

City begins planning Steven P. Odom Serenity Garden



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2014

Ronald Odom Sr. and Kim Odom, parents of Steven, are among those hoping a planned urban garden will be a place to connect with nature, relax in a hammock, or meditate.

By [Laura Crimaldi](#)

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Franklin Park has a playground named for Tiffany Moore, a [12-year-old who was shot and killed as she sat on a mailbox in Grove Hall nearly 30 years ago.](#)

A baseball field in Roxbury pays tribute to [Jermaine “Manny” Goffigan](#), who was killed by a stray bullet on Halloween night in 1994, his 9th birthday.

And this fall, the city is expected to open [Martin’s Park — a Seaport oasis to honor 8-year-old Martin Richard](#), who died in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

All three were innocent victims of violence in Boston who are remembered with carefree play spaces that embody childhood’s joy.

But to pay homage to Steven P. Odom, the 13-year-old Dorchester boy murdered in a case of mistaken identity more than a decade ago, the city is planning to create a serenity garden near his family’s home.

Odom’s mother, Kim, said she hopes passages from her son’s journal inspire what she hopes will be a neighborhood retreat on the Mattapan-Dorchester line.

“There’s something about the elements of nature that help the healing process,” Kim Odom said after the first planning session for the garden last month. “It’s been 10 years. It’s a never-ending healing journey. We’ll be forever healing and we want to find ways to do that and do it in a healthy way.”

The city-owned plot on Hopkins Street where the garden is to be built [was named for Odom four years ago](#), but since then the project has not moved beyond the drawing board.

Last year, the city designated developers to build the garden and transform an adjacent lot on Morton Street that once housed the former Mattapan police station.

Two nonprofits, Caribbean Integration Community Development, Inc. in Mattapan, and the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, Inc., which is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, are behind the project.



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A city park is planned to commemorate Steven P. Odom, who died in 2007.

Their plan calls for building a mixed-income residential development of 38 apartments, plus 2,000 square feet of retail space, 42 parking spots, and 8,000 square feet for Odom's garden.

The organizations are in the process of meeting with neighbors, applying for permits, and securing financing for the project, which is estimated to cost \$15 million. Depending on funding, construction could begin in the spring of 2020.

Odom's father, Ronald Odom Sr., sometimes walks to the future site of the garden with a folding chair and radio to look at the trees and listen to birds or to music on his radio.

"I'll read. I'll sit quiet or just listen to some music or something," said Odom, a Pentecostal minister and retired mail carrier who now works as a school crossing guard. "It's just a place where you can regroup and get away from it all."

Lisa B. Alberghini, president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, said the garden would be built after the apartments are completed. The city has set aside \$50,000 to pay for design work; the cost of building the garden hasn't been determined. City officials anticipate it would be ready to open in three years.

"It's an opportunity to honor Steven's memory and really for me it is about peacemaking," Alberghini said. "It's about bringing the community together."

Odom was shot and killed on Oct. 4, 2007, as he was walking to his home on Evans Street with friends after playing basketball. Authorities later revealed that his killer was a Roxbury gang member who fired at the group after he mistook one of Odom's friends for a rival.

The gunman — identified by prosecutors as Charles Bunch Jr. — died 10 days later in an unrelated shooting. In 2010, another man, David Johnson of Mattapan, was sentenced to six to eight years in prison after he pleaded guilty to providing Bunch with the gun used in the attack.

At the city's first planning meeting about the garden, Odom's parents and other family members joined neighborhood residents, city officials, and the project developers to discuss their ideas.



DAVID L RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2013

Kim Odom and her grandson (left) held a sign in remembrance of her slain son, Steven Odom who died by a gun on 10/2007.

Leon David, an aide to state Representative Daniel Cullinane, said the garden is an opportunity to reflect the spirituality and faith of Odom's family and realize the biblical passage urging people to "beat their swords into plowshares."

"You're breathing life back into the community," he said.

Kim Odom suggested designating activity corners in the garden after her son's poem, "I Am," which he wrote for the peace curriculum at the James P. Timilty Middle School in Roxbury.

"I am basketball. I am drums. I'm a person," reads the opening of the poem, according to Kim Odom.

The group discussed elements that they find soothing like waterfalls, children's laughter, and natural light. They contemplated ways that residents could use the garden as a place to connect with nature, relax in a hammock, or meditate.

Birdhouses, a water wall, and an entrance marked with a peace rock were added to a list of possible features. Two more planning meetings are planned in the next few months.

“Sometimes you just need to be rejuvenated,” Kim Odom said. “Sometimes it’s just about sitting down and breathing and feeling the wind or just looking into the trees.”

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