Dear Mayor Bouley, Concord City Council, Parks and Recreation Department,

I recently learned that the Friends of White Park have been meeting to discuss building a new Monkey Around Playground. I have a new grandson, and another grandchild on the way. I now use a large power wheelchair for mobility, and I would like to be able to enjoy time at the new playground alongside my grandchildren. This is why I would like to share some thoughts about the importance of building this playground as a universally designed, barrier-free gathering spot for ALL families in Concord, including my own.

Throughout my career in education, one of my core beliefs was inclusion. The importance of inclusion was first instilled in me during my time at Springfield and my early work as an elementary physical education teacher. I saw the tangible benefits of inclusion in the classroom and the gym. I witnessed the type of cooperation that occurs when you have students with a range of abilities working closely together. This type of collaboration that occurs directly correlates to real world skills. Skills that help our entire community become more empathetic, more understanding, as well as creating more well rounded citizens.

I truly believe that our public schools and community playgrounds are the spaces where we have to be pushing for inclusion. That by pushing for inclusion in this space, it ripples out into our greater community and into our world.

Since I was diagnosed with ALS, the importance of inclusion is more clear than ever. It is no longer a theoretical philosophy, but a practical reality for me. This experience reminds me of a line from the Robert Frost poem, “Into My Own”: *They would not find me changed from him they knew – Only more sure of all I thought was true.*

My experience with ALS has only made me more sure that inclusion is an essential part of education and life.

Therefore, it is critical that the Monkey Around Playground incorporate universal design.  This would also be in keeping with the inclusive, community spirit of the new Concord Main Street Project.  Concord has an opportunity to create a destination playground where EVERYONE can enjoy outdoor play together.

Any child born into this community – including those with disabilities – should be able to fully access a playground in the most central and well-known park in our community.

Sincerely,

Gene Connolly

Retired Principal, Concord High School