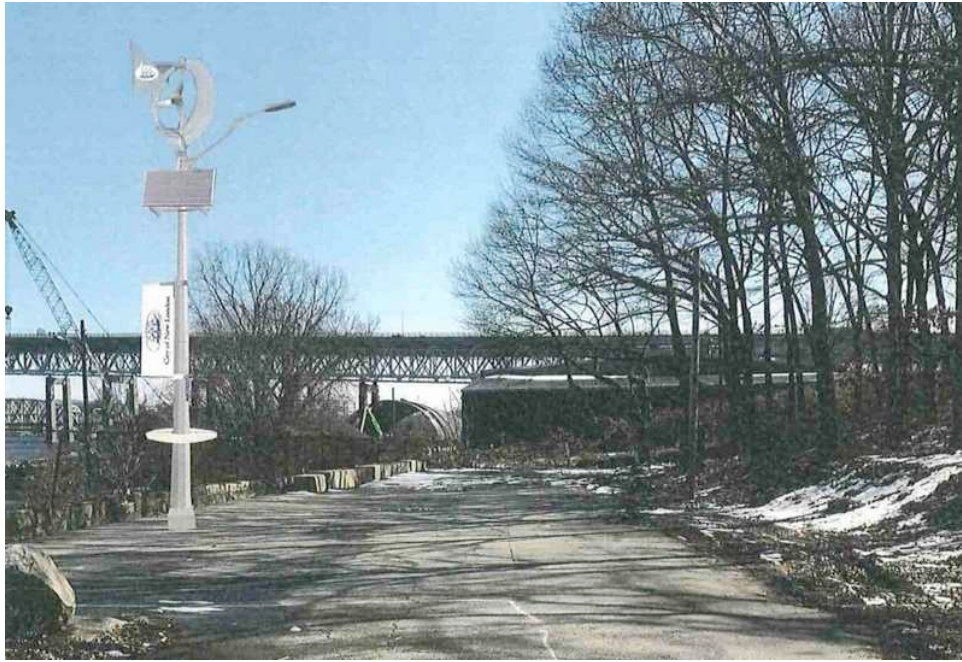


New London to install off-the-grid lights in Riverside Park



A conceptual illustration of what the new wind- and solar-powered street lights, to be installed in Riverside Park as part of a pilot project, will look like. (Courtesy of the city of New London)

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By Greg Smith, Day staff writer
g.smith@theday.com

New London — The city is planning installation of three off-the-grid street lights powered by solar panels and small wind turbines along a riverside promenade at Riverside Park, a pilot program that city officials say could lead to more throughout the city.

The City Council approved the \$50,400 purchase of three “Remote Power Units” crafted by New York-based Aris Wind LLC to be located along a path adjacent to railroad tracks, part of an ongoing effort to help revitalize the park. Funding comes from a pool of money borrowed for improvements at the park.

The units, with backup batteries for days of use without wind or sun, provide at least enough power to light an 80-watt LED bulb and light to cover about a 70-by-35-foot area. The units also will have charging stations for cellphones and computers and a café style wrap-around table.

Despite the park being closed after dark, Public Works Director Brian Sear said the installation of the lights fits in nicely with ongoing efforts to open the park up and make it more inviting. It is also an area where it would have been problematic to run electrical wires.

Sear said the lights should be installed within four to six weeks.

The city’s Public Works Department, with guidance from the Parks and Recreation Commission and Riverside Park Conservancy, has helped to transform the park in recent years, with additional walking paths, parking areas and picnic areas. It also is home to a basketball court, children’s playscape and a new pavilion. The most noticeable change over the past year is the removal of some trees and trimming of others, which has opened expansive river views from many parts of the park.

The city also recently demolished the so-called bath house, a building that had stood since the 1940s along the fence separating the park from the railroad tracks. Sear said the concrete pad that remains could be the base of a new pavilion. The park has sweeping views of the river but no actual river access aside from a long-condemned bridge over the tracks. There are no immediate plans to reopen that bridge.

The city also is looking at plans to install more picnic areas and further limit vehicular traffic into the park, which abuts Winthrop Elementary School and whose main entrance is off Adelaide Street.

Riverside Park Conservancy Treasurer Ronna Stuller said some of the improvements follow a plan for the park that dates to 2011 and work by the Community Research and Design Collaborative at the University of Connecticut. That same year, city residents narrowly defeated a proposal to sell off 9 acres of the 17-acre park to the adjacent Coast Guard Academy for \$2.9 million.

The conservancy has money in its own coffers for park improvement projects. One project Stuller said she would like to see is the paving of Adelaide Street to allow vehicles to drive closer to the river without driving through the park. Jersey barriers now halt the traffic, she said.

Stuller contends that one of the biggest challenges for the park attracting visitors is its relatively isolated location. “We still hear from people in New London who don’t know where the park is or how to get to it,” she said.

Stuller said the clearing of trees and limbs helped to open sight lines to the river and she applauds the city’s efforts to move the park forward from its past days when it attracted some “unsavory activities.” She does, however, feel a sentimental tug for some of the trees lost.