

Healthy Parks and Playgrounds

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

*City of Cambridge
Fall, 2011*



Why do we care about *play*?

- We dedicate **space for play** because it is a **public good**.
- Important to the health and development of **individuals** and the **community** at large

- *Do our spaces meet the community's needs for play?*
- *Do they serve everyone – all ages, all interests, all abilities?*
- **Can we do better?**



Start at the beginning – What is Play?

- Part of human development
- Part of public life

*How is play **healthy**?*



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 play spaces will evolve over time



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



- Challenge abilities
- Understand real limitations, risks
- Respect playground safety standards

Play environments should support curiosity, creativity and imagination



- Setting for imagination, make-believe
- “Props” for play-acting
- Artistic or musical features

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

- Babies
- Toddlers
- School-age
- Teenagers
- Adults
- Seniors
- Intergenerational



Play environments should be community places

- Social and intergenerational
- Where relationships and communities can form
- Features that encourage social connection



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



Objectives

- Increase variety
- Improve public understanding of play
- Support education
- Advisory committee
- Research and evaluation
- Develop new resources
- Plan beyond playgrounds



Recommendations

- **Incorporate goals into park development/renovation**
- Evaluate existing parks
- Promote play within the public
- Identify partnership opportunities, grant sources
- Create resources for designers, planners, and the public

What to Expect in Future Play Spaces

- Different parks for different needs – *one size does NOT fit all!*
- More focus on “environment” than “equipment”
- More “moveable,” less “fixed”
(*e.g.*, swinging, spinning, building with loose parts)
- Age-appropriate challenges
- Space to explore and learn
- Natural materials, plantings
- Social, community space
- Imaginative, artistic elements
- Play outside of playgrounds
(*e.g.*, sidewalks, plazas)

