

Growing Up Boulder

Engaging Children, Youth and Families in Concept Planning for Valmont City Park

FINAL REPORT

I. Introduction

The City of Boulder Parks & Recreation Department is revisiting the Valmont City Park concept plan that was developed in 2008. As a part of this process Growing Up Boulder (GUB) solicited ideas from groups of children, youth and families. GUB facilitated community outreach activities with school-age children from YMCA's University Hill and Crestview Elementary programs, with middle- and high-school youth from the Youth Services Initiative (YSI), and with families of the YSI youth. This report is a summary of the child, youth and family input gathered by Growing Up Boulder.

Data was gathered using different methods with each group. YMCA children were engaged with a Co-design activity during a field-trip to the site, where they created drawings of playgrounds in an imaginary newly developed park. YSI activities took place using photovoice during a field-trip to the site, and using a visual preference survey at the YSI meeting space at Salberg Park facilities. Parents of participating youth were interviewed at an informal social gathering for Dia de los Niños at the Manhattan housing site. Although responses varied between and within each group, two major themes that were present and highly prevalent for all three groups were *nature* and *play*, while two other themes, *transport* and *food* were mostly a concern of the older groups of youth and parents. Priority recommendations for these three groups are summarized in Table 1. The rest of this document provides detailed descriptions of the methods and results for each activity.

Table 1.
Child, Youth and Parent Priority Recommendations for Valmont City Park

Theme	Children	Youth	Parents
Nature	➤ Nature-play structures (esp. underground tunnels based on prairie-dog habitat)	➤ Well maintained meadow-like green open spaces (green grass and flowers).	➤ Natural vegetation in general (not specified).
Play	➤ Adventure-play (e.g. tunnels, ropes, climbing walls, zip-line, trampoline) ➤ Petting zoo ➤ Traditional play structures	➤ Adventure-play (e.g. ropes & zip-lines, trampolines, bright colors). ➤ Water-play ➤ Petting zoo	➤ Water-play (e.g. splash-pads).
Transportation	-	➤ Park-train ➤ Bike	➤ Bus ➤ Bike
Food	-	➤ Taco truck ➤ Campfires	➤ Shaded picnic areas with grills.

II. Methods

2.1 Children's engagement: Park Co-design

Twenty children ages 6-10, from two local elementary schools (Crestview and University Hill) participated in a field-trip to Valmont City Park during their after-school program with YMCA. After an initial walk around the site children were asked to envision themselves in a park where all the designing had been done already, and draw what they would be doing in this park on a blank sheet. The task was described the following way: "Imagine yourself at this park, where all the designing is done and it has been built to your satisfaction. Think of what you will be doing. Now, draw yourself and your friends first in the picture. Then draw the surroundings."

2.2 Youth Engagement

Photovoice: Eight youth ages 11-16 (3 girls, 5 boys) from Boulder's Youth Services Initiative (YSI) participated in a one-hour long field-trip to Valmont Park. The goal of this activity was to allow youth to explore the park with the following three questions in mind: "What would you preserve? What would you create? What would you change?" Youth were given cameras and a cardboard frame (green on one side and red on the other), and were instructed to take pictures of things they like (would preserve) framed green, and things they dislike (would change), framed red. During the walk around the park CYE and YSI staff pointed out different objects that may be important aspects of the park-planning process (e.g. types and sizes of paths). The following week, GUB presented a compilation of the photos YSI youth had taken on the field trip. GUB asked youth to provide feedback regarding the photographs they had taken. Half-way through the park exploration youth took a 10 minute break, and were asked to draw what they imagine or wish for in this park (what they would create) on yellow-framed blank sheets.

Visual Preference Survey: Fifteen youth ages 11-16 (8 girls, 7 boys) participated in this activity. A power-point visual survey consisting of 22 slides was created, depicting choices of park-related infrastructure within the categories of a) transport (to and within the park), b) social spaces (seating and picnic options), c) playgrounds (e.g. adventure-play, water-play, surface, and accessibility), and d) food/recreation. The goal of the activity was to expose youth to a wide variety of park ideas and to help narrow down their preferences. Slides presented 2, 3, or 4 choices in a visual format, and in most cases also included a short verbal description that clarified which aspects of the image were under inquiry. Youth were asked to position themselves in the room according to their most preferred image.

2.3 Family Engagement

Parents of the participating YSI youth were interviewed at an informal social event – a Dia de los Niños potluck gathering held on a weekday evening at their local housing complex. YSI youth, their families, YSI youth workers, and GUB staff and volunteers attended the one-and-half hour event. Five parents were asked the following three questions: "If there were a park where you could take your family and spend the afternoon, what would it be like?" "Who would be there with you?" and "By what mode of transport would you like to get to the park, assuming that it is not within walking distance? Would you use a bike, bus or drive?" All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

III. Results

3.1 Children's engagement

Major themes that occurred in children's responses are presented in the order of prevalence in Table 2. By far the most dominant theme that emerged from these drawings was *play*, with over 70 different forms of play structures or equipment depicted in the 20 pictures. Within the play theme the *adventure-play* sub-theme was most predominant, followed by the *traditional* and *nature-play* sub-themes, respectively. Most common examples included underground tunnels (one with a jet), climbing walls (including a rock wall), slides (two of these were water slides and one a 'tornado' slide), trampolines, mazes, zip-lines, and tree-houses (examples in Figure 1.). Other interesting play-structures were huts and a toy-house, a dragon to climb on, a ropes-course, one laser, a jet, a rocket, a rock with tubes, and a tower.

Depictions of *nature* were the second most commonly occurring theme in the drawings (N=34), and included the sub-themes of *natural environment* and *nature-play*. The third dominant theme that emerged was *animal*, although this category had considerable overlap with both the theme of *play* and the theme of *nature*. Figure 2. shows overlapping areas of the three major categories within children's park activities.

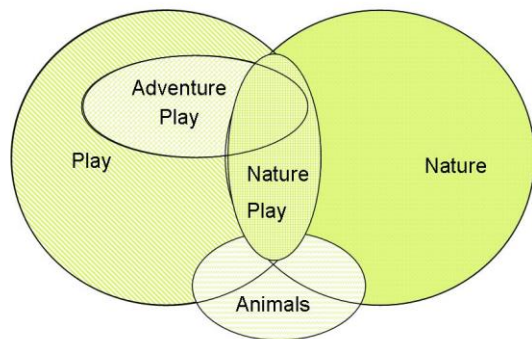


Figure 2. Overlapping Categories of Children's Drawings



Figure 1. Children's Drawings of Imagined Playgrounds

Table 2.
Dominant Themes in Children's Drawings of Imagined Park Activities

Theme	Frequency	Sub-theme	Frequency	Specific responses
Play	n= 71	Adventure play	n=38	Underground tunnels* (8); Climbing wall (or rock*) (7); Trampoline (5); Maze (5); Zip-line (4); Net/rope ladder (2); Haunted house (2); Ropes-course (1); Tower (1); Bridge (1); Dragon* (1); Rocket ship (1)
		Traditional play structures	n=18	Slide (5); Monkey bars (4); Hut/house (2); Swings (2); Ladder (2); Stairs (1); Steering wheel (1); Nets (1)
		Nature Play**	n=16	Underground tunnels* (8); Tree-house (3); Zoo/petting zoo** (2); Climbing rock/rock-wall (1); Dog** (1); Bunny**(1); Horse**(1)
		Fantasy	n=5	Tornado slide (1); Laser (1); Dragon* (1); Rock with tubes (1); Experiment station (1)
		Water Play	n=4	Water slide (2); Water balloons (1); Pool-maze* (1)
		Animal	n=1	Pet store**(1)
Nature	n=34	Natural Environment	n=17	Sun (7); Mountains (2); Hills (2); Fields (2); Sky (1); Clouds (1); Pine cones (1); Prairie dog**(1)
		Nature-Play**	n=17	Underground tunnels (8); Tree-house (3); Zoo/petting zoo** (2); Climbing rock/rock-wall (1); Dog** (1); Bunny**(1); Horse**(1)
Animal	n=7	-	-	Zoo/petting zoo**(2); Pet store**(1); Dog** (1); Bunny**(1); Horse**(1); Prairie dog**(1)
Other	n=3			Hot-dog cart (2); Giant TV(1); Video theatre(1); Fire hydrant(1)

