

Park and Recreation Commission
Daniel F. Ford Playground at Emerson Garden
Design Review Committee

Tuesday, April 26, 2016
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm
Brookline Main Library
Hunneman Hall – 2nd Floor
361 Washington Street

Committee Members Present: John Bain, Nancy O'Connor, Clara Batchelor and James Carroll

Committee Members Absent:

Staff Present: Erin Gallentine, Parks and Open Space Director, Kathleen Fasser, Landscape Architect, Jessica Zarni, Administrative Assistant

Guests Present: see attached

J. Bain welcomed everyone to the kick off meeting for Emerson Garden. Introductions were made. J. Bain stated that we will be selecting three members of the public for the Design Review Committee.

E. Gallentine thanked everyone for coming tonight. She personally feels that are our parks are there for connection to self, connection to mental and physical wellness and for connection as a community. The parks are a very important element of what makes Brookline so special. Emerson garden is the center and heart of the neighborhood. The playground itself has a whole host of uses and user groups. The park is in need of renovation, the bones of this park are terrific and what we are looking from everyone tonight is to hear what works well and what could work better. This is a terrific opportunity to get your input and have community sharing. Kathleen Fasser, is the Landscape Architect for the project and she will be taking all the information here tonight and will be coming up with concepts to present at the next meeting. E. Gallentine discussed when a park is determined to be ready for renovation. Emerson Garden was last renovated in 1995. E. Gallentine stated that safety and accessibility are two of the top priorities when renovating a park. She stated that we must be compliant and resolve any safety and accessibility issues.

E. Gallentine described the Design Review Process and the makeup of the Design Review Committee. She stated that if you would like to serve on the Design Review Committee, you can submit a letter and she provided that information. She described what information she would like to see in that letter.

E. Gallentine discussed the budget for the park, which is estimated around \$770,000.

E. Gallentine went through future meeting dates and what would be discussed at those meetings. The next meeting is June 13, 2016 in Town Hall, Room 111.

A resident addressed the Committee. She was on the Emerson Garden Design Review Committee the last time around. She stated that there were deficiencies in the planting in the last renovation and she discussed how the neighborhood raised money to help with that. She stated that we need to take a good look at the plant pallet.

Kathleen Fasser stated that we are here tonight to listen to everyone and see how you use the park. K. Fasser provided everyone with a survey of the existing conditions of the Daniel F. Ford Playground at Emerson Garden. K. Fasser gave some background into the park. The site is two acres and bordered by Emerson Street, Davis Avenue and Waverly Street. It is a lovely site, with a great large lawn as a center piece. She stated that there are passive areas, there is a walkway system that generally hugs the outer perimeter of the site and loops through the playground area, the play area has both 2-5 and 5-12 year old play equipment, there is a water play area on the northern edge and there are garden areas at the entrances to the park. There are three entrances to the park and they are marked with granite bollards. K. Fasser discussed the circulation. She stated that there is one general area of play, she listed the equipment and described the surfacing. The water play is pushed activated. The edge condition mostly around the park is black chain link fence, along the Davis Avenue side is a retaining wall and there is granite posts and curbing as you come in to each of the entrances. There are two types of benches that are out there, one being a wood bench and the other an updated ornamental bench that has Yellowwood slats. There are a couple of movable benches within the park. There is some conversation to be had to create some harmony between different pieces. The utilities in the site were discussed. K. Fasser discussed all the different signage in the park and showed where it is located. K. Fasser discussed drainage and erosion. She discussed ornamental plantings at the entrances and mentioned that some have not been as successful as others. She discussed the shrubs and great shade trees.

J. Bain opened the discussion to find out from the audience what the Park's strongest and weakest points, who are the parks users and what would the most valuable improvements would be.

A resident addressed the Committee. She wanted to make a comment about landscaping and the drainage. She said that the two drains that are there are not in the right place, days after it rains there is one whole section under water and mud. You have to walk around the grass and there is a similar spot on the other side. She discussed the erosion problems there.

