

City of Evanston, IL

Independence Park Improvements

Community Open House #1

Chandler-Newberger Community Center
Tuesday January 10, 2023 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Feedback
Summary



Community Open House #1

Chandler-Newberger Community Center
Tuesday January 10, 2023 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Independence Park | Look, Feel, & Focus

The planning team hosted an open house style meeting with the Evanston community at the Chandler-Newberger Community Center on Tuesday January 10, 2023. During the event, which ran from 6p-8p, attendees participated in a series of interactive exercises designed to introduce the project, explore their relationship with the park, and envision what the future could hold for this beloved community space. This input, along with the planning team's site analysis and field work, form the foundation upon which design concepts for the park will be built.

The following pages document the input received during the event. This is the first of three community engagement touch points that will be held during the planning process.





Tell Us A Little About Yourself!

Let's explore your relationship with Independence Park.

What brings you to Independence Park?

(37%) Dining Nearby

(29%) Shopping on Central

(27%) Leisure

(6%) Work Nearby

How Often do you visit Independence Park?

(63%) Weekly

(25%) Daily

(13%) Monthly

How do you typically spend your time at Independence Park?

(25%) Socializing

(22%) Relaxing

(19%) Passing Through

(17%) Playing

(16%) Attending Events

(2%) Other

What's your favorite memory of time spent at Independence Park?

(8) Playing at the playground

(7) Special Events

(4) Relaxing under the trees

(3) Spending time with friends & family

(3) Enjoying food from local businesses



Top Response(s)

(X) *Number of mentions in comments

Tell us a little about yourself!

Let's explore your relationship with Independence Park.

What brings you to Independence Park?

Work nearby	Dining nearby	Shopping on Central	Leisure	Other

How often do you visit Independence Park?

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Annually

How do you typically spend your time at Independence Park?

Grab a post-it note and share a bit more!

Attending Events	Socializing	Relaxing	Passing Through	Exercising	Playing	Other

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Plenty of nice views
Comical my friends
for best views etc

What's your favorite memory of time spent at Independence Park?

Grab a post-it note and paste it on the board!

Come Take A Look Around!

Let's explore Independence Park together!

What do you notice about these photos?

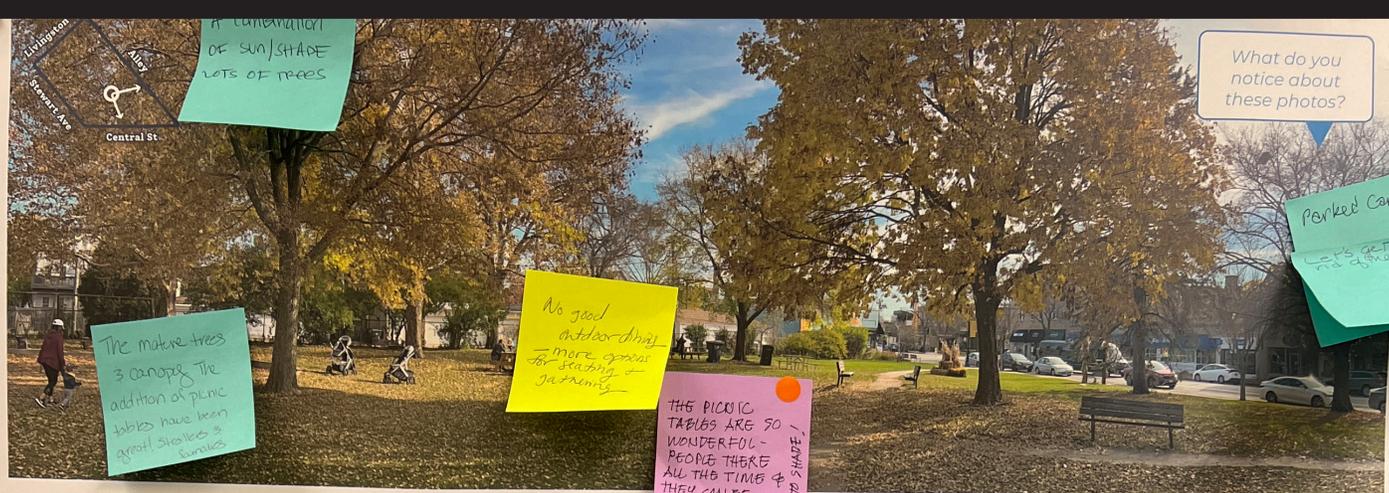
- (4) Uninviting, hard edge and entrance along Central St.
- (3) Mature trees and vegetation
- (3) Safe, enjoyable playground away from main streets
- (3) Access to shops and restaurants
- (3) Underutilized space with potential for amenities such as benches, splash pad or bigger playground
- (2) Picnic tables, seating options and gathering space
- (2) Lack of landscaping and signage, opportunity for natural barriers
- (2) Potential for amenities such as tables, chairs, chess tables, stage, etc.
- (2) Lack of seating options
- (2) Uncomfortable tables and seating
- (1) Lack of paved pathways
- (1) Lack of pickleball court as there are no dedicated courts in Evanston



Top Response(s)

(X) *Number of mentions in comments

What do you notice about these photos?



