



Boston Parks & Recreation Department

Improvements to Clifford Playground Community Meeting #3: What We Heard

Zoom: January 17, 2024

In-Person: January 20, 2024

Summary

Community Meeting #3 reviewed the three park concepts presented at the 2nd Community Meeting and summarized feedback from those meetings as well as additional conversations with local schools. Meeting #3 discussions focused on community member input on individual park elements such as access points and fencing types/heights, court striping and games, storage areas, and athletic field layouts and surfacing. Given the level of detail involved in this project, a fourth meeting (to be announced in late winter) was added at which point a final design with the details incorporated will be shared. Representatives from the Coordinated Response Team also attended both the in-person and Zoom meetings to provide an update on Mass & Cass since the intervention to close encampments at Atkinson Street in November.

Summary of Community Discussion

1. Park Entrances & Circulation

- Proposed entrances are generally in the right locations
- Reconsider Shirley Street entrance as an emergency entrance; often double parking here and EMS vehicles wouldn't be able to get in
- Entrance gateways
 - o In favor of gateways. They're bright, make the park obvious to passers by, & tell the story of the neighborhood.
 - o Like gateways that incorporate kids' artwork at entrance by Mason School
- Plaza
 - o Residents noted that motorcycles sometimes ride through the park – design needs to be open/accessible but should discourage this.
 - o There was discussion of potential use of plaza for local vendors and they encouraged the design team to consider how future vending could be accommodated in the plaza. City Councilor Julia Mejia noted that an ordinance is being drafted for legal vending. Some meeting participants felt that vendors/food trucks should be on the street (e.g., a designated area on Proctor Street) and not in the park so that neighborhood families could use the space for gathering.
 - o One participant suggested a food forest or community garden on the site. Boston Parks doesn't currently manage any food forests/community gardens. There are raised beds for the students at the Mason School.

- There was a suggestion to incorporate elements that uplift the youth in the neighborhood such as a mural or community board to showcase the teams that play there.

2. Fencing

- Generally the community doesn't want high fences; wants to maintain an open feel to the park.
- General consensus for an open perimeter along Norfolk and Proctor Streets. Alternately, could consider low, wooden guardrails (or large boulders similar to Franklin Park) to keep vehicles out and double as seating.
- Waterplay area shouldn't be fenced in so that the space can be repurposed when water is off.
- Review fencing around athletic fields to ensure an emergency vehicle (not just stretcher) can get onto athletic fields if needed.
- One community member encouraged considering the cost of different fencing options and whether spending less on fencing would allow for other desired park amenities.
- The playground should be fenced off and participants suggested that the playground's fence shouldn't be integrated with a perimeter fence; this was felt to be better for children's safety to not have people passing through playground to get to the park.
- There was discussion around fencing and ball netting for baseball/softball fields to minimize balls breaking windows at nearby buildings. Boston Parks and Recreation Department confirmed that ball trajectory studies would be conducted.

3. Seating and Shading

- One participant noted that umbrella poles in the middle of tables limits ability to play games on tables. Adding separate game tables without umbrellas was discussed.

4. Sport Courts

- Prefer traditional court painting/stripping on basketball court
- Would like lower basketball hoops for younger kids to play
- Would like scoreboard for basketball
- Don't need basketball hoops with integrated soccer goals
- Like painted activities for kids (e.g., hopscotch, math activities, etc.) but prefer that they aren't in court so players don't get confused with all the lines
- There were suggestions to paint additional activities in the walking loop or move one tennis court to be close to playground and paint activities in the perimeter around the tennis court

5. Fitness Equipment (around walking loop)

- Discussed having standard equipment (e.g., pull ups, push ups, etc.); didn't think some equipment (e.g., terrain challenge) targeted for seniors would be used as most would prefer to walk on loop
- Interested in distance signs to know how long each loop is; when a mile is completed, etc.
- Interested in having games painted on walking loop

6. Dog Park & Additional Amenities (e.g., water fountains, bike racks, trash cans)

- Bike racks should be located near courts
- Bottle fillers are a plus
- There were no concerns with the dog park area as shown

7. Playground

- Limited discussion as engagement of Mason School students is planned; see notes about fencing
- Preference to avoid any enclosed play structures (e.g., solid panel playhouse) that people might use for shelter

8. Storage and Portable Restrooms

- A suggestion of portable restrooms with open bottoms so you can see feet/if someone is inside were suggested (*Note: portable restrooms are provided by permit holders; Boston Parks provides a pad / partial enclosure for the portable restroom to be placed in); Boston Parks can look at alternate options with more visibility
- Request to review all storage and portable restroom locations on diagram to consider vehicle access to those locations. Will the entrances, paths, and fences allow a vehicle to get there to drop off storage container or portable restroom? (Will provide detail on this in Community Meeting #4.)

