



MALCOLM X POP-UP NATURE-BASED PLAYFUL LEARNING SPACE ART COMMISSION SUBMITTAL

23 June 2025

To whom it may concern,

My name is Alex Gilliam and I am the Co-Founder of Tiny WPA, a non-profit that helps build better designed spaces, stronger places and equity in Philadelphia by supporting citizen-led design improvements and the growth of 'Building Heroes'. I am writing to apply for Art Commission approval of a pop-up nature-based playful learning space in Malcolm X Park that we are designing and building with community members at the behest of the Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation.

Location

The proposed location of the pop-up nature-based play space is in a southern triangle/quadrant of Malcolm X Park in West Philadelphia (please see attached). This location has been chosen by stakeholders, PPR staff, and Tiny WPA for its close proximity to the existing playground but also for its adequate distance from the existing playground so that the pop-up nature-based playful learning space is not impacted by demolition or construction. Further reasons for choosing this location include the site being shaded for a good portion of the day; adequate clearance from the roots of existing trees; proximity to the nearby bathrooms, gazebo, and benches; and a lack of flooding that other areas of the Park can regularly experience.

Purpose

With grant funding supporting the creation of playful learning installations at public parks in hand from Springpoint Partners, the staff at Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation (PPR) hired Tiny WPA to work with stakeholders at Malcolm X Park to identify and then prioritize possible playful improvements to the Park. Through an onsite community picnic table build day, three community meetings conducted in partnership with PPR staff, and a variety of meetings with key stakeholders from the Friends of Malcolm X, it became clear that the community's main priority is to develop a pop-up nature-based playful learning space in an unused area in the Park.

The primary goal of the space—shared by PPR and stakeholders—is that play and families hanging out never disappears from the Park during the demolition of the existing aged playground as well as the construction of its replacement. As such this pop-up nature-based playful learning space will be built onsite with stakeholders before demolition of the existing playground begins. After the various community meetings as well as two participatory design sessions with students from the adjacent Global Leadership

Academy, it was crystal clear that the secondary goal of the space is to create more opportunities for nature-based play and exploration. As such there is a focus in the design on not only using natural materials but also drawing attention to the flora and fauna that can be found in the Park. To make things much more interesting, students from the Global Leadership Academy had the great idea to not just focus on what's currently in the Park but also what was there hundreds and even thousands of years ago. The students' ideas have led to an overall theme that is focused on a 'travel through time', with the site being roughly divided into three zones; swamps (dinosaurs), tundra (ice age), and present. Community members requested more informal play/gathering space, so we have designed a historical-tree-seating area that can also be used for climbing, hopping, and balancing.

The intent is that the pop-up nature-based playful learning space will be a part of Malcolm X Park for about three years before it is de-installed. As such we are not going to use concrete for any ground connections and have designed elements that require nothing more than gravel-set ground beams and posts for anchoring. We are using wood chips for a safety surface and mounds because they can be easily replenished as well as cleaned up by PPR. We will source the logs and stumps in collaboration with PPR from trees onsite that need to be pruned and/or are dead and dying. Additional building materials are affordable yet durable and easily maintainable.

A final goal for the project is to help support and grow the Friends of Malcolm X. Mr. Greg, Chinere, and others have done an incredible job at Malcolm X Park. However, while lots of folks say that they want to help the Friends group be stewards of the Park, relatively few have transitioned into these roles. Tiny WPA's speciality is not just designing but also building improvements WITH stakeholders in a manner that builds skills, new connections, ownership, and community power. We have designed most of the elements in the nature-based playful learning space to maximize opportunities for stakeholders to help in the building process. Last summer's picnic table building event with the Friends group was a great success and we are so excited to expand on that potential and do more.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

My best,

Alex Gilliam

Contact

Alex Gilliam, C/O Tiny WPA
3145 W. Jefferson Street
Philadelphia, PA 19121
[**alex@tinywpa.org**](mailto:alex@tinywpa.org)
[**@tinywpa**](#)
917-335-5518

