



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: July 27, 2011

TO: Park and Recreation Commission

FROM: Parks Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Playground Program Report

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive a report about the Parks and Recreation Department's playground program.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Department manages 21 playground sites throughout the park system. City park playgrounds range from large and unique sites like Kid's World at Alameda Park, to small traditional facilities such as the playground at Eastside Neighborhood Park. There are a number of practices and policies that support the playground program. Staff is continually studying new research and regulations to keep the Department on the cutting edge of playground management.

The Value of Playgrounds

Recreation professionals and childhood development experts regularly point to the necessity of playgrounds, especially with the current trend toward childhood obesity. Playgrounds are a much needed attraction to increasingly sedentary children to engage in outdoor physical play. Playgrounds are also known to build a sense of community, not only between the children who use them, but also the adults who accompany them.

The History of Playgrounds

There has clearly never been a time when children haven't played in their environment. With the growth of massive urban centers in the early 20th century, that environment increasingly became streets and alleyways. In New York in particular, the modern playground movement was a way to remove children from the dangers of playing loose in the urban setting, and sequestering them in a safer area. The first recognizable playground structure built in the U.S. was erected in New York at Seward Park in 1903.

The Design of Playgrounds

Playground design has gone through a number of phases in the last hundred years, from simple fenced yards, to themed adventure play, to the classic galvanized steel jungle gyms most of us played on as children. Currently, the majority of playgrounds being installed are of the modular structure style seen in most parks today. According to State of California regulations, playgrounds must be designed for either 2-5 year-old children, or 5-12 year-old children. A playground will be signed or labeled with the intended age group. The future of playground styles will likely include sites built to more accurately mimic the natural environment, sites that will offer more universal access to children with varying abilities, and sites that will offer less structure but greater imaginative play opportunities.

The Regulation of Playgrounds

Modern playground regulations involve both industry standards of care and State legislation. Both of these facets of playground regulation stem primarily from two documents: The Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) Handbook for Public Playground Safety and the American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM) F-1487 document. Most states rely on playgrounds meeting industry standards, which limits liability. California is among a minority of states to legislate playground standards and has the most stringent laws in the country. The California law references both the documents noted above and adds some other requirements. The CPSC handbook is available free from their website, while the ASTM charges for their document, which also can be downloaded at their site.

The Maintenance of Playgrounds

Playground maintenance is at the forefront, in both importance and frequency, of all the tasks the Parks Division performs. Playgrounds are checked daily for obvious problems and are meticulously inspected monthly for wear and other issues. Materials are regularly added to maintain a soft surface and worn parts are replaced. Additionally, Parks Supervisor Ken Brown is a Certified Playground Safety Inspector recognized by the State to conduct thorough audits of the City's playgrounds.

The Replacement of Playgrounds

The average life-span of a playground is approximately 10 years. This can be longer or shorter depending on the materials, use, and location of the playground. Staff performs a detailed analysis of any potential site that needs replacement. This includes looking at wear and tear, conformity to regulations, the needs of the users, and aesthetics. Funding for playground replacement is usually through the General Fund Capital Improvement Program although also occasionally through Community Development Block Grants.

When a site is selected for replacement and funding is secured, staff assesses the area to determine the type and style of playground to install. Some of the factors staff considers include the aesthetics of the park, the use patterns of the existing equipment, and whether it's prone to vandalism, flooding, or heat.

Over the last 8 years, the Department has replaced 16 playgrounds with \$1.3 million dollars in funding, averaging \$81,700 each. The table below lists the location of all Parks and Recreation Department playgrounds, and the year the playground was installed.

| Location | Date Installed |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Alameda Park (Kid's World) | 1993 |
| Bohnett Park | 2006 |
| Chase Palm Park | 1997 |
| Dwight Murphy Ball Field | 2008 |
| East Beach | 2004 |
| Eastside Neighborhood Park | 2010 |
| Escondido Park | 2009 |
| Hidden Valley Park | 2011 |
| Hilda Ray Park | 2011 |
| La Mesa Park | 2000 |
| Los Baños | 2011 |
| MacKenzie Park | 2006 |
| Oak Park | 2008 |
| Ortega Park | 2007 |
| Parquē de los Niños | 1995 |
| Shoreline Park | 2002 |
| Stevens Park | 2004 |
| Sunflower Park | 2009 |
| Vera Cruz Park | 2006 |
| Westside Community Center | 2009 |
| Willowglen Park | 2011 |

In FY 2012 the Shipwreck Playground at Chase Palm Park was scheduled for replacement. Given the uncertainty of Redevelopment Agency Funds, this project will likely be delayed.

PREPARED BY: Ken Brown, Parks Supervisor

SUBMITTED BY: Santos Escobar, Parks Manager

APPROVED BY: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director