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MASSACHUSETTS

PLAYGROUND REFERENDUM

FOR

Cities and Towns of over Ten Thousand Inhabitants

CITIES VOTE IN DECEMBER, TOWNS IN SPRING



WANTED, A PLAYGROUND

¶ Shall Chapter 513 of the Acts of 1908, requiring certain cities and towns to provide playgrounds, be accepted by this City (or Town)?

YES	X
NO	

PUBLISHED BY

THE MASSACHUSETTS CIVIC LEAGUE

3 Joy Street, Boston

AND

THE PLAYGROUND ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

1 Madison Avenue, New York

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PLAYGROUND REFERENDUM.

An act of the last legislature provides that the people of every city in Massachusetts, and of every town of over ten thousand inhabitants, shall vote at the next municipal election, upon the question of providing adequate playgrounds, unless such provision has already been made. The act is as follows:

CHAP. 513. ACTS OF 1908. AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS IN CERTAIN CITIES AND TOWNS.

Be it enacted, etc., as follows:

SECTION 1. Every city and town in the Commonwealth having a population of more than ten thousand, accepting the provisions of this act shall, after the first day of July in the year nineteen hundred and ten, provide and maintain at least one public playground conveniently located and of suitable size and equipment, for the recreation and physical education of the minors of such city or town, and at least one other playground for every additional twenty thousand of its population.

SECTION 2. Cities and towns may appoint, and determine the compensation of, a qualified supervisor of each playground, who shall direct the sports and exercises thereon.

SECTION 3. In cities and towns where the provisions of this act are not already satisfied, land for the purpose aforesaid may be taken, and the money necessary to pay for such land may be raised in accordance with sections nineteen, twenty and twenty-one of chapter twenty-eight of the Revised Laws, and any land owned by the city or town may be set aside by vote of the city council, or of the board of selectmen, for the purposes of this act.

SECTION 4. In cities and towns which have a population of more than ten thousand, and which have not already satisfied the provisions of this act, the following question shall be placed on the official ballot at the next city or town election:—Shall chapter 513 of the acts of the year nineteen hundred and eight, requiring certain cities and towns to provide public playgrounds, be accepted by this city (or town)?

SECTION 5. This act shall take effect in any city or town to which it applies upon its acceptance by a majority of the voters voting as aforesaid. (Approved May 12, 1908.)

Revised Laws, Chapter 28, Sections 19, 20, 21.

SECTION 19. The board of park commissioners, if any, otherwise the city or town may take land within the municipal limits, in fee or otherwise, by gift, purchase or by the right of eminent domain, or lease the same, and maintain it as a public playground; but no land shall be so taken or leased until an amount equal to the estimated cost thereof has been appropriated by the city or town. The city or town or board of park commissioners, as the case may be, shall, within sixty days after the taking of land, under the provisions of this section, file and cause to be recorded in the registry of deeds for the county or district in which the land lies a description thereof sufficiently accurate for identification and a statement of the purpose for which it was taken.

SECTION 20. Said board, or if there is none, the city council of a city or the selectmen of a town shall estimate and determine the damages sustained by such taking of land; but a person aggrieved thereby may have his damages assessed in the manner provided for the assessment of damages sustained by the laying out of ways if suit therefor is brought within two years after the recording of such taking. If upon a trial, damages in excess of the award shall be recovered, the petitioner shall recover costs; otherwise he shall pay them.

SECTION 21. A city or town, except the city of Boston, may, in order to meet the expense of acquiring land for the purposes named in section nineteen, incur indebtedness beyond the limit of municipal indebtedness to an amount not exceeding one-half of one per cent. of its assessed valuation. It shall not be necessary to establish a sinking fund for the payment of the same unless the city or town so votes.

The vote in the towns comes late in February or early in March; the dates of the city elections are as follows:

Tuesday, December 1st:

Fitchburg, Marlborough, New Bedford, Northampton,
Pittsfield, Quincy, Waltham.

Tuesday, December 5th:

Beverly, Brockton, Chicopee, Everett, Gloucester,
Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Malden,
Medford, Melrose, Newton, Salem, Somerville, Springfield,
Taunton, Woburn, Worcester.

Tuesday, December 15th:

Boston, Fall River, Newburyport, North Adams.

Cambridge votes in April.

It is to be noted that municipalities do not satisfy the provisions of the act (see Section 1) unless they not only possess the required number of playgrounds, but also have those playgrounds "conveniently located" and "of suitable size and equipment for the recreation and physical education of the minors of such city or

town." The act contemplates giving all the children a chance, girls as well as boys, small children as well as large. This requirement is not satisfied by a common or ball field alone or by a playground on the outskirts of the town. It includes suitable provision for every class of children, conveniently accessible to them. Most cities have already done something in the way of providing playgrounds; some have done a great deal. But the present question is of making provision that shall be at least approximately commensurate with the need.

