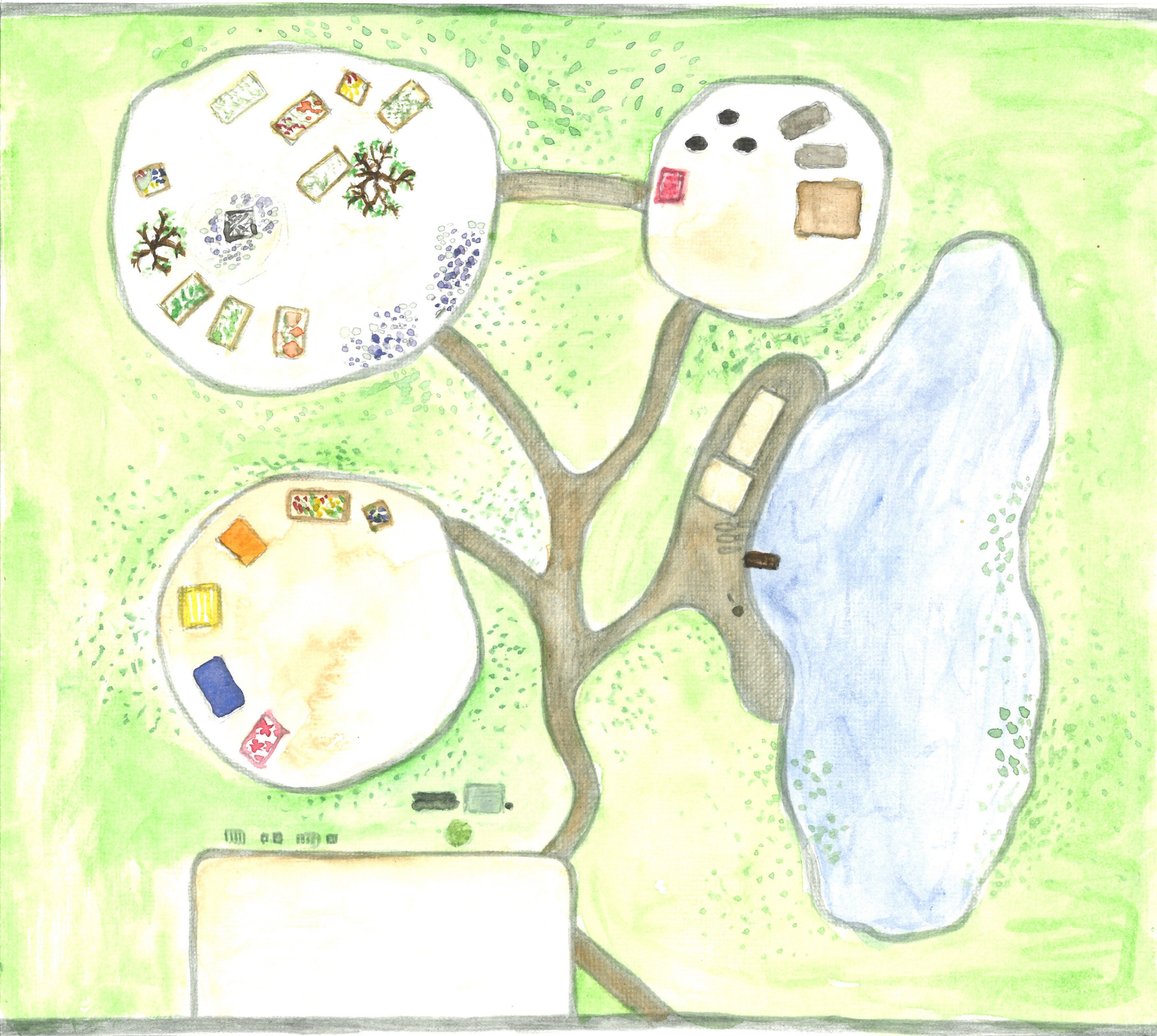# The Community Tree

A Creativity Nature Park for Tweens and Teens

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My dream is to work with my community to create a nature space geared specifically toward tweens and teens, though _everyone_ is welcome! The nature space would have an eco-education mission to provide positive experiences for youth in nature and help this generation and future generations of young people learn about eco-friendly practices in an environment where they can also have a fun time. The park would be run by a commission of kids elected by fellow kids to plan and promote events in the park's nature spaces. Adults would advise and provide support.

My inspiration comes from my own life, including community, family and early school experiences. Before attending Riverside School, I attended a Waldorf School from preschool through 4th grade, where there was a lot of emphasis on art, engaging with nature and celebrating festivals throughout the year. Also, my grandparents live on a small family farm with gardens, a small orchard, bees and farm animals. I love visiting them at all stages of the growing season and helping to sow, tend and eventually harvest the food that we then get to eat! Finally, going to community events, farmer's markets and festivals here in Richmond (like the Folk Festival and Earth Day), as well as festivals at the Waldorf school (like May Faire) inspired me.

The Community Tree has five main areas: 1) a community garden space, 2) a kids' farmers market, 3) an outdoor pavilion/stage, 4) a lake with kayaks and stand up paddle boards (and a lifeguard for safety) 5) and an eco-educational center and gathering space.

Community Garden

Find your center of PEACE

Water Activities

Pavillion Space

Farmers Market

Education Center

The Community Tree
A Creativity Nature Park for Tweens and Teens

The primary purpose of the park is to educate and raise environmental awareness in order to promote eco-friendly behavior and build good habits in young people. However, the social spaces are also important as they will draw kids in so they can be inspired to participate in more of what the park has to offer.

Education Center – This building is a place to hold indoor – but mostly outdoor – classes, workshops and fun events. Classes can start here and move to any area of the park. Class topics could range from urban beekeeping to composting to identifying edible plants in nature and more. This is also a place where teens can continue to gather during the colder winter months. Events could include craft groups, a board game night, etc. Teen artists can have monthly art shows in the building. This panel depicts a rain barrel, bike racks and recycling and compost bins. These are also available at all locations in the park, and the park is also on a bus route.

Community Garden – This space will have garden beds for vegetables, berries and flowering plants to feed pollinators. There is a beehive and an upcycled piece of furniture for seedling beds. Here kids can have hands on experience working in the dirt to grow food.

Farmers Market – In this space, teens and tweens can sell produce from the Community Garden or other wares they make themselves, like handmade jewelry, upcycled clothing, candles, soap, etc. Other booths might sell food, and one could be a used book exchange.

Pavilion Space – This area is for live performances featuring local talent – everything from rock bands to a youth orchestra, from comedy to square dances, from a play to a poetry slam to an open mic night. Performers can be of any age, but the idea is to allow young people a place to share their talent. Teens can come here with their families and friends to have a picnic brought from home or buy a meal from food trucks with healthy food (which supports local businesses).

Water Activities – I love paddle boarding with friends here in Richmond on the James River. A place like this would allow for paddle boards, kayaks, and fishing as well as learning about the ecological health of water environments.