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Photo credit: Roan Hollander

Alder Sarah Miller speaking at the community meeting where the map of changes to expect at the park was unveiled, July 13, 2023.

QUINNIPIAC RIVER PARK: A RIVERFRONT SPACE FOR ALL

by Roan Hollander

Walking into Quinnipiac River Park is like entering an oasis. The flower beds at the Grand Ave entrance are a joyful greeting to the space, bursting with lilies. Beginning along the gravel trail, one is welcomed by nesting ospreys and newly planted trees starting to provide shade. Continuing farther, the park opens into a breezy, expansive view of the Quinnipiac River, the historic district and oyster farm across the water, and the Ferry Street and Grand Avenue bridges hugging the park on either side. Winding walking trails take Fair Haven residents on a loop through the trees and along the water, where many people like to fish. With all its beauty and spaciousness, the park is truly a hidden gem, and one

of the few places in New Haven where people have access to the Quinnipiac River. “The park is a civic space, and the river unites people,” Chris Ozyck, Associate Director of URI and Fair Haven Heights resident, explained to me.

Because of the draw of the river and the vastness of the park, for the past year URI has been working with the City of New Haven, Ward 14 Alder Sarah Miller, and the Friends of Quinnipiac River Park Greenspace group to formulate a plan to make the park an even more open and inviting place for all.

Before becoming what it is now, Quinnipiac River Park used to be a scrap-metal junkyard, then eventually a grassy space with

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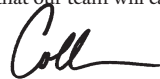
URI has been a champion of urban community forestry in New Haven for decades. Beginning in 1995 working together with Community Greenspace volunteers and then expanding in 2007 to green job training via GreenSkills, we've surpassed the milestone of planting 11,000 trees over those 28 years. While we value the myriad of benefits trees bring, urban forests are now recognized as essential in mitigating the impacts of climate change, including lowering temperatures for city residents by shading hot impervious surfaces, as

well as sequestering carbon.

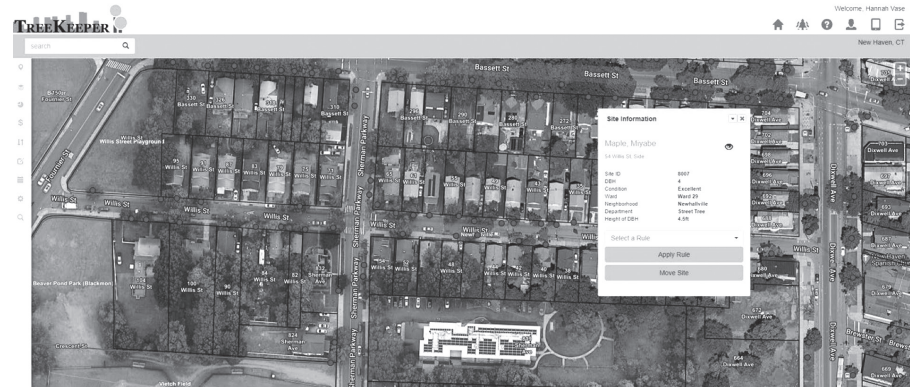
This key role of urban forests to help alleviate the consequences of a changing climate has led to unprecedented investment of more than \$1 billion in grant funding by the federal government through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. URI and the City of New Haven were fortunately one of the 385 grant proposals across the country selected to be funded by the USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program to plant more trees. The grant funds must be specifically targeted to plant in areas where there are fewer trees aimed at reducing extreme heat and increasing equitable access to nature.

We will literally double our efforts over the next five years—planting 1,000 trees annually. Ongoing support from the city will continue to allow URI and our partners to plant 500 trees throughout all New Haven's neighborhoods. The federal funding will make it possible for URI to plant an additional 500 trees in communities like Fair Haven, the Hill, Dixwell, Dwight, and the Annex, all having far fewer trees than other greener areas of New Haven. The federal grant will also pay for the removal of thousands of stumps that currently are barriers to planting these new trees. Yale intern Hannah Vase writes of the important tree inventory data that the URI staff has gathered, which provides valuable information to guide tree planting and stump removals.

As always, it will require a team effort to reach our ambitious goals. Our new partners, from IRIS (the Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services program), the Board of Education, and Believe-in-Me, are joining URI along with our existing partners, the city, Common Ground School, Sound School, and EMERGE, to plant together. Most critically, every tree planted will be at the request of a school, business, or resident who promises to water and care for the tree that our team will carefully plant on their behalf.



Colleen Murphy-Dunning



Snapshot of TreeKeeper software data.

horizon for an urban forest in New England who also provide appropriate options of response to these pests and pathogens. By following these steps, we participate in proactive, and not simply reactive, street-tree management.

Across Newhallville and Westville, we recorded many trees planted before URI was established in 1991, and also encountered URI tree adopters throughout both neighborhoods. This speaks to two things—URI's commitment to planting across New Haven, and also the need for a multi-aged forest structure. One of the big “aha” moments for requesters is that the best time to plant a tree is not always after the large oak comes down—sometimes it is one, five, or even 10 years before. This way, when a tree comes to the end of its life, there is a plan already in place for another tree to serve in its stead. By planting a young sapling next to an aging tree, that sapling has more time to establish itself and to take over more effectively, which also means more moderate temperatures and water-storage benefits for nearby residents.

Additionally, the inventory illustrates that New Haven's street trees are not spatially distributed evenly across the city. It has also been demonstrated that trees are healthier, and are cared for better, when they are planted where people want them. To continue to plant tree cover equitably, and to replace dying trees, URI needs requesters every year. Having updated online tree databases helps pinpoint areas that would be strategic and viable—places in front of homes and schools, for instance, to guide outreach efforts and to identify new adopters. Even one tree makes a difference in offering not only cooling, habitat, and rainwater-capture benefits, but in beauty and aesthetic value as well. Interestingly, it underscores how most people who request a new free tree from URI learned about the opportunity through word of mouth—a neighbor, a friend, or a community member. Sometimes “just one tree” becomes an occasion for people to gather together—with a common appreciation and perhaps enthusiasm to plant even more!

Counting Every Tree

by Hannah Vase

In 2007, the City of New Haven requested URI take over maintaining the citywide street-tree inventory, and it provided the prior comprehensive tree census that had been completed in 2000. URI switched inventory software to TreeKeeper in 2022, enabling the potential for sharing data collection and results with the New Haven Department of Parks and Public Works (DPPW). URI collects field data on tree species, location, diameter, condition, utility-line conflict, inventory date, and date of newly planted trees. The Parks staff updates the TreeKeeper database with any trees they have pruned or removed, and tree stumps they have ground, making space for replacement trees. Having an up-to-date inventory is critical for understanding the species distribution, where the physical gaps are in New Haven's urban tree canopy, species that are thriving, as well as the trees that have become disamenities. This helps URI plan for greater species diversity and a more resilient urban forest, especially in the face of pests, diseases, and climate change. In 2023, we built upon our 2022 goal by assessing Newhallville and Westville, with a total of 4,614 street trees counted. Of those, we found that 401 trees, or 8.7%, were in conditions of concern—stumps, standing dead, or very poor. We shared this data with our partners at the New Haven DPPW to enable more proactive street-tree management and to reduce the risk of hazardous trees.

Inventory field staff walked through each street of Newhallville and Westville, for a total of 66 miles, and identified, measured, and updated the tree data in TreeKeeper. Oaks, maples, and lindens stood out for their high proportion of each neighborhood's trees. While trees like tulip poplar, sweetgum, and Amur maackia were

not as plentiful, their average condition was often exemplary. Pin oak, Zelkova, Norway maple, London planetree, and lindens were the five most counted trees in Newhallville. In Westville, Norway maple, pin oak, red maple, lindens, and honeylocust were the five most abundant. In both neighborhoods, for example, there was a beautiful Miyabe maple, a common sweetgum, but also an ailing Purpleleaf plum and Callery pear—signs of planting programs gone by, and reminders of the legacy of Urban Renewal in New Haven.