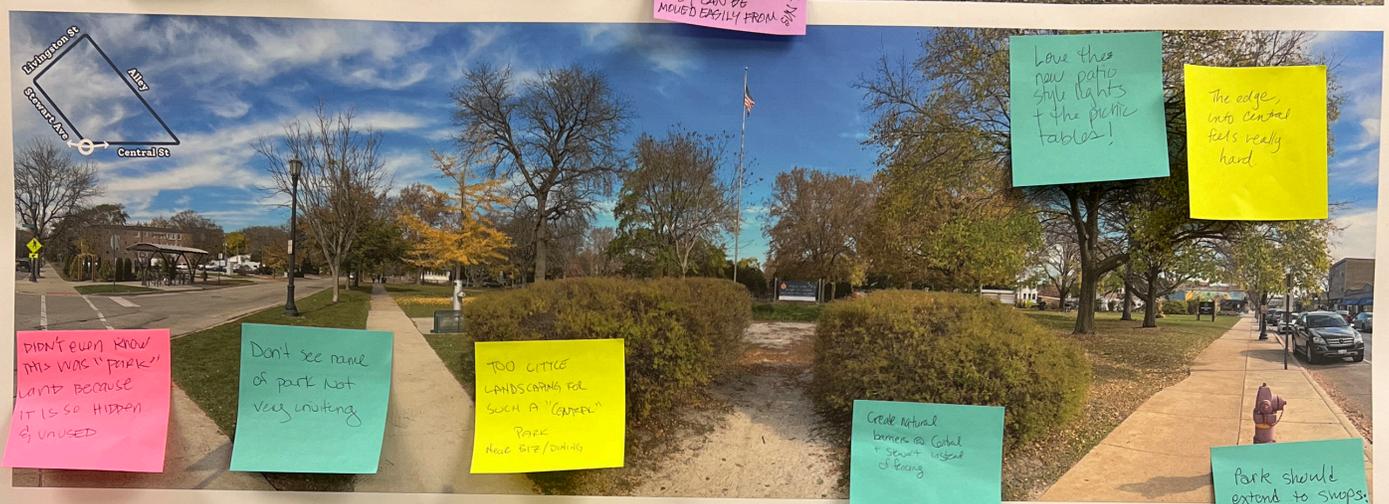
A combination of sun/shade
lots of trees

The mature trees & canopy. The addition of picnic tables have been great. Shaded & sunny.

No good outdoor dining
more grass for sitting & jaunting

THE PICNIC TABLES ARE SO WONDERFUL - PEOPLE THERE ALL THE TIME & THEY CAN BE MOVED EASILY FROM SUN TO SHADE!

Parked Cars
Let's get rid of them!



DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THIS WAS "PARK" LAND BECAUSE IT IS SO HIDDEN & UNUSED

Don't see name of park Not very inviting

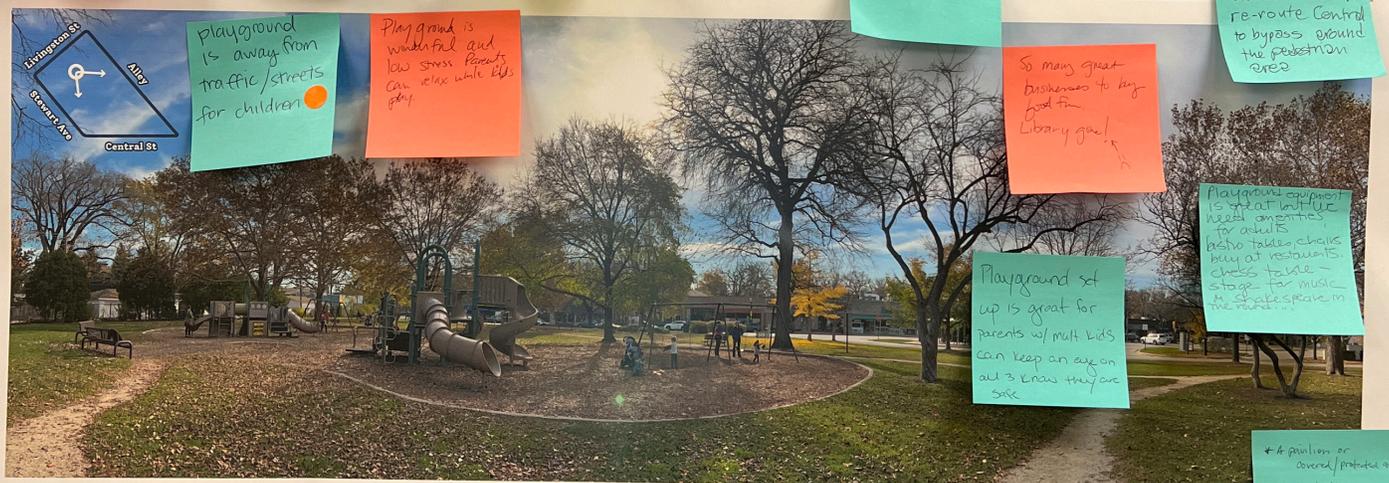
TOO LITTLE LANDSCAPING FOR SUCH A "CENTER" PARK
More SW/SW/40

Love the new patio style plants & the picnic tables!

