



PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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SPLASH MONTANA, PLAYFAIR PARK • CURRENTS AQUATICS CENTER, MCCORMICK PARK

Westside Park 2019 Master Plan Narrative

Overview & History

Westside Park is a 2-acre public park located in Missoula's historic Westside neighborhood. The parkland is owned by Missoula County Public Schools and is adjacent to Lowell Elementary School. The area leased by the city is generally the open space east of Hawthorne Street and contains the existing playground, and splash pad. It is managed by Missoula Parks & Recreation under a 40-year lease agreement and is used as a Neighborhood Park. The current agreement expires in 2044, and should be renewed with the adoption of this plan.

The playground is used by Lowell Elementary School during recess, and is closed to the public while occupied by Lowell school. When students are not present, the playground and court space are open to the public. The playground was constructed and funded in 1998 primarily by volunteers. The playground is highly valued by the community, and there is a strong emotional connection to the structure.

Lowell Elementary School was originally constructed in 1908, and is the oldest active school in the district. There was a large schoolyard adjacent to the school that was used by students during recess, and the community outside of school hours. In 2016, the school underwent a major renovation and expansion. Much of the open green space adjacent to the school was taken by the new school building. This has led to a shortage of open space large enough for most organized activities such as sports and large lawn games. It has also increased use of the smaller open spaces within the eastern portions of Westside Park. Use of the school grounds and park is expected to increase as the school and neighborhood grow. The current enrollment of the school is 310 students, which is projected to grow to 400 students in the next several years. The new school is designed for a capacity of 500 students.

Existing Conditions

One of the most desirable features of the park is the abundance of mature shade trees. Many of these trees remain in a healthy state, and some are of unusual varieties not common in Missoula's urban forest.

The existing playground consists of several wooden structures, and has exceeded its life expectancy. In 2018, Missoula Parks & Recreation hired Playgrounds by Leathers (the original playground consultant) to conduct a playground assessment and give their professional recommendations. In the report, Playgrounds by Leathers recommended that while repairs are an option, when considering accessibility and cost, the best option is to replace the playground.

Some of the park amenities have been in place for many years, and do not meet current accessibility standards. The existing restrooms, picnic shelter, and even some playground components limit or prevent observability of areas of the playground. The two main internal pathways in the park do not meet the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) standards. The existing basketball court surface, despite past repairs is currently in poor condition.

The largest open lawn area is directly to the east of the school. This space is sloping to the center and the soils are compacted and poorly draining, rendering it unusable for much of the school season. It is not large enough, or flat enough to allow active play or sports to take place. Much of the turf around the playground is also compacted and poorly draining.

Originally, the park contained a wading pool that dated back to before 1940. In 2006, it was replaced with a modern splash pad. The splash pad receives considerable use in the summer, and is a valuable neighborhood asset. It is in good condition and is not in need of repair. The lawn around the splash pad traps water and does not drain, creating soggy ground, and mud in a high use area.

Master Park Planning process Guiding Principles

The Westside Park Draft Master Plan is driven by a collaboration between the Northside/Westside Neighborhood, Missoula County Public Schools, North Missoula Community Development Corporation, and Missoula Parks and Recreation. A working group comprised of these organizations led the master planning process. Priorities and ideas from teachers, parents, students, and neighborhood residents were incorporated into the plan.

In January 2019, neighborhood residents were invited to a public open house to learn more about the process and to provide feedback. Following the open house was a 3-week online comment period. The Westside Park Master Plan is a result of this process. Major goals that were identified are: to increase capacity and play value of the playground, provide a larger multi-use recreational lawn, re-define pedestrian circulation to reduce conflict with Lowell Elementary School, preserve trees, and plan for the attrition and replacement of trees.

Playground

The design of the playground is being developed through an additional public process that includes more involvement with Lowell elementary school students, teachers and staff. The specific design details of the playground are beyond the scope of the master plan, but overall goals are to: increase capacity, create an inclusive play environment that is highly accessible, increase observability of the playground, and extend the lifespan of the playground while reducing maintenance costs.

In order to meet the playground and master plan goals, the existing playground will be removed and replaced. Wherever feasible the existing features and artwork should be salvaged. In order to increase capacity the school-aged (5-12 year old) and preschool-aged (2-5 year old) playgrounds are separated. The school-aged playground should be off limits to the public during school recess, but the preschool-aged playground should remain open to the public. Design features may include fencing, or other clear delineation of where non-school children may play. Clear signage requiring adults be accompanied by their child should be included.

