

Ped Mall Playground Public Input FAQs

1. How was this concept developed? Who was involved?

This initial concept was developed by a steering committee of parents, downtown business owners, Iowa City Public Library children's librarians, parks staff, and representatives of the Downtown Association board.

As part of this process, the committee identified project goals including that the playground be:

- Safe but attractive
- Accessible
- Inclusive
- Low maintenance
- Appealing to a diverse group of all ages
- Artistic
- Authentic to Iowa City
- Educational
- Shaded
- Within budget
- Multi-level play

2. Is it bigger or smaller than the old playground?

The new playground is the same size as the old one.

3. How old is the current playground?

The playground equipment is 20 yrs. old, new rubber surfacing was installed in 2015.

4. Why does the current playground need to be replaced?

Maintenance is an increasingly pressing matter. Replacement parts are unavailable for much of the equipment and there are growing safety concerns. Because of these concerns, several play features have been removed and not replaced.

5. Why can't the playground be bigger?

Site constraints prohibit expansion. The playground abuts the fire lane on the south, a pedestrian mall planter on the west, a sanitary sewer extension on the east, and the library building to the north.

Playground safety regulations have also changed since the last play structure was installed and now require greater space for fall zones. This generally means less multi-level equipment can be placed within the play area.

6. How does this playground meet inclusivity and accessibility needs?

This playground provides a sensory-rich environment that enables all children to develop physically, socially, and emotionally. It exceeds the Federal ADA accessibility requirements with more open space and clearances for accessible routes.

Making sure a public play space is accessible to all, not only for children of varying abilities, but for parents, grandparents, and caregivers with different physical conditions helps ensure a play space is a healthy community gathering spot.

The requests for additional accommodations are as diverse as the number of people who value different forms of play. Due to types of mobility, and cognitive, visual, or other life function differences, we strive for an approach that offers as much accessibility as the site constraints will allow, while providing positive experiences for all users.

Our approach is to include more than just a pathway for people using wheelchairs, it is to create a play space where people with diverse inclusion needs can play and feel a part of the larger group at the playground. The result is a balance between structured and free play. Free play can encourage more imagination and child exploration versus structured play which is provided by typical playground equipment. Additionally, free play has shown to have a variety of physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive benefits for children and parents of all ages and abilities and can be an important activity to promote family and social interaction and relationships.

The following are several ways in which this playground provides for enhanced accessibility and inclusion:

- Rubberized surfacing throughout allows wheelchairs and those with limited mobility, full access to the entire playground, and provides for uninhibited free play.
- Sensory and learning panels allow children of all abilities to explore distinctive textures, shapes, and colors. These broaden their experiences, to target tactile, visual, and auditory senses, and to incorporate social/imaginative play.
- Quieter and less active spaces such as the literary play features provide areas for those who are easily overstimulated by noise or activity.

7. Can a perimeter fence be included as part of the design?

To maintain free-flowing pedestrian circulation through this popular downtown location, a perimeter fence will not be installed.

8. Are there other alternatives for a color scheme?

The City will explore other colors that bring vibrancy to the space while blending with the surrounding context.

9. What age group is this playground design for?

This playground is for kids of all ages. Activities on the west end of the space are geared towards younger children and the tower and net climber on the east side provide challenges for older children.

10. Why aren't there places to play hide and seek in this new concept like there are in the existing playground?

Every effort has been made to balance maintaining clear site lines for observation, with the child's need and desire to play. Children love to run through and around the playground features, but for safety reasons, there are no fully enclosed hiding spaces, and all areas are open to view.

11. Can swings be added to this playground experience?

Regulations for clear zones and fall zones prohibit the safe implementation of swings in this compact playground space.

12. What is the City doing to keep this area clean?

The rubberized surface allows the playground and its equipment to easily be washed down and the city provides this maintenance on a regular basis.

13. What type of surface will be provided?

The surface will be a poured rubber surface, meeting ADA requirements.

14. Can there be more trees?

Site constraints do not allow the planting of additional trees in this area.

15. Won't there be congestion on the climbing structure or tower?

Experience with other parks in the city shows that open space and other play elements that are not traditional climbers or towers are very popular, so congestion at any one piece of equipment is unlikely.

16. My kids have loved running and playing tag on the current multi-level structure. Why can't we have a new playground like the one that currently exists?

While the existing multi-level experience can be fun for some, it limits accessible play and is not inclusive for younger ages. Children running around and playing on the various playground features at ground level are likely to have the same play experience while allowing children and adults of all ages and abilities to be included.

Additionally, new safety and fall zone regulations further restrict a new installation of a similarly sized multi-level structure. Any new design with a ramp to an elevated structure would take up the majority of the playground space while only providing one route for wheelchair users.

17. Will there still be a chessboard?

The chessboard was removed as part of the pedestrian mall renovation. There are no plans to add a new one.

18. Can we add a water fountain or bottle filler?

A water station with bottle filler is currently located on the east side of the playground.

19. Can a splash pad or water feature be included?

The Weather Dance Fountain is adjacent to this playground area and provides a similar experience.

20. Will more benches and shade be added?

Backed benches in multiple locations have been placed under the shade structures at the periphery of the play area. This will provide many different shaded seating options at various times of the day.

21. What are the next steps?

Design revisions will be made in response to public comment themes. The final design will be reviewed by the steering committee and upon final City approval will be sent out with a request for proposal to playground manufacturers. The City will then select the manufacturer to design and install a playground that meets the concept criteria.

22. When/where can I see the final design?

Continue to check icgov.org/ParkProjects for updated information.