MALCOLM X NATURE PLAY

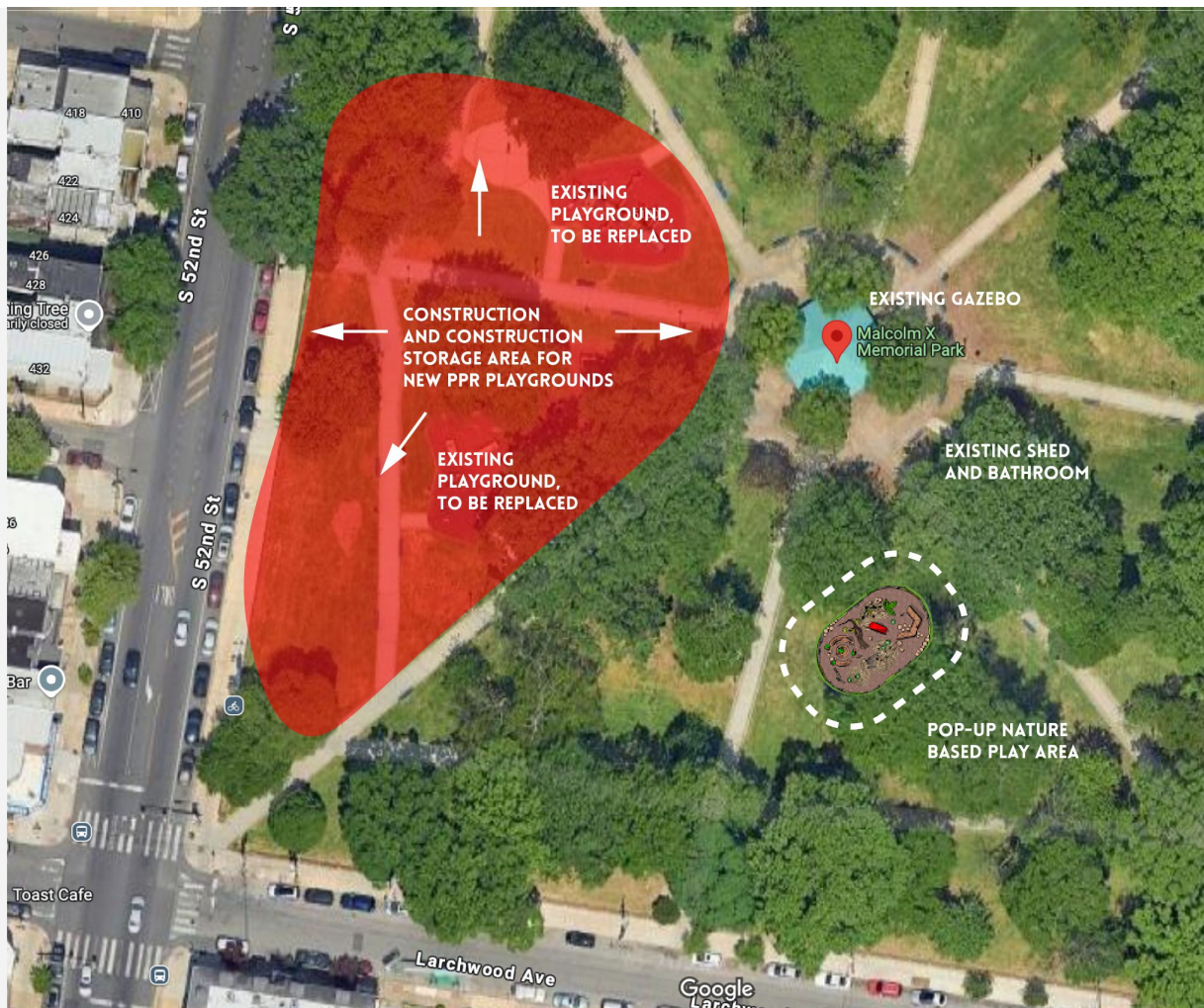
A pop-up nature based playful learning
space at Malcolm X Park

Site



MALCOLM X

A Pop-Up Nature Based Playful Learning And Community Space



MALCOLM X

A Pop-Up Nature Based Playful Learning And Community Space



SITE CONDITIONS

A large green section located next to the shed and gazebo that is used for community gatherings. This site was chosen by PPR, the Friends of Malcolm X and Tiny WPA for:

Its close proximity to seating, the existing gazebo, and the existing storage shed and bathroom.

Its close proximity to but adequate distance away from the existing and future (renovated by PPR) playground so that demolition and construction of the new PPR playground won't impact the nature based playful learning space.

Its lack of flooding that occurs in a number of other places in the Park.



