

# All Access Trane Park

## Everybody has the Right to Play

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### / Location /

La Crosse, WI

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### / Category /

General Design

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### / Abstract /

This legacy project revitalized a neighborhood park for all ages, including people with autism, and physical disabilities. Trane park's rebirth began as a grassroots effort, led by parents of children with autism.

A diverse stakeholder group, including people from the local healthcare industry, school system, autism foundation, business community, and parents of kids with autism and special needs collaborated with the design team. Their input was incredibly valuable, their passion for the project infectious, and we are forever humbled by their steadfast commitment to the project.

This space is bringing the community together in a safe, accessible, and inclusive environment.

## / Narrative /

### **How do you design a park environment for kids with autism, physical disabilities, and a space for all ages? Trane Park's redesign sought to do just that.**

Trane Park has provided modest amenities to the surrounding neighborhood since 1950. The park's rebirth in 2021 began as a grassroots effort, led by parents of children with autism. Raising kids on the autism spectrum comes with many challenges. Parents started bringing their children to a local dog park, instead of the city parks intended for people. They surmised that the enclosed dog park provided a necessary level of safety for their kids to prevent them from running off when over stimulated. There are very few safe outdoor spaces for these children to play. There are stories across the

country of children with autism bolting away when their senses are over stimulated with tragic results.

Eventually members of the La Crosse Area Autism Foundation approached the city and shared their story. The city realized they were under-serving this population. That started a 10-year grassroots movement to create an environment for kids with autism to safely play side by side with their peers. The movement grew and the mission expanded to include a park for all ages and all abilities.

**The Landscape Architect joined the effort in 2016 – first listening and learning about the unique challenges these parents face with equitable access to parks and play areas. Over 5 years we collaborated with a committee of parents, educators, and healthcare professionals on the project.**

Our research into autism revealed the difficulties faced with social interaction and communication. **Sensory overload has many triggers, and the design solution eliminated known triggers and delivered a fun, challenging, safe and accessible environment.** A blue color scheme was selected for its calming ability. Early planning divided the park into delineated zones to avoid over stimulation. The design intended to make play approachable for even the most apprehensive kids.

Independent play zones reduce noise levels. Consistent surfacing throughout the park renders a visually sinuous delineation of the paving without abrupt changes. Preserved and new trees ensure shade from intense sunlight, and plantings buffer play zones from visual distractions beyond. The central paver path provides orientation back to the park's entrance.

Solutions to the project's goal of equitable access and play for all were vigorously pursued. Our team felt that an accessible or "all abilities" design need not translate into a diluted design. We charted a more challenging design direction – one that sculpted the landscape into a dynamic space. The designed topography rises 5 feet as you traverse around to the far side of the park and lowers 5 feet as you proceed straight into the center sculpted 'slide bowl'. The designed elevation change achieved an exciting, yet accessible opportunity for embankment play.

Accessible play was built into all aspects of the park from the resilient rubber surfacing to transfer platforms on slides to the tunnel which provides an accessible route through the embankment and back to the top for wheelchair users to continue play.

**Kids requiring time to process and build-up courage to play can do so from small respite pods included in high stimulation zones. They offer kids with autism an area of refuge, where within they find comfort, and offer a safe space with controlled light, sound, and visibility.**

A children's theater is featured around an existing majestic oak tree carefully preserved throughout construction. The lawn affords a shady space for summer audiences, and the stage and structure offer a unique venue for small performances.

To enhance safety, a perimeter fence and double entrance gate prevent children or kids with autism from running away. The zone for kids 5 and younger was nestled into the site with limited access to corral the youngest visitors. Two overlooks offer excellent vantage points with sight-lines of the entire park. A continuous path encircles the park and provides a 1/5 of a mile walking loop for exercise. An adult fitness area provides exercise equipment.

A cast-in-place concrete wall with handholds provides kids an opportunity to test their strength and ability to overtop the wall and slide down the fireman's pole.

Indigenous limestone from the La Crosse coulee region and a heavily native plant palette add resiliency and familiarity. The plants, trees, stone, furnishings and pathways combine to achieve the project's goal of a park and not simply a playground.



# ALL ABILITIES TRANE PARK

**Everybody has the Right to Play**

**A community inspired, true legacy project - innovative and inclusive all-ages play environment especially suited for kids with autism and physical disabilities.**





# community enthusiasm

Trane Park's rebirth began as a grassroots effort, led by parents of children with autism. Very few safe outdoor spaces exist for these children to play. On opening day, dozens of kids, families and community members were the first to try out the new inclusive park, a long awaited project that brings people of all backgrounds together to play.



