A vision of neighborliness for Grace Park

Regarding your Oct. 25 article about Grace Park ("City works at saving Grace") and the accompanying article on the history of the removed statue of Simon Perkins ("Moving park statue has been long debated"):

The real news in the vision for the future of the park that is driving these developments and giving its ambiguous history a new and creative direction.

The congregation council of the church I serve, Trinity Lutheran Church, authorized me and my colleague, the Rev. Byron Arledge, to lead a delegation of our members, along with members of our ecumenical partner, Wesley Temple AME Zion Church and its pastor, the Rev. Curtis T. Walker Sr., to go to the Akron City Council to protest the removal of the statue months ago.

The park was then being considered by many to be an urban wasteland, from which that precious piece of Akron's history, the statue, should be rescued for a safer, "more visible" location. Much political animus had been directed against "the homeless," in particular, for their use of the park, as if they did not have every right to do so.

Along with nearby business people and residents, and sparked by the leadership of Mayor Don Plusquellic and City Council President Marco Sommerville, those of us involved in church ministries closest to the park have been working with a vision of a city without walls, where people from all walks of life and of all ages, from every neighborhood, from every ethnic and religious group, can safely come together to build a new sense of neighborliness.

Imagine a well-patrolled, well-lighted and well-kept green place with stately trees, beautiful flowers and plenty of parking. An attractive play place for children. A jogging track for a midday walk, followed by a brown-bag recital indoors on an impressive pipe organ.

Teen-agers hanging out in a drug-free park, kept clean by Haven of Rest residents. Citywide gatherings, like watching the fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Early evening summer concerts for seniors, around a gazebo. Church picnics, ecumenical services and community rallies. Friendly competitions of civic and neighborhood groups for the most striking flower bed. Summer programs for kids, with university and church volunteers taking the lead.

The new Grace Park will truly reflect the best of our vision, not the worst of our fears.

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