Stewart for the benefit of the First Baptist Church of Takoma Park.⁹ The congregants constructed a wood-frame church which they later renamed “Parker Memorial Baptist Church” in honor of a former minister.¹⁰

In 1928, the Montgomery County Board of Education purchased a lot across the street from the church on Geneva Avenue within “the Hill.”¹¹ The Great Migration, changing educational theorems, and efforts of Sears, Roebuck and Company founder Julius Rosenwald’s school building program led to the construction of 4,977 schools for Black students, primarily in southern states, in the early 20th century. The Rosenwald Fund provided money and architectural plans to boards of education which were contingent on a matching investment by local Black communities. The two-classroom Takoma Park Rosenwald Elementary School cost \$4,200 to construct. Montgomery County contributed \$3,200, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$500, and the local Black community paid \$500. While the requirement for local participation placed a heavy burden on individuals who could least afford it, these grassroot efforts helped organize and galvanize communities. The Rosenwald school served the community until the 1955-1956 school year when the Montgomery County Board of Education closed the four substandard downcounty segregated Black elementary schools (Takoma Park, Ken Gar, Linden, and River Road) and integrated the students into schools within their respective districts.

As in many of Montgomery County’s kinship-based African American communities, the local church and school provided essential social support. The Parker Memorial Baptist Church and Takoma Park Rosenwald School provided services to the Black community that extended beyond their basic purposes. Because segregation restricted access to social venues, community leaders organized events at the church and school, including regular movie nights and dances. In addition, the Parker Memorial Baptist Church organized trips to amusement parks, beaches, and other nearby locations that welcomed Black patronage.

Takoma Park continued to experience substantial growth. In 1940, the city had an overall population of 8,938 residents, an increase of 182 percent from 1920. Real estate developers, property owners, and other parties used racial restrictive covenants and other discriminatory housing practices to channel the Black population into three distinct areas of Takoma Park. Nevertheless, “the Hill,” the largest of the Black neighborhoods, experienced similar growth compared to the rest of

⁸ The number of residents included domestic servants living in white households. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, State Compendium: Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 26, <http://www.google.com>.

⁹ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber PBR 314, Folio 477, 1922.

¹⁰ In 1975, a fire caused substantial damage to the building and may have contributed to the construction of a new church c. 1981. The congregation, however, remained at this location until the 1990s. In 2011, Parker Memorial Baptist Church reorganized as the Covenant Community Baptist Church and relocated to Silver Spring.

¹¹ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 454, Folio 282, 1928.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 4

the city as the population increased to 143 residents. The neighborhood consisted of at least 13 families (65 residents) who owned property and 14 families (78 residents) who rented their homes. In some cases, members of the community subdivided their property and assisted with the construction of new homes.

In 1950, Black homeownership in Takoma Park increased to its highest levels. There were 56 owners compared to 27 renters. Approximately 67% of Black households owned their property, a dramatic increase from the 12.5% who owned land at the start of the century. The Black population continued to increase with 445 total residents, but the use of racial restrictive covenants in the previous decade continued to isolate and concentrate the community. “The Hill” had a population of at least 227 residents. The neighborhood consisted of approximately 35 families who owned property and 6 families who rented their homes. The residents’ occupations consisted of government employees; healthcare workers; and domestic, construction, and general laborers.

The Colored Citizens Association

The Colored Citizens Association (CCA) formed in the 1920s to advocate on behalf of Takoma Park’s African American communities.¹² As the city expanded civil services and began providing street lights, paved roads, and public utilities, such as electricity, water and sewage, to white communities, Black residents saw that their neighborhoods were consistently placed “on the bottom of the list.”¹³ Many African American households in Takoma Park continued to rely on kerosene lamps for lighting and accessed springs and wells for water. In the 1930s, the CCA petitioned the City to pave Ritchie Avenue and extend electric service to “the Hill” and other African American neighborhoods in Takoma Park.¹⁴ The organization’s meeting minutes and records from the City Council from the 1940s and 1950s reflect consistent advocacy for community concerns. The issues raised included dumping of trash in the neighborhood and irregular garbage pickups, gambling, speeding, and disorderly conduct. The CCA requested street lighting, street repairs, and sewer hookups, and regularly fundraised to offset insufficient funding of the Takoma Park Rosenwald School, which needed their aid to provide a school lunch program.¹⁵ These records also reflect an at-times strained relationship with the local police department. Community members petitioned the City Council to request that “the Police be instructed to use their guns with precaution.”¹⁶ In 1948, the CCA elected Lee Jordan as President. Jordan spearheaded the organization’s work through the late 1940s and 1950s, including the campaign for the construction of Heffner Park.

Historic Context: Lee Jordan (1909 – 1988)

Lee Jordan was among the influx of African Americans who came to Maryland during the Great Migration. Born in Mississippi in 1909, Jordan’s family moved north in 1918. Lee’s father, William Jordan, acquired the house at 28 Ritchie Avenue in 1923, where Lee grew up.

