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Kennedy School Playground Renovation

SCPD Discussion | February 11, 2026

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Introductions

City of Somerville Department of

Public Space & Urban Forestry

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SomerVoice Website

Parks Instagram

Questions or Comments

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Engagement To Date

School-Based Engagement

Numerous meetings with school administrators

Preliminary presentation to school staff

Shadowing teachers during recess to observe playground use

Flyering at the school during various pick-up and drop-off times

Family & Community Events

Tabling and sharing project information at multiple school events, including:

Back-to-School Night

Parent-Teacher Conferences

PTA Harvest Fair

Daytime event for students with additional needs

Afterschool full-class event

Holiday Concerts (Tuesday and Wednesday performances)

Community Meetings

Community Meeting #1 (December)

Round Table on Inclusivity

Surveys & Feedback

Teacher-specific survey

Community Survey #1

Community Survey #2, based on the first conceptual design (Nearly 250 responses collected)

Funding & Advocacy

CPA (Community Preservation Act) funding outreach

Letters of support

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Goals of the Project

The Kennedy Schoolyard will serve students during school hours and operate as a public park during summers and non-school hours.

As Somerville's FIRST INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND, it will be designed to be safe, be durable and easy to maintain, and respond to the

needs of both the school and the community.

- Inclusive Play: Incorporating universally inclusive design principles to support creativity, interaction, and multiple

forms of play for children of all abilities; and complying with ADA standards to improve access and connectivity for

persons with disabilities.

- Active & Passive Recreation: Creating opportunities to play, relax, and connect.
 - Educational Features: Adding elements that foster learning and exploration.
 - Shade & Comfort: Ensuring shaded, comfortable areas for children and caregivers.
 - Site Reconfiguration: Exploring new layouts for the parking lot and bus drop-off to allow for playground expansion
- while meeting school needs.
- Sustainability & Resilience: Developing a stormwater strategy, increasing permeability, using resilient best practices,
 - and expanding tree and pollinator plantings.

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A full site plan showing the project boundaries enclosed by Elm, Cherry, and Sartwell roads. The plan highlights a parking lot on the right side and an expanded playground, made possible by reconfigured parking and a new bus drop-off area.

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Plan A prioritizes imaginative and exploratory play over athletic uses. The playground is organized around a large, flexible central play area, with athletic elements placed along the perimeter. Features include a half basketball court, varied landforms, swings, ramps, a hillside slide, a multi-level play structure, and integrated seating. Shade is primarily provided by trees, with an additional shade structure where needed.

Entering from the main playground entrance, the Kennedy School is on the right and a wide asphalt corridor extends straight ahead, marked with ground graphics counting from 0 to 100. A curving pathway separates sports elements and swings near the entrance from the main play structures. As the path gradually rises in elevation, it leads to a poured-in-place

rubber hillside that connects to the second level of the central play structure. Slides, climbing elements, and ramps return users to the lower play areas.

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Plan B balances athletic activity with play-based experiences. The layout features a full basketball court and a large central play area, with open space located near the school building and along the left side of the site. Seating is distributed throughout the playground, with shade provided primarily by formal shade structures rather than trees. Custom concrete and wood seating elements also function as informal play features for climbing, sitting, and gathering. Multiple large play structures are linked by ramps, pathways, and bridges, along with an obstacle course that supports active play and exploration.

From the main entrance, the Kennedy School is on the right and a wide asphalt corridor extends straight ahead, marked with painted ground games such as four square and hopscotch. An angled pathway loops through the playground, connecting all play areas. In the back corner nearest Sartwell Street are the basketball court and wall ball area. The mostly flat site accommodates a variety of large play structures and ground-based play elements.

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Plan C emphasizes active sports and movement. The playground includes one full basketball court and one half court, with a large swing area and a dedicated wall-ball zone nearby. Additional features include a smaller play structure, an obstacle course, and a large open area for free play and running. Seating and an outdoor classroom are located beneath trees, creating shaded gathering spaces. Pathways loop through the site, connecting all courts and play elements for continuous movement and access.

From the main entrance, the Kennedy School is on the right and a wide asphalt corridor extends straight ahead. A large basketball court sits at the center of the playground, with swings, play structures, and the outdoor classroom arranged around it.

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Feedback emphasized the importance of designing playgrounds that prioritize accessibility, inclusivity, and sensory engagement for users of all abilities. Key recommendations include wider, smoothly curving pathways; clear signage with braille; and thoughtful consideration of caregivers. Ramps should be standard for all multi-level structures, with sensory and interactive elements integrated throughout and accessible at multiple heights. High-contrast colors, varied textures, braille, and non-verbal communication boards support visually impaired and non-verbal users. Fitness and balance elements benefit from handrails and multi-level options, while companion and nest swings, spinning ground-level elements, and a variety of swing types were strongly favored. Slides should include transfer platforms and avoid swirling or enclosed designs that may limit accessibility.

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Next Steps

- Continued conversations with school administration
- Community Meeting February 26th at 6pm
- Construction to begin Summer of 2026

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