Plan welcoming, inclusive, fun play environments for all ages and abilities

Image Credit: Earthscape
Rainbow Park, Vancouver BC

Inspiration: Ground-oriented features that provide play opportunities for a range of abilities

Image Credit: Habitat Systems

Inspiration: Provide safe play features where children of all ages and abilities can play together.

Image Credit: Earthscape
Riverside Park, Guelph, ON

Inspiration: Use high contrast colours and textures to define pathways, spaces, and edges

Inspiration: Leave clear spaces next to play elements for wheelchair parking or care takers in wheelchairs

Background & Rationale

- Increasing inclusive play opportunities was identified as a priority in the PRMP (2019) and OCP (2022).

- Creating accessible, inclusive playgrounds was supported by the community during the public engagement phase.

- Opportunities exist to make many existing playgrounds in Courtenay more accessible and inclusive for all to enjoy.

- Inclusive play spaces allow children with disabilities to enjoy the benefits of play, including enhanced social skills, improved health, and having fun. In universal play spaces, all children learn valuable lessons about the world including diversity and acceptance.

- When planning the design of new playgrounds, consider the Rick Hansen Foundation's Seven Principles of Universal Design:

  » **Equitable Use:** The playground is fun for people with diverse abilities. All children should experience the thrill of a challenge.

  » **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

  » **Simple and Intuitive Use:** The playground is easy to understand, regardless of experience, knowledge, or language skills.

  » **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions.

  » **Tolerances for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

  » **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used effectively and comfortably with minimum fatigue.

  » **Size and Space for Approach and Use:** The design includes the appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Design Standards

- Each new playground should include some universally accessible design features. The degree and amount to which is included can be determined by geographic location, proximity to other playgrounds, play experiences, and community needs.

- Community Park Playgrounds are priority areas for accessible play elements and supporting amenities. City of Courtenay should identify at minimum one fully universally accessible Community Playground for re-development within the next 5 years. Candidate locations for consideration include Lewis, Woodcote, and Bill Moore parks.

- For Neighborhood Park Playgrounds and Nature Play Areas, integrate universal play features and supporting amenities within the overall design. Exact features are to be determined on a site-by site basis.

Design Standards *(cont'd)*

Mobility Challenges

- Plan for people with mobility challenges including wheelchair users, mobility device users (e.g., walker, braces, crutches, or canes), and people with other physical challenges:
  - » Create accessible paths of travel and multiple access routes in and out of the playground area (Refer to Standard 3).
  - » Ensure a maximum 5% longitudinal slope and 2% cross-slope for play areas and surrounding pathways.
  - » Provide a mix of ground-level equipment and elevated equipment that is accessible by ramp or transfer platform (Refer to Standard 6 and CSA-Z614.20 Annex H for recommended ratios of elevated to ground-oriented features).
  - » Provide open spaces next to play elements, transfer platforms, and furnishings to park wheelchairs or for caregivers in wheelchairs (refer to Standard 6 and 8).
  - » Include back rests on seating elements and play components with seats, such as swings (refer to Standard 6 and 8).

Vision Challenges

- Plan for people with vision challenges including colour-blindness, low vision, and blindness:
  - » Use strong contrasting colours and textures to orient users and define and differentiate spaces, pathways, edges, and grade changes.
  - » Avoid the use of red and green or green and blue components directly adjacent to each other, which are difficult to distinguish for people with colour blindness.
  - » Avoid the use of highly reflective surfaces.
  - » Consider integration of custom braille inlays in signage and wayfinding elements to guide users with vision challenges through the playground area.

Hearing Challenges

- Plan for people with hearing disabilities:
  - » Integrate clear sight lines to support hearing-disabled people to easily navigate spaces.
  - » Avoid elements that create scraping or sharp clanging sounds (e.g. stones and gravel on metal) which can be irritating for hearing-aid users. Choose soft or porous materials that absorb noise for key elements when possible (e.g. wood, bamboo).

Additional Considerations

Consider integration of play elements that encourage universal play experiences in multiple ways. For example, adding a fort or play house can provide a range of benefits:

- » Ground-oriented for users with mobility challenges
- » A quiet respite for users with sensory challenges,
- » Offers opportunities for imaginary play
- » Provides weather protection throughout the seasons
- » Low cost

Image Credit: Earthscape

Image Credit: Martins Park Boston
Martins Park, Boston MA

Inspiration: A sensory garden can create soothing opportunities for tactile and visual input

Maffeo Sutton Park, Nanaimo BC

Inspiration: An accessible merry-go-round provides an opportunity for an "intersection" or chance for many different children to come together and play.

Design Standards *(cont'd)*

Sensory Challenges

- Plan for people with autism spectrum disorder and other sensory processing challenges:
  - » Create clearly separate active and passive zones, including quiet, soothing, neutral spaces for retreat.
  - » Provide calming opportunities for tactile and visual sensory input including planting and water play (see Standard 6).
  - » Avoid visual over-stimulants like geometric patterns or stripes.
  - » Integrate play equipment that rocks, swings, and spins for children who crave movement to do so safely.
  - » Provide a non-climbable fence and gate surrounding the future fully universally accessible Community Playground. Children who are overstimulated can suddenly bolt to remove themselves from unsettling environments (see Standard 4).

Intersections

- Provide "intersections" or areas where all children can safely come together and share play experiences. Examples include:
  - » Swings, merry-go-rounds, platforms, or teeter totters that can accommodate multiple children, including those in wheelchairs.
  - » Informal seats / boulders placed within the playground area but separate from the main play structure for children who need more time to observe and adapt to a play environment to do so before "diving in".
  - » Sand play areas with universal access points and raised sand tables. Refer to CSA Standard CZ614.20 for recommended depths, composition, drainage, cover, and other design recommendations.
  - » Tunnels or ground-oriented features with climbing elements above for multiple children to enjoy at the same time.