

Executive Summary

Introduction

Stamford has seized a unique opportunity to augment its dramatic growth with a downtown park and greenway of complementary scale that will fulfill the quality of life expectations of new residents, businesses, students and employees through the 21st century. The Mill River Park and Greenway Project will bring an active, vibrant and verdant environment to Stamford's downtown riverfront while connecting the various sections of the city to the river and Long Island Sound, making it a prominent, alluring and accessible place within the downtown for the entire community. The Park's physical connections to the neighborhoods and to the other major open spaces and recreational trails of the city, position it as a vital centerpiece of the urban fabric and a pivotal symbol of Stamford's evolution as the most highly urbanized municipality in Connecticut.

Implementation

The Mill River project can largely be completed within the next decade provided sufficient funds are available. Some projects such as the playground are already complete and others, such as the river restoration, are in permitting. The river restoration will transform the northern part of the park replacing the Mill Pond and its dam and walls with a restored natural river running through a wooded vale flanked on both sides with large urban park areas appropriate for major events and facilities. The restoration will positively mitigate the future impact of flooding on the city reducing the hundred-year flood plain by 3 feet in the downtown area. Implementation of the river restoration will set the groundwork for the completion of a substantial portion of the northern end of the park, including the new cherry tree grove, a fountain, ice skating rink, carousel, café and great lawn. These improvements will be accomplished in Stage I of the park's implementation, which will also include the majority of the paths, planting and program elements from the Broad Street Bridge to the Pulaski Street Bridge. Stage II, the final stage, will include the sites of the Housing Authority properties and 1010 Washington Boulevard, all of which will be developed into publicly accessible space and park land seamlessly integrated into Mill River Park.

Goals

The history of the Mill River project reaches back to the nineteenth century when the idea for a "central park" was discussed by City leaders. In the 1929, Herbert Swan recommended the creation of a substantial park along the Mill River in his Master Plan for Stamford. Flooding events in 1954, 1955 and in the 1970's resulted in property damage along the river and led City leaders to look for long-term solutions for the management of the river. The City invited the Army Corps of Engineers to perform a series of floodplain studies and initiatives, ultimately resulting in this coordinated effort to restore the river habitat while creating an expanded, world-class park. Upon completion, Mill River Park and Greenway will restore the river ecosystem while creating a new waterfront experience for Stamford residents and visitors.

To ensure an enduring natural, aesthetic and recreational experience, the Park design strives for three primary goals – cultural sustainability, environmental sustainability and economic sustainability. Culturally, the Park must fulfill the needs and desires of diverse populations throughout Stamford. Environmentally, the Park design must balance the need to protect and preserve thriving natural habitat while maximizing the enjoyment of it by the human population. And economically, the Park must be economically viable and maintainable, to ensure its lasting ability to support new growth in the social and cultural life of the City that engages the community year-round.

Vision

Today, landscape architects, public officials and community leaders comprehend the significance of programming a park to ensure its social success. Once people perceive that there is a valuable asset within the park and begin to use the park, the users become the best guardians of the park. With this in mind, the Stamford citizens and the park designers adopted a layered and diverse, multigenerational, and multi-seasonal approach to programming the park. There are four distinct themes to the program, most of which are either focused on the river or involve direct access to the river.

Natural / Ecological

The planting of the river edges and slopes is intended to be durable and capable of withstanding storm events. The native plant material, including grasses, wildflowers, shrubs, understory trees and canopy trees has been carefully coordinated with the hydrologic contouring and will help to revitalize the aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

Cultural / Educational

The interpretation of the history and ecology of any place becomes an educational opportunity. Interpretation of the history of the cherry trees will be significant in defining the cultural legacy of the area. New elements such as the 9/11 Memorial Grove, the Sensory Garden, the Amphitheater and the Great Lawn possess both cultural opportunities as well as places on which cultural activities can be staged.

Additionally, the planting strategy and its resultant habitat will become an educational opportunity for the amateur birdwatcher and for classrooms of students studying natural systems.

Recreational

Most parks experience heavy demand for recreational activities. Because of the river and the linear nature of Mill River Park and Greenway, most of the recreational activities will be uniquely different from other Stamford parks. Paths down along the river and adjacent to the perimeter and neighborhoods will support year-round walking and jogging. Multiple venues will occur along the river for resting, viewing, and fishing and a kayak launch punctuates the southern end of the park. The carousel, café, fountain and ice skating rink will offer multi-seasonal recreational opportunities within the park, promoting a festival, social atmosphere throughout the year. The new playground and proposed basketball court offer opportunities for more age specific physical play.

Experiential

Places that heighten the senses of sight, sound, touch and smell can be extremely memorable, even if ephemeral. The seasonal blooms of the cherry trees, the diverse qualities of the Sensory Garden, the identifiable illumination of each bridge in colorful ways, the seasonally inspired illumination of the skating rink, and the placement of well-sited sculpture will create strong sensory memories of the park.

The Three C's: Connections Community Collaboration

The success of the Mill River Park and Greenway Project is dependent upon the strength of the three C's. One of the overarching missions of this project is to **connect** people to the river and thereby connect multiple Stamford **communities**. A glimmer of what is possible has been demonstrated by the playground. The Mill River Park & Greenway Master Design Plan is a milestone in an extensive public planning process involving **collaboration** between the City, members of the Mill River Collaborative, the residents, institutions, and businesses of Stamford and the design team. The continuation of this collaboration is integral to realizing the community vision for Mill River Park and Greenway.

Take Part

We invite you to join and support the thousands of Stamford residents who have already invested their expertise, time, energy and labor toward the realization of the Mill River Park vision including the City, the Board of Representatives and Finance, the Stamford Partnership, the West Side Community, the Urban Redevelopment Corporation, Downtown Special Services District, Trust for Public Land and many others. The Mill River Collaborative, the public/private partnership spearheading the park's development has as its mission *to provide collaborative leadership to create and sustain a successful Mill River Park & Greenway*. Valuable contributions can be made by volunteers, professionals, donors and developers. Learn how you can help at www.millriver.info.