

Part 2 of 3 - A Good Place to Raise a Family

“Home is where children find safety and security, where we find our identities, where citizenship starts. It usually starts with believing you're part of a community, and that is essential to having a stable home.” - Matthew Desmond

Watchung needs inclusive public spaces.

There are those in town who have expressed the opinion that sports fields and publicly owned buildings, that are generally closed except for planned programs, are all the “public” space our town needs. I beg to differ.

It's safe to say that we would like our town to be thought of as a good place to raise a family, that's the reason many of us live here. In order to fulfill this goal, this unspoken civic promise, we need a healthy balanced community. In many suburbs, ours included, participation in sports teams seems to be the only social activity offered. This single focus, age segregated socialization is unbalanced and unhealthy. A healthy balanced community requires public gathering spaces inclusive of all, young and old, sports minded and bookworms, creators of art and music and creators of practical structures and materials. We need a space that can be used by everyone, in all seasons. Inclusive public spaces help us balance our work, family and personal lives by providing multiple outlets for our interests and creativity. The local public library fulfills most of these needs.

In addition to structured school and sports activities children need time for free play. Scientific studies have found that free play is critical in helping children become socially adept, cope with stress and build cognitive skills like problem-solving. Children thrive when left alone in a safe environment to occupy their own time, develop their own interests, follow their own inspiration and experience the ability to think of an idea, initiate it and bring

it to fruition. The library, with its myriad resources, helpful staff, and safe space is an ideal place for these activities.

A healthy community is also one that encourages intergenerational bonding. It's important to have a space where young and old can mingle and work together. This type of cooperation between the generations is healthy for all involved. Some of the positives include:

- Enhancing social intelligence
- Providing an opportunity for young and old to learn new skills
- Helping children understand and accept aging, and
- Preventing isolation and loneliness in older adults

Intergenerational sharing also helps keep family and town stories and history alive. Developing connections between generations promotes a greater sense of fulfillment in all. Again a properly sized local library is an ideal setting to make these types of connections. The library is open regularly, has trained staff available during all operating hours and is a repository of a large and varied amount of information in diverse formats which are curated for our particular needs.

We all want the best for ourselves, our children, and our elders. A functional public library with adequate space is key to achieving these goals.