

# Landscape & Ecology

In addition to recreation and relaxation opportunities provided by Hartford's parks, they also provide critical ecosystem and habitat services, fostering healthy environments and habitat for species in an urban area.

## URBAN HABITAT

The city's critical habitats are found along the Connecticut River and also near Keney Park, highlighting that these areas are a unique natural asset with environmental significance. Hartford is home to nearly 300 resident and migratory bird species in which parks and open spaces provide significant habitat, especially Keney, Goodwin, and Cedar Hill Cemetery.

Approximately 26% of Hartford is covered by tree canopy. While this number is comparable to many other cities in the Northeast, one urban forestry study concludes that Hartford has room to increase canopy coverage to as high as 42%. Many of the parks with lower canopy numbers typically have a high

percentage of open lawns and athletic fields, however, these parks and other may still have potential to increase tree canopy cover. (Individual parks concept plans have attempted to address this.)

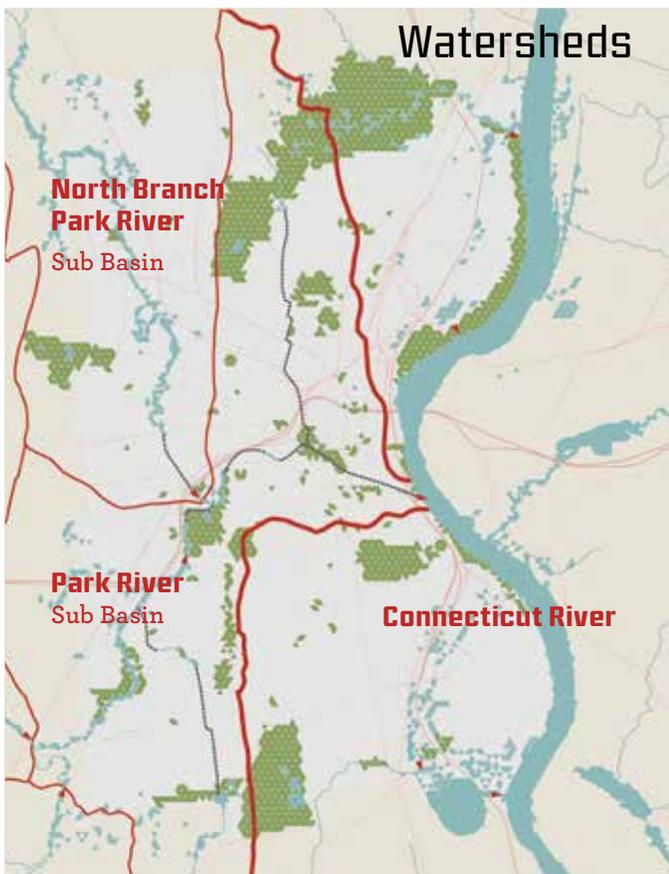
## WATERSHEDS

The Connecticut River is the largest river in New England, draining 11,250 square miles. from Quebec to Long Island Sound. The Park River (a tributary of the Connecticut River), drains the western half of Hartford but has been culverted through significant portions of the city. Approximately 40% of the city is covered by impervious surfaces which contribute a significant amount of runoff, sediment, and pollutants into the Park and Connecticut River systems. Particularly in densely built, urban areas like Hartford,



upland parks can help reduce potential flooding through strategies to help detain and infiltrate stormwater. Hartford's parks and open spaces help protect the city from flooding, reduce and filter runoff, and provide habitat for numerous common and endangered species.

Numerous Hartford parks correspond with floodplain areas along the Connecticut River and along the North and South Branches of the Park River. The North Branch Park River Watershed Management Plan, approved in July 2010, recognizes this linkage between open space and water management and seeks to protect and improve the ecological integrity of the North Branch Park River and its watershed. The concept plans and connectivity plan within the Parks Guide each also seek to find ways to connect the parks and city open spaces as means to improve watershed quality.







# Partnerships

Increased collaboration among City departments, matched by expanded partnerships with Friends Groups, non-profits, the business community, and others will help improve Hartford's parks.

