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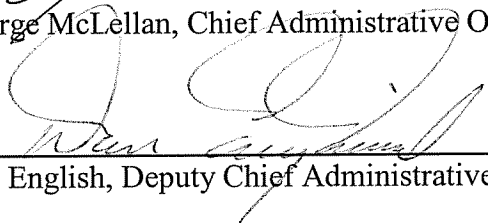
PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Halifax Regional Council
March 8, 2005

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:


George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer


Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 25, 2005

SUBJECT: Inclusive Playgrounds

ORIGIN

Regional Council December 20, 2002, Item # 10.3.1 - Recreation staff were requested to draft a policy for the construction of new accessible playgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approve:

1. the development of a regional strategy for the provision of an Inclusive Playground Program, based on the implementation and evaluation of a pilot project.
2. Westmount School, Halifax, as the selected pilot project site for the development of HRM's initial inclusive playground.

BACKGROUND

Within HRM's overall Parks Delivery System, playgrounds continue to be one of the most highly demanded services. The municipality currently has an inventory of 325 sites region wide. Society places great importance on children developing socially, emotionally and physically through play opportunities in safe environments. However, statistics show that approximately twenty percent of the population have some degree of disability, and traditionally most parks and playgrounds have not been designed to address these needs. HRM is discovering this need not be the case. Many municipalities, both nationally and internationally, are adopting play space design philosophies sensitive to all abilities and with most playground equipment manufacturers now supplying special and adaptive equipment options these barriers are now being removed.

It is important to note the use of terminology in discussing this topic. Rather than referring to such playgrounds as "accessible", industry practitioners are using the terms "inclusive", "playability" and "universal" to better reflect the true intent of the philosophy. For the purpose of this report we will be using the term "inclusive".

Inclusive playgrounds are designed with everybody's needs and challenges in mind. It not only provides the users with the opportunity to enjoy the playground, but also allows for greater interaction with each other. Inclusive playgrounds move beyond "accessibility" by providing higher quality activities for the large spectrum of disabilities/abilities, rather than focussing only on wheelchair access. Instead of limiting playground equipment to the typical climbing challenge/slide concept, playgrounds may also include panel games such as tic-tac-toe, mix and match, etc., which are designed to stimulate children using a variety of senses. Just because playgrounds are inclusive does not mean children with disabilities cannot be challenged physically. Some key playgrounds could even include an obstacle course which could help children with wheelchairs, walkers, etc., hone their skills. (Attachment 1)

Some initial attempts by the Municipality to provide accessible playgrounds in recent years have included the sites listed below. However, it is fair to state these projects did not fully embrace "Playability" and "Inclusive Play" as a primary design philosophy.

1. Dartmouth Waterfront Park
2. Oceanview School, Eastern Passage
3. Mount Edward Road School, Dartmouth
4. Ian Forsythe School, Dartmouth
5. Ashley Jefferson School, Fall River
6. Astral Drive School, Cole Harbour
7. Cavalier Dr. School, Bedford
8. LeMarchant-St. Thomas School, Halifax
9. Admiral Harry Dewolfe Park, Bedford

DISCUSSION

In theory, providing a safe, challenging and interactive play environment inclusive for children of all abilities, appears simple enough. However, why has this not always been the case? There are a number of impediments in providing inclusive playgrounds that need to be addressed in order to allow HRM to proceed in a proactive direction.

1. The main impediment in constructing inclusive playgrounds in the past has been cost. Generally, the cost of a well designed inclusive playground has been twice that of a traditional approach. The majority of this increase is due to the use of the protective rubberized surfacing, which is more than ten times the cost of pea stone and wood retaining methods used in traditional playgrounds. In addition, the equipment requiring ramps, transfer stations, expanded decks, or adaptive items such as swings all impact on the cost. In theory, it would be the correct approach to weigh the benefits of making all of HRM's playgrounds inclusive; however, the reality is one of major fiscal constraint. If the approach taken was to incorporate inclusive standards to all playground upgrades and new projects, based on projected budget capabilities, the impact on proposed upgrades and new projects, would be a 50 percent reduction in both programs. Based on current demand for upgrades and new projects this reduction in service would create concern.

