

PARKMAN PLAYGROUND - Meeting # 2 – Notes

April 27, 2017

Bethel AME Church – Fellowship Hall

Attendees:

Boston Residents: 25 neighbors present

Boston Parks & Recreation Department (BPRD): Nathan Frazee (NF), CSS: Joshua Burgel (JB), Samuel Basta (SB)

***Design Summary:** Residents excited by concepts, the “meander” concept and the “Tools of Imagination and Movement” enjoyed the idea to locate the shelter at the boundary between field and play area, expressed interest in maintaining existing wall/entry and controlling dogs out of the play area with fencing.*

ORDER OF EVENTS/AGENDA:

- o Sign-in with email or contact information for project updates
- o Introductions
- o Meeting overview
- o Project funding and schedule
- o Summary of previous meeting and site analysis
- o Presentation of design alternatives and precedents
- o Community Discussion & Input – Recording of Issues and Opportunities
- o Closing Remarks

PRESENTATION

BPRD (NF) – Introductory comments including (re-)introducing team members, BPRD development goals, and project schedule and funding.

CSS (JB) – Summarized site analysis, including other nearby parks, access, state of repair of play equipment and surfacing, and picnic shelter. Presented three design alternatives “Meander”, “Terrain Park”, and “Tools of Imagination and Movement” as well as inspiration and precedents for the designs. Video clips of examples of potential music play elements were also played.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS

A resident commented, prior to the start of the meeting, that he would like to see improved visibility between the shelter and the street, but appreciates the shelter being located near the basketball court.

A resident asked if the wall along Wachusett Street would be modified. JB responded that at least some of the wall will be maintained (wall continues outside of project area as well) and that there is flexibility to maintain the wall in all concepts.

A resident asked what safety enhancements will be made. JB responded that the current lighting levels will be maintained as well as bringing the fencing to the front of the park and enhance visibility through the park, as more users in the park creates more eyes on the park, enhancing safety. JB also discussed removing the fencing from the side of the basketball court, again to increase visibility.

A resident wanted to discuss the proposed fencing, stating that he like the current fencing configuration, as it both keeps the kids in the play areas and keeps the dogs (dog walkers are a large user group in the park) out of the play areas. He posited that dog owners might like this too. It was also commented on that softball players need to get to the field and that the current configuration works well for that. Due to this functionality, the resident noted that option 3 was preferred. Another resident asked a question about a possible solution to this fencing issue about whether or not the fence at the end of the softball field dugout could be extended, again citing the multiple users (parents/children, walkers/dogs) of the park. NF commented that we can look at the fence alignments in relation to these users.

A resident asked a clarifying question concerning the size of the playground, realizing that the playground would potentially be expanding up the slope where there are currently Forsythia bushes and turf. Another resident commented that the forsythia bush was a child's hiding place. It was stated later in the meeting, that small hiding places for children could be re-incorporated into the park.

It was asked if the dogs in the park was discussed at the previous meeting to which JB replied in the affirmative. NF went on to express a few points: dogs are never allowed in the playgrounds and are not supposed to be on the field. It was noted that calling the park rangers or 311 would be the way to handle such an issue, as the Parks Department does not have an enforcement arm.

A resident commented that, while personally not a dog owner, that the preclusion of those users is not a necessary or wanted (by said resident). The same resident commented that option 3 was the preferred, as it appeared to be the most environmental option [ostensibly because of less need for earthwork] and the current configuration works well.

Resident identified herself as a horticulturalist (it was noted by CSS that Francis Parkman was a horticulturalist), asked if there would be plantings aligning with this legacy. JB replied that yes, particularly focusing on native plantings for reduced maintenance and already adjusted for this environment. He noted that a planted buffer between the parking lot and park/playground. NF added that maintenance generally limits planting, but a friends group would help allay that concern. He also stated that integration of the planting into the park is a goal, allowing children to touch plantings and learn about it. JB also noted that water from a splash area could irrigate plantings and become a visible feature.

