Play in the Public Realm

The City of Cambridge invites you to design playfully...
Everybody plays. Play is something that people of all ages—not just children—enjoy, and is an integral part of great cities. Play gets people moving, spurs curiosity and imaginative thinking, and brings people of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds together.

Play can take many different forms: running, climbing, or jumping in a field; engaging with an interesting piece of public art; playing board games on a café table. Play does not just happen in confined spaces: the entire city can be a place for play.

Whether publicly or privately owned space, the public realm is a representation of the community’s values, and it is here that a city demonstrates and provides for the quality of life for its community members. Playful design in the public realm can make projects and places stand out, and playful places are ones that people are attracted to and want to return to again and again. A playful public realm can bring engagement, serendipity, and delight to members of a community, and it is important for everybody in Cambridge to have places and opportunities for play.
PLAY HAPPENS BEYOND THE PLAYGROUND surfaces

buildings

programming

spaces

infrastructure

THE
Planes don’t have to be plain

Surfaces: Walls, Sidewalks, Streets
Are there elements that are child-friendly in terms of size, color, texture, design? Are there elements of the urban fabric that are inviting to seniors?

Where are the routes to schools, parks, business centers, other nodes of activity?
Infrastructure: Water, Light, Streetscape

Form follows function
If integrated into the design process, playfulness should not interfere with function, take up extra space, or be excessively costly.
Spaces: Plazas, Corridors

More than empty space
Are there elements that can be enjoyed equally by people with or without physical, visual, hearing, or other disabilities?

What makes this space special? Is there a sense of discovery, curiosity or wonder to visitors or passers-by? Does it stimulate imagination, or encourage people to engage with it?
Structures: Façades, Entrances, Transit Stations, Public Buildings

Structure(d) play
All design is artistic, whether it is done by an engineer, an architect, or a professional artist. What are the ways that design can be used to provoke thought, stimulate imagination, and convey a message about a place without the involvement of an artist?

Consider “playfulness” in balance with other design factors, such as engineering performance, aesthetics, accessibility, environmental standards, and maintainability.
Programming: Performances, Festivals, Play Days

All Work and No Play Make Cities Dull Places
Where do people of different ages go to play? Where do people meet? Where do people linger?
How can you make your city more playful?

Cut out the tiles from the following pages, and place them in a container. Choose 5 tiles from the container and place them face up – these will be elements to include in your playful city.

- A piece of a fence that can be manipulated in an interesting way
- A “focal” element within a public space that draws people together to view or interact with it (e.g., an interactive fountain, sundial)
- An unexpected object that encourages make-believe (e.g., chairs carved out of tree stumps)
- A “trail” of elements along a sidewalk that introduces the feeling of playfulness in one’s footsteps – perhaps linking neighborhood parks with each other, or with schools
- An interactive, kinetic or musical installation found in an unexpected place (e.g., the musical sculptures at the Kendall MBTA station)
- Features that offer a glimpse into engineering or science in everyday life, e.g., city infrastructure (storm drains, water system, electrical grid, etc.)
- An unexpected natural space, like a small grove of trees, in the middle of the city

(create your own)
A painting or sculpture embedded into the urban realm in a surprising or unexpected way

Spaces that can host temporary outdoor gatherings, such as seasonal farmers’ markets

A small patch of aromatic flowers

A collection of features across an area that provide the experience of a scavenger hunt, code or puzzle

A grassy hill where people can sunbathe or where children can roll down or sled in the wintertime (e.g., the front lawn of Cambridge City Hall)

Signage, bulletin boards, or other physical features that allow community members to leave messages for others

Elements of the streetscape that are “child-sized,” such as benches and chairs, to encourage use by children

(creator your own)

(creator your own)

A stretching/gathering area along a running or bicycling route

An arrangement of streetscape features, such as seating, to enhance views and encourage gathering around an open space, body of water, monument, or landmark building

Accessible restrooms (in commercial buildings, civic buildings) near spaces that attract activity over long periods of time

An outdoor area with movable tables and chairs near an area with cafes, ice cream shops, takeout restaurants

A water feature that stimulates curiosity and exploration (e.g., the “misting fountain” outside the Harvard Science Center)
A storm drain, stretch of curb, cycle track or sidewalk divider that is a playful shape or material.

Inclusive features that provide meaningful play opportunities for people with and without different types of disabilities (visual, hearing, motor, etc.).

Elements of the streetscape that encourage outdoor enjoyment and low-impact movement by elders, such as swinging benches.

Signage, images, sculptures or other features that encourage people to think about and imagine past uses in the area, or even future uses.

Bike shops or maintenance facilities near popular bike routes.

A small “point play” element that can be spun, climbed on, crawled through, jumped over, etc.