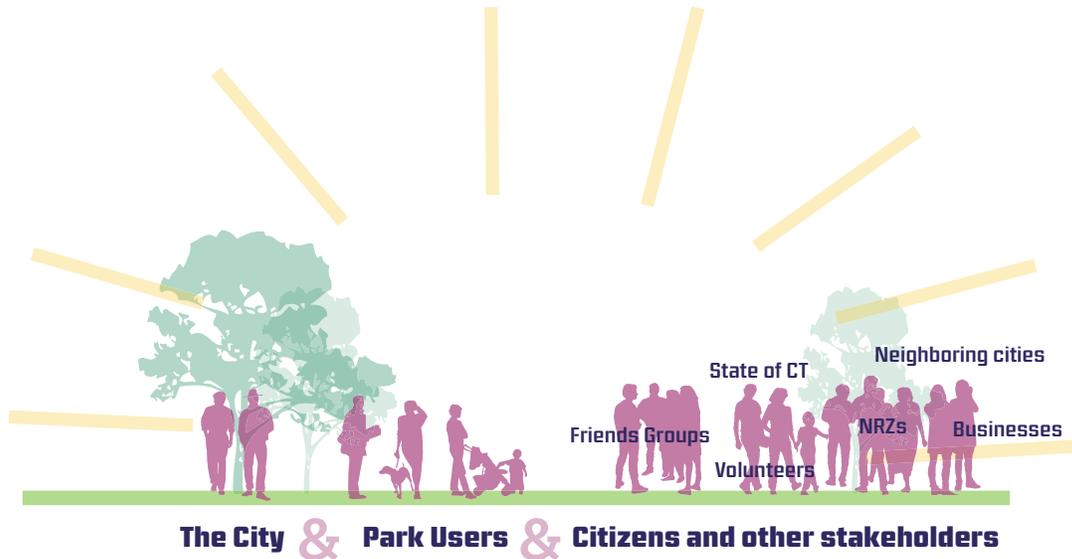
Hartford's system has the potential to be one of the best in the country, yet currently, upkeep and maintenance fails to meet residents' expectations. How do we improve all parks to create a top-notch park system? Given today's economic climate and budget challenges, the City alone cannot close the gap. It will take a team effort, with many different players, to get there. Increased collaboration among City departments, matched by expanded partnerships with Friends Groups, non-profits, the business community, and others will help improve park maintenance, programming, and image.

## **CITY OF HARTFORD: MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS**

First, improving collaboration begins within the City. With close collaboration, the City of Hartford can present a single, unified point of contact for the public, improving user experience. Behind the scenes, different departments and divisions can ensure implementation of the Parks Guide, coordinate scheduling, conduct park maintenance, organize programming, publicize events, and keep parks safe.

Development Services will be the central shepherd of the Capital City Parks Guide, ensuring that future capital projects reflect the priorities of the planning process, that policy changes are supported, and that future development or infrastructure plans consider the parks perspective. The Parks Guide Steering Committee brought together key representatives from City departments invested in the parks and open space system. After adoption of the Parks Guide, it is recommended that this pattern continue, with the creation of an internal Parks Leadership Group. This will be an interdepartmental group that meets regularly, such as quarterly, to discuss major issues in parks capital projects, connectivity projects, safety, management, or events. Representatives should include Development Services (including a MECA representative), Public Works, Recreation, Police, and a member of the Mayor's Office.

Given the current department structure, close coordination between the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Recreation Division within the Department of Families, Children, Youth, and



Recreation is critical. DPW’s primary focus is the physical condition and improvements of the parks and connectivity system, while the Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation’s main responsible is recreational programming.

Beyond these departments, the Board of Education is another important partner. Schools include playgrounds and fields of their own, but in many cases, schools also benefit from additional park resources. Frequently, due to land and financial restrictions, new schools are being constructed without fields of their own, so the reliance of schools on city park resources is likely to increase. Additional use places a greater strain on parks, so it is important that the Board of Education pitches in to help with maintenance at these parks. Similarly, schools provide play and sports resources of their own that can be shared with the community in off hours. Careful coordination and clear rules are required to make these partnerships successful.

Police, Development Services, and Transportation also play important roles in parks. A division of Development Services, MECA (Marketing, Events & Cultural Affairs Division) can help with programming and advertising, spreading the word about up-coming events at parks - an important service according to community feedback. Police help keep parks safe by enforcing rules and laws and creating a sense of security. Programming and increasing park users, such as by MECA or downtown events, will also help deter negative behavior. Many studies have shown that in urban areas, park security is not about limiting access, but in growing park users. Departments need to be aligned and communicating about their different roles in park security and safety.

### **PARTNERS FOR A REGIONAL RESOURCE**

The “Capital City Parks System” is a regional resource. Parks like Bushnell and Elizabeth draw crowds from

many miles away. Elizabeth Park's famous Rose Gardens are even said to draw international visitors! Many of Hartford's largest jewels are partially within other cities, so residents in neighboring towns can also enjoy these parks conveniently. Because these parks serve multiple communities and the State of Connecticut, Hartford is in a position to draw funding and support from additional communities, organizations, or the State. Riverfront Recapture benefits from funding from the MDC (the Metropolitan District, the region's water and sewer authority). Regional funding mechanisms and statewide support should be investigated.

Minneapolis successfully lobbied for state funding for its Olmstedian park system, and today it maintains one of the most highly revered park systems in the country. In Minnesota, parks and trails of regional or statewide significance are eligible to receive funding through the Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program. Grants support acquisition, development, improvement, and restoration projects. In Pennsylvania, the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD) receives half the proceeds from a 1% Allegheny County Sales and Use Tax to fund regional assets. Assets include parks, libraries, and other cultural, sport, and civic facilities and programs. RAD funds help support "regional" parks, including five within the City of Pittsburgh. Since RAD's beginning in 1995, parks have received more than \$400 mil to support repairs, safety improvements, accessibility projects, landscape renovations, and other projects.

## FRIENDS GROUPS AND NRZS

More locally, Friends Groups and similar organizations are playing increasing roles in many parks. Most of Hartford's regional parks have long-established Friends Group, and similar groups for several neighborhood parks have recently formed.

Friends Groups help in many ways for parks – from day-to-day maintenance, to some improvement projects, to revenue generation, to volunteer recruiting and coordination. Friends Groups can also provide programming and help promote a positive image of the park. The Elizabeth Park Conservancy is a good example of how a Friends Group can generate revenue. The Conservancy recently entered into a contract with the City of Hartford that allows Conservancy to operate the Pond House restaurant and receive a portion of the profits. Revenue from the Pond House currently provides 50% of their annual budget, helping them have a small staff, including a fundraiser. Similarly, Riverfront Recapture excels at building partnerships with local businesses, schools, the City of Hartford, and other communities to provide programming, volunteers, and financial support. The Knox Foundation contributes in a similar way, working toward civic renewal and "greening" broadly across all of Hartford. The Foundation also has a focus on downtown improvements and a division called the Knox Parks Foundation that help its mission align closely with that of the Parks Guide. Projects include clean up days, tree plantings, plant sales and community gardens, and volunteer coordination.

The Parks Guide has benefited greatly from the

input of the Friends Groups, and the process has also provided opportunities for Friends Groups to talk with one another. Establishing a regular joint meeting among Friends Groups and the City to discuss issues and share successful strategies could help Friends Groups learn from one another, and foster coordination. Perhaps new partnerships among Friends Groups could even emerge! For neighborhood parks without Friends Groups, the City should work with the established NRZs to share some responsibilities for day-to-day general upkeep.

Hartford has a robust downtown and is an employment hub for the region, particularly in the financial services and insurance sector. The City can explore partnerships with downtown businesses to become active stewards of the parks through “adopt-a-park,” dedicated donations, or other corporate support programs. Downtown parks, such as Wexford, Pulaski, Bushnell, or Barnard, are particularly good options.

#### Action Steps for City:

- Hire a volunteer coordinator to:
  - Negotiate with unions to maximize volunteer potential
  - Formalize shared agreements with Friends Groups to define responsibilities
  - Develop a corporate support program

Principles for maximizing input and volunteer support:

- Make it easy to help!
- Centralize information clearly on a volunteer webpage
- Provide different options for contributions
- Offer incentives/benefits for helping
  - For example, create a corporate partner program, with different levels based on support; in return, specify benefits at each level (ex. free rental of park pavilion for an evening or free passes to local event)

# With all these partners, who does what?

## Roles & Responsibilities

### Development Services

- Oversee implementation and shepherd the vision of the Parks Guide
- Coordinate parks with future developments
- Maintain the parks website
- Coordinate a Parks Leadership Quarterly Roundtable

### MECA

- Programming, events, and marketing
- Master event calendar

### DPW

- Maintenance of parks and cemeteries
- Capital improvement projects
- Coordinate with other groups and volunteers (Friends Groups, etc.)
- Field scheduling

### Recreation

- Programs and fee structure

### Friends Groups (or similar)

- Typically day-to-day oversight
- Basic maintenance and upkeep
- Programming
- Revenue generation
- Minor capital improvements
- Light security (“eyes on park”) – Rangers Programs (sometimes)

### NRZs

- Maintenance and upkeep
- Programming
- Public outreach

### Park Users

- Treat parks with respect
- Leave the parks in a better state than found
- Spread the word about Hartford’s parks – tell your friends and neighbors!

### Education

- Maintenance for parks that schools use (including fields and playgrounds)

