



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee

Date: April 29, 2021

From: Todd Gross
Director, Parks Services

File: 06-2345-01/2021-Vol 01

Re: **Magical Bridge Playground Foundation**

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled “Magical Bridge Playground Foundation,” dated April 29, 2021, from the Director, Parks Services, be received for information.

Todd Gross
Director, Parks Services
(604-247-4942)

Att. 2

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Recreation Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS:	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

At the December 18, 2019, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee, Jennifer Louie, delegate, presented on the Magical Bridge Park fully inclusive playground design that is accessible for all children including children with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities. Jennifer Louie spoke on the costs and other communities in the United States that have developed such playgrounds. Also, she encouraged the City to consider inclusive designs when developing new playgrounds.

In reply to queries from Committee, staff noted that newly developed playgrounds incorporated accessible elements into the design and that the City will continue to explore opportunities to develop additional inclusive playgrounds.

Discussion ensued with regard to (i) estimated costs of developing accessible playgrounds, (ii) assessing the footprint of accessible playgrounds, and (iii) consulting with autism advocacy groups in playground design.

As a result of the discussion, the following referral motion was introduced:

That the presentation on the Magical Bridges playground design be referred to staff.

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information on the Magical Bridge Playground Foundation program as well as background information on existing and planned inclusive playgrounds and practices in Richmond.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #4 An Active and Thriving Richmond:

An active and thriving community characterized by diverse social and wellness programs, services and spaces that foster health and well-being for all.

4.1 Robust, affordable, and accessible sport, recreation, wellness and social programs for people of all ages and abilities.

4.2 Ensure infrastructure meets changing community needs, current trends and best practices.

4.3 Encourage wellness and connection to nature through a network of open spaces.

Analysis

Background

Established in 2016, the Magical Bridge Foundation is a non-profit organization based in Palo Alto, California, founded by Olenka Villarreal, a mother with a disabled and able-bodied child,

and Jill Asher, a public relations executive. The foundation was created to offer comprehensive design and consulting services for communities interested in building inclusive playgrounds and play spaces. Their mission is to create innovative and inclusive playgrounds where all families and community members feel welcome and play together.

The Magical Bridge Foundation team includes the founders, a creative director, designers and landscape architects, a director of education, a director of operations and talent, kindness ambassadors, and a board of directors. The foundation is supported by several corporations and philanthropists such as Nintendo, Walmart Foundation, Google, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and more.

The foundation's flagship Magical Bridge Playground, which is located in Mitchell Park in Palo Alto, California, opened to the public in April 2015. It is a destination playground designed with consideration of persons living with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities, individuals with chronic health conditions and the aging population.

The Mitchell Park Magical Bridge Playground is comprised of several zones including a swinging zone, music zone, kindness corner, playhouse and stage. It includes a combination of readily available and specialized playground equipment such as net spinners, an artist-designed string laser harp, slides, saucer swings, a custom two-storey wheelchair accessible playhouse, and swings with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) adaptive swing seats. The playground surfacing is a combination of artificial turf, rubberized surfacing, wood decking and concrete. See Attachment 1 for photos of the Magical Bridge Playground in Mitchell Park, Palo Alto.

Based on information received during meetings with the Louie's, this playground site is approximately 4 acres and the project cost approximately \$4M to construct.

Magical Bridge playgrounds are attended to by kindness ambassadors, who are middle and high school student volunteers tasked with making visitors feel welcome and included. The kindness ambassadors greet visitors, lead activities such as face painting, engage in conversations with playground users and handout stickers.

Magical Bridge Foundation Program

The Magical Bridge Foundation selects a few projects each year to take on, partnering with municipalities, developers or donors who wish to create universally designed Magical Bridge playgrounds, which serve as regional destinations. On these projects, Magical Bridge Foundation acts as a design consultant, offering playground design schematics and general inclusive play consulting services.

To be considered for the Magical Bridge Playground program, the site must be a minimum of 0.75 acres (0.3 hectares). As a comparison, the footprint of the existing Steveston Community Park playground is 0.5 acres (0.2 hectares). Depending on the size and location, Magical Bridge Playgrounds start at \$1.5M USD (\$1.9M CAD) minimum with design services being charged as a percentage of the total construction costs.

City of Richmond Playground Program

The City currently has approximately 60 playgrounds in its inventory, which range broadly in age, size, design and variety of playground equipment, surfacing and edging. The size and allocated budget for new playgrounds and playground replacements correspond to the Parks and Open Space Strategy park service standards for neighbourhood, community and city-wide parks.