The whole country is watching the action of Massachusetts under this law. It is hoped that every city and town will do its part toward placing our State in the lead in the great movement for giving the children of the country a chance for normal development under the conditions of modern life.

This election is the last chance for the action provided for in the bill. If you do not vote "Yes" now you will not have another opportunity.

WHY HAVE PLAYGROUNDS?

Why? Why does a flower need the light? The child needs a playground because his growth is through activity, through those specific forms of activity which his nature has prescribed; and because, accordingly, he will never grow up—or will grow up stunted and perverted—if he is denied those opportunities and objects to which his vital, instinctive, and formative activities relate.

The thing that most needs to be understood about play is that it is not a luxury but a necessity. It is not simply something that a child *likes* to have; it is something that he *must* have if he is ever to grow up. It is more than an essential part of his education; it is part of the law of his growth, of the process by which he becomes a man at all.

Play is the explanation of the great phenomenon of infancy. Man, above all other animals, is sent into the world so unformed in order that he may be finished by this particular method, the method of growth directed by instinctive acts.

Play is a part of the same great law of life in obedience to which the child is here at all, the same law that makes the buds open and the grass grow. It represents in education Nature's prescribed course. What we may choose to do in school or elsewhere is an elective, very valuable in providing that children shall grow up wise and useful, fitted to their particular surroundings.

Play represents the vital part without which they cannot grow up at all.

Many people who have realized the importance of children's play think that it requires no special provision. They assume that the satisfaction of so universal an instinct is inevitable. But it is not inevitable. Eating is a universal instinct among healthy people, but there is such a thing as starvation. So, when you think of your own childhood and remember that not only was playing as instinctive as breathing, but that, as it seems to you in retrospect, you always found plenty of chance to play without any special provision being made for that purpose, remember also that there was room to play and things to play with; and consider whether there may not be children in our modern cities less fortunately placed. And sometimes even good conditions can be improved.

And besides the children with no playground, there are the children with a bad playground, whose growth is in consequence not stunted but deformed. The whole question of juvenile law-breaking—or at least nine-tenths of it—is a question of children's play. A boy who breaks the law is, in nine cases out of ten, not a criminal. He is obeying an instinct that is not only legitimate but vital, and which, if it finds every lawful channel choked up, will seek an outlet at the next available point.

The boy has no especial desire to come in conflict with the law. He shows, it is true, no morbid aversion to doing so. If there is a man clothed in dignity and a blue coat especially paid to chase you if you will only take the necessary means to gain his interest—and if there is *nothing else to do*—it is a flying in the face of Providence not to make the most of what fortune so considerably sends.

But tag is not the only game, and the policeman is not the only one who knows it. Nor is the avenger of the outraged bell-wire his only substitute. Give a boy a chance at football, basketball, hockey, or "the game"; give him an opportunity to perform difficult and dangerous feats on a horizontal bar, on the flying-rings, or from a diving-board; and the policeman will need a gymnasium himself to keep his weight down. This is not theory, but is the testimony you will get from any policeman or schoolmaster who has been in a neighborhood before and after a playground was started there.

Is play a necessity? Yes, if the boy lives and is a whole boy. If he is above ground, and the best part has not been starved quite out of him, play there is certain to be, if not in one form, then in another.

The "boy problem," as we call it, is really the grown-up problem. The boy is all right. He breaks our laws, but he does so in obedience to a law that is older than ours, a law that has never failed to get its way or else to impose a penalty—and to collect it. The penalty, as is the way with such penalties, is collected of the victim. It is being collected now in our jails and penitentiaries, in weakened and perverted lives. Against the deeper law it is we who are the transgressors. When "the children were left out in the planning of our cities," when we closed Nature's path against the growing child, we made it mathematically certain that he should seek some other path or cease to grow at all.

EXPENSE.

The argument that will be most strongly urged against the adoption of this law will be on the matter of expense. Whatever the force of that argument, one thing is certain: the expense will never be any less than it is now. If your city is not to close nature's path against its children forever, now is the time when it can provide for keeping it open at the least cost. The playground at Seward Park in New York would have cost a few hundred dollars if it had been bought when the city was small; it did actually cost \$1,811,000, for its something less than two acres of extent. Boston and St. Louis have torn down blocks of expensive buildings to furnish playgrounds. It would have been cheaper to take the land before the blocks were built. And if your city is not New York or Boston or St. Louis, it is nevertheless growing larger rather than smaller, and land in the thickly settled parts is rising rather than falling in value.