Pathways and Circulation

The existing interior park pathways do not meet current accessibility standards and the layout conflicts with the goals of the master plan. The path that runs from the corner of Scott and Sherwood Streets northwest to Phillips and Hawthorne Streets should be re-routed through the main park entrance at the splash pad on Phillips Street. The existing path runs directly through the playground, and creates conflict with students and the public during school hours. All the interior pedestrian pathways should be widened and resurfaced to meet the ADA. In the southeast corner of the park, three mature Douglas Fir Trees are growing too close together to allow the pathway to be widened. Efforts will be made to re-route the path around the trees. The existing non-compliant path should remain at the corner in order to reduce erosion by “short-cutting” foot traffic.

Multi-Use Court

The new multi-use court should be designed to allow for a variety of sports including basketball, pickleball, and foursquare. The existing court is used by Lowell Elementary students for morning lineup, which was identified as an important component to include in the new court. The new court is sized to provide four basketball hoops (one full-court and two half-courts) and up to three pickleball courts. Some of the basketball hoops should be lower than standard to accommodate younger children. Striping for activities may vary based on input from Lowell Elementary. Long tables adjacent to the court can be used for games during recess, outdoor classroom space, and gathering space for before and after school programs.

Green Space and Trees

The lawn adjacent to the splash pad pools with water and is poorly drained. Re-grading and installing an additional ~4' ring of concrete sidewalk with a trench drain is recommended to address these issues. There are several other areas of the park with drainage problems. The majority of the lawn around the existing playground is highly compacted from years of daily foot traffic. Repairing these problem drainage areas is a priority. Re-grading, deep tine aeration, soil amendment, and adjusting the irrigation system are all tools that can be used to help improve drainage, and will increase the health of the turf and trees in the park.

Many of the trees in Westside Park are mature, and some are at or near the end of their lifespans. Aging trees will be removed as needed, per best management practices. The master plan identifies where trees should be located for the long-term configuration of the park, and does not necessarily show existing tree locations. As part of the planning process a detailed tree map should be created that shows existing trees, and where to locate new tree plantings as old ones are removed. The Parks and Recreation Community Forestry program should follow this plan when locating new trees. The master plan calls for an increase in park trees compared to existing conditions.

In order to create more usable open lawn space, the pathway configuration leading from Lowell Elementary to the court and playground should be changed. The large mulched area adjacent to the garden should be converted to lawn and the entire area re-graded to provide a flatter open lawn that is large enough for sports and games. A subterranean drainage system common in athletic fields will likely be needed to provide drainage and make this space functional. There is also an area of open lawn located in the south portion of the park along Sherwood Street. The existing trees in this area are likely to be removed within the next decade. Trees should not be re-planted in this location to create an approximately 50'x100' open turf area for sports and games.

Restrooms

The existing restrooms do not comply with current standards and should be removed. A new portalet enclosure, hand wash, and changing station should be located adjacent to the splash pad entrance on Phillips Street. After years of experience and study by Missoula Parks and Recreation, portalets have been found to be the most functional, efficient, and safest way to provide restrooms to a busy park that is used year round. Being adjacent to the street will allow for easy maintenance, and provides a safe and accessible location for all users. Gender specific flush restrooms with sinks are currently required by the County Health Department for all splash pads and pools. As of May 2019, Parks and Recreation staff are in the process of requesting a variance to the Health Department restroom requirement. A portalet with attached changing station and hand wash station meets the intent of the health department requirement, and is preferred in a public park setting such as Westside Park.

Picnic Shelter

The existing picnic shelter should be replaced with a picnic area covered by a shade structure. The most desirable location of the structure is adjacent to the splash pad, and provides good visibility through the park for observation of children in the playground. The shade structure should accommodate approximately 30-40 people and will be reservable for events. The shade structure should not be fully weatherproof in order to establish desirable behavior expectations.

Next Steps & Phasing

The implementation of the master plan will likely need to be phased in as funding becomes available. Some portions of this project such as tree work will be on going. As of May 2019, the working group partners are fundraising with the priority to replace the playground and necessary infrastructure as soon as possible. Full park renovation will happen as funding becomes available. Missoula County Public Schools and Missoula Parks and Recreation should formalize the park management agreement, and renew the lease to 2060, which is the expected lifespan of the playground improvements prior to adoption of this plan.

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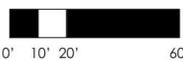
Adopted Master Plan
September 2019



Parks&Recreation
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LEGEND

① Multi-Use Recreational Lawn	⑤ Existing Splash Pad
② Multi-Use Sport Court & Games	⑥ Shaded Picnic Area
③ School-age Playground	⑦ Changing Room & Portalet Enclosure
④ Preschool-age Playground	⑧ School Garden



NOTES

Trees are illustrative and do not necessarily depict existing conditions

Playground to be designed through separate process

Topography is illustrative

Westside Park
City of Missoula, MT