



## OFFICE of the MAYOR

Marc C. McGovern  
*Mayor*

October 25, 2018

Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk:

Please include the attached letter **RE: Creating a fully accessibly playground in Cambridge for children with disabilities** on Communication and Reports from Other City Officers for the Regular City Council Meeting on Monday, October 29, 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Marc McGovern", is written below the word "Sincerely,".



## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

mayor@cambridgema.gov

Marc C. McGovern  
Mayor

Phone: 617-349-4321  
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October 25, 2018

**RE: Creating a fully accessible playground in Cambridge for children with disabilities**

To the Honorable, Members of the Cambridge City Council:

Over the past several months, the City Manager and his staff, along with my office, have been working on a plan to address the challenge that parents face in finding accessible options for their children to play and explore. More than a fifth of students in our public schools report some form of disability, which speaks to the opportunity to more broadly engage children with disabilities in fully accessible playgrounds. It is with great excitement, then, that I can inform you of an upcoming appropriation request from the City Manager for \$2.5 million to create a 100% Universal Design playground in Cambridge. Universal Design is a design approach guided by a specific set of principles that takes into account not only accessibility and mobility, but also potential sensory, cognitive, and emotional barriers.

Creating a Universal Design playground in Cambridge is consistent with and advances the City's goals related to both open space, accessibility, and inclusion. The City currently works to select and integrate playground equipment during park renovations that allow people with a range of abilities to play together. City staff, particularly through the Open Space Committee, will continue to support opportunities to incorporate Universal Design principles and play features as part of park renovation projects. An exclusively Universal Design playground, however, would be the first of its kind in Cambridge and have the potential to serve as a national model.

While the concept of Universal Design is becoming more recognized, there are very few examples anywhere of playgrounds that exclusively showcase Universal Design features. Such a playground can be a very effective way to demonstrate key principles of Universal Design while also providing benefits to the entire community. Users are able to benefit from playground elements not just physically, but also developmentally, emotionally, and socially. A successful Universal Design playground is intended to be used by people of all abilities of all ages.

A relatively large footprint is needed to create a truly one-of-a-kind Universal Design playground in Cambridge, as well as the potential for parking and restrooms. Therefore, we have identified an approximately 0.75 acre, unutilized and undeveloped plot of open space on Danehy Park adjacent to the Field Street parking lot. The engineering/landscape design firm of CDM/Smith, which is under contract with the city for Danehy Park oversight, conducted further analysis of the site and stated: "the site is open and has the most versatility for different playground concepts. Because of the amount of fill on the site, it allows for manipulation of the existing landform to introduce different levels and alternative play options within the landscape."

My office will continue to work with the City Manager and staff to create a focus group comprised of city staff, parents, abutters, and educators to work closely with the design firm to develop program concepts in a comprehensive public process.

The program design phase with the focus group will occur over the next few months, with the goal of having public meetings in the early part of 2019. Construction could potentially begin as early as late summer 2019 and would last about a year.

I wish to express my thanks to the City Manager and his staff for moving forward on addressing this issue which will be of tremendous benefit to the entire Cambridge community, and will continue our work for greater equity and access for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Maire McKeon".