

# 6

## Play Elements and Opportunities

Provide a wide range of play opportunities for all to enjoy



**Existing Conditions:** Ridge Playground



Image Credit: Berger Partnership  
Surrey Downs Park, Bellevue WA

**Inspiration:** Play area designed in circuit a (floor is lava!)



Parkgate Community Centre  
Playground, North Vancouver, BC

**Inspiration:** Areas for exploration



**Inspiration:** Specialty play features - Zip-line

### Background & Rationale

- Many community engagement respondents indicated that there are not enough fun or interesting things to do in Courtenay's park playgrounds and that many existing park playgrounds provide similar features and experiences. When visiting park playgrounds, respondents noted they would like to:
  - » Experience nature (59%)
  - » Be adventurous (55%)
  - » Gather with friends / family / others (55%)
- The top 5 play elements community engagement participants would most like to see in new and upgraded playgrounds are:
  - » New Play Structures (slides, swings, climbing features etc.) - 59%
  - » Nature Play Opportunities (planting, sand, rocks, logs) - 55%
  - » Splash Pad / Water Play - 43%
  - » Areas for Exploration (willow tunnels, stepping stone paths) - 42%
  - » Inclusive Play Features for All Ages and Abilities - 41%
- Opportunities exist to encourage different types of play in Courtenay's playgrounds, including active play, sensory play, creative play, imaginative play, manipulative play, social play, reflective play, risky play, and potential for multi-purpose spaces.
- The PRMP (2019) indicated an opportunity to expand the range of play features in Courtenay's park playgrounds, including:
  - » Opportunities for risky play
  - » Placement of exercise equipment in close proximity to park playgrounds
  - » Integration of nature play
  - » Opportunities to increase creativity and broaden user groups e.g., more interactive play environments and equipment and options for all ages of children, youth, and adults.
- Community Engagement participants noted that special, landmark designs and custom play features could encourage more positive activity in park playgrounds and attract visitation.

### Design Standards

#### Age Ranges

- Plan playgrounds to safely accommodate a wide range of ages, including tot lots (6 mos - 2 years), pre-school (3-5) and 5-12 (+).
  - » For Community Park Playgrounds, provide play features for all age ranges with separate areas for each divided by transition zones, pathways, planting areas, or gathering spaces.
  - » For Neighbourhood Park Playgrounds, provide either tot-lots, pre-school, or 5-12 year features, or some combination of all three. Playground locations for specific age ranges and features to be determined based on ongoing upgrades and need.

## Design Standards (cont'd)

- Consider opportunities for intergenerational use, including exercise equipment recreational amenities near playground areas, play elements that different age groups can enjoy at the same time (e.g., swings that allow adults and babies to swing together, climbing / bouldering walls for a range of ages), and supporting amenities like community garden plots and games tables (see Standard 9).

### Play Elements

- Organize play elements in a loops or circuits so children can easily navigate their way through spaces and from one feature to another. Circuits also help encourage imagination and games like Grounders or Floor is Lava.
- Install all play equipment per CSA Standards and manufacturer's requirements including subgrade preparation, footings, fall zones, offsets, and heights above grade, taking care to avoid entrapment zones and potential hazards.
- Install appropriate fall surfacing surrounding play equipment (see Standard 5).
- Integrate raised and ground oriented features for universal accessibility (see Standard 2).
- Include passive play opportunities in addition to active play (e.g. climbing features and play forts for quiet retreat or seating elements where kids can observe before participating).
- Use a combination of standard and special play features in playground designs:
  - » **Standard Play Features:** swings, slides, climbing structures, monkey bars, stepping stones, bridges, tunnels, merry-go-rounds / spinners, teeter-totters, play houses, nature play.
  - » **Special Play Features:** zip-lines, trampolines, parkour features, custom and landmark play features, creative play elements, musical play elements, exercise equipment, water play.
  - » For Community Park Playgrounds, integrate a mix of standard and special play features.
  - » For Neighbourhood Park Playgrounds, integrate standard play features. Special play features to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### Additional Considerations

With input from the community, interest groups, and City staff, consider developing a theme for each Community Playground to create unique experiences and destinations. Reinforce the theme through the selection of:

- » Materials, Colours and Patterns
- » Signage
- » Custom / Landmark Play Elements
- » Integrated Public Art



Image Credit:  
Earthscape

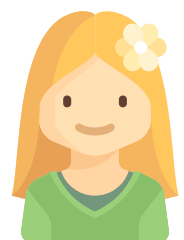




Image Credit: Greenworks  
Westmoreland Park, Portland OR

**Inspiration:** Nature play with sand and water to introduce an element of change in the play environment



Image Credit: Chicago Botanical Garden

**Inspiration:** Natural climbing features arranged in a circuit or obstacle course



Image Credit: Habitat Systems  
Maffeo Sutton Park, Nanaimo BC

**Inspiration:** Nature play elements (log tangles, log steppers, and discovery paths through planting) diversify the play experience and help strengthen sense of place



