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CONTACT:

Susan David
Susan.David@tpl.org
212-677-7171; 347-675-5824

The Trust for Public Land Celebrates Groundbreaking at Nat Turner Park

Newark's Largest City-Owned Park Will Provide Recreation Opportunities for 19,000 Area Residents, Including Nearly 7,000 Children

NEWARK, N.J. (June 16, 2008) – The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and Newark Mayor Cory Booker today broke ground at Nat Turner Park, beginning construction at what will be the largest city-owned park in Newark. TPL will transform the nine-acre lot, which has been underutilized since the city acquired it in the 1970s, into a safe, vibrant, well-used park that will serve the city, including nearly 7,000 neighborhood children. The \$10 million construction project is expected to be complete by next summer.

Located in the Central Ward's Springfield neighborhood, Nat Turner Park is adjacent to Hayes Park West Pool and Recreation Center and surrounded by multifamily residential housing as well as several schools, including Eighteenth Avenue School, Cleveland School and the new Central High School.

“We are making the dream of a quality, modern, park in our Central Ward a reality through the partnership we have built with The Trust for Public Land and the Newark Public Schools and the creativity and input of the Central Ward community,” said Mayor Booker. “Together, we have manifested the spiritual strength that enables us to transform our city into the national leader in safety, prosperity and the nurturing of family life, and make that real for every resident of our community.”

“Nat Turner Park is a reflection of our commitment to addressing the dire need for recreational open space in the city. Urban parks are critical to a good quality of life for residents in Newark and other cities, and we are very excited about the commencement of construction at the park,” said Rose Harvey, senior vice president of The Trust for Public Land.

Participatory design is a signature of TPL's park development work. The process is both educational and rewarding, helping to establish a community investment in each new park and playground. For Nat Turner Park, guided by a Master Plan Steering Committee with representatives from the City of Newark, Newark Public Schools, and the community, TPL held a series of workshops with local residents and students, asking them to set priorities for the park and create models of the design.

The finished park will include an amphitheatre, community event space, multi-purpose athletic field, 400-meter regulation track, ornamental perimeter fencing, a playground, picnic areas, and streetscape improvements— all elements requested by community members. The City of Newark, Newark Public Schools, and the community will play lead roles in park stewardship and programming, with support from Friends of Nat Turner Park.

Lead funding for Nat Turner Park was provided by the City of Newark, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Victoria Foundation. Additional support was contributed by Essex County Recreation & Open Space Trust Fund, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Local Initiatives Support Corporation's NFL Grassroots Program, National Recreation Foundation, The Prudential Foundation and New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zone Authority. TPL is working in partnership with Newark Public Schools, Springfield/Belmont Super Neighborhood Council, and Friends of Nat Turner Park.

“Parks are an investment in our communities and in the city of Newark overall,” said Irene Cooper-Basch of the Victoria Foundation. “The Trust for Public Land is doing a great deal of work throughout Newark. It is our responsibility as private citizens and as foundations to help make projects like this possible.”

The park’s namesake, black resistance leader Nat Turner, was born to a slave family in Virginia in 1800. On August 2, 1831 Mr. Turner led a slave revolt and was later hung for his rebellious actions. In the 1970s, a group of Central Ward community activists demanded green space because of the lack of major parks in the area. They eventually won the right to have and name a park in the Central Ward and did so in Turner’s honor.

The project at Nat Turner Park is part of The Trust for Public Land’s Parks for People—Newark initiative. The Newark based program was launched in 1995 to address the dire lack of outdoor recreational space in Newark’s neighborhoods. The goal is to expand and enhance Newark’s park system, providing a safe park within walking distance of every Newark resident. TPL is currently working to bring a \$30 million investment into 11 of Newark’s parks and playgrounds. Other projects include the renovations of Jesse Allen Park, the creation of a new school playground at Mount Vernon School, expansion of play space at two existing playgrounds, and park development along the Passaic River waterfront.

The national nonprofit organization has already created seven new parks and playgrounds in the city, serving more than 26,000 Newark residents. TPL’s efforts have engaged the community by weaving a system of parks and common spaces throughout the city, linking people and neighborhoods, and strengthening the fabric of Newark itself.

To learn more about TPL’s work in Newark, visit www.tpl.org/newark, call 973-718-7338 or e-mail carl.haefner@tpl.org.

The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and natural areas, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972, TPL has helped protect more than 2.4 million acres of land in 46 states, including more than 23,000 acres in New Jersey. For more information, visit www.tpl.org/newjersey.

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