

Parks and Recreation Commission

Report to City Council

RE: Review the current status of Riverside Park: 9-20-10

Report Accepted by Parks and Recreation Commission: 5-5-11

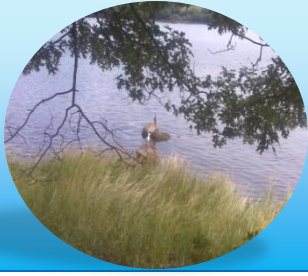
If the Riverside Park remains a city property in its entirety, then the Park and Recreation Department envisions that a group could be formed called the Riverside Park and Recreation District. This organized group would have a mission statement and specific goals and objectives, which are outlined in the following pages.

While this report should not be construed as an endorsement for and against the proposed sale, as per our directive from the City Council, we have also included possible impact upon the city's recreational space if much of this park is not available to the city.

Respectfully submitted by:

Sub-committee on Riverside Park: Nancy Baude, Margaret Cotnoir, Norman Harrison, Tommy Major

Advisors: Lindsey Blank, Martha Bauduccio, Sandra Kersten Chalk



Riverside Nature Park and Recreation District

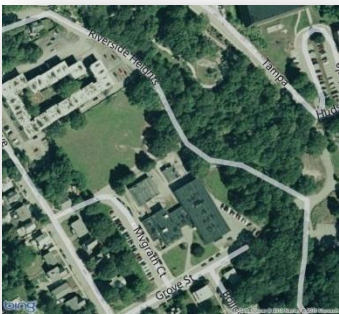
Connecting People, Parks and Nature
New London, Connecticut

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the **Riverside Nature Park and Recreation District** is to provide high-quality park and recreation facilities, programs, services and natural areas that meet the needs of the diverse community it serves.

RIVERSIDE NATURE PARK AND RECREATION DISTRICT PROPERTY:

- Winthrop Magnet School Playground
- Riverside Nature Park
- Fulton Park and Playscape area
- Crystal Ave. Basketball Courts



KEY GOALS OF THE RNPRD

Conserve natural resource areas while recognizing that these areas are dynamic and will change over time.

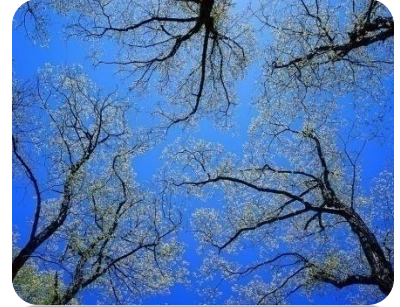
- Plan for, provide and manage appropriate access to natural resource areas while protecting natural resources.
- Develop park master plans to identify, conserve and enhance natural resources.
- Educate city staff and the community and develop opportunities to encourage public awareness and involvement, especially stewardship by individuals and community groups.
- Utilize adaptive management strategies to maintain and enhance natural resources appropriate to an urban environment.
- Provide support for research of interest to the district that would benefit the district in its ability to manage natural resources.
- Manage properties to improve the condition of water, wetlands and recreation areas.
- Evaluate needs and identify acquisition priorities to guide purchase/donation of additional natural resource areas.

SUSTAINABILITY

At its most basic level, sustainability means “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable communities strive to meet this balance from the joint perspective of environmental, economic, and community needs. RNPRD's Sustainability Program will be based on a belief that it is our responsibility to be good stewards of our resources. This entails:

Using resources and materials wisely.

We will work toward being an organization whose activities are climate-neutral, produce zero waste, and generate no hazardous substances. Our activities will include changing the culture to consider sustainable alternatives to some practices or products that may cost more initially but should pay off in the long run.



Respecting and conserving natural systems.

We will strive to protect habitats, wildlife, and ecosystem functions. We will provide appropriate levels of planning, protection, and low-impact development to these areas to support and preserve them. Construction of new buildings will meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards and create pervious pavement or bioswales to reduce storm water run-off and pollution.

Educating ourselves and our community.

We will consider the lifecycle effects of our purchasing and operations on people and the environment, both locally and globally. We will use challenges as learning and improvement opportunities and share our knowledge with our community. District-wide training sessions will be arranged, with follow-up workshops for specific subject areas. RNPRD will also create a financial “costing model” and sustainable purchasing guidelines. This will allow consideration of the lifecycle effects of our purchasing and make wise long-term decisions that extend beyond our immediate needs.

