

BRING BACK THE REC IN THE PAST...

POPPLTON RECREATION CENTER (PRC) AT GREATER MODEL PARK IN POPPLETON

“Rec” centers, as they are familiarly known, demonstrate that a city cares about the lives of its citizens and that it is willing to invest in their social and physical health.”

-Phoebe Stanton, architectural historian, 1976



“I remember when they tore down Carlton street and built that park and that pool and that recreational center for us. There was a division between the Lexington Terrace projects and the Poe Homes. But once they built this pool and this rec center, we all came together as children, and got along and played together... that playground and that recreational center brought the kids together.”

-Sonia Eaddy, Poppleton resident, 2021

The Sun (1837-1993); Jun 20, 1976, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The Baltimore Sun

A ‘high-performance’ public building

By PHOEBE STANTON

The news that the recreation center adjacent to school No. 161 at the corner of West Saratoga street and Arlington avenue will open tomorrow may seem, superficially, to be less than startling. In the contrary is the case. “Rec” centers, as they are familiarly known, demonstrate that the city cares about the lives of its citizens and that it is willing to invest in their social and physical health. These centers come in three sizes.

and seventy-five full-time career staff work in the centers; there are slots for 40 more. Six-hundred part-time teachers of crafts, arts and games and advisors on special work with the elderly and handicapped complete the roster. Thirty-five of the directors are women.

In the school year most centers are open from 2 P.M. to 10 P.M. In the summer the hours are 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. In a sense they are extensions of the school which offer the young educated play and guidance.

These limitations should get the job. The juggling off of parts when the building proves to be too costly or changes in the materials of the original design result not only in savings but in strange deficiencies in the architectural product. The Community Mental Health Center on Fayette street near Pine is a stellar example of architecture as the art of whittling away at a design until the round peg fits the square budget.

Responsibility also demands that new buildings somehow work comfortably with this Nineteenth-Century city, a



A skylight running the length of the building is the outstanding feature of the new recreation center in the Poppleton area of the city. Skylight serves to light both the upper and lower levels.

Image from Baltimore Sun, 1976; Article by Phoebe Stanton

Constructed under the Model Cities Program and sometimes referred to as the Greater Model Rec Center, the “art deco” style building opened in 1976 amongst much fanfare as a “high performance” public building and was described then as a “Play Machine” by the architect. Regrettably, the PRC fell into major disrepair and has remained closed and unused for 20 years now.

For the children of Poppleton the rec center was a unifier. Children would participate in activities such as swimming, skating, karate, and holiday events. In the summer they would eagerly wait until noon, when the pool opened, to swim and hang out with their friends. Parcha McFadden fondly remembers going to the rec center for Halloween parties. In the winter kids could pick up skates from the skate mobile stationed at the rec center.

In some ways the building’s demise is symbolic of the surrounding Poppleton community. The area has witnessed years of neglect, disinvestment, and a decade long delay regarding the Center West housing development. In 2017, then Councilman Brandon Scott, as a member of the State of Play: Baltimore Advisory Committee, pledged to reopen Rec Centers.

IN THE PRESENT...

Long vacant, the Poppleton Recreation Center at Greater Model Park in Poppleton is now being transformed into a community asset--providing recreational opportunities for community youth, seniors, and all ages in between. This is part of a wider revitalization of the Greater Model Park area. This transformation includes the opening of a new United Way Family Center at neighboring Excel Academy, which will include childcare facilities for students and community members, and Baltimore City’s new pool and splash pad funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Transform Poe project.



THE PRESENT CONTINUED...

Reopening the Rec Center was identified as a priority by the Poppleton community as part of a community planning process. The Poppleton Now neighborhood association approached the Southwest Partnership (SWP) and the Southwest Sports and Fitness Alliance (SSFA) to develop a strategy to re-open the Rec, and after conversations with the City and the community about the building's future and possible avenues for re-opening, the capital campaign for renovation funds began in 2019.

SWP has drafted plans for the renovation work and focused on deepening a partnership with public and private stakeholders on a capital campaign to close the funding gap. While the capital campaign is ongoing to raise funds for the renovation of the Rec Center, the SSFA is coordinating regular community meetings of recreation providers in the area and working with the community to identify gaps in existing programming and coordinate future program initiatives.

BE A PART OF THE FUTURE!

“The future's looking pretty bright right now... the rec center will become a community anchor and give people in the Poppleton area something to be proud of in their neighborhood, as well as perhaps being a destination for people in outlying neighborhoods to take advantage of some of the programming that's gonna be going on there.”

—Ivan Leshinsky, co-founder, Southwest Sports & Fitness Alliance, 2022



The Southwest Partnership (SWP) has signed a 15-year lease with the City with two 15-year lease renewals and plans to renovate the building and engage the Southwest Sports and Fitness Alliance (SSFA) to manage and provide programming for children, youth, adults, and seniors alike.



ADDRESS: 1051 W. Saratoga St. Baltimore, MD 21223

SIZE: 7,000'sq on two levels built in a novel geometric design

COST OF RENOVATIONS: \$2,000,000

AMOUNT RAISED TO DATE: \$1,250,000
Church of the Nativity - \$400,000
Maryland State BRNI Grant - \$250,000
Lowes Foundation - \$100,000
MD State Bond Bill - \$500,000

CALL TO ACTION!

PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING TO HELP US RE-OPEN & START YOUTH PROGRAMMING!

The Southwest Sports and Fitness Alliance is calling on YOU to be a part of change for the better. Our youth and our future are at stake here. What better way to set a foundation for them than by heading to <https://sportsfitnessalliance.org/> to check out our events and do as much as you can to make impactful change in your community? This is your community's future. Be a part of change.

