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As a minor correction, the illustration of the University of Virginia (*Cite* 35, p. 27) shows the northern extension of the rotunda. It was added by Robert Mills in 1853. In disgust, Mr. Jefferson's ghost started a fire that destroyed it in 1895.

In its history and design, I thoroughly enjoy learning about my city from your magazine.

Lynn N. Hughes
United States District Judge, Houston

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In a recent article regarding playgrounds designed by Robert Leathers (*Cite* 35), the writer questioned whether children playing on the equipment at Hidalgo Park are safe. The article illustrates why the Houston Parks and Recreation Department no longer uses such playground equipment and gives us an opportunity to introduce the steps we have taken to ensure that YES, our children are reasonably safe on all of our city's playgrounds.

In February 1994, this department created five two-man teams dedicated to playground safety, maintenance, and repair. These teams inspect approximately 250 playgrounds an average of twice monthly. They have special trucks equipped with the necessary tools and parts for immediate repair of playground equipment. The supervisor of the team is a certified playground inspector as designated by the National Recreation and Parks Association.

The City of Houston has some older playground equipment that was manufactured and installed prior to the establishment of American Society for Testing Materials and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission safety guidelines. It is the responsibility of our playground safety teams to inspect older equipment and make sure it is as compliant as possible with the current safety guidelines.

The playground at Hidalgo Park was designed and constructed before the safety standards were adopted. Although the equipment has always been in fairly good repair, its age and construction present challenges in keeping it up to standard. Since April 1994, the playground has been inspected more than 70 times and over \$7,670 has been spent on repairs. Hidalgo Park is part of the Parks to Standard Program, a \$52 million renovation project designed to bring Houston's

parks up to a uniform standard of safety, security, and accessibility. In June 1996, we began renovations to provide Hidalgo Park with \$155,932 of improvements, not only to the playground but also to other facilities throughout the park.

Your article specifically questioned the condition of the wood surfaces. On October 30, 1996 our crews conducted an inspection of the Hidalgo Park playground and found that the overall condition of the wood facing appeared to be weathered but good. The inspector found only a few areas of minor splintering and noted that a recent water power cleaning may have contributed to the weathered appearance. The wood equipment is resealed annually, however, the process has been delayed this year until completion of the Parks to Standard improvements.

To avoid these high repair costs and to improve safety, we now install composite playground equipment designed to be smoother, sturdier, and made of more durable materials. The equipment at Hidalgo Park does not meet the current standards and carries a certain set of liability issues; therefore, it will probably be the last of its kind in a City of Houston park. The new Heights playground referred to in the *Cite* article is located in Donovan Park, which is privately owned and maintained.

It is important to note that one of the most common problems we have with our park equipment is vandalism. Hidalgo Park is on a routine twice monthly maintenance schedule. Our graffiti abatement program maintains a 72-hour response time. In addition, we have a 24-hour Citizens' HELPLINE (645-HELP) so that citizens can report any problems. The City of Houston has set new standards in park excellence and playground safety, and we continue to improve and upgrade our facilities. We feel that the implications in the article could have been presented more accurately if we had been given the opportunity for our input. We firmly believe that the City of Houston has gone above and beyond to ensure that we are providing the safest play opportunities for Houston's children at Hidalgo and all City parks.

William R. Smith II
Director, Parks and Recreation Department
City of Houston

From the Editor

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

The issue behind this Issue is capital — money — the force that makes built projects happen. As political and social changes occur in this millennial decade, *Cite* thought it was time to look at projects around us, how they are funded, and in what ways they influence our community. With the help of four new writers to our pages, *Cite* 36 examines publicly and privately funded initiatives:

- Richard Longstreth and Drexel Turner reflect on West Gray and River Oaks Shopping Center, while David Kaplan explores the Rice University Village. In both cases private dollars have been plowed back in to make older retail developments economically viable.
- Vincent Hauser writes about federal dollars put to work to preserve our architectural heritage.
- Jeffrey Ochsner examines the expenditure of Metro tax dollars that hope to transform the downtown streetscape and challenge the pre-eminence of a formidable, well-financed private tunnel system down under.
- Ann Walton Sieber contemplates the Shrine of the Black Madonna and its African American utopian mission, philanthropically funded on the disadvantaged fringes of the Third Ward.
- And, in an introspective arc, George Greanias considers the framework of the city's infrastructure, the proper role of public tax dollars in influencing the development of the private sector, and how we should frame the dialogue about public-private partnerships that shape a city.

No one person, corporation, board, administration, or referendum has autonomous power to make decisions about how money is spent that effects our public environment. Awareness and discussion might raise the level of community involvement — so that what is built around us is an accurate reflection of the public will.

Barry Moore, FAIA