



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 23, 2022

Contacts: Karen Nozik
knozik@cityparksalliance.org

Branden Happel
Branden.Happel@toro.com

Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center Wins Toro Urban Park Innovation Award 2022

\$50K grant to sustain collaborative youth-driven programs that support circular economy

Washington, DC: Today the City Parks Alliance and The Toro Company announced that Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center in Philadelphia is the winner of the Toro Urban Park Innovation Award 2022.

Sponsored by The Toro Company in partnership with City Parks Alliance, the Toro Urban Park Innovation Award recognizes innovation in park management and practices, and comes with a \$50,000 grant.

The award will be presented at *Greater & Greener 2022*, City Parks Alliance's biennial international parks conference June 18 – 21, in Philadelphia.

For more than 40 years, Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center, operated by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR), has functioned as Philadelphia's one stop shop for processing the City's leaves and wood waste into useable materials. In recent years, the Center turned an increasing volume of collectibles into opportunities for local youth to gain woodworking skills and jobs while also supplying the park system with new furnishings.

"The Toro Company is proud to recognize the Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center project as the winner of the Toro Urban Park Innovation Award," said Judson McNeil, President, The Toro Company Foundation. "The project will undoubtedly make a positive impact on many young lives in Philadelphia, and potentially across the country, as its successes in Philadelphia can be modeled and replicated in other cities. The *Greater & Greener* gathering of park leaders provides the ideal venue for sharing innovative solutions for challenges facing parks in 2022."

Catherine Nagel, Executive Director of City Parks Alliance, added, "The Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center exemplifies urban park innovation by leveraging resources to produce multiple benefits simultaneously, from environmental resiliency to workforce development, and shows how urban parks can help cities address their most pressing issues through creative, community-driven approaches."

Turf Equipment and Supply Company, Inc., Toro's local representative in the Philadelphia market, played a key role in choosing the organic recycling center as the winner. "The innovative project provides many benefits, including changing production from commodities like wood chips and mulch, into high value



merchantable lumber that can be used in park projects or turned into revenue to fund natural lands restoration,” said Lance Ernst, Vice President, Turf Equipment and Supply Company.

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation has seen the intake volume of wood waste increase *tenfold* due to climate change storm impacts, aging trees, and invasive species, creating a major management challenge for the City.

In response PPR began periodically milling portions of the accumulating wood by contracting a sawyer and portable mill for several days a year, with the resulting lumber deployed to park improvement projects such as new bookshelves, cubbies, garden beds, benches, footbridges, kiln dried firewood and more.

Many of these projects have been accomplished through collaboration with youth driven organizations such as [PowerCorpsPHL](#) and [Tiny WPA](#). PPR began branding these finished products around the new tagline of “Neighborhood Wood.”

Despite early successes, PPR faced challenges with their Neighborhood Wood initiative, including improper storage of finished materials, and insufficient capacity to manage a robust program of salvage, evaluation, and production at the highest value.

The \$50,000 grant will allow PPR to create a long-term organization and storage system to protect milled lumber and critical equipment from the elements, and to sustain and grow the program through successful community partnerships.

The Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center (ORC) recycles an average of 6,000 tons of organic waste into usable products each year. These products, including wood chips, mulch, compost, and firewood, are used by contractors, park friends groups, municipal operating departments, community organizations and residents of the city in all manner and scope of projects.

“The Toro prize is helping Parks & Rec realize a long term vision to produce lumber from the beautiful trees that fall in Philadelphia's urban forest each year. We are so excited to use this prize to transform how we re-use park wood into cost saving and revenue generating solutions that encourage entrepreneurship and an appreciation for our natural lands, “ said Kathryn Ott Lovell, Commissioner, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation.”

[Greater & Greener](#) is designed to have a positive impact on the host cities, and the Toro Urban Park Innovation Award will help to ensure that Philadelphia enjoys a lasting, tangible impact for years to come.

Visit these links for more information about the [Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center](#) and [the Urban Wood Design Competition in Philadelphia](#).

Founded in 2000, City Parks Alliance is the only independent, national organization solely dedicated to urban parks. The mission of City Parks Alliance is to engage, educate, and nurture a broad-based constituency to support the creation, revitalization, and sustainability of parks and green spaces that contribute to more vibrant and equitable cities.

###