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SPARK receives record donation of \$5 million to invest in ‘park deserts’ throughout the Houston region

Catalyst funding from Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation will impact 30 schools in 12 districts

Commitment of \$450,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant funding

HOUSTON – September 21, 2016 – SPARK, a Houston-based non-profit organization that develops neighborhood parks on school grounds, received a record \$5 million donation from Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation to increase park equity in the greater Houston region. The City of Houston is committing an additional \$450,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant funding over the next three years for qualifying schools.

This catalyst investment is intended to impact neighborhoods across greater Houston by transforming playgrounds at 30 schools in 12 independent school districts. With prior funding from Houston Endowment in 2014, The Trust for Public Land (TPL) analyzed SPARK’s school-based park program, finding that SPARK parks are heavily used and highly valued by communities. The TPL study identified an estimated 50+ locations in “park deserts” where SPARK parks would provide significant benefit to residents.

“I want to thank Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation for another generous donation toward improving parks,” said Mayor Sylvester Turner. “This continues the public/private partnerships that are helping to fill in gaps in our park system all over the city. More Houstonians will be able to access recreational opportunities without having to travel outside their neighborhoods and that leads to improved quality of life and a healthier Houston.”

Houston Endowment President and CEO Ann Stern shared, “We believe that access to high-quality parks contributes to well-being for all residents. We have long appreciated SPARK’s inclusive approach to park development, and are proud to be a partner on this initiative.”

“We are pleased to be part of this collaborative approach for SPARK, to foster additional support to reach the target goal, and to help bring about all the benefits a school and neighborhood park can have on a wide cross section of Houston communities,” said Nancy Kinder, president, Kinder Foundation.

Each park is designed to reflect the character of the school and surrounding neighborhood. Although a typical park might consist of modular playground equipment, a walking trail, benches, picnic tables and an outdoor classroom, each park design incorporates feedback from the community and includes a unique public art component.

According to SPARK Executive Director Kathleen Ownby, “Parks and recreational spaces are great assets and indicators of a world-class city and today we have made extraordinary headway with the support of Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation. We are excited to be able to transform so many parks – most of them outside of the 610 Loop.”

Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation have each committed \$2.5 million to SPARK for this initiative. Both foundations are committed to increasing high-quality greenspace across Houston; their previous investments include Bayou Greenways 2020, Discovery Green, Buffalo Bayou Park and Emancipation Park, among others.

Nine schools have been identified and additional schools will be vetted and selected. The schools include: Harvey Brown Elementary (Channelview ISD); Wedgewood Elementary (Clear Creek ISD); Winborn Elementary (Katy ISD); Lawson Academy (Charter School); Bush Elementary (Alief ISD); Ashford Elementary (HISD); *Woodview Elementary (SBISD); *Petersen Elementary (HISD); and *Milne Elementary (HISD). To learn more about the selection progress, visit www.sparkpark.org.

* indicates re-SPARK projects

Quick Stat: According to The Trust for Public Land, Houston’s [Park Score](#) in 2016 was 41 (out of a maximum of 100).

Download high resolution images: [example SPARK park](#); [list and map of 9 select schools](#).

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About SPARK

SPARK was founded by then Council Member Eleanor Tinsley in 1983. The organization has more than 150 active community parks in 15 different school districts throughout Houston. Visit sparkpark.org.

About Houston Endowment

Houston Endowment is a private philanthropic institution that enhances the vibrancy of greater Houston and advances equity of opportunity for the people who live here. Jesse H. and Mary Gibbs Jones established Houston Endowment in 1937 to help create a community where the opportunity to thrive is available to all. Visit houstonendowment.org.

About Kinder Foundation

The Kinder Foundation, a family foundation established in 1997 by Rich and Nancy Kinder, has distributed nearly \$260 million in gifts to transformational projects in the areas of urban green space, education, and quality of life. Visit kinderfoundation.org.