Neighbourhood park playgrounds are generally located within each quarter section, serve local neighbourhood residents and are smaller scale than those located in community and city-wide parks. Based on recent neighbourhood park playground replacement projects, they are typically 450 to 550 square meters (0.11-0.14 acres) and cost \$200K, including demolition, site preparation, drainage, surfacing, edging, playground equipment, and remedial landscape works. Some examples include Palmer/Garden City, Wowk, and Lang Neighbourhood Park playgrounds.

Community park playgrounds are generally located every 1.5 km, serve the greater surrounding community area and are large scale destination playgrounds. Based on recent and upcoming community park playground replacement projects, they are typically 1,000 to 2,000 square meters (0.25-0.50 acres) and cost \$600K or more. Demolition, site preparation, drainage, surfacing, edging, playground equipment, and remedial landscape works are included in the project costs. Some examples of community park playgrounds include South Arm, King George/Cambie Community Park, Hugh Boyd, Steveston and Garden City Community Park playgrounds. Note that the cost for the playground at Garden City Community park playground was in the vicinity of \$1M.

City-wide park playgrounds do not have a set distribution standard, and not all city-wide parks contain playgrounds. Playgrounds located in city-wide parks serve the greater Richmond community and also attract visitors beyond Richmond, as the sites they are located in have unique characteristics and are destinations. These playgrounds range greatly in size and cost, and they are designed to complement the special characteristics and program of the park they are located in. Some examples include the playgrounds located in Richmond Nature Park, Minoru Park and Terra Nova Rural Park. For reference, the Richmond Nature Park playground expansion in 2018 was approximately 325 square meters (0.08 acres) and cost \$275,000. Note that the entire playground is 600 square meters (0.15 acres). The Terra Nova Adventure Play Environment is approximately 2,600 square meters (0.64 acres) and was in the vicinity of \$1M. This playground was partially funded by a federal grant.

Table 1: Overview of Typical Playground Size and Cost by Park Typology

Park Playground Typology	Typical Size Range	Typical Cost
Neighbourhood Park Playground	450 to 550 square meters (0.11-0.14 acres)	\$200K
Community Park Playground	1,000 to 2,000 square meters (0.25-0.50 acres)	\$600K +
City-wide Park Playground	Broad Range: 600 square meters to 2,600 square meters (0.15-0.64 acres)	\$350K to \$1M+

Implementation of a Magical Bridge playground in Richmond would require 0.75 acres (0.3 hectares) and \$1.5M USD (\$1.9M CAD) minimum with design services being charged as a percentage of the total construction costs. This funding and land allocation is beyond what is typical for the City’s neighbourhood, community, or city-wide playground programs and would require additional capital funding and land commitments. Should a Magical Bridge playground in Richmond be pursued, additional impacts, which have not been quantified, such as OBI’s would also need be considered. Implementation of a kindness ambassador volunteer program would also require additional staff resources to support and manage.

Existing Inclusive Play in Richmond

The City’s approach for new and replacement playgrounds is to include a range of play opportunities for a broad range of ages and abilities, including children with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities. Depending on the playground, inclusive features may include outdoor musical instruments, interactive panels, spinners, transfer platforms, raised sand tables, saucer swings, and/or wheelchair accessible platforms. See Attachment 2 for photos of examples of existing inclusive play in Richmond.

Since Jennifer Louie’s presentation to Committee on the Magical Bridge playground, a webpage titled ‘Inclusive Play in Richmond’ was developed and added to the City’s website in order to highlight and raise awareness about existing inclusive play environments and elements in Richmond. The playgrounds featured on the webpage include those located at Grauer Neighbourhood School Park, Hugh Boyd Community Park, King George/Cambie Community Park, Middle Arm Waterfront Greenway, South Arm Community Park, and Terra Nova Rural Park. The location, access, and inclusive play features for each playground is provided. The webpage can be found at: <https://www.richmond.ca/parks/parks/InclusivePlayInRichmond.htm>.

This webpage will be updated as new or renewed playgrounds with inclusive play features are added to the City’s inventory.

Upcoming Inclusive Play Opportunities in Richmond

There are several upcoming playground replacement projects, which provide opportunities for enhanced inclusive site access and play elements. These include Steveston Community Park, Minoru Park, and Hugh Boyd Community Park playgrounds.

The Steveston Community Park Playground Renewal Preferred Concept Plan was developed with inclusive play in mind and with input from an inclusive design specialist from the Rick Hansen Foundation. The plan includes a widened wheelchair accessible boardwalk, flush playground entry points, spinners, teeter totter with back support, accessible playhouses, sand and water play, a saucer swing, accessible fishing boat, and accessible ramp to a crow's nest lookout. The larger swing set will also include a seat with back support for those who have challenges for those who require additional support to hold up their upper body. Enhanced accessible surfacing including poured-in-place rubber and artificial turf are also included.