* Included in 2 sub-categories of same main category

**Included in 2 main categories

3.2 Youth Engagement

Photovoice: There were three major themes that emerged from the youth's photographs: nature, garbage, and transportation. These are presented in order of prevalence in Table 3. Of these, the major theme that all youth agreed on, and pictured in red frames, was the presence of garbage. In accordance with this theme, garbage cans were positively perceived. Many youth also disliked the number of parked cars present in the parking lot. The reasons given were: "You should walk to the park," "There needs to be better bus service," "There is not enough parking space," and "I don't like that you have to drive there."

There was disagreement regarding aspects of the natural landscape, with some youth perceiving the natural prairie vegetation, the trees, the mountainous landscape and the prairie dogs negatively, while a larger number (about 2/3) perceiving these positively. Flowering shrubs, large trees and the well-maintained green disc-golf field was favored by most youth, and weeds and yellow grasses (even when part of the native ecosystem) were disliked in general. Bicycle racks and cycle lanes received a more positive assessment, although there was some disagreement here as well. Gravel and paved pathways received mixed reviews, while stone/brick pathways were assessed positively in all cases. Dogs were seen mostly positively, as were the presence of doggy bags. The disc-golf fence received mixed reviews as well: some youth liked how it was designed to keep the prairie dogs out, others did not find it aesthetically pleasing. Representative photographs were selected and compiled into two posters, depicting youth's positive (green-framed) and negative (red-framed) assessments of Valmont Park (see Figures 3. and 4., respectively).

Table 3.
Major Themes in Youth's Photographs

Theme	Positively assessed	Negatively assessed
Nature (Yellow & green grass, natural vegetation & weeds, shrubs, trees, mountains, creek & wetland, prairie dogs).	Green disc-golf field, green grass (n=13)	Weeds & native wild vegetation (n=8)
	Trees and shrubs (n=10)	Yellow grass & branch piles (n=6)
	Mountainous landscape (n=5)	Flood damage (n=3)
	Weeds & native wild vegetation (n=3)	Murky creek and wetland area (n=2)
	Prairie dogs (n=2)	Prairie dogs (n=1)
	Yellow grass (n=1)	
Garbage (Plastic, bottles, glass, and garbage cans)	Garbage cans (n=4)	Garbage (n=14)
Transportation (Paths, cycling related infrastructure, automobile related infrastructure, transit).	Paved bike lane/path (n=3)	Cars/full parking lot (n=5)
	Wide wooden bridge (n=2)	Bike (n=1)
	Dirt path (n=2)	Dirt path (n=1)
	Stone path (n=2)	Cracked paved path (n=1)
	Cyclist (n=2)	Cyclist (n=1)
	Stone bench on path (n=2)	Narrow flat cement bridge across creek/wetland (n=1)
	Signage on paths (n=2)	

Youth drew pictures and/or wrote a list of things they would like to see in the park on yellow-framed sheets (see Figure 5.). The most common requests are listed below in order of prevalence:

- Taco truck with free Wi-Fi.
- Green fields/open spaces with more flowers, and no pesticides.
- Pool and/or waterpark/lazy river.
- Real bathrooms, not portable ones.
- Campfire.
- Outdoor movie theatre/stage.

Other suggestions included gravel walking paths along the existing bike-lanes, Starbucks, a zoo, bike and sport-equipment rentals (e.g. disc-golf Frisbee), a “really cool handicap accessible jungle gym,” and a shooting range.



Figure 5. Taco Truck with WiFi

Visual Preference Survey: When discussing transportation to and within the park, a unique park-train, and the bicycle, quadricycle, or rickshaw ride and rental options were most favored by the youth. A general theme that emerged is that youth prefer colorful, and artistic options over grey stone or cement, be it pathways, seating, or climbing and balancing play structures (see Figure 5). The majority of youth preferred to have grills or outdoor ovens at picnic areas, and most liked more artistic designs, with a larger number choosing picnic tables than benches. Adventure playground structures were generally favored over traditional more common playgrounds. The main features that youth preferred were: wooden castle and animals to sit/climb on; ropes, high-ropes, zip-line; colorful nets for climbing and swinging, rubber surface, many splash or water structures, and ‘chutes-and-ladders’ style slides (see Figure 6).