Does it pay? Volumes of testimony of schoolmasters and judges and police officials in many cities could be cited to show that playgrounds greatly cut down the amount of juvenile law-breaking, with its cost in police and courts and prisons, and in the loss of earning power. Actual figures carefully collected for the Sage Fund in Chicago, show the number of convictions in the juvenile court, of children living within a half mile radius of the playgrounds of the South Park system, to be 28 1-2 per cent. below the normal. Doctors will testify to the necessity of play to health and growth, and to its essential importance as a means of fighting the great white plague.

These are pecuniary benefits of no mean order, even if we are to confine ourselves to the money side of the question. Play-

grounds, apart from the cost of the land, need not be expensive. Back stops, goal posts, tilts and sand boxes cost little beyond the price of the lumber; a good number of swings, teeter ladders, sliding poles, or the like, for the small children, on an iron frame, can be got for \$200; and apparatus for bigger boys, when you get to it, for \$200. Fencing, where necessary, would be additional. Most of the fitting up of the large playground in Salem was done by the grammar school pupils, and the rest was paid for by an entertainment given by them.

The average annual cost of maintenance for each of the splendid playgrounds of Chicago is twenty-three cents for the man who pays taxes on \$10,000.

The presence of playgrounds in a city makes it more desirable for residence, and real estate firms in the West are already beginning to include playground provision in their plans. The appreciation of the need is growing, and parents are beginning to look more at the question of what their children are to do in the afternoons before selecting a place to live.

And then, besides, children are worth something in themselves.

JOSEPH LEE.

SOME OPINIONS.

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT:

"There can be no more important reform than to provide adequate playgrounds. Cities should secure available places at once, so that they may not need to demolish blocks of buildings in order to make playgrounds."

JANE ADDAMS, of Hull House, Chicago:

"Every city in the United States spends a hundred fold more money for juvenile reform than is spent in providing means for public recreation, and none of us, as yet, sees the folly and shame of such procedure."

DR. LUTHER H. GULICK, President Playground Association:

"Democracy must provide not only a seat and instruction for every child in the school, but also play and good play teachers for every child in the playground. Without the development of the social instincts, without the growing of the social consciousness—which has its roots in the early activities of the playground—we cannot expect adults to possess those higher feelings which rest upon the earlier social virtues developed during childhood."

ROCHESTER PLAYGROUND LEAGUE REPORT, 1908:

"The playground is helping to wipe out the Great White Plague."

FROM GOVERNOR GUILD'S MESSAGE, 1908:

"Healthy childhood means healthy citizenship, and no town can afford to practice false economy at the expense of the health if not of the lives of its school children."

ELMER E. BROWN, U. S. Commissioner of Education:

"It would be difficult to find any point at which, in our large cities, a dollar will go further in the making of those things for which the city exists than in the provision and maintenance of play-grounds—with incalculable advantages to public health, public morals and the general efficiency of our people."

GEO. H. MARTIN, Secretary of State Board of Education:

"In view of what boys are, of nature's provision for their growth, of the necessary interference of city life with those provisions, the first obligation of a city to its boys appears to be to give them a chance to develop freely in accordance with the laws of nature without breaking the laws of man. In other words, every city is bound to furnish suitable and ample means by which its boys may grow physically into men without becoming criminals or even juvenile delinquents."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON:

"We are students of words: we are shut up in schools and colleges and recitation rooms for 10 or 15 years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands or our legs or our eyes or our arms."

From WM. D. PARKINSON, Superintendent of Schools, Waltham:

"I believe play-grounds are as necessary to a community as a safety-valve to a boiler. Every community ought to have them, and the earlier they are reserved the less occasion for regret that suitable sites are not available. No community has made the mistake of reserving too much land for public use."

From H. W. HARRUB, Supt. of Schools, Taunton:

"I am under the opinion that under conditions now governing the education of minors, and the restrictions placed upon the employment of minors, it has become the imperative duty of cities and towns to make suitable provision for their right physical and moral education. This apparent duty of a municipality to its youth makes the public playground a necessary and natural adjunct of the public school."

From JOSEPH LEE.

"The boy without a playground is father to the man without a job."

From EDWIN D. MEAD, Member of Peace Conference:

"We have been very stupid in dealing with the masses of boys in our crowded cities. We have not recognized by proper provision what their nature demands for its physical and moral expression and exercise. Any provision like that contemplated in this excellent bill will be vastly more than repaid by any city making it, from the most strictly prudential point of view, to say nothing of those larger aspects of the discipline and culture of the bodies, minds and social consciences of our young people, who are tomorrow to constitute the State."

From ROB'T A. WOODS, of South End House:

"I shall be very glad to be counted in favor of the playground bill. It would represent a great forward step for the State."