After a stint playing baseball for the Homestead Grays in the segregated Negro League, Lee Jordan returned to the Hill and began working as a custodian at the all-white Montgomery Blair High School (1935-1946) and then at Takoma Park

¹² “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Susan Schreiber, Historic Takoma, Interviewed by Eric Griffitts, August 8, 2022.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, 1940 – 1954, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.

¹⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, April 1-30, 1950, 254. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archives-minutes-1950-04.pdf>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 5

Junior High until his retirement in 1973.¹⁷ Through these jobs and his community service, including his role as a deacon at the First Baptist Church, he became a mentor and coach to Black and white boys and girls who joined his football, baseball, and basketball teams.¹⁸ Jordan worked to bridge racial divides and welcomed white and Latino players to join the teams he founded for Black children who lacked the same access to organized sports.¹⁹ His welcoming attitude was notable in a time of steep racial divisions. As noted by a former Mayor of Takoma Park, unlike many others, “he just assumed that blacks and whites were supposed to play together.”²⁰ The City of Takoma Park’s recognition of his legacy as “one of the most influential citizens” in the history of the city stemmed from his leadership in local youth sports and recreation.²¹ His efforts to integrate youth athletics and provide recreational outlets are seen as a key factor in the peaceful racial integration of Takoma Park’s public schools following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling.²²

Historic Context: Racial Segregation of Parks and Recreational Facilities in Takoma Park (1927-1950)

Parks and recreation have played an important historical role in American community life. The ideal of the “neighborhood park” which took root in the early 20th century led to the proliferation of local playgrounds, swimming pools, ballfields, and indoor recreation facilities.²³ The initial development of these resources occurred in a period of legalized racial segregation that denied access to recreation and leisure opportunities for African Americans across the country.²⁴ Public recreation facilities for Black communities were sub-standard, when provided at all.²⁵ Other non-dominant groups, including Jews, were likewise excluded from places for recreation and leisure.²⁶ Dr. William E. O’Brien notes in *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South*, the ways in which Black communities relied on “self-help and advocacy [to obtain] their own quality recreational facilities” in the Jim Crow era.²⁷ This pattern is reflected in the decades-long advocacy of Takoma Park’s Black residents for access to park and recreation facilities. The segregated recreation facilities in Takoma Park were in keeping with practices across Montgomery County, which did not begin to integrate its recreation activities until 1955.²⁸ The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) held primary responsibility for the county’s recreational facilities and programs from its inception in 1927 to the adoption of Montgomery County’s home rule charter in 1948. Through this era, M-NCPPC established parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities for white residents in heavily populated areas, primarily in downcounty

¹⁷ Resolution 2021-3: Establishing February 23 as Lee Jordan Day in Takoma Park, City of Takoma Park, Resolution, February 17, 2021. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/resolutions/2021/resolution-2021-3.pdf>

¹⁸ McGuckian, 11.

¹⁹ Lee Jordan’s former mentees recall playing for Jordan’s teams as they racially integrated in “Lee Jordan Day 2023: A Celebration,” Takoma Park City TV, YouTube, April 7, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7RNP200JdA>

²⁰ Former Mayor of Takoma Park, Sam Abbott, quoted in “A Farewell to Lee Jordan, Who Made Lives Better,” *The Washington Post*, Tracey A. Reeves, March 3, 1988.

²¹ Resolution 2013-30: Rededication of Lee Jordan Field, City of Takoma Park, Resolution, May 28, 2013. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/resolutions/2013/resolution-2013-30.pdf>

²² Resolution 2021-3.

²³ “Parks and Recreation in the United States: Local Park Systems,” Margaret Walls, Resources for the Future Backgrounder, 2009, 2, https://media.rff.org/documents/RFF-BCK-ORRG_Local20Parks.pdf

²⁴ “Observing from a Lens of Equity,” Kristine M. Fleming, Ed.D., Parks & Recreation Magazine, National Recreation and Parks Association, August 2021, <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2021/september/observing-from-a-lens-of-equity/>.

²⁵ “Separate but Unequal: The History of Racial Exclusion in Southern Parks,” Glenn LaRue Smith, FASLA, The Dirt (Blog), American Society of Landscape Architects, <https://dirt.asla.org/2022/07/26/separate-but-unequal-the-history-of-racial-exclusion-in-southern-parks/>

²⁶ “Discrimination and Quotas,” *Antisemitism in American History*, Anti-Defamation League, 2023. <https://antisemitism.adl.org/antisemitism-in-american-history/>

²⁷ “Separate but Unequal,” Smith.

