Tragedy Strikes Tacoma’s Hilltop Community

A Girl’s Death Reveals the Need for Family-Friendly Spaces

“The Fourth of July was a beautiful evening that, at the last moment, disintegrated into a nightmare for one family ... Just as the sky began to darken, Zina Linnik, 12, was apparently snatched from the alley behind her home ... The news that [she] had been found dead eight days after she was abducted was hard to take.”

-- The News Tribune, July 11 & 20, 2007

Tacomans everywhere felt the horror and shock of Zina Linnik’s tragic kidnapping and murder. This unspeakable tragedy was felt most deeply by friends, neighbors and classmates in the Hilltop community, where Zina lived, played and went to school. A sense of unease and frustration filled the air. Where can the children go to play – safely?

A community that cannot go outside and gather together without fear is not a community at all. It’s people that just happen to live in the same area. It happens to communities everywhere. If there’s no pride or ownership in a neighborhood, fear, crime and desolation escalate.

Shaken Citizens See Parks as the Answer

Reeling from this tragedy, grieving Hilltop community citizens rallied together with members of the Linnik Family to search for hope and healing.

“Our Hilltop neighborhood has been forever and deeply impacted by this tragedy. We feel we must create spaces that will transform the neighborhood and the children who live here.”

-- Carol Ramm Gramenz, McCarver Elementary Counselor

The community group envisioned a project that would evoke the beauty of Zina’s life and create safe, engaging places for children to play and laugh, instead of live in fear. Searching for a solution, they convened representatives from McCarver Elementary School, Metro Parks Tacoma, Hilltop Action Coalition and the Pierce County Health Department. Together, this determined group then approached the Greater Metro Parks Foundation to ask for professional fundraising guidance, assistance and community outreach to help them build beautiful parks as a catalyst for reclaiming their community.

The Greater Metro Parks Foundation had been planning for a capital campaign to fund additional amenities for Wright Park when grieving Hilltop citizens approached foundation leaders for help. From these conversations emerged the Zina Linnik Project at Wright and McCarver Parks -- a
community-wide effort to improve two parks that bookend and bridge the Hilltop/Central Tacoma neighborhoods where Zina lived and played. By adding the McCarver Park project to its capital campaign objectives, the Greater Metro Parks Foundation has moved even closer to realizing its vision: *Our community transformed ... all lives enriched ... through greater parks.*

“Parks help build and strengthen ties among community residents by bringing people together, including those who are otherwise divided by race or class, and by helping them work together on common projects. These ties... provide avenues through which information, values, and social expectations flow, and they empower people to tackle communitywide problems, embark on collective actions, and advocate effectively for their community”.

--The Public Value of Urban Parks by Chris Walker, Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute, Washington, DC

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**The Need at Wright and McCarver Parks**

The community around McCarver and Wright Parks needs the amenities and features that will encourage neighbors of all ages to use these neighborhood parks to their full potential. A recent Metro Parks Tacoma survey showed that 85% of respondents use their neighborhood parks. Of all Metro Parks facilities, neighborhood parks were noted as one of the most frequently used venues with an average of 36 visits per year or about three times a month.

Currently, Tacoma’s Hilltop/Central community is under-served in terms of safe, attractive, and easily accessible family gathering places.

- **Wright Park**
  - Located about 20 blocks from the Hilltop community, adjacent to Tacoma’s Central and Stadium neighborhoods.
  - Attracts people from throughout the city and beyond due to its size and attractions, but needs expanded, youth oriented upgrades and additions that attract families with children.
  - Lacks sufficient space for running community and Metro Parks programs.
  - Adjacent to Tacoma General Hospital and MultiCare Clinic, which creates additional demand for use of park spaces.

- **McCarver Park**
  - Located within a block of where Zina Linnik was tragically abducted. Children in this area typically do not have the resources or opportunity to travel outside their immediate neighborhood to participate in recreational activities.
  - Currently under-developed and under-utilized (only used during recess by ~430 McCarver Elementary School students, it lacks adequate play equipment and boasts none of the amenities necessary to attract neighborhood residents.
  - Adjacent to St. Joseph Hospital, there is need for a peaceful park space for the passive user.
The Zina Linnik Project will strengthen and help revitalize the Hilltop and Central Tacoma neighborhoods by offering free, open, accessible, family-friendly spaces and facilities to the 30,000 people (including more than 6,850 children) who live within walking distance. Twenty-three percent of the surrounding households report incomes less than $15,000 a year; 50% less than $35,000. Twenty-six percent lack a vehicle. The new facilities at Wright and McCarver Parks will:

- Improve neighborhood and community aesthetics and stimulate economic development.
- Enhance safety by relocating play areas and attracting more family and community gatherings.
- Increase youth and family participation in park-hosted programs and at park events.
- Increase the number of organizations who partner to help build and maintain the parks as well as provide park programming.

