

Minutes

New School Playground Committee

February 8, 2018

Present: Paul Perzanoski, Steve Walker, Corey Perreault, Jeanie Doughty, Tracey Peck-Moad, Lisa Martin, Jeanne Stinson

- 1) The January minutes were accepted with one correction – under 7b changed the spelling of Senter Fund from my error “Centre”.
- 2) We heard a two pronged presentation from Josh Tompkins who is a licensed landscape architect who is working with PDT on this project. The first part of the presentation involved looking at the latest plans for the landscape surrounding the new building (placement of paths, playgrounds, parking lots, etc.) while the second part was a slide show and informational presentation about the principles of good playground design.

THE LANDSCAPE OF the JORDAN ACERS SITE

There are three major playground areas at the new school site – one in the far south east which has a small rise and some woods. In the north east there is a large open space appropriate for field play. The west side playground also abuts a wooded area and is in the north away from the parking area. On both sides the access roads necessary for fire safety are widened in some places to provide space for hard surface play. Plan shows depressions which are part of storm water management for the site. These will not contain standing water, nor be fenced, but will be landscaped with a variety of plants (grasses) that can tolerate occasional wetness and which will be mowed only several times per year. The site is very sandy and should have swift drainage and no standing water. Josh assured us that the play spaces on each side of the building are large. Near the building there are two designed spaces – an outdoor art room between the wings on the east side, and an outdoor classroom designed with granite risers and a grove of trees between the wings on the west. The art room would not be accessible to students at recess while the outdoor classroom could be.

The third playground is the space needed for the preschool. Josh sees its current shape and location as a “placeholder” as not much thought has been given to it yet.

There was some discussion about fencing (from traffic), about drainage, about the general size of the spaces, about walking distances to each playground from classrooms in the building, and about the ease of supervision of some oddly shaped spaces with corners. We may want to manipulate the shape and placement of the preschool playground to ease supervision on the east side play space. The members of the committee who supervise recesses at Coffin currently are anxious to design two spaces that can be used equally OR to make programming decisions in advance so that we can put more resources into the playground that will be used by more children.

“PRINCIPLES, PROCESS, AND POSSIBILITIES OF PLAY SPACE DESIGN”

The 10 principles of successful play spaces:

- Bespoke (reflects the unique place where it is found)
- Well located
- Makes use of natural elements
- Wide range of play experiences

- Accessible
- Meets community needs
- Different ages play together
- A mix of risk and challenge
- Sustainable and appropriately maintained (it is important for the community/parents/etc. to feel ownership – if they do then vandalism or inappropriate use will be curtailed)
- Allows for change and evolution (a good space is not “set in stone” but can change to meet new needs of old or new users)

When we think about a playground we often think of the built equipment (he showed slides of several public and home-based play spaces) but that definition is not broad enough for what a play space could be –

Josh was excited about the possibilities of this site. It has access to woods. (Which he can see “capturing” with progressive thinning so that a space might go gradually from open to more closed.) It has a tiny bit of elevation change but more could be added. He felt that our small budget could be a source of forced creativity. Many playground elements do not have to be purchased from a catalogue (showed pictures of balance beams made out of logs and of granite tunnels and of slides in hillsides). Using local and/or traditional materials offers a sense of unique “place” and can provide beauty as well. He showed pictures of bridges and tunnels and some carved stone elements.

We will need to “blob” out spaces at the conceptual level – designating areas for all the types of play we want, to scale, on the site, and deciding where we want each element to go. Many playgrounds have a balance of built (catalogue) and natural elements.

We’ll need to make choices about:

- Boundaries/fencing
- Equipment
- Providing natural elements
- “ground modeling”
- Planting
- Natural features
- Surfacing (including for impact absorbency – wood chips are typical but not accessible)
- Self-built play features
- General maintenance (must be planned for – can’t expect the playground to be “free” once it is put in...)

Showed some slide of places we might visit – Breakwater School (lots of natural and local materials), Freeport YMCA (repurposed industrial materials), Deering Oaks (combination of “traditional” and “natural” elements).

The scope of Josh's planned work with PDT on our project includes the planning of the two designed spaces only. He is not fully knowledgeable about issues involving safety and liability of natural and self-built playground elements.

Discussion at our next meeting should center on what elements we'd like in our new playground space and how to design the RFP process to support our goals.

Next Meeting: March 8, 2018 5:00 PM

Josh recommended this book:

Asphalt to Ecosystems: Design Ideas for Schoolyard Transformation
by Sharon Gamson Danks (Author)

While researching the above I discovered several others that might be useful. I wondered if it might be possible to purchase a few to share as we work through this design process together.

- The Science of Play: How to Build Playgrounds That Enhance Children's Development
by Susan G. Solomon (Author)
- **Design & Play: Imagination Needs Places to Thrive** by Sam Aquillano (Author)
- **Natural Playscapes** by Rusty Keeler (Author)