The edge, into center feels really hard

Create natural barriers on Central & signpost instead of being

Park should extend to strips, re-route Central to bypass around the pedestrian area



playground is away from traffic/streets for children

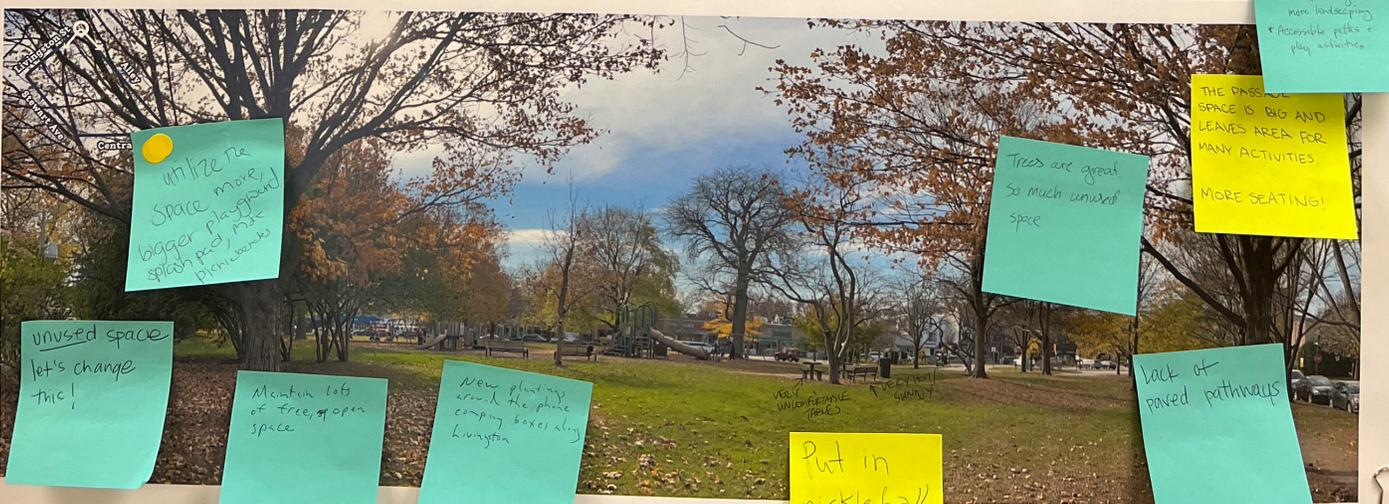
Playground is wonderful and low stress. Parents can relax while kids play

So many great businesses to hang out from Library good!

Playground set up is great for parents w/ mult kids can keep an eye on all & know they are safe

Playground equipment is great but little need amenities for adults like tables chairs bench at restaurants chess table stage for music to shake space in the middle...

+ Pavilion or covered/professional area
+ Native plantings - more landscaping
+ Accessible paths + play activities



utilize the space more
bigger playground splash pad, picnic

unused space let's change this!

Mention lots of tree/open space

New planting around the picnic canopy boxes along Livingston

Trees are great so much unused space

THE PASSIVE SPACE IS BIG AND LEAVES AREA FOR MANY ACTIVITIES.
MORE SEATING!

lack of paved pathways

Put in pickleball courts. There are NO dedicated

What's Working Well?

Let's explore what you love most about Independence Park!

My favorite things about Independence Park are _____ because _____.

- (8) Picnic tables, communal seating
- (6) Large shade trees
- (6) Large active green space to gather and hold events
- (5) Welcoming lighting to provide safety and aesthetics
- (4) Close proximity to local businesses
- (3) Special events such as summer concerts

Where are your favorite places in Independence Park?

- (8) Playground area
- (5) Picnic tables and benches
- (5) Local pizza restaurant at the corner of the alley and Central St.
- (4) Local coffee shop on Central St.



Top Response(s)

(X) *Number of mentions in comments

What's Working Well?

Let's explore what you love most about Independence Park!

My favorite things about Independence Park are _____ because _____.

Grab a post-it note and paste it on the board!

<p>..5 Natural shade.. it's the only covered outdoor space in the area</p>	<p>Favorite thing - trees and shade (photo of someone's lawn and garden)</p>	<p>Favorite thing - trees and shade (photo of someone's lawn and garden)</p>	<p>The trees @ the NW corner of Stewart + Livingston - they have a canopy!</p>	<p>The picnic tables! Because I need a place to sit + drink my coffee</p>	<p>The lights b/c they add light (dark!)</p>	<p>Picnic tables - Playgrounds for big kids - Small bench that bring them to the area - Natural shade - Great place to relax</p>	<p>The playground is ONE for little. Beyond keeping it safe for small kids - Tables for sitting or even working - open space for events - other structures and more</p>
<p>Not much... - location - space to do a creative video</p>	<p>MUST KEEP DESIGNATED TOPPER AND BIG KID AREAS - ADD MORE SWINGS</p>	<p>PICNIC benches but need more shade</p>	<p>NO Sweetbox</p>	<p>How close the park is to our local businesses!</p>	<p>Calculus ARE REAL FRIENDS!</p>		<p>Although its old, love how the playground is shaded, contained 3' away from street. Its very safe. Allows parents to be social while watching kids play</p>
<p>1. All of the picnic tables where you can meet for coffee or late a pizza. 2. The lights at night really make it seem inviting</p>	<p>Picnic Tables - Lighting (communal seating) Tree Canopy for drinking</p>	<p>PICNIC TABLES! LIGHTING TREES MEMBERING PATH THROUGH! ditto that!</p>		<p>Don't forget the deck ATMS! Room for @ least 2 @ Parkville Courts</p>	<p>IT IS NOT OVERBUILT, OPEN + PLEASANT + TEMPORARY TENTS, LIGHTS, ETC CAN BE ADDED.</p>		<p>Do not pave the walkways</p>
<p>Shady trees / cover because you can visit longer in summer potential for better park/play areas for kids aged 0-10</p>			<p>picnic table under the tree lighting because I can sit with my friends after school</p>	<p>OPPORTUNITY FOR SO MUCH MORE!! ESPECIALLY IN NW EVANSTON.</p>	<p>Green space in an active area... Because it gives a place to relax and people work.</p>		<p>proximity to local businesses! large space to invite friends, meet up w/ groups</p>

Where are your favorite places in Independence Park?

