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### **FORMER K.T. MURPHY STUDENTS RECEIVE CITIZEN'S PLANNING AWARD**

(December 15, 2009) The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association recently honored former students from K.T. Murphy Elementary school with its 2009 Citizen Planning Award. The award stems from their ten year effort to draw attention to the need for a school playground and green space in the Cove neighborhood of Stamford. In presenting the award, Committee Chair Valarie Ferro explained why the students were chosen. "While professional planners and consultants have helped to achieve significant results, it is truly citizens and lay people who often make the difference in our communities," she said.

Ferro referred to an effort that began in 1999, when Stamford City planners launched a youth outreach campaign as part of its anticipated update to the city comprehensive master plan. As part of this process, 3<sup>rd</sup> graders at K. T. Murphy analyzed other school properties and discovered that they had the least amount of land of any of the city's public elementary schools. They built models and lobbied the City's Planning Board, emphasizing the need for a real playground rather than blacktop. Students recognized that it might take a while and knew that the city would need to acquire more land. When asked by the local media about the schedule, their response was in the context of their age—thinking it might take a year or so.

In the words of Robin Stein, Stamford's Land Use Bureau Chief, in a 2000 news article, "They took a fresh look at issues us old people had been looking at for years and came up with some innovative solutions."

Two years later, in 2002, the Master Plan was adopted and the students' project was highlighted and added to the City's Capital Program. By now, the students were in middle school and were wondering if they would ever see the project come to fruition.

Then, in 2006, the owner of adjacent property was contemplating selling when he recalled the students' appeal. He offered it to the City for purchase. The students, now in high school but never to be denied, showed up at the Board of Finance and Board of Representatives meeting to plead their case again. The purchase was approved.

Finally, in August 2008, the playground was opened at K.T. Murphy School during a ribbon-cutting ceremony. There were some much older students in attendance that day—some of the same that had originally petitioned the City nearly a decade ago.

Although the original twenty students are now away at college and were unable to attend the December 4 awards luncheon in Middletown, Stamford Land Use Bureau Chief Robin Stein, Associate Planner Erin McKenna, and K.T. Murphy teachers Debbie Okun and Jennifer Smith accepted the honor on their behalf.