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### GARDNER PARK PLAYGROUND CLOSED UNTIL RENOVATION

Earlier this month, the City of Newport made the difficult decision to close the Gardner Park Playground over safety concerns. An annual Risk Management Report performed by the City's insurance carrier prompted discussion on whether the City should continue spending unbudgeted funds on repairs when there is a total renovation is on the horizon. The City's property insurance carrier, The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), requires annual inspections of the City's parks to ensure that the municipality is following best practices and complying with safety code. Annual visits usually result in a short "to-do" list of recommendations for repair or maintenance on things that could present a liability risk to the City.

Jessica Booth, Parks & Recreation Director, manages the public parks for Newport and is very familiar with these routine check-ups. "It's not unusual for Gardner Park to be the star of the show," she said in reference to the follow up reports. "Our playground is being used well beyond it's intended lifespan, so we've been trying to keep up with safety repairs for years."

This summer though, with fundraising on track for a big 2021 playground overhaul, the City decided not to fund the needed repairs, looking instead toward the re-build. The final straw was a recommendation from VLCT to completely resurface the play area by replacing existing compacted pea-stone which, according to playground code, doesn't meet fall protection standards. "Bringing in engineered wood chips would have been the most cost effective solution, but that still would have run about \$12,000. It just doesn't make sense at this point in the game," says Booth. With usage down heading into the winter months, she said the City opted to close off the area instead.

Jennifer Smith, Chair of the Newport Recreation Committee is disappointed, but hopeful. "We knew it was only a matter of time before this happened, I'm just glad we're well on our way to a new playground," she said. The Recreation Committee has been furiously fundraising for the project since 2019 and they hope this closure might inspire more people to give. "There are a lot of families who use the playground in Gardner Park. If each one made a small contribution, it could bring us across the finish line. Knowing that there won't be a playground in Gardner Park until we do might be a little extra motivation."

To date, the Recreation Committee and municipality have raised 80% of project costs through grants, fundraisers and community donations. Supporters are invited to make a contribution and see project designs at [www.GoFundMe.com/SPLASHPLAY](http://www.GoFundMe.com/SPLASHPLAY) or call Jessica Booth at (802)334-6345. Donations are tax deductible and can also be mailed to Newport Parks & Recreation, 222 Main Street, Newport VT 05855.