²⁸ “From Little League to the Big Leagues: The Takoma Tigers.” Eileen McGuckian, *Montgomery County Story*, 55 (Summer 2012): 11.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 6

communities that paid a special recreation tax for the provision of these services.²⁹

M-NCPPC built one such facility for the white residents of Takoma Park while the city's Black residents were actively seeking access to parks and recreation facilities. M-NCPPC, with the support of the City Council, purchased 12.7 acres in 1947 that comprises present-day Takoma-Piney Branch Local Park. The Commission soon thereafter constructed the Takoma Park Recreation Center, which was completed by 1953 when it appeared on local maps.³⁰ The facility had a community room, kitchen, heating, indoor plumbing, and a fireplace, with park grounds that included football, baseball, and softball fields, a playground, and picnic area.³¹

The 1948 county charter led to the reorganization of county government and the formation of new departments to provide better services to residents.³² Montgomery County's Department of Recreation officially began operations on June 1, 1953, when it assumed responsibility for recreation from M-NCPPC.³³ In its first year of operation, the department led year-round recreational activities and summer programs throughout the county which were segregated by race.³⁴ Forest V. Gustafson served as the department's first director and led a staff of six employees. Gustafson initiated the desegregation of the department's activities with the opening of the 1955 playground season.³⁵ Prior to desegregation, limited summer recreation programs for Black children were offered at Montgomery County's segregated schools for African Americans. In the mid-1940s, these programs were available in the Lincoln Valley High School in Rockville, Scotland, Emory Grove, and the River Road community, as well as in the Takoma Park Rosenwald School on Geneva Avenue.³⁶

Community Advocacy: 1941-1950

African American residents advocated for nearly two decades for places for Black children to play before the construction of the Heffner Park Community Center. In February of 1941, the Parent-Teachers Association of the Takoma Park Colored School (Takoma Park's Rosenwald School) requested that the City donate playground equipment for the school.³⁷ The PTA sought the playground equipment from the decommissioned Seventh-day Adventist Takoma Park Church School at 8 Columbia Avenue, which the City had recently purchased for use as a municipal facility.³⁸ Given the poor conditions at the Takoma Park Rosenwald School, which in the 1940s lacked basic amenities such as sanitary

²⁹ McGuckian, 11; "Guide to the Records of the Department of Recreation, 1954-2000." Montgomery County Archives, Gaithersburg, MD: 2.

³⁰ This building is no longer extant. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1947, 44. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1947-05.pdf>; Montgomery County Land Records, Liber CKW 1129, Folio 320, 1948.

³¹ "Park Guide," The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, April 1954, Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Archives.

³² McGuckian, 11.

³³ Guide to the Records of the Dept. of Rec., 2.

³⁴ Guide to the Records of the Dept. of Rec., 2; McGuckian, 11.

³⁵ McGuckian, 11.

³⁶ "24 Recreation Centers Will Open Monday," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, Rockville, MD, June 21, 1945. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress; "Recreation Program Opens This Week," *Montgomery County Sentinel* Rockville, MD, June 27, 1946. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress.

³⁷ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1 – March 31, 1941, 156. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1941-02.pdf>; note that the school is often addressed as Geneva Avenue

³⁸ "Takoma Park Serves Early Adventists with Christian Education," Beth Michaels, *Visitor Magazine*, Columbia Union Conference, 2007, 18. <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/CUV/CUV20070301-V112-03.pdf>; Montgomery County Land Records, March 15, 1939, Liber CKW 728, Folio 385.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 7

drinking facilities, it is likely that the school lacked any playground equipment.³⁹

Councilmember Herman C. Heffner became the first elected official to take formal action in support of Black residents' request for access to recreation facilities.⁴⁰ At a Council meeting held November 24, 1947, Heffner raised the matter and led the Council to adopt a motion to request that M-NCPPC study the issue of establishing a recreation center in Takoma Park for Black residents.⁴¹ Meeting minutes suggest no discussion of constructing an integrated recreation center or of integrating the new Takoma Park Recreation Center. While the African American community favored an integrated facility, the City consistently identified the new center as specifically for Black patrons.⁴²

By the summer of 1948, the City Council heard consistent public demand for a playground or recreation center to serve Black residents.⁴³ Mina E. Fischer, a white homeowner on New York Avenue, urged the Council to coordinate with M-NCPPC to "take immediate steps to make a playground for the colored children of Takoma Park."⁴⁴ Fischer later returned to the Council to introduce a petition signed by 95 African American families in the City calling for a playground for Black children. She reported that a copy of the petition had also been sent to M-NCPPC. At the same meeting, the Takoma Auxiliary to the Takoma Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, endorsed "the colored recreation center for the children of the colored residents of the Park."⁴⁵ Through early 1949, the City held discussions with community residents and M-NCPPC staff and debated the purchase of two lots on Ritchie Avenue for the playground, but determined that it was best not to act while waiting to see what the new County Council would do.⁴⁶

The Colored Citizens Association played an integral role in lobbying the City to provide recreation facilities for African Americans. Though the primary focus was to obtain a playground in "the Hill," this advocacy was supported by Black residents across the City, including Lucille Barry, who owned a home with her family on Colby Avenue in "the Bottom," another of Takoma Park's predominantly African American neighborhoods.⁴⁷ Representation from both communities reflects the recreation center as a priority for Black residents across the city.

