



Shoot for the stars: Easton's Nurture Nature Center aims to add new planetarium exhibit

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Courtesy / Nurture Nature Center

Easton's Nurture Nature Center may be able to expand its offerings to add a new immersive dome theater, provided they receive a parking variance and clearance from the federal government to use already-approved funding for the project.



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EASTON, Pa. — Easton's Nurture Nature Center is looking to add a new planetarium-like structure for its Northampton Street location.

Center Executive Director Rachel Hogan Carr said it's considering adding an "immersive dome theater" to its existing property, provided the city Zoning Hearing Board grants a parking variance for the lot.

Zoners were set to hear the case for the Nurture Nature Center's variance request on Tuesday, Jan. 16, but the hearing was moved to Feb. 20.

Carr said the plan still is in its infancy, as federal funding originally was intended to put the dome at another location, but that option didn't pan out.

Carr and the Nurture Nature Center now are in talks with the government to see if the funds it got can be repurposed to put the dome at its Northampton Street headquarters.

The idea behind the new expansion stemmed from enthusiastic community input, Carr said.

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"It came from discussions with the city of Easton, and then also local school districts and community organizations who helped us to do a community needs assessment and think on the additional programming and resources and goals that we could serve within the community," Carr said.

"And we heard loudly and clearly from area school districts that a planetarium line of programming would be very welcome to them.

"And the planetarium — they're really 'immersive dome theaters' — can do much more these days than a traditional planetarium.

"So we would be able to show a wide range of programs in an immersive dome theater, including space programming, but also other environmental issues that are consistent with our mission."

The Nurture Nature Center wants to put the dome in its parking lot, which would, in turn, reduce available parking spaces, hence the need for a variance.

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If it gets approval, the center would be able to accommodate up to 75 people at a time, allowing ample room for classes from local schools to enjoy a variety of programs.

"I think it would be a tremendous resource for the community, for local students, educators and our community members. I think people would really appreciate it," Carr said.

Further planning for the structure is dependent on the center getting the zoning

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The Nurture Nature Center already is well-known for its science-oriented spectacles, particularly its Science on a Sphere globe.

The room-sized animated object can display visualizations of “a diverse range of phenomena, including hurricanes, earthquakes, climate change, transportation, the planets, moons, and more,” according to the center website.

The Science on a Sphere globe has more than 500 datasets obtained from the NOAA and NASA, with new material added regularly. A new topic is featured on a routine basis during the Sphere Spotlight, with a themed program held each month, with subjects including the solar system, migration, geology and habitats.

Other exhibits include the Interactive Watershed Exhibit, an augmented reality sandbox that helps to explore issues related to watersheds, flooding, climate change, and even local environmental topics.

The center also features artistic exhibits to complement the scientific programming, including a “Living Local” mural and guidebook, and a replica of “Manifest Destiny,” a monumental mural of New York City underwater, which help to serve as environmental lessons and springboards for discussions.

Easton's Nurture Nature Center is open noon through 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays.