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## **California neighborhood to gain new park**

### *Flood mitigation land will transform 20 acres in West Louisville*

LOUISVILLE, KY – More than a decade after intense flash flooding throughout Louisville’s central core, southern and western portions, one of the hardest hit areas in the West End—the California Neighborhood—is celebrating the creation of a 20-acre park. On August 8, 2022, FEMA granted approval for MSD to transition 114 properties—all permanently conserved as greenspace—to the city, which is working with the Parks Alliance to transform this vacant land into a vibrant public park serving hundreds of area residents. This achievement is the result of residents, Louisville MSD, Louisville Parks and Recreation and the Parks Alliance of Louisville working together to achieve this goal.

“MSD strives to be a good neighbor in all the communities we serve. Giving back to the California Neighborhood through acquiring these flood-prone properties for a community park is just one example of that commitment,” states MSD Executive Director Tony Parrott. “Our Community Benefits Program leverages economic, environmental, and social impacts through our large-scale construction, construction-related, professional services, and engineering projects by ensuring ratepayers benefit from MSD’s capital investment.”

Following catastrophic flooding on August 4, 2009, MSD acquired these parcels through a federal Hazard Mitigation Grant, a program that enabled homeowners who chose to participate to sell their property at pre-flood value and relocate from the low-lying Maple Street area. FEMA’s approval of the land transfer and phase I design plan allows the first phase of park construction to begin later this year.

In addition, Congressman John Yarmuth secured two federal Community Project Grants to improve quality of life in the California Neighborhood: \$500,000 to the Parks Alliance of Louisville for construction of the new park and \$480,000 to MSD for odor control improvements in and around the Maple Street area. The funding will support repairs at 34 locations in the neighborhood to prevent odor-causing hydrogen sulfide gases from escaping the sewers. While MSD already invests more than \$2 million annually to address customer concerns through sewer main flushing and the cleaning and deodorizing of catch basins, this funding goes even further by installing and rehabilitating catch basin traps where odors can persist, especially in hot, dry summer months.

“I’m so proud to have secured this funding for the Maple Street Park project in Louisville’s California neighborhood, which will be used to help transform this vacant property into a 20-acre public park,” stated

Congressman John Yarmuth (KY-03). “This will be a permanent greenspace where children can play and learn, residents can exercise, and families can come together for special events or simply to enjoy the outdoors. I fought hard to secure this investment not just because of the power vibrant public spaces can have in a community, but also because the California neighborhood has been overlooked or ignored for far too long. I want to thank the California neighborhood residents and the Parks Alliance of Louisville for their leadership in ensuring that this land will be conserved forever as a communal space for recreation, education, and celebration. I also want to acknowledge MSD for its important role in facilitating the transfer of this land into a public greenspace. This is a great day for the California Neighborhood and for our city as a whole, and I am honored to be a part of this effort.”

“As a city, we’ve documented the need for more greenspaces and nature-based opportunities in west Louisville. But there’s still more work to do,” said Mayor Fischer. I want to thank the Parks Alliance, MSD, Congressman Yarmuth and our friends in the California neighborhood for seeing the opportunity the Maple Street property has to improve the lives of those in this community. We appreciate all these parties coming together to ensure that equitable investment occurs in parks throughout Louisville.”

“Residents know best what is needed to make their neighborhood vibrant and connected,” said Brooke Pardue, President & CEO of the Parks Alliance of Louisville. “That’s why we’ve centered the community’s voice in the design, development, and leadership of the Maple Street park project. Thanks to the generosity of many donors and the steadfast leadership of this amazing neighborhood, we will build a new park with the amenities that residents want.” She noted that plans for the first phase—encompassing roughly five acres—include all of the community’s most-requested features, including a lawn for festivals/events/ athletics, walking paths and fitness stations, a picnic shelter and performance space, a playground, and an outdoor classroom.

Long-time California resident Dreema Jackson has played an active role in bringing the park to life. “I participated in MSD’s neighborhood meetings where residents prioritized the ways we want to see this area activated as a public amenity. And now, I’m one of more than a dozen residents serving on a park leadership committee. We are very excited to make our vision for our neighborhood a reality with less vacant land and more public greenspace for recreation, relaxation, and enjoyment.” Jackson and fellow resident Juan Davis, Jr. joined the Parks Alliance board of directors in 2020.

## **Background**



The California Neighborhood takes its name for once being the “far west” of Louisville. Maple Street between Dr. W. J. Hodge and 28th Streets is a low-lying area built along a historic streambed and combined sewer constructed in the early 1900s. As a result, it is vulnerable to flooding.

On August 4, 2009, Louisville’s central core, southern and western portions experienced widespread flash flooding, with 7.5 inches of rain falling in 75 minutes, with some of the worst floodings in the Maple Street area. To improve public health and safety, MSD pursued and was awarded a FEMA grant to assist residents and provide opportunities for those in the highest-risk areas to relocate. In addition, the flooded homes were razed, and the land was permanently conserved as greenspace to prevent future residential flooding.

From 2015-2018, more than 400 people completed surveys collected through public meetings, online, at community events, YMCA camps, and a door-to-door campaign. A “Community of the Future Advisory Committee” comprised of neighbors and other stakeholders met to discuss acceptable uses. A “Champions Committee” of institutional stakeholders also met regularly from 2018-2019 to explore long-term ownership/maintenance solutions.

In 2020, the Parks Alliance of Louisville joined the effort as the fundraising champion—and took the lead on neighborhood engagement in the design and development of the green space. During the past two years, this community-driven planning process included establishing a resident Leadership Committee to steward the project; playground visioning with area children and families; tabling at Victory Park Day and California Day; direct mail surveys; and, free pop-up events at Maple Street.

As a result, hundreds of California Neighborhood residents have provided direct input on the best use for the greenspace—choosing their preferred park amenities and the overarching park theme of “Thriving Community.”

The Alliance is now launching the next phase of community engagement with a survey mailer to 1,200 surrounding households to determine what residents want to name their park.

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**About MSD**

The Louisville/Jefferson County Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) works to achieve and maintain clean, environmentally safe waterways for a healthy and vibrant community. The organization's more than 670 employees provide wastewater management, drainage and flood protection services across the 376 square miles of Louisville Metro, and wastewater service in portions of Bullitt and Oldham counties. In addition to operating and maintaining Louisville Metro's sewer system, floodwall system, water quality treatment centers and flood pumping stations, MSD invests in hundreds of infrastructure improvement projects each year, plants more than 1,000 trees and other vegetation annually to enhance water filtration and reduce runoff, and provides numerous outreach programs to inform and educate the community about protecting our waterways.