



Press Release

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HPARD Receives \$1 Million Dollar TPWD Grant For Emancipation Park Expansion & Renovation Phase I

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department has been awarded a \$1 Million Dollar Grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for the Phase I expansion & renovation of historic Emancipation Park.

“Emancipation Park is a fixture in Houston’s history and the Third Ward,” said Mayor Annise Parker. “This grant will help rejuvenate it with a new building and expanded parking, entry plaza, outdoor exhibit area, and much needed walking trails.”

Emancipation Park was purchased in 1872 by freed slaves who desired to have a place to commemorate and celebrate the anniversary of their emancipation in Texas.

“Emancipation Park is the oldest and one of the most historic parks in our department’s inventory,” said Joe Turner, Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department. “It dates back to even before this department was created. This grant will allow us to begin the process of recognizing and creating a park befitting its history and the vision of the men who first dreamed of the park.”

The redevelopment of the park is driven by three goals:

- To create a beautiful and functional park for the residents of the Third Ward
- To spark redevelopment within the Third Ward Community
- To make the park a destination point for national and international visitors to Houston

The Emancipation Park Renovation Project was kicked off after the interest expressed by the community following the Juneteenth, 2007, 135th Anniversary Celebration of Emancipation Park.

The park continues to be the community’s favorite site for Juneteenth celebrations, and has grown in prestige for other local and family get-togethers.

The project is the result of a 2009 program study developed by the Project for Public Space of Emancipation Park. This document, developed at the request of the OST/Almeda Corridors Redevelopment Authority (TIRZ #7) and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD), included a myriad of ideas about spaces and activities that the residents wanted to see in the park.

Theola Petteway, Executive Director of the Authority, said, "Emancipation Park is a historical symbol of freedom for African Americans and its redevelopment will serve as a major economic development driver in the Northern Third Ward area."

In 2010, the TIRZ and HPARD issued a Request for Proposals in search of a nationally recognized design firm to develop a cohesive concept for Emancipation Park. Durham, North Carolina-based, The Freelon Group, was selected to work with M2L Associates, a landscape architecture firm in Houston, to deliver a pre-design study for the project that would allow the TIRZ, HPARD, and community stakeholders, such as the Friends of Emancipation Park, to raise funds for design and construction. The pre-design study was delivered to HPARD and the TIRZ on December 8, 2010, and was presented to stakeholders at a community meeting on February 23, 2011. The proposed recreational elements in this grant project are selected from the Preliminary Facility Expansion Program Document presented to the community.

The Authority and the City of Houston are also partnering in a street improvement project on Dowling Street, the main thoroughfare to the park. The project proposes ADA accessible, on-street parking along Dowling next to the Park. Other proposed streetscape improvements include distinctive street lights, historical markers, and improved pedestrian safety and accessibility. The same landscape architecture firm, M2L Associates, is providing design services for this project and the proposed Emancipation Park improvement project, facilitating cohesiveness between both projects.

Existing facilities to be impacted in future phases include the community center building, a pool and pool house, playground, picnic pavilion, baseball/softball field, outdoor basketball court, tennis courts, horseshoe pit, picnic tables, and park benches.

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.) stewards and manages over 38,992 acres of parkland and greenspace for the City of Houston and develops and implements recreational programming for citizens of all abilities. For more information on the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, call (832) 395-7022 or visit www.houstonparks.org.