Grab a sticky dot and paste it on the site!

What Needs Some Love?

Let's explore how we can make Independence even better!

The things I most want to improve about Independence Park are _____ because _____ .

- (7) Accessible and attractive playground equipment
- (7) Tables and chairs for outdoor dining and gathering
- (5) Poor condition of tables near playground area
- (5) Provide restroom facilities
- (5) Stage/shelter for community events
- (4) Reroute Central St. around the park to improve pedestrian access
- (3) More parking options
- (2) Safer crosswalk from the park to the local businesses
- (2) Electrical hookups for versatile uses to support lighting, concerts, and events
- (2) Improve pathways to be more accessible
- (2) Fitness/exercise area
- (2) Splash pad/water activities

Where needs the most tender loving care?

- (11) Southern border of the park along Central Street
- (4) Playground area
- (3) Southwest entrance to the park
- (2) Picnic table area



Top Response(s)

(X) *Number of mentions in comments

What Needs Some Love?

Let's explore how we can make Independence Park even better!

The things I most want to improve about Independence Park are _____ because _____.

Grab a post-it note and paste it on the board!

MISS THE LIBRARY - BRING IT BACK

Eliminate Pedestrian fatalities or control by closing/central or re-routing around the park

PLEASE ADD BATHROOMS!!!
No bathroom unless approved by neighbors (immediate)

Lighting - it's too dark near the playground / central area in the winter / fall / spring
not enough for older kids
tables every day
use middle chairs
take near the wings
and hang on the WPC etc or more to do

Better ground around the play equipment

Perhaps a mini bike / ride on path around
Shutter - Event Space
Food Trucks / Event Space

DON'T WANT TO ADD MUCH - IT IS GREAT ALREADY AS LONG AS PLAYGROUND, PATHS + TABLES ARE MADE HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE

Allow takeout / alcohol / dinner since limited outdoor patio seating

pathway is difficult to navigate w/ a smaller scooter or bike maybe paved instead of gravel?

Improve pedestrian access by re-routing central around the park
Reduce ~~speed~~

WOULD LOVE A STAGE FOR COMMUNITY EVENTS
Ex. Holiday tree lighting
use a platform
* simple raised stage

PLEASE ADD PADI
WILL MAKE THE PARK A DESTINATION + DRIVE BUSINESS!

NEW playground
* Different ground
* MUCH bigger

* More designed Place for Sit, like Park
* Central Stage
* Bike Storage
* Stage / Picnic / Seating
* Bathrooms
* Electrical Hookups for Keep a Park Veranda
* More Parking

Tables by playground are not a great slope
* Buy back EPL bench
= like the approach - if updated make it more modern
= better seating

please make the playground equipment site not just a big blob of plastic

more places for trees / signs to hang

Pathways feel aimless; no points of attraction

* Affordable for no money
* Self-sustaining gardens
* Space to sit and have a coffee and/or sandwich - Season
* Covered seating area
* playground - create bathrooms
* picnic tables for large / small groups
* use area for interactive area for children - give them a chance to be part of the park
* Fitness Stations

Splash pad

LESS WOODCHIPS
MORE SOFT / LUSKY SURFACE LIKE @ MIDDLEBURY

EMULATE HUBBARD WOODS PARK
SMALL RESTAURANT BUT AMAZING!!

if you do pave the paths please make them permeable + attractive

access - re-route central around the park

crosswalk across Stewart at Livingston - so easy to get from parking lot to park safely

Collaboration with local for clean-up events - hub + volunteer work community org

Enlarge park area by re-routing central street

Art / statue installation

Need bathrooms since the city privatized the North Branch land sold it to LUSH

Lack of restrooms for adults and children. We shouldn't have to depend on local businesses to wait.

We need more parking maybe the lot across the street could be used on certain days similar to Boston Farmers market

Restrooms would make it better for families with young children, better, no other re using an old structure

1. Grab trash can
2. the cranes
3. Expand the brick pavers along the walking
4. consistent park hills (style)
5. Do not add bathroom

