

# *Healthy Parks and Playgrounds*

*A new **old** way  
to think about  
play*

*Eastern Cambridge  
& Kendall Open  
Space Committee  
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# *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, self-esteem
- 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



- Sharing
- Communication
- Cooperation
- Competition
- Trust



- 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



[www.cambridgema.gov/healthyplaygrounds](http://www.cambridgema.gov/healthyplaygrounds)