

Community Meeting 1 for: Benjamin Brown Schoolyard

Meeting Date: November 18, 2019

Presenters: Arn Franzen, Senior Project Manager, Public Space & Urban Forestry
Kaila Bachman, CBA Principal, Brown School Project Manager
D.J. Chagnon, CBA Principal-in-Charge (Brown & WSNS Schools)

Arn Franzen introduced the meeting and provided a brief overview of the process, as well as recognizing Principal Maguire and Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis, both of whom shared brief remarks about the project. Arn then introduced CBA Landscape Architects LLC, the lead designers for the renovations of the Brown and West Somerville Schools, which are being designed in tandem for upcoming renovations.

Kaila Bachman of CBA presented an introduction to CBA, including a number of past projects that have some potential relevance to the Brown School site; a summary of our site analysis to date; an overview of the issues raised in the December 2018 Community Meeting; possible precedent images and ideas to inspire discussion; and preliminary conceptual layouts for community feedback. Below is a summary of the questions and comments brought up for discussion during the meeting, organized by topic:

General / Logistical / Process:

- The community requested that the presentation and notes be made available to share with those who were not able to attend the meeting.
 - (City) Arn will post them on a project page on the City's website.
- What is the funding status of the project?
 - (City) The design is fully funded, partly through a CPA grant and partly through other City sources, due to the fact that there is a strong desire to include a synthetic turf component, which the CPA grant is not allowed to fund. Construction funding is not yet identified, and there are other projects in the pipeline closer to construction. Final construction timing will be dependent on the financial situation and availability once the design is done – the City's goal right now is to get the most appropriate design for the Brown School and the surrounding community, and then sort out funding and timing from there.
- Would the construction take place over the summer, or the school year?
 - (City) Summer is the intent – whichever year it would be constructed, we would have a contractor lined up and ready to begin as soon as school is out, with the goal of being fully complete (or at least substantially able to open the schoolyard) before school resumes again in the fall. The team recognizes that this is the school's only open space.
- The community encouraged CBA to visit during the school day and observe the space being used, as well as to reach out to Ms. Von Trapp, the Gym teacher, for specific input. They also encouraged CBA to keep the PTA in the design loop.

Logistics / Site Layout:

- When considering the alley space – all proposed plans for future ADA upgrades / elevator addition to the building have been assuming it would go into the “alley” of the building and possibly also replace/upgrade the bathroom area, so don't place anything there that couldn't be relocated or removed at a later date.
- Storage space is sorely needed – the more of it that could be incorporated into other things or designed into the plans (especially more appropriately than the corrugated metal box approach) the better.
- Pickup and dropoff locations are at the Willow and Josephine Ave stairs. Assembly space for parents near there would be helpful if possible.
- Multifunctionality of spaces will be key – the school tends to be used by two classes at once (gym and recess) fairly frequently, so it should be divisible into two areas, but free movement between the two is important at other times.
- The corner of Willow & Kidder is the loudest area of the schoolyard at present in terms of traffic noise – not an ideal space for outdoor classroom, quiet reflection, etc.
- Placing an outdoor classroom near the Kindergarten end of the building (Kidder & Josephine corner) would give those students easiest access to it; the older grades can more easily walk around to get to an outdoor classroom.

Program Requests / Items:

- Roxana Caro (PTA) shared a wish list prepared by Brown School students (attached to the end of this document). Among the key items not raised elsewhere were: monkey bars, balance beams, seesaws, a trampoline, space/loop for bike and scooter use, and quiet reading spaces.
- The community expressed strong support for adding a drinking fountain / bottle filler.
- Lighting is needed since this is the school's only recreational space, and it gets dark early in the wintertime for the afterschool programs, etc., but that should be balanced with the fact that it's in a neighborhood.
 - (CBA) talked in response about using LED lighting with side cutoffs so that there's little to no light spill or glare beyond the property lines, as well as exploring high/low fixtures that could be on when the space is in use (ie, into the evening) but then dimmed for later hours to discourage use while maintaining safety.
- Are there expected to be security cameras installed?
 - (City) There are not plans to install any security cameras in the space. The administration would consider doing so if there was a strong community desire to have them, but without a direct request and in the absence of a history of misuse the City would not include them.
- There is strong interest in keeping basketball hoops – even the littlest kids use them. Worth considering adjustable height hoops, multisport goals, etc.
- Wall Ball is regarded as a key point of the current playground's legacy – the alley space walls aren't classroom walls, and there's a desire to keep (or even formalize) wall ball. “The Brown has produced a lot of good runners, and good pitchers, over the years, because the kids race across the schoolyard and back, and they play wall ball.”



Synthetic Turf:

- Is it possible to play basketball on synthetic turf?
 - (CBA) There are varieties of turf that work fairly well for hard-court sports; our synthetic turf subconsultant will weigh in with the pros and cons of different options and we can discuss turf area programming at a future meeting.
- Has the City had issues with misuse of the synthetic turf fields at other schools?
 - (City) None so far – they're heavily programmed and frequently used informally even when they're not being used by a specific organization, which may help – there are always eyes on them – but users generally seem to be respectful.
- Are there different material choices that could affect what sports could be played or what seasons of use it's ideal for? This one will need to perform well in winter.
 - (CBA) We'll look into those questions with our subconsultant for the next meeting.