RIVER Coalition (Riverside Investment Valuing Environmental Resources)

The RIVER Coalition will be a publicly supported Connecticut nonprofit corporation to be formed to benefit the residents of the Riverside Nature Park and Recreation District.

RIVER will develop resources to ensure access to recreation for all City residents. RIVER will engage the community in support of its guarantee to the continued growth and success of our parks and park programs, enriching the lives of those in our community.

We will work to create partnerships and collaborations with local businesses, government agencies, private foundations and people who want to guarantee the quality of life.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The Natural Resources Management Plan will be an administrative, planning and maintenance reference guide that provides a flexible tool kit for managing natural resources and recreation areas contained in parks within the Riverside Nature Park and Recreation District (RNPRD). The district has both a wide diversity of natural resources, recreation and a diverse set of natural resources management issues.

Natural resources provide critical functions contributing to the ecological health of the community, as well as providing community values that contribute to the quality of life and character of the district. Central to the RNPRD are several concepts:

- Valuable natural resources exist in and around all RNPRD parks.
- These natural resources are remnants of the original native landscape.
- These natural resources provide irreplaceable ecological functions and social values.
- These natural resources should be protected, nurtured, and managed as necessary to maintain or enhance their integrity over time.
- Management of natural resources is an important responsibility of the district.

The RNPRD is formulated with a broad perspective of the functions and values that parks can provide to the community. All parks provide some degree of natural resource function and should be managed as such. From a single specimen white oak to a mature second growth forest, management decisions need to respond to short-term and long-term goals for natural communities and to the functions provided in the landscape.



Every kind of park requires park maintenance, and some need more than others. The main factor that determines the quantity of work that needs to be done is typically the number of people who use the park. Another factor is the kind of park it is, including playgrounds, nature preserves, athletic facilities, trails, beaches, bodies of water, and others. The main type of park maintenance that usually needs to be done, regardless of the variety of park, is trash pickup and cleanup.

The purpose of most park maintenance is to preserve the aesthetics of the park, which can include the landscaping and its surrounding areas. People in charge of keeping a park or facility maintained will often have to rebuild any of a number of its broken or worn-down elements. A common example along these lines is when a playground has broken equipment; not only is it unavailable for use, but it may pose a serious safety threat to children who attempt to use it. Other safety issues can include broken fences or obstructions on a path; such problems generally are considered a maintenance priority.

Park maintenance may include the building of more facilities or even the addition of natural structures, such as new nature trails.

ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING

Stewardship of natural areas should be promoted by working closely with park neighbors, schools, civic groups, local businesses and government agencies. In addition, opportunities should be provided for schools and organizations to participate in park improvement projects as a part of their advancement process.

Trail Construction and Maintenance

- Native Plant Enhancement
- Exotic Plant Removal
- Habitat Restoration
- Beach Cleanup

Educational Programs for School Groups

- Tours, Nature Hikes, Summer day camp
- Living History Programs and Demonstrations



These partnerships would provide excellent opportunities for volunteers to work together and improve the community. A Weekend Projects calendar would be established each month for volunteer opportunities.

NATURE PROGRAMS

With the Nature Park Interpretive Center acting as the headquarters, the Riverside Nature Park will provide environmental education programs and opportunities for people to connect with nature throughout the Park District.

A wide variety of classes will be offered for adults, families, children, and groups. These classes include outdoor recreation, arts and crafts, nature study, fitness, yoga, environmental education, and workshops. Emphasizing hands-on activities, active learning, and experiences in the outdoors. Programs would be run throughout the year and can be found throughout the community.

NATURE PARK INTERPRETIVE CENTER

The Riverside Nature Park is a 18.5-acre preserve in New London, Connecticut. It features evergreen and deciduous forests, wetlands and meadows. The park is home to a variety of birds, mammals, and smaller creatures.

Highlights of the Nature Park Interpretive Center would include classrooms, a nature store, reference library, and exhibit area. The Interpretive Center offers a variety of environmental education classes and activities for adults, children, and school groups throughout the year.

RECREATION DISTRICT

Building healthy communities through people, parks and programs.

The purpose of the Recreation District is to provide, protect and preserve a park system that promotes quality recreational, cultural and outdoor experiences for the New London community.

Our mission is to enrich the lives of the residents of New London by providing safe, welcoming parks and recreation facilities, diverse recreation and human services activities for people of all ages to play, learn, contemplate, build community and be good stewards of our environment.