9. Athletics Seating

- Would like benches between the courts (perhaps double sided to face each court)
- Would like more seating at baseball/softball fields
- Bengals Football is interested in option to have secure storage underneath the football bleachers

10. Athletic Fields & Surfacing (Meeting reviewed 5 different concepts - showing different fields/sports and surfacing (1- artificial turf and 4- natural) within area of park designated for athletic fields)

- Concept #1: Artificial Turf – Includes 1 softball, 1 baseball, and 1 multi-use (full size football and soccer) field
 - o Input that this was best for the community using it – Cape Verdean community wants a soccer field; doesn't displace any teams currently using the park for practice/games; felt this was the most flexible and comprehensive to handle changes in the neighborhood and changes in demand over time; could have two U-12 teams play at the same time.
 - o Also many participants commented on benefits of artificial turf regarding consistent readiness of play, extended seasons, lower maintenance, better drainage
- Concept #2: Natural Turf – Similar to concept #1 except soccer field size is reduced to U-12 size to allow for natural turf
 - o Concern about fields flooding/mud with storms
 - o Participants said if natural turf was needed, this would be the next best option and natural turf would help with heat in the park
- Concept #3: Natural Turf – Includes 1 multi-use field (full size football & soccer) and two softball fields (no baseball)

- Noted as problematic because Roxbury Prep also needs baseball and the proximity to the Base
- Concept #4: Natural Turf – Includes 1 baseball field, 1 football field, and 1 U-12 soccer field (no softball)
 - Noted as problematic because there are existing softball teams (girls and adult leagues) that play at the park; don't want to displace them
 - Doesn't support baseball for kids 12 & under
 - One participant preferred this concept as they weren't aware of any current soccer or softball teams using the park and would like to focus on current teams/leagues (football and baseball).
- Concept #5: Natural Turf – Includes 1 baseball field, 1 softball field, and 1 or 2 U-12 soccer field (no football)
 - Park must have football so this option doesn't work
 - Have concern for softball field facing buildings on Shirley Street; would prefer fields face Proctor
- General discussion regarding artificial turf:
 - Benefits:
 - Many participants commented that natural turf is ideal or they understand the environmental benefits of natural turf; however, in this case artificial turf is better primarily because it is better for drainage, can support more hours of play, would allow longer seasons (e.g., during wet March, April, May). Currently, the park gets very muddy.
 - Teams/coaches appreciated that turf would always be at same height (no mowing) and could see needles or other debris more easily, if in the fields.
 - Artificial turf allows for artificial pitcher's mounds which can be removed and allow that space to be used for different purposes in the off-season.
 - All of the community requested sports can be accommodated with artificial turf.
 - Cons
 - One meeting participant expressed concerns about an increase in heat island effect at park and additional injuries on artificial turf. They also noted that turf is not "no maintenance" – blood from injuries or animal droppings, for example, need to be cleaned off.
 - Natural turf is more environmentally friendly and sustainable. Artificial turf has to be redone. It was noted that only the carpet of the artificial turf needs to be replaced. Materials underneath the carpet have a long useful life. In addition, plants for recycling the carpet portion of artificial turf are available)
 - Community members requested that Boston Parks provide information (e.g., manufacturer brochure) about the artificial turf that would be used so they know details
- Other Comments

- Focus on concept that will get the most utilization, maximize youth engagement, and allow for multiple permit holders. Don't want a scenario where one permit goes out and other fields can't be used

11. Other

- There was continued discussion about importance of maintaining of the park after improvements are made and enforcing ordinances with respect to illegal vendors, motorcycles in park, late night loud music, people coming from Mass & Cass, etc. The neighborhood has a "Friends of Clifford Park" Facebook page. Boston Parks & Recreation Department suggested setting another meeting with multiple city departments focused on issues in and around the park.