

# City Is Building 12 Movable Playgrounds

## Designs Allow for Freedom in Shaping

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

With a \$401,888 check from the Federal Government and four experimental designs, the Parks Department soon will begin a program that will turn 12 vacant lots into novel playgrounds.

The new designs, intended to be prototypes for general city use, have been developed under a demonstration grant given to the city by the Department of Housing and Urban Development last July. The grant covers design and construction.

The grant was designed to help the city find ways to build small, temporary movable neighborhood playgrounds on odd-sized city lots for which future uses are undetermined. The results, which combine new structural systems and a new philosophy of play-activity, are expected to set future standards for New York and to serve as models for other cities with similar problems.

Sites for five of the new playgrounds have already been selected and they are expected to be completed by next summer. Charles E. Thomsen will direct the program. The designs are by M. Paul Friedberg, a New York landscape architect commissioned to make the pilot study by the Parks Department.

### 4 Sites Empty Lots

Four of the sites are empty lots. They are on East Fifth Street between Avenues C and D on the Lower East Side; New Jersey Avenue between Dumont and Blake Streets in East New York, Brooklyn; East 122d Street between Park and Lexington Avenues in East Harlem; and 138th Street between Willis and Alexander Avenues in the Bronx.

The fifth site is in parkland along the route of the old Croton Aqueduct in the Bronx.

The four playground designs consist of different "systems" of modular, prefabricated parts that can be combined in many ways for varying locations and purposes. They bear no semblance to the standard playground equipment that is ordered from catalogues and anchored in concrete. Manufacturers are being contacted now for production of the prefabricated parts.

All four systems are based on creating a self-supporting, fastened-together framework that provides play opportunities in itself, and can also contain play equipment.

One design bolts together wooden "logs" of different lengths to make a frame for climbing and sitting, with slides and swings attached. Its crossed members form spaces for sandboxes and games. The weight of the bolted wood units eliminates the need for fastening into heavy foundations.

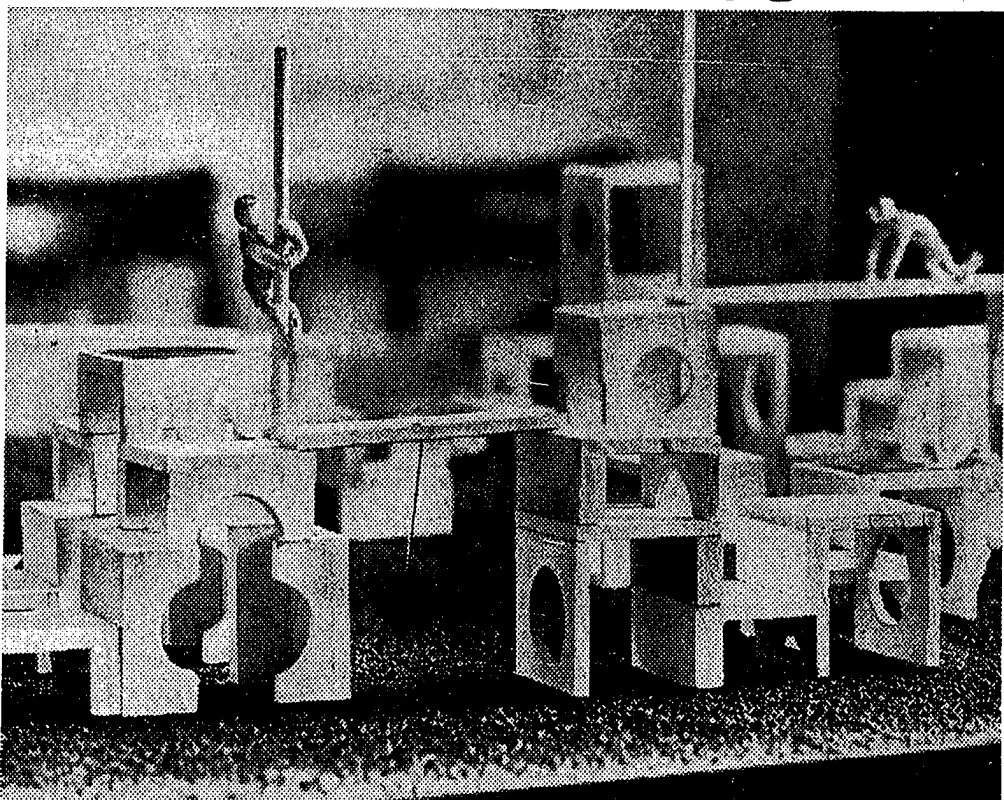
A second system consists of U-shaped and V-shaped precast concrete pieces that can be put together to make an abstract world of boxes, platforms, shelters and mazes. This is planned to include seesaws, sliding poles and other familiar units installed in unfamiliar ways.

The third design uses tubular steel elements as a rigid geometric frame. The framework is the "playpiece." Mr. Friedberg says, with slides, balls, swings and seesaws incorporated into it.

