



Mayor Jones, VCU, Monroe Park Conservancy Announce Successful Completion of Private Fundraising Renovation to Begin in November

Richmond, VA., September 21, 2016: Mayor Dwight Jones, Virginia Commonwealth University, and the Monroe Park Conservancy today announced completion of a multi-year campaign to raise \$3 million in private funds to renovate Richmond's oldest city park. The announcement sets in motion procedural steps to allow construction to begin later this year.

"Many of us have labored for more than a decade to launch the renovation of Richmond's oldest park," said Alice Massie, president of the Monroe Park Conservancy. "I'm grateful to the Mayor, VCU, and the many generous Richmonders who have brought us to this moment. It's exciting to know that the work can now begin."

Under a 30-year lease agreement that City Council approved unanimously in March 2014, the non-profit Monroe Park Conservancy will operate the park following the City's completion of the renovation. The Conservancy will steward the park in a partnership agreement with the city, ensuring that it remains a public park with access for all. This is a common practice nationally, including Central Park in New York and Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. Richmond's Maymont Park operates through a similar arrangement.

"The Monroe Park Conservancy has done a great job in securing extensive private support to invest in Richmond's most historic city park," said Mayor Jones. "It's time to put shovels in the ground and begin bringing this beautiful park back to life."

"VCU loves Monroe Park so much that we named our main academic campus for it," said VCU President Michael Rao. "In many ways, it feels like our front yard. The Park and the new Institute for Contemporary Art together are transforming this neighborhood, and we're excited to partner with the City of Richmond to make it happen."

Mayor Jones said he will introduce legislation on September 26, authorizing the City to accept the private funds necessary to launch construction, as required by the Conservancy's lease.

Following City Council approval, a groundbreaking ceremony will formally close the Park in early November to begin extensive infrastructure upgrades to antiquated underground sewer, gas, water, and electrical systems. Like laying the foundation of a house, this must be completed first before second-phase work begins on the grounds. The overall construction is expected to take between 12 and 18 months.

The renovation plans include roughly \$6 million in overall improvements. Monroe Park originally was designed in the nineteenth century to be a safe, accessible, inviting, and engaging green space, and the Conservancy is working to ensure that it will be again. The eight-acre park will be fully sustainable, with a goal of mitigating water runoff, efficient LED lighting, and native plants that enhance the park as breathing space. The Conservancy's plans have been honored for their commitment to sustainability.

The Conservancy emphasized that Monroe Park will continue to be a place that is welcoming to everyone—from lawn athletes to picnickers to patrons of the arts. The space will also include free WiFi and improved lighting for safety, comfort and convenience. During construction, safety concerns will limit access to the park.

Homeward and United Way urge those interested in providing food and clothing to Richmonders in need, or those wanting to receive them, to call **2-1-1**.

History of Monroe Park

Established in 1851, Monroe Park is Richmond's oldest park and one of the capital city's most culturally and environmentally significant open spaces. Once a state fairground and later a military encampment, the registered historic park now provides passage and respite to VCU students, as well as residents of Carver, Oregon Hill, and the Fan.

Forming the western edge of the City's downtown grid, Monroe Park is bounded by Belvidere Street to the east, Main Street to the south, and Laurel and Franklin Streets to the west and north. It is often considered the front yard of Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, and the newly-renovated Altria Theater. VCU's expansion of the Business and Engineering Schools and nearby dormitories has significantly altered the context and use of the Park. Such a shift offers an unprecedented opportunity to transform the Park into a vibrant, urban oasis.

###