

Healthy Parks and Playgrounds

*A new **old** way
to think about
play and public
space*

*Elm & Hampshire
Plaza
February, 2014*



Why does the city care about play and the public realm?

We dedicate **space for play**

because it is a **public good**. Play is important to the health and development of **individuals** and the **community** at large

Public play shows how a community values **imagination** and **creativity**

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

How should we plan for 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 physical , experimental, challenging and sometimes risky

- 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



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



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



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