

**Park and Recreation Commission
Pierce School Playground
Design Review Committee Meeting
Monday, May 4, 2015
Denny Room, Public Health Building
7:00pm -9:00pm**

Committee Members Present: John Bain, Nancy O'Connor, Daniel Lyons, Jean Stameris, Philip Kramer, and Maria Bellalta

Committee Members Absent: Lauren Carroll

Staff Present: Brittany Bonney, Conservation Assistant, Annie Blair, Landscape Architect, Erin Gallentine, Parks and Open Space Director

Design Consultant: Ray Dunetz, Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture

Public Present: See attached

Welcome/Call Meeting to Order

N. O'Connor called the meeting to order, briefly introduced the project and thanked everyone for participating. The Committee reviewed the previous meeting minutes with no comments.

J. Bain moved to approve the minutes from 3/25/15. D. Lyons seconded. All in favor.

Progress to Date

A. Blair welcomed everyone to the second public meeting and summarized the design review process thus far. A. Blair outlined the goals of this meeting and discussed the key points of the first meeting. During the previous meeting a set of issues and a wish list were established. Some of the key points included:

- Perimeter of the park: very important to have it fenced in and secured
- Accessibility for play equipment and circulation, including the path system
- Lighting: enforcement of park hours (dawn-dusk) versus a request to light the basketball courts
- The hill: very important to keep the ability to sled in the winter
- Entrances: need to be improved and made more welcoming
- Walking circuit around the Park
- Repairing the stone wall on Harvard Ave.
- More attractive and varied site furniture
- Incorporating art into the park
- Improved signage
- Incorporating natural elements
- More challenging play equipment

Ray Dunetz, Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture, introduced himself. R. Dunetz explained how he will develop some of the ideas that come up in tonight's meeting into a stronger concept for the next meeting, which will be held later this month or in June, where he will have a preferred design to present. He briefly explained the current site.

Presentation of Schematic Design

R. Dunetz presented three and a half conceptual design alternatives to the existing site. The goals for all design alternatives include:

- Preservation of trees; the Town Arborist has assessed the site and has decided which trees need to be removed. The goal is to keep as many trees as possible. There are many trees that are in good condition and will remain and fit into the design;
- Water play will remain;
- The entire perimeter of the park will be secured with upgraded fence;
- Create an improved entrance at the School Street parking lot;
- Add gates to all entrances;
- And increase the square footage of the play areas.

Schematic Design – Alternate A

- Repair the damaged stone wall
- Gates will be added to the entrances
- One entrance on Harvard St will be closed off with a decorative panel
- Trellis structure for shade and passive seating
- Do something with the tower and add a gate at that entrance
- Formal entrance at Harvard Avenue with an ornamental gate
- Continuous loop walking path
- Square Footage
 - 2-5 year play space – was 2,500 now 3,500
 - 5-12 year play space – was 4,700 now 7,000

Schematic Design – Alternate B

- Create an embankment slide on the hill
- Create an additional climbing area to get back up the hill using hand holds or ropes/nets
- Keep all entrances open and put in ornamental gates at all
- Completely fence in the 2-5 year play area
- Add a tennis backboard
- Continuous loop walking path
- Close off the Harvard Place entrance with a fence
- Square Footage
 - 2-5 year play space – was 2,500 now 3,500
 - 5-12 year play space – was 4,700 now 6,500

Schematic Design – Alternate C1

- Place the 2-5 year old play area closer to the passive area for a quieter space
- Regrade sledding hill with the slide
- Has a 'swing zone' in between the 5-12 year play area and 2-5 year play area
- Takes out the circular walking path, doesn't have a continuous loop
- All entrances remain
- Square Footage
 - 2-5 year play space – was 2,500 now 3,000

- 5-12 year play space – was 4,700 now 7,500
- Swing area - Additional 5,000

Schematic Design - Alternate C2

- Takes out the embankment slide
- Regrade the hill to be a sledding hill only
- Square Footage
 - 2-5 year play space – was 2,500 now 3,800
 - 5-12 year play space – was 4,700 now 5,900
 - Swing area - Additional 5,000

