

Inclusive Playgrounds

RVE has extensive experience providing design and planning services for park and recreational facilities, including inclusive playgrounds. Inclusive playgrounds ensure all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation. Inclusion supports removing physical and theoretical barriers to increase access to health opportunities for those with physical and cognitive disabilities. Inclusiveness brings people together and celebrates the diversity of their communities. Providing safe, accessible spaces for everyone to enjoy allows children of all abilities to play side by side. This dissolves the line between “us” and “them” to create an empowering play experience for everyone.

Our Professional Planners work closely with each client to develop innovative design concepts that are economical and meet project goals. A key goal is to develop a park design that is unique to the area and that, at a minimum, respects and reflects the history, natural features, scenic beauty, traditions and local conditions of the community. Our project approach ensures that park and recreation facilities, programs and activities are accessible, welcoming and inclusive.

Each of our Planners has an individual specialization, ranging from zoning and land use planning to urban design, historic preservation and transportation planning. The experience and technical expertise of these professionals enables us to develop an excellent design that reflects community goals and enables us to quickly respond to any unanticipated conditions that may arise during the design process.

RVE’s Parks and Recreation Professionals focus their services on three keys pillars of support: conservation; health and wellness; and social equity. Parks play a critical role in the preservation of natural resources, which have a quantifiable economic benefit to the communities they serve. Our staff includes licensed landscape architects who work on conservation projects such as green infrastructure; wetlands restoration and planting for pollinators. Our team focuses helps improve community health and wellness, especially through efforts to reduce obesity and physical inactivity, while promoting healthy lifestyles. To ensure social equality, we work with our clients to include all project stakeholders in a project to ensure quality parks and provide universal access to those parks.

The challenges preventing parks from being inclusive to all members of a community include insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, lack of staff training and facility space shortages. Inclusive playgrounds can be more expensive since they require specific features. There is not always enough space for work being done to the park, which requires the design to be altered. Another challenge is the method of reaching underserved members of a community and understanding the specific needs of these communities. The public and local government leaders support inclusion efforts, which is critical.

Why RVE?

- Our team includes Professional Planners, Licensed Landscape Architects and Professional Engineers who consistently provide for maximized use of land, protection of the environment and responsiveness to the community's needs
- We work closely with community leaders, businesses, residents and other stakeholders to identify characteristics, qualities and features that make the community unique and incorporate them into the project design
- We produce high-quality, cost-effective sketch plans that can be used to obtain local review input while avoiding substantial expenditures on fully engineered drawings

Contact Information



Annina Hogan, PE, RA, LEED-AP
Executive Vice President and COO

Annina.Hogan@rve.com
856-795-9595

Case Study

Watsessing Park Playground Upgrades, Bloomfield, NJ

Contact: Daniel Salvante, Parks Director, 973-268-3517

The County of Essex retained RVE to provide engineering design and landscape architecture services for upgrades to the Watsessing Park Playground. RVE worked closely with the Essex County Department of Public Works, Essex County Department of Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs and community leaders during the initial tasks of the project to confirm the improvements prior to advancing into the final construction documents.

This park is 15,000 square feet and provides something that most other playgrounds do not — inclusivity. The park was built with special-needs children of all kinds in mind. Gently sloped ramps and large landings provide enough space for children in wheelchairs to enjoy the jungle gym and venture higher onto the structure than was possible in the past. In addition to the ramps and landings, the park provides visual, auditory and tactile surface features for children at lower-than-usual heights. The park was designed to allow children who are not walking, who are not upright or are in wheelchairs to enjoy those features. Each landing area features at least three different stimuli for children, including tic-tac-toe and a set of musical pipes. One slide is made up of rollers, providing a different feel than typical plastic slides. The variety lets children with differing abilities find their own way to have fun. A second shaded area encompasses an instrument section and a cool-down station. Children can bang on bongos and play the xylophone while being sprayed by a cool mist. The playground is the first park in Essex County developed for children of all physical and developmental abilities.



New all-access playground equipment built to allow special needs children to play alongside their friends

Park improvements included a full upgrade of the playground, on-site parking access for at least 25 cars and five buses, appealing to both genders, compliant with ADA as well as all local, State and Federal regulations, rubberized safety surface with designs complementing the park theme, separate areas for children from ages two to five and five to 12, dual height drinking fountain, benches and trash receptacles, signage, shade structure, light improvements, spray apparatus, durable play features, play equipment including but not limited to swings, slides, climbers, gliders and interactive musical instruments, seating areas for parents close to the playground, improvements to fencing, grading, retaining walls, landscaping, drainage and paving.



Aerial view of Watsessing Park Playground