

FAIRMOUNT PARK

CONSERVANCY

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Four U.S. Cities Join Philadelphia in “Reimagining the Civic Commons”

National and Regional Funders Invest \$40M in Initiative Piloted by Knight Foundation and the William Penn Foundation with Fairmount Park Conservancy

September 8, 2016 – PHILADELPHIA – A new national initiative to foster civic engagement, economic opportunity and environmental sustainability launched today with the announcement of a \$40 million investment in public spaces in four U.S. cities. Building on a pilot project in Philadelphia, *Reimagining the Civic Commons* will support projects that revitalize and connect civic assets in Akron, Chicago, Detroit and Memphis.

Four national foundations –The JPB Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation – are investing a total of \$20 million, to be matched by \$20 million from local sources. The four cities will engage in a three-year demonstration of how investments in public spaces such as parks, libraries, trails and community centers can reverse recent trends of economic and social fragmentation while making cities more environmentally sustainable in the process. An initial \$11 million in funding for the pilot in Philadelphia was awarded to Fairmount Park Conservancy in late 2014 by Knight Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.

Today and tomorrow (September 8 -9) in Philadelphia, Mayor Jim Kenney and Fairmount Park Conservancy will host a Mayor and Foundation Forum on the Civic Commons for the mayors of the participating cities and the foundations to discuss lessons learned in Philadelphia and ways to collaborate in the future.

“I look forward to speaking with my counterparts about the investments our city is making in Philadelphia’s public resources,” said **Mayor Jim Kenney**, whose first major piece of legislation upon taking office this year was the passage of a sweetened beverage tax to support the Rebuild initiative, a \$300 million investment in the city’s parks, recreations centers and libraries. “From river to river and out through Philly’s many diverse neighborhoods, our citizens, businesses, and local funders are working to make recreation and nature accessible for all.”

To provide tools and grow the resources needed to re-knit communities across the country, *Reimagining the Civic Commons* will support a national Civic Commons Learning Network to coordinate a learning agenda, impact

assessment, and storytelling across the five demonstration cities. Building on the experience of the Philadelphia's Civic Commons Collective, which consists of several organizations working on five public space projects, the network will emphasize collaboration by hosting cross-city learning opportunities and generating a series of toolkits to act as how-to resources for civic asset and city leaders in demonstration cities and beyond.

Jennifer Mahar, Senior Director of Civic Initiatives at Fairmount Park Conservancy, has been coordinating communication among the five local projects, which range from riverside trails to community libraries to historic parkland.

“This type of public space learning collaborative had never been done before, so we’ve had to create the process as we go along,” said Mahar. “It’s been fascinating to see how ideas from very different institutions come together to inspire creative thinking.”

Videos, interviews, and articles about the Philadelphia Collective’s work to date are housed online at <http://civiccommonsphl.myphillypark.org/about/>. The five projects are in various stages of development:

- **Bartram’s Mile:** Construction of this trail and greenway project along the lower Schuylkill River up to Bartram’s Garden is set to be completed in Winter 2016 by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and Schuylkill River Development Corporation.
- **Centennial Commons:** Groundbreaking to transform this underutilized section of West Fairmount Park into a creative new playspace for the Parkside community is set for October 2016 by Fairmount Park Conservancy.
- **Discovery Center:** Site work is underway on this unique collaboration between Audubon and Outward Bound to reactivate an abandoned reservoir in East Fairmount Park as a site for environmental education and adventure programs.
- **Viaduct Rail Park:** While the Center City District awaits further funding to repurpose this section of the former Reading Railroad line into an elevated green space, the viaduct is establishing itself as a popular destination through the Night Market and a pop-up beer garden.
- **Lovett Library and Park:** Since closure of this branch of The Free Library of Philadelphia in Spring 2016 in preparation for renovation, Mt. Airy USA has been holding neighborhood meetings to generate innovative ideas for programs that will be bring this diverse community together.

To explore plans for the *Reimagining the Civic Commons* initiative in Akron, Chicago, Detroit, and Memphis as well as Philadelphia, please visit: www.CivicCommons.us. In the coming months, the website will be updated with research, metrics and stories from each of the partner communities.

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