

Joshua Eaton Field and Play Area Master Planning Committee

The Joshua Eaton Field and Play Area Master Planning Committee included the following membership:

Patricia DeGaravilla, Joshua Eaton School Principal
Frank Driscoll, Commissioner, Reading Youth Softball
Charlie Ehl, Commissioner, Reading Youth Baseball
Maura Rhodes, PTO President
Andrew Grimes, PTO Member
John Feudo, Staff Liaison- Recreation Administrator

Background, Findings and Current Conditions:

The Joshua Eaton field and playground are currently used for many activities by a variety of groups of residents.

The school uses the park and playground on a daily basis for P.E., wellness classes, recess and as an area for students to congregate before the school opens. Students also play there every day after class and the school holds a picnic there in the fall and a fun run each spring. The playground is also used informally by residents of the neighborhood throughout the year.

Reading Youth Baseball and Reading Youth Softball use the field through the spring and summer months for games and practices. During the fall season, the field sees activities such as after school sports run by the Recreation Division as well as an annual field hockey clinic. Reading Pop Warner football uses the field for practices in the early part of their season before the clocks turn back.

Like many of the fields in Reading, Joshua Eaton field is over-scheduled leaving very little restore and recovery time. Therefore, over the years of use, there has been little time for rest and repair. There are many ruts and lips on the ball fields. In general the infield gives more of an appearance of a circle than an actual ball field. The drainage of the field is generally decent; however a heavy rain storm will leave some areas of the field in an unplayable condition.

There are three sets of concrete bleacher steps that are used for both access to the field as well as for spectator seating. There is no current ADA ramp to get to the lower field. This will need to be addressed in the plan.

The upper area currently features an old wooden playground that was installed in 1997, a paved basketball area featuring two baskets as well as a small tot swing area on the back side of the school that has become obsolete. There is limited open space on the upper part of the play area which kids use for various activities.

There were several major areas the committee focused on;

- Parking and Traffic Flow
- The backstops need to be taller and have an overhang for fan protection and better ball capture.
- There is a drainage issue for both ball fields that will need to be addressed.
- Renovation of infields
- Other Site Amenities

Parking and Traffic Flow

Existing Conditions:

The committee found traffic flow and parking to be one of the central challenges for the field and play area. The current lot holds between 55 – 60 vehicles. This seems to work well for the school day, but is neither adequate nor ideal for evening or weekend activity. The committee also heard the concerns on behalf of the large student “walker” population coming from the Oak Street side of the building that they must cross a very busy school driveway.

The committee asked the Parking, Traffic, and Transportation Task Force to look at several different options for the redesign of the parking. The PTTTF was also asked to look at the Oak St. crossing issue.

The Parking, Traffic, Transportation Task Force (PTTTF) recommended that the Joshua Eaton School consider changing the use of the front of the school as a one way driveway that would cut across the front of the school. There was no practical solution for the Oak Street issue as the driveway abuts private property and there are limited ways to correct it. The school will look into painting the driveway to mark a walkway area and continue the current practice of setting up traffic cones in this area during peak hours.

Recommendation:

Use option as plotted on engineered conceptual design (appendix A) of lot. The lot would expand over the current basketball court area allowing easy flow of foot traffic to the lower field area and playground. The island that allows for the turn-around would be reshaped for more parking. This would afford an extra 16 – 18 total parking spaces to the area.

The island closest to the west side of the lot should be raised by 8” curbing to protect the green space as well as prevent vehicles from passing over the landscape and disturbing the trees.

The center island shall be paved and flat. This will allow for easier plow access as well as make the lot more functional. The HC spot should be moved to the closer side of the school and connect with the crosswalk and sidewalk for accessibility.

After discussion with school principal, the committee decided not to entertain the concept of a drive through loop in the front of the school as it presents many logistical issues inside and outside of the school. The school will work with the RPD Safety Officer to look at alternatives for crossing guards.

Finally the committee recommends installing a swing gate to restrict vehicle access to the paved play area. The gate will only be present off of the back parking lot. The back entrance of the school off of Summer Ave. should become a one way access for leaving the property and should only be accessed by emergency vehicles in the opposite direction.

The Field

Existing Conditions:

The committee looked at the baseball field area as an open canvas. The field currently hosts youth baseball and softball play as well as Pop Warner football in the fall. There is a walking path of stone dust that connects Pennsylvania Ave to the back of the school. The fields themselves are in disrepair with many lips and ruts that have been created over time. There is an inherent flooding issue that occurs near the staircase closest to the “B” field bench. There is also evidence of runoff on field “A” near Indiana Ave. Both backstops lack height and overhang and do not adequately capture foul balls or protect spectators.

There are three sets of stone steps the serve as bleachers and access for the field. These concrete steps are in decent condition. There is no ADA ramp to gain access to the field.

Recommendation:

After careful consideration, the committee felt it was best to keep the fields as they are currently set. However, the drainage of the field needs to be corrected and should be looked at by qualified engineers. Both backstops will ultimately need to be replaced and are in the current capital improvement plan (FY 17 & FY20). They should be replaced by a standard heavy gauge 12 ft chain link fence with a minimum of a 4ft over hang. Benches should be placed behind the chain link fence for player protection.

Field A (closest to the school) shall move approximately ten feet forward to accommodate more space behind the backstop for patrons, maintenance equipment and

for the potential for a batting cage. This should be done in conjunction with the backstop to ensure that the backstop is able to capture the balls.

The stone bleachers shall remain intact and repaired as needed.

The committee recommended the walking path be paved and formalized through the center of the field. Many students use that path to gain access to the school each day. Although the path is not plowed by Town workers in the winter, students still use the path frequently which keeps them away from the roadway. An ADA path/ramp should be available for access to the playground area as well as the lower fields.

The ball fields themselves need to be reestablished. The infield should be completely dug out and refilled with a proper base and proper clay levels.

Other site amenities

Due to the basketball court being moved to create more parking, the court would be relocated on newly paved area. The area would also allow for other activities.

The playground and swing area will be shifted toward the middle of the top of the hill. The space for the playground should be approximately 65 X 95 and include a swing area. One to two Town standard picnic tables are also desirable near the play area for parents and families to congregate.

The committee talked about extending the use of the field by entertaining the concept of a batting cage. With practice times being at a premium on grass fields, much of the youth baseball and softball season are focused on playing games. Practices opportunity are far and few between due to scarce resources of fields and growth across the all of the youth organizations. This was probably the most controversial topic from the public hearing. The final proposed location would be set directly behind the A field backstop, furthest away from neighboring houses. It would be single style cage (20 X 60 ft) with heavy duty black netting on the interior with poles and no fencing. The net could come down in the winter time. With no fencing there is a reduction of noise and less maintenance. The committee felt this would be a practical and long term solution enhancing playing opportunity.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the committee worked hard to take a holistic approach to the process. With the three major users of the field at the table, the committee was able to address many of the current concerns to make the Joshua Eaton play area more functional without interrupting or sacrificing the natural beauty of the park.

The public hearing was very telling in that the neighbors were interested and excited about the changes. There is a commitment from RYB and RYS to continue to improve the conditions of the ball fields. The Joshua Eaton PTO has appointed a playground

committee to begin design and fundraising for FY12. Currently, Reading Youth Baseball is prepared to begin field renovations as soon as the Master Plan is approved. The Board of Selectmen will hold a second public hearing before final approval of the plan.

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