Group participation and "advocacy architecture" are the themes at a neighborhood playground designed by MIT graduate student Nick Elton, which is being built on North Harvard Street in Allston.

"We aren't going to just present the people of the neighborhood with a park," Elton said of the project. "They will have been involved in design and construction of their playground from the start - it will be theirs."

The playground is being sponsored by the North Harvard Neighborhood Council, a community group composed mainly of residents of the Charlesview housing project in Allston. The group, organized about 18 months ago, raised almost $2000 to lease three-quarters of an acre from Harvard University, and then asked MIT's Community Projects Laboratory for aid in designing the playground and park.

"There's nothing really fantastic or unusual about the design," Elton, an architecture student, told The Tech. "But it is unusual to see a community as involved in planning, design, and construction as this one has been."

Since $2000 is "not a whole lot of money to develop that much land," Elton said, scrounging and volunteer labor have been the watchwords for the project. The Federal government provided funds to hire 30 neighborhood children to work full-time during the summer on the playground, and several schools in the Boston area have supported students who are helping, but most of the work on the playground has come from what Elton calls "sweat equity."

Neighborhood children, as the main beneficiaries of the project, have also been strongly involved in completing it. Wood for a 70-foot long fence was donated by educational TV station WGBH, and the local kids are painting a mural - showing a "people's park," of course - on the fence. "We're trying to get the kids involved and get interaction with them, too," Elton said.

When completed, the playground will serve the people of the North Harvard Street area of Allston, including residents of proposed married-student housing planned by Harvard.

**A Community Design Project**

Photos by Roger Goldstein