

TO: City of Boise, Planning and Development Services
FROM: Drew Alexander, Boise State University
DATE: September 24, 2019
SUBJECT: Challenge Course – 1507 S. Oakland Ave.

I. INTRODUCTION

Boise State is requesting a Conditional Use Amendment for the property located at 1507 S. Oakland Ave., often referred to as the BOAS Tennis and Soccer Facility. This 10.5 acre site is currently permitted to host the Boise State Women’s Soccer program, and indoor tennis programs. Our request is to amend the Conditional Use by adding a challenge course to the area, of which would be maintained and operated by Boise State Campus Recreation.

2. OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

A challenge course contains various initiatives that aim to enhance teambuilding, self-confidence and leadership development through adventure-based experiences. Our request includes elements typical to challenge course programs: High- and Low-rope elements, as well as support buildings or structures. The overall goal is to create an exciting and memorable venue for outdoor recreation, where participants gain valuable and long-lasting skills.

Low-Ropes

Low-rope initiatives can be as simple as logs or wooden platforms placed on the ground, or more technical features that involve cables or ropes. In total, there seven low-rope initiatives that will require professional installation. Campus Recreation will also use some very low-impact features, such as small wooden platforms in various areas.

High-Ropes

High-rope activities occur on an aerial course, which is the most substantial structure in our request. The aerial course consists of platforms raised above the ground, with various challenges that participants navigate as a team. Participants access the platform by climbing up nets, and exiting the course by the nets or zip line. Each person is equipped with safety gear, including but not limited to harness and helmet.

Other Buildings/Structures

Very few physical structures or buildings are necessary to support the challenge course. Our request includes a 12’ x 30’ storage shed for equipment and a 20’ x 35’ covered pavilion for group meetings and instruction. In addition, we have included a proposed location for a future footbridge across the drainage ditch. However, that feature will not be built right away. No other buildings or structures are part of the request.

3. SITE SAFETY

No activity will happen at the course without instruction and supervision from trained Campus Recreation personnel. The typical staff to participant ratio is 8:1 for Low Ropes and 6:1 for High Ropes. Programmed events will occur either as part of curricula, extracurricular activity, or other group reservations. As stated above, large nets provide access to the aerial course platforms, and a

lockable crank system is able to stow them safely away. This prevents trespass on the aerial course when Campus Recreation is not present.

Additional safety considerations relate to the area between the irrigation ditch and the base of the Ridenbaugh Canal. Vagrancy and homeless camps are prevalent in this area. Boise Police has been called numerous times help with enforcement of the area, and neighbors have noted drug use and littering. Boise State is hopeful that the program and additional activity will curtail these events. In other words, by clearing out overgrowth and having programmed activity in the area, the site becomes far less appealing for vagrancy and other illegal activity.

4. OPERATIONS

Hours

Campus Recreation will program and oversee scheduling the use of the facility. At this time, Boise State's hope is to have flexibility with programming Sunday through Monday. Sessions range from two to four hours. The hours of operations will depend on weather conditions and group size. The proposed range of hours of operations is from 8:30am to 7:30pm. For safety reasons, the course will never operate after dusk. During the last academic year, there were approximately 700 participants in Campus Recreation's leadership and teambuilding programs.

Lighting

Boise State is proposing no lighting to extend operating hours. The only additional site lighting stems from neighborhood feedback, and will be at the northwest portion of the site. This light will illuminate an area where vagrancy and illegal camps have been most prevalent.

Sound

Boise State will not use any PA systems for loudspeaker announcements or music. The only sound will be verbal communication between Campus Recreation personnel and program participants.

Parking

The BOAS facility is adequately parked for challenge course events. The parking lot south of the tennis bubbles (63 stalls) was added in 2002 when competitive soccer events were permitted. This lot will be prioritized for participant parking during scheduled challenge course events.

The Conditional Use Amendment in 2002 specified that no tennis events are to be scheduled at the same time as a soccer event, or vice versa. Boise State views this as an advantage for challenge course parking needs. With group sizes likely being around 40 participants (plus staff), there should ample parking capacity to accommodate the program, either in the south or north lots. In the event that no parking is available, Campus Recreation is able and willing to rendezvous with participants at the Rec Center (or alternate location on campus) and vanpool to the site.

5. DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS AND VARIANCE

Most of the initiatives are very simple structures. Often, a series of poles allow for ropes or cable to span and create the challenge. Boise State is requesting two variances, one for height and another for setbacks.

Height

As shown on our detailed drawings, the aerial teams course has a proposed height of 43 feet. However, the structure will be situated on a berm with a gradual slope. To have consistent platform heights, the poles on the low side of the slope may need to be taller (as measured from finished grade) than the 43 foot poles on the high side of the berm. Without a final grading plan in place, Boise State is seeking allowance for 55'. This will prevent significant excavation or disruption of existing conditions, of which neighbors have expressed concern.

Setbacks

Boise State has attempted to comply with R-3 zoning standards to the greatest extent possible. Larger elements (aerial teams course, storage shed and pavilion) are located within required setbacks. At the cul-de-sac at the end of Oakland Avenue, element number six – Nitro Crossing – is approximately eight feet from the property line. Nearby neighbors have voiced support for the initiative in this location, so long as it is accompanied by landscaping and maintenance. Along the base of the slope leading up to the canal, elements one and four (Team Wall and Mohawk Walk respectively) are 10 feet from the property line. These features are not buildings, but simple wooden structures with attached cables or ropes.

6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Neighborhood

In this area of the BOAS property, Boise State has maintained the lawn along Oakland Avenue and performed limited maintenance along the irrigation ditch. Otherwise, the area has been undeveloped for several years. As such, nearby residents have come to enjoy the area for relaxation, dog walking, or simply to access the Ridenbaugh Canal pathway.

The primary concern for neighbors are changes that may affect previous enjoyment of the site. Boise State is committed to allowing access to the site, and maintaining the area in a more purposeful manner. We would like to leave the area open, without fences, so that while not in use neighbors may continue to enjoy the site. However, and as voiced with the neighbors, if vandalism were to occur, these commitments may be reconsidered.

Additional feedback focused on hours of operation, noise and parking. Boise State believes that using the facility only during daylight hours is reasonable for the venue and intended use. Noise will be limited to verbal communication between staff and participants. Regarding parking, we feel the site has more than enough parking for the program (detailed description in Part 4 above).

Ada County Drainage District No. 3

Early on, Boise State met with Drainage District No. 3 to review the concept. The District's Board has been very receptive and supportive of the idea so far. We have mutual goals of keeping the site clean and safe for all users. It is our anticipation that if approved, Boise State will create a memorandum of understanding with the District to outline maintenance responsibilities along the ditch, as well as other required terms.

7. CONCLUSION

Boise State is confident the challenge course is a responsible and ideal use of the property. The course will create exceptional opportunities for students and the community to enhance leadership

and teambuilding skills. The course, by design, maintains many of the qualities of the site that neighbors have grown to appreciate over time. This includes open space and access to nearby pathways. In an urban setting, outdoor programs demand a high level of creativity, problems solving, and strategic use of available space. We believe this site and our proposed layout incorporate those three critical values. In closing, we would like to provide two quotes from students after completing challenge course activities (other campuses) and a link to a video that provides an example of the aerial teams course.

“The ultimate proof of the success of this program was walking into class the next day, and looking at all my classmates in a completely different light. They were no longer just people filling a chair in the classroom, they were now my friends, people I can talk to, trust and depend on. The immediate laughs and conversation that is present when waiting for class to start in comparison to the awkward silence that used to fill the room, is a direct reflection of the major impact and contribution that this program has had over the success of this class and the success of us as students.”

- *Student, Georgia State University*

"At first our group was scared and thought that we could not go through any of the challenges. We thought that we were going to be made fun of if we did not go through the entire course. However, the facilitators made it very comfortable, fun, and easier. This course even brought out the best in everyone in our group. All the members were very supporting and motivating; no one was left behind or frowned upon if they couldn't finish the course. If you are looking for a way to improve teamwork amongst members of your organization or to have fun, then the Challenge Course is definitely an exciting and excellent activity you and your group can do. I highly recommend participating in this course! You will not regret it!"

- *Vietnamese Student Association, Kansas State University*

Link to aerial course video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC-bp3TY0CA>