



# Nature Play Spaces for Acton Schools

Overheard at the  
Community Gardens  
planting project at the  
Morrison Farm:

“All my kids need is time to dig for worms,  
we could stay here all day.”

# HISTORY AND HURDLES

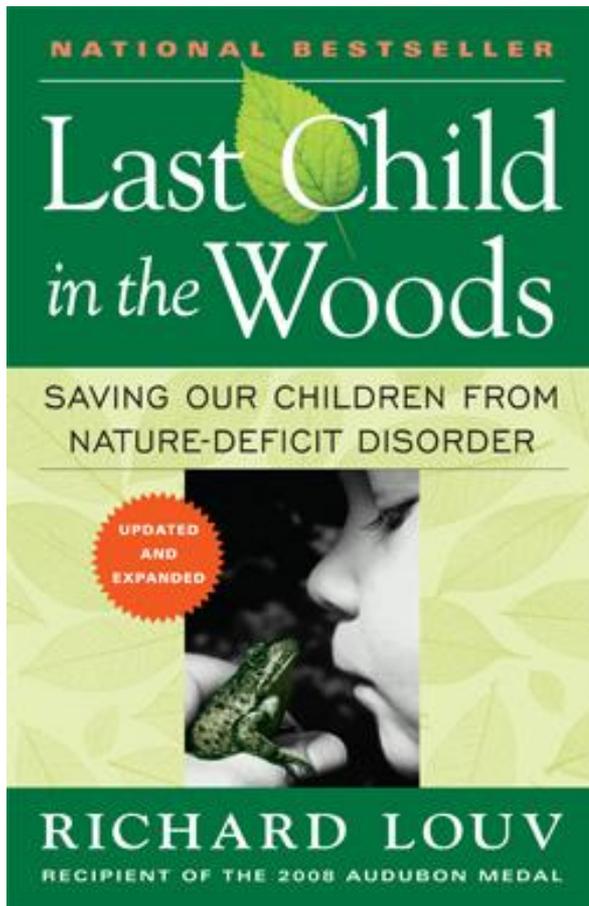


- As a district, we have wanted to add natural play areas to our schools for a number of years, but our efforts always stall due to the lack of funding, made more complicated by the complexities of design, including the need to make the areas accessible to children of all abilities.
- We hope that CPA can move us over the highest hurdle by funding our planning.
- Plans will include involvement of faculty, parents and students. We know that a breadth of ideas will emerge and our schools will be able to offer dynamic, natural play spaces for children to explore.

# CONNECTING TO THE CPA 2014 GOALS

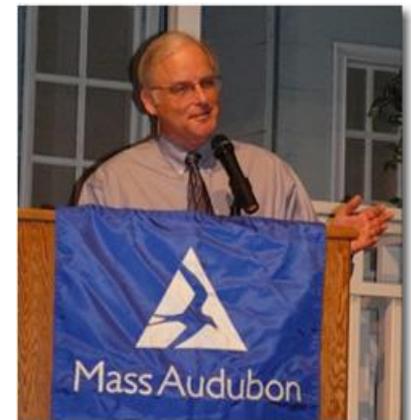
- The CPA defines “active or passive recreational use (as) including, but not limited to, the use of land for community gardens, trails, and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the **use of land as a park, playground** or athletic field.”
- We would like to build natural play spaces on six school sites, including the Administration Building (pre-school), two at the Parker Damon Building, and one each at the Douglas, Gates, and Conant schools.





“Children are smarter, more cooperative, happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors.”

– Cheryl Charles, *Children and Nature Network*



# HEALTH BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

- Being physically active outdoors and in nature can improve children's health.<sup>1</sup>
- Greater access to green views and green environments yields better cognitive functioning; more proactive, more effective patterns of life functioning; more self-discipline and more impulse control; greater mental health overall; and greater resilience in response to stressful life events.<sup>2</sup>
- Less access to nature is linked to exacerbated attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, more sadness and higher rates of clinical depression.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>(McCurdy, L. E., Winterbottom, K. E., Mehta, S. S., & Roberts, J. R. (2010). Using nature and outdoor activity to improve children's health. *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*, 40(5), 102-117.)

<sup>2</sup> Kuo, Frances E. (Ming), (2010) Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat, National Recreation and Parks Association

# DISTRICT COMMITMENT AND LONG-RANGE GOALS

- The District recognizes a need for expanded self-directed recreational opportunities outdoors (e.g. at recess) in order give students:
  - more choices in their activities
  - More play opportunities in which children make their own decisions
  - more opportunities to interact with nature-based activities in a setting more natural than a lawn or playing field
  - more options for students who are less interested in competitive games and sports



# THE NEED FOR EXPANDED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ACTON

## From the 2014 Community Preservation Plan:

- As Acton's population has grown, so has the popularity of its recreation programs. **There is a need for recreational opportunities to be broadened to include all age groups and interests ...**
- Improvements have been made in the areas of recreation, however **there is still a need to serve Acton's significant population of families with young children. As playgrounds age, further investment will be needed in this area.**
- These natural play areas, properly designed, will help “preserve the remaining elements of Acton's rural character” by moving our school properties closer to their rural roots.



# DISTRICT FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

- The FY 2014 AB Regional budget is paying local landscape architect Holly Ben-Joseph for consulting.
- Preliminary work included:
  - Meetings with the natural play area planning group
  - Site visits to two schools
  - Assistance in writing the CPC grant proposal



# PROPOSED USE OF CPA FUNDS



## 6 Sites included in proposal:

**Douglas, Conant, Gates, McCarthy-Towne, Merriam and Administration Building**

### Tasks (activities would commence in May, 2014)

**Cost Per Site**

**Totals**

**Task 1:** Walking the site, collecting information, taking photos. Develop base plans for each site using surveys provided by the Schools' Facilities Department.

\$1,500

\$9,000

**Task 2:** Kick-off meeting - PowerPoint presentation & brainstorming with building-based planning committees

\$1,500

\$9,000

**Task 3:** Develop a schematic design sketch for each site and hold one meeting to discuss the designs with the committees.

\$1,500

\$9,000

**Task 4:** Develop a Final Master Plan for each school and hold one meeting to discuss the plan with the committees. Review cost estimates, phasing, and task lists for volunteers.

\$2,250

\$13,500

**Total**

**\$40,500**

### Cost-Sharing

minimum of 25% cost-sharing from non-appropriated funds

**(\$10,125)**

**Request from CPA funds**

**\$30,375**

# FISCAL IMPACT AND FEASIBILITY

## Consistent with CPA guidelines:

- The **initial cost** is quite reasonable, and multiple sources of funding will be sought for completion of the project.
- **Ongoing maintenance** and program costs will be the responsibility of the District.
- **Feasibility** – We have support from many areas of the school community, including parents, teachers and administration.



# CONNECTING TO CPA 2014 GOALS - RECAP

Consistent with the CPA goals, this project will:

- ❖ increase/expand recreational facilities by taking existing town-owned property and expanding its recreational usage potential;
- ❖ address community needs and fill a void in the community by
  - ❖ creating spaces in which children may explore nature and
  - ❖ connect with one another in a self-directed environment under the supervision (but not direction) of adults;
- ❖ maximize number of people affected by and benefiting from the play areas by:
  - ❖ including elementary students during school hours and
  - ❖ being available to local families after school hours and on weekends;
- meet the needs of a diverse community by encouraging students to return after school with their families.



I like to play indoors  
better 'cause that's  
where all the  
electrical outlets are.

- Fourth grader in San  
Diego