With approximately 20,000 people living within a 400 meter radius (5 minute walking distance) of Minoru Park, the existing playground is currently undersized and does not offer an adequate range of play opportunities. The renewal of this playground presents opportunities to better respond to the needs of the growing population living nearby, which is expected to double by 2041. Given the close proximity of the park to Richmond Hospital and Richmond's medical and health core, there are also great opportunities through the playground design and consultation process to explore innovative ways of incorporating inclusive and therapeutic play features. The planning and consultation process for the renewal of Minoru Park playground should start within the next two years. As part of that process, staff will conduct public and stakeholder engagement and can also reach out to health and education professionals working with children with disabilities to receive advice and input.

Hugh Boyd Community Park playground includes several inclusive site and playground elements such as flush poured-in-place rubber surfacing, an accessible ramp to a raised platform with interactive panels, accessible playhouses, seesaw with handgrips, spinner bowl, saucer swing, and a barrier free pathway to the top of a hill with a large sand play area complete with sand tables and a large shade structure. Over the past few years, some of the playground equipment and surfacing has deteriorated rapidly resulting in components being closed off to the public. Unfortunately, replacement parts for the damaged elements are obsolete and not available. As a result, the playground is in need of near future renewal. Given the existing inclusive play elements at this playground, there are great opportunities to build upon and expand inclusive play at this popular destination playground through the playground renewal planning and design process.

Jennifer and Gregory Louie (JGL) Foundation

Founded by Jennifer and Gregory Louie in 2014, the JGL Foundation was established to offer grants to aid children and adults with cerebral palsy to fund necessary services and equipment. They offer grants on an annual basis through a competitive online application process. The grants are typically allocated to therapeutic services or equipment, however, given their interest and support of the Magical Bridge Foundation, there could be potential for grant funding towards inclusive or therapeutic play equipment. Due to a high number of applications in 2020, the JGL Foundation is no longer accepting applications at this time. When or if grant applications are reopened, staff can submit a grant application for an upcoming playground renewal project for consideration.

Staff will also seek other grant opportunities, which are eligible for inclusive playground renewal projects on an ongoing basis.

Financial Impact

None

Conclusion

Inclusive parks and playgrounds are a key component of complete and welcoming communities. Should a Magical Bridge playground be pursued in Richmond, adequate funding and a site that is 0.75 acres (0.3 hectares) minimum would need to be identified in order to be considered for the program. Other impacts, such as OBI's for maintenance and additional staff resources for a kindness ambassador volunteer program would also need be analyzed.

Richmond has multiple playgrounds with inclusive site and play features incorporated into them, which offer recreation, socialization and play for children and adults of all ages and abilities. Staff will continue to seek and implement new and enhanced inclusive site and play features as new playgrounds are added or existing ones renewed. To raise awareness and keep the public informed, the Inclusive Play in Richmond webpage will be updated as new inclusive playgrounds are developed.



Miriam Plishka, BCSLA, CSLA
Park Planner
(604-233-3310)

- Att. 1: Magical Bridge Playground, Palo Alto
- 2: Examples of Existing Inclusive Play in Richmond

Attachment 1: Magical Bridge Playground, Palo Alto



Attachment 2: Examples of Existing Play Elements in Richmond



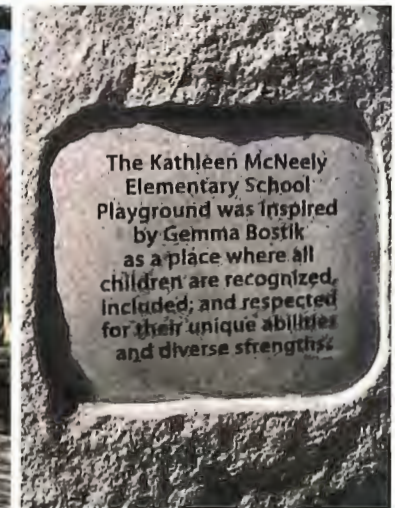
South Arm Community Park playground accessible bridge and playground



Middle Arm Greenway accessible, inclusive play elements



King George/Cambie accessible water park



Kathleen McNeely Elementary School inclusive playground



Terra Nova Adventure Play Environment inclusive play elements



Steveston Community Park accessible water park



Steveston Community Park playground accessible boardwalk, interactive panels, and digger