With an understanding of the fiscal constraints, and not diminishing the need to provide more opportunities for inclusive playgrounds, it is recommended that HRM take a regional approach in the provision of this service. This would translate into the introduction of an Inclusive Playgrounds Program. The capital construction of the playgrounds would be done on a phased-in approach, which would be extended over future fiscal periods. This regional approach will be similar to the strategy used in establishing skateboard parks within HRM.

Initial playgrounds should be located at schools or regional facilities as these serve a larger catchment area. Further, these sites also provide wheelchair accessible parking, which is a key factor for locating inclusive playgrounds.

2. Presently, there is no legislation in Canada requiring municipalities to provide inclusive playgrounds, as is the case in the United States under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The lack of legislation should not prevent HRM from being proactive. Examples of possible guidelines would be the Ontario Parks Association which has produced a resource document, "Playability-Growing Learning Together Through Play" (Attachment 2), which is being adopted by many Ontario municipalities. Further, the City of Edmonton has also established guidelines for "universal" design.

It is staff's recommendation that HRM should adopt the "Playability-Growing Learning Together Through Play" philosophy and guidelines by utilizing their resource kit. This approach would be the first step in training and educating staff directly responsible for playground development.

Further, it is recommended that Parks Capital Projects staff continue the ongoing communications with the HRM's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities to foster the implementation of this philosophy and encourage initiatives in the provision of this service.

3. One of the other key impediments in the past has been the limited availability of play equipment specifically designed to meet the needs of the various users. However, as the demand for inclusive equipment has grown internationally, manufacturers have increased the production of adaptive equipment and continue to improve in this area.

Currently, there are a number of excellent case examples of well designed inclusive playgrounds which have been built by municipalities across Canada and the United States. Through staff research and visitation the common denominator tends to be the majority of municipalities started with pilot projects designed to introduce the philosophy of inclusive playgrounds. Therefore, staff is recommending that HRM undertake a pilot project that would focus on incorporating this philosophy and provide training opportunity for staff. It is tentatively proposed that Westmount School, Halifax, be selected as the pilot project site.

Westmount School approached HRM in 2002, presenting the need for an inclusive playground. This need was based on the above average percent of children attending the school with special needs. In addition, this site is located within a densely populated area, in close proximity to Access-a-Bus Terminal and presents ideal site characteristics conducive to the development of an inclusive playground.

In conclusion, some of the key benefits that would be realized from the development of inclusive parks and playgrounds would be:

- Children of all abilities having greater opportunities for social interaction.
- Parents/guardians with disabilities would experience the joy of playing with their children.
- Inclusive playgrounds can foster a greater sense of unity and local pride.

Generally, staff recommends undertaking a pilot project to evaluate financial impacts, community use, maintenance requirements and design efficiencies. It would be staff's intent to report back to Council upon completion of the pilot making more definitive recommendations towards the delivery of this service and development of this policy. The recommendations within this report have been presented to and endorsed by Council's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Should Council approve the implementation of a Regional Inclusive Playground Program, there would be a need for additional capital funding capacity in the amount of approximately \$150,000.00 per year. Otherwise, to implement this program within the current base funding, Council would need to recognize that the impact would be a reduction in the progress of upgrading existing playgrounds and providing new playgrounds.

In the 2004/05 Capital Budget \$145,000.00 was approved under Account No. CPC00677 - New Playground Development. Expenditures from these funds to date have included the rubberized surfacing and access pathway at DeWolfe Park, Bedford, and cost sharing on an inclusive swing at the Beaver Bank/Monarch School.

It is recommended that the remaining funds of approximately \$125,000 be committed to the Westmount School project. In addition, joint applications will be made to the Province for additional funding in the amount of approximately \$80,000. The availability of funds has been confirmed by Financial Services.

