

# Parks and Rec needs funding for mulch at Harvard Park playground, cites safety hazard

BY AMANDA LARIVIERE · FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2022

The Parks and Recreation Commission is wrapping up safety improvements at the Harvard Park playground after receiving only \$10,352 instead of the \$36,000 the commission requested from the Community Preservation Committee. Replenishing the playground's diminished mulch surface is among their outstanding goals, as this poses a safety risk to visitors.

"If we think it's violating code and somebody could get hurt, maybe we should just shut the playground down," said Parks and Rec Chair Bob O'Shea at the commission's Feb. 22 meeting.

The playground needs 6 to 9 more inches of mulch and has "deeper deficits at the high use exit sites of slides/swings," according to the CPC funding application the commission submitted in October. The application also cites this as a state code violation.

The funds the commission received can cover the installation of an additional picnic table, bench, and new hardware on the swings. However, its funding requests for mulch, a new slide, and new suspension bridge cables were not approved. Didi Chadran, chair of the CPC, consulted in January with the Community Preservation Coalition, which advises participating towns on matters of funding, before making the decision. Since replenishing the mulch surface would constitute maintenance, he said it did not qualify for funding under state law.

Parks and Rec member Marisa Steele said she spoke with the town's insurance representative in October about the playground's safety hazards. "She saw that [the mulch] and was aware of it, and she never said 'you need to close it down,'" Steele said at the commission's March 7 meeting. "But she knew we were trying to get it done for spring or summer at the latest."

While Parks and Rec has received verbal confirmation from the insurance representative and the town that the playground does not have to be closed, the members said they want to get it in writing.

At the commission's Feb. 22 meeting O'Shea said the Department of Public Works should be executing this kind of standard maintenance. "They used to buy a mountain of mulch and put it down by the beach," he said. O'Shea asserted that part of DPW's annual budget is supposed to be used for replenishing the mulch. He estimated that \$400 for mulch was included in the annual budget, and that replenishment should be completed every two years.

Now, Parks and Rec is seeking other sources of funding.

The warrant for May Town Meeting is not officially closed, so Select Board member Kara Minar said it might be possible to insert a small warrant article requesting money for mulch. "But our first choice would be to see if there's any money left over in DPW," said Minar, adding that DPW typically has leftover money at the end of a budget season that could be used for expenses like this. "The benefit to that—it would be immediate in not having to wait for an article or wait until the start of the next fiscal year."

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