

Armory Tot Lot

History and Character

Armory Tot Lot is located at 208 South Royal Street in Old Town. The Alexandria Light Infantry built the Armory Hall, designed by Benjamin F. Price, on the site where Armory Tot Lot now resides in 1880. In 1887, Armory Hall was enlarged and became a popular site for expositions and performances. The City took over Armory Hall after World War I and used a portion of the building as a recreation center to operate recreational basketball and volleyball leagues. In the 1940s, the armory served as a USO center for service members during World War II until a new USO club opened on Cameron Street. The building was destroyed by fire in 1953 and never rebuilt. The City later developed the site into a park and playground.

The 0.18-acre park features a playground, large shade trees, a small walking path, and a small seating area.

The playground is intended for ages 2-5 and consists of standard play equipment, swings, a sand box, and wood chip surface. The park is a popular spot for both locals and tourists given the proximity to Market Square and the King Street shopping and restaurant corridor just two blocks north.

Existing Conditions Map



Armory Tot Lot

Which of the following existing park elements would you like to preserve, enhance, or transform?

Element	Utility boxes		Element	Lights	
Number of responses	11		Number of responses	13	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	5	46	Preserve it	8	62
Enhance it	2	18	Enhance it	5	38
Transform it	4	36	Transform it	0	0

Element	Playground		Element	Landscaping	
Number of responses	14		Number of responses	14	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	0	0	Preserve it	6	43
Enhance it	11	79	Enhance it	7	50
Transform it	3	21	Transform it	1	7

What is currently NOT in the park that you would like to see there?

1. Drinking fountain. Swings for bigger kids. Bigger sandbox.
2. More creative areas and areas where kids test boundaries more- not just run on the mill. More building tool and areas to hide and create things.
3. Better sand in the sand box, adult swings, bathroom
4. There needs to be more paved are to ride the cars and scooters that are there
5. Shade, turf ground
6. Bathrooms! Rubber ground.
7. More plants, trees, greenery
8. Plant more large and understory native shade trees for shade and to support native wildlife
9. Proper benches for parents. Remove picnic tables. Kids just climb on them.

Community Feedback

In Fall 2018, RPCA staff collected community feedback to understand how the park is used and how it could be improved in the future. The following information summarizes what was heard through an online survey and community workshop. Over 400 people responded to the survey in total, 28 of which were specific to Armory Tot Lot. RPCA staff used the collected information to develop the draft park plans.

In 10 years, I would like this Park to...

(Top three rankings shown, based on a weighted score)

1. *Be a safe place for children to explore*
2. *Be a place to create social connections with neighbors*
3. *Help reduce environmental impacts from urban surroundings*



Above is a picture (right) of a flyer advertising the draft plan and survey hung in Armory Tot Lot. The image on the left is that of the Adirondack chairs that were rotated around the pocket parks informing park users of the draft plan and survey.

Armory Tot Lot

Which of the following existing proposed park elements do you love, like, or not like?					
Recommendation	Utility boxes		Recommendation	Shaded seating area	
Number of responses	32		Number of responses	33	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	9	28	I love it!	27	82
I like it	20	63	I like it	6	12
I don't like it	3	9	I don't like it	0	0
Recommendation	Stroller parking area		Recommendation	Toy signage	
Number of responses	32		Number of responses	32	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	11	34	I love it!	10	31
I like it	16	50	I like it	18	56
I don't like it	5	16	I don't like it	4	13
Recommendation	Playground				
Number of responses	34				
Value	Count	Percent			
I love it!	23	68			
I like it	5	15			
I don't like it	6	18			

In the summer of 2019 RPCA staff collected community feedback on the draft recommendations for improving this pocket park. The following information summarizes what was heard through online surveys and community feedback (see appendix for full results). The city received 716 responses in total, 32 of which were specific to Armory Tot Lot.

Based on information from the summer input phase, staff updated the plan to best represent current and future community needs. A major change to the draft park plan is the replacement of the existing fence. The current fence is not in compliance with RPCA's fence standards and is outdated. Additionally, the playground will remain for ages 2-5 based on community feedback.

Improvement Recommendations

- Cover the utility boxes with mylar patterned covers**
Similar to the traffic control box wraps project that the city conducted in 2015 and 2016, cover the two existing utility boxes with patterned wraps. Wrap the utility box closest to Royal Street and near the entrance ramp with a cover that includes a welcome sign for the park. Wrap the utility box inside the fence with a cover that integrates the history of the park and educational information.
- Create shaded social seating areas**
Community feedback indicated a need for gathering space for caregivers to relax while children play. Install round tables to provide places for visitors and caregivers to relax, picnic, and socialize.
- Add a stroller parking area**
Convert and designate the area between the utility box and the playground as a stroller parking area.
- Install a sign about leaving toys in the park**
Visitors enjoy leaving toys in the park for children to play with; however, many of these toys are left in the equipment fall zone and need to be removed by staff for safety. Installing a friendly sign thanking visitors for leaving their toys, and asking visitors not to leave toys in the fall zone could help resolve this safety concern. The sign will include a map of the fall zone to be clear about what that area is.
- Update existing playground and provide swings for multiple age groups**
The current playground includes outdated play equipment, mainly focused on ages 2-5. Community feedback indicated that there is a need for additional swings for older children. A renovated playground will include features that promote more imaginative play. Given the limited space in this park, this plan also suggests replacing the bucket swings with "swing with me" swings similar to those already installed in other parks in the City, such as Beverly Park and Potomac Yard Park. These swings can each be used by one or two people and will allow children of all ages to use the swings.

Armory Tot Lot

Improvement Recommendations

1 Cover utility boxes with a mylar patterned covers
Cover the two existing utility boxes with patterned wraps, similar to the traffic control box wraps project that the City conducted in 2015 and 2016. Wrap the utility box closest to Royal Street and near the entrance ramp with a cover that includes a welcome sign for the park. Wrap the utility box inside the fence with a cover that integrates the history of the park and educational information.

2 Create shaded social seating areas
Community feedback indicated a need for a gathering space for caregivers to relax while children play. Install round tables to provide places for visitors and caregivers to relax, picnic, and socialize.

3 Add a stroller parking area
Convert and designate the area between the utility box and the playground as a stroller parking area.

4 Install a sign about leaving toys in the park
Many park users leave toys in the park for children to play with. However, these toys are left in the play equipment use zone and need to be removed by staff to ensure safety. Install a friendly sign thanking visitors for leaving their toys and asking visitors not to leave toys in the use zone to help resolve safety concerns. The sign will include a map of the designated use zone.

5 Renovate playground and provide shade
The current playground includes outdated play equipment, mainly focused on ages 2-5. Renovate the playground and include features that promote more imaginative play. As requested by the community, new play equipment will remain geared towards 2-5 year olds. Community feedback indicated a need for shade in this park. Install a shade structure, such as a shade sail, as part of the playground renovation.

6 Replace fence
The existing fence is dated and no longer complies with RPCA standards. The new fence will be decorative and compliant the City's historic district guidelines.

Recommendations and Rankings

#	Recommendation	Dept. Lead	Priority	Cost
1	Utility boxes	RPCA	Low	\$1,400 - \$1,881
2	Create a seating area	RPCA	Medium	\$29,500 - \$39,646
3	Stroller parking area	RPCA	Low	\$1,200 - \$1,613
4	Sign about leaving toys in the park	RPCA	Medium	\$190 - \$255
5	Update existing playground	RPCA	Medium	\$122,500 - \$164,630
6	Replace fence	RPCA	Medium	\$5,700 - \$7,660
7	Park welcome sign	RPCA	Medium	\$1,800 - \$2,419