<u>Budget Summary</u>	<u>Capital Project No. CPC00677 - New Playground Development</u>	
	Cumulative Unspent Budget	\$308,000
	Less: commitment to the Westmount School Project	<u>\$125,000</u>
		\$183,000

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES


Council could decide not to adopt the recommended policy and remain status quo, on the provision of this service. This is not a recommended alternative.

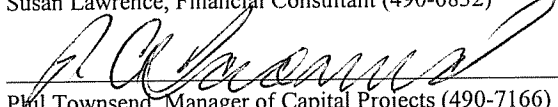
ATTACHMENTS

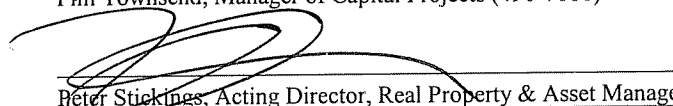
1. Wheelchair Challenge Course - Statement of Purpose
2. Ontario Parks Association "Playability Growing Learning Together Through Play"

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Blair Blakeney, Coordinator Parks/Capital Projects (490-6789)

Report Reviewed by: 
Susan Lawrence, Financial Consultant (490-6832)

Report Approved by: 
Phil Townsend, Manager of Capital Projects (490-7166)

Report Approved by: 
Peter Stickings, Acting Director, Real Property & Asset Management (490-7129)

Challenge Course

Statement of Purpose

Difficulties mastered are opportunities won.

Winston Churchill

Prologue

The benefits of playgrounds are widely accepted - strength, agility, flexibility, coordination, fitness, skills, confidence, friendship, trust – are all enhanced by typical play. These benefits are generally unattainable for disabled people, even when conventional playgrounds are back-engineered for accessibility.

The turn of the millennium has brought new attitudes towards disability. Blindness, paralysis, deafness, age and a host of other conditions are no longer seen as barriers to living a full and productive life. Technological solutions have emerged to many previously difficult situations. Lightweight wheelchairs, audible crossing signals, curb cuts, closed captioning and a range of solutions make life much more interesting for people with disabilities.

Still, the cultural bias is that a disability is a deficit to be fought and overcome, something that separates a person with a disability from a 'normal' person. In the face of persistent messages that a disability represents a defect, disabled people learn after a length of time to embrace their disability, that life is defined and circumscribed by certain limits and that working with limits is often more productive than waiting for cures.

There are many physical barriers for disabled people, but there are attitudinal barriers as well. The disabled need a chance to work on useful life skills for better integration into the real world. Improved health and productivity will result from increased independence and confidence. This project aims to create an environment for disabled people of all ages analogous to 'challenge courses' in respect to development of physical ability and confidence.

General goals

- Provide a controlled environment to practice and develop wheelchair and other skills
- Provide a laboratory for developing new solutions to access problems
- Improve confidence, coordination, body awareness, attention to detail
- Opportunities to showcase useful skills
- Can be negotiated by people with a variety of disabilities and people with no disability
- Increase awareness of athletic opportunities for the disabled

Specific Features

- Sample list of Obstacles
 - Doors
 - Ramps
 - Tight spaces
 - Curbs
 - Cross slope
 - Various surfaces
 - Potholes
 - Thresholds

- Skills developed
 - Steering and turning
 - Speed
 - Braking
 - Wheelies
 - Hops
 - Strength
 - Precision
 - Balance
 - Transfers
 - Reaching

- Additional features
 - Timers
 - Supervision
 - Education
 - Spotting straps

Playgrounds – risks, benefits and choices:

http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2002/crr02426.pdf

Playability

GROWING AND LEARNING TOGETHER THROUGH PLAY

Philosophy & guidelines Backgrounder

Playability Principles

Playability provides a philosophy and guidelines for bringing the universal design approach to public playspaces. It is based on six principles:

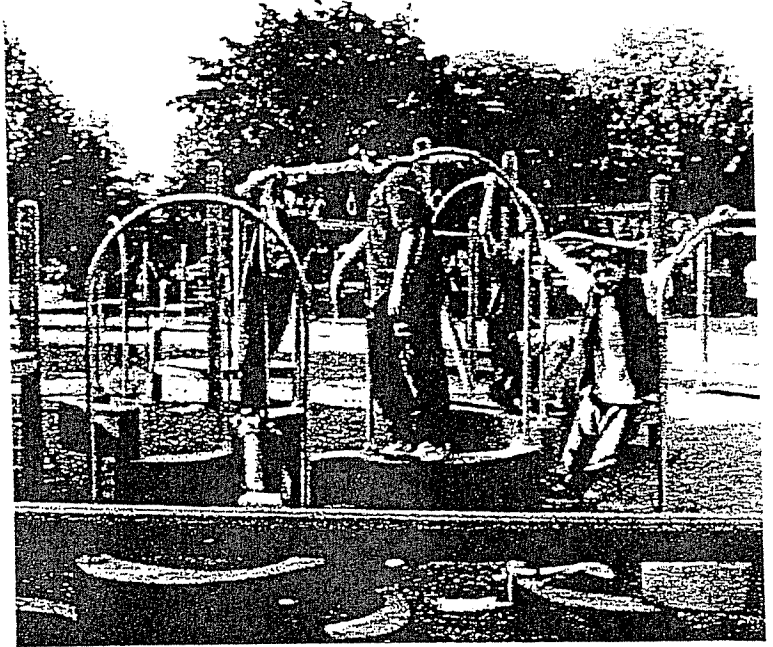


- All people have a right to equitable opportunities for themselves and their families to play
- The right to equitable opportunities for play means having access to events in a play setting that promote physical, mental, emotional, and social development, social interaction, and a spirit of fun
- All people have a right to choose their challenges and to undertake those challenges in an environment that minimizes safety hazards
- Active intervention to remove barriers or provide supports is necessary to allow all people to exercise their right to play and undertake challenges
- All people have a right to participate, directly or indirectly, in planning and decision-making on measures designed to assist them in exercising those rights
- A playspace encompasses the total environment in which a playground is located

What is Playability?

Playability is a philosophy for designing and creating quality play environments in public spaces. Its focus is on removing barriers, providing supports, and increasing opportunities for people to grow and learn together through play.

The Playability philosophy is closely related to the concept of universal design. Most of our buildings, furniture, vehicles, recreational facilities, and equipment are designed for use by the “average” person. Universal design, on the other hand, recognizes that people have a range of capabilities. Design that addresses the safety and convenience of all users makes good sense.



There are many reasons for bringing the universal design approach to our playspaces:

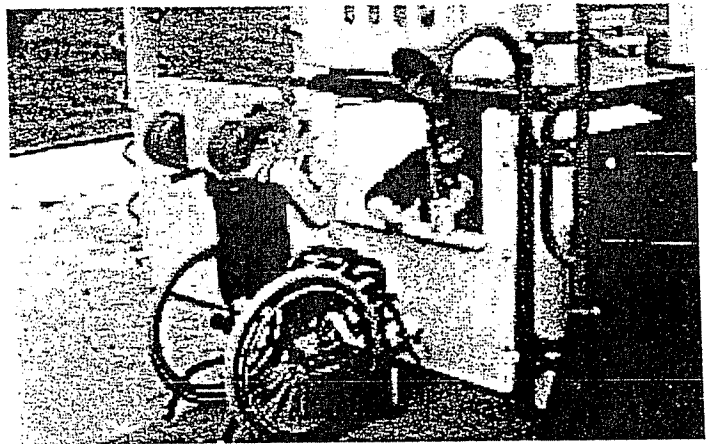
- about 7% of Canadian children under the age of 14 have a disability
- the number of people with disabilities is increasing as the population ages
- more and more people with disabilities are living actively in the community

The value of play

Play can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

Play is so important to development that the United Nations included the right to play in its 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The International Association for the Child's Right to Play says in its Declaration:

- Play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital to develop potential
- Play is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement
- Play is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous
- Play helps people develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially
- Play is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time



Play has benefits for both children and adults. Play provides opportunities for ongoing physical, mental, emotional, and social development. It's also a good occasion for family interaction, relaxation, and stress management.