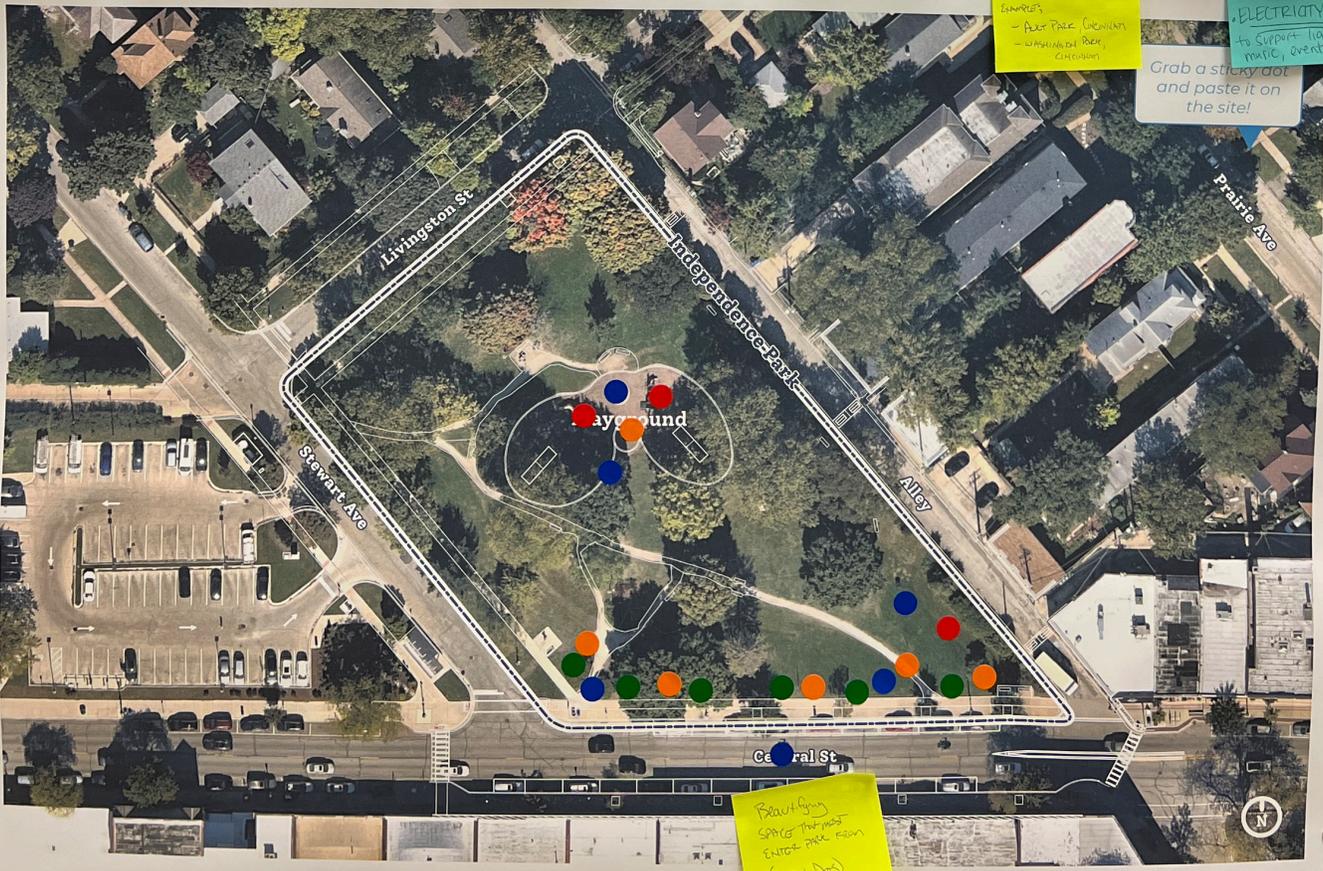
Solar charging directly from the park to shops!

Playground for toddlers + older children as well as more seating for adults, picnic tables, etc

Safe & inclusive park equipment for all

ELECTRICITY! ☺
to support lighting, music, events

Where needs the most tender loving care?



DESIRE SPACE TO PICNIC w/ FRIENDS + EMPHASIS
EXAMPLES - AXE PARK (MONTANA) - WASHINGTON PARK, CHICAGO

Grab a sticky dot and paste it on the site!

Placing green spaces that most enjoy the view (Loren Dow)

Where Should We Focus?

Let's explore what we should prioritize improving!

If you only had \$100 to spend improving Independence Park, what would you spend it on?

