

## Woodward Park Playground Improvements Survey Summary 2024

The playground improvements survey was created by the playground workgroup and distributed in February 2024 via the town bulletin and the town listserv. It closed on March 31, 2024 and received 70 responses total.

Originally, Eva Patrone created the playground workgroup to research obtaining a new piece of equipment. After meeting with four different playground consultants\*, Eva realized that many of our current pieces of equipment do not meet safety and/or ADA regulations. She wondered if, in addition to purchasing new equipment, certain existing pieces should be removed, repaired, and/or replaced. With the survey, she and the playground workgroup hoped to gain clarity as to what the town's priorities should be when making improvements to the playground.

### **Since the survey was given, some improvements have already taken place:**

- new metal basketball nets installed
- some regrading done by RJ Landscaping to improve drainage
- picnic tables repaired
- all four wooden borders removed from around the swing set for increased safety
- wood chip path created from the parking lot to the picnic area, and openings cut into the picnic and play areas for wheelchair and stroller access
- more wood chips added to all areas
- new signage purchased, including "play at your own risk" and a handicapped parking sign (the latter is yet to be installed)

### **And the following improvements will be made in the near future:**

- put the two baby swings together in the same bay as recommended by playground consultants
- purchase and install a new bench (or two?)
- install small footbridge over the creek
- replace some of the rotting/splintering wood on the blue-slide wooden playhouse

**Overall, the survey revealed that residents are concerned about safety, and there is a desire for new equipment, however there is also a strong attachment to the older pieces of equipment (most of cannot be brought up to meet safety regulations).**

Eva has stepped back from the project for now due to time constraints, so **the addition of a new piece of equipment will have to be revisited at a later time.**

**The survey seems to reveal that there is one safety improvement that would likely be agreeable to most residents: the removal of the metal jungle gym on the far side of the parking lot (by the baseball field).** The jungle gym was struck by a tree many years ago, causing damage, and it was never repaired. The playground consultants flagged it as not meeting safety standards, and they named it as a priority for removal. In the survey, it was not specifically listed by anyone as a favorite piece of equipment, and some residents

listed it as a safety concern and/or that it should be removed. **Eva will look into the possibility of removing the metal jungle gym in the next year. The decision to remove or replace any other pieces of equipment will be deferred until a later time. The public will be given the opportunity to comment before any decisions are made about the removal of any playground equipment.**

\*A summary of Eva's findings from her meetings with playground consultants, as well as other playground workgroup research, can be found at the end of this document.

## **Playground Improvements Survey Summary, Question-by-Question**

### **#1 How often do you and/or your family use the Woodward Park playground?**

- 23 (33.5%): rarely or never
- 10 (14.5%): occasionally
- 36 (52%): regularly/often

### **#2 What are you and/or your family member's favorite pieces of equipment to use, and why?**

- **32 people: swings**
  - "The tall swings provide a sense of freedom."
- **21 people: small playground (wooden with blue slide)**
  - Wide assortment of positive comments about this.
- **16 people: merry-go-round**
  - "The wooden merry go round builds determination and strength."
- **15 people: large metal slide**
  - Many positive comments about both metal slides.
- **11 people: horse swings**
  - "[The horse swings] are an irreplaceable tie to the past, sweet fun for kids, and physically beautiful addition to the playground."
- **10 people: small metal slide**
- **7 people: climbing equipment**
- 4 people: metal bouncy horses on far side of parking lot
- 3 people: see-saw
- 3 people: metal monkey bars (on other side of the tennis courts)
- 1 person: everything
- 1 person: everything except merry-go-round and metal bouncy horses

### **#3 What pieces of equipment do you and/or your family members rarely use and why?**

- **7 people: log see-saws**
  - several mentions of it being dangerous
- **7 people: metal slides**

- several mentions of the metal getting too hot in the summer
- **6 people: large merry-go-round**
  - several mentions of it being hard to push and/or safety concerns
- **5 people: metal jungle gym on far side of parking lot**
  - mentions of it being unsafe and broken
- 3: older equipment
- 3: horse swings
- 3: metal bouncy horses on far side of parking lot
- 3: green spinning cups
- 2: metal climbing dome
- 2: blue ring
- 2: old monkey bars near tennis court
- 2: newer equipment
- 1: spider web climber
- 1: small red merry-go-round

