

Local Mom Urges Repairs and Accessibility at Wood River Township Park

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER/COTTAGE HILLS - A local mom is advocating for maintenance and an accessible playground at Wood River Township Park.

Cottage Hills resident Makayla Hawks lives near the park and believes it has become an “eyesore” in recent years. In addition to vandalism and closed bathrooms, the park’s playground equipment is “tangled-up, broken and rusted.” As the mother to twin boys with cerebral palsy, Hawks wants to see an inclusive playground installed as well as basic maintenance to improve the park, and she has some ideas about how the community can help.

“It’s really sad because there are a lot of kids that are in this community over here that deserve a safe playground to play at,” Hawks said. “I’m very hopeful that something can get done with this.”

Hawks has started [a petition](#) asking the Wood River Township organization to upgrade and maintain the park. She is also planning to meet with the Township Supervisor next week. She has researched several grants already, and she hopes to create a committee of other parents and community members who can work to improve the park.

She has been delighted to see such a positive response so far. Hawks has met with a few other moms and spoken to several people on Facebook about this issue, and she has received a lot of support from other community members who want to help.

In addition to cleaning up the park and installing a fence, Hawks is pushing hard for an ADA-accessible playground. While there are a few similar playgrounds in the Riverbend region, Hawks believes more are always useful.

Her sons have different levels of need, but both — and many other children in the area — would benefit from the accessible playground. It is difficult to transport one of her sons in a car seat, so while they can drive to an accessible playground, Hawks loves the idea of being able to carry him down the block to the Wood River Township Park and avoid the additional stress on his body. She believes an accessible playground would help a lot of families.

“Navigating life with disabled children, it’s not easy, and it got me thinking,” she said. “All kids of all abilities should have a chance to play on a playground and be a kid. So I’m really advocating for an inclusive, ADA-accessible playground for kids of all abilities to play at. I’ve been around and some of the parks around here are not accessible for my son. They don’t accommodate his needs, and it breaks my heart.”

Hawks has also done some research into the park’s beginning. She found that the park was named after a schoolteacher named Betty Lee Browning several decades ago. Browning passed away in 2017 at the age of 94; Hawks hopes to get in touch with her son so she can find out more and potentially install a new sign in Browning’s honor.

All of these plans are impossible without the community’s support. Hawks encourages people to [sign the petition](#) and reach out to her with more information or questions. She hopes to have productive conversations that lead to upgrades at the park.

“All kids should be able to have the access to play at the playground instead of staying on the sidelines and watching other kids enjoy their childhood,” she added. “I am not bringing this proposal forward simply to point out what is broken. I am bringing it forward because I believe this park has tremendous potential.”