(26%) Providing more ways to rest and relax

(24%) Providing more ways to come together

(20%) Providing more ways to play

(10%) Providing more ways to experience nature

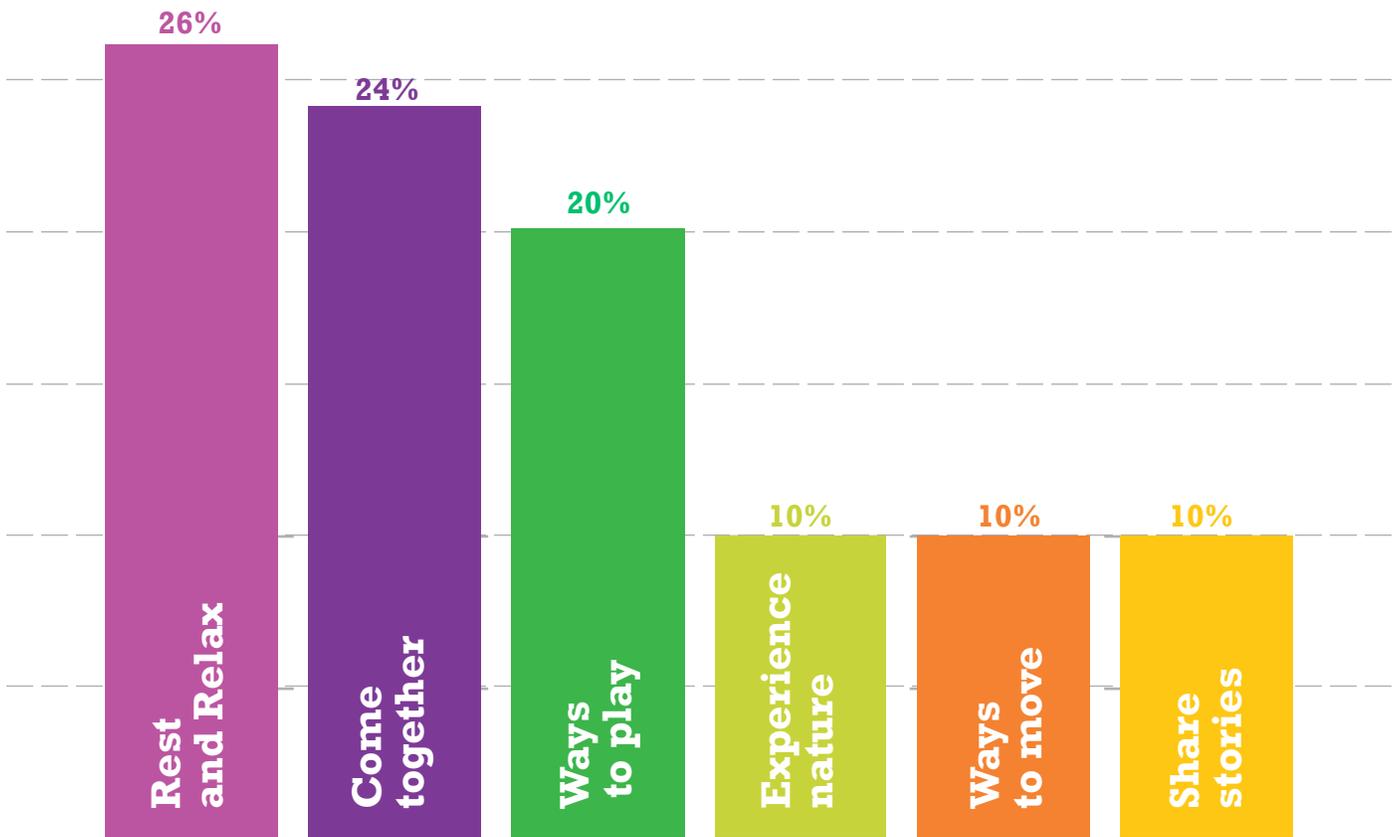
(10%) Providing more ways to move

(10%) Providing more ways to share stories



○ Top Response(s)

(X) *Number of mentions in comments



Providing more ways to rest and relax (26%)

- Chairs and tables
- Additional restroom facility
- Gazebo with charcoal grills to host gatherings

Providing more ways to come together (24%)

- Performance or stage pavilion for live music
- Community events
- Food trucks
- Farmer's market
- Blocking off street access to cars

Providing more ways to play (20%)

- Play equipment for smaller children
- Nature based play structures
- Play amenities such as monkey bars, slides, etc.
- Unique rope structure instead of one structure

Providing more ways to experience nature (10%)

- Community gardens
- Maintain shade trees
- Splash pad

Providing more ways to move (10%)

- Bike racks
- Weekly health and wellness activities
- Exercise playground/equipment
- Yoga in the park
- Accessible walking path

Providing more ways to share stories (10%)

- Historical information through park signage
- Rotation of interactive public art
- Gazebo for live music and public events
- Trolley car as a nod to past trolley sculpture

Where Should We Focus?

Let's explore what we should prioritize improving!

If you only had \$100 to spend improving Independence Park, what would you spend it on?

Each sticky dot is worth \$20. Place them where you'd like to see investment made!

Providing more ways to play

Multi-generational, Nature-based, Sensory, STEM, Game Tables, Splash Pad, etc



Monkey bars!
- Caroline, age 6
- Zip line
- Maxine, age 6

Play areas for toddlers, young kids, & big kids
- safe space to play & easy to keep an eye on
- Lots of slides, soft things to jump & climb

Reps are ok but not on big monkey structure
- There are many parts around it - this part needs to stand out!

KEEP PLAY STRUCTURES SAFE FOR SMALL KIDS (Aho I do want it to be fun for teens too!)

STILL NEED SLIDES + EXTRA SCENARIOS (BONUS + BEAUTY)
- ALSO WOULD LOVE TO HAVE MORE + BIG MONKEYS MORE SPECIFIC OTHER

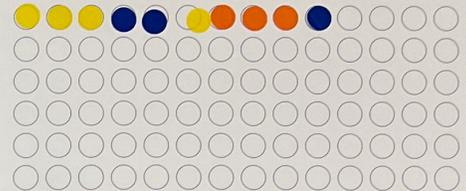
would love nature based play structures
- Also, current playground feels tucked away, site contained want to keep that feeling

native based play but structured

If the play equipment needs replacing, pls. just replace it - don't build those wretched monstrosities that need the expense squandered on it

Providing more ways to experience nature

Tree Planting, Native Plantings, Pollinator Gardens, Rain Gardens, Community Gardens, etc.



Definitely community gardens

Keep the trees and shade!

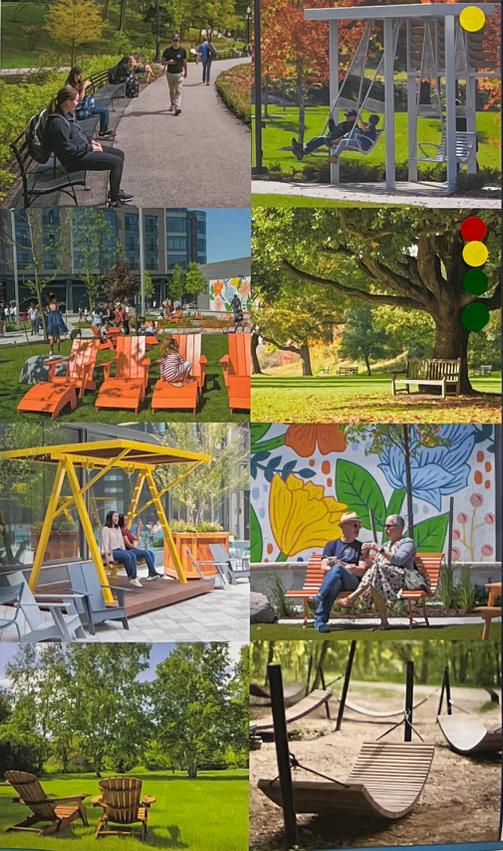
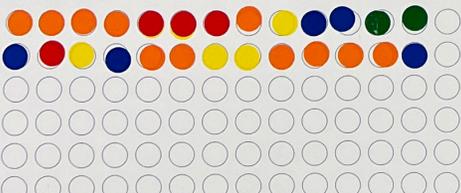
The park is really too small to be a destination point
- It needs to feel a neighborhood park
- What you can really work with is to have good places to play & relax