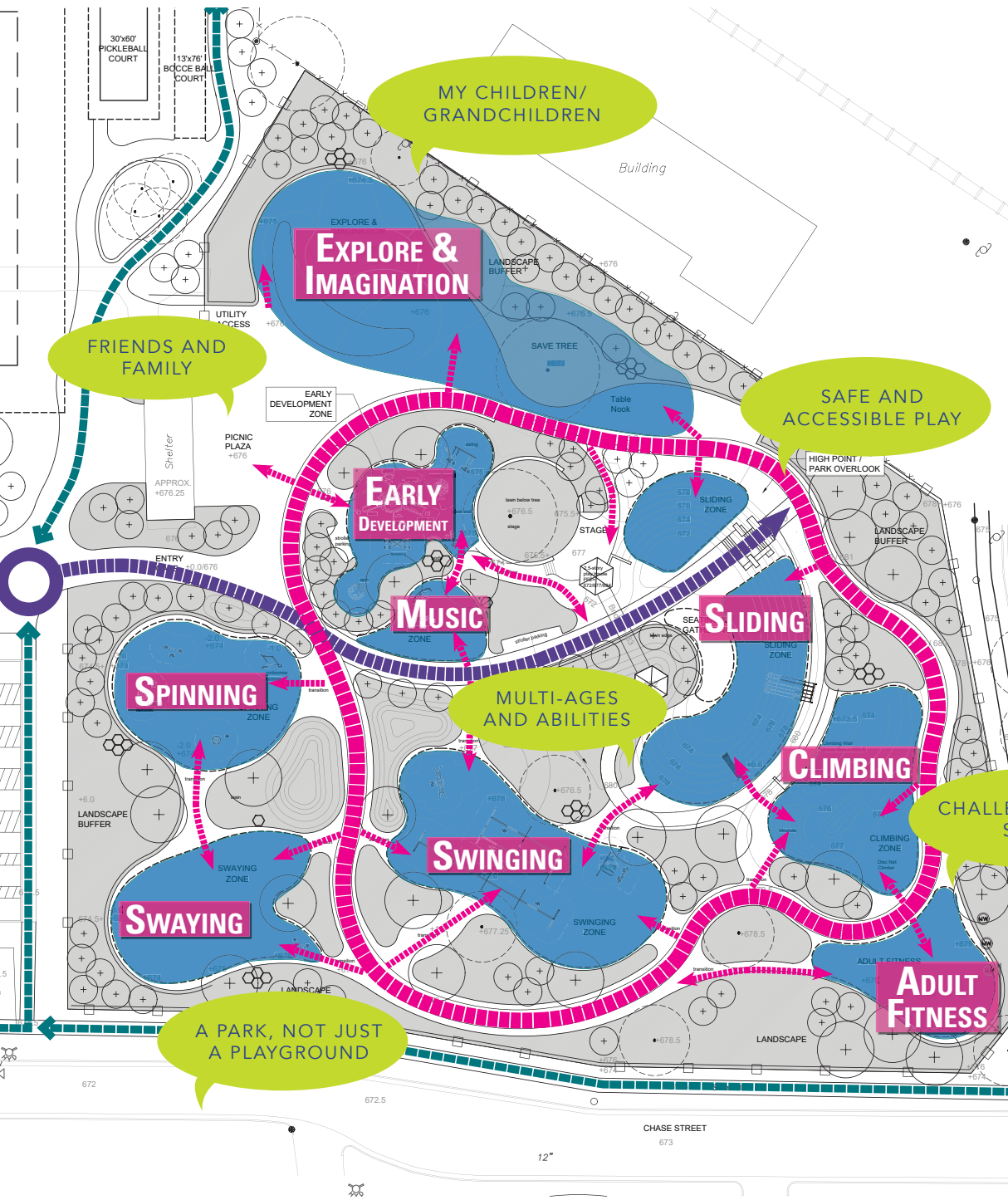




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**This project is an example of what makes our community exceptional, transformational. But our work does not stop today. The All Abilities Trane Park project continues to educate and promote inclusivity and acceptance across our community while celebrating uniqueness and varying abilities. ”**

*– Amy Hendrickson - La Crosse Area Autism Foundation*



MY CHILDREN/  
GRANDCHILDREN

FRIENDS AND  
FAMILY

SAFE AND  
ACCESSIBLE PLAY

MULTI-AGES  
AND ABILITIES

CHALLENGING, FUN  
SPACES

A PARK, NOT JUST  
A PLAYGROUND

# deep listening

The Landscape Architect joined the effort in 2016 – first listening and learning about the unique challenges these parents face with equitable access to parks and play areas. Over 5 years we collaborated with a committee of parents, educators, and healthcare professionals on the project.

CHASE STREET

12"



An aerial photograph of a large, modern playground. The playground is divided into several distinct zones by white concrete paths. The zones include a central area with a large tree and a white structure, a blue and green play area with slides and climbing equipment, a red circular area with a white and red structure, and a blue and green play area with slides and climbing equipment. The playground is surrounded by green grass and trees. In the top left corner, there are several buildings with blue roofs. In the bottom right corner, there is a red circular area with a white and red structure.

a legacy  
project

**Our research into autism revealed the difficulties faced with social interaction and communication. Sensory overload has many triggers, and the design solution eliminated known triggers. Early planning divided the park into delineated zones to avoid over stimulation.**





**fun, challenging, safe  
and accessible**

The goal of equitable access and play for all was merged with a dynamic innovatively-designed space that is centered around a sculpted 'slide bowl'. The designed elevation change achieved an exciting, yet accessible opportunity for embankment play.



