

Healthy Parks and Playgrounds

*A new **old** way
to think about
play*

*Central Square
Study Committee
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Why do we care about play?

We dedicate **space for play**
because it is a **public good**.

Public play shows how a
community values
imagination and
creativity

Play is important to the
health and development
of **individuals** and the
community at large

Play invites participation
from **all segments of the**
community

How do we think about play?

- Contained areas
- Flat surfaces
- Fixed-in-place climbing equipment
- Safe for very small children



- Limited opportunity for upper age groups
- Few movable features
- Very few natural materials

How could we think about play?



Play is **NOT**

- Just for little kids
- Just burning calories
- Just wasting time
- Just for playgrounds



Start at the beginning – What is Play?

How is play healthy?

- Part of human development
- Part of public life



Play is an integral part of human nature



- Play happens everywhere
- Play happens all the time
- Play is for everyone (kids are just better at it!)

Play is free, often unstructured and can be messy



- Play is a process, an activity
- Purposeful, but not a means to an end
- Self-directed
- Participatory
- Improvisational

Play is fun and makes people happy



- Emotional health and well-being
- Lifelong benefits

Play is a self-directed learning process, self-initiated

- Active thinking
- Players make their own rules
- Independent learning
- Applied knowledge
- Testing ideas
- Following ideas to conclusions



Play is exploratory, creative and imaginative



- Exploring the unknown
- Building new things
- Storytelling
- Not unlike the process of artists, innovators

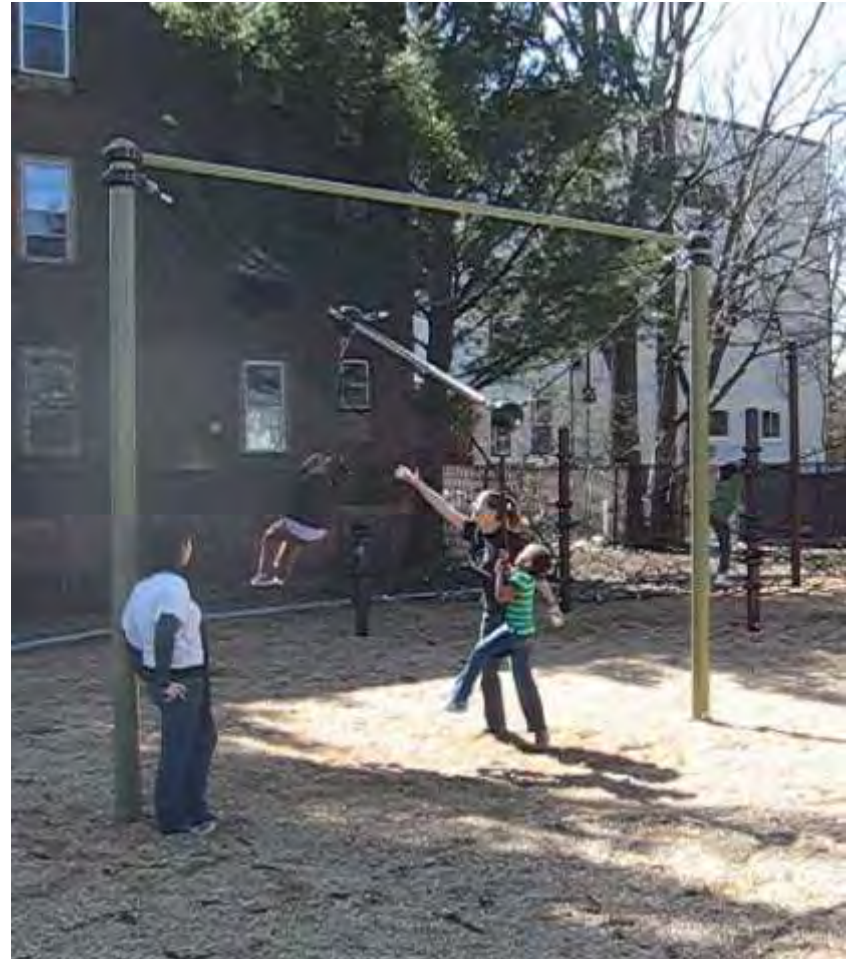
Play is experimental, challenging and sometimes risky



- Inventing, pursuing new challenges
- Physical, cognitive, emotional abilities
- Confidence, self-esteem
- Reasonably safe, but not risk-proof

Play is physical

- Uses energy
- Improves circulation, reduces stress
- Coordination, balance and motor skills
- Thinking and movement



Play is learning about the outside world



- Natural and urban
- Using all senses
- How objects and materials interact
- Manipulating materials, objects
- Plants, soils, sand, water
- Fresh air, sunshine, greenery

Play can be solitary or social



- Sharing
- Communication
- Cooperation
- Competition
- Trust



- Reflection
- Introspection
- Independence

Goals for “Healthy Parks and Playgrounds” in Cambridge



- A direction for how the City’s public space can evolve over time
- What does it mean to be a “play space”?
- **The City as Playground**



Parks and playgrounds should be **integrated play environments**, not just collections of play features in an enclosed area



Play environments should balance the need for a **reasonable level of safety** with the need for **challenge, adventure and risk-taking**



Play environments should support **curiosity, creativity and imagination**



Play environments should stimulate **physical activity** with many different types and combinations of **movements**

- Strength
- Balance
- Coordination
- Safety awareness



A **diverse range** of play environments should be provided across the city to **serve a full range of age groups and interests**



Play environments should be **community places**

Meaningful play opportunities should be available to **all levels of ability**



Play opportunities should be provided during **all seasons of the year and all weather conditions**

Beyond Parks and Playgrounds



- Inviting play throughout the public realm
- Inviting all ages to participate



Vision for the Future



Parks and Playgrounds

- Different parks for different needs – *one size does NOT fit all!*
- More focus on “environment” than “equipment”

The Public Realm (e.g., Sidewalks, Plazas)

- Playfulness and whimsy in unexpected places
- Spaces for imaginative interaction
- Spaces for socializing, community



www.cambridgema.gov/healthyplaygrounds