

Park and Recreation Commission
Emerson Garden
Design Review Committee

Monday, November 7, 2016
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Town Hall
School Committee Room, 5th Floor

Committee Members Present: John Bain, Clara Batchelor and James Carroll, Joel Pedlikin, Stephen Burrington and Antonia Osborne

Committee Members Absent: Nancy O'Connor

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. Pedlikin moved for approval of the September 6, 2016, October 8th (site walk), October 17th (site walk) Emerson Garden Design Review Meeting Minutes . Seconded by J. Carroll. All in favor.

K. Fasser welcomed everyone and thanked everyone from coming.

The agenda for tonight consists of

- Project goals and baseline improvements
- Timeline
- Summary of public comments
- Presentation of Design Concept and Alternatives
- Presentation of planting approach
- Presentation of playground options
- Budget Review

The project goals are to improve accessibility, improve safety, improve grading and drainage, upgrade infrastructure and accommodate multiple generations.

E. Gallentine went through the baseline improvements. They include:

- Maintain and improve the open lawn space
- Repair/regrade the walkways
- Replace/supplement planting with appropriate irrigation
- Replace play equipment
- Plant succession trees
- Repair/replace utilities
- Supplement/replace site furnishings

The timeline of this project was discussed. This is the 4th meeting and there were 2 sites walks. The next meeting is scheduled for December 6, 2016.

K. Fasser went through the timeline and progress.

A summary of public comments from the previous meeting was shared including:

- Maintain overall character of the existing setting
- Balance types of uses (passive and active)
- Accommodate all age groups including teens
- Expand play area for a mix of age groups
- Drainage needs to be improved
- Plantings: seasonal interest, irrigated, variety
- Consider historic context
- Consider fencing/gates to protect children from busy adjacent streets
- Entrances: continue to have signature garden
- Circulation: simple, similar to existing
- Gathering areas: varied, permanent picnic and maintain memorial benches

The existing conditions with the proposed concept were shown.

The Design Concept was shared with the Committee and audience.

The Entrances

- Existing and extended curb and garden
- 14" ht. ornamental fence (on top of granite curb) and existing bollards
- Signage

Gathering/Seating

- Gathering areas with varied seating and boulders
- Two picnic areas, plus one in the playground
- Rhythm of memorial benches
- Bicycle Racks

Approach to play

- Existing spray pad location with new activator
- 3' ht. fence around sides with central transition zone with fence

Alternative: Spray Pad

1. Existing with minor renovations and new activator.
2. Alternative: new concrete pad, activator and small flush jets.

K. Fasser discussed the planting approach goals of Garden and Diversity: to maintain the overall "garden" character (color, seasonal interest, flowers texture) and to plant a diverse spectrum of species=arboretum.

1. Existing Plants

- Maintain and protect existing healthy trees
- Maintain and protect or transplant existing understory planting
- Remove dying, threatened, end of lifespan trees, shrubs, etc.

2. New Plantings -Trees

- Trees for succession=to reach maturity and fill in canopy when older trees die
- Variety of trees that have interesting form, color, flower, etc. Examples of various trees were shown.

3. New Planting- Understory

- At entry gardens: augment or replace planting, flowering with interesting texture, low in height, simple palette, easy for DPW to maintain, appropriate irrigation.
- Inner edge plant beds- develop simple groundcover and flowering/seasonal interest specimen shrubs, easy for DPW to maintain.
- Outer plant beds-aerate, amend existing soil, add topsoil and shallow planting
- J. Carroll was looking at the low cover plants as he is thinking about the Green Dog program and is worried about the maintenance. K. Fasser stated that inner edge is one of the most difficult areas to deal with because of the running of the dogs there, the compaction, the tree roots and it's very shady. She stated that we have worked to come up how we can have something truly sustainable. The idea here is to plant this bed and keep a short temporary 2-3 foot fence up for several seasons of growing before removing it to make sure it is very well established. Once established it will be able to handle a lot and the goal is to have this lush edge along the inside of the fencing for a long period of time. A resident stated that is not the dogs in the Green Dog Program, it's the dogs on the length of leash that walk along the planting beds.
- A wide pallet of plants was shown.

