

Park and Recreation Commission
Emerson Garden
Design Review Committee

Monday, June 13, 2016
7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Town Hall
Room 111

Committee Members Present: John Bain, Nancy O'Connor, Clara Batchelor and James Carroll, Joel Pedlikin and Stephen Burrington

Committee Members Absent: Antonia Osborne

Staff Present: Erin Gallentine, Parks and Open Space Director, Kathleen Fasser, Landscape Architect, Jessica Zarni, Administrative Assistant

Guests Present: see attached

J. Bain opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. J. Bain stated that it is a special park to him.

N. O'Connor moved for approval of the minutes. Seconded by C. Batchelor. All in favor.

The Committee members introduced themselves.

E. Gallentine thanked everyone for coming and welcomed the new design review committee members.

E. Gallentine stated that in the design review process we really engage with the public and want to know from the public, what the parks strengths are, who are the folks we are servicing and who we need to better service. The Town's goal is to have a park that is multigenerational and has a place and space where everyone feels welcomes. E. Gallentine heard at the kick off meeting that there were some things that didn't go so well as part of the first renovation in 1995, and how in some ways the design missed the mark and she wants to set that right. There are things we hope to remedy with the process. E. Gallentine discussed the makeup of the design review committee and its members. She wanted to point out that everyone has a voice.

E. Gallentine discussed the budget and how it was determined by the existing conditions. Kathleen Fasser is going to walk us through four different concepts and we want to know from the public what resonates with you. She stated that you may want to mix and match concepts and that is fine. E. Gallentine stated that we will look at concepts, go to public comment and once we move through that we will present some concepts around play. There are just different styles and themes so we can find out from the public what the right direction/fit is for this park.

K. Fasser introduced herself.

The project goals are to improve accessibility: design for all ages and abilities to access the park. The second goal is to improve safety: address site safety issue; play equipment, trip hazards, etcetera. The third project goal is to improve grading and drainage: adjust site evaluations to allow storm water to flow to working catch basins. The fourth project goal is to upgrade infrastructure: repair, refurbish or replace infrastructure that is in poor condition. The fifth project goal is to accommodate multiple generations: place making as a way for everyone to feel like there is a place for them in the park.

She went through a summary of the public comments that consisted of

- Balance types of uses (passive and active)
- Balance landscape /aesthetics with the heavy use
- Accommodate all age groups including teens.
- Play equipment for a mix of age groups
 - Expand, with more challenging equipment
 - Linear active equipment along the walkways
 - Exercise equipment
 - Some felt the sand makes the pavement slippery; others noted the beneficial aspects of sand.
- Drainage needs to be improved
 - Walkway surfaces
 - Protect lawns
 - Address over- compaction of the soil under the trees
- Plantings
 - Native
 - Needs Irrigation in order to thrive
 - Variety, label tree species
 - Perimeter planting
- Consider Historic context in details/site furnishings
- Consider fencing/gates to protect children from busy adjacent street

- Consider signage
- Provide water fountain with bottle filler and dog fountain

A site assessment was done and we found some needs and opportunities. The needs and opportunities include clarification of park entrances, improved safety and an

opportunity to create a signature space. ; The park edge can be unified and the plantings simplified so that they are maintainable; Some furnishings need to be replaced and there is the opportunity to unify selections and accommodate multiple users. Play equipment needs to be updated with a new safety surface; and the spray pad needs a new accessible control and improved drainage. The lawn area needs to be regraded to move stormwater and soils improved/regraded to reduce compaction; and tree canopy can be reinforced with new planting and infrastructure needs to be installed that will maintain plantings. Some utilities need replacement or repair and there is an opportunity to improve aesthetics; and site catch basins need to be updated and increased in number for proper drainage.

K. Fasser stated that we have developed 4 and half concepts. They all have communalities. The concepts can be combined in any way.

The existing site conditions were shown.

Concept A is similar to what is existing and it's simplified. It uses the existing entrances, it has a curbed garden, with this is seating and signage. This concept uses the existing walks but with expanded play. The gathering seating consists of one large picnic area (permanent), picnic in the play area and a rhythm of benches along walkways throughout park. She discussed the use zones, pointed out the fence panels and wall separation. It is not a fully fenced concept and there are not gates at the entrances.

