Spring 2025

Urban Issues

NEWSLETTER OF THE URBAN RESOURCES INITIATIVE AT THE YALE SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Liz Doyle-Santini, Sam Sigg, Kevin Maher and Tashi finished planting a new park tree in July 2024.

Fort Wooster Park: A Green Sanctuary of History and Community

By Yvonne Trenh

Fort Wooster Park, nestled in New Haven's East Shore, is a unique greenspace where historical archeological significance meets what is now an ecologically rich forest with beautiful trails for community members. The neighborhood park is cared for by the Friends of Fort Wooster, a volunteer-run non-profit organization affiliated with the Elm City Parks Conservancy, and works closely with URI's Community Greenspace program.

A Site of Deep Historical Significance

Long before it became a public park, Fort Wooster was home to the Quinnipiac Tribe,

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From **The Director**

URI is fortunate that our mission of engaging the public in stewardship of our local environment means that our purpose is focused on carrying out good work. Articles in this newsletter shine a light on some terrific examples, from our partnership with the Garden Club of New Haven, to our work with stellar Greenspace volunteers, to our amazing staff.

Longtime Garden Club member, educator, and tree advocate Carol Ross emailed me an article she prepared for this newsletter very shortly before her recent passing. URI owes a great debt of gratitude to Carol and the Garden Club for their many years of supportive partnership. For instance, Carol and fellow members successfully advocated to their national organization for URI to be awarded a Founders Fund gift in 2011, which supported 20 high school interns to plant and inventory trees. This marked our initial endeavor to inventory the city's street trees, which continues as an ongoing effort. The Garden Club members not only helped raise funds, they also got actively involved working alongside the youth to inventory the trees on the New Haven Green.

Volunteer efforts of the Friends of Fort Wooster are equally inspiring. Yvonne Trenh shares their impressive story of working together to advocate and care for this park. Through URI's Community Greenspace program, they diligently clear invasive vegetation, plant native trees, and improve the park's trails.

Every volunteer group participating in our Community Greenspace program has their own remarkable history of achievement. We have included in this issue a photo essay of some early imagery of volunteers who have tirelessly carried out good work for many years on behalf of their neighborhood. Within this constellation of stars, one shines particularly bright: Chris Ozyck, who has led this program for 25 years. Named Person of the Year in 2020 by the New Haven Independent, and Urban Angel Award by the Urban Design League in 2009, Chris was also recognized by the Friends of East Rock Park this spring. They celebrated his accomplishments with a luncheon and proclamation from the city thanking him.

I am so grateful to our many partners, volunteers, and to Chris and rest of the URI staff for their collective hard work and leadership.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

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The Garden Club of New Haven is celebrating 100 years of serving the Greater New Haven community!

By Carol Ross †

2024–2025 has been a time for reflection, for planting, for reconnecting, and for celebration.

Using both our mission statement—*to create interest in and promote knowledge of gardening, preservation of natural resources, and civic horticultural work in the Greater New Haven area*—and our centennial tagline, *Rooted in History. Planted in the Present. Branching into the Future,* as a focus, we have reconnected with our many civic partners throughout the city. No partner could be stronger than Urban Resources Initiative.

Rooted in History

You have educated us on the importance of street trees in an urban environment, and we have become strong supporters of your efforts. We worked with you to map the urban canopy, we have promoted the benefits of a planting project that lowers surface temperatures, aids water absorption, reduces energy costs, pollutants, and stormwater runoff, and we have advocated for your goal to plant 10,000 trees.

In 2011, we applauded your **GreenSkills** and **Community Greenspace** program, which provided community groups with the materials, expertise, training, and structure necessary to carry out environmental-restoration efforts within many New Haven neighborhoods.

These projects, which were designed to restore, improve, and protect the quality of the environment, seemed to the Garden Club to be worthy of national attention. We partnered with you to apply for a Founders Fund award from the Garden Club of America. URI was recognized as an exceptionally strong community asset and received one of their three annual award grants!