4. Lawns

- Central Lawn space: re-grade, topsoil and seed, improve irrigation. It will drain much better and be a better place for play.
- Inner edges: aerate, add topsoil, use shade-loving seed mix. There will still be lawn between walkaway and planting beds that was just described.

K Fasser wanted to give a broad overview of various play equipment pieces to get feedback on.

Playground options/examples from Rocks and Ropes were shown.

Playground options/examples of Treehouses and Nature Play were shown. It gives the idea of a natural feeling for the playground.

Playground options/examples of Boats were shown.

A slide that focuses on playground options from 6- Months to 5 years was shown. K. Fasser stated that we want to be sensitive to colors and have a clear site line of the park.

A slide of Sculptural/ imagination play was shown. These are pieces that are not scripted. K. Fasser touched on swings and spinners.

K. Fasser stated that we have received input from the site walks and she provided an example to every one of how the playground might develop. The playground fencing and openings were described. A transition zone in this example was discussed. The 6 month to 5 year old pieces would be on the right and the 5 to 12 year old pieces would be on the left with a large open space. All the areas under the tree are mulched and the existing trees are edged with flat stones and boulders for a natural look. A little area for sand play is outlined in this example. Examples of the picnicking in the playground area were shown. Logs and stumps will be kept for the children to play on.

K. Fasser and S. Burrington discussed the survey work that was done to point out major drain lines and catch basins. In the 5-12 areas this example shows a climbing rock with a rope climber along the side, which leads to a bridge structure, which then leads to a rickety bridge and linked together by stepping logs. There are stepping stones connected to a piece similar to a climbing piece as well. An arch transition piece was shown, as well as flat stepping stones that will connect the area. The swings in this example were shown. An arch play piece was shown. The younger children area starting at the right, the area is mounded with a similar rock structure, then there is a roller slide for the tots, as you get to the bottom of hill there is an at grade tree house, tables and mushroom seats. She stated that next to those pieces is a larger structure similar to 5-12 element and it incorporates a number of different panels that are very accessible for the little children and wheel chair accessible. The swings in this area were listed. A separate area for sand was shown in this example.

The site furnishing options were shown.

J. Bain asked if the wall on Davis Avenue had been looked at. K. Fasser stated that not within these improvements it has not. E. Gallentine stated that she will take a look at that with the Highway Division.

Gusti Kustyanto addressed the Committee. He stated that at the last meeting there was talk about the idea of moveable furniture. K. Fasser stated that we have not heard a lot more interest in it but we have not tabled the idea.

Amy Buchman addressed the Committee. She stated that example of playground seemed to be relatively conventional playground furniture as opposed to some of the other possibilities. She personally prefers something with a bit more personality to it, she likes the more natural and imaginative pieces. She wonders if there is something tying it all

together. K. Fasser stated that she would summarize the input she has received people really wanted to see the imaginative and very natural play. She stated that it is interesting to bring these two together. E. Gallentine stated that the opportunity tonight is provide input on the playground pieces. She wants to know if there is something you love and would want to see in this park. She stated that we will take that information and come back with a concept for the next meeting. The Emerson Design Review Committee will make recommendation that will go before the full Park and Recreation Commission for a full vote. A. Buchman stated that a lot of parks look similar to her she doesn't see a park in Brookline that uses all natural pieces. She is saying if the choice more imagination vs conventional things she would lean towards imagination. She teaches kindergarten at Pierce and described some of the pieces in Pierce that are not being used by the children. She finds them artificial and not interesting over time for children and would want to stay away from those pieces at Emerson. E. Gallentine discussed the play pallet at Pierce.

Julie Bruno addressed the Committee. She wanted to thank K. Fasser for the great presentation. She was an advocate for the tire swings and loved seeing them in the presentation. She wants the park to look natural and provide the kids with great play. She thinks the big rocks are great. In terms of the benches she thinks the Boston benches are nice, but she hopes there will be some continuity amongst the seating. She wants it to feel like a family.

