

Long Range Planning Subcommittee
Playground Development Process
Discussion Summary

2021-03-17

The Question We Posed:

Staff is not asking for an ordinance or even a policy, we are trying to share what we are doing in terms of our attempts to control what neighborhoods can donate to Parks for a playground replacement. My thinking was, after the LRP was made aware of staff's process, we could have three possible outcomes:

1. LRP likes what we are doing and they provide the stamp of approval
2. LRP is OK with our approach but wants to tweak or add or take away a few things to make our approach better and then add stamp of approval
3. LRP does not like it all, tells to circular file this and they come up with an entirely new approach for staff to follow.

Summary of Mike's Summary of our Current Approach

- In 2013, the Parks Division received Council authorization to initiate a system-wide playground replacement process.
- Parks has over 175 playgrounds and the majority of our inventory was reaching the end of the equipment service life.
- Based on playground inspection audits, Parks has been replacing playgrounds at a rate of 8-12 playgrounds per year.
- The replacement process includes meeting with park neighborhoods for equipment selection, playground location and other association site improvements.
- City funding for the replacement playground equipment is based on the park's classification, with Parks following the NRPA categories: mini- < 5 acres, neighborhood, 5+ and community, 20+ acres
- Neighborhoods have the option to contribute funding for additional playground features.
- Contributions are received through the Madison Parks Foundation for specific projects
- In an effort to avoid playground installations that cannot be maintained by current operational staff levels, playground equipment contributions have been limited to roughly 25% of the allotted equipment budget for a given year.

- The neighborhood classification sets our standard equipment budget, which is typically increased by 50% for community level playground replacements.
- For example, the equipment budget for a standard neighborhood playground replacement in 2021 was approx. \$35K and the equipment contribution limit was \$9,000.
- The cap also avoids building inequities within the park system (more affluent neighborhoods having more extensive playground amenities).
- Playground equipment budgets are adjusted annually for inflation (approximately 4% increase), with a corresponding adjustment in the neighborhood contribution limit
- Contributions are required to include all costs for the additional features, include additional earthwork, draintile, subgrade material, border timbers, play surfacing and the vendor supplied equipment.
- In recent years a few elected representatives have questioned the limit on playground contributions.
- A few examples where neighborhood contributions have exceeded the cap include Westmorland Park (over \$11K raised, Sunset Park (over \$12K raised), Swallowtail Park (approx.\$20K raised)
- In addition to maintenance and equity concerns, larger than standard replacements can create the assumption Parks will replace playgrounds that received private fundraising at a similar level in the future.

Questions generated during the discussion:

- How often do neighborhoods want to fundraise for playground improvements? Is playground equity a theoretical problem or an actual problem?
- Our extensive playground system takes a lot of money to maintain. Are all the playgrounds even getting use -- do we need as many as we have? Do we have too many playgrounds?
- If half of raised funds are going somewhere else, will people want to fundraise? Concerns with limiting giving.
- The Madison Public Library put 20% of every donation into an endowment - could Parks do something similar? Putting away money for equity/maintenance/etc from the beginning could be a better 'story' to pitch to fundraisers.
- How do we foster generosity? How do we make people want to give?
- Is it our policy to 'put a ceiling on donations or raise the floor'?