Inventories from URI are helpful for prioritizing and visualizing the needs of New Haven's trees of concern, and for people to understand the magnitude of the task that is asked of the DPPW. We discussed this with many members of the public who were concerned about potential tree hazards, and connected with people who were admirers of their nearby street tree. One of the most frequent comments that we encountered from people while inventorying trees was about trees of concern. It is the DPPW's responsibility to remove standing dead and hazardous trees, and several people were grateful to be introduced to the city's process for that. More often than not, though, people needed a space to grieve the approaching end of their tree's life, and to share with a listening ear.

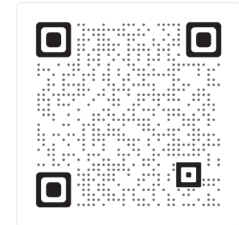
Like people, trees have a beginning, middle, and end of life. It is necessary to plan for the end, and to help trees "age gracefully," both by planting climate-resilient trees and monitoring those already in the ground. Part of monitoring includes staying up to date on current pests and pathogens that are risks to specific species—the emerald ash borer and beech leaf disease, for example. There is a host of experts learning about

Gathering Ideas to Re-Envision New Haven's Parks

URI Selected to Facilitate Community Input

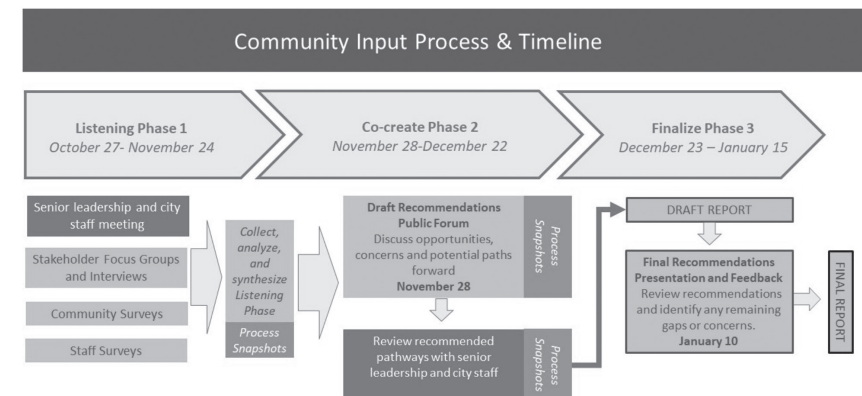
The City of New Haven intends to restructure how it manages its parks and wants to include public feedback to make improvements. In October 2023, URI submitted a competitive bid and was honored to be selected by the city to lead the facilitation of gathering the community input. Since then, URI has generated and summarized a bilingual community survey, conducted several focus group meetings with city staff and park stakeholders, and hosted a November 28 community forum. To see periodic process snapshots and learn more about the endeavor, visit our website:

<https://uri.yale.edu/get-involved/gathering-ideas-re-envision-parks>



The final opportunity to participate will be on January 10, 5:30 pm, at the Final Recommendations Community Forum. We invite all New Haven residents to register to join using the link or QR code above.

On January 15, URI will submit to the city a report including a summarization of the community feedback, case studies on how other municipality-park systems are managed, and recommendations for the city to consider. URI is grateful for the opportunity to engage with the community in this capacity and to be entrusted with this important project. Thank you to all the participants who have taken the time to respond to the surveys and/or participate in focus groups and/or the community forum. Your input matters and is appreciated. It is what will help to shape how our city manages and the ways we experience our parks in the future.



The graphic illustrates the process and timeline for gathering community input.

