



Playground

Planning a Playground for the Driscoll School in Brookline, MA

Mary Dennis



Parks and playgrounds are now a part of most cities and towns. In Brookline, for example, so many are scattered throughout the town that a place to play is within a five-minute walk for almost every resident. These open areas are the town's complement to neighboring Boston's Emerald Necklace, and they provide Brookline's neighborhoods and schools with their own little jewels.



Boston's Emerald Necklace is a linked system of parks, ponds, and parkways over five miles long. It was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1875.



One of the most heavily used playgrounds in Brookline is at the Driscoll School. Throughout the day it is filled with children playing. But playgrounds, like sneakers and clothes, get old and worn out after years of use by hundreds of children, day after day after day. This is the story of what happened when Driscoll's playground needed renovation.





"We need clear views into the playground."



"Emergency and service vehicles must be able to get onto the playground."



"Basketball courts need to be placed so neighbors are protected from noise."



"The playground must be easy to take care of."

First a plan had to be developed. So there was a meeting. WELL . . . actually, quite a few! Lots of people gathered together, neighbors and parents, teachers and students, the town planning department, the police, and even the DPW crew. All these folks had ideas and concerns to discuss and review. (There were so many it created quite a stew.)



"The playground should be attractive for both children and adults."



"The playground needs to provide active and passive recreation for the whole community."



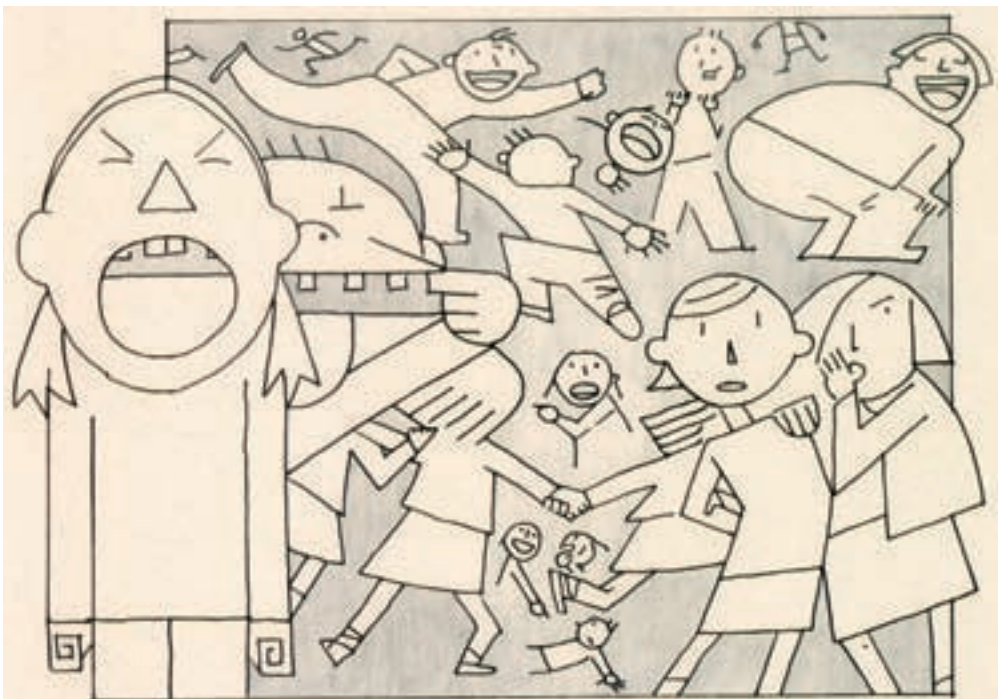
The teachers requested an outdoor classroom and a place for a garden.