# safe enclosure

Raising kids on the autism spectrum comes with many challenges. Parents started bringing their children to a local dog park because it was enclosed and it provided a level of safety for their kids if they ran off when over stimulated. Trane Park is designed with complete enclosure while balancing visibility.





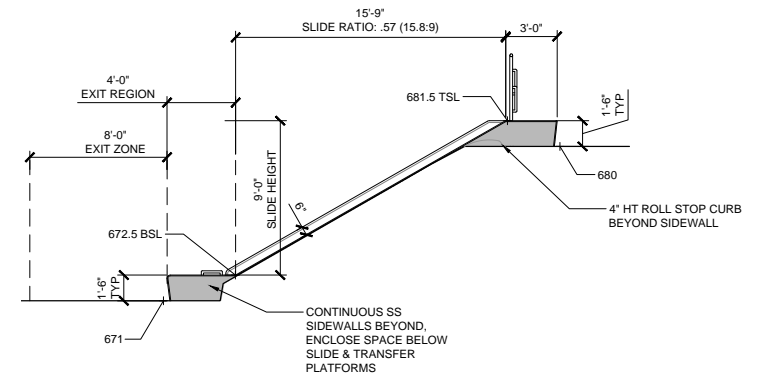


**Independent play zones reduce noise levels. The 5 and younger kids zone is nestled into the site with limited access. Two overlooks offer excellent vantage points with sightlines of the entire park.**

**diverse + visible  
play zones**



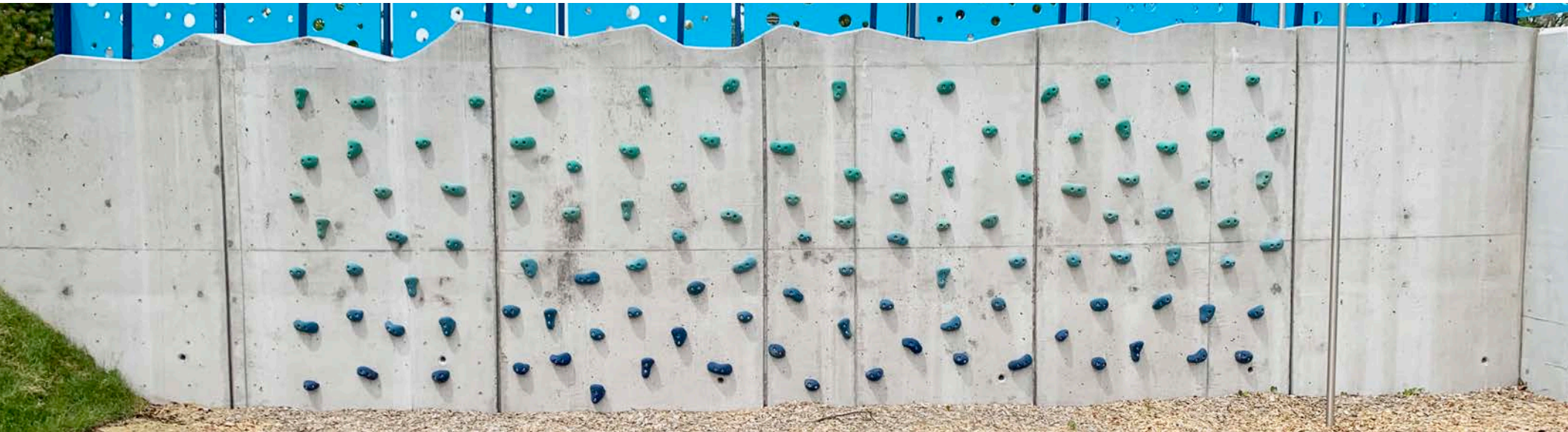




**Accessible play was built into all aspects of the park from the resilient rubber surfacing to transfer platforms on slides to the tunnel which provides an accessible route through the embankment and back to the top for wheelchair users to continue play.**

**universal  
 access**





## artful + playful compositions

A cast-in-place concrete wall with handholds provides kids an opportunity to test their strength and ability to overtop the wall and slide down the fireman's pole. Materials throughout the park follow a blue calming color palette.





## **balanced quiet + active space**

**Consistent surfacing throughout the park renders a visually sinuous delineation of the paving without abrupt changes. The central paver path provides orientation back to the park's entrance.**



**Preserved and new trees ensure shade from intense sunlight, and plantings buffer play zones from visual distractions beyond.**





## **natural elements + bright play**

**Indigenous limestone from the La Crosse coulee region and a heavily native plant palette add resiliency and familiarity. The plants, trees, stone, furnishings and pathways combine to achieve the project's goal of a park and not simply a playground.**





**design for all  
abilities**

The design intended to make play approachable for even the most apprehensive kids while delivering the highest quality play environment and challenging, fun, experiences.





# ALL ABILITIES TRANE PARK

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