In May 1949, Mayor John C. Post met with the CCA to report that the City would set aside \$2,000 or more to buy land for a recreation center, but that residents (presumably the Black residents for whom the facility was intended) would be responsible for clearing the land and fixing up the site.⁴⁸ The City's 1949-1950 budget officially set aside the purchase

³⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1942, 174. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1942-09.pdf>

⁴¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1 – December 31, 1947, 82. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1947-08.pdf>

⁴² Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, April 1950, Courtesy of Historic Takoma.; "Houston Says 'Rights' Furor Gives Group Balance of Power," *The Atlanta Daily World*, October 17, 1948.

⁴³ Records throughout this era alternately refer to the requested facility as a "playground" and a "recreation center."

⁴⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1948, 160. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1948-05.pdf>

⁴⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1948, 188. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1948-07.pdf>

⁴⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1 – 5, 1949, 239. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-01.pdf>

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, May 1949, Courtesy of Historic Takoma.; 1950 U.S. Federal Census.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 8

money: \$2,000 of a total \$8,000 approved for capital improvements to municipal parks was earmarked for a playground for the community around Ritchie Avenue.⁴⁹

The process by which the City selected a site for the playground is not well-documented, though it is clear they sought a location within the Ritchie Avenue neighborhood. Finally, on September 26, 1949, Councilmember H. Brooks Perring presented a proposed site for the playground and reported an offer from W.W.W. Parker to sell three lots on Oswego Avenue for \$4,400.⁵⁰ The purchase was finalized on April 25, 1950.⁵¹

Nine years after Takoma Park's Black PTA began their call for a playground, land had finally been acquired. Nine further years of turmoil would follow before the park found a permanent home.

Historic Context: Development of the Original Heffner Park (31 Oswego Avenue) 1950 – 1957

The City failed to develop the park and playground once the land had been acquired. Residents spent the next two years seeking the City's assistance to clear the land of stumps and dumped trash, while the CCA carried out independent fundraisers to pay for the work of preparing and developing the site. As late as the spring of 1953, the City entertained the idea of using the land for a new library rather than its intended use.⁵²

Eventually, the City acquiesced and established a playground and baseball diamond on the site by the mid-1950s. Finally, the Black residents of Takoma Park had a place to play and gather outdoors.⁵³ The City named the park in honor of Councilman Heffner in August 1952. Heffner Park was a place where the community met to play well-attended baseball games, throw horseshoes, and listen to local musicians. Residents remember it as "the place to go," and a long-awaited venue for organized sports and athletic competition.⁵⁴ Baseball fields like this one were cornerstones of many of Montgomery County's African American communities, along with local schools and churches, through the 1960s. These ballfields provided entertainment and a place to socialize for Black residents who had few other options under legalized segregation.⁵⁵

Black residents continued to advocate for additional facilities for their communities. In particular, Lee Jordan and the CCA recognized that Black teens still lacked a place for club meetings or to socialize by holding dances and parties. Through 1958, Lee Jordan appeared consistently at the City Council and met separately with Council members to request

⁴⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, June 1 – June 30, 1949, 84. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-07.pdf>

⁵⁰ This land is the site of the City's present-day Public Works facility. The lots are identified as lots 16, 17, and 18 in Block 60 of Gilbert's Addition to Takoma Park. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1- 30, 1949, 135. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1949-09.pdf>.

⁵¹ Montgomery County Land Records, April 25, 1950, Liber CKW 1381, Folio 594.

⁵² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1-31, 1953, 111. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1953-03.pdf>

⁵³ "Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center," Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 7.

⁵⁴ Historic Takoma, Inc. "They Called Him 'Mr. Lee,'" YouTube, October 27, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utOXiG8erXs>

⁵⁵ "The Black baseball leagues of Montgomery County," Bruce Adams, *Bethesda Magazine*, <https://bethesdamagazine.com/2022/06/12/the-black-baseball-leagues-of-montgomery-county/>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 9

that the City provide a recreation building for use by Black residents, specifically “his teenagers.”⁵⁶ Dolly Davis, a Takoma Park resident born in 1958, described her mother’s experience growing up without such a place to go: There was a time she said that the [white] Rec Center wasn’t open to her. But she would go at night and watch the dancers from the parking lot, the bands that would come and play for the white kids... They would be in the darkness at the parking lot dancing in the parking lot, watching over the hill, unseen by those who were down below.⁵⁷ An existing, run-down building on the Heffner Park site, in which children liked to play, had been removed by the City by 1957 as a safety hazard.⁵⁸ Jordan repeatedly requested that an abandoned school building be repurposed as a recreation building, which presumably referred to the now-vacant Takoma Park Rosenwald School on Geneva Avenue that had been shuttered with school integration in 1955.

