



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Minutes

August 23, 2023

4:30 PM

Gardner Field Playground
West Acton – In Person

Present: Peter Darlow, (Chair), David Honn, Holly Ben-Joseph, Tom Doolittle, Dean Charter, SB Liaison

Public Attending: David Martin, Alissa Nicol, Dennis Dale

1. Opening

Chair, Peter Darlow opened the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

3. New/Special Business

A. On site review of the newly installed Gardner Playground:

The HDC has raised a concern that the installation of a precast concrete stepped retaining wall to establish the new lowered playground grade and to offer an amphitheater type of seating wrapping three sides of the playground is not compliant with the Historic District Commission bylaw. This feature was not presented in documents reviewed when the HDC signed off on the playground proposal. The plan presented to the HDC proposed a relatively level, sloping site with no retaining wall or significant grade drop proposed at the time. The HDC has jurisdiction on any element visible from Massachusetts Avenue that is more than 12" above grade. The precast concrete wall is very easily seen where it wraps the east and west sides of the playground. The type of wall construction material utilized is not acceptable to the HDC. Short of complete removal of the retaining wall installation, the DRB has been requested to review and offer alternative adjustments to ameliorate the visual impact of the precast concrete installation.

A site plan prepared by GPI, titled Gardner Field & Playground Renovation – Site Furnishings Plan, sheet 1 of 3 dated 07/05/23, was referred to while observing the retaining wall installation. David Honn and Dean Charter offered some history on the development efforts by West Acton Friends of Gardner Field, complications encountered with grade and drainage control driven by concerns to protect the adjacent wetlands, ADA considerations, and of the town's assistance with implementing the playground update.



DRB Observations:

- The precast concrete retaining wall installed does not correspond to the Site Furnishings Plan. Where a radiused corner was proposed for the retaining wall at the western corner, the blocks turn the corner at 90 degrees. An access stair to bring pedestrians from the walk in from Massachusetts Avenue directly down to the playground at this same western corner was not implemented.
- The precast concrete blocks have a number of rough edges and pockets where the concrete has spalled off. These will potentially cause scrapes and small injuries to children playing in the area.
- Some sections of the retaining wall are unnecessarily higher than the surrounding grade they are meant to hold back.
- Where the wall is parallel to Massachusetts Avenue, a couple of bituminous paved surfaces have been prepared to receive a water fountain and a bench. The pavement is brought tight to the retaining wall. This walking surface meets the top of the wall where there are no plans for a guardrail despite the overall vertical drop of more than 36".
- Existing trees that buffered the residence to the east of the playground were removed due to the needed level change of the site. The residence is presently fully exposed to the playground.
- Other than planted grassy patches, which has not yet developed, the landscape plantings depicted have not been implemented.
- It was noted that the playground safety surface did not get fully installed into the western corner of the site as the Furnishings Plan proposed, leaving a rough grassy patch that will not likely hold up to constant play traffic.
- It was noted that the metal slide, facing south and to the parking lot, is likely to get very hot given no shading element has been incorporated to shield the sun.

DRB members discussed a number of thoughts on potential adjustments to address the above noted conditions during the site walk. A meeting to review these thoughts with the intent to assemble an outline of recommendations to present to the town will be scheduled for September 13 in room 09. Peter Darlow will look to invite Corey York and others that the town manager may wish to have attend for furthering the discussion on recommended improvements.



4. Adjournment

At 5:36 p.m. it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
The DRB