Design Engagement



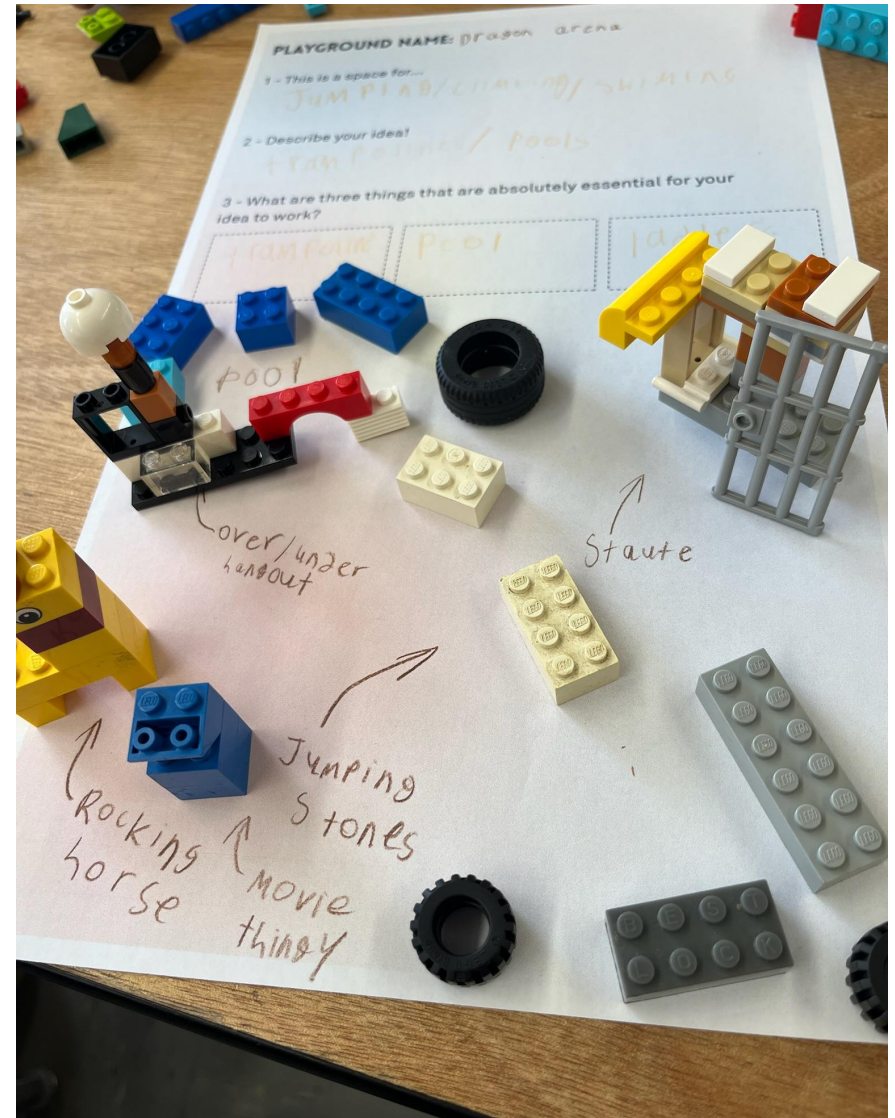
COMMUNITY PICNIC TABLE BUILD

In the summer of 2024 Tiny WPA built three picnic tables in the park with stakeholders. 12 months later, all three picnic tables are well used, in good shape, and folks frequently move them throughout the park to meet their needs.



COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Tiny WPA partnered with PPR and the Friends of Malcolm X Park to conduct three participatory design workshops over the course of four months.



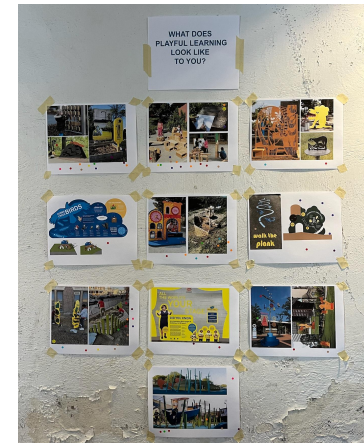
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Tiny WPA conducted two after-school workshops with Global Leadership Academy students, whose school is adjacent to Malcolm X Park. They are excited to helped build the new playspace.