Historic Context: Closure and Relocation of Heffner Park (1954-1959)

Plans for Relocation of the Public Works Facility

By the early 1950s, major changes were underway just south of “The Hill” along Maple Avenue. Developers were interested in building large apartment buildings in the area, M-NCPPC had constructed the Takoma Park Recreation Center, and major flooding of Brashears Run (which ran beside and under Maple Avenue) was wreaking havoc on roadways and adjacent properties. In August 1950, heavy rain washed out the Maple Avenue bridge, prompting the City Council to consider longer term solutions. They wanted to straighten and channelize the stream as well as reorganize the roads to facilitate larger scale development.⁵⁹

City officials recognized that the enclosure of Brashear’s Run and the improvements to Maple Avenue would make the area between Philadelphia Avenue and Sligo Creek attractive for substantial new development.⁶⁰ Until this point, this stretch of Maple Avenue, subject as it was to flooding and drainage problems, was less desirable land and the site of “sub-standard homes,” per public testimony heard by the City Council.⁶¹ The City’s Public Works facility was also situated on Maple Avenue between Philadelphia and Lee Avenues.⁶² Nearby Takoma Park residents complained about the facility’s terrible odor, unsightly garbage trucks, and the mess created when Public Works employees dumped collected leaves and ashes at various locations around town.⁶³ It was clear that the Public Works facility was a nuisance to its immediate neighbors. In light of the anticipated development along Maple Avenue, city officials determined it was “mandatory that a

⁵⁶ Takoma Park City Council minutes, September 1-30, 1957, 148. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁵⁷ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Dolly Davis, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 2.

⁵⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1957, 148. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁵⁹ Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes - June 18 - June 30, 1951, 230. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1951-07.pdf>

⁶⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1 – March 31, 1954, 59. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-03.pdf>

⁶¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-May 19, 1952, 174. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1952-06.pdf>

⁶² “Takoma Park Budget Requests Head,” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1956;

⁶³ Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes - September 1 - September 30, 1951, 16. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1951-10.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Meeting Minutes, January 1 - January 31, 1953, 83-84.

<https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1953-01.pdf>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 10

new location for the Public Works Department be found.”⁶⁴

On March 22, 1954, without prior public debate, Councilman Klinck announced on behalf of the Public Works Committee that a contract had been signed to purchase Lot 3 in Block 62 of Gilbert’s Subdivision as the new site for the Public Works facility.⁶⁵ The proposed location was just north of the original Heffner Park site at 31 Oswego Avenue, in the midst of the predominantly Black neighborhood of “the Hill.” This lot is the present-day site of Heffner Park.

Residents and property owners in the vicinity of the proposed site quickly began to protest the decision. In addition to written objections by individual property owners, Black citizens coordinated an action at a July 12, 1954, executive meeting of the City Council. Opponents of the facility’s move to Oswego Avenue submitted a petition with over 120 signatures, and a large group of citizens appeared in person to voice their objections. Mayor Miller noted that citizens were not typically allowed to speak at this type of meeting, “but due to the number of citizens present there must be something of importance to be considered,” and gave them the opportunity to speak. Lee Jordan spoke on behalf of a citizens group, likely the CCA, to protest the move, followed by four other residents of Oswego and Ritchie Avenues.⁶⁶ The content of their objections was briefly reported the next day in the *Evening Star*: “the city trucks and other vehicles would be objectionable to look at and also would constitute a traffic hazard.”⁶⁷ No direct response to these concerns is evident in City Council minutes.

Land Swap of Heffner Park and the Public Works Facility

The exact chain of events leading to the City’s decision to use the original Heffner Park for the new public works facility is unclear. Plans for the new public works facility progressed gradually over the period of 1954-1957, with street repair, grading, and survey work underway on Oswego Avenue. Heffner Park was still in use through the summer of 1957, when new playground equipment was installed.⁶⁸

In the fall of 1957, the City began taking action towards the design and construction of the new public works facility.⁶⁹ The Council formally signed a contract with Silver Spring architect Philip W. Mason for plans and specifications for the new facility that November.⁷⁰ The timing of subsequent events suggests that behind-the-scenes conversations about an exchange of the sites may have already been underway. The Public Works Department reported on a discussion of the idea with E.W. Bucklin, Director of Montgomery County Department of Inspections and Licenses just two months later. Regarding “the use of the Heffner Park site for the new Public Works Department facilities,” Bucklin stated “that Municipalities are not bound by zoning regulations, and can use property belonging to the City in whatever way they

⁶⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1 – March 31, 1954, 59-60. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-03.pdf>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1- 31, 1954, 109-110. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1954-07.pdf>

⁶⁷ “Takoma Park Plans Fight on Conditions Leading to Floods,” *The Evening Star*, July 13, 1954.

