

CLARENDON TOT LOT PUBLIC MEETING #1 Meeting Summary Notes

DATE: January 7th, 2021 @ 6:00 to 7:30pm

LOCATION: ZOOM

PRESENTERS: Nathan Frazee (NF) | Boston Parks & Recreation Department (BPRD)
Cheri Ruane (CR) | Weston & Sampson
Cassie Bethoney (CB) | Weston & Sampson

PRESENTATION:

- NF opened the meeting with informing the public that this will be recorded and will be available on the city website the following week.
- NF introduced Christine (BPRD Outreach Coordinator) and Weston & Sampson team members. He discussed general schedule and funding: Capital funding of \$1,530,000, Kick Off Community Meetings (now - March), Design Development (June 2021), Construction (August 2021), Anticipated Park Opening (Spring 2022)
- Next, CB introduced the context plan showing six nearby playgrounds within a mile radius. She asks the public to consider their likes and dislikes of the nearby playgrounds. She briefly reviews an initial inventory and analysis of existing playground features, then reviews neighborhood population statistics to initially understand who is currently using the park and who could use it in the future. CB ended by discussing defined features, elements of the park and current issues the park faces.
- Next, CR reviewed precedent imagery indicating the possibilities of what the play equipment and designs can look and feel like.
- NF closed the meeting by sharing next steps. Weston & Sampson will be developing conceptual designs to be presented at a future public meeting.

General Comments:

- Echo'd by many - How the playground fits to the surrounding areas of the park is extremely important.
- Is the Back Bay Architectural District / Landmarks Commission included on the timeline? There has been an issue with their approval in the past.
 - **CB:** It has been built into our schedule. The team has experience working on Commonwealth Avenue Mall and understands the process.
- There was emphasis to the importance of this playground to the families of Back Bay.
- Mel Barkan is a resident of the building the park abuts and he had comments to add,

but his sound was not working. NF to follow up to hear his input.

Park Use and Operations:

- The neighborhood uses the playground for outdoor events, picnics, birthday parties, etc., so maintaining the open space is vital.
- Many of the schools nearby bring their students to the park on a coordinated schedule, so construction in the fall would mean students will not be able to use the park for that part of the school year.
- There are four schools that use the playground after school. There have been past issues with the back service gate, it is currently chained and padlocked. Unsure of having two entrances because a second gate will be more to watch for kid safety. The schedule is ambitious and great.
- There was a gas leak at the corner. There is a rough estimate of about 400 kids per day using the playground from the schools. The pear trees are not doing great on the mound, is irrigation part of the plan?
- Many people would like easily accessible electrical and water service to the park.
 - There is a desire for lighting (especially in the winter) and utilities in the park
 - For neighborhood organized events
- Would not prefer to have lighting inside the park because it is nestled in a residential area.
- The park previously had no trash cans and is still a carry-in/carry-out park; there are a few trash cans presently that are responsibly maintained (unsure of who).
 - **NF:** There are trash cans with lids that we can look into that can prevent squirrel access.
- The bulletin board is used and appreciated; however it is in poor condition.
- The storage shed's storage availability is desired; however, it currently is not very accessible and disorganized.

Park Access

- The back entrance would be ideally suited to be an emergency entrance because of the alley but not as a new entrance.
- The park is locked at night - is that BPRD's responsibility?
 - It wasn't locked for a time and for a month prior to COVID. BPRD was locking it at night, while other people/schools were unlocking it in the morning.
 - John Winthrop would typically get there first thing in the morning with 40 students, unlocking the park for the day.
- The entrance gates are always left open allowing active children direct access to Commonwealth Ave. Consider having a double gated entrance.
- There could be more coordination in what group would be responsible for locking and unlocking the park

Trees and Vegetation:

- Delighted about keeping the trees.
- The shade the park provides in the summer is important.

- Many kids that do not live near the area are also using the playground, so include their population into the plan as well. Consider accessibility vs. visibility. The park is a community green space - not just a playground - because it is embedded in this neighborhood.
- Aggressive squirrels are an issue – tree collars could be a solution.
 - **NF:** feeding the squirrels encourages more interaction (there has been signage in other parks about not bringing food into the park that may trigger allergies or feeding the squirrels)
- Vegetation along the perimeter of the park will need to be hardy due to high use, traffic, and digging from the kids.
- The vegetation along the edges of the park, the kids love to explore and dig up the soil.

Play:

- Appreciates that kids of all ages can play in the park and current equipment allows kids freedom of movement.
- Suggest keeping the playground open, green, soft, and natural.
- The openness and play equipment platforms allow kids freedom of movement horizontally and vertically.
- Many noted they are in favor of preserving the “open play” area as it is important for city kids to have room to be active, the neighborhood uses that space for events, and the surfacing allows kids to dig/interact with the natural elements.
- There are older kids in the park as well (not just 2-5 year and 5-12 year); the proposed play equipment needs to serve their interests as well.
- Natural play elements and open freeform play are important for the kids; many like the open space and the various elevations in the park that were maintained after the building was demolished to establish the park.
- “Preserve the flavor of the playground” – the park’s thematic color scheme has always been blended into the surrounding natural elements; people would like it to stay true.
- In the past, it was all sand and there was access to water. Swings are loved by all.
- No rope climbing structures; there are plenty in the nearby playgrounds.

Surfacing:

- Mulch is a safety hazard as dangerous objects could be easily hidden there.
- There have been drainage issues in the open area of mulch.
- Some expressed preference toward solid surfacing in replacement of the mulch, whereas others favored the mulch.
- The sand pit is unique to the park and kids love to dig, however keeping the sand in the designated area has been difficult.
- The stone etchings in the mound were designed by kids through The Learning Project Elementary School. They should be salvaged and placed in the new design.
- Buried rebar has consistently been found by park users and will need to be completely removed.

End of Notes. SK