More flowers?
- Decorative splash fountain
- EXAMPLES: WASHINGTON PARK, COLUMBIAN @ MUSICAL PARK

Hopefully it will not get so cluttered with stuff that you lose the feeling of relaxing in nature

Providing more ways to rest & relax

Shade Structures, Chairs, Benches, Lounges, Swings, Hammocks, Tables, etc.



chairs & tables to grab a bite to eat across the street, then enjoy in the park

Tables for dining large & small, benches, chairs, shade

Add a bathroom

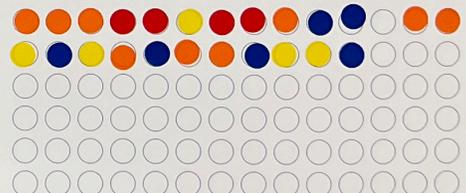
only if approved by immediate neighbors

Gazebos w/ charcoal grills to stay longer, cook-out, host gatherings

More fresh trash cans w. to bathrooms

Providing more ways to come together

Performance Pavilion, Stage, Group Seating, Plaza, Flexible Lawn, etc.



cars would park in lot & parking lot just south of street

Performance/Stage Pavilion

Love the idea of a flexible lawn!

Saw amazing play out in Zuluville neighborhood center open to the cars
- sheet of blocked off play area to play with
- pieces of plastic
- structural alleys
- natural steps

Maybe a garden or small stage that is usable for gatherings? (But it's not over here)

FOOD TRUCKS
- LIVE MUSIC
- MIDWINTER FARMERS MARKET
- Ditto that!

Like the idea of more performing area stage/pavilion

PERMANENT STAGE AREA

DO NOT OVERBUILD!
IT IS SIMPLE AND DELIGHTFUL - TENTS etc CAN ALWAYS BE PUT UP FOR EVENTS

Agree if do not Over build!
Enhance existing elements?
- keep open spaces

Space up the ally zone



Providing more ways to move

Accessible paths & trails, Fitness Equipment, Bike Racks, Bike Repair Kiosks, etc.

raised crosswalks / speed tables on Central

Exercise/Fitness Stations
Space for Yoga in the Park!
V-Zumba in the Park like at millennium parks a park + v blends

Bike Racks will be great in morning Bell

AN ACTUAL WALKING PATH WOULD BE NICE
ACCESSIBLE - STAIRLIFTS + WHEEL CHAIRS

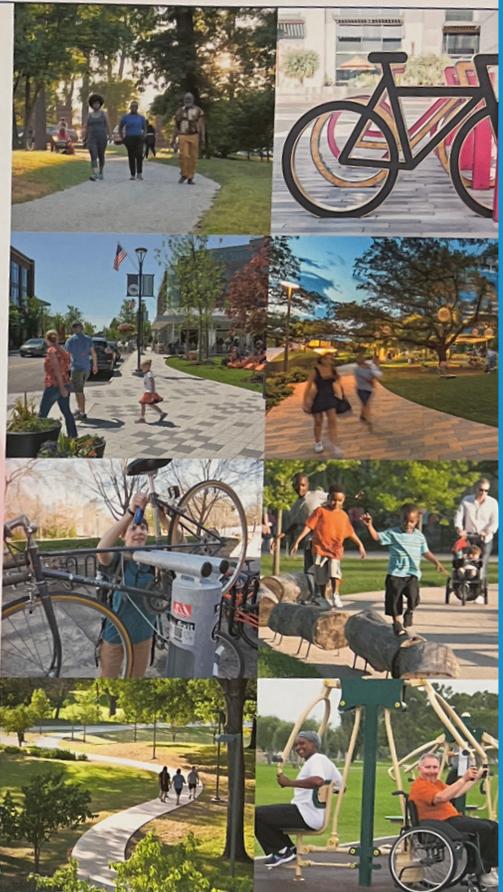
skate park?

Bike racks and repair kiosks?

chin up bars

Central Street hosts Wellness Wednesdays in the Summer. Free Yoga + Pilates in the Park for residents

bicycle racks
The local bike shop is ready to support! (marks)



Providing more ways to share stories

Public Art, Interpretive Signage, Little Free Libraries, etc.

Little Free Library to reflect all North Branch of Evanston Public Library + Encourage Reading

rotating interactive public art
Outdoor summer library like at Bryant Park behind the NY Public Library in Manhattan

Instead of feel library - read about public some free etc - like standard library track, something to appreciate of art

Have the idea of more permanent mixed of temporary + rotating public art

Interactive public art!

