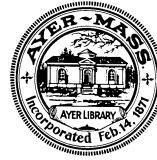


# AYER PARKS DEPARTMENT

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## **Playground Remediation Update**

August 10, 2022

BETA Group Inc., the company hired to assist in the evaluation of the Kiddie Junction playground, has finished their analysis and have put together a Request for Proposal for the remediation phase of the project. This first phase will involve removal of the structure due to its composition of arsenic, removal of contaminated soil to allow safe installation of replacement playground equipment, and the removal of any trees required to do so. The RFP will be put out to bid in early August and bids will be opened in early September. This has been a long and difficult process to make determinations on what it is that needs to be done to comply with MassDEP requirements and satisfy the desires of the community. After testing various areas within the playground area, BETA determined that the amount of soil remediation required will most likely result in the majority of trees in the current structure's area needing to be removed. Several of the oak trees in the center of the area may be able to be preserved, and every effort will be made to do so. The key factor is that MassDEP requires the removal of arsenic contaminated soil within the area to satisfy state standards of safety, and much of that work cannot be done without removal of certain trees. We have had numerous public outreach events to get thoughts and ideas from residents on the remediation of the playground, and are aware that removal of any trees in that area is not a popular decision, so any tree removal that is done will be due to necessity. The most important ones:

- Inability to save the tree due to the need to remove soil at a depth that the root system cannot be sustained.
- Unsafe limbs that represent a hazard for future recreational use in the area. Paring may be an option for some of these, but most of the pines are considered very dangerous, especially if their root system is damaged from the soil removal.

We consulted on this subject with several local entities, including the Conservation Commission and Tree Warden, and will continue to seek their expert advice on this. Another resource used to help make determination for the health of trees within the playground area was the recently completed Tree Inspection Report done through the Town of Ayer. This showed moderate to significant concern for many of the trees within the playground. We also asked Beta to offer an explanation regarding the need for tree removal. Randy Collins, Vice President and RLA for BETA, offered the following:

*The health of any trees we decide to save will be based on how they react to the disruption of the root system as a result of the pea stone and soil removal needed to remove the contaminated material. And while the removal will be limited to the top 6" to 24" (mostly around 6" to 10") the soil will be tested again to determine if more removal is necessary. Any additional removal will result in further impacts. And this doesn't include the impact that will result from the installation of a new playground. The depth of excavation for walks and safety surfacing will, on average, be 10" to 14" and is in addition to the excavation associated with the contaminated material.*

*We are proposing to save three Oaks that are within or directly adjacent to the existing playground area. This will be done by vacuuming out the soil that needs to be removed during the contaminated soil removal process. It will be replaced with new gravel. This is an expensive way of removing the soil so we are limiting this approach to three Oaks. And there is no guarantee that it will work.*

*Oaks are especially sensitive to a disruption to their root system. This impact may not be enough to kill them outright, but may be enough to send them into decline. This might be a worse scenario. Over time, as the trees decline and they start dropping branches, a new safety issue will emerge.*

It should also be noted that part of the replacement plan will call for the planting of new trees in locations that will conform to the new structure and offer shade to families using the playground for generations to come. We have been working on a replacement plan and will continue to do so through the remediation process. We hope to have construction begin in either late fall or early spring so that we can reopen the playground by spring of 2023.

Thank you,

Ayer Parks Commission