⁶⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 – 30, 1957, 146. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-08.pdf>

⁶⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1 – December 30, 1957, 178. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1957-10.pdf>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 11

choose.”⁷¹ In late January 1958, City Council members met with Lee Jordan and Peter Remsen, Director of the Public Works Department, to discuss the possible location of a building to be used as a recreation center. They reached an agreement that Remsen would draw up plans for a “simple cinder block structure,” and submit a cost estimate to the Council.⁷²

Planning for the two new facilities progressed through the spring of 1958. On March 10, 1958, the City Council approved the transmittal of plans for the new public works facility from Philip Mason, architect, to the construction contractor. More detailed coverage of the meeting in *The Washington Post* revealed that the final site had in fact been selected, noting that the council had “approved preliminary sketches for three new Public Works Department buildings...to be located on Oswego ave. [sic] at the site of the old Heffner Park.”⁷³

This decision was not formally announced by the Council until May, when Councilmember Robert W. Collison stated that “an agreement has been established with the people who use the [playground] to interchange, so that the playground portion could be used as part of the Public Works Project.”⁷⁴ Details of the discussions leading to this agreement, as well as the terms agreed to, were not recorded. However, the timing of these actions does show that the City did not take substantial action towards provision of a recreation building for Black residents until an agreement was reached to place the new public works facility at the site of the sole existing park and playground accessible to African Americans.

Regardless of ongoing discussions that may have been underway about the swap of these sites, the news that the existing Heffner Park would close came as a painful shock to the people who used the park. Lester Barry recalls the Saturday that Lee Jordan told him he could not play at the park anymore, because “they’re going to park the trash trucks there.”⁷⁵ Without Heffner Park, Black residents “didn’t have any place to go, nothing at all.”⁷⁶ Patricia Matthews remembers that when the City “decided to take that playground...that was the only place that we could go to play because all the other playgrounds were segregated. That was our playground, our recreation center, our picnic area, our park. But they decided to take the Public Works and build it in that area, which eliminated any place that we could have to go...”⁷⁷ Heffner Park’s Black patrons saw their long sought-after playground and ballfield, land which community members had cleared themselves, become home to collected leaves, garbage, and trash trucks.⁷⁸

Historic Context: Design, Construction, and Use of the Heffner Park Community Center (1957-1960)

⁷¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 1958, 203. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-01.pdf>

⁷² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 208. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival%20minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-01.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1-28, 1958, 225. This may be the point at which an agreement was made to switch the two sites.

⁷³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 1-31, 1958, 243. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-03.pdf>; “Takoma Council Approves Plans,” *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1958.

⁷⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 22. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁷⁵ Lester Barry, in “They Called Him Mr. Lee,” Historic Takoma, Inc. YouTube, October 27, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utOXiG8erXs>

⁷⁶ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Patricia Matthews, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 5.

⁷⁷ Second Oral History of Patricia Matthews, 7.

⁷⁸ “Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral History of Lester Barry, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 12

Design and Construction of the Community Center (42 Oswego Avenue)

After finally agreeing to the construction of a new recreation building for Black residents, the City began planning for a simple building that would maximize economy. Officials began negotiating the details with architect Phillip Mason, who was under contract to design the new public works facilities. In May 1958, the Council asked Mason whether it would be possible to build a cinderblock recreation center “with the minimum of facilities” for approximately \$6,500. Mason projected that costs would be closer to \$10,000 and agreed to prepare preliminary plans for such a building.⁷⁹ Later that month, the Council reviewed Mason’s proposals for the recreation building at the new Heffner Park: “the building would cost approximately \$12,800 to complete... this would include the heating system, two restrooms, a kitchen space with roughed in plumbing, and electric wiring; also that the building would be constructed of cinder block, painted on the inside, so that there would be little in the building that could be damaged...” With this plan in hand, the City authorized Mason to draw up detailed plans and advertise construction bids.⁸⁰

On September 22, 1958, the City Council awarded a contract for construction of the public works facility to the Bethesda-based Robert W. Blake Company, Inc. for the sum of \$101,899.⁸¹ The City instructed the contractor to begin the project within ten days and started to plan for a groundbreaking ceremony.⁸²

At the same meeting, the Council elected to award the construction contract for the “Heffner Park Community Building” to Bethesda builder Charles Bang for the sum of \$13,423. The contract was not signed as there were still “various points to be worked out,” but the builder was to be given three months to complete the project once the contract was executed.⁸³ Preparations for the paving of Niagara, Ritchie, and Oswego Avenues were also being made; these streets had been left unpaved to this point, but “the street will be much needed once [the] Public Works project is started.”⁸⁴ Work was underway on both facilities and the playground area for the new park by late October 1958.⁸⁵

Through the early months of 1959, small sums were authorized by the Council for items overlooked in the original community center plans: exit lights (\$46.67), gutters and downspouts (\$85.00), and installation of hardware (\$60.10).⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 7. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁸⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, May 1-31, 1958, 12. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-05.pdf>

⁸¹ The Council received eleven bids received for construction of the two new facilities. Bids for the public works facility ranged from \$101,899.00 to \$129,575.00; while bids for the community center ranged from \$13,423 to \$16,350. Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1958, 97. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-09.pdf>

⁸² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1958, 98.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 108. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

⁸⁵ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 118. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

⁸⁶ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, January 1-31, 1959, 157, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-01.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, February 1-28, 1959, 166, <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-02.pdf>; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, March 10-31, 1959, 194.