Approaches to Play Equipment

- **Kompan:** The first company R. Dunetz presented was the Kompan line, which has been very successful in Brookline. First, he showed the 2-5 year old play equipment which tends to be lower to the ground. This equipment included traditional style Tower and Bridge structures. The line is very fun and imaginative. They are custom made structures which are also handicap accessible. Some pieces of equipment he showed were:
 - ‘Blocks’ – Geometric 3D Shapes with handhelds, challenging
 - ‘The Crest’, ‘Explorer Dome’

Many pieces in this collection challenge children to use their upper body strength. This line also has high play value; there are many activities to perform on one piece of equipment.
- **Robinia:** A new nature inspired line which uses Black Locust wood. This type of wood does not splinter and is very long lasting, guaranteed for over 12 years.
- **Landscape Structures** – This equipment also has high play value and incorporates many different activities. They are incorporating roofs made of fun shapes and also some natural looking elements such as climbing logs (made of precast concrete to mimic the natural environment). Some pieces shown were:
 - ‘Geonetrix’ – A line of mostly cable net equipment
 - ‘Disk net’ – climbing up holes
- R. Dunetz mentioned the many fun things that can be done with resilient rubberized surfacing such as illustrating paths, roads or objects.
- R. Dunetz showed an example of an embankment slide which is a potential for the sledding hill on site. He explained how stainless steel will not work because it will get too hot in the sun so we will have to come up with some alternative materials that are cooler to the touch. One possible alternative is polished concrete.
- Next, R. Dunetz presented some individual pieces of play equipment, including:
 - **Berliner** – Can chose colors to customize
 - ‘Cosmo’--a sit and spin toy
 - ‘Tannebaum’--a large spin toy surrounded by net, group effort to spin
 - ‘Cable climber’--A cargo net that could be used to get back up the hill
 - ‘CombiNation’--hammocks, climbing nets
 - **Elephant Play** – ‘Rotating Basket’ and ‘Rotating Dish’ which is the more challenging one

Site Furniture, Fencing/Gates, Drinking Fountains

- Big belly trash receptacles are easiest to maintain for the Town
- Very important to have all site furniture match
- Possibility of designing some custom features, such as benches that rock back and forth
- Entrances--ornamental fencing, metal fence is more elegant than chain link. Ornamental gates can have objects/designs of choice
- Drinking fountain--Needs to be accessible, can have bottle refill station, would like it to be solar powered

Open Discussion

- N. O'Connor said she would like to see the bulk of the budget go towards play equipment, rather than the walking path, because of the high volume of children who use the playground. She asked about the existing shed on site. It is believed to be an equipment shed that the school uses to store P.E. equipment. She would like to find out if they use it for certain.
- J. Bain said he is concerned about the walking path (in C1/C2) being so close to third base on the baseball field, for people's safety. N. O'Connor said it is only little league that plays on the field, it should not be too much of a safety concern. Kim, of Harvard Gardens, said she believes that kids have created an unofficial path in that same area from walking in the dirt.
- J. Bain said he is also concerned that by adding the tennis ball wall, it is creating additional noise for the abutters who are very close to the noisy basketball court. He would also like to see a lower fence at that entrance, if possible with the court. D. Lyons said he thinks a tennis back board would make more sense in that space if there were tennis courts, would like to see the half basketball court remain instead.
- J. Stameris asked if we necessarily need both a slide and a climbing feature built on the hill. P. Kramer said that he likes both the slide and climbing feature on the hill and he also really likes the swing station. Nancy said she likes the slide moved to the left and would like to see the trellis along the border, as shown in Alternate A.
- Michael Hecht, Pierce parent, really likes both the embankment slide and the climbing feature; he said it was very unique.
- R. Dunetz said that the climbing feature would have a rubberized surface which will protect the grass. He said there will be little visibility of the walking path from the bottom of the hill.
- J. Bain asked if the entire walking path will be handicap accessible. R. Dunetz said yes.
- M. Bellalta said that she likes the design of C1/C2 where both play areas have moved to the North of the park and increased in square footage. She feels though, that we may be giving up too much space to circulation and is not fully supportive of the embankment slide. She is afraid that adding an obstacle would divide the hill's open space, where people really enjoy sitting. She said that she prefers how the slide is designed in Alternate B, where it is off to the left side, out of the way, with no climbing feature. She would also like to see the passive area have more lawn, with picnic tables, doesn't want to lose too much usable space with circulation.
- Rina Silivitch, abutter to the park, asked if the Beech trees on Harvard Ave will remain. R. Dunetz said yes they will all remain. She also said that she supports moving the 2-5 year play area to the NE