Planted in the Present

This year our efforts have been many and varied. Last fall, GCNH planted shrubs (recommended by Broken Arrow Nursery) in the New Haven Botanical Garden of Healing. Our Garden History and Design Committee started to document this serene and beautiful space for submission to the permanent garden archives of the Smithsonian Institution, and a tree was planted there in honor of Colleen Murphy-Dunning, whom the Club designated as a centennial environmental hero—a person who has significantly contributed to protecting and enhancing the health, sustainability, and beauty of our environment.

In November, the Garden Club, recognizing that green spaces are critical components of successful and livable urban areas, held a symposium at the Hotel Marcel entitled **Green Spaces: an Urban Imperative**. The discussion featured four exceptional green-space preservationists advocating for initiatives that create healthy open spaces for our communities. Once again URI joined the Garden Club in promoting this event, and Colleen served as moderator of the panel.

Branching into the Future

In honor of the club's commitment to future civic stewardship, an endowment fund (*The Centennial Fund for the Future*) has been established at the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. This fund is envisioned as a source of scholarships for graduate and undergraduate students attending higher-educational institutions in Connecticut, studying in the fields of horticulture, ecology, forestry, the preservation of natural resources, environmental science, and/or climate change.

The Garden Club of New Haven is excited about this opportunity to encourage and support research in areas which will make a sustainable impact on the environment and the well-being of Connecticut residents. Garden Club members are rooted in the community in many ways and eagerly anticipate nourishing the growth of ecological research and service far into the future.

As we celebrate 100 years, we take great pride in collaboration of over two decades with URI!

† *We sadly report the passing of contributor Carol Ross in February.*

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Fort Wooster Park: A Green Sanctuary of History and Community

By Yvonne Trenh

Sam Sigg and Tashi pruning invasive vines in March 2025.

a coastal Algonquian group whose name meant Long Water People. Their village, situated at the top of the hill and called *Mioonhtuck,* was palisaded as a defense for protection from other Native American groups, and later became a sacred burial site.

In 1638, just following European settlement, English settlers signed a treaty with the Quinnipiac leaders, designating only 1,200 acres on eastern New Haven Harbor as a reservation for the Native American tribe, promising sanctuary in the event of a future attack. The reservations included what is now Fort Wooster Park. However, by the 18th century, due to illness and displacement, the Quinnipiac people no longer inhabited the area.

The hill's strategic location became significant again during the American Revolution. In 1775, the New Haven Colony constructed a signal tower atop the hill to alert of the movement of British forces along the coast of Long Island Sound. Fort Wooster played a key role in communication and defense against the British invasion of 1779. Though the fort's defenders were ultimately overcome, Fort Wooster Hill remains an enduring symbol of resistance and the fight for American independence. Named after Major General David Wooster, a Connecticut patriot who was killed in action during the Revolutionary War, Fort Wooster Park honors his legacy and sacrifice.

A Community-Driven Restoration

Today, Fort Wooster Park is not only a historical site but also a growing ecological haven and a shared community space. Reestablished in 2012, the year-round stewardship by the Friends of Fort Wooster has played a vital role in the park's ongoing restoration. They have worked tirelessly to care for the park, clearing invasives, improving trails, and planting native trees and wildflowers.

"When we first started working on the park, it was overgrown, forgotten, and neglected," says Ann McGuire, a longtime volunteer. "But we could see its potential to become a place where the community could connect with nature and learn about the history right under their feet."

Volunteer Sam Sigg describes the effort as more than just a cleanup: "It wasn't just about clearing the brush—it was about creating a space where people could experience the park's historical roots and natural beauty."