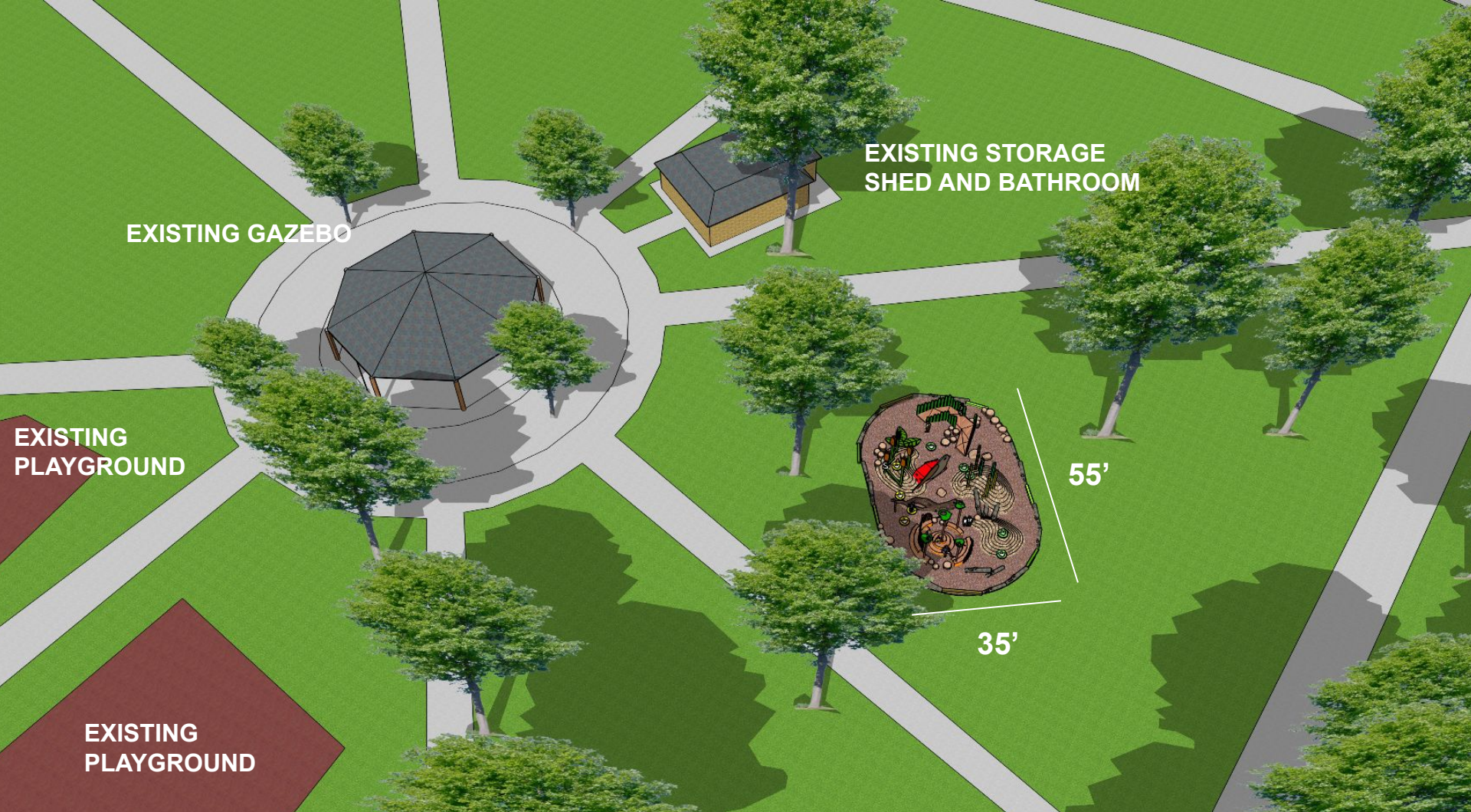
KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

- ACTIVE PLAY and RELAXATION are the most important activities to the staff, students, and South West leaders
- The tree swing needs to stay
- Local nature is the most important theme that needs to be highlighted in the space
- Everybody wanted sensory and imaginary play (sand/dirt pit), and larger than life play structures to climb

The three main things people would like to do in this space are **actively play** (climb, throw ball, run, jump, dig), **sit** (relax, community gathering, hanging out) and **connect with/learn about nature**.



Layout



MALCOLM X

A Pop-Up Nature Based Playful Learning And Community Space



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MALCOLM X

Playful Learning And Community Space at Malcolm X Park

Large Structures



'FLOWING' TUNDRA RAMP

A place to run, climb, and play.