**Zina Linnik Project Design and Scope**

Master planning for improvements to both Wright Park and McCarver Park was completed through an open community participation process lead by local residents and local business owners, and included a series of public presentations facilitated by the Metro Parks Tacoma Planning department. Amazing public participation also happened at the core level of users for our playgrounds at the parks – the children.

**Productive Meetings of Young Minds: University of Washington Landscape and Urban Design Class and McCarver Elementary Students**

The Landscape and Urban Design class from the University of Washington took a vested interest in the Zina Linnik Project after hearing about the proactive grassroots effort that was taking place in Tacoma to reclaim the neighborhood through parks. Seventeen UW students decided to use McCarver Park as their design project and worked directly with the fifth graders at McCarver to learn what they wanted in their parks. They returned to McCarver with designs and concepts based on what the children dreamed of seeing in their world. The UW students then engaged the fifth graders in the process of creating park models of their own.

“I like the water and some of the gardens. The kids want the community and the other kids to be safe and to come together ... have fun.”
-- McCarver Elementary fifth grader

This interaction was inspirational on many levels – especially for children, many of whom have never traveled beyond their immediate neighborhood. Imaginations were sparked; designs and models were created; and, in some instances, career ambitions were set in motion.

“We really bonded with them. When we were talking to them they just knew what we were talking about. They get us!”
-- McCarver Elementary fifth grader, speaking about the UW students
Key Design Attributes: Metro Parks Applies Student and Community Input

When asked in the Metro Parks Tacoma survey, “Which of the following contributes most to your feeling of safety in a park?”, respondents rated the following the highest:

- **Visibility/signage/lighting**: Good lighting; well-marked, clear signage; good visibility.
- **Maintenance**: Well maintained, clean parks.
- **Activity**: Other people present in the park who are a variety of ages/families.
- **Location of amenities**: Locating play equipment, tennis courts, etc. so they are clearly visible from the street.
- **Landscape Design**: Designing landscaping to allow unobstructed views of surrounding areas.

Metro Parks designers considered all comments from McCarver and UW students, as well as public surveys and forums when developing designs for the Zina Linnik Project. Together we came up with the following improvements and renovations to make McCarver and Wright Parks safer, more attractive, and more accessible as family and community gathering places. Below is a summary of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZLP at McCarver Park (area 2.33 acres)</th>
<th>Improvements</th>
<th>Est. Project Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Upgrade</td>
<td>Remove</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security gating and entryways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walkways, entryway and plaza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playground and surfacing (ages 2-5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Community garden for residents</td>
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<td>School garden for children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community plaza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorial to Zina Linnik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading circle &amp; program amphitheater (14,200 sq ft)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusable, unsafe wading pool</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrigation system</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running track, walking trail</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>Landscaping, tree planting, signage</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Cost</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>$750,000</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZLP at Wright Park (area 10 city blocks)</th>
<th>Improvements</th>
<th>Est. Project Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Upgrade</td>
<td>Remove</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sprayground (3000 sq ft water park feature)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renovation of building for program delivery (~1000 sq ft)</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusable, unsafe wading pool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concrete plaza and community gathering space (6600 sq ft)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playground equipment and swing sets (ages 2-5; 5-12)</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Site furnishings: picnic tables, benches, signage</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landscaping</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Cost</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>$1.93 million</strong></td>
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Maintenance and Repairs

Zina Linnik Project Campaign objectives include $500,000 to create a new maintenance endowment to assist with repairs, maintenance and equipment replacements for the new facilities created at Wright and McCarver Parks. Committed to ensuring that the quality of each park experience remains positive, Metro Parks Tacoma will rely on ongoing operating funds, existing nearby maintenance facilities, and staff on site, as well as income from the maintenance endowment, to ensure that both parks stay well-maintained.

