



## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Park Commissioners

FROM: Shon Sylvia, Executive Director

**SUBJECT: Renaming Franklin Park as Senator Rosa Franklin Park**

DATE: February 17, 2021

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** In recognition of the lack of public spaces named for people of color and in celebration of the inspiring achievements of one of this city’s residents and former government official, the Park Board has determined to rename Franklin Park in honor of Senator Rosa Franklin. Senator Franklin was a major supporter of the park district and was the first African American woman elected to the Washington State Senate. She was a tireless advocate for healthcare and social justice in Tacoma and is worthy of this level of recognition.

**BACKGROUND:** In 1937 the West End Playground Association donated a substantial plot of land to Metro Parks Tacoma for “perpetual public park and playground”. Extending from Lawrence Street to Puget Sound Ave and from South 12<sup>th</sup> to South 16<sup>th</sup> Street, this new community feature was named Franklin Park due to its proximity to Franklin Elementary School. The land had been considered for a park as early as 1909 but it wasn’t until the 1930s that it was developed into a formal recreation site. Today, Franklin Park encompasses more than 20 acres and hosts multiple playfields, playground, picnic shelter and restrooms, and a sprayground in addition to a community garden

Board members have discussed the potential of renaming Franklin Park for Senator Rosa Franklin and in recognition of Black History Month wish to honor this local resident who has made a significant impact on Tacoma through her advocacy in the State legislature.

The Metro Parks policy governing the naming and renaming of parks, recreation areas, facilities and features enumerates specific guidelines for appropriate park names. One of the criteria is:

“Consideration may be given to an outstanding individual who has given a substantial and lasting contribution to Metro Parks Tacoma, the City of Tacoma, or the State of Washington.”

Senator Franklin is without question an outstanding individual, a person who forged a path for herself through adversity and built connections to forward the causes of social justice, healthcare, and racial equity in Tacoma and throughout Washington State.

Senator Rosa Gourdine Franklin has made her home in Tacoma since the 1950s, moving here after her husband was stationed at Fort Lewis. Senator Franklin turned to politics after a 42 year career as a nurse where she cared for everyone from wounded veterans to disabled children, newborns, and women from all walks of life. She put her dedication to community health to work on the political scene beginning in

1990 when she served in the House of Representatives on behalf of Tacoma's 29th District. In January 1993 she was appointed to the Senate, filling the remainder of late Senator A.L. "Slim" Rasmussen's term, and was elected to that seat in November 1993. She was not only the first African American woman (and only the fourth African American of either gender) to serve in the Senate, but secured her legacy as the first African American woman to be elected to that position, serving until her retirement in 2012.

Senator Franklin was also the first African American to be selected for the post of Washington State Senate President Pro Tempore, responsible for presiding over the chamber in the absence of the Lieutenant Governor and wielding the gavel to direct proceedings. She was the first African American woman to hold that position in any of the 50 states.

During her time in the Senate, Rosa Franklin supported funding multiple programs and capital projects for the park district. She advocated for safe and healthy communities in Tacoma, working on bills to promote education, affordable housing, trauma care, law enforcement reform, and environmental equity. Her legacy as a breaker of barriers, a builder of bridges, and a dedicated public servant live on in the hearts of her Senate colleagues as well as in the community organizations and charitable groups she continues to support.

Franklin Park, located in central Tacoma, was named for the nearby Franklin Elementary School, founded in 1889 as Franklin School, named for the famous statesman and inventor Benjamin Franklin. It is fitting to rename this park in honor of Senator Rosa Franklin due to her groundbreaking role as the first African American woman in the state Senate and as an advocate for healthy communities, including adequate education and housing. Like Benjamin Franklin, she challenged the conventions of her day and pushed those around her to broaden their minds and expand their sense of what was possible.

Rosa Franklin's work with children in the Hilltop area during her time as a nurse illustrates her dedication to the youth of this part of town even before she formally entered public service. That commitment is reflected in the important role this park serves as a place for youth sports, a sprayground for children of all ages, and in the hosting of family celebrations that are the cornerstone of any neighborhood gathering space.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The park sign will be replaced, additional interpretive signage highlighting Senator Franklin will be created and Communications staff will facilitate updates to Metro Parks' website and official inventory listing.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** For additional information, please contact Debbie Terwilleger, Director of Business, Administration, and Planning; [debbiet@tacomaparks.com](mailto:debbiet@tacomaparks.com).

**METROPOLITAN PARK DISTRICT OF TACOMA**  
**RESOLUTION NO. R19-21**  
**RENAMING OF FRANKLIN PARK TO SENATOR ROSA FRANKLIN PARK**

WHEREAS, "the Social Pillar of Sustainability from the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma's Strategic Master Plan calls for Metro Parks Tacoma (MPT) to "inspire our community and achieve equity in our parks, programs, service delivery, decision-making, and community engagement"; and

WHEREAS, the Park Board of Commissioners desire to expand MPT's commitment to social equity and carry forward the work outlined in the Anti-Racism Resolution (Resolution No. R32-20); and

WHEREAS, the Board of Park Commissioners has a policy governing the naming and renaming of parks, recreation areas, facilities and features enumerates specific guidelines for appropriate park names; and

WHEREAS, one of the criteria is that "consideration may be given to an outstanding individual who has given a substantial and lasting contribution to Metro Parks Tacoma, the City of Tacoma, or the State of Washington; and

WHEREAS, persons of color have provided significant contributions to the City of Tacoma that have not been adequately recognized to date; and

WHEREAS, Senator Rosa Franklin, a longtime Tacoma resident, was the first African American woman in the Washington State Senate and advocated for healthcare, affordable housing, environmental equity, and social justice in Tacoma and across the state; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED that in support of black history month, the Board of Park Commissioners of the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma approves the official renaming of Franklin Park to Senator Rosa Franklin Park.

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma at a regular meeting held on \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

ATTEST: President\_\_\_\_\_

Secretary\_\_\_\_\_ Clerk\_\_\_\_\_