Concept B vision is an open space for all users and there are vignettes throughout the garden. The entrances are gated with a switch back and have an ornamental fence, this creates space for signage or seating and this doesn't let a child leave straight out of the garden. This makes the child do a zig zag. The circulation has more curving; it is gently graded about a foot and a half and has curved ornamental entrances to play and the spray pad. The gathering /seating consist of pods within the garden, a variety of seating and individual and group seating within planted areas. The use zones are multigenerational play, integrated into the garden and are open. The park is completely open.

Concept C can be described as a separation of uses: garden and play. The entrances are signature "garden" beds, added entrances and there are no gates except at play. The circulation has the existing walkway except at the play space and there are distinct entrances to the play space. The seating/picnic areas are not designated and there is a rhythm of benches. The use zones are separated and there is fence/gate at play. It is separate from the rest of the garden.

Concept C (2) is similar to above, except the water play is moved to within the other play area and the addition of a gazebo-like structure for gathering.

Concept D is a combination of B and C. It is simplified, there are curbed garden entrances, curved walkways, a variety of seating, the spray pad is moved and there are separated uses with a fence/gate at the play area.

K. Fasser stated that we will now move to public comment, and was looking for the public's input on the following questions:

What enhancements would improve your experience?

What challenge should be resolved with updated design?

What are your top priorities for the park for the park improvements?

What activities of your children enjoy at the playground? Challenges? Sensory? Social, themed and familiar or unique?

Miriam Modricamin addressed the committee. It was her understanding that Emerson was given to the Town for the purpose of a park for young children their mothers and by making it available to those of all ages is exactly the opposite of what the park was given to the town. Kathleen Fasser stated that there are no deed restrictions or language to that fact. M. Modricamin stated that her only priority is the drainage along Emerson Street, about halfway down close to the fountain thing there is this water that comes out. The rest of the park she would leave it alone other than the drainage.

E. Gallentine stated that every park has a certain life expectancy, this is a high use park and the current play equipment doesn't meet current industry restrictions/standards. She stated that all the play equipment requires replacement. She stated that we have been asked many years to have special attention paid to the lawn and do some improvements to the care and condition for the lawn. She stated that there are a lot of reasons why the park needs to be renovated.

A resident stated that she has two questions. She wanted to know what will happen to the dedicated benches, people have chosen them as memorials and what is the plan for them. E. Gallentine stated that we will use the existing benches if possible and those we couldn't reuse we would move to a new bench model and transfer the plaque on the new bench. The resident would like to see improved trash receptacles.

Diane Pikiakias addressed the Committee. She wanted to thank everyone who worked on design committee because she sees so many ideas/concerns that the public has talked about brought into these concepts presented here tonight. She would like to say from her perspective she likes option B. She likes that there are gated entrances and exits. She thinks with all the use that option is the best choice for the safety of all the users. She thinks it is important to have the spray pad integrated with the playground. She stated that it is very hard as a parent to have the double back and forth between the water play and the play structures.

Michael Lefkowitz addressed the Committee. He wonders if that park has passed its maximum usage. He stated that the park is such a wreck after the concerts. He wants to know if that has been discussed or thought to limiting the uses. J. Bain stated that the concerts are limited. N.

O'Connor heard at the last meeting there was a desire around moving the concerts, but there is nothing formal at this point. He discussed how the park is used all day everyday by the preschools.

The fencing in all 4 options was discussed.

Catherine Anderson addressed the Committee. She stated that these concepts are wonderful and thought provoking. She has to say as a grandparent with little kids and being in the park again, she can see that completely fencing the playground would be difficult for a lot of families who have a 5 year old on a scooter and a little kid in the play area. She can see how this can be safer but can present challenges.

Richard Nasser addressed the Committee. He wanted to thank K. Fasser for a detailed and concise report. His own preference is for the C option and that is because we talked about this at the last meeting, there are multiple users with multiple interests and he thinks some people want quiet while other want activities and the trick is to balance all of this. He thinks having a fixed picnic area is a great idea. A pad under the picnic table would be a great idea. K. Fasser stated that In C and D there is no designated picnic area, but there is a variety of seating/gathering,

Reese Boyd addressed the committee. He thinks that option A and B are better for the kids and even if we can keep them in that half of the park that leaves them a lot more area to play run around and imagine different things.