Financial

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Financial Details</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Capital / Construction Project Costs</td>
<td>$2,680,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment Fund to help defray the maintenance and repair costs at both parks</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Oversight, Fundraising, and Administration</td>
<td>$520,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less Metro Parks Tacoma Initial Contribution</td>
<td>($200,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Zina Linnik Project Capital Campaign Goal</td>
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Zina Linnik Project Benefits

Entire Community will Benefit from Exciting, New, Family-Friendly Facilities at Wright and McCarver Parks

Parks are the only free, open, and accessible spaces in our communities. They are fundamental building blocks of strong neighborhoods; strong communities. In the face of hardships, crime and uncertainty, we need to reengage and reinvest in our neighborhood backyards.

Improvements made to Wright and McCarver Parks, which are located only 1.25 miles – a short 25 minute walk – apart, will provide children and families from the Hilltop/Central Tacoma community and beyond vital access to safe, attractive, healthy, family-friendly places to gather, play, learn, and recreate. Here are a few specific reasons why Tacoma citizens should become invested in this important project...now.

Safety

The community will benefit from this project by having a safe place for all children to play and learn. Great parks help define a community as more than a gathering of people or businesses. Parks offer a place for people to gather, talk or play.
“(Public green spaces) can deter crime in poor urban neighborhoods in any or all of the following ways: by increasing residents’ informal surveillance of neighborhood spaces, by increasing the implied surveillance of these spaces, and by mitigating residents’ mental fatigue, thereby reducing the potential for violence.”

-- Kuo & Sullivan: Environment and Crime in the Inner City - Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?

The Zina Linnik Project will move Wright Park play areas to a more visible location, closer to the maintenance facility and police department – greatly enhancing the safety of children who play there. The complete renovation of McCarver Park will give the space a purpose and function for play and positive activity.

**Community Building**

The ability to play and have adequate green space, especially in the midst of the developing and fast pace of city life is critical. Rejuvenating parks will enhance the livability of Tacoma, bring more people outdoors and foster a deeper community connection.

_Urban parks call attention to the broader contributions they can make to the vitality of communities and their residents. These contributions include:

- helping youth choose rewarding paths to adulthood by providing programs and opportunities to build physical, intellectual, emotional, and social strength;
- helping community residents improve their health by providing a place to enjoy fresh air and exercise;
- helping citizens join together to make their communities better, by encouraging them to participate in park planning and management._

-- The Public Value of Urban Parks by Chris Walker, Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, the Urban Institute, Washington, DC

Breathing a new life back into the parks can be a catalyst for the continued growth of the surrounding neighborhood and strengthen the pride the community has in where they live.

**Economic Vitality**

Parks contribute to the quality of life element that makes Tacoma so attractive for its residents. The much needed overhaul of McCarver Park and the face-lift for Wright Park will benefit the entire neighborhood and larger community. Wright Park and McCarver Park deserve a revitalization to match the level and magnitude of the building and redesign that is going on around it.

_Park and recreation areas are economic engines that improve the quality of life and make communities livable and desirable for businesses and homeowners._

--“Top 10 Reasons Parks are Important”, Richard J. Dolesh, Director of NRPA Public Policy

**Access to Youth Programming**

The renovations and improvements that the Zina Linnik Project will bring to Wright and McCarver Parks will attract countless people, many of whom are currently under-served in terms of recreational and program opportunities.
One of the home sites for the Metro Parks Tacoma Summer Playground Programs and USDA lunch program served to low-income children on free or reduced price lunch, enhancements at Wright Park will draw more children into this great outdoor learning environment. Attendance statistics show that adding a new sprayground facility attracts 50% more children to Metro Parks Summer Playground Programs.

A completely renovated McCarver Park will allow for new and exciting programming. The reading circle will be the perfect backdrop for early childhood education and reading programs. The children’s and community gardens can house programs on healthy eating, horticulture, and much more.

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**Zina Linnik Project Heroes**

**Learning Beyond the Classroom: McCarver Fifth Graders Lead Early Campaign Successes**

“I used to be a closed door teacher. But after this process, I have been amazed at what has transpired with the involvement of my class in a real project and by inviting people into our classroom. I will never teach the same way again!”

-- Sheila Haase, McCarver Fifth Grade Teacher

What started as a bold neighborhood project to create new park facilities in Zina’s memory has blossomed into a model for collaborative, grassroots involvement in fundraising, community building and leadership. The Zina Linnik Project has united a community in need, inspired government and philanthropic support, and provided valuable lessons in civic leadership and personal efficacy for the children and families involved.

