



**CITY OF LARKSPUR
Staff Report**

July 15, 2021 Parks & Recreation
Commission Meeting

DATE: July 8, 2021
TO: PRC Commissioners Koepfel, Blauvelt, Friedel, Harrison and Sunshine
FROM: Rita Schoch, Public Works Administrative Analyst II
Julian Skinner, Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Dolliver Park playground modifications

ACTION REQUESTED

Recommendation by the Park & Recreation Commission for staff to support proposed draft design and commence public outreach for a new play area for children under 5 years old at Dolliver Park playground

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

A new tot play zone to be located within the footprint of the current Dolliver Park playground is proposed. It is conceptualized as a play area designed for children under 5 and separated by the rest of the playground by a low perimeter fence for safety. The project would be completely funded by a donation from a private citizen.

DISCUSSION

In 2015 when the Dolliver Park playground was upgraded, the old play equipment was replaced with new in a like-for-like fashion (see Attachment A). The resulting configuration is comprised of five pieces of play equipment -- four pieces for children 5 to 12 years old. The one piece of equipment for children under 5 is tot swing set, which requires adult assistance to get in and out.

Well-balanced playgrounds offer play opportunities children to develop physical, cognitive, and emotional skills in a healthy and age-appropriate way. They allow children build and master skills through play that is challenging yet achievable because the equipment is scaled to their physical size and cognitive-emotional stage. This balance results in a play experience more enjoyable and rewarding for children and their caretakers -- children play longer and more independently as they navigate age-appropriate equipment while caretakers can relax when their children do not need constant adult intervention. Most parents can recognize a child's sense of achievement through the "I did it myself!" declaration.

Dolliver Park's playground is a popular and well attended; and the lack of equipment suitable for children under 5 is not ideal. Caretakers regularly allow younger children to use on equipment designed for older children because no other options are available to them. They must hover next to their wards to assist and

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monitor play. Another concern is for safety. The existing split rail fence has the potential, especially for younger children, to wander onto busy Madrone Avenue or into the creek should caretakers be momentarily preoccupied.

A few months ago, a Larkspur citizen who regularly visit the Dolliver playground with his children, ages 1 and 3, contacted staff with an offer to fund the purchase and installation of new play equipment designed for children under 5. Staff has since collaborated with the citizen on a draft playground design for the creation of a “tot play zone” (see Attachment B). The tot play zone is conceptualized as a separate play area for children under 5 located within the footprint of the current playground. Varying sizes of new play equipment pieces are being considered as well as a short, perimeter fence and benches. The proposed tot zone would improve play opportunities for younger children and enjoyment for caretakers.

Staff believes that the proposed project greatly benefits Larkspur’s young families as it fills a void in the current playground configuration. To create this new tot play zone, however, an existing climber will need to be removed and relocated to another park. While staff is loath to take away existing equipment, there are two considerations that tip the scale toward this decision (see Attachment C):

- a) Play features on the metal climber, such as overhead and rung ladders, can also be found the large play structure which will remain. No unique skill building features are added by the metal climber. Children, ages 5 to 12, who are the target group for the metal climber, will still have the large play structure, a ground spinner, and a 3-bay swing set at their disposal;
- b) Enormous benefits will be gained by the creation of a new tot play area to serve families with younger children who have only had a single swing set in this playground that is specifically designed for their age group. This is a case where a relatively small sacrifice will benefit a currently underserved group.

Assuming PRC’s support for this project, prior to any work commencing, staff will conduct public outreach. The community will have an opportunity to see the draft playground design, to weigh in on proposed play equipment, be given a choice to select certain play features, and to comment on their reaction to the removal of the climber. An invitation to participate in an on-line survey will be posted at the playground and by email to the Recreation Department’s family database.

Based on feedback from the outreach efforts, the tot play zone design will be drafted for final review at a future PRC meeting and recommendation to enter the construction phase.

FISCAL IMPACT

Project costs, including preliminary design, play equipment purchase, installation, and site work, will be funded through a private donation by a Larkspur resident.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of the concept design for a Tot Play Zone area within the Dolliver Park playground and recommendation to staff to proceed with public outreach and final design.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Schoch, Public Works Administrative Analyst II

Attachments

1. [2015 Playground Equipment Update Schedule](#)
2. [Proposed Draft Tot Zone Design](#)
3. [Climber Removal Exhibits](#)