

MEMORANDUM

TO: B Chatfield, BPRD

FROM: Billings Field Project Team

MEETING DATE: 10.13.2022

SUBJECT: Virtual Community Meeting #1 – Meeting Minutes

Panelists:

- *B Chatfield, BPRD*
- *Christine Brandao, BPRD*
- *Matthew Soule, W&S*
- *Melissa Green W&S*

Meeting Goals:

- Boston Parks and Recreation will be renovating Billings Field in the next year. This meeting was organized for BPRD and the design team to present their site analysis and hear suggestions from community members regarding the direction of the project. The goal was to learn about how the park is currently being used, what community members like about the park, what they would like to be different, what to keep or change, and any new suggested park programs.

Attendance:

- 81 total attendees including 4 team members

Virtual Discussion (Including Zoom Chat Comments):

The team presented Interactive Polls at various points throughout the presentation. Results are as follows:

- 63% of users visit the park daily, followed by weekly users (27%)
- Dog walking is the most popular activity reflected in polling, followed by community gathering space, use of the playground, fitness, softball, and baseball.
- A word cloud generated by users revealed preferences for a dog park, no dog park, street hockey court, softball, and baseball as the most popular activities desired at the park.

Comments on Organized Field Sports:

- Parkway Girls Softball League (PGSL) is one the largest permit holders and users of the park
- Parkway Little League and Parkway Babe Ruth League are other big permit users of the park
- Parkway Lacrosse would like to use the space more
- There is a very strong interest in maintaining and fostering youth athletics in the community.
- Interest in incorporating batting cages

- Community members are interested in turf infields and natural grass outfields. Synthetic turf is supported by community members for ease of maintenance and use.
- Design team to consider the youth athletics calendar when planning the construction schedule
- Netting at fields is preferred as it protects foul balls from hitting adjacent houses
- Concrete stadium steps, backstop, and field at Babe Ruth Field needs repair or replacement

Comments on Playground Use:

- The playground location is successful because of its proximity to the softball fields
- There is support for adding a splash pad
- Community does not like the large boulders in the center of the playground because they are dangerous to children running around
- The playground is well used and is very popular
- The tot lot can get very hot, are the slides oriented correctly?
- The water feature in the playground floods
- More swings for younger children are desired
- The playground is heavily used, could it potentially be expanded?

Comments on Courts:

- Interest in formalized pickleball court, pickleball is a sport for all ages
- Poor lighting at the courts. The timing of the lighting and direction of lighting is off.
- Others expressed that the lighting was too bright, on too long, and shine into neighborhood windows. (Design team will explore lighting that can mitigate these concerns)
- Parkway Youth Hockey would like a street hockey court, as there are no courts near this neighborhood.
- Resurface the tennis courts
- Tenacity is one of the major permit holders for the tennis courts
- Rethink the distribution of courts throughout the park. Currently it feels weighted to one side of the park
- Another commenter stated that the park has “good bones” and does not need major changes to the layout

Comments on Circulation:

- Many noted that the Centre St intersection is very dangerous and is a barrier to getting to the park safely. BPRD will investigate this with Boston Transportation Department (BTD)
- There is currently no accessible walking path around the entire site. There is community interest for a track or paved walking/biking loop that goes around the entire site
- Stairs coming down from Bellevue St are dangerous and need to be repaired.
- Interest in accessible entrances on Bellevue and Quinn Way
- Interest in a formal entrance on Sturges

Comments on Amenities for Dogs:

- Many dog walkers currently using the site. There is a community of people who bring their dogs to the park to run around together, outside of the youth organized sports time frames
- Support for a specific fenced off dog park area (as there are no dog parks in this part of the city), while other community members are against an enclosed dog park because of limited space on the site

- Is there a way for a dog park to coexist with the athletic fields? Often dog walkers and youth sports do not occupy the space at the same time. Could there be certain times of day where dogs off leash are allowed? Design team will investigate Brookline's Green Dog Program

Comments on the Woodland Slope by Bellevue St:

- Woods are dense and there is a lack of visibility
- There is often broken glass and beer bottles in the woods
- Desire to open up the woods (visually) and formalize the trails to make the woods feel more welcoming
- Removal of invasive species
- Add another formal entrance along Bellevue, possible that goes through through the woods

Comments on Planting in the Park:

- Salt tolerant canopy trees along Quinn Way
- Interest in pollinator plants and enhancing the ecological component of the park
- Keep as many existing trees as possible
- Could clover be a hardy alternative for grass fields?

Miscellaneous Comments:

- Flooding and drainage in the park is poor, fields can get muddy
- Bathrooms are not always open and could be improved
- The park should be better maintained, fields are often unplayable for days
- Many community members grew up in the area, have played sports and have memories at Billings Field. It is a very important park for the neighborhood
- Many community events are held at Billings such as "Trick or Treat Centre Street" and the road race. It is important that these events can be maintained
- More seating is desired
- Parking is a big issue, there is very little parking around the park. People often use Quinn Way for drop off/parking which causes congestion, driveways sometimes are blocked.
- The fence along Quinn way is in poor shape
- Bike racks needed
- Billings is a large open space that is not divided by sports field fences. This is one of the things that makes it a great space because it is used in many different ways throughout the day and seasons (formal sports, walkers, informal catch, dog walkers, snowshoeing etc). Keep the openness of the park, so that there can be many different uses in one space.
- Integrate more trash and recycling receptacles
- Some community members snowshoe and crosscountry ski in the park during the winter
- Lighting throughout the park is desired for dog walkers at night
- Is there a way to incorporate seasonal activities like ice skating?
- Billings Field needs to serve a variety of users of all age groups
- Can the park incorporate art in the space?
- Interest in incorporating shade structures into park