Joan Collins addressed the committee. She was hoping to maybe have description labels put on the trees.

Leo Collins addressed the Committee. He thinks we need to start with an advanced playground and thinks you have to lift that whole area above so that the water will drain.

Jennifer Pieszale addressed the Committee. She would like to make a historical comment. She stated that at one time that park had a pond in it. She thinks some of the drainage issues go way back and unless that is resolved it will always be a problem.

Charles Osbourne addressed the Committee. He stated that he actually has some pictures showing the pond in the park and the house in the park. There are water colors he would put them from the mid 1800's. He would like to see some development about the history of the park and would be happy to contribute.

Milton Kornfeld addressed the Committee. He stated that Emerson needs curbing around the lawn edging the walkways.

Brian Hochleutner addressed the Committee. He wants to agree with the comment about the historical aspect of this. He would love to see some research done, but not just into the photos but research into the original design. He hopes maybe we could find out some details of original site furniture and see if any of that can be brought back. He stated that Emerson works as a passive place but at the same time it is heavily used by children. He would love to see us keep that balance in the redesign; he thinks the layout of the park with separate zones works very well. He thinks it would be nice to upgrade the fencing around the park and maybe see if we could bring in some historic detail with the stone wall.

Larry Whitney addressed the committee. The playground is very important to him. His older daughter gets splinters going down slide. He wants to make sure the kids can play on the equipment for the next 18 years. E. Gallentine stated that the play equipment needs full replacement.

Allison Lamanna addressed the Committee. She is the parent of two year old, and she hopes that when we consider new play equipment that we take into consideration accessibility for a mixed age range. She finds herself walking to other s with a variety of play equipment for older kids. She stated that the sand is fun but it escapes from the sand pit often and thinks that is part of the drainage problem and contributes to erosion.

Stephen Burrington addressed the Committee. He thinks that everything is great. He thinks the two big challenges moving going forward is to figure out how to get the landscape and the esthetics of the place to hang together with heavy usage. He stated that the turf is one big part of that. The plantings in proximity to play area were very beautiful when they were first put in but they have not coexisted well with the play area. He would like to see some clever designs to have planting and shrubs that co-exist with the play area.

A resident stated that he would like to see a balance between historical value and at the same time not have Emerson become a destination playground. It is about striking the balance from us locals. He wants to show off but not too much.

Jennifer Pieszak addressed the Commission. She stated that the drainage was an issue from day one. The sand play area's biggest issue is that it goes everywhere. There is a slight slope when you come out the corner and kids wipe out on their knees from slipping on sand. The entrance bed at the corner of Emerson and Davis, she stated, were never successful because there were not sprinkler systems in the bed. The neighbors have carried water to the park. She discussed the Green Dog Program. The fence at the perimeter was added to the park project later with additional funds. There has been a real issue with kids climbing in the bushes.

E. Gallentine stated that a couple of residents have mentioned sand. Sand is something that the Commission decided that they would be phasing out of parks as we go through renovations, unless a community wanted it and was committed. E. Gallentine stated that every 3 years we replace all sand in every sand box. She stated that we cannot keep the sand clean. The sand will be a conversation we will want to have and we will want to hear from the community. She stated that sand is a great play experience for kids, but we don't have an opportunity to have a covered sand box.

A resident addressed the Committee. She stated that as you think of the garden, she hopes we think historical garden. She thinks that maybe we can get back to native plants, that way you don't have to spend as much time, water and fertilizing to keep them alive. She would advocate for native New England plants and that will allow you to keep with historical complement and save money. She wanted to make a few comments about the salt and winter. She feels that sometimes there is way too much extra salt that ends up in Emerson Park. There is overkill with that salt in winter and it affects kids, dogs and plants. She started going to Emerson in 1992 with her one year old; she is at Emerson every day since then. She stated that Emerson is a somewhat small park and one thing she is concerned about is during the day there are an enormous number of daycares that use the park. She thinks it's important to know what the capacity for Emerson is and how do we modulate the use. She thinks we have to be mindful as we think about the park and how to make it useable and acceptable for everyone.