Structure overall dimensions: 15'l x 7'w x 5'h

Max platform/ramp height: 24"

'Grass' slat spacing: 3.5"

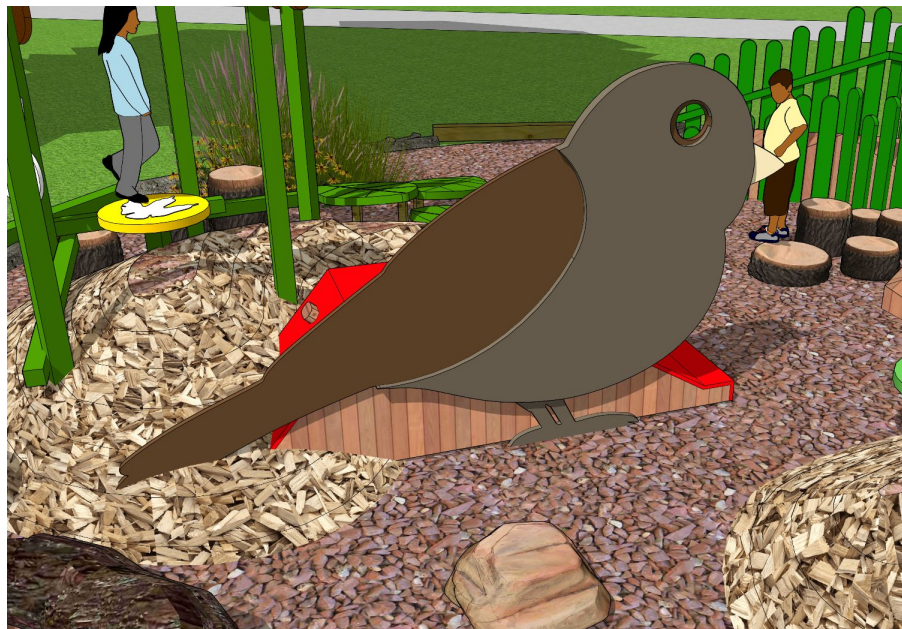
Materials-

Painted pine 2 x 6 grass slats

5/4 cedar decking

2 x 4 and 2 x 6 pressure treated pine framing

4 x 4 ground beams dry set in gravel



BIRD SLIDE

A place to climb, slide, and explore the Park's birds.

Structure overall dimensions: 10'l x 5'h x 3'd

Max platform height: 24"

Slide slope: 30 degrees

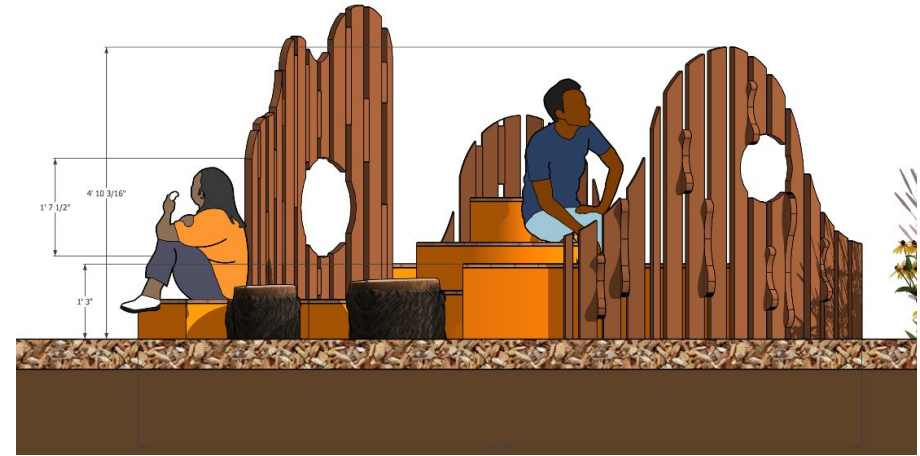
Materials-

$\frac{3}{4}$ " HDPE slide

$\frac{3}{4}$ " layered and painted Extira or Duraply panels

2 x 4 and 2 x 6 pressure treated pine framing

4 x 4 ground beams dry set in gravel



TREE HANGOUT PIT

A place to climb, gather, and relax.

Structure overall dimensions: 12'dia x 4.5'h

Slat/'bark' spacing: 1.5"

Materials-

2x4 cedar slats/'bark'

5/4 cedar decking

2 x 4 and 2 x 6 pressure treated pine and CNC'd $\frac{3}{4}$ " Duraply ribs/rings for framing

$\frac{1}{8}$ " HDPE or ACM for vertical riser wrap

4 x 4 ground beams dry set in gravel



'SWAMP' OBSTACLES

A place to balance, stretch, hop, and weave.

