

Meeting Notes



Project
McLaughlin Playground
Client
Boston Parks and Recreation Department
Meeting Date
September 17, 2026
Issue Date
September 24, 2026

Attendees (virtual)
Boston Parks and Recreation Department: B Chatfield,
My'Kel McMillen
Crowley Cottrell: Naomi Cottrell, Mark Warfel Jr.
John Carter
Community Members: 13-18 people

+ Synopsis of the Presentation

On September 17th of 2026, Boston Parks and Recreation (BPRD) and Crowley Cottrell held a virtual community meeting to solicit feedback from community members for McLaughlin Playground.

Crowley Cottrell presented the responses received in an online opinion survey that was posted after Meeting 1. The survey results revealed that the majority of respondents are daily or weekly users who primarily use the park for walking, dog walking, and playground activities. Responses concluded that the top priorities of the park shall be increased shade, diverse planting, and the additions of a dog park and water play. Walking paths, lawn areas, and the softball field should be retained and improved in the new design, while climbing, sliding, and swinging are the most desired play elements.

Boston Parks discussed access needs and requirements before presenting three ramp options that provide ADA-compliant access to the park's interior from Fisher Avenue. Given the scope and cost of the project, Boston Parks mentioned that an accessible route from Fisher Ave will likely be necessary for code compliance. Boston Parks also confirmed that the "Pool Stairs" (located at 129 Fisher Ave) will be renovated during the project, and renovations will include new handrails. BPRD requested that abutters to the "Pool Stairs" connect with B Chatfield (abigail.chatfield@boston.gov) to discuss encroachments that must be resolved before construction occurs. The presentation was then paused for a period of listening and discussion, which is **summarized on the following pages**.

Crowley Cottrell ended the meeting with a presentation of three design options for the project site. "Option 1 – Structured" features a switchback ramp connecting the upper terrace and softball field, a central lawn, a playground adjacent to the woodland, and a basketball court adjacent to Parker Hill Ave. "Option 2 – Interconnected" blends the two terraces with sloping paths, includes a dog park, and re-orientates the softball field for better sun positioning. "Option 3 – Hub and Wedges" concentrates activity on a central hub, containing the playground, splash pad, and courts. A dog park is located to the east, beyond the relocated softball field. Crowley Cottrell reviewed different approaches to playground design and showed images of various play typologies. Following the presentation, there was a brief listening and discussion session. BPRD committed to posting a follow up opinion survey to better understand community priorities.



+ Comments from Community Members and Discussion

Community member comments regarding the ramp from Fisher Ave:

- Is it possible to not have as many switchbacks?
 - o Boston Parks and Crowley Cottrell responded that this request is not possible, due to the site's terrain and the goal of limiting woodland disturbance.
- Are raised walkways above the ground possible?
 - o Boston Parks responded that it may be possible, though this solution may not reduce disturbance and would be expensive.
- The stairs (presumably the Pool Stairs) need handrails if they still don't have them.
 - o Boston Parks responded that handrails will be installed on the Pool Stairs as part of this project.
- Many attendees questioned if the park needs accessibility from Fisher Ave.
 - o Boston Parks explained that access from Fisher Ave is likely necessary to obtain a variance and is recommended by Disabilities Commission. Final determination is at the discretion of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB).
- Many attendees do not want any disturbance of the woodland. Given its low expected usage, and possible maintenance and safety concerns, a ramp of any kind is not desired. They additionally fear that a ramp may exacerbate the existing erosion issue in the woodland.
- Some attendees suggested connecting the lowest terrace to the lower terrace in lieu of a ramp from Fisher Ave.
 - o Other attendees mentioned that a connection between the lower terrace and lowest terrace may be unnecessary due to lack of existing circulation (i.e. few people walk from the softball field to little league field and vice versa). This connection would disturb the lower meadow, which is habitat for pollinators and birds.
- Would plants be replaced if they were disturbed during construction?
 - o Boston Parks answered that they would, but it would take time for the woodland to completely fill back in.
- Various attendees mentioned that existing access from Parker Hill Ave is "adequate enough" that an ADA compliant route from Fisher Ave is unnecessary.
 - o Boston Parks responded that ADA access from Fisher Ave is expected to be a requirement by MAAB.
- One attendee liked option 3 the most. They mentioned it would allow for easier access to the playground with a stroller.
- Many attendees preferred option 1 because it would cause the least disturbance to the woodland. A number of community members support preserving as much wooded area as possible.
- Attendees mentioned that birds are prevalent and important in the park and ramp construction may negatively affect their migration.



- Regarding the existing unpaved path from the Pool Stairs, many attendees would prefer if the path remained unpaved.
- One attendee mentioned the need for cost estimates of the ramp construction and a survey to find out how many people would use the ramps. Many people use the park's existing path network as a shortcut and would not be using the ramps due to their indirect path of travel.
- One attendee asked if the ramp would need to be deiced in the winter.
 - o Boston Parks responded that de-icing of the ramps would likely be necessary, though Boston Parks does not typically de-ice interior paths.

Community member comments regarding the three design options:

- Tree branches may break if they are near the basketball court.
- The playground should be close to Parker Hill Ave.
- The existing track around the softball field was once heavily utilized by runners and walkers, but its dilapidated paving has made it very dangerous. Restoring this path is desired by many attendees.
- One attendee requested the installation of wooden park benches along the woodland paths for elders to stroll and rest.
- Multiple attendees like the pollinator meadows and support of local fauna, bugs, birds, etc.
- A request was made for more signage regarding trash and disposing of food items properly.
- Boston Parks mentioned that a crosswalk across Parker Hill Ave will be included in this project.
 - o One attendee asked if a speed bump or raised crossing would be possible to slow the frequently speeding cars.
- Community members raised that these designs appear to eliminate space for youth football, which meets at the park almost daily during the fall. Attendees mentioned that the 100+ football users should be accommodated. Parks team will review this and consider changes to accommodate these users.
 - o Numerous attendees mentioned that parking and vehicular circulation along Parker Hill Ave is virtually impossible during football events.
- One attendee noted that the lower terrace originally had two softball fields. Some attendees would prefer the space continue to accommodate two fields.
- One attendee likes the walking paths to the softball field in all options.
- Having basketball courts adjacent to Parker Hill Ave will disrupt residents.
- Stray softballs have been known to hit houses and cars along Parker Hill Ave. Some form of screening will be needed to prevent balls from hitting cars and houses.
- Many attendees are against having a dog park. The dog park would occupy too much potential greenspace.
 - o Nearby Fitzgerald Park has a dog park.
- One attendee wants fully restored walking paths and the removal of excessive fencing.



- Two attendees prefer option 1, but the playground and basketball court locations should be swapped.
- Full court basketball is better than two half courts.
- The softball field is currently multi-use. Volleyball, spike ball, football, soccer (though soccer goals get broken easily and quickly), ultimate frisbee, cricket, softball games, little league baseball practice, and youth football all occur on the softball field and adjacent multi-use field.
- One attendee asked if the entire \$3.5 million budget needs to be spent. They think it would be better if not.
 - o Boston Parks responded that a budget reduction is possible but will be based on determined needs and that any renovation is likely to trigger the accessibility review.
- One attendee questions the need for ramp down to the softball field.
- One attendee likes option 3 but thinks maintenance would be a challenge.

Next Steps

The project team will develop and issue a follow-up opinion survey to gather broader community consensus on the design options, program, and accessibility ramp options. Crowley Cottrell will synthesize community feedback from community meetings and opinion surveys and develop a design scheme to be presented at the next community meeting. Community Meeting 3 will likely take place in November 2026.