#### **#4 Are there any pieces of equipment you would like to see removed, repaired, and/or replaced?**

- **16 people either specifically said “remove nothing” or answered “no” to this question.**
  - “I asked my kids and they were upset that any would be removed. Some just need an extra coat of paint.”
- **8 people had overall concerns about the safety of older equipment**
  - “[Remove or repair] any equipment that is not up to current safety standards. I have concern about kids getting injured, particularly on the older metal items.”
- **6 people said the large merry-go-round should be removed and/or replaced**
  - The merry go round should be removed and replaced with a safer piece of equipment that can be used by a larger range of ages. The seated see saw or something similar would serve that purpose as adults can sit on it with kids safely.”
- **5 people said the large merry-go-round should be repaired**
  - “Merry go round needs updating, it is rusty and doesn't turn well.”
- **4 people said metal jungle gym (on opposite side of parking lot) should be removed**
  - “Remove legacy jungle gym by ball diamond, not used, unsafe, dented after tree damage.”
- **4 people had safety concerns about the log see-saw**

#### **#5 Are there any pieces of equipment you'd like to see added to the playground?**

- **8 people: large centerpiece tower/jungle gym system** (maybe with a rock wall and/or multiple slides)

- **8 people: exercise station for adults**
- 4 people: a 4-person seesaw or new seesaw
- 3 people: something with a natural look, maybe like these:
  - Georgetown Day School tower
  - Earthscape Tower
- 2 people: stepping stones
- 2 people: new, modern equipment
- 2 people: more benches
- Other comments: adaptive equipment for kids with disabilities, a gated toddler area, a 2-person swing, a zipline, and swings for adults.

**#6 Are there any pieces of equipment you feel strongly should NOT be removed or replaced?**

- **14 people: swings**
  - Several mentions about the swings being popular for all ages: “They are unusual and wonderful and a favorite for all ages.”
- **10 people: large merry-go-round**
  - Several comments about the historic/nostalgic/unique value of the merry-go-round: “The merry go round is the essence of what the Grove playground is all about.”
- **9 people: metal bouncy horses**
  - Several mentions of their uniqueness and historic value: “I feel quite a bit of fondness for the bouncy horses; please keep them, they are so unusual.”
- **6 people: metal slides**
- 4 people: vintage equipment
- 4 people: monkey bars
- 4 people: nothing should be removed or replaced
- 2 people: wooden playhouse with blue slide
- 2 people: horse swings
- 1 person: spider web climber

***Other Comments:***

“We had new pieces installed not long ago so the goal should be, we think, to preserve the unique and many traditional pieces we have as well. There are updated suburban playgrounds all around the area. We do not need to fill every niche, perhaps our niche should be the irreplaceable sense of the past combined with the present that we already have and that our kids have loved.”

“Mostly I would just like all equipment to be SAFE and meet safety standards so my children and others can play there without undue fear of harm. They love the playground - it just needs safety modifications.”

“It would be nice to keep all pieces.”

“I think it should all be fair game to remove/replace.”

### **#7 What is most important to you:**

Out of the 60 responses:

- **8 (13%) felt obtaining new playground equipment** was most important.
- **33 (55%) felt repairing and retaining old equipment** (as long as it can be brought to current safety and ADA requirements) was most important.  
*\*Approximately 25% of residents who gave this response were those who rarely or never use the playground.*
- **11 (18%) felt removing equipment that does not meet safety and/or ADA requirements** was most important
- **8 (13%) had other concerns** such as improved drainage, fun for kids, and the character/history of the town.

### **#8 Do you prefer to keep the swings as they are and enlarge the enclosure, or replace the current swings with new swings that are lower in height?**

This question is moot for now. Originally, when Eva met with the playground consultants, they explained that, in order to meet safety standards, we would need to greatly expand the mulch enclosure or lower the height of our swings. The concern is that a child could fall from the swings and land either outside of the shock-absorbing mulch, or, worse, *on* the wooden border itself. After discussion, the playground group came up with a compromise: instead of enlarging the enclosure, we simply removed the wooden borders. This likely does not meet the safety regulations, however it does eliminate the largest safety concern.

So, again, this question is no longer applicable, but the results are below:

Out of 65 responses:

- **45 (69%) wish to keep the current swings as they are** and expand the enclosure
- **20 (31%) wish to replace with new swings lower in height**

### **#9 How important is it to you that the playground has "Grove Character," and what does Grove Character mean to you?**

- 9 people: not important or not very important
- 13 people: somewhat important
- 18 people: important or very important

Note: Some people who said Grove character was important defined Grove character as vintage/unique, whereas others who said Grove character was important defined it as nature-themed, wooden, or simple.

**20 people**, with no relation to their statements of the importance of character, **said the top priority over everything else should be safety and/or functionality.**

The most popular words to describe “Grove Character” were: **vintage, eclectic, nature, and unique.**

***Comments:***

“It’s a playground not a shrine to the past. The Grove Character is all around the park and that’s great. Vintage playground looks nice to those who don’t use it but often isn’t functional. We can do a nature ascetic if that’s what the community wants, but the trees, fields, and people make up the Grove character.”