Our vision is to provide affordable recreational, physical and cultural opportunities for all of New London residents, with a focus on families, youth development and building healthy communities. The programs and services offered by the District will provide excellent value and quality and emphasize the equitable distribution of resources throughout the district. We will offer these programs in safe, attractive and well-maintained facilities that will reflect the public's needs and interests.



Riverside Park & Environs

The Role of Riverside Park in New London's Future

An exploratory study performed by UConn's Community Research and Design Collaborative
August 4, 2010



Riverside Park & Environs

Park: Aerial



Park: Summary Analysis

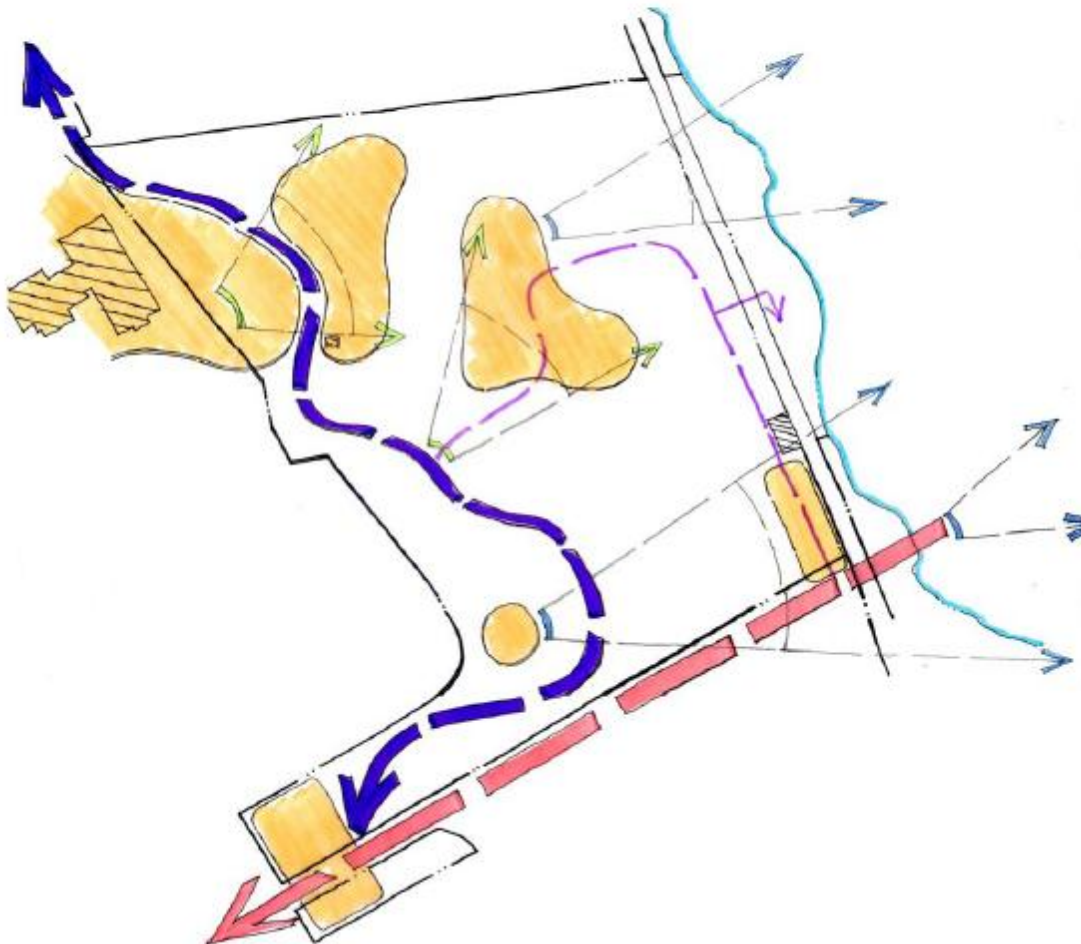


| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Location: | Good = Magnificent location of river, services residential neighborhood and school Bad = Isolated |
| Adjacent Land Uses: | Good = West uses create potential for active edge condition. East is the river Bad = North offers no energy or activity. South offers limited activity. |
| Roads: | Good = Do not need additional roads Bad = Too many, confusing, dead-ends, disrepair, lack of hierarchy |
| Vegetation: | Good = Plenty of trees and trees are good Bad = Blocks views to river, limits views within park, denies the creation of "outdoor" rooms |
| Topography: | Good = Sloping toward major resource, varied, interesting Bad = creates sense of isolation and discontinuity |



