

TO: Honorable City Council

FROM: Richard C. Rossi, City Manager

DATE: June 9, 2016

RE: Response to Sacramento Field Concerns and Community Process

It is my intention with this memorandum and the attached appendices to clarify the City's perspective, and to respond to the most recent resident concerns about specific elements of the proposed design concept for Sacramento Field. Though the community process is not yet complete, I hope this information clarifies recent questions regarding the process to date and specific topic concerns.

For any park renovation process, we grapple with many issues and constraints that are physical, technical, and regulatory in nature, which add to the complexity of the process. Thus far, we have had robust community feedback at two public meetings, staff input across multiple departments, and we have developed a design concept that has evolved with the interests and needs of the community while balancing other key City policy initiatives such as Universal Design and Healthy Parks and Playgrounds principles. Though we are unable to satisfy every request, we are confident that we can meet the community's expectations for a great park for the neighborhood for years to come.

Goals for Sacramento Field Renovation

The City has recognized for a number of years that Sacramento Field could be better utilized, and that improvements would benefit a number of residents given the limitation of open space in the neighborhood. For any park renovation process, the City's policy is to make accessible, safe, and inviting for everyone. As such, our goal is to take Sacramento Field, an existing park that is well loved and bring it up to date. This includes looking at how the park is used, and considering current standards for safety, materials, accessibility, and maintenance, and also introduce new features that would increase and enhance the use of the park. Over the last seven months, CDD has been working with residents to explore ideas and hear concerns about improvements to Sacramento Field that the community would like to see in the future.

Sacramento Field: How We Look at Open Space in the Agassiz Neighborhood

Sacramento Field serves as the central open space component for the entire Agassiz neighborhood. Prior to any open space planning process, we like to start by looking somewhat broadly at the role a park plays within the neighborhood and the city at large. For a neighborhood park such as Sacramento Field, we look at it as primarily serving an area within a ¼ mile to ½ mile walking distance (See Neighborhood Park Buffers Appendix). Within this walking distance, Sacramento Field is a critical asset serving both the Agassiz and Neighborhood Nine neighborhoods to support informal active and passive recreation.

Community Outreach

In preparation for the each of the community meetings, we used a variety of outreach methods. In addition to the community meetings, we also have met with different stakeholders to better understand specific needs or circumstances. We also met with staff across departments, notably the Open Space Committee, Commission for Persons with Disabilities, DPW, Cambridge Electrical Department, Public Health, and the Conservation Commission to discuss key topics and receive input on the design concept.

Community Meetings to Date:

To date, we have held two large community meetings. The first was the initial kickoff to the public process, and the second meeting was to review the design concept (see attached image) and request feedback from the community. We are also in process of hosting a third event (open houses) to review a modified design concept in late June (week of 6/20 and 6/27).

- Initial community meeting, December 7, 2015, approximately 50 attendees
- Presentation of design concept, May 4, 2016, approximately 50 attendees

What we learned: Feedback from our first community meeting

We had robust feedback from our first community meeting on the current use of the field and how the field might be improved. Approximately 50 residents attended the meeting. Below is a list of key takeaways and common themes for improvement:

- New grass planting, irrigation and maintenance to field
- Keeping the field open for multiple activities
- Consideration of both passive and active areas for all ages
- Create more interesting edges with plantings, pollinators, grasses
- Adding benches and seating
- Creating a dedicated “track” around the field
- Need for cooling areas and shade trees
- Better access and signage and the potential for school use
- We heard much support for off leash opportunities for dogs, and some opposition
- Don’t overdesign the park, it already supports creative and spontaneous uses

How we got to the design concept

The overall design concept was informed by the community input, neighborhood open space considerations, and the City’s perspective on how the role of parks in health, learning, and overall development of children, families, and the community [see [Cambridge Healthy Parks and Playgrounds](#)]. An important design challenge for Sacramento Field is to address the lack of connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood. Another intention for the design concept is to preserve the field so that it will continue being used for unstructured activities; while adding park furniture, expanding play opportunities, and adding other amenities.