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Page 2
Street Art in East Village, New York, NY
http://www.flickr.com/photos/35034365374@N00/2434200018

Decorated Fence
http://www.flickr.com/photos/10064873@N00/galleries/72157624123168347/

Bridge, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Snail on Building

Page 3
Dance Party (photo: David Kong), Cambridge, MA

Page 4
2. City Museum in St. Louis, MO

3. Sidewalk Art

4. ArtPrize Festival, Grand Rapids, MI

5. Imagine That Bricolage, Grand Rapids, MI

7. Water Dances (Phyllis Labanowski), Cambridge, MA

8. Dino (Conlastic)
http://www.flickr.com/photos/87762368@N00/2911567465/

Page 5
2. Game Tables, Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA

3. Decorated Building, Poland
http://addi.se/album/piano-bike-rack/

5. Whirlwind (Conlastic), Dortmund, Germany
http://www.thorterkulve.nl/

6. Table Tennis, Old Morse Park, Cambridge, MA

Page 6
Dance Steps (Jack Becker, artist), Seattle, WA

Page 7
1. Dance Steps (Jack Becker, artist), Seattle, WA

Page 8
2. Asphalt Engraving (Paula Mejerink, artist)

3. Bicycle Shop Wall, Alsfandsberg, Germany
http://www.alfremodel.com/blogs/2010/10/120-bikes-on-a-wall/

4. Green Wall, Mexico City, Mexico
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_wall

5. Street Garage Wall [Ed Andrews, artist], Cambridge, MA

6. Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, UK
http://alfalfastudio.com/a-nature-trail-in-an-unexpected-place/

7. Painting the Streets
http://arch442544.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/tactical-urbanism/

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1. Before I Die (Candy Chang), Brooklyn, NY
http://beforeidie.cc/site/brooklyn/

5. Boulevard 28 de Setembro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Calçada_musical.JPG

6. Bounce Pads in Sidewalk, Copenhagen, Denmark
http://www.flickr.com/photos/87762368@N00/2911567465/

Page 10
3. Roombeek the Brook (studio: Buro Sant en Co), Enschede, the Netherlands

4. Exposing Infrastructure (Sidewalk Painting)

5. Hydrant Attachment Street Art (Thor tel Kulve, artist), Arnhem, the Netherlands
http://www.thorterkulve.nl/

8. Drinking Fountain (Mags Harries, artist), Fresh Pond Reservation, Cambridge, MA

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2. Dragon Street Light, Copenhagen, Denmark
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:North_toldbod_.jpg

3. Sonic Bloom [Can Carson, designer], Seattle, WA

5. Buscycle [Matthew Mazotta]

7. Yarn-Bombing [NYC DOT], New York, NY
http://www.flickr.com/photos/10812336@N02/3653613563/in/photostream-

8. Talk Tube Bench, Cary, NC
http://landperspectives.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/kids-together-playground/

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1. Roombeek the Brook (studio: Buro Sant en Co), Enschede, the Netherlands

5. Invasión Verde (Genaro Alva, Claudia Ampuero, Denise Ampuero; photo: Musuk Nolte), Lima, Peru
5. Spring Street Parklet, Los Angeles, CA
   http://www.flickr.com/photos/ladotpeoplest/

Page 18
Transit Accelerator, Overvecht Station, Utrecht, the Netherlands
http://www.hik-ontwerpers.nl/projecten/entree-station-overvecht/

Page 20
3. Kids’ Gate at Alexander W. Kemp Playground (Eric Powell, artist), Cambridge Common, Cambridge, MA
4. “Octo-Pied Building”
   http://cubeme.com/tag/installation/page/3/
5. Santa Marta Houses, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Page 21
1. Interactive Light, Auckland, New Zealand
   http://yesyesno.com/nightlights
2. Children’s Museum of Manhattan, New York, NY
5. Kendall Band Interactive Musical Installation (Paul Matisse, artist), Kendall Station, Cambridge, MA
   http://kendallband.wordpress.com/about/the-kendall-band/

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Play Street, London, UK
http://www.hackneyhive.co.uk/index/2012/09/stoke-newington-hackney-launches-first-street-play-in-london/

Page 24
1. Park(ing) Day 2009 Connect Four, Seattle, WA
   http://freeassociationdesign.wordpress.com/2010/06/09/user-generated-urbanism/
5. Bocce Court, North End, Boston, MA
6. Farmers’ Market, Kendall Square, Cambridge, MA

Page 25
1. Food Truck and Cart Festival, Columbus, OH

3. Play Me, I’m Yours (Celebrity Series), Cambridge and Boston, MA
4. Allston Village Street Fair, Boston, MA
5. CicLAvia, Los Angeles, CA

Page 27
Bus Shelter Swing (Bruno Taylor), London, UK

Page 28 (top to bottom)
Outdoor Reclining Chairs, High Line, New York, NY
Valente Library Reading Garden (Judy McKie, artist; photo: Jim Thomas), Cambridge, MA

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Public Art Between Buildings (DeWitt Godfrey, artist), Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA

Page 30 (top to bottom)
“Williamsburg Walks,” Brooklyn, NY
Game Tables, Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA

Page 31
1. Skateboard (Conlastic), Gelsenkirchen, Germany
2. Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia
4. Pooh’s House (Mitch Ryerson, artist), Cambridge, MA
5. Dymaxion Sleep (Jane Hutton and Adrian Blackwell, designers), Reford Gardens, Grand-Métis, Quebec
   http://inhabitat.com/dymaxion-sleep-a-hammock-for-your-garden/
7. Wilhelm-Hamacher-Platz, Troisdorf, Germany
8. LEGO Bridge (Martin Heuwold, designer), Wuppertal, Germany

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www.cambridgema.gov/healthyplaygrounds