corner but would like to see a 'No Smoking' sign put up in that space. She also asked if the slide poses a danger to sledding. She pointed out that there is a dedicated memorial tree in the park that is very important to the community and needs to be preserved.

- Annie Frechette, Owner of Sunshine Academy, likes the circular, full loop walking path. She also said from a teacher's point of view she likes the idea of boundaries. She would like the slide on the hill to remain and supports its position in Alternate B (to the left). She would also like to see play equipment that won't block visibility for parents and teachers trying to watch their kids, such as netting. She is concerned with the fall zone that comes with swings and believes they are dangerous especially at Pierce with the high volume of kids playing at recess at one time. She also said when it comes to picking out equipment, we should ask the Pierce teachers. E. Gallentine agreed, said we should communicate with the school to see if anything is off limits.
- An abutter to the park said that she would like to see the slide made from slip resistant materials especially because of water play area close by.
- Rina Jacobson, abutter to the park, said she loves the concept and theory of a slide and climbing feature built into the hill but doesn't want those features to diminish the hill as a sledding hill. She would like to see the fencing made of something other than chain link. She asked how many benches and chairs are going to be installed. She would really like to see an increase in all site furniture compared to what there is now. She would also like the Committee to consider colored fence that could color coordinate with the play equipment.
- P. Kramer gave the example of South St. Park in Jamaica Plain which has a wavy, purple fence. He also pointed out that he really likes the shape of the passive area next to 2-5 year play area in Alternate A; the interrupted circle is very powerful. R. Dunetz agrees but is not sure it will still fit when adding the 2-5 year play area into that corner as well. E. Gallentine said that it doesn't have to be a circle, could be an oval to save space. P. Kramer also supports the trellis, thinks it could be a good way to help screen abutters.
- Henry Katz, Pierce parent, said he is concerned with closing off the Harvard Place entrance with a fence because it is the most accessible way for his children to get to school. A. Blair said we can't make Harvard Place an official entrance because it would have to be made handicap accessible, which we cannot do. She said for this reason, we will not be adding stairs in this area but we could consider adding boulders. E. Gallentine said we do not have to put a fence in that spot. Iris Alpert, abutter to the park, would also like to see this area remain open because it is the closest opening to her home and a fence would make her feel closed off.
- Jerry Navarrete, abutter to the park, likes the slide positioned to the left (west side), supports moving the 2-5 year play area to the northeast (thinks that corner is currently underutilized), and believes that a circular path is very inviting causing concern that it may bring additional users into the park. He explained how currently, kids use the side of the tower as a makeshift back board to kick/throw balls at, thinks we could work with that existing structure instead of adding a tennis ball wall.
- D. Lyons said he thinks there may have been a strike zone drawn into the tower wall at one point. He asked M. Bellalta what her concerns are about the slide. M. Bellalta said she would like to see the design done very carefully, without complicating the informal areas of the park. She is concerned about losing valuable space but thinks moving the slide to the left could resolve that issue.