<https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-02.pdf>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 13

Larger requested expenses including “auditorium seating” and “stage draperies” were set aside to be considered.⁸⁷

By June of 1959, the new park had playground equipment and was ready to host a summer recreation program, though construction would not be finished for several more months.⁸⁸ Both facilities were nearing completion by July, when the Council began planning for an open house to mark the opening of the new facilities.⁸⁹ The celebration was held September 13, 1959.⁹⁰

Programming and Use of the Heffner Park Community Center

The construction of the community center prompted planning for its programming and use. City officials envisioned that it would serve as “not only a Recreational building, but will be used for Civic purposes too.”⁹¹

Soon after the community center opened in September 1959, Councilmember Emily Monitor, who served on the Parks and Recreation Committee, met with Lee Jordan, Public Works Director Earl Rhodes, and Forest Gustafson, Montgomery County’s Director of Recreation, to work out “a satisfactory recreation program at the Heffner Park Community Center.” The group agreed to a new “teenage recreation program, including games and dancing” to be held Friday evenings from 7:30 to 10:30 PM, beginning on October 16. The County agreed to provide someone to lead the program, but a record player and other items for the center were still needed. Monitor suggested that a community fundraiser, such as a bake sale, could offset the cost for these needs.⁹²

Additional work would need to be done to the building to accommodate the teen program: when built, “only the necessary items were installed.” In October, the City approved additional funding, not to exceed \$1,100, for the necessary plumbing work, an electric stove, kitchen sink, birch cabinets, a water cooler, and electric hand driers.⁹³ On October 30, a gathering was held at the new Heffner Park Recreation Center, for which Montgomery County provided the promised record player. This was likely the first meeting of the ‘teen club.’ Councilwoman Monitor attended and reported afterwards that there was a “good turnout, which definitely indicated that people are interested in having an organized program for teenagers.” She stated that as she was leaving, she overheard the comment, “Our dream has come true after 15 years.”⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1958, 106. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-10.pdf>

⁸⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, June 1-30, 1959, 246. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-06.pdf>

⁸⁸ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, June 1-30, 1959, 246. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-06.pdf>

⁸⁹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1959, 261. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-07.pdf>

⁹⁰ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1 -30, 1959, 15. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-09.pdf>

⁹¹ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1-31, 1958, 57. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1958-07.pdf>

⁹² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, September 1-30, 1959, 30. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-09.pdf>

⁹³ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, October 1-31, 1959, 36. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-10.pdf>

⁹⁴ Takoma Park City Council Minutes, November 1-December 31, 1959, 58. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1959-11.pdf>

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 14

Dale Jones, a Takoma Park resident born in 1945, described what the teen club meant to Black teenagers at the time: Until we got the Teen Club we didn't have much for youth to do for dances and things like that. We could go different places, but a lot of the places we could go you weren't supposed to be there. For children 14, 15, and 16, there really wasn't any place where we could go to be teenagers. Then when Heffner Park came and they put the building down there then that was where we all gathered. Teens from other neighborhoods came there like the teens from Linden, [they] came to do activities there.⁹⁵

The teen club was small, without space for a lot of people, but it provided a place for teenagers to host parties, play records, dance, and eat together. The Friday night gatherings were chaperoned by neighborhood mothers who made sure things "didn't go off the deep end," as well as police who "set out there because they didn't want people to hang around and drink."⁹⁶

Teen clubs had emerged as an important priority for the county's Parks and Recreation departments in the mid-1950s. These agencies prioritized the establishment of indoor, evening gathering places for teenagers as "healthy and constructive" environments where young people could socialize, particularly with members of the opposite sex, without getting into trouble.⁹⁷ Though the Heffner Park Teen Club operated in a City facility, the program had at least some support from the county Department of Recreation.

It is unclear how long the Heffner Park Teen Club operated after the County's public accommodations law (1962) began to make other social venues available. One Lyttonsville resident, Patricia Tyson, recalled that it lasted only through the early 1960s.⁹⁸

The new Heffner Park lacked the space for a baseball diamond, a significant amenity of the previous site, but the new Community Center gave Black residents of Takoma Park a place to gather for community and familial get-togethers, such as "Girl Scouts, birthday parties, [and] special events."⁹⁹ Lee Jordan's daughter, Patricia Matthews, recalled that Heffner Park was the site for her family's annual Labor Day picnic, a large party that served as a de facto community picnic because the family was so well-known. The community center also hosted classes including a General Educational Development (GED) course.¹⁰⁰

Since the 1960s, Heffner Park has continued to operate as a community center and rental space operated by the City's

⁹⁵ "Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center," Oral History of Dale Jones, conducted by Alison Kahn 2020-2022 for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc., 3.