Design Concept: Key Features

CDD presented the concept design at a second community meeting on May 4, 2016 with approximately 50 residents in attendance. The following are the key elements of the design concept that were presented:

- To create two connections/entrances to the field that are visible, accessible, safe, and well identified with park signage.
- A path around that field that is stable, permanent, and accessible for wheelchairs, walkers, baby strollers, and joggers.
- The field to be redone with drainage improvements, and an automatic irrigation system
- To create a new nature based tot area that achieves a less artificial look
- Resurface and re-line the court, replace the timber retaining walls with masonry wall, and fencing
- To incorporate landscaping improvements with native tree plantings as well as buffer planting of shrubs and vines to visually soften the edges of field, attract birds, and give more privacy to abutters

- In appreciation and cooperation with the Sacramento Community Gardeners, Improvements to the garden notably raised plant beds, and new fencing
- **(see detailed design concept and site plan in appendix)**

Feedback from the second community meeting

After presenting the design concept, we asked residents to identify what they like about the overall park design concept, and suggestions for what might change. The following are some of the key points from the meeting, and also includes thoughts submitted via email/phone:

- At the meeting, there was general support for the overall design concept. Attendees liked that the park would remain a multi-use open space with upgraded features.
- There was also positive feedback about the idea of incorporating more natural design elements and more seating
- Attendees had no major objections about the loop path feature, but there were some questions and concerns raised about using asphalt, specifically health impacts and permeability. We later heard from some residents expressing that they do not want to see any changes made to the dirt path (see Recent Issues section below)
- At the meeting, there was not too much push back on the idea of incorporating lighting. However, there were questions about programming the lighting so that it would not be too bright or invite late night activity. Some people would prefer there to be no lighting. Generally, attendees seemed fairly open to the idea of programming, shielding, and working with the City to adjust the lighting to work for the neighborhood, but were curious to learn what the program might be and what the process working with the City might look like.
- Considerable support for more nature based play areas for tots. We also heard support for gates at both the entrances to keep toddlers from getting away
- Interest in incorporating more native species for the plantings and trees and shaded areas
- For the basketball court, there were a couple of comments to keep the “full court” with two hoops, the Baldwin School supported the shorter hoop; there was no interest in the Bankshot concept
- We heard from less than a handful to keep the backstop, otherwise, it didn’t garner much attention
- We received a handful of comments about the public art installation due to the material, and how it would “fit in” the more natural look of the field.
- We heard strong support for off-leash hours in the mornings for dogs. We have also heard opposition due to noise issues and clean up as well as wanting to keep the park for people to enjoy.

Recent Issues

After the second community meeting, the City Administration and CDD have been fielding questions and concerns raised about two key design elements to the park including the loop path and the lighting programming. This section outlines the concerns raised by residents and provides justification for the proposed plans and clarification of the City’s approach in order to broaden the use of the Field.

Loop path: Goal of Universal Design

The loop path is a key feature in the overall design concept and a component in which a broader range of people in the neighborhood could enjoy. This would include parents or grandparents with strollers, afterschool and day care program providers, toddlers on tricycles, and wheelchair users. In any park redesign, the City strives to uphold human centered design and universal design principles. This means that the park is designed to accommodate maximum usability to the maximum possible array of users, regardless of age, ability, disability, size, etc. We have heard some residents request to keep the dirt path

for its charm and natural qualities. However, we do not see this as an option, because it would be at the exclusion of others to enjoy.

Furthermore, under state and federal accessibility standards, we are legally obliged to provide an accessible path of travel between the park entrances and the various unique elements within the park, e.g. play structures, passive seating areas, basketball hoop, etc.

Response to Health concerns

We heard interest from some residents for the path to remain dirt. In particular, there were questions and comments about the health impact of a proposed asphalt loop path. Asphalt is recommended for the loop path for a combination of reasons including accessibility, long-term durability and maintenance, aesthetics (the graying of the material over time), and its cost-effectiveness. What we are proposing to do is the same as in our other parks (e.g. Dana, Cambridgeport, Gold Star Mothers), which has worked well in terms of the durability, accessibility, and the ability to be easily plowed.

