



# Age-Friendly Parks

Photo Credit: Charles Krupa, 2015 (Maddock, 2017)

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**Increasing seniors' desire to access parks as places to pass time improves their mental and physical health, but this requires spaces of interest designed for older adults.**

National parks and provincial parks are significant assets but often are destination spots that require vehicular travelling. Local, neighbourhood parks offer active daily living opportunities, though they lack attention given to larger parks. Today's parks, in general, are often dominated by sporting facilities such as basketball courts, soccer fields, and baseball diamonds, which are biased towards the youth. However, urban parks used to be designed to be "pastoral, where nature is present in a tamed environment" (Maddock, 2017), such as Central Park, but parks later changed focus towards children's activities such as playgrounds and sporting fields. This matter is most evident in North American parks, which lead to a lack of interest in using parks within older adults without children. Asian countries such as China and Taiwan had equally as many if not more older adults present in parks than the younger generation; Chinese parks are later used as inspiration for North American parks (Maddock, 2017).

Seniors accessing green spaces and parks brings numerous benefits for their mental and physical health: reducing social isolation, increasing social engagement, provides opportunities for intergenerational interaction, creates a sense of place and attachment along with a safe and comfortable outlet to pass the time. However, older adults find "parks that are primarily designed for younger populations...not psychologically accessible" (Loukaitou-Sideris as quoted in Traverso, 2019) as they are can almost be perceived as hazardous. As the number of seniors is projected to increase to 30% of the total population in 30-40 years, it becomes even more crucial to design for older generations.

## Memory Gardens

The Portland Memory Garden is a soothing space specifically designed for those suffering from dementia and other memory disorders (portlandmemorygarden.org, N/A), but is open to the entire public. It is designed with one central access point (Green, N/A), providing a safe space for seniors to freely wander while their companion supervises them and enjoys the garden. The plants aim to stimulate the senses to trigger memory while walking the loop. The garden is designed with tinted pavement to reduce glare, raised curbs to prevent falling into the beds, and has accessible washrooms and benches with armrests for sitting (Green, N/A). The sensory garden can consist of plants that can be enjoyed all year, including winter times by planting herbs and grasses, but should delicately choose dementia-friendly plants avoiding prickly vegetation (Gilmer, 2018).



Photo Credit: Brian Bainson

Figure 1: Portland Memory Garden with different pavements to distinguish changes in space, also note multiple benches with armrests.

Green, J. N/A. What do seniors need in parks?. <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/what-do-seniors-need-parks/1070996/>

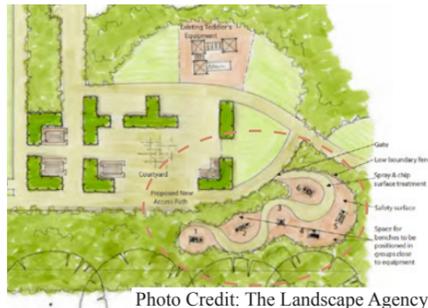


Photo Credit: The Landscape Agency

Figure 2: Senior Playground at Hyde Park situated near existing courtyard and children's playground. (Loukaitou-Sideris, et al., 2020, p.61)



Dailymail.co.uk

Figure 3: Equipment can be for all ages and abilities.

Firth, N. 2008. Playtime for Grandma: Council opens new playground for the over-60s [Photograph]. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-511253/>

## Seniors' Playgrounds

“Exercising in groups [increases seniors’] social interactions, which in turn, encourage them to exercise more” (Loukaitou-Sideris, et al., 2020, p.77). Senior playgrounds provide a range of motion in a fun alternative option to fitness gyms. It is also free and publicly accessible to all. Hyde Park in London, dedicated a portion towards a seniors’ playground with specifically chosen equipment with high levels of accessibility for the elderly (Loukaitou-Sideris, et al., 2020). According to research in Nanchang, China by Maddock, “the most popular machines are the ones that deal with common old age issues like balance and dexterity” (Traverso, 2019). These spaces weren’t common in Canada but are now found in British Columbia communities — referred to as “seniors’ community parks” — such as Cranbrook with it located just outside Cranbrook RecPlex and a block away from the youth skatepark (gov.bc.ca N/A). Residents in Blackley, Manchester initiated the installation of six low-impact equipment, where they specifically chose Damhead Park for their seniors’ playground’s location (Loukaitou, 2020). Figure 3 shows there are equipment options that can be accessible by wheelchairs and other abled-bodies.

These spaces can be multigenerational, where not all locations restrict youth younger than 15 from using the machines (Cohen, 2010). Meshing different recreational users of different generations strengthen the whole community morale, although semi-private locations for these playgrounds are best as to give shy seniors some privacy, such as in Hyde Park (Figure 2), where it is observed to be used more frequently (Cohen, 2010).

