

RECREATION

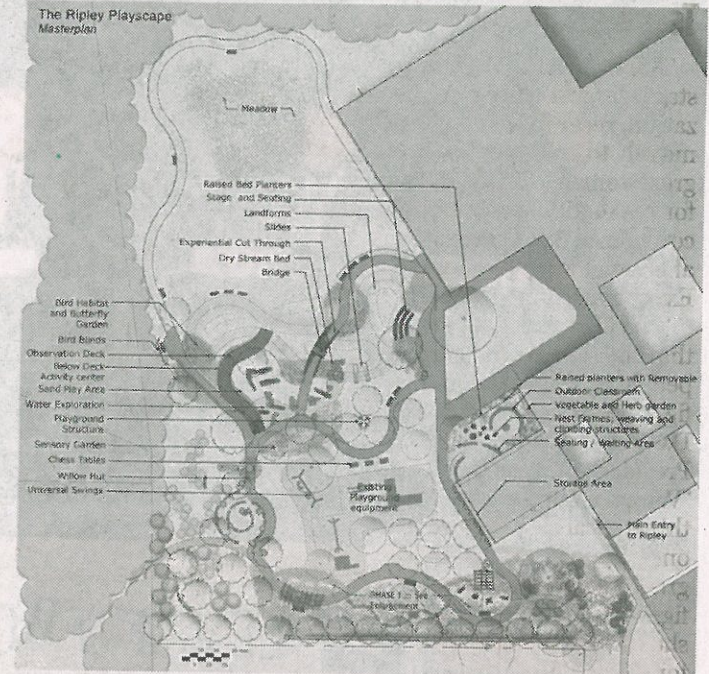
A nature park for kids

Plans are under way for a playscape at the Ripley building

Once upon a time — a very long time ago — going out to play often meant a romp in the great outdoors, one that fed the imagination as richly as it fed the spirit. Times have changed, but group of Concordians is determined to restore that experience.

Earlier this month, a group of volunteers met behind the Ripley Administration building on Meriam Road to stake out an outdoor classroom and nature loop for the planned “Playscape at Ripley,” a nature park for all ages and abilities to be constructed on town land in Concord. Planning for the playscape has been in the works for a few years, but with the formalization of a Steering Committee this winter — the Friends of the Playscape at Ripley — and the passage of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding at Town Meeting late last month, the journey is now under way.

The concept of a “playscape” — a landscape designed to intentionally connect visitors with nature through imaginative and sensory-based activities — has grown in popularity in the 21st century as educators have recognized the lasting benefits of unbounded, exuberant, and often delightfully unpredictable experiences that come from engaging with nature. With this playscape’s location and design, it is hoped that visitors will develop a deepened appreciation for Concord’s extensive and unique natural areas and their stewardship and for the rich land history of the town’s East Quarter, while playing and interacting in this safe and fostering environment. Advisory Board member and mentor Dr. Lou Casagrande, former CEO of the Boston Children’s Muse-



A map of the playscape planned for outside of the Ripley Administration Building. COURTESY IMAGE

across all demographics: “All kids need to have the kinds of experiences that we are creating here.”

About the project

The playscape project, designed by AGER Group of Boston, includes interactive areas such as bird blinds, chess tables, raised vegetable and herb gardens for sparking the interest of all generations of visitors. The loop trail around the playscape and meadow garden will be a standard unit of distance so walkers can track their steps and exercise activities. Elements such as the reinforced stone dust path with corded guides for visually impaired walkers, raised garden beds, sensory garden, and shallow hill are designed to engage visitors of all physical and intellectual abilities on physical, social and sensory levels.

“We are very excited to start realizing the promise of this special spot and are very grateful for the \$70,000

Committee chairman. This amount, representing donations and grants from the Concord Community Preservation Fund, Middlesex Savings, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, Garden Club of Concord, and private residents has made it possible to begin construction of the project this spring.

Phase 1 includes construction of the first portion of the loop trail, the outdoor classroom/meeting circle, a portal to the Gowing’s swamp nature path, removal of invasive plant material, and installation of native plant landscaping. The fully accessible nature loop trail and surrounding conservation land can be accessed via the Phase 1 trailhead at the Ripley School parking lot and is expected to be completed this summer. Phase 1 costs are projected to be \$130,000, while total project costs are estimated to be \$450,000.

For more information, to sign up for updates, and /or to contribute, visit the Playscape