

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Trust for Public Land, City of Scranton Joins John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Celebrating Groundbreaking of new Community Schoolyard

SCRANTON – Trust for Public Land (TPL) is proud to celebrate the groundbreaking ceremony for the new community schoolyard at John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Scranton, PA. This transformative project marks a significant milestone in enhancing outdoor spaces for learning, recreation, and community cohesion.

“Having access to quality green space is vital for building strong, healthy communities and this new schoolyard brings nature close-to-home for over 2,000 residents,” **said Owen Franklin, Vice President of the Great Lakes Region for Trust for Public Land.** “Community voice and vision are central to this project and Trust for Public Land is thrilled to be part of bringing together students and neighbors of Kennedy to help create an amazing green space for all to benefit from.”

“A project like this doesn’t happen without collaboration between the City, the Scranton School District, and our nonprofit partners at Trust for Public Land and Valley In Motion,” **said Scranton Mayor Paige G. Cagnetti.** “We have invested significantly into our own parks and green spaces, but working together to transform a school playground into a space designed by Kennedy Elementary students is truly special.”

When school is not in session, the [schoolyard](#) will serve as a community space for the approximately 2,500 residents within a 10-minute walk of campus and will include new ADA accessible play equipment with sensory panels and ramps, a running track, basketball court, picnic tables, newly planted trees and garden, and an outdoor classroom for students to learn in nature.

"To quote Fred Rogers, ‘Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.’ This is one of my favorite quotes in regards to play and childhood,” **said John F. Kennedy Elementary Principal Nora Phillips.** “The students of JFK have anxiously awaited the opportunity to have a safe place to conduct their most serious learning. This groundbreaking symbolizes the beginning of a new chapter in our school community creating an environment which allows all students to access equitable learning through play. Play which will facilitate the good work of childhood for each child in our community.”

"I am beyond grateful for the work that Trust for Public Land and Valley in Motion have done here at JFK," **said Superintendent Dr. Erin Keating.** "The students at JFK, and the community, deserve a place where they can safely connect with nature and relieve stress during and outside of the school year. Children deserve safe places where they can be children and explore the wonders of the world outside of the traditional classroom setting; this space offers that and the SSD is honored to be part of it. I would also like to thank the work of the previous administration. They started this project, understanding the importance of having access to a safe, green space in a child's development. Without their work, we wouldn't have this space. I am excited to see the outcome of the project and work with Trust for Public Land and Valley in Motion further."

Participatory design work was carried out in partnership with TPL's local partner Valley In Motion (VIM) and capped off at a student design unveiling in June 2023. TPL and VIM staff worked on evaluating student conceptual designs and have developed full design and are ready with construction documentation.

"This playground is a fantastic example of collaboration for the public good," **said VIM President Gus Fahey.** "The city, school district, non-profit and foundation partners all came together to do something none of us could have done individually."

Generous funding from The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Moses Taylor Foundation, Scranton Area Community Foundation (SACF), The Robert H. Spitz Foundation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation helped move the Kennedy Schoolyard through design development, pre-construction, and ultimately into construction.

"Moses Taylor Foundation is proud to support Trust for Public Land in bringing their proven model to Scranton," **said Danielle Breslin, President and CEO, Moses Taylor Foundation.** "We believe the new park will positively impact not only the school's staff and students, but also increase health equity and social connection throughout the surrounding community."

Using TPL's national community schoolyard prioritization [tool](#), which evaluates water quality, urban heat, mental and physical health, it was determined that the Scranton School District was one that would benefit the most from these renovations. The schoolyard at John F. Kennedy is the first of three planned in South Scranton which will transform the asphalt schoolyard into green space.

Scranton is part of the inaugural cohort of U.S. cities that to receive support to address long-standing barriers to outdoor equity through the [10-Minute Walk® Park Equity Accelerator](#). The program is the first of its kind, addressing the root causes of park inequities shared by many of the 10-Minute Walk program's champion cities. The Accelerator will direct resources and provide technical assistance on solving park equity problems through policy change and innovation, with the support of TPL, cross-sector partners, and other experts.

About Trust for Public Land

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 4 million acres of public land, created more than 5,420 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised \$94 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected nearly 9.7 million people to the outdoors. To learn more, visit tpl.org.

About the City of Scranton

Incorporated in 1866, the City of Scranton has a population of approximately 80,000 residents and is the sixth-largest municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Scranton City Hall is located at 340 N. Washington Ave., Scranton, PA 18503. Residents requiring services should visit www.scrantonpa.gov.