Early leadership came from a courageous group of McCarver Elementary fifth graders and their teacher, Mrs. Sheila Haase (who taught Zina the year before her murder). Mrs. Haase turned the Zina Linnik Project into an exciting, hands-on educational adventure in civic involvement, advocacy, park design and philanthropy for her class. Responding enthusiastically, her students made it their year-long mission to help plan and promote the Zina Linnik Project. They led first by example – saving their own pennies and holding car washes to raise money.

With the help of Rep. Dennis Flannigan, these courageous fifth graders packed up their design models and headed for Olympia to testify before the House Capital Budget Committee on behalf of a proposal submitted by the Greater Metro Parks Foundation for Zina Linnik Project funding. They carefully prepared written statements in advance and spoke eloquently about their desire to honor Zina Linnik by meeting important community needs in her memory. The result: a **$950,000 capital appropriation.**
Through their heroic efforts, these McCarver fifth graders have changed their neighborhood, their school and their community forever. Their own lives will never be the same.

Supporting the Children and their Families: Greater Metro Parks Foundation Board Members Resource the Campaign Effort

In 2008, having completed a strategic plan, engaged professional counsel and created a comprehensive campaign plan, the Greater Metro Parks Foundation Board of Directors launched a major capital campaign to raise the $3.5 million capital campaign necessary to fund the Zina Linnik Project at Wright and McCarver Parks. Foundation Board members and staff have advised and resourced the efforts of McCarver Elementary fifth graders, consulted with numerous community partners (e.g. Metro Parks Tacoma, Hilltop Action Coalition, Pierce County Health Department, University of Washington, Central Neighborhood Council, Stadium Business District, Pierce County Early Learning Consortium, and others), recruited top-notch campaign leadership and led by their own generous example. Already, the Greater Metro Parks Foundation has raised more than half of its campaign goal.

Leading the Zina Linnik Campaign: Steering Committee Members Pursue Philanthropic Involvement and Support

Inspired by McCarver school children and resourced by the Greater Metro Parks Foundation and Metro Parks Resource Development staff and counsel, Co-Chairs Joanne Bamford, Charley Bingham and Jim Dawson have brought extraordinary talent to the Zina Linnik Campaign. Thanks to their leadership, the Zina Linnik Campaign has achieved significant early success and the momentum needed to move forward with confidence that the full goal will be met. Already, the campaign has attracted a stellar group of Campaign Steering Committee members and other volunteers.

You Can Be a Hero, Too

“This is a story of great partnerships – of people helping kids, and one another, to dream. All those partnerships coming together -- from individuals to organizations – that’s how it should be with community initiatives. And, it’s the kids that are leading the way on it. That is the most exciting part of this to me.”

-- Lauren Walker, Tacoma City Council

It’s clear that the children are doing their part through tenacity and effective advocacy. To date, the McCarver fifth graders have helped the Greater Metro Parks Foundation raise about half of the total project cost of $3.5 million. Their dream deserves to become a reality.
We Need You!

So, today we stand at a crossroads. Ask our teachers and school principals, or talk with parents and police around Tacoma. They will tell you how they search every day for real solutions that can break the cycle of violence so our children and communities can be safer and stronger. They need us. Our children need us.

We can drive and sustain the positive change in our community. We can reward the efforts of the McCarver children. Or, we can leave their dream unfulfilled. Their hopes dashed. We have a lot to be proud of, a lot to build on – and a lot at risk if we fail to take action.

We hope you will join us -- and the McCarver children -- in supporting the Zina Linnik Project at Wright and McCarver Parks. Don’t miss this unique opportunity to transform tragedy into triumph...

“But of the best leaders when the task is accomplished and their work is done, the people will all remark... we have done it ourselves.”

--Lao Tzu

McCarver Park

Wright Park
Greater Metro Parks Foundation Board of Directors
Debbie Bingham
Richard Brady, Vice President
Sharon Chambers-Gordon
Sara Clair, Vice-President
David Easterday
George Pilant
Jeff Quint, President
Andrea Smith, Secretary
Robert Thoms
Leon Titus, Treasurer
Todd Ward

Zina Linnik Project Campaign Steering Committee
Joanne Bamford, Campaign Co-chair
Charley Bingham, Campaign Co-chair
Jim Dawson, Campaign Co-chair
Debbie Bingham
Richard Brady
Diane Dimmer
Melanie Dressel
Booth Gardner
Mike Grunwald
Art Jarvis, ex officio
Steve Knauer
Lyle Quasim
Herb Simon

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For a video on the Zina Linnik Project go to
www.metroparksfoundation.org/zina-linnik-project