

In Northwest Portland, students help design an inclusive playground

In Couch Park, an old wooden play structure was the domain of Max Nathe and other students at Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC), the public school next door. They would eat lunch under the slide, collect horse chestnuts, and set rules for games on what they called the “top tower.”



When PP&R announced it would replace the play structure, Max, then a sixth grader, and his mom Lauren got involved. Their goal: an inclusive play space for all ages and abilities in one of Portland’s most densely populated neighborhoods. With its many apartment buildings and grand old homes converted to offices, the Historic Alphabet District is rich on history but has few backyards and just one park, Couch Park, for people to gather and play at.

Max, Lauren, and other neighbors are working with PP&R to enhance this urban gem by helping create the inclusive playground. They’ve raised \$500,000, via a partnership of Harper’s Playground and Friends of Couch Playground, to supplement improvements funded by the Parks Replacement Bond.

And Max, along with another MLC student, joined the playground’s project advisory committee, giving PP&R and the design team ideas based on his years playing there with his friends and watching how other kids played there. He’s happy with the results: “We helped create a design that would best support everybody in the community.”