

Greetings and good evening.

My name is Bill Waite. I am a MAC Committee member. And, I am also the Manager for Research Projects at the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis (CCEA), a group that is located in the University of Connecticut's School of Business, and which has, since 2010, been working with MAC to conduct research, perform analyses, and make recommendations regarding that group's various initiatives.

One of the primary areas of CCEA's work – and the area on which I, as I volunteer, continue to focus – is community connectedness – that is, ^{the} level of engagement in and satisfaction with the Mansfield community that residents have – and the relationship between that metric has a host of other factors, such as education, health, and the like.ⁱ As part of CCEA's work, the team reviewed studies and research conducted by other communities; that is, we performed a "Lit Review," to use the academic jargon. However, we relied most heavily on feedback directly from Mansfield's residents, which came to us via survey data.

Both sources for information were aligned with each other; that is, both the general research (Lit Review) and the survey results were in agreement – or 'said the same thing' – which is to highlight the importance for communities to have high-quality outdoor recreation facilities available to all children.ⁱⁱ

More specifically, having such facilities can, should, and generally does promote:

- 1) Healthier, better educated, children;ⁱⁱⁱ
- 2) Increased levels of residents' involvement with their community – a necessary condition for Mansfield (or any town) to be able to be considered "community of choice";^{iv} and
- 3) Higher property values and economic growth.^v

In short, by providing outdoor, public resources that promote physical fitness, peer-to-peer interaction, and all of the other benefits kids get when they play on a playground, the entire Mansfield community stands to benefit in a number of different ways – both quantitatively and qualitatively.

As both a MAC Committee member and given my knowledge of this particular topic/situation in my role as CCEA's Manager, I encourage the Council to provide as much support for initiatives such as the Playground Project as is possible.

I thank you for your time and attention this evening, and would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

References & Notes

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ⁱ A summary of CCEA's work on this project is presented in the *Phase I Executive Report: MAC Data Collection and Evaluation Project*, copies of which are available upon request.

ⁱⁱ The survey results indicate that playgrounds are one of the top four – out of the 26 specific topics included for consideration – most important issues for *all* Mansfield residents.

ⁱⁱⁱ See, for instance: Wolch et al (2010) and Witt & Crompton (1997).

^{iv} As stated in CCEA's *Phase I Executive Report: MAC Data Collection and Evaluation Project*, "...CCEA's analysis supports what other academics' studies have previously shown: how connected an individual feels to the community is statistically significant and positively correlated with how satisfied that person is with their community." For additional information regarding this general topic see, among others: Cuba & Hummon (1993), Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001), Kelea, Graefeb, Manningc, & Baconc (2004), Hur & Morrow-Jones (2008), Manor & Mesch (1998), Bates & Santerre (2001), and Obst, Smith, and Zinkiewicz (2001).

^v See, among others: Bolitzer & Netusil (2000), Crompton (2001, 2005), Gunther et al (2011), Munnell (1992), and Singh & Siabpush (2010).

To Whom it May Concern, (feel free to insert a more appropriate greeting here or none at all!!)

As a Mansfield mother of a six year old with a severe developmental disability, I would like to express my opinion on the matter of the project that the town of Mansfield should consider for the Small Cities Grant.

In my travels through town with my son, we have entered many buildings and businesses. All of the schools are accessible by wheelchair, as are the community center, our major grocery store, the town hall, gas stations, at least one hardware store, and our pharmacy. We have visited a total of one business which was not accessible by wheelchair in any way, and this business is redundant in our town. The buildings necessary for the basic needs of adults and children in town are already accessible.

My son cannot use any of the playgrounds in town. They are all inaccessible by wheelchair, which is my son's primary mode of ambulation. I would like to feel part of the community by meeting other families in a free public space, but Mansfield has no such space. I would feel more a part of the community if we had a space like an accessible playground in which to spend time. I have talked with other parents in town who have children with limited mobility, and the consensus is surprise that the town does not already have an accessible playground. The town has been so strong in covering my son's needs in school, it really is shocking that we don't have this facility in place yet.

The playgrounds at the schools in town are not only inaccessible, but out of date. A new, safer playground would be welcomed by many families with young children. The playground that we plan to build would be for everyone, no matter what their abilities.

The only basic need of disabled children in town that is not being met is that of an accessible playground. The Small Cities Grant is designed to revitalize small communities, and an accessible playground would play a critical role in fulfilling the needs of Mansfield families; those with able-bodied children, and those with mobility-challenged children. I urge you to consider applying for this grant to use for the playground project, rather than for building improvements which I feel are not as necessary at this time.

Sincerely,
Melissa Shippee

I support choosing the Mansfield Community Playground for the Small Cities Grant for all the reasons that have been discussed.

- To create a meeting place for families close to the downtown and other services in Mansfield
- To create a highly accessible playground so that kids and caregivers of all abilities can have a place to gather and play.

I also support this project because it will strengthen our community through the community built process.

- It will take approximately 750 volunteers over a 5 day period to build our playground.
- That means hundreds of Mansfield residents will have the opportunity to work side by side with their neighbors, whom they may never have even met before, to create something lasting for our community.
- Strong relationships can be built when we work together.
- We will be providing meals and childcare. Even kids will have the opportunity to help.
- This is for more than just families with young children. We will be providing an opportunity for all Mansfield residents to serve and strengthen their community for years to come.

I know that a lot of people have come out to show their support of this project. I would like to ask them to stand.

We all hope that you will choose to support the Mansfield Community Playground. Thank you.