



## **Couch Park Play Structure FAQs**

### **Why are the wooden play structure and stage at Couch Park closed, and so abruptly?**

Because of safety concerns. As soon as Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R), along with an independent report from an engineering firm, determined that the play structure and stage posed too great a risk for children to play, we made the decision to close the structure and communicated the decision to our partner, Portland Public Schools (PPS). We simply will not take chances when it comes to the safety of the children who play at our playgrounds.

The Couch Park play structure spent approximately 40 years exposed to the Oregon rain. While monitoring it carefully, PP&R crews have been clear with the school and community over the past several years that the structure had been nearing the end of its useful life. Based on recent findings from an independent engineering report (by G2 Consultants and MC Consultants) and our own staff's assessment, we made the determination that the play structure and stage were unfortunately no longer safe for public use. Our staff made repairs as long as they could. The structure had deteriorated beyond repair.

### **Does Portland Public Schools support this decision?**

Yes. PP&R works closely with PPS at Couch Park and many other shared or adjacent school / park properties. At Couch Park, the decision to close the play structure was made by PP&R, with the understanding and approval of PPS, as we all share the number one priority of keeping our children safe.

### **Can the wooden play structure and stage be repaired?**

Not anymore. Unfortunately, the wood structure and stage were in such poor condition that they are simply no longer safe, usable, nor repairable. On several occasions over the past several years, PP&R staff worked hard to prolong the structure's life, making repairs as they were able to, and removing pieces and portions of the wood structure – as well as other play equipment in the Couch Park playground – as they deteriorated. Unfortunately, the play structure and stage are no longer safe for public use. They have deteriorated beyond repair.

### **I understand there was an engineering report commissioned; what does it say?**

PP&R recently asked an independent firm, G2 Consultants, for an engineering analysis

of the play structure to help us understand any risks. The [report](#) from G2 Consultants, in partnership with MC Consultants, lists several concerns, some of which include:

- Poor overall structural condition; some structural elements are coming apart, others contain dry rot
- Severe rotting of wood in parts of the structure's flooring
- Presence of termites
- Wood and steel railings severely deteriorated due to weather

It was these results, and PP&R staff's assessment, that prompted the decision to close the wooden play structure and stage – strictly out of safety concerns.

### **What is the plan for replacing the wooden play structure and stage?**

That remains to be seen. PP&R does not currently have funding available to replace the closed play equipment at Couch Park at this time. It is not that PP&R was not aware of this impending need, but rather that no funds are available to replace the structure in the immediate future. There are approximately 60 playground structures in Portland's parks that are nearing the end of their useful life and will be at risk for safety concerns in the next ten years, and there is not nearly enough money in the PP&R budget to pay for replacements.

### **Why is there no money right now to replace the structure?**

PP&R's overall list of maintenance and replacement needs far exceeds the funds available. PP&R has a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) list which includes replacement / repair / renovation projects throughout our park system. Based on PP&R's current CIP list, the annual funding gap for repairing / renovation of existing assets is \$36.5M. This means that we have \$36.5M of unfunded maintenance projects planned each year for the next ten years – a ten-year total of \$365M of unfunded maintenance projects.

Money for major repairs and equipment replacement must come out of PP&R's General Fund, allocated by the City Council. Replacement of the Couch Park wooden play structure is on the CIP list, and has been for several years. In PP&R's 2014-15 Requested Budget (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/480175> – page 31), there is reference to funding a replacement structure at Couch Park several years in the future. Funding allocated beyond the current fiscal year cannot be guaranteed, however, because other emergencies may happen and displace the availability of these future funds.

The Couch Park play structure has been and remains on PP&R's capital improvements list because we want neighbors to have a safe, accessible, and enjoyable play structure. When funding becomes available to replace the wooden structure at Couch Park, PP&R will move forward with community involvement and input for the project. You can review the entirety of PP&R's CIP list here:

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/63265>.

### **Why can't System Development Charges (SDC) funds be used for play structure replacement?**

Major repairs and equipment replacement must come out of Portland Parks & Recreation's General Fund, allocated by the City Council, rather than System Development Charges (SDCs). SDCs are charges paid by construction development. SDC revenue is restricted to expanding capacity only; SDCs cannot be used for other purposes such as the Couch Park playground. The rules around use of SDCs are designated by state law.

### **Can the wooden play structure be replaced with another wooden play structure?**

No. Playground standards and manufacturing specifications have changed over the last four decades. Wooden play structures are susceptible to decay and deterioration, and thus, safety concerns, particularly in our wet climate. Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) and Portland Public Schools (PPS) can no longer install new wooden play structures. We recognize it was a much beloved play structure, and will be missed. Metropolitan Learning Center student and staffs contributed to designing the structure in the 1970s.

### **Wasn't some new equipment just added to the play area?**

Yes, several new play elements have been added to the Couch Park playground in the past several years. Additionally, some other safety improvements have been made to help extend the life of the wooden play structure. Below is a brief chronology:

- 2003: The Couch Park Master Plan was completed in 2003 (and is available on the PP&R website: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/469524>). The Master Plan called for the addition of a young children's play area.
- Spring 2009: Thanks to a grant from the Opus Foundation and our partnership with the Portland Parks Foundation, new play equipment was added to the playground. In addition, some safety improvements were made at the same time, which included removal of some small play elements, and the addition of a fence surrounding the play area.
- Fall 2012: PP&R removed the monkey bars and several other features due to rotted support beams.

Other repairs have been done as needed over the past several years as well.

### **What other play options are there?**

The adjacent, newer play equipment at Couch Park is not affected and remains open for use. The closest nearby playgrounds to Couch Park are Wallace Park, NW 25th & Raleigh, and The Fields Park, NW 10th & Overton.