Overall dimensions: 1'w x 7"d x 7.5'h

Max cattail height: 9'

Max 'leap pad' height: 16"

Materials-

Paint washed 4 x 4's dry set 40" in the ground with gravel

Paint washed 4 x 4 'balance' beams connected with 6" coated Headlok's ¾" painted Extral 'tails'

Duraply 'leap pad' bases with paint washed 5/4 cedar decking

4 x 4 pressure treated posts for 'leap pad' bases set 40" in the ground with gravel

Small Structures



FOSSIL AND LEAF LEAP PADS

A place to jump and explore history.

Overall dimensions: 2' dia x 1' - 2' h

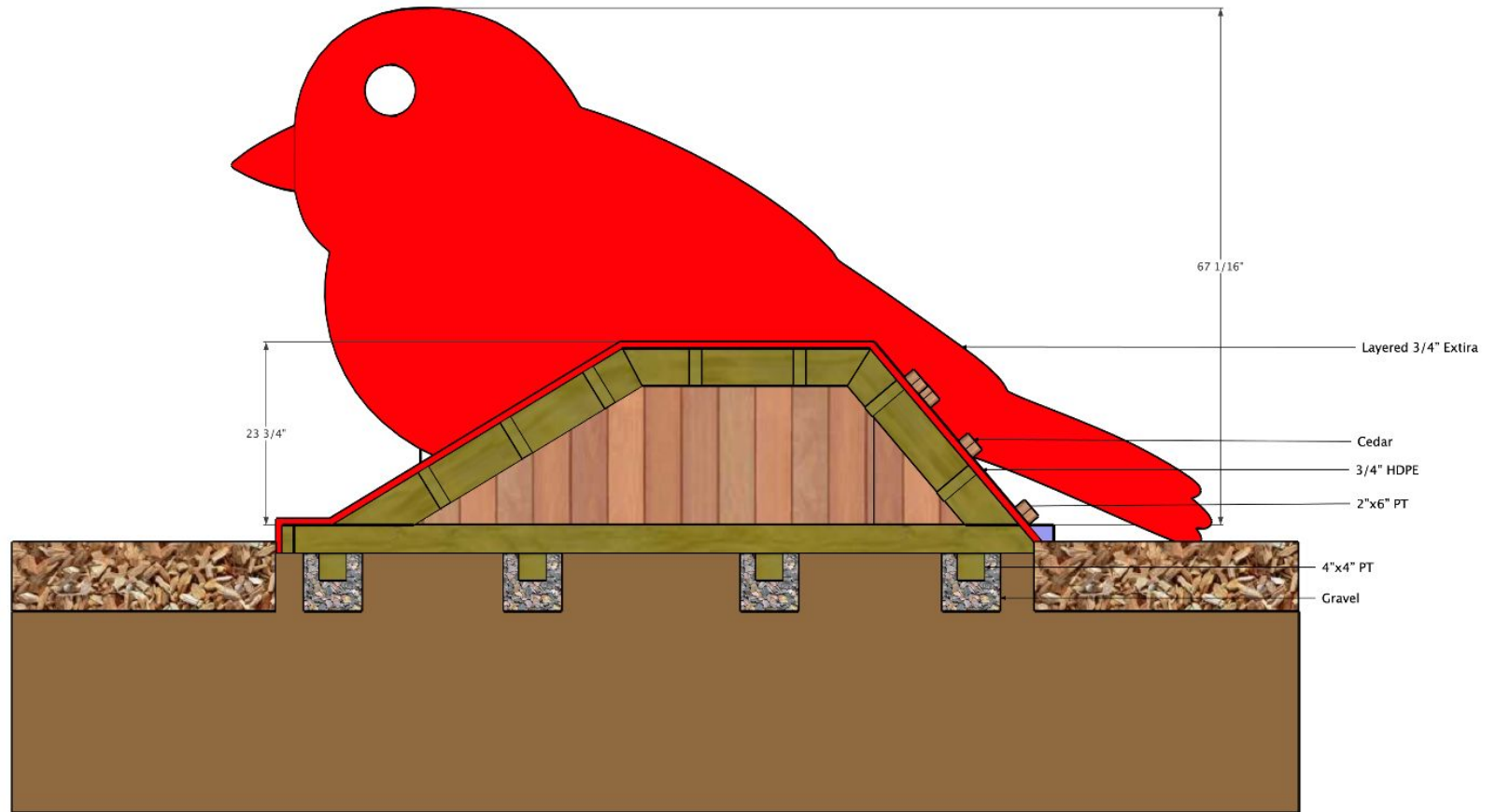
Max height from adjacent surface: 16"