Fencing:

- Would the perimeter ornamental iron fence be replaced, and if so, with what?
 - (CBA) Still analyzing the fence, to assess whether it could be refurbished or not, and what the budget implications would be. We will present various possibilities to the community on how to address the fencing at a future meeting.
- Community members noted that there are serious safety concerns based on past injuries from the fencing.
 - (CBA) We'll definitely look into that further and assess the fencing, and appreciate the information.
- Several parents also expressed concerns about the chain link fence around the back of the school, where there are projecting bolts that are perceived to be a hazard.
- The fencing that separates the side yards of the school from the back, and from the entrance areas at Willow and Josephine, breaks up the space too much – at the very least, gates should be added.
 - (CBA) This is part of what we're already looking at as part of creating a path around the school.
- Would fences be required around artificial turf areas, etc?
 - (CBA) They're not required if the area in general can be protected, though there needs to be some definition of the edge for winter maintenance etc. However, a fence can often be useful at the edge of a ball sports area to keep the balls contained so that kids using other parts of the space don't worry about getting hit.
- Currently the school has temporary fence panels that they use to divide the space into smaller areas for gym, etc. - could something like that still be an option?
 - (CBA) We'll definitely explore that.
- The open feeling of the space is important in the larger area – don't over-fence it internally!

Play Elements:

- The school has a lot of vertical surfaces in addition to the open areas – consider a climbing wall somewhere in the process.
- There was a suggestion to look into a “Wallholla” type of structure (a fully enclosed climbing structure with ramps etc between levels and access out to climbers and slides



- similar to the one at the Childrens Museum or Jackson Square Playground in Boston.
 - (CBA) We'll look into it, though there are possible concerns with how adults / caregivers would access the interior of the structure to assist kids if needed.
- Upper body / obstacle-course style equipment and parkour-type uses are a possibility
- Since older kids don't use the playstructures as much, and the space needs as much flexibility as possible, don't put in too much equipment that takes up a lot of space.
- Look for ways to bring play elements around to the other sides – is there space along the Kidder Ave side at all? (Particularly for less “active” play or sensory play, or kindergarten-oriented elements such as dramatic play or smaller structures, since that's the Kindergarten side and they could have direct access out.)

The Transformer:

There was quite a bit of discussion about the transformer .

- The City explained that the decision to put the new pad where it currently is was based on the logistical and financial considerations – where the utility pole that power would be drawn from is, where in the building the power needs to connect to, and so forth.
- Community members expressed that the proposed placement is really disruptive to the intended use of the space, in that it presents an obstacle to connecting the rear schoolyard to the entrance and the rest of the space, as well as disturbing the former garden.
- CBA pointed out that if relocated (depending on location) installing conduit to get the power to the building could necessitate removal of a number of the mature trees, since the space to run conduit is very limited, even aside from the budget implications.
- Councilor Davis has asked the City Council to look at and review the process that led to the decision to put it where the pad has been poured, and would like to be sure the placement is the most appropriate long term. No final decision has been made yet.
- CBA pointed out that when this gets to construction (which does not yet have a final timetable) it's possible to relocate a transformer that's already been placed, provided that budget and site design allow for it. The team will keep all those considerations in mind when designing the schoolyard.

- Notes prepared by D.J. Chagnon of CBA Landscape Architects, 11/25/19



What would you like to see in our outdoor space?

• A but house slide

• Three benches

• A water slide

• A trampoline

• A coke stand

• A tree house

• A bench swing

• No changes

• Soft material

• Soccer goals

• playground

• football field

• V.R.

• A gaming P.C.

• A soccer field

Basketball court

Swing

Seesaw

Climbing structure

Monkey Bars

Blue Blox

• A gym space

• Swings/grass/trees

• Legos

• Soccer goal

• Grass and trees

• plants

• soccer balls

• Rock Climbing

• shed for play toys (organised)

• Everything in a normal playground.

• pool ON hot days

• CAT Adoption hut.

• A slip-n-slide on hot days.

• flowers

• hot tub

• A bigger area

• A recycling and compost bin

• turf

• turf / fake grass

• Net structure

• A playground

• flowers / Decor

• Ice cream stand

• A Baseball field

• A ROBLOX Logo

• toys

• Monkey Bars

• Steg + tow

• Monkey Bars

• YAY!

• Obstacle course

• structures

• slides

• Skate Park

• A window's
10 dell computer

• A Terf
that says
Brown school.

• POOL

• T Oys
Play structure

• Garden
• Net
• Monitor

• Poly Game
Playground
• Playground

• Bikes

• Slides

• Swings

• A RKADE
Balance beam

• Zipline

• A tree

house

• monkey Bars!