URI's Greenspace program has been instrumental in this transformation, offering expertise and material support to enhance the park's ecological health throughout the past four summers. Tashi, a second-year Master of Forestry student at the Yale School of the Environment and a former Community Greenspace intern, reflects on their incredible progress this summer, "We cleared out invasive species, like English ivy and mugwort, and got the chance to plant multiple native trees, including white pines and oaks.... The park is not just a space for people to walk through—it's a place they can be proud of and connect to."

A Vision for the Future

The City of New Haven recently received a state grant to further Fort Wooster Park's transformation, allowing the Friends of Fort Wooster and their partners to take the next step in its redesign, including significant infrastructure and ecological improvements. Their long-term vision is to create a beautiful, accessible space that honors its rich history while fostering a thriving native habitat.

Josh Price, City of New Haven's Landscape Architect leading this redesign, explains the importance of the grant. "The funding we've received allows us to carry out Phase 1 of the redesign, but it's also about creating a comprehensive plan that can guide future investments." The first phase includes the removal of invasive species, the planting of native trees, and well-designed trails that connect park visitors to key historical and ecological features. "We want to create areas that highlight the beauty of the environment while supporting native plant species and encouraging community engagement," says Price.

One exciting feature of the redesign is the creation of more native habitat and structures that will provide essential stopover space for migratory birds along the Atlantic Flyway. Additionally, by expanding and better connecting the park's trails, visitors will be able to more easily explore the historic and ecological aspects of the park.

Community Engagement: The Heart of the Park

The efforts to engage residents through volunteering, education, and advocacy are at the heart of the park's long-term restoration project. As Tashi points out, "If we're not creating a place that works for the people who live here, what are we doing?" Sam Sigg echoes his sentiment. "This park has always been part of the community's identity.... Seeing people enjoy it now is a victory for all the work we've put in."

Fort Wooster is always looking for additional volunteers to join them in stewarding their special sanctuary. "It's incredibly rewarding," says Liz Doyle-Santini. "You help create a space for the whole community." No special skills are needed, just a willingness to show up. "Every effort makes a difference," adds Al Santini. With continued community support from people like you, Fort Wooster Park will remain a lasting treasure, where history, nature, and people converge, creating a space for future generations to connect, learn, and thrive.

We owe credit to the Fort Wooster Park booklet for the historical facts printed here.

Chris Ozyck, former volunteer
and URI Associate Director

Jody Kelly of Shepard Street

The Community Greenspace program **just celebrated its 30th year!**

Adeli D'Arce of Saltonstall and Lloyd

Betty Thompson (in pink) of Cedar Hill

Thank you to all Greenspace volunteers!

Mr. Scott at Watson and Bassett

Sara Ohly far left, Nan Bartow (in blue)
and Chris Ozyck far right

We are deeply grateful to all the invaluable Greenspace volunteers for everything that you have done for your communities and public greenspaces.

There are at least 21 volunteers with outstanding records of dedication—over two decades of service—whom we want to especially applaud: our **Chris Ozyck** former volunteer and longstanding URI Associate Director; **James Scott** of Watson and Bassett; **Betty Thompson** of Cedar Hill; **Sara Ohly** of Lenzi Park; **Pat Wallace** of Rainbow Park; **Nan Bartow** of Beaver Ponds Park; **Adeli D'Arce** of Saltonstall and Lloyd; **Rose Bonito** of Clifton Street; **John Fitzpatrick** of Monitor Square; **Lenora Moore Turner and Katie and Paul Hawkins** of Orchard Street; **Steve Wilcox** of Oyster Point; **Jody Kelly** of Shepard Street; **Roxanne Condon** of Scantlebury Park; **Cordalie Benoit** of Russo Park/Wooster Square; **Stephanie FitzGerald, Sandy Shaner, and Cathy Roy** of East Edge; **Kate and Bob Bradley** of Blockwatch 303; and **Evelyn Rodriguez** of Arch Street.

East Edge gardeners with Sandy Shaner on the right

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In 2011 interns Dimitri Lemonas and Terrence Walker inventory trees with support from the Garden Club of New Haven.