Materials-

Duraply 'leap pad' bases with paint washed 5/4 cedar decking

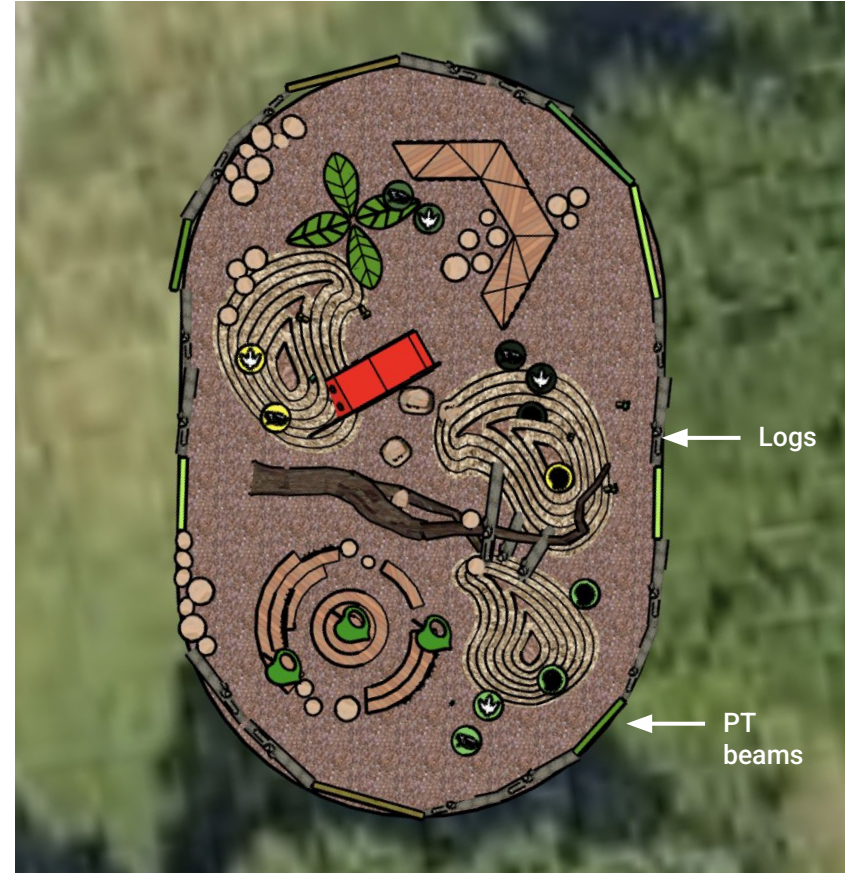
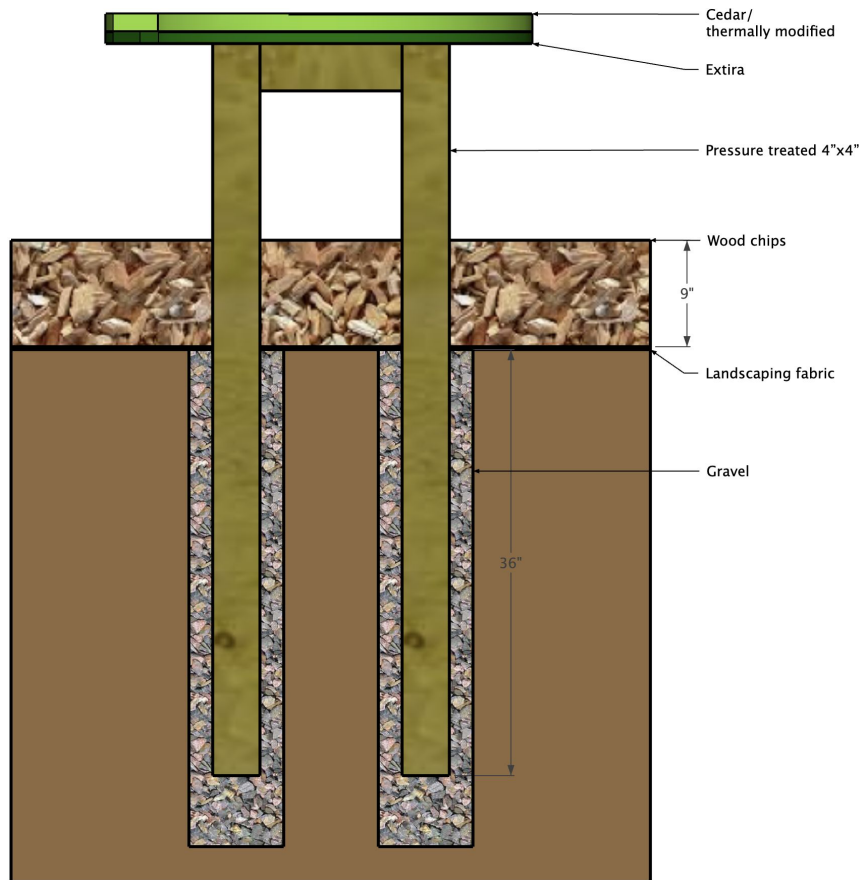
4 x 4 pressure treated posts for 'leap pad' bases set 40" in the ground with gravel