Antonia Bellalta addressed the Committees. She stated that one of the things she has expressed over time is the overuse of this park and is there a way to look at the activity and size of the events that happens there. She wanted to add to all the comments being made, she wonders if we should take a real serious look at improving the walk and the grading. In regards to the planting, the kids are outgrowing the playground so they use the plants and trees. Her concern with trees in the picnic area is that they have a lot of compaction under the beech trees and they have very high roots. She thinks there should be some heavy duty plantings along the perimeter that could nestle the park and more sensitive planting on the outside and expand the lawn. It is tough Park with all the shrubbery that is not surviving.

Lawrence Whitney addressed the Committee. He wanted to speak about the daycares. He stated that there is a sign that indicates when different group's ages have access to the playgrounds. He stated that some have two different slots a day, it is very heavily used and then in the summer we get summer camps. Out of town users for this area was discussed. E. Gallentine stated that in regards to the daycare use, it is tough because these are public

open spaces. The permits for the Day Care Centers using these parks are put together through the Health Department. The children have access to open space to have outdoor play time weather permitting twice a day. E. Gallentine stated that what was happening a few years ago was they would all converge on same playground at the same time. There were a lot of concerns from different daycares because of this, and so the Park and Recreation Commission had several public hearings on the matter. In the end came the volunteer schedule that put together by the Health Department.

Tricia Mark addressed the Commission. She walks at Emerson every day so she sees a lot. One of the things that is really important to her bringing up the fact the parents are not watching their children and are on their cell phones. She wanted to know if there is any way that the entrances can be fully fenced for the safety of the children. E. Gallentine stated that there could be an option to have gates at the entrances and also an option to have the playground area fully fenced in. Her concern with the sand is the kids take the sand and track it to the walking paths and dump it in a pile. This causes people to trip when walking around. She thinks that as far as plantings are concerned, some of them are beautiful and some of them are really struggling. She discussed a tree that was replaced four times in the same space.

A resident addressed the Commission. She thinks of Emerson as her front yard and wanted to thank the Town for taking care of it. She discussed the water/drainage issues in the park. She stated that we can't redo entire grading of the park, but she thinks there is a real benefit to looking at maybe needing a dessert area. She thinks that we need to think long and hard about putting in an infrastructure in there that we can contain. She wants to request that we relocate the concerts every other week. She is worried about the lawn with the constant abuse. The cleanup after the concerts was discussed.

Amie Buchman addressed the Committee. She also has thought of Emerson as her front yard and appreciate sit very much. She stated that her understanding is that this park was designed for younger children. She stated that another group that uses the park is kindergarteners at Pierce School. She goes to Emerson with her Kindergarteners because their playground has an artificial surface. As a kindergarten teacher she is in favor of sand, children can play their peacefully and quietly.

Alton Hughes addressed the Committee. He stated that he message board should be moved, he sees kids taking the corner on their bikes and hitting it. He stated that as far as the sprinkle park and how it runs and drains over, the kids go over and put leaves in the drain and blocks it. He thinks that we need bigger drains with a different drainage system. He stated that we need a sign telling the kids to keep the sand where it is.

Stephen Burrington addressed the Committee. The teenagers in the neighborhood will hang in the park after dark, he thinks it is great and they really need a place to hang out. He thinks this is a user group that we should be aware of and accommodate.

A resident addressed the Committee. He is interested at looking for some comments from the day care users. It sound to him it's very heavily used by those groups. J. Bain stated that

all the parks are heavily used and if we close down a park for renovation they all migrate to nearby parks. He stated that we don't have the open space we would like to have in town. He understands about the daycares, but they are mostly residents of Brookline and the parks are open to everyone.