“It is very important to me. It means having an eclectic collection of equipment including historical pieces that may be no longer available for purchase. The fact that it serves people of all ages, abilities, and size is part of its Grovey character.”

“I like the current spread-out nature of the playground among the trees, which I think is unique, and I would love the playground to be more "nature-themed" which would tick the box of "Grove Character.””

“Pretty important, but safety has to come first. I am very confident we can find safety-compliant modern pieces that look eclectic as all get out. I do love the vintage look and feel.”

“Safety is my biggest concern. Character is wonderful but if children are not safe playing there, it’s not worth it unfortunately.”

“Very important that the playground is campy. Strong preference for wooden structures to enhance wooden look that aligns with Grove Character.”

“Very important. There should be no "astroturf", ground up tire surfaces or paved surfaces (other than the existing basketball court and nearby hard tennis court). I would like to see at least some of the "vintage" equipment remain, but am fine with modern additions that children find engaging.”

“Critically important, sets this playground apart from every other playground the area. There are lots of playgrounds around.”

“I like keeping the Grove character (to me: old charm) but it does not necessarily mean keeping equipment that is almost unable to be used or is not up to current standards (like ADA and safety). The point of the playground should be to be used, not to be a museum to the past. Keep stuff that works, remove what doesn't.”

## #10 How do you think the playground could best be improved?

- **10 people: improved drainage**
- **7 people: safer equipment**
- **6 people: new equipment**
- **5 people: exercise equipment for adults**
- **4 people: better maintenance of old equipment**
- 2 people: a tall centerpiece tower/jungle gym
- 2 people: revamp the basketball court
- 2 people: new picnic tables
- 2 people: accessibility for those with mobility issues
- 1 person: repair and consolidate old equipment then add a large, natural-looking centerpiece tower/jungle gym

**Other mentions:** remove large merry-go-round, remove small metal dome climber, a trash can, welcoming signage, a two-person swing.

## #11 Any other comments:

- **4 comments urging the town to consider the Grove character of the playground:**
  - "I am very concerned that any major changes will destroy the current character."
- **3 comments in favor of improved drainage:**
  - "I would recommend that the town find a separate contractor to do the grading and fix the drainage issues. The playground is hard to use after it rains and the landscaping contractor doesn't appear to have bandwidth."
- **3 comments in favor of adult exercise equipment:**
  - "I hope you take adults into consideration. The playground is a town amenity and one of its greatest features is that it has some equipment that is sturdy and proportioned to be accessible to those of us who are full-grown."
- **3 comments with concerns about the removal of equipment:**
  - "Equipment should not be removed without public comment."
- **2 comments that we should ask the children in town what they want.**
- **2 comments in favor of improved safety:**
  - "Of course repairing and updating current equipment would be great, however, I find it very unlikely that such repairs could be done for every single piece of equipment... Ultimately, safety is what's important - I am of the opinion that the only way to get the playground to current standards is to replace much of it."

### **Other comments:**

- "Look into environmentally sustainable pathways that will allow people with disabilities to access the equipment."
- "When purchasing any equipment, stay within your budget."

- “The playground area is more spread out than it needs to be... And the equipment can become quite hot in summer, so a shade structure might be considered. At minimum, aim not to remove any healthy trees that are providing shade.”
- “The F&B Committee cannot support any improvements which would damage the playground trees.”
- “A water feature for water play- would be nice as well as a tree fort like structure with a pulley and bucket to bring up sand and dump it. A covered sand pit (with retractable cover) would be nice.”
- “My kids’ favorite playgrounds are the ones at nature centers. I think a lot of inspiration could be provided by other nature-themed play areas.”
- “I have hated the piece-meal approach to the town's playground areas. I prefer unity and harmony, something our current playground is seriously lacking.”
- “I look forward to the day that the landscaping equipment is electric, to eliminate the fumes and greatly reduce the noise in the playground.”
- “I’m a little confused about ADA requirements. It doesn't seem to make sense that every piece of equipment be usable by those with various handicaps as long as enough are.”

*Summary of survey results compiled by Eva Patrone  
with help from Peggy Booher, August 2024.*

## **Playground Workgroup Summary 2023-2024**

In late 2023 and early 2024, Eva met with **four different playground consultants** to discuss playground improvements, new equipment options, and playground safety/ADA accessibility. Eva also found a group of interested residents to serve on a playground work group. The group met once in person and had several discussions via email.

