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MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 4 P.M., SATURDAY OCTOBER 2

Project Westside Park meets fundraising goal with a \$1 million grant from Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation

The City of Missoula has been awarded a \$1 million grant from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation to fund the new playground, sports courts, and more at Westside Park and Lowell Elementary School. The Foundation is the primary charitable organization of The Washington Companies. It is funded primarily through personal contributions by the Washington family and annual contributions by the Montana-based Washington Companies.

On Saturday, Council President and Ward 1 Representative Bryan von Lossberg accepted the donation at a neighborhood block party hosted by the City, Lowell Elementary School and PTA, North-Missoula Community Development Corp (NMCDC) and community partners.

The project is an investment in Missoula's future, said Missoula Mayor John Engen. "We're so fortunate in Missoula to have such a generous partner in the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, and this latest gift to the community is testament to the Washington family's commitment to kids, particularly kids who could use just a bit more help."

"Missoula works together to solve community problems and to make life better for everyone, and this gift is a stellar example of that collaboration between the public and private sectors. Generations will benefit from this park and the lessons learned in Lowell School. We are grateful to the Foundation and the residents of Missoula who invest in young people and our collective future," Engen added.

Park improvements will include a new all-abilities playground, basketball and multi-sport courts, turf play areas, new pathways throughout the park and additional trees and landscaping. Phase 1 of the Westside Park Project, including a new preschool-age playground, picnic shelter, hand-washing station and restroom enclosure, opened earlier this year.

Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation Executive Director Mike Halligan says the Washington family has a passion for giving back in meaningful ways to the communities that have contributed to their success. "By supporting the construction of an all-abilities playground at Westside Park adjacent to Lowell School, children will build the necessary self-confidence, self-esteem and social-emotional skills to succeed in life," Halligan said.

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The grant award agreement states that any funds remaining after park improvements are completed may be used to benefit the newly formed Lowell-Westside Neighborhood Center and Lowell elementary students.

Parks and Recreation Director Donna Gaukler says the grant award has fast-tracked the project, which has been in the works since the fall of 2018 when 300 Lowell Elementary School students visited playgrounds across Missoula to help inform the design of their playground. “This playground comes from an incredible student, parent, neighborhood, and community effort,” said Gaukler. “The power of public-private partnerships to make our community healthier, more livable and inclusive is astounding.”

Gaukler says Project Westside Park includes many generous private and public partners, including the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Giuliani family, the Tykeson Family Foundation, the Sunderland Foundation, Providence St. Patrick Hospital, Missoula County Public Schools and the City.

Native Missoulian John Giuliani considers his family’s contribution to be part of their legacy. “Two generations ago, our grandparents emigrated from Italy after World War II, settling in a small apartment in the Northside neighborhood. They spoke broken English and had minimal financial resources. Their sacrifice, hard work, faith, strong values, and unwavering emphasis on educational opportunity created a path forward for the family. A generation later, our parents lived in the same neighborhood as they started their lives together, and those shared values transcended to the next generation. Today, along with our efforts to develop affordable housing opportunities at Villagio, we are grateful to contribute to the enhancement of educational excellence at Lowell Elementary and recreational and social opportunities for this special neighborhood.”

“We greatly appreciate the tireless effort of Lowell Elementary Principal Barbara Frank, Donna Gaukler and Meg Whicher of Parks & Recreation, and the unwavering contribution of their respective faculty and staff for the excellent work they do in our community. They are all true champions for our youth,” he added. Giuliani and partners are working with the Missoula Housing Authority to construct affordable housing on Missoula’s Northside.

The City’s \$350,000 contribution comes from developer impact fees and the City’s Capital Improvement Program. Gaukler says construction could start as soon as April 2022 with projected completion by October 2022, pending equipment, contractors, and materials availability. For more information or to donate, visit www.projectwestsidepark.com.