### Police

- Security

### CT DOT & Local Transportation Dept

- Help implement bicycle connectivity
- Improve pedestrian access to parks

### Neighboring Communities

- Shared responsibility for Hartford parks in their town

### State of CT

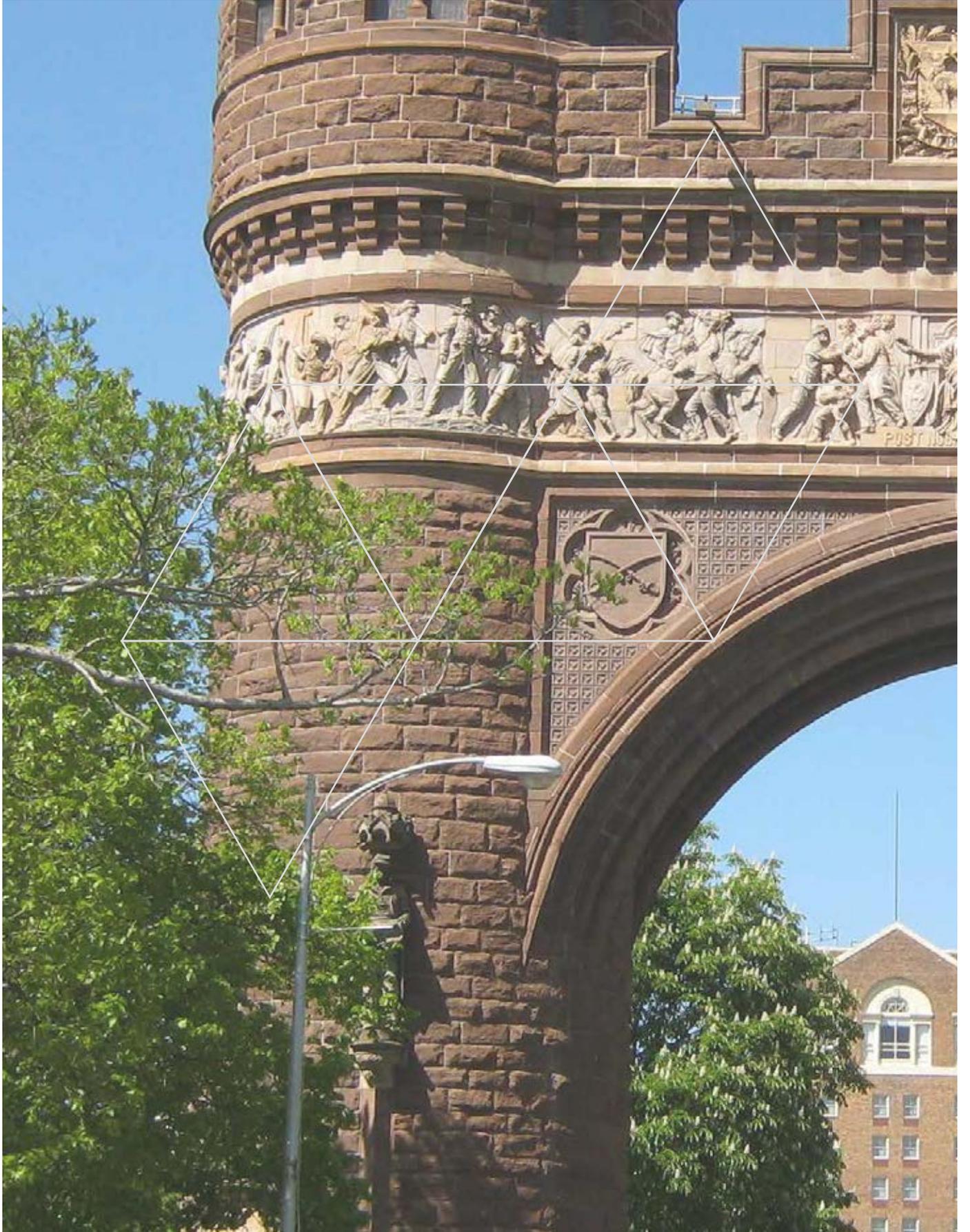
- System-wide funding (“Capital City Parks”)
- Special focus on and support for Bushnell, major riverfront infrastructure projects, and connectivity plan

### Businesses/Private Sector

- Monetary donations
- In-kind donations
- Volunteers
- Rentals

### Volunteers

- Clean-up, light maintenance
- Small improvement projects



# Governance & Financial Sustainability

Given recent challenges for operations and funding the system, an assessment of park operations and maintenance practices was conducted as part of the Capital City Parks Guide.

## PARK OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE ASSESSMENT

Given recent challenges for operations and funding the system, an assessment of park operations and maintenance practices was conducted as part of the Parks Guide. Background research for the assessment included a review of the Trust for Public Land's 2007 report "Renewing a Historic Legacy," Mayor Segarra's 2011 Green Ribbon Task Force Report (GRTF), Parks Maintenance Manual prepared by TO Design, LLC (2013), current budget information, a review of public input comments, and a series of meetings with Parks Division and Public Works employees, as well as other City department staff. As part of the assessment, two employee focus groups were held to gain perspectives of employees working in park maintenance activities.

The Parks and Cemeteries Division is currently part of the City's Public Works Department and represents approximately 15% of the Department's General Fund budget. The Parks Division program services include the following goals:

- Park Maintenance Goal: Provide the residents of Hartford and the region with well-maintained parks, athletic fields, play areas, and playgrounds for recreation, events, and passive activities.
- Horticulture Goal: Provide residents of Hartford with high-quality seasonal landscaping and garden displays for recreational activities and scenic areas.
- Forestry: Provide residents of Hartford and the region with a healthy and safe urban forest,

The staffing and budget resource decreases have been well documented in previous reports and continue to be a major challenge for quality of the parks system.

streetscapes, and parks to enjoy.

- Cemetery Operations: Provide residents and families of Hartford with burial operations for efficient internment of deceased and to ensure appropriate landscaping for cemeteries.

The current (2013) Parks Division budget is \$1,919,225. Current there are 31 park employees.<sup>1</sup> Park maintenance staffing has reduced from 62 positions in 1999 to 35 in 2006. The staffing and budget resource decreases have been well documented in previous reports and continue to be a major challenge for quality of the parks system. The Green Ribbon Task Force Maintenance Subcommittee identified 22 recommendations for improvement, as follows, which – despite some progress – bear repeating today:

- Workforce staffing and resources
- Supervision: minimal level of supervision exists
- Lack of maintenance standards
- Equipment: replace current with state-of-art

<sup>1</sup> As of May 2, 2014, including 23 park maintenance workers, 3 tree trimmers (forestry), and 5 Elizabeth Park gardeners.

technology

- Professionalism: seasoned professionals managing parks
- Urban forest: maintain, expand, and care for city’s tree canopy
- Volunteers: maximize the use of volunteers
- Maintenance deficits: conditions of poor quality and deteriorating conditions
- Staff training: skill and knowledge deficits
- Job descriptions, organizational structure: outdated descriptions
- Seasonal/contractual employees: utilize to accommodate staffing flexibility during the off-season
- Maintenance impact of new facilities needs to be considered
- Ecosystems: implementation of policies and procedures that support sustainable design practices