Construction Details



GROUND BEAMS

Large play structures will be tied together with 4"x4" beams that will be dry set into the ground.



WOOD CHIPS

The play area will be covered with a 9" deep layer of wood chips on top of a layer of landscaping fabric. The wood chips will be contained with logs and 4"x6" pressure treated wood beams place along the perimeter of the area.



LEAF AND LEAP PAD PRECEDENT/DETAIL

Leaf and leap pads will have an Extira or Duraply platform base with cedar decking added as treads.



SWAMP 'CAT TAILS' AND BALANCE BEAMS

Paint washed 4 x 4's with $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick painted Extira 'tails'. Vertical 4 x 4's are dry set in gravel at 40" in the ground. Coated Headloks ranging in length from 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ " to 6" are used to connect everything.

Maintenance And Budget

BUDGET

Funding Source

A grant given to PPR from Spring Point Partners to support playful learning and park activation.

Costs

\$22,000	Engagement, Design, Approval
\$18,500	Fabrication and community builds
\$12,000	Materials
\$2500	Maintenance
\$55,000	Total

MAINTENANCE

Tiny WPA will partner with and support the Friends of Malcolm X Park and PPR in maintenance over the course of the installation of the playful learning space. This will include Tiny WPA conducting a twice a year assessment of the space with the aforementioned partners and generally being on-call should any issues arise.

Materials

HDPE

Colorful, environmentally stabilized high-density polyethylene sheet: perfect for making slides and signage.



EXTIRA

Treated wood composite panel designed for exterior use and high moisture environments.



DURAPLY

Duraply is a highly durable, sustainable and environmentally friendly exterior grade plywood that is made in Europe. It has been an essential part of wooden playgrounds around the world designed by Monstrum that are designed to last 15-30 years.



WESTERN RED CEDAR

Weather, rot, insect resistant wood, able to be paint-washed for color.



PRESSURE TREATED

Wood that has been treated with preservatives that enhance its resistance to structural degradation. Ideal for structures that are set in the ground.



TREE STUMPS AND LOGS

Logs and branches chopped at various lengths for seating and climbing.



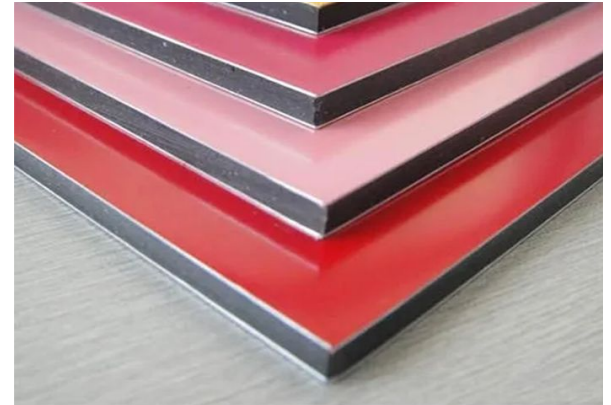
THERMALLY MODIFIED

Wood that has undergone a thermal modification process, enhancing its durability, dimensional stability, and resistance to weather, rot, and insects.



ACM (ALUMINUM COMPOSITE MATERIAL)

ACM is a highly durable rigid panel made from a plastic core sandwiched by sheets of aluminum and colored vinyl. This material is frequently used for durable exterior signage and even building siding! We use it in $\frac{1}{8}$ " and $\frac{1}{4}$ " thicknesses.



WOOD CHIPS

We will use easily replenishable single ground woods chips gathered from trees broken down onsite supplemented with wood chips from the Organic Recycling Center as needed.



Thank You!