A resident addressed the Commission. She discussed two natural playground materials playgrounds built in Mission Hill and Jamaica Plains. She stated that when they were first built they were some charming, but after the first year the plantings and the water feature were gone.

Jennifer Pieszak addressed the Committee. She thinks that if you combine the natural but she would like to see metal things more sculptural and a little pop of color would help. She thinks it will be a great mix.

A resident addressed the committee. He discussed the play area at the Reservoir; he thinks that it's soft and would speak well here. He thinks it is nice to have a theme at the park, he likes the idea of having a signature theme. He suggested visiting the example of the play house at the Franklin Zoo.

Another resident wanted to second the sentiment of encouraging the committee to think about having a theme. He finds if you take one concept and really run with it and figure out how to tie the pieces together. He would like to see one idea/concept flow through the space. He would like to make the plea to have a sand area. He knows the splash pad is separate but would like to see it tied together with a theme.

A resident made a plea to not have to wait two years for a water fountain. E. Gallentine stated that we don't have water fountain in stock and we may be in construction next year.

Charles Osbourne addressed the Committee. He stated that it is Intriguing that the playground is in some ways triangular shapes. He discussed urban planning and organizing

principal. He always looks for a theme and kind of some intrigue that drives the plan of the circulation. K. Fasser and C. Fasser discussed potential organizing to principal of space..

J. Pedlikin stated that the quality of K. Fasser's presentation is top notch. He likes what she did with the playground. He feels like there is a lack of tall climbable piece. He discussed the new Pierce playground piece, he stated that the piece is so popular and great. He thinks kids need something to pretend it's a structure and he would like to see something along on those lines. He did not like the two big pieces shown in K. Fasser's example.

J. Bain stated that when he grew up it was Emerson Park then it became Emerson Gardens. He stated that it's a classic name. He would like to see a lot of plantings, colors, and a lot of respect for the perimeter where the kids do not play. He loves the Boston Benches. He stated that we need to have equipment kids are attracted to; he thinks we are getting there. He likes the idea of a theme and there are nice things shown that can be put in there. He thinks it needs a classic setting somehow. He would like to see more plantings in the passive areas along the inside. He discussed a possible isolated area to sit that was brought up by a few people in previous meetings, a place to sit read a book .

S. Burrington stated that on right hand side along Waverley there are 2 beech trees and oaks, he wanted to point out that he would think twice about adding too many trees in that area. He finds it to be an elegant area now. K. Fasser and S. Burrington discussed the light planting within the playground area.

C. Batchelor stated that overall the scheme is nice, she stated that where it is not as strong is when you enter the playground a lot of little pieces are spread throughout. She thinks the islands of mulch are nice. She suggested that you work with the playground equipment manufacturer and they could customize pieces that connect everything so you are almost like on an obstacle course. She stated that maybe have a rope you could climb on that takes you along the connected pieces. She thinks it would feel like you're on an adventure and you could even try to link them across the mulch. She feels it would be a lot more fun and imaginative. She finds the 2-5 year olds and the Dumor (one on right) take up a lot of space with not a lot of play value. She thinks we could find something better and more united.

A resident addressed the Committee. She stated that she agrees it is not a playground area now and she lives across the street and can't even see playground equipment. She imagines the new play equipment to be tall and she is torn because the fun stuff is big. She likes it understated and she doesn't want the play equipment to be the main attraction of the garden. C. Batchelor discussed that it can be done so that it is not visually strong from a distance.

S. Burrington wanted to point out that he does not care for plastic rocks.

J. Carroll stated that he follows J. Bain feeling with the garden aspect, he would like to see a more organic/natural feel for the play equipment. A vertical ropes structure that connects the pieces that C. Batchelor had mentioned feels would work well like here. K. Fasser discussed the pieces that kids would go to, to get away. He doesn't like the feel of a little

cabin is right here, he is thinking like an organic pirate ship would work better. He discussed examples Mitch Ryerson's pieces that he think would work well here. He would like to see something stand-alone piece that is not part of a larger apparatus.