- Sustainable practices
- Information systems, technology improvement
- Regional cooperation for maintenance, sharing of equipment
- Design standards: standardization of park components and amenities
- School ground maintenance: consideration for Parks to maintain school grounds
- Illegal dumping is a pervasive problem throughout the system
- Golf course management: contractors should be held to the same standards as the Parks Department as policies and procedures are

developed

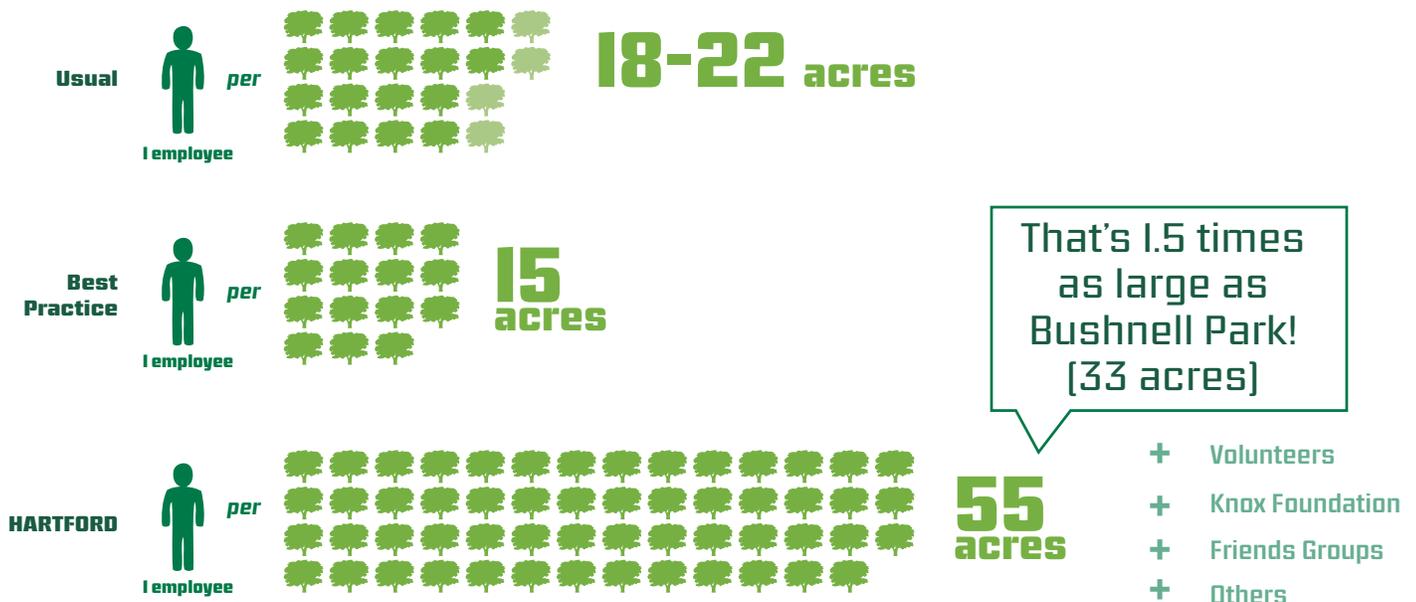
- Respecting our parks: education of users about parks as a resource
- Value of burial grounds: explore the design, construction and long-term management of high-density urban burial facilities

### Operations and Management Benchmark Comparisons

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) manages a database of information of park and recreation systems nationwide in its PRORAGIS database (Parks and Recreation Operating Ratio and Geographical Information System), which was

## Maintenance Capacity

- 2,200 acres of parks and cemeteries in Hartford’s park system
- approximately 1,700 developed acres require significantly higher maintenance efforts than undeveloped areas\*



\* undeveloped = natural areas along South Branch of Park River and along I-91 (south edge of city); 1/2 of Batterson and 1/3 of Keney

used for the parks needs assessment and to compare operations and maintenance strategies. Hartford was reviewed within a comparative field of cities with a population of 100,000 to 200,000; Hartford's current population is 124,775. These criteria allowed the Hartford park system to be compared to 28 systems nationwide. Due to the character of the data, the New England region was under-represented. The information includes staffing and budget comparisons. One limitation of the comparisons is the exclusion of any volunteer hours. Hartford has significant volunteer help to maintain its system; however, this is not captured in peer comparisons nor is it frequently well documented.

### **Parks and Recreation Budget**

In Hartford, Parks and Recreation operate separately from one another. Parks is part of the Public Works Department, and Recreation is part of the Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation. For

budget comparisons to peers, Hartford's Parks and Recreation Divisions are both included in the first comparative information. Using the FY 12-13 numbers, Parks and Recreation Divisions have a combined budget of \$3,853,179. This represents a 6.3% budget reduction in Parks and a 14% reduction in recreation from the FY 11-12 actual figures to the FY13-14 projections.

When compared to peers nationwide, Hartford's budget is significantly lower than the 28 comparable agencies. It is 48% lower than even the lower quartile of reporting agencies. This is particularly important to consider in the context of Hartford generous park acreage which is significantly higher than other reporting agencies, exceeding the number of the upper quartile of reporting agencies. Due to this, when Hartford's operating expenses per acre of land are compared to peers, the challenge becomes even more clear: Hartford's number, once again, is 232% lower than the lowest quartile of reporting agencies.