Playgrounds encourage fun and playful relationships between parents and children. Unfortunately, those opportunities are too often limited when the parent or child has a disability.

Playability = Inclusion

Inclusion is central to the Playability philosophy.

The Canadian Institute for Universal Design at the University of Manitoba has a good suggestion. When considering an existing or future playspace, think of yourself as one of these users:

- parent with stroller
- small child
- pregnant woman
- large person
- older person with less mobility
- person of small stature
- person with limited use of their hands
- person who has a hearing disability
- person who has a visual disability
- person with respiratory difficulties or allergies
- person who uses a wheelchair or scooter
- person who uses a cane, walker or crutches
- person with a cognitive disability
- person from another culture whose primary language is not English or French

Take a look around the next time you visit your neighbourhood park. You are going to see people running, jumping, climbing, crawling, splashing, building, exploring, pretending, negotiating, and solving.

These activities are easier for some people than for others. But inclusion doesn't mean designing a playspace for the lowest common denominator. It does mean providing a variety of activities and different levels of challenge so there is something for everyone.

An inclusive playground is one where:

- children are able to play together at a variety of activities
- "accessible" play events are not set apart from other activities and structures

- parents, grandparents and other caregivers can get close enough to supervise, assist and join children at play

• everyone can have fun!

Playability Guidelines

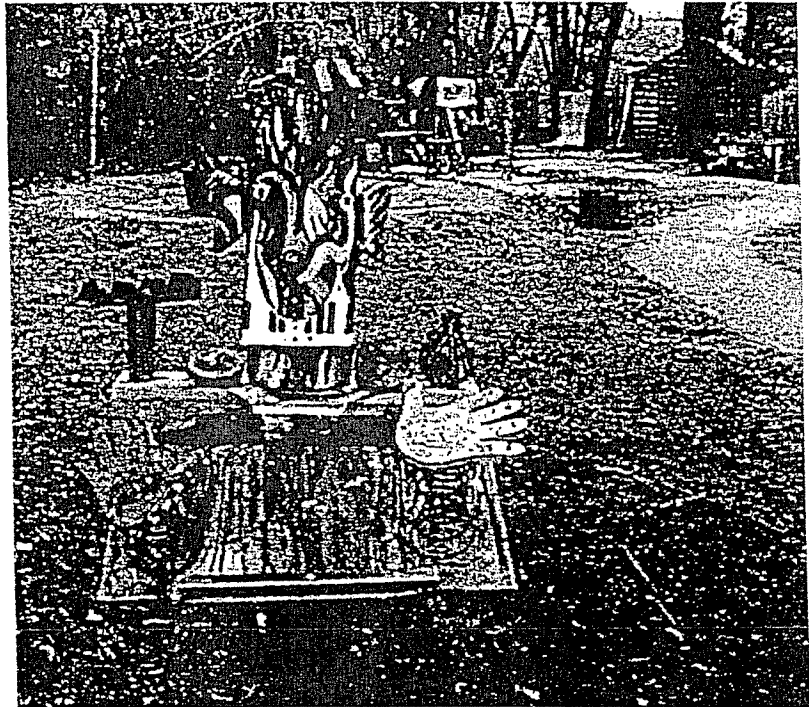
The following guidelines are not hard and fast rules for playspace design. They are guidelines, to be used with the Playability Playspace Audit, to help communities as they plan and design playspaces.

1. Create equitable opportunities for all people to participate in each kind of activity.

2. Consider the many physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of individuals when designing a playspace.

3. Create different levels of challenge to meet individual interests and abilities.

4. Make sure the size of structures is appropriate for users.



5. Allow creative risk-taking without exposure to hazards by following the safety standards for children's playspaces and equipment.

6. Incorporate pathways and surfaces into the playspace design.

7. Ensure routes lead to play opportunities and never a dead end.

8. Be creative with signs, using pictures, colours, and type to get the meaning across.