⁹⁶ Oral History of Lester Barry, 1.; Oral History of Dale Jones, 3.

⁹⁷ "Master Plan of Schools, Parks, and Recreation," 1956. Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 26. Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Archives.

⁹⁸ Patricia Tyson, Interviewed by David Rotenstein in 2016, "Montgomery County Historical Society BOOM exhibit is a dud," History Sidebar [Blog], June 6, 2018. <https://blog.historian4hire.net/2018/06/06/boom-exhibit-is-a-dud/>

⁹⁹ Black residents may have gained access to the nearby Takoma Recreation Center baseball fields after Montgomery County's Department of Recreation began desegregating its program in 1955; Oral History of Dolly Davis, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Oral History of Patricia Matthews, 6.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No.

Name
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 15

Recreation Department, offering drop-in programming and classes and hosting birthday parties and family gatherings.¹⁰¹

Historic Context: City of Takoma Park Councilmember Herman C. Heffner (1870 – 1952)

Herman Claude Heffner was a popular civic leader who served for 10 years as a member of the Takoma Park City Council.¹⁰² After retiring as a railway postal clerk, he held community leadership positions as president of the Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department, secretary of the Community League, and member of the local Masonic lodge.¹⁰³ As a member of the City Council in the 1940s, he advocated for improvements to the Takoma Park Rosenwald School, such as clean drinking water and sewer hookups, prior to raising the matter of a recreation center for Black residents in 1947.

Lee Jordan first raised the idea of naming the recreation center for Councilman Heffner, who had “been of great assistance,” at a meeting of the Colored Citizens Association in May of 1950, two years before Heffner’s death in July 1952.¹⁰⁴ Following his death, the CCA submitted a request to the City that the recreation center be named on his behalf, which the Council agreed to in August 1952. The formal resolution recognized Heffner as a community leader admired by people “irrespective of race, creed or color,” whose dedication to the provision of community park and recreation facilities spurred the City’s purchase of the park land for Black residents.¹⁰⁵

Historic Context: Philip A. Mason, AIA (1922 – 1996)

The City of Takoma Park hired local architect Philip W. Mason to design both the Public Works site and the new community center. Mason grew up in Montgomery County and opened his general-practice architecture firm in 1952.¹⁰⁶ In the mid-to-late 1950s, Mason did some residential architecture but primarily worked on institutional projects. His work in this period included regular contracts with Montgomery County Public Schools on the construction of new buildings and additions, Silver Spring fire station #19, and the Connecticut Belair Club, a private recreation center in Wheaton. By the late 1960s, Mason was elected to a series of leadership positions with the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, including serving as chapter President in 1968.

¹⁰¹ Deborah Huffman, Acting Recreation Director, City of Takoma Park, Interviewed by Kacy Rohn, February 24, 2023.

¹⁰² Takoma Park City Council Minutes, July 1 – July 31, 1952, 2. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1952-10.pdf>

¹⁰³ U.S. Register of Civil, Military, and Naval Service, 1863-1959, page 1610. Digitized by Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, USA.; “Heffner, Herman Claude,” Obituary, *The Evening Star*, July 14, 1952; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, April 1 – 30, 1940, 54. <https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-council/archival-minutes/1900s/council-archive-minutes-1940-03.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, May 1950, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the Colored Citizens Association, August 1952, Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.; Takoma Park City Council Minutes, Takoma Park City Council Minutes, August 1 – 31, 1952, 28.

¹⁰⁶ “Philip W. Mason, AIA,” *Potomac Valley Architect*, Jan./Feb. 1968, Volume 11, Number 3. <https://usmodernist.org/AIAPV/AIAPV-1968-01-02.pdf>

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<https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/city-clerk/takoma-park-archives/>

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Records of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Archives, Various.

“Reflections on the Origins and Early Days of the Heffner Park Community Center,” Oral Histories conducted by Alison Kahn, 2020-2022, for the Takoma Park African American Oral History Project, Historic Takoma, Inc.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 32,275 SF

Acreage of historical setting

Quadrangle name Washington West

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Heffner Park Community Center at 42 Oswego Avenue occupies Lot 3 in Block 62 of Gilbert’s Addition to Takoma Park in the City of Takoma Park, Maryland. The site consists of the entire 32,275 square feet of land identified as 01060657, District 13. The boundary includes the entire property historically associated with the park.

11. Form Prepared by

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|-----------|----------------|
| name/title | Kacy Rohn, Cultural Resources Planner II, and John Liebertz, Cultural Resources Planner III | | |
| organization | Montgomery Planning (M-NCPPC) | date | March 28, 2023 |
| street & number | 2425 Reddie Drive, 13 th Floor | telephone | (301) 563-3407 |
| city or town | Wheaton | state | MD |

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-697-9591