Midway Peace Park, one of the most ambitious park designs in the city’s recent history, breaks ground

Officials with St. Paul Parks and Recreation and the Trust for Public Land held a groundbreaking celebration for the future Midway Peace Park on Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2019. The $6 million project, which is half publicly funded and half funded by donors, is expected to open in summer 2020. Its design has been hailed as one of the most ambitious in recent city history. (Frederick Melo / Pioneer Press)

By FREDERICK MELO | fmelo@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press
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In 2014, the Trust for Public Land’s “Greening the Green Line” report laid bare an obvious truth, and put it in stark numbers.

While Minneapolis and St. Paul are 15 percent parkland, the areas within brief walking distance of the light rail corridor come nowhere close.

In the fact, less than 5 percent of the Green Line area is parkland — and some station areas offer less than half that much greenery.

A $6 million fundraising effort led by the Trust for Public Land aims to change that.

On Tuesday, St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter joined Parks and Rec Director Mike Hahm, St. Paul School District Superintendent Joe Gothard and other key partners for a groundbreaking at least six years in the making.

Work crews with LS Black Construction officially began turning dirt at the future Midway Peace Park off University Avenue and Griggs Street in late August. The five-acre park, half funded by taxpayers and half funded by foundations and private donors, could open as soon as June 2020.

While located behind the Gordon Parks High School and near the High School for the Performing Arts, the city park at 416 Griggs Street will be open to anyone, including the many young people who live nearby at the 24-story Skyline Tower apartment building. The low-income high-rise is home to a large East African population.

Trust for Public Land officials said the $6 million fundraising effort drew support early on from the St. Paul Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation, Target Corporation and other key partners.

Residents of Skyline Tower met with then-St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman in 2015 and delivered 400 postcards stressing the need for green space.

To assemble the land, the Trust purchased underused parking lots from three separate ownership groups in 2015 and 2016 — a key step in the evolution from wishful thinking to a real parkland campaign — and then donated them to the city.

The Union Park District Council's “Green Space Report” had alerted the community to
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Heavy fundraising was completed by the fall of 2018. More than one donor has remarked on the park's elaborate design, which was laid out with heavy input from Skyline Tower residents and other community members.

FredMelo, Reporter | @FrederickMelo · 19h
Construction crews are ripping up the earth at the future Midway Peace Park by Gordon Parks High School. “This is our park! Everybody say ‘Our Park!’” The audience complies. Superintendent Gothard says a park attached to a school is a win-win.

Addendum: This slide will rock!

Please see the images for visual content.
The playgrounds will be fairly centrally located within the five acres, allowing room for an open field, a rain garden, a traditional garden, two separate plaza areas, a stage, a seating area and a full basketball court.

The park will be bounded by a maze-like, zig-zagging walking loop, with a diagonal path that cuts through the park itself. There’s also a rain-fed stream feature, developed in partnership with the Capitol Region Watershed District.

Tags: St. Paul St. Paul development

Frederick Melo
Frederick Melo was once sued by a reader for $2 million but kept on writing. He came to the Pioneer Press in 2005 and brings a testy East Coast attitude to St. Paul beat reporting. He spent nearly six years covering crime in the Dakota County courts before switching focus to the St. Paul mayor’s office, city council, and all things neighborhood-related, from the city’s churches to its parks and light rail. A resident of Hamline-Midway, he is married to a Frogtown woman. He Tweets with manic intensity at @FrederickMelo.

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