A. Osbourne doesn't think the nature play for her is being spoken to with the plastic leaves, so much as the logs do for her. She likes the intentional in between space that is misled with off the road paths. She loves the bridges and the metal arches. She remembers from her childhood when there is a single bar at waist height and she stated that there is always a line to use that piece. She thinks an old school jungle gym is always popular and aesthetically pleasing, she thinks it's a timeless thing. She personally does not enjoy the elaborate ball with ropes between it that is popping up all over the world, she would rather see a boat than that. She would like to see a small boat at Emerson. She thinks thematically, you could do Peter Pan and that would allow you to have an imaginary lagoon or a fortress. She thinks you could be imaginary and she appreciates the window and angulating landscape. She thinks a theme or story to make up the course it would make more sense. She likes the stepping logs and maybe those could be continued sometimes flat and have a connecting line between it. She loves the metal mounds, arches and bridges. She likes bridges amongst the trees, the idea of them going between/through the trees. She thinks the Boston bench has an appeal.

E. Gallentine stated that all comments are really helpful and she stated that we have work to do for the playground to come together and have it fit with the rest of Emerson. She stated that it really embraces everything that the neighborhood loves about what exists now and elevates it in terms of condition. She stated we will see more color, better drainage, better conditions of lawns and plantings and more place to gather but in subtle ways. In terms of the playground she likes the flow. She likes the area for 2-5 year old, she likes the mound and the embankment slide coming down. She likes how the swings are tucked back, so that you don't have kids running behind or in front. She likes how K. Fasser used the stones to set our edge for the safety surfacing, so that it is mulch behind that and it's still all play within trees. She likes how those work together. She stated that what she is hearing with those other pieces is that we need to figure out a way to pull that all together and have something unique to Emerson Garden. E. Gallentine has an example of a piece at the Esplanade that is a rock climber, something like that might be an option. E. Gallentine stated that she would be interested to hear if people like the footprint of play structures and the structures of the movement within, but that can change a little bit based on what goes in there.

S. Burrington stated that there is a lot of play activity here and he is wondering if we all feel if the quantity of structures of play is right. E. Gallentine stated that is a good point and stated that maybe it is something signature and special and we pull other elements out.

J. Bain and K. Fasser discussed the surfacing the budget calls for. J. Bain and K. Fasser discussed pieces that are wheel chair accessible.

A resident addressed the Committee. She stated there is an area near bucket swings that is just bushes and she often sees little girls under the bushes having tea parties. She thinks it's important for the kids to have a quiet space to use imagination and be in nature.

A resident doesn't care for the fencing in the playground area. She doesn't see fencing it off more than it currently is. K. Fasser discussed the evolution of how we got to this fence design. C. Batchleor stated that everyone wants this place to be a garden, but none of the perimeter planting will live without a low fence. It will keep people from cutting through and it allows you to shield the play area from plants. A. Osbourne suggesting adding an extra gate.

Antonia Bellalta addressed the Committee. She would like to see a lot more planting around the perimeter, making this more of a garden. She stated that she was walking around park with her dog on a leash and there was this three year old on the other side of the park away from the playground. She thinks the whole park is a playground and if there is an issue it is up to the parents to take care of how they are dealing with their children. If she had it her way she would put gates on all the entrances and make the whole park a playground because that is how she sees the kids using it. There has been the question of not fencing the kids into the playground and she thinks people need to weigh which way the community wants it. E. Gallentine thought that we had found the happy medium. She thinks the park is such a unique place. She stated where are you drawing lines between the play, fencing it in and the park. She thinks we need to come to some kind of a consensus.

Brian Hochleutner addressed the Committee. He would reiterate some of the things that were said at previous meeting had the expressed idea the general balance of park that is there today is a good balance and we shouldn't tip too far in one direction. He didn't realize how much more fencing would be there than what is there today. He stated that what is there now for fencing works very well. He thinks that we should be careful of tipping the balance and adding that amount of fence. He thinks when you come in the corner on upper left, right now you walk into park and it is open in terms of the view and now you are adding a fence and creating an alley there. He stated that you will not be able to walk into this park and have an open park feeling with this fencing.

Jennifer Pieszak suggested having seat walls instead of fencing.

