

July 13, 2019

I do not support renovating the existing play area known as the Hingham Centre Playground.

When I started this project, over two years ago, I and others thought it would be a simple matter of replacing the old equipment with newer pieces that met contemporary safety standards. We were enthusiastic, but we were [very] wrong.

I became uncomfortable with the direction we seemed compelled to take, and Michael stepped into the leadership role. He, Katie and I worked hard at developing the revised and scaled down proposal we're discussing. While I supported the process, I grew increasingly concerned with its size, scale, aesthetic, and the appropriateness of its components.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: Mark did not only support the process; he supported the plan, and [stood before the Selectmen](#) when it was unopposed and [unanimously approved](#) by both the Planning Department and Board of Selectmen during a public meeting in June 2018. From the beginning, we have been committed to creating a fair, transparent, and inclusive process that considers the varied interests within our community. Toward that end, we created a website ([SaveHinghamCentrePlayground.com](#)) and an email subscriber list, and conducted an online survey completed by nearly 200 respondents. In addition, the project was the subject of three separate articles in the Hingham Journal and Patriot Ledger, and we appeared before the Selectmen in an open meeting. We respect Mark's decision to change his mind, but no one can claim that they did not have ample opportunity to express their concerns prior to the Town's June 2018 approval.]

Concerns:

- Original intent. We cannot do what it was we told people we'd do when we began. ADA and other safety standards make that impossible. [Michael Monteiro wrote: We owe Mark our gratitude for starting the initial campaign to replace the dilapidated playground equipment. However, there were scant details about the "original intent," or how the money being collected would be used. Indeed, there was a general lack of rigor, transparency, and community input surrounding the early process. In short, there was no plan early on; just a desire to replace the aging equipment. What followed was the formation of a playground committee led by citizen Michael Monteiro, and comprising citizens Mark Cullings, Lisa Donoghue (former), and Katie Zandbergen. This gave us the opportunity to create a more open and inclusive process that did not just reflect the intent of a few, but rather incorporated the varied interests of our community. It is never easy balancing such diverse, and sometimes opposing views. However, after gathering input from over two hundred citizens, and working closely with Town officials, playground equipment

manufacturers, local installers, and local landscape architect Sean Papich over the past two years, we believe we have a plan that does so exceptionally well.]

- Aesthetics. The aesthetics of the proposal are inappropriate for this site, which abuts a historic cemetery and is bordered by two local historic districts.
 - Equipment: Everything is bigger. Two of the three proposed pieces of equipment are 8' tall, taller than any of the pieces there now. The proposed spinner is an angular contemporary design, and the swing set is also a non-traditional design. While traditional designed swings are available, they're no smaller than the one being considered.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: From the beginning, one of our goals (and one of the Town's mandates) is that we keep to three pieces of equipment that are a similar size and scale as the original. Mark is right; the proposed swing set and climber are slightly taller than the equipment they are replacing. But the difference (e.g., just 11 inches in the case of the climber) is imperceptible from any distance. Moreover, the proposed climber is half the size of the current jungle gym (i.e., 90 cubic feet vs 175 cubic feet). The climber looks smaller because it is. Another one of our goals is to use colors that blend with the adjacent cemetery and natural surroundings. Aesthetics are extremely important to us too, which is one reason why we engaged with local landscape architect Sean Papich early on in the process. And while we understand that aesthetics are a matter of personal taste, we are perplexed as to why those who are concerned about the aesthetics of the proposed equipment are not equally concerned about the aesthetics of the dilapidated (and unsafe) equipment that is there now.]
 - Surface: The new, artificial surface required for the equipment requires excavation of a large area (2,500sq' feet or more) of what is now a grass field.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: Per the site plan created by landscape architect Sean Papich, the total square footage of the proposed play area is 1,715 square feet (not 2,500 square feet). That said, we cannot have a grass play surface. We all love the look of grass, but it does not provide a "firm, stable, and slip resistant" surface per state and federal accessibility guidelines. As a result, all new playgrounds in Hingham, like Kress Field and the new Hull Street playground, feature poured rubber play surfaces. However, unlike those larger playgrounds, ours features just three pieces of equipment. Therefore, most of the play surface will comprise natural wood chips with just enough rubber (colored to blend with the natural surroundings) to create a discrete pathway to the equipment so that children of all abilities may access it.]
- Traffic. Concerns about traffic, initially, I thought were overblown. Maybe not. What has been there (and, I note, still is) for generations is a tiny little play area generally used by young families out for a walk. The new area certainly will, at least for a while, attract more users. Parking is very limited, and I have no appetite for increasing it.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: Due to limited parking and the fact that the play area comprises only three pieces of equipment, the current play area attracts mostly pedestrian traffic. Similarly, our plan features just three pieces of equipment and includes no changes to the current parking situation at Powers Field. We are not increasing the capacity of the play area, so there is little reason to think that restoring it will create parking issues.]