Maggie Daley Park, Chicago IL

**Inspiration:** Discovery pathways with stepping logs and wooden arches to create a sense of wonder

## Nature Play

- Provide opportunities for nature play in Community, Neighborhood, and Nature Parks (with specific focus on Nature Parks).
  - » When Sandwick Park is due for renewal, consider replacing the existing play structures with nature play elements.
  - » Assess opportunities to develop new nature playgrounds in Nature Parks or to convert existing Neighbourhood Park playgrounds to nature play areas. Determine locations based on geographic location, proximity to other playgrounds, community needs, support by a park management plan, and in the absence of any restrictive covenants. Public engagement is suggested prior to converting existing playgrounds to nature play areas.
- When allocating space in playground design, aim for the following areas for nature play opportunities:
  - » **Community Park Playgrounds:** Minimum 15% of the total playground area
  - » **Neighborhood Park Playgrounds:** Minimum 20% of the total playground area
  - » **Nature Park Playgrounds:** 100% of the playground area
- Plan the nature play area to be integrated with the overall flow of the playground, considering relationships to pathways, planting, and other play elements.
- Integrate a range of nature play features for all ages and abilities:
  - » **Natural Climbing Features:** boulders, climbing logs, and stepping stumps for balancing, climbing, jumping, and risky play. Arrange elements in an obstacle course or circuit that links to the overall playground layout.
  - » **Nature Discovery Features:** log tunnels, willow tunnels, “adventure pathways” through planting, gnome homes or fairy doors - elements that create a sense of wonder or mystery.
  - » **Topography and Landforms:** hills or mounds to climb or roll down, integration of landforms and play features including slides, climbing logs, and boulders.
  - » **Water Play:** integrated stormwater management strategies within play areas (e.g., bioswales, biofiltration ponds), or lazy rivers with a hose-bib connection to turn on and off.
  - » **Sand and Mud Play:** for sandcastles and structure building, creative play, imaginary play, and messy play.
  - » **Loose Parts Play:** loose logs, sticks, rocks, bark, leaves, pine cones, and surfacing materials (sand, mud) to invite imaginative play and allow children to modify and manipulate the play environment.
- Natural elements should meet CSA safety standards for fall zones. Integrate appropriate soft surfacing to the required depth within the entire fall zone surrounding all elevated climbing features (see Standard 5).
- When using natural materials such as wood or boulders, provide smooth surfaces. Sand to remove all protruding elements and sharp edges.

## Design Standards (cont'd)

- Source materials locally whenever possible.
- Limit the use of synthetic materials for nature-play elements.
- Plant trees and native plant material in the play environment, including opportunities to integrate urban agriculture and pollinator planting areas (see Standard 7).
- Integrate universal design principles in nature play areas (refer to Standard 2, including):
  - » Clear zones for parking wheelchairs.
  - » Raised elements where appropriate (e.g., raised sand / water table, raised urban agriculture planter, or table for loose parts play with wheelchair access).
  - » Ground oriented elements including play forts, willow tunnels, discovery pathways, etc.

### Creative Play

- Provide opportunities for creative play in Community Parks and select Neighbourhood Parks, including:
  - » **Multi-purpose Open Spaces:** for creative play and creative programming (building, painting, dancing, crafts etc. (see Standard 9).
  - » **Stages:** for performance and imaginary play.
  - » **Musical Play Features:** bongo drums, wind chimes, etc.
  - » **Drawing Surfaces:** chalk boards or paved areas for sidewalk chalk.

### Sensory Play

- Provide opportunities for sensory play in Community Parks and select Neighbourhood Parks, including:
  - » **Tactile Panels:** with a variety of different textures to feel or objects to manipulate.
  - » **Musical or Sound-producing Play Features:** (see above)
  - » **Sensory Gardens:** including plants with a variety of colours, textures, and scents (see Standard 7).
  - » **Water & Sand Play:** see Nature Play section on previous page.
  - » **Light Play:** interactive lit installations to enliven play environments in the evening hours.
  - » **A Variety of Swings:** for varied movement experiences, including basket swings, chairs, hammocks, and cocoon swings.



Image Credit: Lifespace Gardens

**Inspiration:** Raised planters for urban agriculture or tables for sand / loose parts play help foster universal access to nature play experiences



**Inspiration:** Paved areas provide blank canvases for a range of art projects including painting and sidewalk chalk



**Inspiration:** Interactive play installations with lighting to provide unique sensory experiences in the evening hours