Brian Hochleutner addressed the Committee. He stated that there is an Emerson Garden Neighborhood Association that has an email group and is very heavily used. There is also a similar group from White Place, separate area but same concept. He is curious in connection with other similar park renovation projects, he wonders if they have friends of the park group. It seems like there is a lot of conversation about use, some gets filtered out but some other groups that are not here tonight. E. Gallentine stated that he should write down the Emerson Garden Neighborhood Association email on the sign in sheet. E. Gallentine stated that it would be great opportunity to reconstitute or reenergize a friends group of Emerson. She finds it great for a friends group to liaison with, friends are a great way to stay connected

Joan Collins shared her concerned with the noise from the concerts. The volume from the speakers was discussed from the audience. N. O'Connor stated that will bring this up to our Recreation Department.

Richard Nasser addressed the Committee. He hopes that the new park gets new signage. He discussed all the Green Dog Signage and how it makes for an unfriendly entrance to the park. He would hope that we could design signage that is brief, simple and clean. He discussed what he thinks would work with the signage. He discussed the community bulletin board. He was wondering if there was some way to make the posts time limited. N. O'Connor asked if there is a real need for the bulletin board. She stated that some parks need it, while others des not and some just do not want it. Not every park has that need and she wanted to know if there is a need or desire for Emerson to keep the bulletin board. Antonia Bellalta stated that the neighborhood association communicates through the board.

Charles Osbourne addressed the Committee. He sated stated that this is a unique 22 year opportunity that we have , and he thinks it would be interesting to hear from the Committee's perspective any trends that you are seeing in the newly renovated parks. He thinks there are structural aspects of the park that need to be looked at. He also agrees that we need a place for the teenagers to hang out.

A resident addressed the Committee. She has lived at her house for 50 years and discussed the beautiful wrought iron fence that at one time went all around the park. She discussed how far the park has come since 50 years ago.

A resident addressed the Committee. He wonders whether there is anything coming up in any of the nearby parks, for example renovation that we should be aware of. All of the places are in such close proximity and wanted to know if there is anything we should be aware of. Daycare schedules were discussed. He stated that he hopes we can design Emerson to accommodate heavy use.

Allison Lamanna addressed the Committee. Her son is in daycare near Cypress and the daycare would walk them to Emerson to play there and she stated that is the max distance these kids can walk. She hopes that when you are thinking about daycare usage you need to think about the range of where these kids can get to. She stated that part of the reason she moved to this area was because of the parks and the Town's commitment to the parks. She has used a lot of the parks in Town. She discussed the Avery and Waverly intersection. She discussed how she worries about that intersection and safety of the kids and that makes the gate more important.

A. Bellalta discussed the overuse of the park.

E. Gallentine stated that she would like to hear from the audience tonight about any opinions or ideas anyone has on what type of play equipment they would like to see at Emerson. She stated that it would be extremely helpful to hear.

A resident stated that she would like to see more linear active play equipment for older kids, such as exercise equipment along the walkway.

Ann Trecker addressed the Committee. She would like to see the playground expanded and have some challenging pieces put in. She talked about the spider web play and log structures at Storrow Drive. She would love to see something along those lines put in at Emerson.

A resident discussed the possibility of incorporating adult exercise equipment into Emerson

Leo Collins addressed the Committee. He would like to know if we will consider looking far ahead to the new hotel that is being put in on Boylston. He stated that traffic is going the wrong way and there needs to be street light they can turn left onto. He stated that after some time there is going to be some auto work around the VW Building and the third one of course is the High school coming out to Cypress Street. He stated that we will be inundated by a fair amount of building, and he thinks that we must look far ahead at it. We have a lot of traffic there and right up to door steps.

A resident asked if there is a recent census on the number of usage at each Park. E. Gallentine stated that we do not have the capacity to do something like that.

The water bubbler replacement was discussed. Interest in a bottle refill was expressed, as well as a dog fountain.

The next Emerson Design Review Committee Meeting will take place on June 13, 2016 and then again on September 6th, both from 7-9pm at Town Hall in Room 111.

E. Gallentine thanked everyone for coming out tonight.

J. Bain moved to adjourn. Seconded by N. O'Connor. All in favor