Given some residents' concern about health impacts of asphalt, the Public Health Department noted that hot asphalt sets quickly, and therefore, does not tend to off-gas. As such, there was no concern that using asphalt for the loop path would constitute an exposure issue. Plus, a distinction should be made that the City *does not use* sealants (typically used for residential driveways) which are highly volatile, and where off-gassing occurs.

Permeability

Based on requests, we have also looked into other alternatives for the loop path, such as flexi-pave or porous asphalt as a potential for improved permeability. Other materials suggested, such as stone dust, have not been considered because the material is not considered to meet accessibility standards over time.

Upon further review of alternative materials such as flexi-pave or porous asphalt for improved permeability, Public Works determined there would be no benefit to using a permeable material given the conditions of the soil and the drainage challenges. The City does not dismiss the value of storm water management, but generally DPW uses multiple strategies at a much larger scale. The history of the site as the former Old Pine Swamp, and the underlying soil is peat and clay do not provide for much permeability so that a permeable path material would not appreciably help with the water runoff and drainage. At the same time, a path made of asphalt would not further exacerbate run off or drainage issues. The drainage of the Field will be improved through a scheduled cleaning of the nine catch basins on the site and regrading of the field and paths to direct water to the catch basins.

Lighting: Developing a Lighting Program Balancing Safety and Disincentivizing Late Night Activity

We have also heard some concerns about the lighting proposed for the Field. Having no lighting currently, it may seem like a dramatic change. The City generally provides park lighting that is balanced to allow the passive stroll in the evening without encouraging inappropriate activity. Today, the City's capabilities to control the light program for this park are much different than in the past. The proposed plan recommends lighting program broader in use and is sensitive to the concern about after-hours usage. With the new lighting programming capabilities, the adjustability (dimming) of individual lights, and the shielding, there will be far less lighting impacts than what residents might expect. The Cambridge Electrical Department has committed to developing a program that works for the neighborhood. The intention for any lighting plan would be to mitigate foreseeable issues such as basketball or Frisbee at night, but allow for enough light that people taking an evening stroll would feel safe.

Commitments Moving Forward

In addition to the improvements and enhancements made to Sacramento Field, the City will make future commitments to ensure that drainage and storm water management systems are maximized taking full advantage of the nine catch basins.

- DPW has a renewed commitment to maintain the nine basins on a regular schedule
- The City will ensure that when the field is redone that it has grades to better cooperate with the catch basins, e.g. a crown in the center of the field to take water to basins better
- We will design berms and the pitch of the path to encourage flow of drainage towards the basins
- In addition, we plan on reducing the total number of light fixtures by five along the perimeter of the field along mostly along the northeast portion of the field (closest toward Garfield Street). The City will continue with the plan to install conduit underground around the field and along the entrances for the remaining light fixtures and at least provide the capability in the event that the City decides there is a future need.

Next steps in the Community Process:

The Community Development Department will be hosting a couple open houses to present the modified concept design (anticipated week of June 20th/June 27th) as a follow up to what was heard at the second community meeting, and the feedback thereafter.

Sacramento Field Renovation: Community Outreach

In preparation for the Sacramento Field community process, we reached out to residents and other stakeholders using the following methods:

- Direct mailing to over 1,300 residents within a ½ mile radius (prior to 1st community meeting)
- Notice to the Agassiz Baldwin Community and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council and public notice within their Whistler newsletter and email blast
- Posted notices and updates on [the Sacramento Field webpage](#)
- Placed flyer notices on all abutters properties including Sacramento Street, Sacramento Place, Garfield Street, and portions of Mass Ave. and Oxford Street.
- Posted notices at Sacramento Field, Sacramento Community Garden, Alden Playground, and Maria L. Baldwin School message board
- Emailed notices to the Baldwin School Community via Family Liaison and parent group to distribute
- Emailed notices to the Sacramento Community Garden via their Garden Coordinators to distribute
- Contacted particular Sacramento Field users including local day care providers, the Guidance Center, after school program organizers, CitySprouts, and the Baldwin School leadership including the P.E. teacher
- Conducted informal site visits to the Field to inform people of upcoming meetings, and had informal conversations with a handful of abutters about the use of the Field
- Emailed follow up notices to individuals who signed up on our contact lists

Other notable stakeholder meetings Winter 2015/Spring 2016:

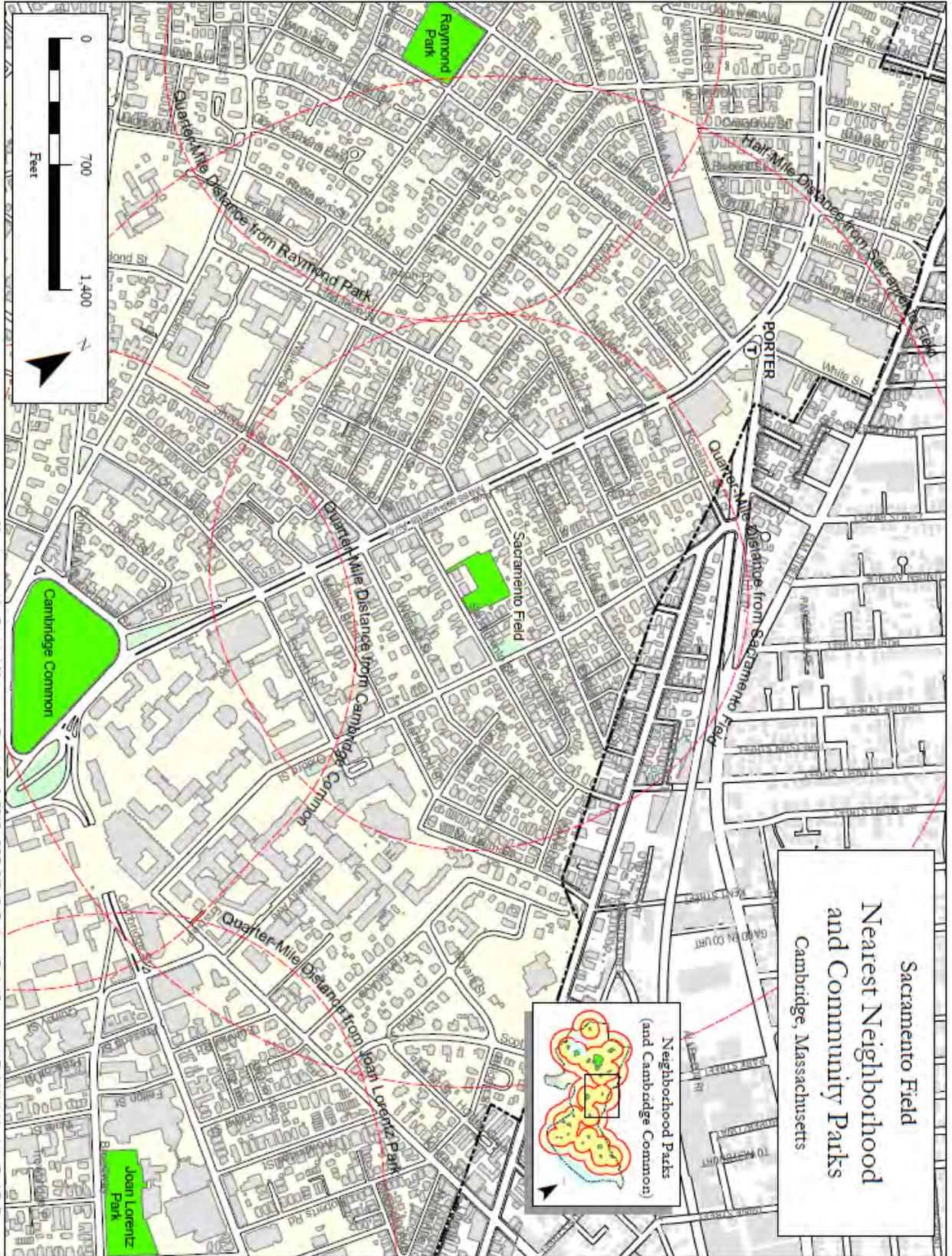
Over the course of this process, we also met with different stakeholders to better understand specific needs or circumstances.