**The following is a summary of Eva’s findings from meeting with the playground consultants, as well as what is being done to address their concerns:**

### **#1 All playground specialists immediately and emphatically said our swings do not meet safety code.**

The enclosure (wood borders surrounding the swings) needs to be enlarged (twice the height of the swings in front and back and 6 feet on either side.) Or, the swings need to be lowered. The concern is that a child could fall from the swings and land either outside of the shock-absorbing mulch, or, worse, on the wooden border itself.

Also, swings are now made with a single side pole instead of the three poles we have. The old-fashioned tripod model is considered less safe. In fact, a WG resident’s child was recently injured on the swings when his swing got wrapped around one of those side poles.



**Link to the CPSC Handbook for Public Playground Safety:** [www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/325.pdf](http://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/325.pdf) The information for swings is Section 5.3.8.3.3, page 43 of the PDF file and page number 39 in the document. This document has been held as a standard of care in the U.S.

- After discussion, the playground group came up with a safety compromise: instead of enlarging the enclosure we removed the wooden borders. This likely does not meet safety regulations, however it does remove the largest safety concern.
- We also plan to put the two baby swings in the same bay, as was the safety recommendation, and do some repair on the red Jenn swing.

## **#2 Other major safety concerns from the consultants included: the old merry-go-round, the log see-saws, the horse swings, and the metal jungle gym on the other side of the parking lot.**

Also of concern: we should be using playground-grade wood mulch fiber, not the landscaping wood chips we currently use.

- To address safety concerns, we will **continue the discussion of potentially removing unsafe equipment and replacing it with new, safety-compliant equipment.** Town residents will be given the opportunity to comment before the decision to remove any equipment is made.
- **All members of the playground workgroup agreed on the removal of the metal jungle gym on the other side of the parking lot** (especially since it was damaged by a fallen tree many years ago and was never repaired after that incident). Several members of the workgroup are in strong support of the removal of the large merry-go-round (others are not). We plan to move forward with the removal of the metal jungle gym, after giving town residents time to comment.

## **#3 Liability**

The specialists were concerned if a child got injured on a piece of equipment that we KNOW is not safety compliant, the town would be held liable.

- On the topic of liability, Mayor John Compton said: "I think there is an important difference between safety compliance and 'best practices'. I can ask Suellen [the town attorney] what law or standards define whether the Town may be engaging in willfully failing to meet *safety requirements*. Whatever the answer, **our insurer tells us we are covered by them should we be found responsible for injury for whatever reason.**
- As recommended by our town insurer, who recently did a town audit, we installed a sign that says (in English and Spanish) "playground is play at your own risk."

## #4 ADA compliance

ADA regulations are about access. So the top priority should be safety because it doesn't make sense to provide access to a piece of equipment that is not safe. After safety concerns are addressed, ADA compliance comes second. This includes: a handicapped parking space and pathways from the parking space to the pieces of equipment. Also, the wood chips are not ADA compliant, but playground-grade wood mulch would be.

- To address this, a path was created from the parking lot to the picnic table area. Access openings were cut into many of the playground areas. We have purchased a handicapped parking sign for the parking lot but still need to install it.
- There is some disagreement about the mulch used for the playground. Steve Wertz, who has done an incredible amount of work helping with the playground, believes the mulch/wood chips we currently use are up to playground/ADA regulations, but Eva was told by all four playground consultants that they are not. Eva will work on switching mulch to playground-grade wood fiber if that is what needs to be done.

### Other information and items of note:

- A. Purchasing new equipment:** The workgroup consulted three different playground equipment catalogues. One option that appealed to the members of the workgroup was a four-person see-saw:
- GameTime: <https://www.gametime.com/>
  - Playworld: <https://playworld.com/>
  - Metro Recreation: <https://metrorecreation.com/>

- B. Budgeting:** When we decide to purchase a new piece of playground equipment and/or do other improvements, we can potentially receive matching funds from Program Open Space. The application deadline for POS funding is the end of May. To apply, we will need a full proposal of how we intend to spend the money.

*As an example, to get an idea of pricing, Eva got a quote for removing the merry-go-round and replacing it with a four-person see-saw (a possibility discussed at the in-person playground workgroup meeting in the fall). The quote came in at around \$30,000.*

- C. Historic Preservation:** Eva consulted with the HPC about the playground. Their main concern is that the playground maintains a look of "continuous use" by having various styles of equipment from various eras. This doesn't seem to be a problem because any improvements made will certainly be piecemeal and made over an extended period of time.

**D. Drainage in the park continues to be a problem.** In Fall 2023 RJ did some regrading to help water flow down towards the gully, but it didn't help as much as we hoped.

**A huge thank you** to Steve Wertz and RJ Landscaping for their help with many playground projects, along with Peter Nagrod for helping to coordinate with RJ.