Additional suggestions for playground structures included a trampoline, a treehouse, a rock cave and tunnels, paintball, mini-golf, and horse-back-riding. All youth liked the idea of a petting zoo, and the option of not only petting and feeding, but also riding some animals. Concerns were raised, however, over the price of this and other services, such as a high-ropes-course, or bicycle and rickshaw rentals. The group was mostly split between an indoor and outdoor ice-skating rink. With regards to food, stationary food stands or buildings were preferred, and it was recommended that food-delivery by bicycle should be made available within the park, especially if food-related and play-related structures are significantly far from each-other. Nice, clean, non-mobile bathrooms and working water fountains were also high priority for many youth. Results of the Visual Preference Survey are presented in Table 4.

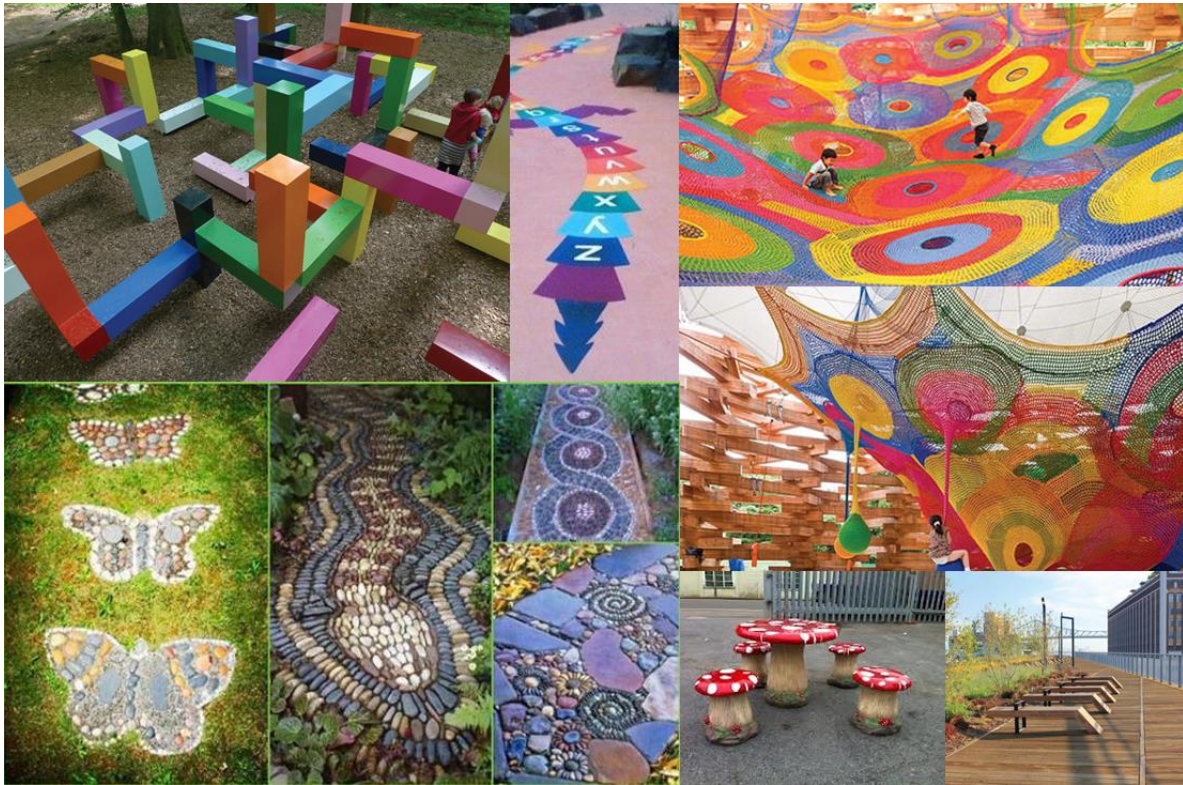


Figure 5.Youth preferences of Artistic and Colorful Structures



Figure 6.Youth Preferences of Adventure Playgrounds

Table 4.
Visual Preference Survey Results of Youth Park Preferences

Slide	Top choice(s)	2 nd choice	Comments/concerns
1. Getting to the park	Park-train (n=8)	Family bike ride (n=5)	"Nice to ride something different."
2. Getting around in the park	Rickshaw(&quadricycle) rides/rentals(n=12)	Park train (n=3)	Train is fun to ride, you can see everything.
3.Pathways	Elaborate/artisitic (n=14)	Simple/natural (n=1)	The fancy trail will just get messed up.
4.Social Spaces	Lounge bench (n=6) & Artistic picnic table (mushroom) (n=6)	Regular picnic table (n=3)	Fun to sit on [a mushroom table].
5. Picnic areas	With oven/grill (n=12)	No oven/grill (n=3)	Fire hazard; dislike smoke; when barbequing, people will leave trash around.
6. Playgrounds	Adventure (n=15)	Traditional	You can go to any park and find traditional playground, but this would be something new/different to go to.
7. Surface	Rubber (n=15)	-	Sand would get in your toes; rubber is squishy and feels nice.
8.Styles/color	Artistic (n=12)	Adventure (n=3)	Artistic catches attention; is exceptional and makes people come back, like the swing-balls.
9. Styles	Hand-carved/ wood (n=12)	Modern/grey stone (n=3)	Modern nowadays pretty boring, dull, depressing.
10.Slides	Chutes & Ladders (n=15)	Regular	
11. Climbing	Rock (n=11)	Metal (n=3)	Metal can burn in summer heat; why not have both.
12. Balancing	Geometric/colorful (n=15)	Logs/natural	[Geometric is] more colorful and looks more challenging.
13. Swings	Bird's nest (n=9)	Glide-swing (n=4)	You can lean back [on glide swing].