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## Parks Staff Recommendations

Linked directly to budget challenges, it has been well documented that staffing deficits exist. The Green Ribbon Task Force advocated for 65 positions within the Parks Division; currently there are 31.<sup>2</sup> The approximate ideal number of staff was calculated to be 68; however, there are many organizational issues to consider as well.

## Department Organization

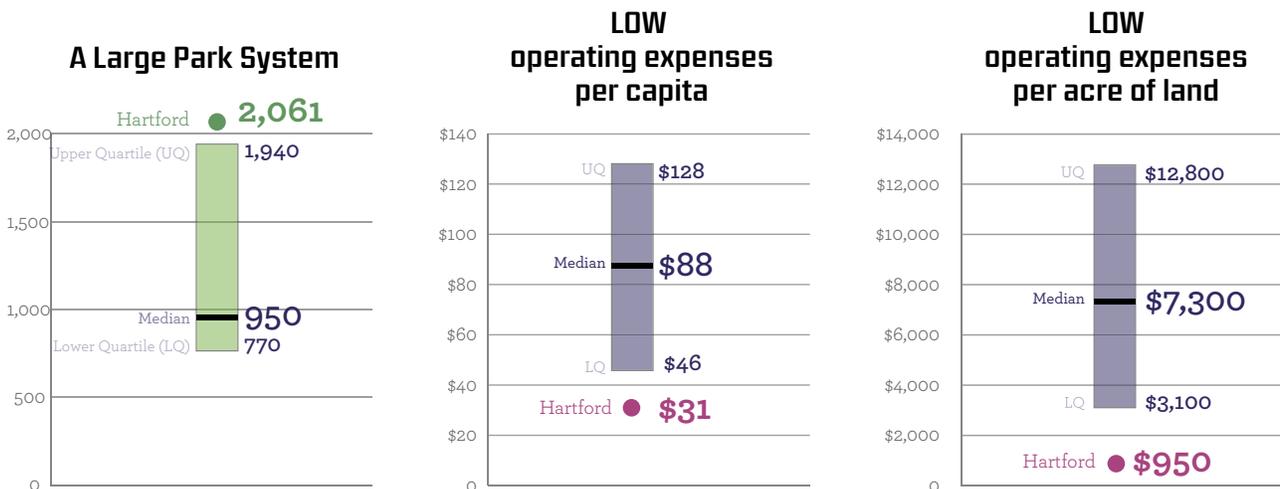
In past years and reports, there have been recommendations for a structure that includes a united parks and recreation department. The parks division has recently benefitted from the hiring of a Superintendent of Public Works and is currently restructuring in many ways. Employees reported that in the past there has been an absence of clear

<sup>2</sup> As of May 2, 2014, including 23 park maintenance workers, 3 tree trimmers (forestry), and 5 Elizabeth Park gardeners.

direction and vision for the division, including an absence of goals and objectives and methods to measure organizational performance. As changes are made, there is an opportunity to clarify the division's missions and core goals, and develop an annual work plan. With plans and schedules in place, employees will be able to become more proactive than reactive, more purposeful, and less random in day-to-day work assignments. A first step will be to develop and implement task lists for monthly, weekly, and daily tasks, as specified in the Parks Maintenance Manual.

One strategy that is currently being implemented by new leadership is to co-locate all operations under a single district. The current configuration includes an overall Parks Director with two Park Operations systems reporting to the director, one for the North district and another for the South district. Under the future single district strategy, there should be clear divisions of role and expertise to allow for skills

# Hartford staff maintain more acres with less money than comparably sized cities



- Data source: National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS database
- Graphs show Hartford compared to 28 systems nationwide with a population of 100,000 to 200,000

# A newly developed Parks Maintenance Manual identifies standards, work scheduling, and athletic field condition assessment and renovation recommendations.

development and specialized training. The Parks Guide recommends that four areas of responsibility include: grounds, structures, athletics, and special events/projects. Currently, the Parks Division and the Recreation Division report to separate departments, however, they share overlapping responsibilities, such as league use of athletic fields. The City is centralizing all scheduling of league fields under the Public Works Department.

Community feedback suggested that special events are a popular role of the parks system. Yet, special events are also a strain on parks staff and require weekend diligence and significant clean-up. Responsibilities for a special events/projects subgroup would include special event support, trash/

garbage pick-up, and special projects. When the Parks Division is able to build itself with additional staff, there should be an effort to negotiate with the union to create staggered work shifts to ensure weekend coverage, rather than all full-time employees working Monday through Friday. In the meantime, they can supplement the work force with a seasonal weekend crew. Marketing of events should also be considered.

## MAINTENANCE IMPROVEMENTS

Ongoing maintenance is a persistent challenge of the Parks Division. A newly developed Parks Maintenance Manual identifies standards, work scheduling, and athletic field condition assessment and renovation recommendations. These standards are sound and



Events like Envisionfest attract many visitors to parks, but these events can also strain park conditions and staff.

should be implemented incrementally to allow staff adjustment and system congruence. At the same time, the park concept plans support reduction of maintenance through consideration of possible low mow areas in parks system wide. Additionally, a work order system for both preventive and demand maintenance can be instituted to help prioritize tasks.