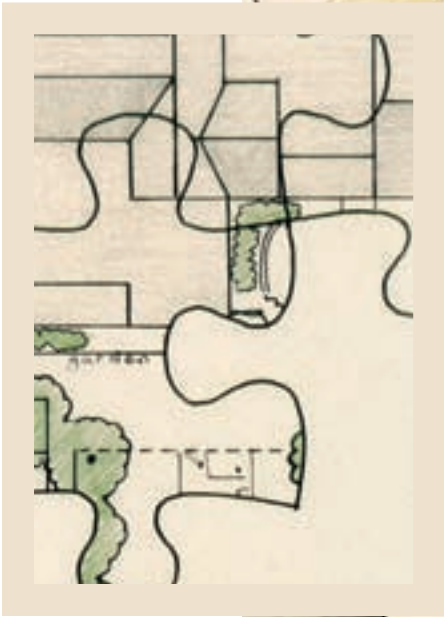


The children were quite clear about what they wanted: Space for a variety of games, room to run, and special places for make-believe.



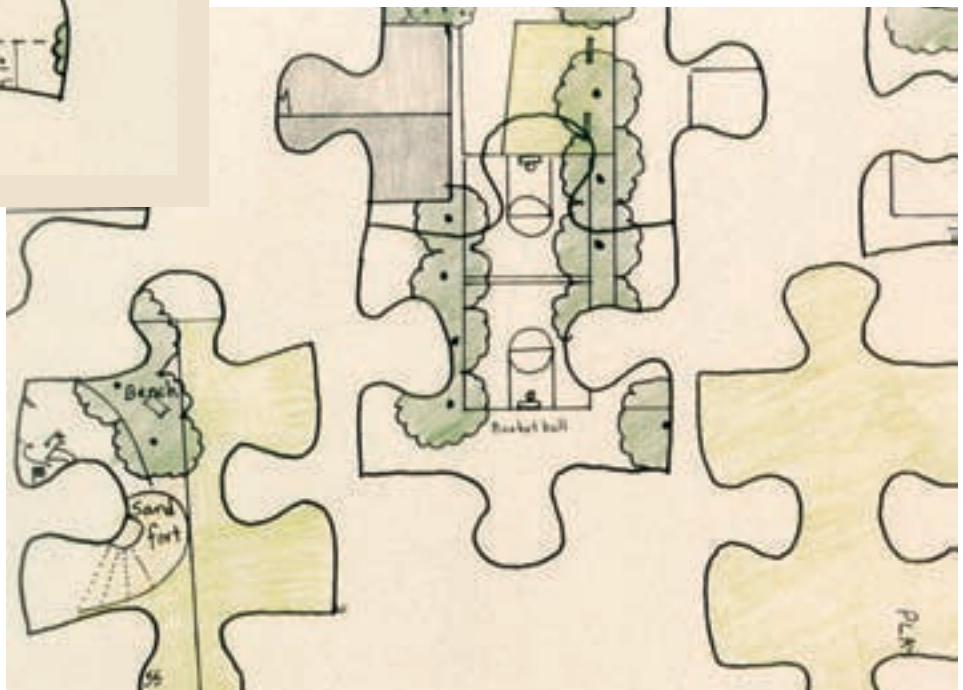
The town officials helped the community sort out all their ideas until agreement was reached. They also made sure the new playground would be safe and accessible to all.