add a Gazebo for music + public discourse

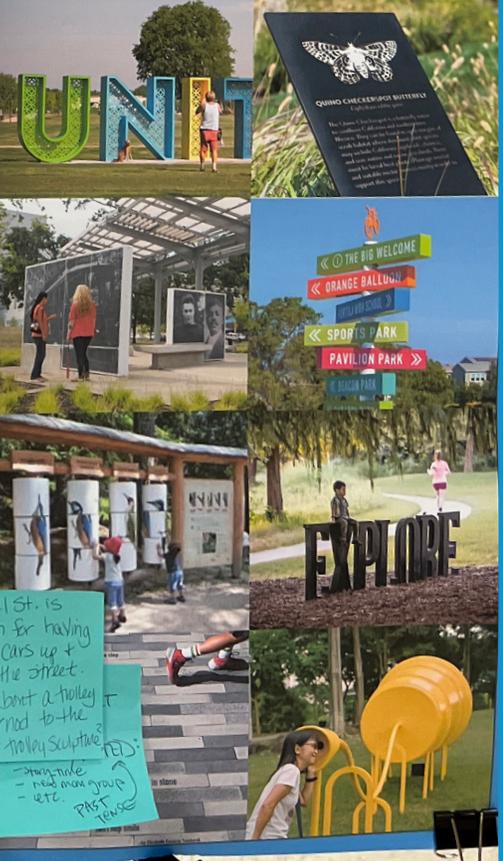
central St. is known for having trolley cars up + down the street. How about a trolley car-orned to the Post Trolley sculpture?

Use the public art around + along the pathways

engage posting the history of the Park

Rotating concert series

need more group - etc. POST TROLLEY



Online Feedback

Record of comments received from the project website

Response #1

I'm unable to attend the public meeting for the Independence Park renovations. However, there are two parks that our family enjoys and they both have features that are worth examining for this project. Duke Park in the Glencoe Park district is awesome! Their playground features an interactive water feature (splash pad & water trough with hand pump), a hand-crank train, and a 2-12-year-old play area with a poured-in-place safety surface. Another favorite playground is McCulloch Park in Evanston. The new equipment is fun, engaging and challenging. It is a huge improvement to the previous play equipment. A combination of features from these two parks would be a lovely addition to the Independence Park renovation.

Response #2

I agree, Independence Park does need some renovating and updating. It is used by so many people, every day, all year long; children, shoppers, walkers, people who work and live near Central St and people who come to visit or eat out. Please keep some places to sit and relax, picnic tables for eating, trees for shade and a nice playground welcoming children of all ages. I love picking up lunch and eating there watching kids playing, or resting there in the shade on a hot summer day after a walk. And it's a good place for gatherings of various kinds. Thanks for considering the update! Flowers are nice, too...

Response #3

I would like to see an enhanced street wall on central ave to provide separation between the street and park while adding to the pedestrian realm. You could do this by planting more trees near the sidewalk within the park. I would also like to see the addition of native plants and decorative bushes near the alley to clean up the overgrown foliage.

Response #4

Upgrading the playground equipment. Adding a small pavilion that can provide a venue for organized and regularly scheduled music performances, pop-ups from the local Central St vendors (food/wine tastings, bakery sale, etc). Adding a parking spot off the bordering alley or Stewart St designated for 1-2 food/ice cream trucks that can accompany an event at the park, and on the weekends to attract Central St shopping visitors.

Response #5

My suggestion would be to consider a design which incorporates a 1) small band shell/gazebo for small folk/jazz/pop music concerts and film screenings and 2) more interesting green space. There are a lot of businesses and people along that stretch and a functional, usable urban park would be great. The current park doesn't have a lot going for it as you've pointed out.

Response #6

I am a direct neighbor to Independence Park (my bedroom window overlooks the playground) and a parent of 3 kids (10, 4, and 3). We are daily users of the park in good weather. I am excited about the planned renovation.

My kids are asking for swings, slides, and monkey bars. As a parent, I would like the rubberized ground cover instead of wood chips. The park has also lost a number of mature trees over the past several years and the playground lacks shade - so planting trees and considering sunshades on the play structure would be very helpful.

I am somewhat concerned by the discussion of building a pavilion or stage at the park. Although the park borders Central Street and a parking lot on Stewart on two sides, it borders residences on Livingston and on the alley. Because the lots on Prairie are zoned for multifamily construction, some of the residences (such as mine) are built very far back on the lot and consequently very close to the park. Care must be taken to ensure that all noise is directed away from these homes and toward Central Street and/or the Stewart parking lot.

In addition, I read in the Evanston Roundtable that some participants have asked for restrooms. I understand this -- families used to use EPL branch and this is no longer an option. But if you do add restrooms, please, please, please make the entrance on Central Street. I ask this for two reasons: First, the park is sometimes used by Haven students who sometimes act destructively. I am concerned about the mischief that they will get up to if they have unsupervised access to a bathroom. Putting the doors on Central will ensure that the community is watching and should act as a deterrent to that type of behavior. Second, I am concerned about my own security when I return to my dark alley from work in the late evenings -- I do not want to worry that someone is lurking in a restroom positioned very close to my garage. Again, knowing that everyone driving down Central can see who is going in and out of the restroom would be reassuring. Locking the restroom when the park is closed would also be very helpful.

Finally, as you think about how to balance the desire of people to use the park for take-out and the kids who use the playground, I urge you to adopt an allergy-aware position. According to the CDC, 8% of children have food allergies. For children with anaphylactic allergies like my youngest, this can mean that they are unable to use the playground when people there are eating their allergens. Whenever we go to a park, I have to visually survey all of the kids and their snacks to see if we can safely stay. What helps? Keeping the food area (picnic tables) and garbage cans separated from the play area. This means that much of the food is kept away from the playground, and that food wrappers do not blow out of overstuffed garbage cans onto the playlot (as, unfortunately, has happened at McCulloch). This is particularly important for a park like this one that, in the mornings and late afternoons, is full of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers who tend to pick things up and put their fingers in their mouths.

Thank you very much for your hard work on this project!"

MKSK