

Press Release

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CONTACT: Estella Espinosa
Work: (832) 395-7022
Cell: (832) 465-4782

**Multi-Million Dollar Bethel Missionary Baptist Church Restoration Project
Will Pay Tribute to History of Building & Fourth Ward Area**
Project Funded by Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone No. 14/Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority

Mayor Annise Parker & the Houston Parks & Recreation Department, in partnership with the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone No. 14/Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority, today announced plans for Bethel Park, a multi-million dollar project on the site of historic Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, 801 Andrews Street.

"Houstonians came together after the Great Storm of the 1900's destroyed the original wooden church and we will once again to preserve the church site for the future," said Mayor Parker. "The new park will be developed while memorializing the history and significance of this land to the Fourth Ward."

Bethel Missionary Baptist Church was founded in the late 1800's by Reverend John (Jack) H. Yates, an early leader of Houston's African American community. Located in Freedmen's Town, a post Civil War Houston neighborhood founded by freed slaves, the Church has had three sanctuaries on the same site, with the earliest constructed in the 1890's. The first structure was destroyed by the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900. The third and most recent structure was destroyed by fire in 2005.

The Bethel Park Project will restore three walls and convert both the interior of the church & the remaining property into a passive use park for the neighborhood. The park will be managed by the Houston Parks & Recreation Department. Funding for the project is being provided by the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone No. 14/Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority.

"The Board of Directors of the Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority/TIRZ #14 has worked tirelessly with the Houston Parks & Recreation Department to save what remains of Bethel Church and place in the city's inventory, a historically significant & unique open space that reflects the cornerstone of Freedman's Town," said Jackie Bostic, Chair, Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority/TIRZ #14. "The Authority looks forward to continuing its partnership with the City of Houston to assure that the final project reflects the essence of what Bethel Church meant to the fabric of the Freedman's Town community."

"Today, all that physically remains of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church are the three exterior walls & the interior concrete floor," said Joe Turner, Director Houston Parks & Recreation Department. "But, the long history of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, its founders & the Fourth Ward Community will live on in Bethel Park. We thank the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone No. 14/Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority for their partnership & funding."

The scope of work includes restoration of the brick walls & window openings; removal of the exterior temporary stabilization bracing & installation of the interior permanent bracing; installation of new metal panels and poly-resin glass panels in the window openings; installation of new metal panels and poly-resin glass panels for the south wall; concrete & brick walkways; installation of an interior courtyard; and site amenities including raised fountains, seat walls, benches, lighting, drinking fountain, fencing, landscaping & irrigation. Total project cost with property acquisition, bracing, design & park development is \$4.2 million. The project is under construction & scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2013.

About Bethel Missionary Baptist Church

Founded in the late 1800's by Reverend John (Jack) H. Yates, Bethel Missionary Baptist Church is located in Freedmen's Town, a post Civil War Houston neighborhood founded by freed slaves. The Church has had three sanctuaries on the same site with the earliest constructed in the 1890's. The first was a wood framed structure that blew down as a result of the 1900 "Great Storm" in Galveston. The second wood framed structure was erected in the early 1900's & had a 40 foot tower. Enlarged & constructed of brick in 1949-50, the third sanctuary was designed by James M. Thomas, a prominent architect of African American churches. In January 2005, a fire gutted the interior of the historic structure. In 2009, the City of Houston provided emergency wall stabilization & minor structural repairs due to the unsafe conditions of the building. The city also purchased the property in order to preserve the church's façade & provide park space for the community. The goal of the project was to pay tribute to Bethel's significant history & architecture as well as the history of the Fourth Ward. The current Bethel Park project is expected to be completed in the spring of 2013.

About the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone No. 14/Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority

The Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority (the "Authority") is a non-profit local government corporation created by & operating on behalf of the City of Houston & administers Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Number Fourteen, City of Houston, Texas ("TIRZ #14"). The Authority was created by Houston's City Council on June 9, 1999, to aid assist & act on behalf of the City in the performance of its governmental function for the common good & general welfare of the area included in Reinvestment Zone Number Fourteen, City of Houston, Texas to promote, develop, encourage & maintain housing, educational facilities, employment, commerce & economic development in the City. The Authority is governed by a Board of nine Directors with six appointed by Houston's Mayor & City Council, one appointed by the HISD Board of Trustees, One by Senator Rodney Ellis & one by Representative Garnet Coleman.

About The Houston Parks & Recreation Department

The Houston Parks & Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.) stewards & manages over 38,752 acres of parkland & greenspace for the City of Houston & develops & implements recreational programming for citizens of all abilities. For more information on the Houston Parks & Recreation Department, call (832) 395-7022 or visit www.houstonparks.org.