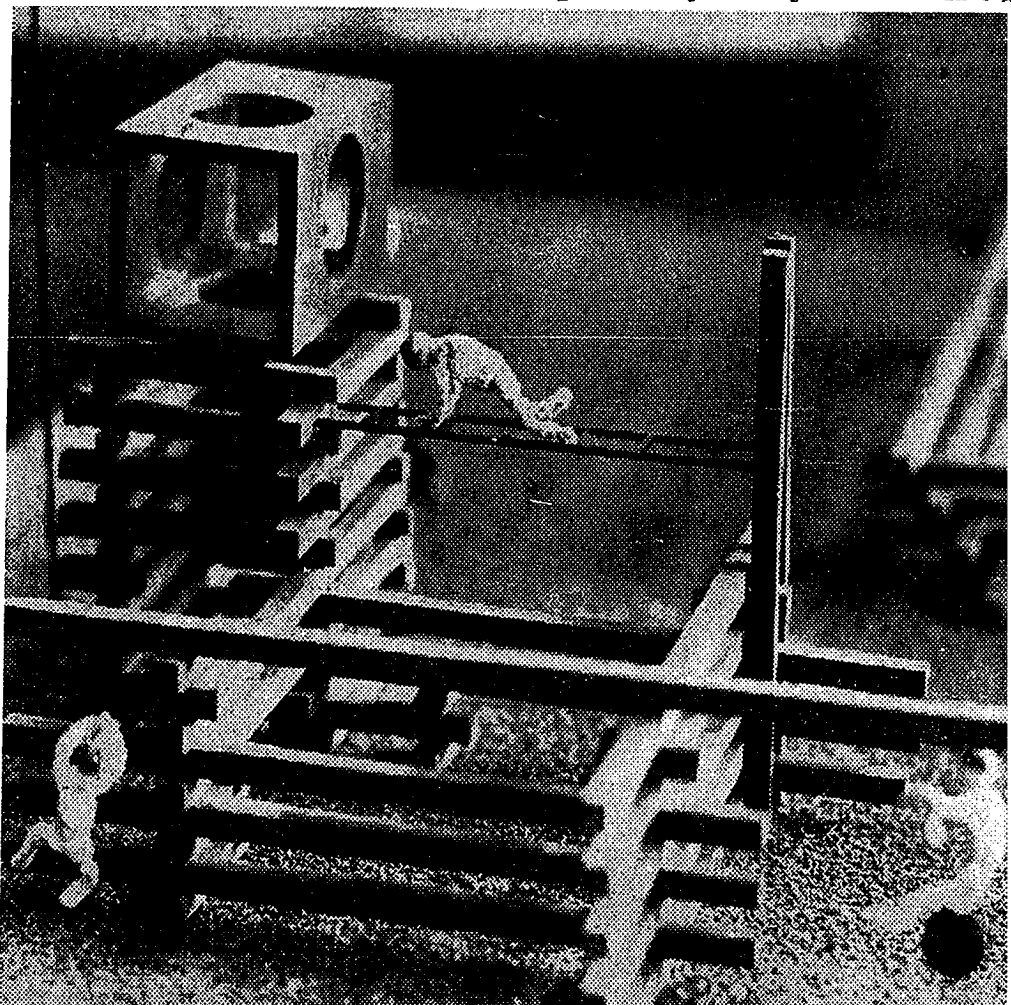
The fourth design is a combination of pipes and cables, with boxes and planks suspended on the cables to move and slide, so that the child can control the play objects.

All of the installations will create what the designer calls "continuous play situations," in which the play equipment is "open-ended," with one thing leading directly to a choice of others. "The child controls the play equipment, instead of being controlled by it," Mr. Friedberg says.

This idea was pioneered in the Riis Plaza playground at Jacob Riis Houses, on the Lower East Side, as part of a two-block open space designed by Mr. Friedberg in collaboration with the architectural firm of Pommerance & Breines. Riis Plaza has



Precast concrete forms are one of solutions designed for city's lots by M. Paul Friedberg



The New York Times

Weight of bolted wooden "logs" makes foundation unnecessary. Units are easily assembled.

become a pilgrimage point for those interested in new ideas in recreation.

The Riis playground consists of four "outdoor rooms," or zoned sections, that extend for two blocks between the apartment buildings.

The rooms include a raised sitting area with a fountain and flowers, a sunken amphitheater surrounded by a pergola and a promenade, and a children's playground. The architects were cited for having shown "a keen understanding of human activities."

There are no fences, no asphalt and no signs saying "No" at the Riis playground. Not even the clumps of bushes are forbidden the child. Stepping stones

wander through them and the child is effectively controlled by thorns on the bushes.

The costs of the new "knock-down" playgrounds are estimated at a range of \$18 to \$20 a unit for pipe components to \$45 to \$50 a unit for the precast concrete elements. Installed, they are expected to average roughly \$4 a square foot or \$30,000 for an average playground. Temporary use, in Parks Department terms, means several years, or until land-use is changed.

The department points out that the cost of an average playground runs \$4.50 to \$5 a square foot, with most of it invested in foundations. It cites one example where the commu-

nity contributed \$3,500 worth of equipment and the foundations for it cost \$10,000. "We can't very well pick up that playground and go," says Commissioner Thomas P. F. Hoving.

Appearance has been as important as function in the new designs. The installations, which are not "arty," but form attractive assemblages of simple, geometric shapes, are intended to be handsome additions to any neighborhood. The designer is working with artists now to develop colored plaques and sculpture to be incorporated as easily as slides and swings.

The city will add approximately \$50,000, to the Federal grant, a percentage required by Federal regulations.