



May 27, 2025 City Council Meeting

Title

Update on Kids Castle Construction—Brian Mancini, Larry Propst

Summary

After a joyful farewell event to the old Kids Castle, construction is now underway on the new playground, which incorporates extensive community input that was received through the design process. Costs for the new Kids Castle are projected to exceed the budgeted funds. The budget was based on an initial cost estimate developed during the ARPA community engagement and budgeting process in 2022. In particular, the cost of the playground equipment and installation has substantially increased. As a result, staff have worked with the contractor, Harman Construction, to minimize these increases without compromising the playground design. City staff has identified alternative funding outside of the designated American Rescue Plan Act funding to fill the gap. Before proceeding with presenting a reallocation request to City Council, City staff wanted to make City Council aware of the projected budget overage, the reason, and seek confirmation that City Council desires for alternative funding to be dedicated to this project.

Recommendation

Option 1. Direct City staff to identify alternative funding to increase the project budget by \$317,791 to complete the project with minimal changes to the design.

Fiscal Impact

\$317,791

Context & Analysis

The community bid a final farewell to the old Kids Castle playground on May 8. This heavily attended event demonstrated the love that residents of the City and surrounding area had for this iconic structure. Though difficult to say goodbye to, the old Kids Castle had exceeded its life cycle and needed to be replaced to ensure the safety of children coming to play at Purcell Park. The structure was fenced off and demolition will occur soon.

The new Kids Castle aims to deliver an even more expansive playground to the children of Harrisonburg. The concept for the park was created from survey results and drawings of kids imagining their ideal place to play. Some priorities identified included preserving the castle

theme and adding a zipline. As a result, the new playground will offer more castle-like details, higher towers, and two ziplines. Other new features will include climbing walls, more slides, a bike track, and adjacent structures for younger kids. Beyond serving as a fun and attractive space, the playground will be designed with greater ADA accessibility and more safety features than the previous castle.

Cost estimates for this ARPA project were provided in 2022 and totaled \$3,175,000. Since then, the cost of material and labor has increased substantially. In addition, the City procured services for the design and construction of the playground using a design-build model. Two benefits of this model are that it provides faster construction and more flexibility to make changes because the design and building are done by the same firm. A challenge staff are experiencing with this model is that it does not lock in a price. Staff have the option to make substitutions, but the builder does not absorb costs that exceed the initial budget estimate.

Despite the upward market pressure, staff have worked with Harman Construction to minimize these projected increases by finding alternative materials and reconfiguring the site layout. Additionally, staff have made the decision to cut some features that were not central to the goal of providing quality play structures, including a stage, decorative pavers, and aesthetic fixtures. These cost-saving modifications do not diminish the overall scale of the new Kids Castle, and the finished product will be a faithful build of the design that the community has seen.

In addition to minimizing costs, staff have been able to identify additional sources of funding to fund the construction. City staff recommends that City Council in June allocate an additional \$317,791 for Kids Castle.

Options

1. Direct City staff to identify alternative funding to increase the project budget by \$317,791 to complete the project with minimal changes to the design.
2. Direct City staff to remove elements of the design in order to complete the project within the current project budget.