- Ajay, abutter to the park, said he is afraid of doing too much. He enjoys the passive area in its natural state. He asked about putting benches on grass. He prefers to see less cement but understands there is a balance with accessibility. He thinks the hill is a nice open space to sit with the kids. He would also like to see better quality grass/lawn. He also said that he likes Landscape Structures and that he believes children prefer swings over cable net equipment.
- D. Lyons said he agrees with moving the 2-5 year play area to the northeast corner, likes the trellis and wants to keep the slide to the west side and leave the rest of the hill open.
- I. Alpert suggesting adding shade to the 2-5 year play area if it moves to the NE corner. She said there are not a lot of shady trees in that area; maybe shade can be incorporated into equipment.
- M. Hecht said there is basically a makeshift slide on the hill now from kids sliding down the dirt. He also said that he would like to see some attention called to the area behind home plate. He likes how Alternate B shows picnic tables in that area.
- Kim Reynolds asked about the current stone wall that has seating, would like it to remain. R. Silevitch agreed and said that wall is critical. N. O'Connor asked if the seating wall was taken out of the design and R. Dunetz said it only remained in Alternate A. He said leaving it in the design would cause limitations.
- P. Kramer asked if the water play is too far away from 2-5 year play area. R. Dunetz said they need more supervision outside of the fenced area anyway. He also asked if natural elements have been decided against and R. Dunetz said it is still a conversation. There is potential to add boulders as seating options. P. Kramer said we need to discuss the entrance at School Street.
- A Blair read the comments from L. Carroll. Her comments included that she prefers Alternate C1 with the addition of a walking circuit, is okay with eliminating an entrance and wants to see art incorporated into the fenced area around the basketball courts. She also believes the 'Rotating Dish' from Elephant Play is too difficult for kids to use.
- E. Gallentine asked A. Blair to summarize the preferred features of all 3.5 alternates thus far.
 - A. Blair explained how we will most likely create a 'hybrid' of all alternates.
 - Most people seem to like Alternate C1 because of the location of the 5-12 year play area to the NW and the 2-5 year play area to the northeast, however, we need to be mindful of the swing area taking up a lot of sq. ft.; would like to see a happy medium.
 - Would like a legible form/shape for the passive area, with simplicity and beauty to it.
 - Don't want to 'overdo it'.
 - Seat wall needs to remain but could be modified.
 - If there is a slide, have it be pushed towards the western side of the property line.
 - Practical problems need to be dealt with, such as drainage and fencing.
 - At the next meeting, we will see more incorporation of the tower.
 - Preference is to have 1.5 basketball courts rather than the tennis ball wall.
 - Keep the trellis as part of the passive area for a quieter space (to the right side).
 - Maintain the integrity of the hill while still incorporating the slide.
 - Want to see a loop path.
- M. Hecht asked R. Dunetz to consider the visual impacts of the play equipment; these giant structures could have a negative impact to passersby and abutters. N. O'Connor asked R. Dunetz if

they will be doing poured-in-place rubberized surfacing, and he said yes. I. Alpert asked if we could mix and match vendors for equipment. E. Gallentine said yes, as long as they were similar in style. Everybody agreed that they like either the 'Tannebaum' by Berliner or the 'Rotating Basket' by Elephant Play. A. Blair said Berliner makes their rotating pieces slower than Elephant Play. For both age groups, Kompan and Landscape Structures were favored. E. Gallentine said we could work with both of them for layouts and then add in some individual pieces of equipment. There will be layouts shown in the next meeting. R. Jacobson asked if we will see fence samples also, and E. Gallentine said possibly. N. O'Connor asked if we could add other play equipment to the swing area, such as rope baskets. R. Dunetz said yes. M. Hecht would like to explore different types of swings and have the swing area act as a transition zone between the 5-12 year play area and 2-5 year play area. That way there could be very challenging equipment in the 5-12 year play area only.

Adjournment

N. O'Connor thanked everyone for their comments.

N. O'Connor adjourned the meeting at 9:05pm.

Documents Used at the Meeting

- Meeting Agenda
- PowerPoint presentation prepared by RDLA

Submitted by B. Bonney.