



PARKS BUILD COMMUNITY PROJECTS

SANDY CREEK PARK BOULDERING WALL

We propose converting a long-closed structure in Durham’s Sandy Creek Park—a round structure with thick concrete walls and a domed cover—into the City’s first outdoor bouldering wall. In addition to climbing holds, we would install fall zone safety surfacing under the climbing area, a fence to block access to an old control area, and an accessible walkway to the site. Staff would receive training in monitoring bouldering activities, and an introductory event would welcome the community to the site.

In 1928, the City of Durham built a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant adjacent to Sandy Creek. In 1963, that plant was closed and the 102-acre site cleaned and turned over to the Parks Department. Today, the site has trails, flowers, picnic shelters and several remaining old structures from the plant—including the concrete-walled, domed Vacuator building. The building is 24 feet in diameter and 18 feet tall at the top of the dome, with solid walls 12 to 18 inches thick. Please see attached plans and photos.

We proposed to fence off the former door and stairs (which are currently being used illicitly to access the building room) and to add climbing holds around the remaining wall area to create a bouldering experience and training wall. There will be safety surfacing around the base for a fall zone, eliminating need for climbers to bring their own “crash pads.” There will be an accessible walkway constructed to the site, not only for legal compliance but because some with great upper body strength are disabled in other ways, such as the wounded veterans for whom we run programs.

Area climbers tell us that in this area, with its large population, outdoor climbing opportunities are scarce: “the cliffs are really short and the bouldering is terrible”; other climbing destinations are “3 to 6 hours from Durham.” Would-be climbers pay a good bit to use the two indoor facilities in neighboring communities. An outdoor wall, open to the public, would be used by many drop in residents as well as by programs run through this department. Sandy Creek Park has a past as a wastewater treatment plant; it has been recycled into a park with bird-watching, nature trails, and flowers. It won a local Appearance Commission award, and it is a Monarch Butterfly conservation site. In the spirit of Seattle’s GasWorks Park, we want now to recycle this old Vacuator building into a new recreational amenity for this site.

Focus areas

Healthy living

Access to sports