A resident wonders if it is worth fencing off a quiet area instead of fencing of the play area.

Antonia Bellalta stated that currently the park is used by a lot of kids and a lot of kids playing along the lines of scheme B. She thinks having nature as the entire playground has worked really well. She hopes we can find a way of respecting areas for private time. She likes the idea of kids running around and having something to do in different areas rather would be great. She really appreciated the realignment of the entrances, such as in option C or D and allows you to actually enter through the crosswalks. She thinks she has done a great job expanding the needs of the playground while being respectful to the open space.

Jennifer Piezak addressed the Committee. She stated that she really doesn't like B, it makes the park feel very exclusive. She likes the idea of no gates. Option B also gets rid of any plant materials at the corner which have been the signature of this park. She thinks that some resident who would be upset who are not here tonight to not seeing any plantings at the entrances. People in the neighborhood worked with the committee in the past to have those plantings and put a lot of time and effort into maintaining them. She prefers C or D with the plantings at the entrances.

Gordon Bennett addressed the Committee. He discussed how the dogs congregate in the center of the park. He discussed how his sons learned to ride their bikes at Emerson and how

it's a great place for kids. He likes the idea of concept D and the splash area. He likes that the option is aesthetically pleasing and keeps with the integrity of the green space. He loves the idea of an island at the entrances. He does like option A as well. He likes the idea of a designated picnic area and having the center area open and green.

Joel Pedlikin addressed the committee. His biggest concern is the gating issue. He stated that we use all the parks around town and every other park has some means of gating and feels that parents of small kids need something. He thinks there has to be a compromise for parents to be able to relax. He doesn't feel like this park was designed for concerts and he would like to see that addressed. He is in favor of having the water integrated with the play.

Stephen Burrington addressed the committee. He is assuming that in all these designs they are equally able to handle drainage/irrigation problems. He wanted to stress that the flow and use of the path for young bicyclists is important. He thinks it is the signature feature of this park. He thinks that completely fencing off the play area from the rest of the park is problematic. He is a little concerned about the lack of the solution to the picnicking location. He is in favor of permeant picnic, maybe not a structure, but he thinks it needs designation. He thinks the point that Gordon made about having the splash pad integrated with playground area is a good one. He stated that option B feels a little busy, he stated that there is an elegance to the park that he likes and doesn't want to see it disrupted.

Nancy O'Connor stated that as a user, as a kid, parent and now grandparent she has seen it all different ways. She was thinking about fencing and she was all for gates at the entrances, however as a teenager she would walk through the park. She likes this idea of easily getting in the park. She likes fencing the playground completely. She likes the idea of water features within that space and likes having it all together. The garden/irrigation is key and having the pieces at the edges is important. The bike path piece she thinks is brilliant. In terms of the Waverly and Thayer entrance she can't decide which part she likes better. Option A being off of the corner feels safer to her. In terms of thinking with the pods, having benches around is one thing, she agrees she doesn't want too much going on and a balance needs to be struck. She thinks that maybe there can be one place to have a piece of exercise for an older person.

Jim Carroll is leaning toward option D; he likes the simple approach and the gardens at the entrances. He is a little ambivalent about gating. He thinks that in terms of budgeting, the less different areas/pods/picnic areas the better and sees keeping the option D and maybe moving, having one area and build that out. He likes all the play equipment area in one area. He stated that maybe a combo of fence and hedges to close it in more organically instead of all fencing.

The Elm trees at Waverly and Thayer were discussed.

C. Batchelor stated that here have been great comments so far. She does like it simple. In terms of the gazebo this park it has so many trees. She likes the idea of having one entrance instead of split entrance, the more continuous edge of planting you have the nicer and cheaper it will be. The path and playground in option C she likes, but she prefers the entrance to the top in

Option A, but no gazebo. She thinks it would be nice to fence in the playground area and not the rest of the park. She thinks it's important to keep the playground area fenced and it's a nice way to keep it separate from the Green Dog Program.

