



David B. Cohen  
Mayor

## CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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October 23, 2007

Community Preservation Committee  
c/o Planning and Development Department  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Newton Upper Falls Playground

Dear Community Preservation Committee Members:

The Newton Historical Commission would like to express its sense that Newton Upper Falls Playground contributes significantly to Newton's historic community character as both "the Garden City" and a place that has welcomed successive waves of new immigrants.

Urban reformer Jane Addams argued that "play, beyond any other human activity, is ... most useful in modern cities, which are full of devices for keeping men apart and holding them ignorant of each other" ("Public Recreation and Social Morality," 1907).

In 1895, Boston's new Metropolitan Parks Commission removed the popular band pavilion and dance floor from the private Echo Bridge Park to create a more natural landscape for passive recreation at its new Hemlock Gorge Reservation. This made it even more important to provide opportunities for active recreation elsewhere in Upper Falls, as well as Newton's other densely settled, ethnically mixed mill villages. By 1928, thanks to both outdoor recreation and formal school programs, local historian Kenneth Newcombe's description of Upper Falls reflected Jane Addams' early vision: its Woman's Club was run by 12 elected officers from 7 different national origins.

Yet the early development and importance of the Upper Falls Playground has remained largely unrecognized. As early as 1870, the area was known as "Dudley's Field," a hayfield mowed seasonally and used for baseball. Within a year after 1908, when Massachusetts state law required cities and towns of over 10,000 residents to provide playgrounds for the "recreation and physical education of minors," this Upper Falls parcel was sold and deeded to the City for use as a playground. In 1910 the City hired Herbert J. Kellaway, master landscape architect trained in the Olmsted Bros. office, to develop an extensive plan for the playground, just as he had the year before for the Newton Centre Playground.

**Newton Historical Commission**

1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, Massachusetts 02459

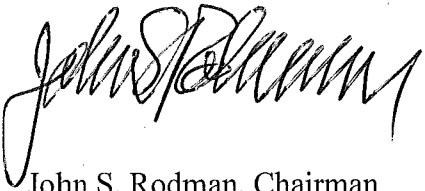
[www.ci.newton.ma.us](http://www.ci.newton.ma.us)

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Newton Upper Falls Playground

A design consultant, Weston & Sampson Engineers, Inc., recently completed a master plan of the grounds for the Parks and Recreation Department that offers a history of the Upper Falls Playground, provides an assessment of its current uses and conditions, and acts as a guide to its future rehabilitation. Kellaway's original design intent was for a playground in a public park setting with baseball field, tennis courts, children's play equipment, and access to the river. Its proposed rehabilitation plan will preserve and restore space for all these uses, while taking into account contemporary needs and providing for future generations.

The Upper Falls Playground has retained its historic setting, layout, use and associations to a surprising degree over the past century. The Newton Historical Commission hopes that the CPC will look favorably upon the Parks and Recreation Department's proposal to restore and rehabilitate this historic landscape with community preservation funds.

Sincerely,



John S. Rodman, Chairman  
Newton Historical Commission

cc: Carol Schein, Open Space Coordinator, Parks and Recreation Department  
Michael Kruse, Director of Planning & Development