A resident noted that in 2 of 3 concepts, the adult fitness area was in the back corner of the park while in the third, the splash pad is in the back corner. Did not particularly like the adjacency of the splash area to the basketball court as some "adult language" is often used on the court. NF brought up the idea of a half-court basketball area here. A resident replied that the splash area was nice in the back.

Another vote for Concept 3, appreciates the idea of spending more money on equipment.

The trike loop received multiple comments on how it activates the back of the park and would keep the splash area useful through the year. It was also suggested that the space used for the splash area could be used as a younger kid's ball court (basketball and tennis mentioned among others), which others thought was a good idea.

A resident asked if sand would be an option for surfacing. JB replied that sand needs regular maintenance to remain a safe surfacing. NF also replied that Parks is moving away from sand surfacing because in addition to requiring maintenance, sand playgrounds often attract feral cats and can present dangers such as needles.

Someone asked how large the picnic area is now, JB thought it might be a little larger than that shown in the concepts. A resident replied that the shelter draws people there to drink and that broken glass was an issue and asked how it could be made less appealing for that use. JB asked if moving it to the other side might help alleviate these issues, as it is less tucked away and is more visible. The residents thought that it would help and

that the shelter might not need to be so deep. It was then noted that the shelter was used for more appropriate uses too, such as birthdays, etc. Perhaps half the current size would be suitable.

A resident asked if shade could be incorporated into the play equipment, to which NF replied that it is likely in addition to natural shade.

One resident commented that the “Meander” was a great option and asked about the music play and if they were difficult to maintain. NF replied that the mallets occasionally go missing, but that Parks has and maintains them in other parks.

JB played the music clips, the community voiced support for the idea of music in the park and a discussion of whether Boston had City Sound Standards. A resident replied that there were city standards and that all the decibel levels displayed conform to City code. NF stated that any installed equipment would be within City code.

A resident asked about whether there would be a large climbing tower would be included in the play equipment. NF replied that nothing like the height of the Fallon Field structure.

A resident (self-identified graphic designer) asked about play equipment – liked the idea of natural play like at Cambridge Commons. The resident would like to echo the beauty of nature, with wood and logs, etc. The resident is not a fan of bright, primary colored play equipment and surfacing. JB responded that this idea was thought about, but that the feedback from the first meeting was unenthusiastic concerning natural play, due to the proximity to the Boston Nature Center. Some residents replied that this was more easily accessible from the T than the BNC. NF then stated that a combination of nature play and more traditional structures is a possibility and that bright colors do not need to be used. A second resident appreciated the idea of nature play and asked if mulch could be used and if moveable play elements could be incorporated (things to make tents, etc.). NF responded that rubber was needed due to the fall heights, that mulch is compliant but requires maintenance. JB replied that moveable equipment is good, that it promotes learning. He went on to say that Friends Groups are useful for incorporating these types of elements. NF seconded this giving the example of foam play equipment brought into Fallon while the playground was under construction.

A resident offered that winding path and natural elements were good along with a wide slide (called it a “game changer”) and that no theme be incorporated into the equipment (pirate ship, etc.) as the kids bring their own theme.

Another resident voiced support for nature play (and woodchips). Asked if woodchips were safe for children who often put them in their mouths. NF replied that chips used at playgrounds were not pressure treated or have other chemicals in them (at least in Boston). JB added that the chips are an engineered wood called Fibar which stay in place better and break down more slowly.

A resident asked for wiggly bridges and other “riskier” elements. NF said that having equipment that helps children learn risk assessment helps them learn their limits and abilities.

A resident made the statement that the playground doesn’t need to be “nature-y”. Other residents replied that it doesn’t need to be like Cambridge Commons, but some nature could be incorporated. When CSS showed the nature precedent slide from the first community meeting, the residents liked the top precedent images.

A group of students from Northeastern University stated they were in attendance to advocate for playground accessibility. The members of the group commented that it was clear accessibility was considered and a priority in the design process.

FINAL COMMENTS

NF reminded attendees to sign in if they hadn't already, as the next meeting has not been set. Signing in would be the best way to get that information as soon as it is available.