Quinnipiac River Park: A Riverfront Space for All

by Roan Hollander (continued from page 1)

walking trails but few trees. Regular stewardship of the park launched nine years ago when Tom Burwell, who grew up just a few blocks from the park, began reaching out to community members to form the Friends of Quinnipiac River Park group. Tom used to go crabbing and fishing at the park, and he speaks fondly of the community events that were hosted there when he was a kid. Despite eventually moving away from the park, he knew he had to get involved in caring for it after hurricanes Irene and Sandy hit the park hard in 2011 and 2012, respectively. After the storms, there were only six trees left standing near Grand Avenue. Since then, the Friends of Quinnipiac River Park group has planted 27 trees there and hundreds of native perennials and shrubs to attract pollinators and birds. The group's consistency each summer and their amicable, open nature give them an exuberant magnetism apparent to everyone who stops by during their workdays.

In the summer of 2022, after years of stewardship and increased park use, neighbors' interest in making some major improvements to the park arose. Shared hopes for change concerned the walking trails' not forming a whole and accessible loop, eroded parts of the seawall, the deteriorating fence along the road, and a need for more shady areas. Over the course of several community meetings hosted at longtime Friends of Quinnipiac River Park member Sadi Vidro's house, the Friends group and community members created a survey with Alder Sarah Miller to gain a better idea of what residents wanted to see change. Questions on the survey asked about how neighbors like to use the

park, what issues they've encountered in the park, and what improvements they'd like to see. The survey received over 130 responses, and certain points to address arose repeatedly.

In the responses, the most frequently mentioned deterrents that stopped people from using the park were litter, crumbling walking trails, and safety concerns. Agreed-upon priorities for park improvement included adding trash cans, repairing walking trails, and planting more trees and flowers. There were several community meetings held to discuss the results and what initial plans were to look like going forward after a consensus was reached. Alder Miller, who facilitated much of this undertaking, remarked that "It's been a positive process all the way through, because people understand that this park is a citywide resource."

State Senator Martin Looney and Representative Al Paolillo were involved in the process right alongside the community and the city, and they were integral in securing funding. The dollars to replace dilapidated preexisting infrastructure are coming from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Representative Paolillo was also able to win funding for improvements at four other parks around New Haven as well: Peat Meadow, Fairmont, Fort Wooster, and Lighthouse Point.

During a July community meeting at the park this past summer, the air was noticeably full of excitement and joy. After a year of surveying, meeting, and planning, a map of the proposed improvements was going to be revealed. The map was drawn up by URI's Chris Ozyck, who is also a park neighbor. As he walked the group of neighbors and city and state representatives through the



Photo credit: Roan Hollander

Members of the Friends of Quinnipiac River Park group and a freshly planted honeylocust this past summer.

plans, clear common themes emerged: the creation of places for people to come together, infrastructure improvement, and ecological restoration.

To generate more opportunities for neighbors to meet, there will be a gathering space with wooden picnic tables near the Grand Ave bridge, game tables farther down the length of the park, and the open field will be maintained. Increasing the tree cover at the park is a big priority, and, where the trail cuts through the path perpendicular to the river, more trees will be planted on either side to provide more habitat and shade. A living shoreline comprised of native plants will be positioned to combat erosion. Popular fishing spots will

feature new interpretive signage about the ecological history of the area as well as additional trash cans. Infrastructure improvements include completing the path that makes an incomplete loop around the park and adding three new water spigots, as easy water access will encourage the planting of more trees and perennials.

The next steps in implementing these plans are dependent on final securing of funding so the process can begin. Katherine Jacobs, the Chief Landscape Architect for the City of New Haven, says that once the city approves the grant from the state, they're hoping to begin the renovations as soon as possible.

Restoring and improving Quinnipiac River Park have been a collaborative effort involving countless people who care deeply for the Fair Haven and New Haven communities. Tom Burwell described the process to me as being similar to making a snowman—"People are holding onto an idea, and they just want to join something they can believe in." With enough support to get the ball rolling, the momentum and progress build and continue on. Tom's vision for the park is clear. He wants it to be "a sanctuary, and a tranquil getaway to come into contact with nature," declaring, "We should all be out there enjoying that peaceful, beautiful waterfront park in New Haven." The new improvements coming to Quinnipiac River Park will go a long way toward making that dream a reality.