J. Bain and K. Fasser discussed the access to the toddler area for all the options and the crosswalks. J. Bain doesn't see the necessity of fully gating in the park.

K. Fasser stated that for planting she envisions color and maintainability, but the most important it is maintainable, has a good site line and it's irrigated. The maintenance entrances in the concepts were discussed. J. Bain stated that Option D seems the most passive and has the most open space out of all the options to him.

K. Fasser went through the passive areas within the concepts and circulation that would the amount of the center lawns within each concept.

A. Bellalta stated that she sees the issue with fence or no fence being for safety reason. K. Fasser described what a switch back is and what it looks like in option B. A. Bellalta stated that she is really in favor of trying to get water into the playground area, because she think it will create more of a passive area. She is wondering if K. Fasser could look at entrances to the playground without a gate. She likes where the entrances are to the playground in Option A. She wants to see a connection to open space. There is so much passive/active activity going on right now, she likes the way it is currently set up.

Brian Bergtsein addressed the Committee. He stated that it seems reasonable to make a compromise between the flow the park has now and the need for safety of the kids playing in the playground. He stated that maybe the portion closet to road can be fenced and maybe not the other part, it could preserve the fluidity in and out of the park. He asked what would be the difference in time to get this done, the time the park is off limits, and if there is different of concept of time to carry out each design. E. Gallentine stated that all project are 8-12 months and each concept would take that long.

Michael Modricamiri addressed the Committee. He wanted to say that it is a wonderful neighborhood park and part of the reason it is a circular park and the park draws everyone in. He wanted to voice his opposition to gating, he would hate to see people to have to make an effort to get into the park.

E. Gallentine stated that she is hearing clear feelings leaning towards gating/ not gating. She stated that her objective is to maximize everything we are hearing here while providing public safety. She will be taking everything into consideration and plans on coming back with a few options in September.

Laurie Lasky addressed the committee. She stated that you mentioned in one of them is slight grading due to drainage and she has concerns with the grading for her elderly mother. K. Fasser stated that it is very gentle grading and described what it would be like. She wanted to thank

you to your thoughtfulness and how this design took into consideration all the concerns everyone expressed around safety. She stated that as beautiful as the dual entrances are visually, but she feels that it complicates the safety elements around the kids and dogs running in and out of the park. She prefers single entrances.

Richard Nasser addressed the committee. He wanted clarification on the yellow bit at the wipe out corner. K. Fasser stated that the idea was to have a very informal seating opportunity, we looked at this as being a desired meeting spot, it is a paved zone that maybe can have tables and chairs.

A resident stated that two exit options might be difficult, she stated that maybe if you are keeping with that option maybe showing where the crosswalks are would be helpful.

A resident addressed the Committee. She stated that Drainage is always a problem and wondered if there was any into doing a water permeable surface on the walkway. K. Fasser stated that there are some maintenance needs for permeable paving that the town would need to do, she described the higher level of care a permeable paving would need.

Jonathon Ceely addressed the Committee. She stated that there are lots of exciting ideas here tonight. She stated that no one has addressed the outside perimeter between the fence and the walk. She stated that in many ways that is the least attractive aspect of the park and she wondered if maybe you move the fence out closer to the sidewalk. K. Fasser stated that in needs and opportunities comments, there was a need for a cohesive outer edge and it depends on how budget turns out, and if there is enough room; there is a need to loam the bed and clean up that edge. It is something that has been talked about and will discuss what options there are along that line.

K. Fasser presented playground options/ideas for ages (0-2, 2-5, 5-12 and 5-100). K. Fasser is looking for input and thoughts on the age groups the playground will be geared towards. She showed playground structure options for types of play in terms of motion, such as swinging, rocking, spinning, sliding and climbing. Playground options for pretend play, imaginative play, sensory play, gathering in play, fitness were shown. K. Fasser wanted to touch on theme play (ship, garden, unique) for consideration.

Reese addressed the Committee. There are a couple of things he saw that he would really like to have in the park. He thinks that thematic play is great for small kids. He loves the hammocks benches, seats for kids it's a great place to hang out. He likes the pieces that encourage exercise. He discussed pieces that would work for kids to have a place to hide.

