Client:	City of Portland
Project Name:	Will's Playground, Portland, ME
	Community Workshop #1
Date:	October 26, 2026
Time:	5:00-6:30 PM
	Merrill Auditorium Rehearsal Hall

Attendees:

- Tatyana Vashchenko (TV), Project Manager, Portland Parks and Recreation Dept (PPRD)
- Cassie Bethoney (CB), Landscape Architecture Practice Leader, Weston & Sampson (W&S)
- Allison Gramolini (AG), Project Landscape Architect, Weston & Sampson (W&S)
- Rebecca Bagdigian (RB), Landscape Designer II, Weston & Sampson (W&S)
- Nathan Frazee (NF), Project Manager, Portland Parks and Recreation Dept (PPRD)
- Jodi Kurilla (JK), Project Manager, Portland Parks and Recreation Dept (PPRD)
- Jessica Teesdale (JT), Senior Executive Assistant, Portland Parks and Recreation Dept (PPRD)
- Jen DeRice (JR), Assistant Parks Director, Portland Parks and Recreation Dept (PPRD)
- Jack Phillips (JP), Executive Director, Portland Parks Conservancy (PPC)

Event Description:

The format for this event was a brief presentation of the project's timeline, background, summary of community feedback to date, site analysis, and design considerations, followed by an open discussion. Attendees were then invited to walk around the rehearsal hall where boards of the presentation slides were displayed in a gallery-style. Project team members were dispersed through the hall and encouraged attendees to add their own observations, preferences, and dreams for the playground to these boards.

Presentation:

- TV opened the presentation with a general project overview and introduced the W&S team and other city and partner organization members in attendance
- CB described the format for the evening's event, introduced AG and RB, and then explained who else is involved with the project (PPRD, W&S, and the playground working group)
- CB outlined the project timeline and highlighted further community input opportunities
- AG gave a background on the history of the site, starting with the 1828 creation of the Eastern Promenade, through to the early 2000s when the play equipment was last replaced.
- CB summarized feedback from the online survey which had been open for about a week.

- CB talked through the site analysis starting with a larger scale analysis of circulation before zooming in on site amenities, viewsheds, utilities, sun/shade, and slope.
- CB discussed various design considerations involved in the renovation, including material choices, age range, connection points, and safety/containment.
- CB closed the presentation by outlining how community members can continue to contribute feedback to the project
    - Three community workshops
    - Two online surveys
    - Pop-up engagement events

General Comments:

During the gallery portion of the meeting, feedback provided by the attendees followed a few main themes:

- SHADE
    - The lack of shade on the site currently was brought up by almost every attendee and reflects the feedback we've heard in previous engagement sessions
    - In the summer the site can get incredibly hot, and while the breeze from the ocean occasionally provides some relief, the play equipment itself gets extremely hot
    - Attendees suggested adding more shade trees and shade structures, as well as strategically placing seating and play areas (especially for younger children) in the shade

- VIEWS
    - When attendees were asked what their favorite element of the site is, the majority listed the views from the site as their favorite
    - Many reflected positively about enjoying being able to take in the view while their children played
    - Attendees suggested they'd like to see these views emphasized more or improved with selective pruning through the vegetated slope
    - Some attendees also mentioned they would not like the view to be detracted from by the introduction of large, brightly colored play structures and would instead prefer to see play elements that don't block the view and blend more into the landscape

- ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY
    - Apart from shade, the element that could use the most improvement is access into the playground, which is currently undefined and difficult
        - Attendees wanted to see a more inclusive route from the street into the playground instead of the steep slope that currently exists
        - A more accessible route from the lower food truck parking lot and Cutter Street lot was also mentioned
    - Feedback was also aimed at connecting to the mid-slope trail
    - When thinking about the future playground, attendees emphasized wanting to see an accessible route that would link different play elements
        - With the current wood chips, some attendees mentioned difficulties transversing the wood chips with strollers and mobility devices

- AMENITIES
    - Attendees were asked what ideas they had for Will's Playground, and several amenities were listed:
        - More seating, more seating in shade (3)
        - Picnic tables (2)
        - Water bottle filler (2)
        - Stage (2)
        - Bathrooms, bathrooms with diaper changing areas (2)
            - Attendees mentioned that the East End Beach bathrooms and Eastern Prom Public bathrooms were occasionally too far to reach during children's bathroom "emergencies"
        - Vendor cart space
        - Movie night space
        - Bike racks
        - Hammock posts/stands

- PLANTING AND MATERIALS
    - Multiple attendees were interested in incorporating edible planting into the playground, citing Portland's foraging community
        - Blueberries were mentioned specifically
    - There was also an interest in using planting to "zone" different areas of the playground
        - A few attendees mentioned combining native planting with other natural materials like boulders and logs/tree stumps to pay homage to coastal Maine without being overtly "theme-y"
    - Playground enclosure:
        - A small group of neighborhood parents mentioned they strongly preferred the renovated playground to remain unfenced
            - A few had listed their favorite aspect of the playground currently was that it is unfenced
        - Attendees who preferred to have a playground that was enclosed cited safety concerns (being so close to the street), having children with special needs sometimes bolting, and increased peace of mind when watching over multiple children at once
    - Attendees mentioned the opportunity to tap into local artisans to have a hand in contributing to portions of the playground
    - As mentioned above, there was some negative feedback on the woodchips currently on site
        - Attendees would prefer to see woodchips in strategic areas vs. throughout the entire site
        - Some attendees said their small children had trouble crawling over the chips, or would try to eat them

- PLAY
    - Attendees mentioned wanting to see expanded opportunities for multi-generational play, especially for teens

- Also emphasized was creating more inclusive and adaptive play opportunities
- Some attendees wanted to see some blurring between the wooded slope area and the playground, with the playground expanding into the slope
- Individual play pieces called for were embankment slides, tunnels, spinning features, and a zipline
- As mentioned earlier, a comment was left asking for a smaller structure to be used so that it doesn't block the views of the water

- UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES
  - An attendee mentioned that there was an opportunity to feature the wind on the site somehow, maybe through windsocks or some other sculptural element
    - This also ties in with a desire to see more art and "whimsy" in the playground beyond the play structures themselves
  - Another mentioned wanting to see the renovated playground incorporate the site's history, hydrology, geology, and local ecology
  - One comment referenced the scavenger hunt at the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden in Boothbay as a potential play enhancement
  - There was some discussion around playground themes
    - About half of the attendees said they wanted to avoid typical Maine "tropes" or clichés
    - The other half of attendees liked the idea of having a unifying theme that would complement the playground's coastal location
      - A previous version of Will's Playground had a lighthouse play structure, which was mentioned by a few attendees
    - Overall, attendees wanted to see something "uniquely Portland" that would match how spectacular the site is

Minutes submitted by: Rebecca Bagdigian