

Human Rights Park

“Empower citizens with knowledge so they can work towards making a positive difference in their community life!”



Human Rights Organization NGO, Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly - Vanadzor, Citizens of Taron IV, Jane Britt Greenwood, AIA Fulbright Scholar, Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction, and Kathleen Lestina, US Peace Corps Volunteer in Community Business Development are working as a collective team to have a Human Rights Park built in the disadvantaged community of Taron IV. The touchstone of the project is that it is a collaborative effort between members of our team, public agencies, and entrepreneurial businesses, our national and international friends and supporters.

Early in 2011, a community needs assessment revealed that Taron IV, a poor community in Vanadzor, did not have an outdoor space to meet together as a community, parents did not have a safe place to walk with their children and teach them about the natural environment, youth needed a place for healthy activities and the elders needed a place to play nardi or chess, or a place to have lively discussions. The conversation naturally led to the fact that it is all too common in Armenia for rich individuals to buy and own “public land” and therefore the community not only loses municipal land but they also have no say on what is developed in their neighborhood. Not having their “collective civic voices heard” on the way the communities’ open space is developed is a grievous social injustice. Before this land is “sold” to a private individual, Taron IV has initiated a grass roots effort on how they would like their common open space designed and developed.

Our team understands that partners are critical to the success and image of a public improvement plan so we ask if you would be willing to partner with us. *We feel this collaborative park project will actively engage citizens and youth in a process that will help them better understand and appreciate the value of a healthy and sustainable environment as well as empower them in civic life and engage them volunteerism.*

Background History of Taron IV

As a result of the earthquake in December of 1988, many people in Vanadzor, Armenia lost their homes. Several countries offered assistance and began building apartments, schools, and poly clinics in an unpopulated area within the city limits of Vanadzor in the community of Taron IV. Regrettably, the building projects were not always completed, sometimes because of government

corruption and greed, which resulted in several unfinished buildings and vacant park land. Over time, Taron IV (population 7,756) has been often overlooked by the more affluent and persuasive sections of the City of Vanadzor and has been underserved by its city government. It is a poor community with high unemployment. The people are willing to work but need vocational job training, guidance and enhanced skills to be more competitive in the job market. The people also need something in their lives right now to give them a feeling of belonging to a compassionate world that cares. The area designated for park use has been vacant for many years and it is time the community takes action and provides a place where multi-generations enjoy community life.

The people of Taron IV identified a need for a community park, specifically a Human Rights Park, where all ages can gather together and experience basic human rights values of freedom of assembly and freedom to have a voice in how their community is designed.

Therefore the citizens of Taron IV and a group of volunteers have started a Grass roots effort to build a park in their neighborhood. The community has banded together and is strong-willed about bringing this park to realization. However, they will need help from others, especially professional groups with more specific and specialized skills.

The main goals:

- To provide a safe and natural outdoor park that would offer a place for people of all ages in the community to gather during all seasons of the year to experience healthy leisure and recreational activities.
- To provide a Human Rights Park which would engage and inform the community and the Republic of Armenia that the “owners” of parks can no longer be the unseen private landholder but that public agencies and community organizations must now work hand in hand as the true co-owners that they are on every aspect of the park.
- The collaborative park project would be used as a prototype for other parks in Armenia as an example of a community having a voice in how public space is designed and used.

What we have done so far...We have completed a needs assessment with the community members of Taron IV. Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly has initiated educational sessions on human rights to school children. A schematic design has been presented and accepted by the community. We have created social media portals to keep our partnerships and friends informed of our progress. We have met and discussed the design process and our ideas with the architect who was project architect for Lover’s Park in Yerevan. On May 7, 2011 we had our ground breaking ceremony and planted over 40 trees with the community and also a park clean-up with the children. This community event was successful and covered by the Vanadzor media. We are initiating partnerships between Helsinki Citizens Assembly, the community, city government, private companies, National and International partnerships and volunteers.

What we will do in the future With your support we will be able to move the project forward with construction documents prepared for the park. We will be able to provide the water and electrical infrastructure. We will be able to purchase trees and flowers. We will be able to provide lighting and walkways. We will be able to provide shade shelters for the older people in the community. We will be able to provide artists with materials and provide technical assistance to educate and train people in the community on how to use recycled materials to build trash containers and benches. We will be able to provide the youth and children, some with

disadvantages or disabilities, with a place to play in a safe, healthy environment. We will be able to provide an amphitheater where people can enjoy a concert or listen to a political discussion or speech. An indispensable component of this collaborative park project is that the citizens take ownership and take pride in keeping their park clean, healthy, safe, and sustainable. We plan on encouraging this with educational seminars that reach out to the entire community. This will make the park sustainable for generations to come.



The parcel of vacant land is located on a corner lot bordered by streets, an elementary school, a school for “at risk” children, and a cemetery. There is a bus stop for public transportation directly across the street which we would like to enhance with a shelter and coordinate into the design. On the land bordering the street we would like to provide low bushes which would be a natural border to prevent children from straying into the street, yet still make the park visible for security. A



concrete wall separating the cemetery from the park is a design challenge with many variations to consider. A wall of trees or a “green wall” would be a natural barrier. Some of the wall sections could be painted with designs from artists or children in the community. It would also make a pleasant backdrop as a memorial wall for the amphitheater where small music concerts or peaceful rallies could be held. The land slopes naturally towards the south and there is a beautiful vista of the mountains in the background where we plan to



provide benches for people to enjoy this view. The benches would be labeled with some of the basic human rights edicts that have made this park possible. The land has several trees but we would like to provide many for shade and shelter during the hot summer months so the elders can play nardi together and watch the children play. Walking paths would wind around the park and provide a space to stroll or for rigorous exercise. Good lighting and garbage receptacles would be placed around the park which could help keep the park clean, secure and safe. An open air café would be a comfortable place for having a cup of coffee or glass of juice and would bring in money to continue the maintenance and sustainability of the park. These are several ideas, we have many more. To view the schematic design as a pdf or PowerPoint presentation in both Armenian and English go to our FB Cause site.





- Taron IV has partnered with Helsinki Citizens Assembly-Vanadzor --- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly will be the stewards of the land so that it remains a public park for all people. In Armenia, much of the park land is owned by private individuals who typically don't maintain the land and are just interested in monetary personal gain. Many of these people who own park land are not interested in the needs of a community.
- A design team was formed and a design schematic was presented to the people of Taron on February 24th. The Design Team: Jane Britt Greenwood AIA Fulbright Scholar teaching at Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction and two of her students Mahdiyeh Jomeh Farsangi and Ali Marefat and Kathleen Lestina, United States Peace Corps, currently volunteering in Vanadzor, Master's In Architecture and Urban Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



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- Public education of children, adults and the elderly in the community. Educational meetings on human rights values on how they affect individuals and the population.
- Skills Assessment -The community is identifying and documenting the talents and assets within the community to see where the citizens can volunteer on the park project.
- Competition for Armenian architects to prepare construction drawings
- Outreach Design competition- University students to design park logo
- Seeking funding and/or grants from national and international organizations
- Community request to VivaCell, Beeline and Orange Line for corporate support of park
- Public health issue– The community needs a place for safe, healthy, outside activities. A place that people of all ages, from babies to the elderly, can meet, share time together and learn from each other. Research has shown that communities who maintain and create a unique sense of place offer better quality of life for its residents.

- Sustainability issues--- (6,077 sq. meters) The site makes the best use of orientation to the sun, topography, wind, and is accessible by walking, public transportation and surrounded by neighborhood buildings. The park area is no larger than necessary for the size of the community which helps ensure sustainability. The design will not impose on the natural beauty of the land.
- May 5, 2011 created Face Book Cause Page to use as a portal for online friends and supporters of the Taron IV Park Project to keep current with the project progress and to make donations.
- MAY 7, 2011 – GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY AT TARON IV. Media Coverage. PLANTING OF OVER 40 DONATED TREES from the Forestry Department in Vanadzor, Lori Marz.
- May 31, 2011 Meeting with project architect of Lover’s Park in Yerevan



We recognize this park project is an enormous undertaking and it will only be accomplished with environmental and human rights education, vocational training, a willingness of the community to volunteer, partnerships, financial support and a sincere effort by a team of dedicated volunteers who wish to see the park schematic design become a reality. We are confident this collaborative park design could become a prototype for other park projects in Armenia.