14. Water-play	Rubber splash-pad (n=12)	Natural creek/pond (n=3)	Splash pad is cleaner, with more structures; I like to play in mud and have mud-fights; little kids may like messier one more.
15. Adventure type	High ropes/zipline (n=13)	Low ground nature/adventure (n=2)	The [high ropes] do not seem so safe; will we have to pay? – It should be free.
16. Location of play structures	All together (n=10)	Scattered (n=5)	All together because I don't want to walk around; When scattered, you have more things to do than if it was all in one area.
17. Animals	Petting zoo (n=15)	Wild/native animals only	You will always have wildlife there, but this way you can also pet them; Don't have to go all the way to Denver to see and touch animals.
18. Animals	Ride them (n=15)	Feed/pet them	Will it be for free? – It also costs money to feed them; Not really about money – Yes it is.
19. Accessibility	Yes (n=15)	No	Combine, and make some parts wheelchair accessible
20. Skating	Indoor (n=7)	Outdoor (n=6)	Indoor rink great on a hot day.
21. Food	Stationary (n=15)	Mobile	Stationary is cleaner, you can wash hands, bigger, more seating, great on a hot day; should have Mexican food; don't call it a café, make it a 7-11.
22. Food-play vicinity	Food & play in separate areas (n=8)	Food and play all in one area (n=7)	Playground will get more dirty if people eat around there; separate but not too far.

3.3 Family Engagement

The most important elements stressed by YSI parents were picnic tables with shade and grills, and public transit, specifically bus access to the park. Other important structures recommended by parents were water-play areas and bicycle and walking paths. Informal interview results are presented, generally in order of preference in Table 5.

Table 5.

Parent Responses to Interview Questions Regarding Valmont City Park Plans and Design

Questions	Answers
If there were a park where you could take your family and spend the afternoon, what would it be like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Picnic tables with shade coverings*• Grills*• Playground with swings and rubberized top• Bicycle paths• Water play area• Vegetation• Walking paths for the whole family• A fence for security• Basketball hoops, soccer fields for pick-up games
Who would be there with you?	Extended family would use the site together
By what mode of transport would you like to get to the park, assuming that it is not within walking distance? Would you use a bike, bus or drive?	Access via public bus* and bicycle

* Highly prevalent responses, specifically stressed by many of the respondents