CFPBC led by UConn Assistant Professor Peter Berman
 Peter Berman, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning
 Graduate Student Council, UConn's Undergraduate Student Action Network
 Please contact Peter with any suggestions or comments regarding this study.
 His email address: peter.berman@uconn.edu

Park: Circulation Alternative IA "Upper Spine Road"



Objectives:

1. Create "defensible" spaces
2. Compose a series of sequential paths to organize park activities
3. Re-connect the park to the river.
3. Re-connect neighborhood to the park
4. Develop strategy for management of vegetation



Open Areas



Short Views



Primary Road



Long Views



Adelaide St.

CFBC UCONN

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 The information contained herein is for informational purposes only.
 The information contained herein is not to be used for any other purpose.
 Please contact the author for any questions or comments regarding this study.
 E-mail address: park-studies@cfbc.org



RIVERSIDE PARK

Unintended consequences of selling a portion (9.5 acres) of the park to the United States Coast Guard Academy



1. The sale of the whole center of the park, 9.14 acres for \$2.9 million will leave a small edge for public use

- It keeps a small playground area for the new Environmental Magnet School, fencing off the park from student use
- The narrow area along the west edge is steeply graded and basically unusable
- The waterfront is inaccessible and not usable without a considerable and yet-to-be analyzed expense.
 - Restoring the waterfront to use will require new access for cars; repair or replacement of the bridge; confirmation with the State on ownership of this waterfront property; and extensive remediation to make it usable.
 - What use should the City make of this waterfront? Swimming? (Needs lifeguards); Boating? (Needs piers, docks and possible supervision)
- The strip along Adelaide Street is a bit of undeveloped space with limited use except for a small playground and/or basketball court. This is not open space or attractive space for any “park-like” use - it would be just another playground.

What this narrow strip really is - a buffer zone to protect the Academy’s security. The City will end up paying for the maintenance of this security zone with little appeal to residents.

2. Property Values:

- In closely packed urban areas neighborhood property values are increased by 10% to 20% when there is a nearby park (not a playground). The neighborhood next to the park is the last vestige of the historic East New London, developed in the late 1800’s and early 1900s. The homes are well-kept, in a variety of styles and sizes. This is a very nice neighborhood, cut off from the city by the bridges, but maintaining character and cohesiveness. The Police Department says it is a safe neighborhood. While lack of maintenance in Riverside Park has limited neighborhood use, it remains an important amenity for the neighborhood and property values are very likely to decrease if they lose the park.

RIVERSIDE PARK

Unintended consequences of selling a portion (9.5 acres) of the park to the United States Coast Guard Academy

3. Re-Connect New London

- The construction of Route 95, the twin bridges and all the access roads have completely cut this area off from the larger city
- Lack of attention to the neighborhood, Hodges Square and Riverside Park have maintained this disconnect.
- Connecticut College and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy are equally distant from the center city and their students access few of the city amenities. There are no bike lanes or pedestrian access to the city.
- The area under the bridges is underutilized, not maintained by the state or the city, and is a huge part of the disconnect.
- THE ONLY AMENITY IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD IS RIVERSIDE PARK
 - Without the park, what will happen to this whole section of the city?

4. What is the future for New London?

- There is a choice today. Continue demolishing neighborhoods; accepting “depressed city” status; crying “Poor Me” whenever new ideas are introduced; not investing in schools and infrastructure; maintaining a negative attitude about possibilities for change
OR
Finding the possibilities for change in the 21st century. Develop plans for the city;
- re-envision downtown as a vibrant center for transportation and 21st century business;
- re-connect East New London with the center city
- restore Riverside Park as a great neighborhood asset
- plan bike paths and pedestrian access around the city

Oddly, Riverside Park is a symbol of a vibrant and hopeful future

OR

Another give-away to the immediate gratification of \$2.9 v/s a vision for a prosperous future

RIVERSIDE PARK: 5-YEAR PLAN

YEAR 1: Spring 2011 - Spring 2012

Create RIVER Coalition (Riverside Investment Valuing Environmental Resources)

