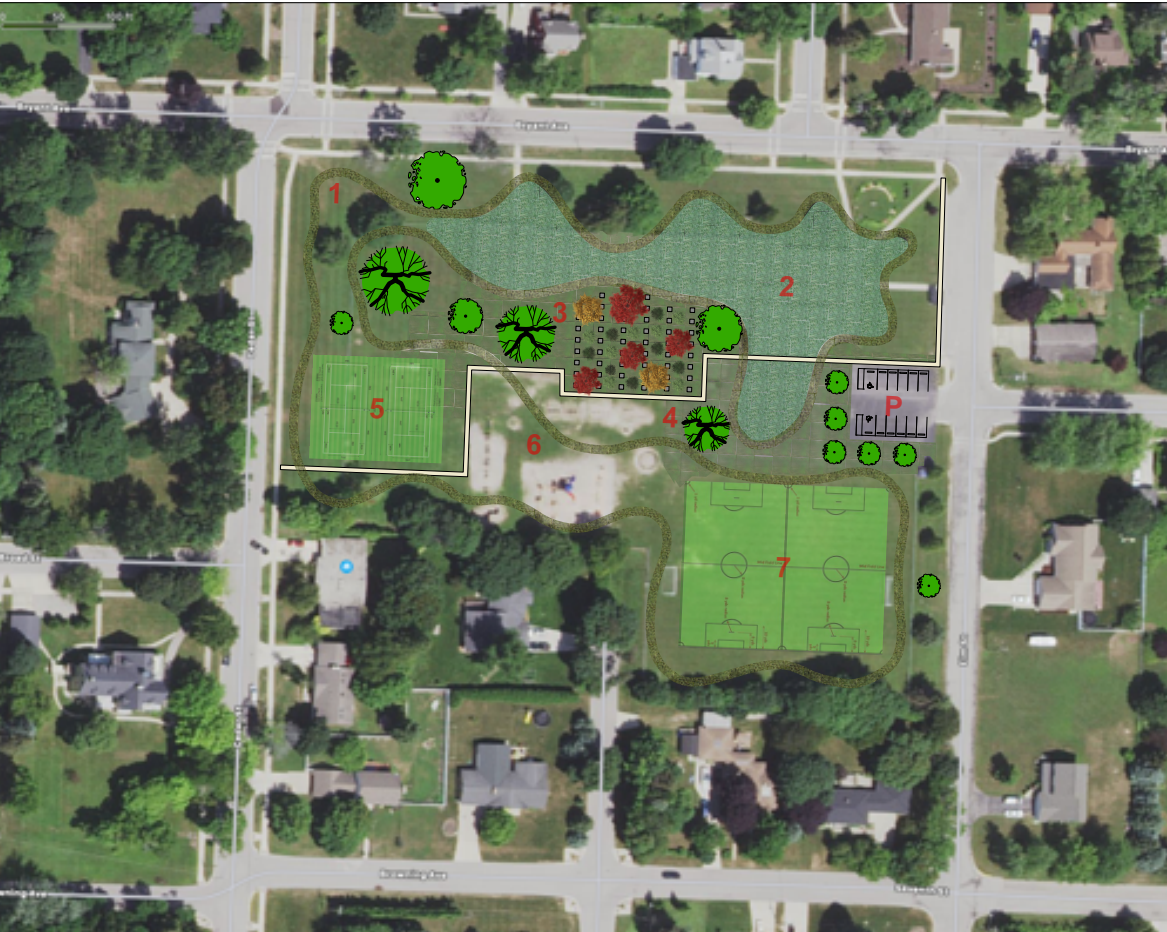


THE TOGETHER PLACE



The proposed consolidation of the Jefferson and Kennedy schools, with the planned demolition of the Jefferson school building, provides a unique opportunity in Manistee for the school district and the community to come together to create a TOGETHER PLACE: a new kind of place for outdoor learning, physical exercise, and recreation.

The new Together Place is envisioned as a green space extension of the consolidated Kennedy school: a destination for teacher-led field trips within ten minutes of walking distance. The Together Place has the potential to become a school garden of an entirely new type: specific to the characteristics of the Northwest Michigan natural environment, and tailored to the specific needs of the school district, with a focus on physical education, learning through playing, while functioning as an outdoor laboratory for the study of native “deer resistant” grasses, bushes and flowering plants.

For the community, the Together Place will offer new and innovative ways for everyone to play, walk, run, rest, converse, meditate, and enjoy the natural and man-made beauty of a green space - a place like none other.

Demolishing the school buildings should include protecting existing trees on the site and returning the grounds with a layer of soil suitable for planting. The existing football/soccer field is left as is, with the opportunity for various soccer and/or football field layouts. The site perimeter along Cedar, Bryant, and Elm are left as is and mowed to 10-20 feet inside the sidewalk. The conversation ring at the corner of Bryant and Elm is preserved.

The existing parking lot is reduced in size, while keeping the same curb cut on Elm. The plan shows parking for twelve cars, including two spaces designed for drivers with disabilities.

The conceptual plan is based on the following principles and features:

1 A green path, mowed at a width of eight feet, prepared for walking and running. The path, as it turns white in winter, provides an opportunity for skiing for all ages: gently winding through a meadow, with only minor level changes. While students may use the path for fast pace running, it's gentle nature lends itself to walking the dog, kids learning to ski, and adults enjoying slow walking or low level cross country skiing. As funds become available, a ten station fit-trail could be introduced, with instruction signs and exercise equipment designed for users of all ages (fittrail.com).

2 A grass field for the study of native species, a natural laboratory for teaching and learning in biology and environmental sciences. With the need for planting new grass varieties, the grassy meadow can expand into any part of the site not occupied for other designated uses.

3 An idea garden with native flowering plants, decorative bushes, and small ornamental trees that naturally resist damage by deer. This garden could be developed as a show case of species to beautify your garden with plants, bushes and trees that deer are not attracted to for their nutritional needs.

4 A hard surface path connecting the parking lot, the playground, and the new tennis courts with a 4-6 feet wide walkway from Elm to Cedar. This paved path connects to the existing sidewalks along Cedar, Bryant, and Elm, creating a loop for easy strolling, for kids to learn how to use their first bike, for roller skating, and so on. This paved path also could be seen as a link in a bike route from the east end of the city to the Lake Michigan shore.

5 The existing portion of the Jefferson site between Cedar and the playground easily fits the size needed for two double tennis courts, which would serve as an addition to the tennis court capacity needed for tournaments.

6 The existing playground will be kept as is, possibly with the addition of new types of equipment as funding becomes available.

7 The existing ball field can be kept as is. The plan shows a layout with two smaller soccer fields side by side, but the open field allows for various configurations tailored for various types of team sports activities.

An important design goal has been to create a place where the need for maintenance will be generally low, not to exceed the level of maintenance provided today. The plan could grow from a low level of intervention (mowing the path, planting grasses) to increasingly adding features, such as the idea garden, the tennis courts, and the Fit-Trail equipment.

There are many potential funding sources to support successfully implementing the plan. Ideas and sources for funding are available if the school district and community comes together behind a plan for a new kind of educational and recreational urban green space. As an example, just one website (seedyourfuture.org) lists 45 organizations offering educator grants to help support horticulture and garden programs in schools and youth programs.

In search for partners, one could start locally with contacting the Manistee Recreation Association, the MSU Extension Manistee County, and others.