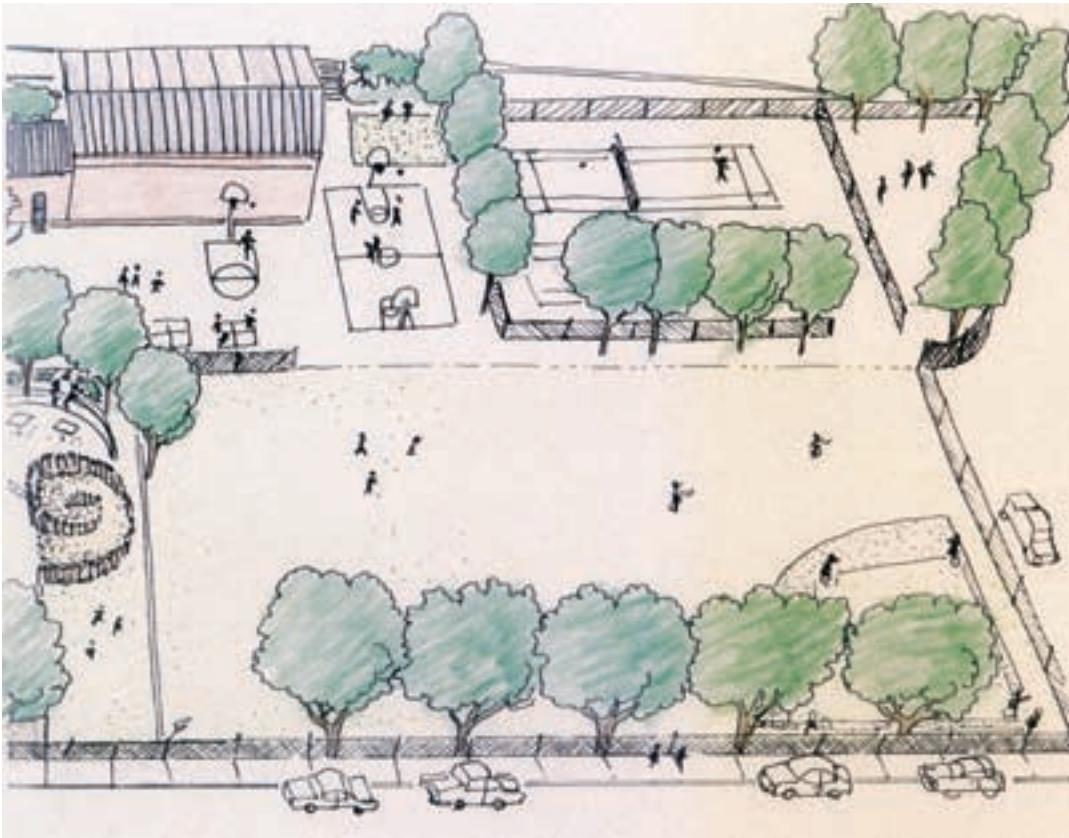




To fit all these pieces together and to resolve conflicts as they arose were the challenges the designer had to meet.

Finding a solution for multiple uses in such tiny places is no easy feat.



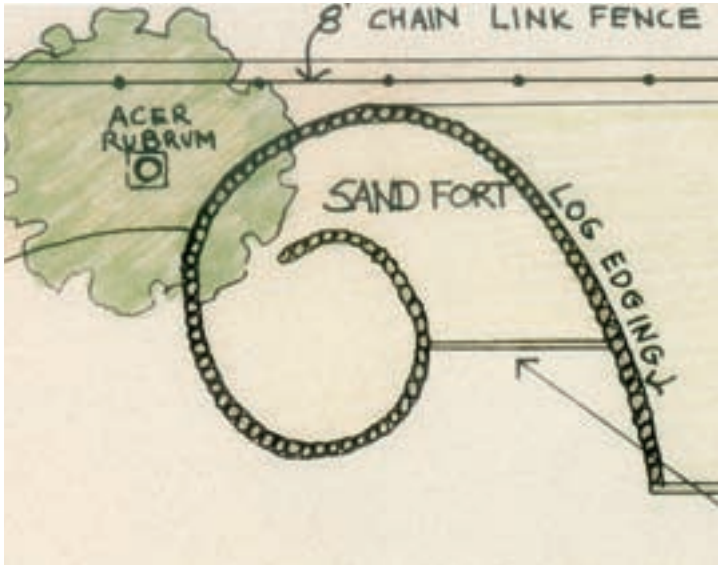


The plans were drawn up and presented. Then even more meetings took place. Many details still needed to be worked out.

Picnic tables and benches placed in the shade provide quiet places for checkers and relaxation.

A giant map of the U.S.A. painted onto the blacktop puts geography right underfoot.





When every detail was worked out and approved, including places for a water fountain, sand fort, and ginkgo tree, the drawings were finally finished.

Then a builder was chosen to buy all the materials, hire the workers, schedule demolition, begin new construction, and even roll out the new grass.

During renovation the playground was closed and off limits. The children watched with anticipation while construction proceeded, anxious to return to their games.



Finally there was reason for celebration. The playground is well planned and rebuilt. This little jewel is now safe and attractive and with care will provide a place for every kind of recreation for this generation . . . and maybe the next.

Mary Dennis received the certificate for landscape design in 1993. She participated throughout the entire planning, design, and construction of the Driscoll School playground. John Furlong was the project landscape architect.

