

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mayor Hancock, City Officials Break Ground on Montbello Open Space Park and Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) Education Center

The creation of over 5.5 acres of natural open space and trails will significantly increase outdoor recreational and environmental education opportunities for the entire community.

DENVER, May 26, 2016 – Mayor Michael B. Hancock, joined by Executive Director of Denver Parks and Recreation, Happy Haynes, Councilwoman Stacie Gilmore (Dist. 11), Councilman Chris Herndon (Dist. 8), The Trust for Public Land Advisory Board member, Scott Sampson, and ELK Executive Director, Loretta Pineda, today celebrated the formal groundbreaking of the Montbello Open Space Park and Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) Education Center. The 5.5-acre open space park and education center is located at East 46th Avenue and Albrook Drive, near Peoria Street and Interstate 70 in the heart of northeast Denver's Montbello neighborhood.

“This project provides a transformation to the neighborhood and surrounding areas by establishing an important community connection to the natural environment.” Mayor Hancock said. “The open space park and educational facility will directly encourage underserved youth and their families to spend time outdoors by creating an urban open space that is within walking and/or biking distance from their homes.”

The Montbello Open Space Park project is a partnership among Denver Parks and Recreation, The Trust for Public Land and ELK, a nonprofit that will oversee restoration of the natural area and lead hands-on environmental education programs for young people, especially children from underserved communities in the metro area including the neighborhoods of Montbello, Parkfield, Green Valley Ranch, Stapleton, Park Hill, Commerce City, and Old Aurora.

“Denver Parks and Recreation is enthusiastically engaged in this project as it supports our goals of enhancing lives by providing innovative programs and a safe, beautiful, sustainable place within the Denver Parks system,” said Happy Haynes, Executive Director of Denver Parks and Recreation. “The education facility will provide greatly needed programs that introduce underserved youth and their families to Colorado's natural resources.”

In addition to creating access to natural open space, a planned perimeter-walking trail will provide the neighborhood with increased physical activity opportunities. Long-term, the goal is to create a safe connection to the nearby - and currently inaccessible - Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge. When the vision is fully completed, ELK estimates its environmental education center will serve more than 40,000 low and moderate-income youth and families annually.

“We are proud to be a part of the creation of Montbello’s first open space park,” said James R. Petterson, The Trust for Public Land’s Colorado State Director. “We believe that this project, designed with the local community, will help inspire Montbello’s kids and families to get outside, explore and connect with nature, all within a 10-minute walk of their homes.”

Working with Denver's Department of Parks and Recreation, The Trust for Public Land purchased the 5.5-acre property in 2012 to secure the site and prevent it from being developed into a 12-story commercial building. The land was transferred to the City and County of Denver in 2014 using funds raised by The Trust for Public Land, ELK, and Denver Parks and Recreation. ELK then signed a 50-year land lease with the city to develop and maintain the site. The Trust for Public Land and ELK are jointly committed to raising the \$1.4 million needed to restore the land and complete the open space park. With partners like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, The Trust for Public Land and ELK have successfully raised over half the funds needed to complete the park renovation portion of the project.

"As ELK's mission and reach continues to grow, we are excited to expand the next chapter of ELK's impact," said Loretta Pineda, Executive Director of ELK. "The #BuildELKs Home Campaign will provide a home in the Montbello community for youth and families to learn, play and create through improved access to nature and educational community programs."

Dependent upon funding, construction of the park is slated to begin this fall with completion anticipated in spring 2017. Those interested in donating to ELK's youth programs or the Montbello Open Space Park can find more information at <http://elkkids.org/content/community-campaign>.

About Denver Parks and Recreation

Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) facilities are unrivaled in the Rocky Mountain West. The DPR system spans over a 148-year history, from the first park created in 1868 to nearly 20,000 acres of urban parks and mountain parkland today. For more information, visit www.denvergov.org/parksandrecreation, check us out on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/DenverParksRec>, like us on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/denverparksrec> and follow us on Twitter <https://twitter.com/denverparksrec>.

About Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK)

Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) is a Denver-based, 501(c)3 organization established in 1996 to address the growing need to introduce and educate Colorado's urban youth about science, leadership, and careers. Twenty years later, ELK continues to provide strong educational support, good role models, and opportunities for positive community action for youth, helping them to become engaged, productive, and successful members of society. For more information about ELK please visit www.elkkids.org

About The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Millions of people live near of a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. To support The Trust for Public Land and share why nature matters to you, visit www.tpl.org.

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