Charles Osbourne stated that John Bain's comment was really good. He thinks the overall experience, if there is anything coming close to being an arboretum it is this park or this garden. He stated that in of the first meetings he heard "we like it the way it is". He thinks what they really like is the feel. He thinks it would be interesting to go back to the small plans and look at the small plans and the general disposition of the spaces and then start to talk about the quantities. He thinks it's about a hierarchy and in that hierarchy he feels that the arboretum type feel is really so precious.

E. Gallentine stated that we have spent every meeting up until now is talking about that and we have to make decision on the playground. The role of this committee is submitting a conceptual plan. She stated that K. Fasser has accomplished the goal as it relates to the

whole in terms of, the drainage, the path and planting. She stated that at every meeting we are getting pushed back in different direction and we cannot keep redrawing the fence line.

S. Burrington stated that he would look at the play area and he thinks there is a lot of hard surface and with the fencing and a very large number of a play structures could throw that whole part of the park off from what he thinks everyone wants in term of the spirit of the park. He would to try to think about the balance between the mulch and the hard surface. He stated that if we could cut the fence back a little could work. He thinks the fence is low and has sharp curved and he feels will give it a nice feel in a way. He thinks we came out the right on conceptual solution when talking about gates and fencing. He thinks people would be a little bit surprised when the thing got done. E. Gallentine, K. Fasser and S. Burrington discussed where the mulch and safety surfacing would be placed, but some of it is not be specified since we have to choose the play structure pieces. S. Burrington wanted to stress striking a balance between mulch and playground surfacing is important.

J. Bain asked for a general consensus for park in general minus the playground equipment.

The alternative for the water play was discussed.

E. Gallentine thinks the upgraded water play would make a huge impact on the design, but it is a cost factor. She thinks having a flush water play element there would be a real improvement, especially with the lawns and planting. She does think the shape/oval seems to work well with the design. J. Pedlikin stated that the splash pad is the most dated piece in the park.

K. Fasser gave a budget overview. A preliminary cost estimate was given. The add alternate is the new spray pad. The preliminary cost estimate is over budget and does not include contingencies.

Considerations are:

Spray pad

Playground surfacing: poured-in-place versus wood safety surface

Flat stone edge versus concrete edge

Groundcover beds versus lawn

Phase in furniture

A. Osbourne stated that she loved things having to do with grading and mounding of things in the play area. She likes the effect of a mound for seating. She thinks that maybe it can eliminate fencing and create a barrier. She loves what is happening around the edges. She thinks coming into the park and being able to see it as a whole space not broken up is very important.

C. Batchelor thinks that the committee should approve the general layout. She thinks that it keeps going back and forth, some are opposed to the fence and some are for the fence. She thinks we have to keep moving, we need to approve the layout and work on the play area.

J. Carroll stated that in terms of the purpose of the fence, he remembers when we first started people wanted gates at every entrance and total fencing around the play. He

remember that being a big issue, he understands why people don't want the fence, but in terms of maintenance of the park if you have use of all areas in from the field to the edge how does that work. She stated that a fence will help control the flow of the traffic so we won't have wear zones. E. Gallentine stated that we have heard a lot about the Nature based play, but she stated that you have to be very careful with that and she feels that we need a playground and a whole park that we can maintain, sustain and that we will love it overall for a long time to come.

Charles Osbourne stated that fundamentally/conceptually the plan is approved in his eyes. He stated that we are hearing a lot of positive feedback about the new spray area and it seems like it is approved with some qualifications. He thinks it's a great presentation that had a lot of great work put into it.

C. Batchelor moved for the Committee to approve the general organization of the park as presented with path layout, with further studies of the playground, with study of the refinement of the water feature/ splash pad and that the playground remains fenced with the possibility of an additional gate. Seconded by J. Pedlikin. All in favor.

A. Bellalta aggress maybe there needs to be one more opening.

The next meeting is on December 6, 2016, if there is a vote on December 6th it then could go before the Park and Recreation Commission on December 15,2016.

J. Bain moved to adjourn. Seconded by J. Carroll. All in favor.