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## **NEW “PARK-WITHIN-THE-PARK” OPENS IN CENTENNIAL DISTRICT Parkside Neighborhood Gets a Place to Gather, Rest, and Play**

**Philadelphia, PA – June 13, 2018** – Today, Fairmount Park Conservancy hosted a group of public and private sector partners in unveiling the first phase of Centennial Commons, a new park-within-the-park that is designed to make this section of West Fairmount Park more accessible to neighbors and more welcoming to all visitors. Initial redevelopment of the site – which was the central hub of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 but has been under-supported for decades – was made possible by an initial gift of \$5.4 million from the William Penn Foundation to Fairmount Park Conservancy, supplemented by a \$1 million capital contribution from Knight Foundation. Designed by Studio Bryan Hanes with significant community input, the 67,000-square-foot-area along Parkside Avenue between 41<sup>st</sup> Street and Belmont Avenue features freshly laid walking paths on what was before simply lawn, a rain garden featuring native plants, giant porch swings, and 68 new trees that will increasingly provide shade as they grow.



Future phases of the project pending funding (see rendering), include a youth play area, a skating loop, and restrooms.

“Parks only reach their potential when people use them,” said **Jamie Gauthier**, executive director of Fairmount Park Conservancy. “Through an extensive community engagement process, we learned

that Parkside residents have long used these lawns for picnics, but they wanted some proper seating. We realized that people were risking fast-moving traffic just to cross the street. Today we're seeing the beginnings of how this historic site can be remade into a welcoming community gathering place."

Getting Centennial Commons to this point has involved an extraordinary collaboration among city agencies. As always, Fairmount Park Conservancy worked closely on every step of the project with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, which owns and will maintain the land. But other city agencies made notable contributions as well: Philadelphia Water Department spent \$1 million to build systems that will divert stormwater from the city's aging sewer infrastructure, including a rain garden of native plant species; Philadelphia Department of Commerce enhanced the streetscaping along Parkside Avenue with sidewalk extensions, a pedestrian island, and flashing beacons, at a cost of over \$250,000; Philadelphia Streets Department assisted in designing street improvements to create safer pedestrian crossings and calm traffic on the avenue, valued at approximately \$50,000. The total cost of Phase I was \$5 million.

"This first phase of Centennial Commons is a terrific example of how city government can work with nonprofit leaders and citizens to turn an underused resource into a gem for the community," said **Mayor Jim Kenney**. "I offer congratulations to the vision and collaboration of the many partners who made this possible."

**Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell** said, "The last few weeks have been an exciting time for parks and public spaces in the City of Philadelphia, and none of it would be possible without the support of our partners. Centennial Commons has been a project many years in the making—I am genuinely excited to see the first phase take shape—and I thank my fellow Commissioners from other City departments and agencies who have committed to our vision of making beautiful, accessible public spaces for Philadelphia residents."

Neighborhood partners have been critical to the success of Centennial Commons as well. In particular, the Centennial Parkside Community Development Corporation has taken a leading role in shaping the design of this area and committing to maintaining it. The CDC has created a Clean & Green Team of two part-time, locally hired maintenance workers to collect trash and is hiring a program manager to oversee community events throughout the warm months, such as movie nights, cooking demonstrations, home repair workshops, and festivals.

"It's such a joy to see people relishing in the new public space," said **Joyce Smith, Board Vice President of Centennial Parkside CDC and member of Viola Street Resident's Association.**

"Every day I see children playing while parents relax and neighbors lounging and chatting like they are on their front porch. Not only is it fast becoming the quintessential gathering place for residents and park visitors, but the park improvements may even leverage CDC's mission to attract responsible and equitable investment in the East Parkside neighborhood."

Centennial Commons is also part of a national collaborative effort called **Reimagining the Civic Commons**. Launched three years ago as a pilot project in Philadelphia with funding from John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the William Penn Foundation, [Reimagining the Civic Commons](#) has grown into a multi-city, multi-foundation initiative that seeks to counter growing economic and social fragmentation in our cities by revitalizing and connecting parks, libraries, community centers and other public space. In Philadelphia alone, the original five nonprofit partners have expanded to 19 organizations who continue to share ideas and strategic ways to leverage funding.

### **About Fairmount Park Conservancy**

Fairmount Park Conservancy exists to champion Philadelphia's parks. We lead capital projects and historic preservation efforts, foster neighborhood park stewardship, attract and leverage investments, and develop innovative programs throughout the 10,200 acres that include Fairmount Park and more than 200 neighborhood parks around the city. For more information, please visit [myphillypark.org](http://myphillypark.org), join us at [facebook.com/fairmountparkconservancy](https://facebook.com/fairmountparkconservancy), and follow us on Instagram and Twitter @myphillypark.

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Editor's Note: Download high-resolution renderings of the project design here:  
<http://bit.ly/ConservancyPressKit>.

*Rendering Credit: Studio Bryan Hanes*

*Photo Credit: Albert Yee for Fairmount Park Conservancy*