RE-INTRODUCE RIVERSIDE PARK TO RESIDENTS

1. MayDay clean up - a great beginning!
2. Engage in interests of neighborhood groups, Local First, Youth Groups, Boy and Girl Scouts and other community groups to plan outings/picnics/walks through the park
3. Organize Skate-Board groups to use the park - Some Supervision required
4. Contact Crystal Ave. high-rises to plan some clean-up and use efforts in the park. (Perhaps repairing the basketball court).
5. Can you view the Sub Base fireworks from the park? If so, can a viewing party, especially for neighbors, be arranged?
6. Get Bike New London involved in using the park
7. Encourage picnics by cleaning and repairing the open area that has tables and grills
 - a. Contact churches and neighborhood groups to plan picnics
 - b. Advertise and/or promote the picnic area with photos, press releases, etc.
8. Support Landmarks fall plans for walking tour of the neighborhood (cost \$15) and include picnic and walk in the park
9. Engage the planners of the Magnet School to detail their expanded use for the park and its importance for their environmental curriculum
10. If the Water Authority approves Landmarks grant request - conduct a feasibility study on reclaiming the waterfront and repairing the bridge. This project will also explore the specific water rights and ownership of the narrow waterfront strip.
11. During the fall and winter of 2011-12;
 - a. Form a formal group/board similar to the SOBs support of Ocean Beach Park
 - i. This should include neighbors, community activists and at least two or three people with the “juice” to get things done.
 - b. Apply for a 501-c-3 status for a Riverside Park organization
 - c. Lobby the new Mayor of New London to make restoration of Riverside Park a major goal of his/her new government.
 - d. Lobby the new City Council with regular news of the planning process
 - e. Lobby state agencies for funding to restore the urban park
 - f. Draw up specific 4-year improvement plans
 - i. Immediately implement new signage and directions to find the park.
 - g. Continue with efforts to engage local groups to use the park
 - h. Try to find a few businesses who might have company picnics in the park
 - i. Develop promotion, event and marketing plan for the summer of 2012

YEAR 2: Spring 2012 - 2013

1. Develop a list of specific projects - see the Re-connect New London study of Riverside Park
2. Encourage specific events in the park, youth groups, neighborhood groups, etc.
3. Explore possibilities for the Academy to use some areas of the park for activities not requiring extreme security: tennis courts; a running track or trails that meet their physical requirements
4. Work with the magnet school to confirm their uses of the park
5. Write grants to fund projects
 - a. Waterfront remediation
 - b. Finalize plan for re-organizing the street patterns.
 - i. Select the main automobile road through the park
 - c. Define bicycle paths, walking trails that are closed to motorized vehicles
 - d. Create a maintenance plan for all trees/bushes/grasses in the park.
 - i. What areas should remain wild and possibly untouched - at least in the immediate planning period?
 - ii. Which trees need immediate attention because of age, growth, health, etc?
 - iii. Which trees should be limbed up to create views of the river?
 - iv. Develop a 4-year plan for this care and maintenance
6. Work with FRESH New London to create a community garden along the Adelaide Street area
 - a. A long-term plan to have a farmers market here should be explored
7. Analyze parking needs - existing and future as part of the 4-year plan of development
8. What additional uses could be developed along the Adelaide Street parcel?
9. Should a short road be reopened near the water end to provide quick access to the parking area near the pedestrian bridge when the waterfront remediation is complete and the bridge re-opened?

SUMMER 2012

As these plans (above) are developed by the RIVER Coalition, their major responsibility will be to get people into the park to work and to play. From a community garden to new walking and bicycling trails (that should be well marked immediately) all efforts must be made to get people using the park.

1. A long-term plan to appropriately re-pave hiking and biking trails will be part of development - but signage and stopping automobile traffic in designated bike and walking trails can be done immediately.
2. Basketball court and picnic areas should be repaired - clean - with new picnic tables, grills, perhaps some solar lighting.
3. Community clean-up days
4. Youth Groups engaged through community service to take responsibility for specific projects and given credit for their success

YEAR 3 - 5

SET SPECIFIC GOALS FOR EACH YEAR - 2013 - 2015

1. Based on grants and fundraising and the City Budget for maintenance of all city parks, realistic goals should be set for each of the following years (2013 -14-15).
2. Ideally after 2 years of work the RIVER Coalition will have a good list of community partners and will be able to assign tasks and responsibilities to each group.
3. Strong community partners are essential to the development of Riverside Park. The business community, Social Service Agencies, New London Historic and Cultural organizations should all have a piece of the action to return Riverside Park to the larger New London community.