- Trees. The area is near mature trees. Whether or not the excavation will have an effect on their health is a concern. Regarding the proposal, the town's tree warden has said. "Trees are an issue."

[Michael Monteiro wrote: Though the wood chip play surface and accessible pathway will require some minor excavation, we do not expect it to adversely impact any of the adjacent trees. The Town could change its mind, but it is worth noting that when the Planning Department and Selectmen both approved the original plan to restore the play area in June 2018, they did so with the condition that no trees would be removed.]

- Respect for the cemetery. There are some who feel the proposal is incompatible given its proximity to the cemetery. I'm sympathetic to this concern, however acknowledge that a playground has been there for about 100 years.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: There has been a playground next to the cemetery for around 100 years. The two have been compatible for a century and, in our view, there are no legitimate grounds for thinking that that will change in the future.]

- Other playgrounds. A large and popular playground is just a couple of blocks away.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: There is a larger playground nearby, located behind the Town Hall, but as was noted above, there has been a playground next to the cemetery for decades. Further, if the playground next to the cemetery went away, neighborhood parents and grandparents would either have to drive to the playground behind the Town Hall or they would have to walk across busy Route 228 and Main Street, next to Dependable Cleaners and Hingham Centre Pharmacy. Anyone who has had to do that knows how fast people drive (sometimes distracted) through that stretch, and just how scary that can be. Further, while the larger playground by the Town Hall is a valuable resource for the town, the goals of this project are to, through the restoration of our small-scale, local gem of a play area, give children and grandchildren in the neighborhood the same opportunities for outdoor play that were had by those children who came before them, and to bring our local community closer together through the amelioration of our shared outdoor space. As one family in the neighborhood noted, "any place that promotes fun, healthy outdoor activity for children, also promotes healthy neighborhood relationships." An important distinction is that this is a neighborhood play area, not a town playground, and we value it and seek to save it for that very reason.]

- Misc. Other users, fencing, drainage and surveyed property lines are some of the other questions that have arisen.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: We're not sure of the origins of these purported concerns, but the current proposal does not require fencing, nor are we aware of any issues related to surveyed property lines or drainage.]

We have tried, with the best of intentions, to fit a square peg into a round hole.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: We know many people within the community have fond memories of their children growing up playing on the existing equipment. The old swing, see-saw, and jungle gym have served our community well for several decades, but the equipment does not meet today's safety standards, and is dilapidated (the [word the Planning Department used](#) to describe the condition of the equipment) with hazardous metal protrusions, sharp edges, and failing paint that, given its age, likely contains lead. It is simply well beyond its useful life. Further, the play area is not accessible and the equipment is dangerously close to the wrought iron fence surrounding the cemetery per current fall zone guidelines. Moreover, the community has generously offered to fund the entire project. Reasonable people can disagree about the appropriateness of any proposal, but no one can credibly argue that the play area is currently safe. Our children deserve better.]

My suggestion is that this proposal be abandoned and that donors be offered either their money back or to allow it to remain in the town account for use to maintain or improve Powers Park.

[Michael Monteiro wrote: Our strong recommendation is that we move forward with this project, thereby providing a safe place for neighborhood children to play for decades to come and, through this, enhancing the local community for *all* families in the neighborhood.]

Mark Cullings
markcullings@me.com

[Michael Monteiro wrote:
Michael Monteiro & Katie Zandbergen
michael@michaelmonteiro.com
kbross15@gmail.com]