- Multiple meetings with the Sacramento Garden coordinators, plus an additional meeting with the full garden membership in which over 20 gardeners attended
- Multiple meetings with the Friends of Baldwin School parent group and the Baldwin School Principal, Vice Principal, P.E. teacher, and Family Liaison
- Spoke at the April 12th 2016 Agassiz Baldwin Neighborhood Council meeting to provide an update on the Sacramento Field community process, 25 residents attended
- Meetings with a local day care and after-school program providers
- Regular contact with the Agassiz Baldwin Neighborhood Liaison
- Meeting with Harvard University in regards to granting of an easement for a park entrance
- Responded to additional meeting requests or phone calls on an ongoing basis

Internal meetings Winter 2015/Spring 2016

We also met with staff to discuss topics and receive input on the design concept and specific topics.

- Open Space Committee
- Cambridge Electrical Department
- DPW and the City Arborist
- Conservation Commission
- Cambridge Public Health Department
- Arts Council
- Traffic and Parking
- Commission for Persons with Disabilities



DESIGN CONCEPT FOR SACRAMENTO FIELD [Detailed]

Two Viable Entrances

- To create at least two connections to the field that are visible, accessible, safe, and well identified with park signage
- Qualitatively both entrances should be wide enough to accommodate two-way pedestrian use
- Having two entrances at both ends of the field will set up a more enjoyable circulation pattern, enabling park goers to enter park from either end, walk around the main open space, and exit at the other end
- Having a more convenient way for the neighborhood to be able to access the field is an important consideration; it will also be convenient for the Baldwin School, and Agassiz Baldwin Community programming

Path around the Field

- A path is proposed around field that is stable, permanent, and wheelchair accessible for walkers, joggers, riding a bike.
- The field area to be completely redone, with drainage improvements, and an automatic irrigation system.
- There are designated small pockets of space around the field area for bikes, a message board, drinking fountain, emergency phone, moveable furniture, tables with game boards, swings, benches, etc.

Nature Based Play Area

- Intention to create a less artificial looking play area
- A new tot lot with a custom wood tree climber, “tree house”, log steps, and slide built into slope (“bowl” shaped area under trees).
- Movement play equipment is developmentally the most valuable for children, also the most lacking in the neighborhood. The plan includes 2 tot swings, and 2 group swings for older children.
- A small seasonal water element for younger kids (farm pump)

Multi-use hard surface ball court

- What we propose is to modify the existing “full” court (undersized) into a regulation half court, with a second lower hoop for younger kids.
- Will resurface and re-line court, replace the timber retaining walls with masonry wall, and fencing

Lighting

- Pedestrian scale light poles will be installed along all walks. The Cambridge Electrical Department (CED) has the capability to program light fixtures individually, giving them more flexibility in controlling the amount of illumination, and minimizing unwanted impacts.
- In addition, these lights will have shields to further restrict the light distribution pattern
- We recognize that programming these lights will entail balancing safety concerns with unwanted lighting impacts and night sky pollution. The CED is willing and prepared to work with the neighbors to get it right.

Landscaping Improvements

- Proposing to plant some trees, where space allows, as well as a buffer planting of shrubs and vines along property boundaries, to give more privacy to abutters, separation, to attract birds, and to visually “soften” these edges and corners around the field
- Play areas will contain some more kid tolerant plantings, to expand the quality of play for roaming through, playing tag, etc.
- Final planting choices to be worked out in collaboration with the Sacramento Street gardeners, and the Public Planting Committee

Community Garden Improvements

- The square footage loss from the community garden, for the new park path, will be replaced with an equivalent amount of area at the back, field side of the garden
- Selective tree pruning (thinning of branches and removing lower limbs) over a period of several years, to improve light into garden, will be undertaken by the City arborist, including removing the Mulberry tree
- New garden fencing and gates, water spigot, message board, and some raised planters. The lower portion of the garden fence shall be solid and the upper portion to allow sunlight to come through.
- Sequencing of improvements will be carefully worked out in advance with gardeners.

Off Leash Shared Use Hours

- We are proposing to pilot shared use off leash hours in the mornings. In general, there has been considerable support for off leash hours. However, there has been opposition as well due to noise concerns. The pilot would allow for dogs to be off leash during designated hours. Outside of shared use hours, dogs must be on leash. The next closest off leash shared used areas are Joan Lorentz and Raymond Parks.