A resident addressed the Committee. He stated that his kids are 8 and 10 and some of their friends are a little bit older. He stated that older kids will hang out there and he thinks you are wise to consider structures that scale from little kids to teenagers. He thinks that things that facilitate that, instead of a theme, might be more conducive to the wide range of age groups there.

Gordon Bennett addressed the committee. He likes the consolidated play and he would like to have a neutral structure. He loves the half moon and arches, he thinks that the very simple structure you can be creative with and fit in the natural surroundings. He thinks that themes can get out dated very quickly. He likes the garden feel. He stated that as a parent you are always looking for place to sit.

A resident addressed the Committee. He stated that he is very jealous of this rich variety. He wanted to make a comment that he is very gratified that so much attention is paid to special needs kids/equipment. It speaks so well for the community that we are aware of that and want to incorporate that into our parks.

Antonia Bellalta stated that she likes the more natural/ imaginative play. The area is very natural. That is the way she sees this park used and wants to encourage that. She has the same feeling that things get dated.

A resident addressed the committee. She wanted to urge the committee to keep it more natural. She wants to see a place where kids can go and hide and if that isn't provided the kids will hide in the plantings. She thinks that a piece that something to get away and hide is very important. She discussed the natural flow of the park and hopes that feeling will stay.
A resident and E. Gallentine discussed sand.

Trisha Marks addressed the Committee. She thinks that there should be something good for climbing, because at that park she sees children climbing the trees.

Nancy O'Connor stated that she likes the lady bug idea in right color. Her thinking around the sand is from park to park we have different needs, desires and wants from different neighborhoods and parents. The balance is tough to strike and she is wondering if we keep the sand.

A resident discussed how great sand play is for sensory play and she would hate to see it go.

A resident stated that she thinks all ideas are great, but her only concern is pieces that make music or noise.

Clara Batchelor stated that the kids hide in bushes and she thinks it not bad thing to incorporate shrubs in that so it makes feel like they are playing in nature. You could work in plant material that kids can play around.

Stephen Burrington wanted to discuss swings/ social swings. K. Fasser wanted to get input on swings tonight because they can take up a lot of room and thinks it would be good to have that conversation. He would advocate for swings. He seems to agree with the consensus in terms of having play equipment not as specialized and is left to the imagination. He would reduce the

sand play area. He is curious about the layout of the play area, the schematic design. K. Fasser stated that it has not been designed yet.

Joel Pedlikin stated that in his opinion the sand right now is unavoidable, he isn't opposed to having sand but it has to be reduced. He hates swings he doesn't want more personally, but the kids love it and there are not enough swings. He hopes the water play coming now is better than what is currently there. He thinks the water play definitely needs an update.

N. O'Connor stated she was also thinking earlier about the naturalistic log looking pieces. She wondered what opportunities there are with that manufacturer. It would be fun if it was something like that was a climbing structure and natural looking. She would like to see one piece put in for older play, maybe something for exercise. She is thinking that would engage in adult. She would like to see some updated water play as well.

J. Bain knows you want your own unique park but wanted to point out that a good example is Clark Park, the climbing structure there is phenomenal. Soule and Waldstein water play was discussed. He is opposed to sand. He doesn't know how a park couldn't have a swing. He would like to see a piece of play equipment relates to Emerson Gardens , such as a green house or a beanstalk.

Jim Carroll's experience lately with his grandchildren when they go to the park is that they love the combination play structure with ladder, slope, slide and the bridge. He thinks those are successful and get a lot of use, especially for 2-5 year olds who are just learning those skills. The other thing he was thinking about is budget wise is maybe having Mitch Ryerson build one of those wood structures. E. Gallentine described the Mitch Ryerson custom pieces.

The Fisher Hill grand opening was discussed.

C. Batchelor stated that the dish swings are great because they are great for mobility and they take up less space. She would say that if we are short on space for all our wants than lean towards the dish swing. She stated that the post and platform piece are good for the smallest children but they probably stop having appeal at 3 1/2 -4, she stated that more open more transparent we stay the more the natural part of park will shine through.

J. Bain thanked everyone for coming. J. Bain moved to adjourn. Seconded by N. O'Connor. All in favor