## Intergenerational Interactions

- McGhan Park, Sherwood Park, AB, Canada
- Cottonwood Park, Coquitlam, BC, Canada
- Crandall Park, Glen Falls, NY, USA
- Rancho Tapo Community Park, Simi Valley, CA, USA

Activities enjoyed by older adults such as pickleball courts, and chess/checker tables (Loukaitou-Sideris, et al., 2020) are integrated within the parks

**Seniors playgrounds are multi-generational but other amenities presenting intergenerational opportunities could include pickleball courts, bocce ball courts, shuffle boards, and chess/checker tables.**



Photo Credit: Bri + Tom Lyons

Figure 4: Simple integration of pickleball courts (and others) with chess/checker tables at Crandall Park. The seating only on two sides allow wheelchair users to also partake in the activity, but the static bench may present some hindrance being immobile.

Lyons, Bri & Tom. 2020. First Look: The Courts at Crandall Park [Photograph]. <https://www.glensfallsliving.com/blog/crandall-park-courts>

Figure 5: Bench with armrests and a space welcoming wheelchair users to sit beside their companion.



Photo Credit: Dodsworth, P.

Dodsworth, P. N/A. Installation of Benches [Photograph]. *W.H.O.* <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/afp/installation-of-benches/#prettyPhoto>



Pinterest.com

Pinterest.com. N/A. [Bench designs for gardens] [Photograph]. <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/516928863460994675/>

Figure 6: Alternative bench design for users with strollers or as a rail to lean on for quick rests from walking.

**Park-scape features such as seating options, pavement detail, lighting design contribute to the parks’ accessibility and overall appeal.**



Figure 7: Cottonwood Park, Coquitlam, BC with intergenerational amenities, and details including smooth surfaces, garbage bin, washroom, shaded and unshaded seating options.

Van der Zalm + Associates. N/A. [Cottonwood Park, Coquitlam, BC] [Photograph]. [vdz.ca. https://vdz.ca/portfolio/whonnock-lake-park-copy-copy-copy-2-copy/#prettyPhoto](https://vdz.ca/portfolio/whonnock-lake-park-copy-copy-copy-2-copy/#prettyPhoto)

listed above while they also offer other courts, grass fields, playgrounds and walking trails. McGhan Park’s additional features are toboggan hills and an outdoor rink (Strathcona County, 2020). Cottonwood Park offers fitness equipments, table tennis, a water filling station, splash park and public washrooms (Englund, 2020). Rancho Tapo Community Park (rsrpd.org, N/A) and Crandall Park (Lyons, 2020) are situated in larger urban contexts, but both present various amenities to choose from to integrate into smaller parks such as bocce ball courts. Each neighbourhood can select specific features valuable to residents to integrate with existing structures and amenities at their local parks. The benefit of integrating seniors’ spaces as part of the general park use portrays they are equally valued (Ibest, et al., 2018) and prevents isolation (Figure 4 & 7), promoting passive and active social interactions while being within visible areas providing safety and security (Agnello, 2018).

## Park-scape Detail on Seating and Pathways

Detailing on pathways is important like the tinted pavements in the Portland Memory Garden reducing glare. Raised curbs, different edge pavements (Figure 1 & 5), and smooth surfaces (Figure 7) are good transition indicators to help with navigation and prevent falls (Green, N/A). Seating options are also essential, where bench designs

can determine the comfortability of spaces, and the type of interactions to occur (Black, 2016) — Figures 5 and 6 presents different resting options.

## Final Thoughts

Green spaces are valuable in all contexts and should be inclusive of all ages, including the senior population. Seniors are projected to be at least 30% of the total population; therefore, more attention to detail and facilities serviced within parks should be oriented towards the older generation. Sensory gardens can stimulate memory, providing a safe space for dementia patients to engage with nature and others. Seniors’ playgrounds with accessible and low-impact fitness equipment can be enjoyed by older adults and a majority of the population. Integrating these features and other facilities, especially those utilized by older adults like pickleball courts and chess/checker tables, will increase intergenerational interaction opportunities. Higher social interaction within safe and comfortable spaces improves everyone’s mental and physical

health, but particularly seniors who “do better when they are around all age groups” (Green, N/A). Detailing of pavement and seating and the availability of washrooms heighten the appeal of parks for seniors to engage as they rely on walking and parks as their primary source of activity. Ideally, parks should be within a 10-15min walk from seniors’ homes to increase accessibility (Acquino, 2019). Mile markers to the proximity of the parks or other points of interest could be considered to encourage walking to farther locations.

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