Healthy Parks and Playgrounds

A new old way to think about play

Eastern Cambridge & Kendall Open Space Committee September, 2013



Why does the city care about play?

We dedicate **space for play** because it is a **public good**.

Public play shows how a community values imagination and creativity

Play is important to the health and development of individuals and the community at large

Play invites participation from all segments of the community

How do we plan for play?

Trends in 2007

- Contained areas for kids
- Flat surfaces
- Fixed-in-place climbing equipment





- Safe for very small children
- Limited opportunity for upper age groups
- Few movable features
- Very few natural materials

How should we plan for play?







Play is **NOT**

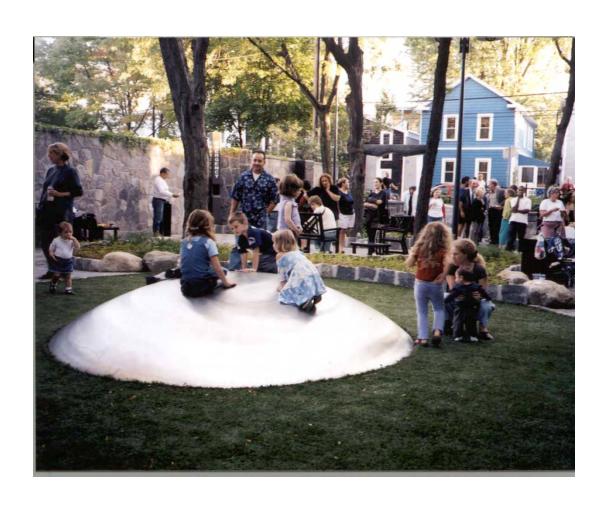
- Just for little kids
- Just burning calories
- Just wasting time
- Just for playgrounds



Start at the beginning – What is Play?

How is play **healthy**?

- Part of human
- Part of public life



Play is an integral part of human nature





- Play happens everywhere
- Play happens all the time
- Play is for everyone (kids are just better at it!)

Play is free, often unstructured and can be messy



- Play is a process, an activity
- Purposeful, but not a means to an end
- Self-directed
- Participatory
- Improvisational

Play is fun and makes people happy



- Emotional health and well-being
- Lifelong benefits

Play is a self-directed learning process, self-initiated

- Active thinking
- Players make their own rules
- Independent learning
- Applied knowledge
- Testing ideas
- Following ideas to conclusions



Play is exploratory, creative and imaginative



- Exploring the unknown
- Building new things
- Storytelling
- Not unlike the process of artists, innovators

Play is experimental, challenging and sometimes risky



- Inventing, pursuing new challenges
- Physical, cognitive, emotional abilities
- Confidence, selfesteem
- Reasonably safe, but not risk-proof

Play is physical

- Uses energy
- Improves circulation, reduces stress
- Coordination, balance and motor skills
- Thinking and movement



Play is learning about the outside world





- Natural and urban
- Using all senses
- How objects and materials interact
- Manipulating materials, objects
- Plants, soils, sand, water
- Fresh air, sunshine, greenery

Play can be solitary or social



- Communication
- Cooperation
- Competition
 - Reflection
 - Introspection
 - Independence

Goals for "Healthy Parks and Playgrounds" in Cambridge



- A direction for how the City's public space can evolve over time
- What does it mean to be a "play space"?
- The City as Playground

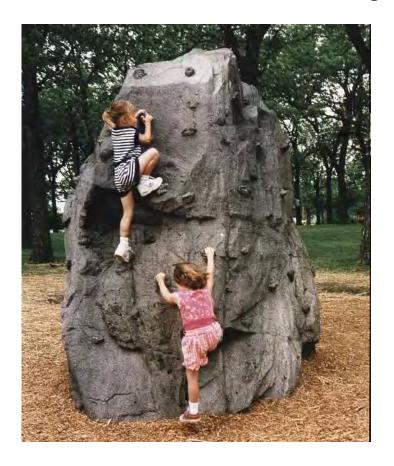


Parks and playgrounds should be integrated play environments, not just collections of play features in an enclosed area





Play environments should balance the need for a reasonable level of safety with the need for challenge, adventure and risk-taking





Play environments should support curiosity, creativity and imagination



Play environments should stimulate **physical activity** with many different types and combinations of **movements**

- Strength
- Balance
- Coordination
- Safety awareness



A diverse range of play environments should be provided across the city to serve a full range of age groups and interests







Play environments should be community places

Meaningful play opportunities should be available to

all levels of ability





Play opportunities should be provided during all seasons of the year and all weather conditions

Beyond Parks and Playgrounds



- Inviting play throughout the public realm
- Inviting all ages to participate



Vision for the Future



Parks and Playgrounds

- Different parks for different needs
 one size does NOT fit all!
- More focus on "environment" than "equipment"

The Public Realm (e.g., Sidewalks, Plazas)

- Playfulness and whimsy in unexpected places
- Spaces for imaginative interaction
- Spaces for socializing, community