Implementation of the Parks Maintenance Manual recommendations can begin with a focus on turf management for both parks and athletic fields. If politically feasible, it would ease maintenance demand on limited staff to contract services for fertilization, pesticide application, and aeration until staff size is adequate to handle internally. Implementation can start with the following schedule:

#### **Parks**

- Aeration: Spring and Fall each year (work toward the ideal of three times a year)
- Pesticide application: once every two to three years (work toward annual application)
- Fertilization: once per year (work toward three times a year application)

#### **Athletic Fields**

- Aeration: Spring, Summer and Fall
- Pesticide application: twice a year
- Fertilization: four to five times a year
- Overseed: twice a year

#### **Low Mow Lawns**

The Parks Guide indicates areas within parks to be converted to No-mow grasses. These seed mixes, such

as Prairie Nursery's "No-Mow Lawn Mix," can greatly reduce the time spent maintaining park lawns. No-mow grasses are a blend of fescue grass varieties that, once established, grow about five inches tall. They are ideal for sunny and partial-shade sites that will receive regular activity such as picnicking and walking, but do not require grooming for sports activities. Despite their name, no-mow grasses require a single annual mowing to control weed development. Additionally, fescues have deep root systems making them more drought tolerant than other grass varieties, which reduces the need for irrigation in City parks.

Site preparation is critical to successful establishment of no-mow lawns. First, the ideal time to seed is between September 1 and November 1. Fescue grasses germinate best during these cool, damp months whereas most weeds germinate in spring. Once a site is selected the next step is to remove all existing grasses and weeds. There are four methods for removing existing vegetation:

- Smothering: Cover the site for a full year with black plastic, old carpet, plywood or a thick layer of leaves or newspapers.
- Sodcutting: Remove the top two to three inches of grass and soil using a sod-cutter. Till the site.
- Cultivating: Cultivate the site once a week for three weeks to kill the existing grasses. Cultivate once more before seeding to break up clumps.
- Herbicide: Apply Roundup to the site in either the spring or fall. Till the sod under when the grass has turned brown.

After existing grasses have been removed the site should be graded as needed. This is also the time

to add any necessary amendments such as sand to improve soil drainage. The site should be tilled and finely graded for firm seed-to-soil contact. The seed is applied using a drop seeder or by hand broadcasting. Lastly, rake the seed lightly into the tilled soil, and roll to firm it.

During the first two or three years of establishment the grasses will need addition care. This will mostly focus on controlling weed development. Additional mowing may be required to suppress weed growth until grasses are fully established. No-mow grasses should not be fertilized as this will promote weed growth.

#### **Other methods to improve maintenance practices**

Technology and up-to-date equipment should also be integrated into the Parks Division to improve maintenance practices. The Parks Division has begun to deploy iPhones to some maintenance supervisors. It should also initiate a replacement schedules for

equipment/facilities/park amenities. With this in place, they can have a clear schedule for equipment, vehicle, and amenity replacement and begin updating the infrastructure and equipment.

#### **SUPPLEMENTING STAFF THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**

While there is a need to grow the size of the Parks Division, this will not happen overnight. Further, it is not practical for the City alone to bear all responsibility for the quality of the parks. Already, major contributions to park quality are made by groups such as the Knox Foundation, Riverfront Recapture, the many parks Friends Groups, and dedicated park foundations such as the Bushnell Foundation. However, the level and presence of this involvement varies significantly from park to park, resulting in great variation in the quality of maintenance throughout the parks system. Additionally, there are no formal mechanisms in place to regulate duties of the City in relationship



Slopes are often good candidates for low mow areas.

Hartford's unique position as a regional parks resource creates a rationale to create partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions and the State of Connecticut to coordinate with maintenance of parks that are outside of Hartford boundaries or serve a regional benefit.

to friends groups, volunteer groups, and private foundations. The Parks Guide process has set up a pattern of meetings that bring together city managers and the Friends Groups. This pattern should be institutionalized and continued, and formal agreements should be put into place with Friends Groups. These agreements can list tasks completed by Division staff and task completed by Friends Groups.

Contracting services that the City cannot complete on its own is another option to reduce burden on staff. The City should work at re-directing resources in order to gain more maintenance employees, such as contracting trash removal services and moving those existing positions to grounds maintenance positions. Additional temporary positions can also help to close the gap. Staffing resources can be augmented with the use of local college interns majoring in turf management curricula or through the hiring of park rangers. Park rangers serve a dual purpose: they will add a presence in the parks and serve a public relations role.

In addition, quantify labor dollars spent doing litter

pick-up and educate the community about the costs. Increase fines. Initiate citizen groups for all major parks for park clean up days and volunteer park watch groups. Reach out to community groups, civic, and faith-based groups to elicit volunteers.

Finally, Hartford's unique position as a regional parks resource creates a rationale to create partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions and the State of Connecticut to coordinate with maintenance of parks that are outside of Hartford boundaries or serve a regional benefit.

## STAFF AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Just as important as growing the size of the staff is to nurture the skills and development of existing and future employees. Key areas to focus on include:

- Develop skills of supervisory level staff.
- Develop onboarding and ongoing training. Establish a training system based on skills and competencies needed for job classifications.
- Require specific positions to have appropriate

certifications, including pesticide application, playground, and risk management

- Document and institutionalize key processes such as athletic field maintenance, mowing, playground inspection, etc. This will result in the transfer of knowledge to new employees, and will also assist in the continued improvement of processes.

## PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

In the future, it will be important to be able to measure if changes to maintenance practices and staff are having an impact on the quality of the park system and the communities. Key performance indicators should be put in place now and data collected regularly to measure and chart progress. Examples of data that could be collected include:

- Athletic field maintenance/ park user satisfaction
- Cost per acre to maintain
- Acres per full time equivalent to maintain
- Outputs such as numbers of vehicles, acres to maintain
- Cycle time for equipment/vehicle repair
- Employee retention both full time and part time
- Percentage of parks meeting inspection standards
- Internal customer satisfaction toward work order system
- Vandalism amount

Establishing good data and record-keeping practices

are critical to sustained improvements of the park system.

## REVENUE AND FEES

### Expanding Revenue Opportunities in Identity Parks

As municipal budgets continuously tighten, it has become increasingly important to find ways to promote self-sufficiency within the park system. A major focus of parks systems nationwide in recent years has been creative ways to increase revenue within the parks. For Hartford, a priority in the near term needs to be to establish more revenue-generating projects within the large “identity parks” of the system that can help support both those parks’ operations and other smaller parks throughout the City. This strategy is an overarching method for the system-wide Parks Guide. Each revenue generation project, however, should be planned and considered carefully. When possible, it will be advisable to include third party or partnership opportunities to reduce the addition of responsibilities to the City’s already full plate.

Hartford has several great models of this within its own system; Elizabeth Park is emblematic of the ability of a park to generate revenue and support its operations. The Pond House at Elizabeth successfully provides funding to support the full park. The Pump House in Bushnell and the Club House in Keney are existing, underutilized structures in two of Hartford’s historic, identity parks. Both of these buildings are well-located, masonry structures worth preserving

and returning to active uses that can be managed to generate revenue through the use of restaurants, rental meetings, and/or events spaces. Madison Square Park contains an example of a concession building, operated by a third-party vendor, that was used to activate the park and provide funding. After decades of decline, the Madison Square Park Conservancy formed to restore the park after decades of disinvestment. In 2004, the Shake Shack opened in a building in the park. A portion of each purchase directly benefits park maintenance and programs in the park. The building was financed and built by the Conservancy at a cost of \$750,000; it is now operated by Union Square Hospitality Group. Today, the renewed Madison Square Park sits at the center of a revitalized business district. A similar arrangement could also be considered for a renovation of either the Keney Clubhouse or the Bushnell Pump House, or for

a new concessions building at Colt Park.

Hartford can look both within its system for opportunities, and to national trends for inspiration. A national trend is to offer programming in parks such as yoga and exercise classes. This is happening already in Bushnell Park, but without revenue capture. Some systems charge instructors a percentage of gross revenues for programs. New, popular nature-based and backcountry recreation programs, kayaking or canoeing could be introduced by third party vendors in existing parks.

A great example of a third party vendor operating in a park is the Adventure Park in nearby Bridgeport, Connecticut. In July 2012, Outdoor Venture Group, LLC opened an “aerial forest park” with routes through trees in a portion of one of Bridgeport’s wooded parks.

A priority in the near term needs to be to establish more revenue-generating projects within the “Identity Parks” that can help support both those parks’ operations and other smaller parks throughout the City.

The project has brought new activity to the park and new revenue to the system. Bridgeport receives 10% of revenues; first year revenues totaled about \$800,000. Future annual revenues are expected to reach \$2.5 million. This type of project could be introduced in Keney Park at no cost to the city; in addition, the structures have low environmental impact to the park.

### Communicating Value through Fees

Within Hartford, there has been a history of not charging fees for park services or programs. However, this is extremely uncommon and may not be tenable for Hartford to continue in the future. The topic of park fees was introduced at the parks guide public meetings and, in general, Hartford residents did not object to the possibility of future fees. Rather, their priority lied with finding ways to create a sustainable, high quality park system. In addition to offsetting costs, fees also help to communicate the value of the park system to its users and to Hartford residents.

We tend to culturally value things that have a clear monetary value, or price. Small fees for some services can help reinforce the value of parks and programs and promote better stewardship and care of the parks.

Other park systems have different methods to introduce fees or ensure parity and affordability across users. Scholarships and scaled options help address affordability. One way to begin might be to introduce new programs and charge fees for them, while retaining existing programs at current levels for the first phase, to test political climate and community acceptability. A challenge for Hartford is that its recreation programs are currently free to both residents of Hartford and of outside communities alike. Charging admission for non-residents is an additional scalable option.

Parks are for public benefit. Groups or organizations who operate on park lands or who physically occupy park lands should financially give back to the park



Goodwin and Keney Golf Courses are underutilized revenue opportunities.

system. For instance, a corner of Columbus Park is occupied by a parking lot for an adjacent facility; this organization should pay for its use of park. The City should work to formalize leases with any groups that physically occupy park land or private vendors who use park lands for profit (such as a privately-run group exercise class which charges participants a fee and takes place in a park).

Both of Hartford's two public golf courses, at Keney Park and Goodwin Park, are underutilized opportunities for revenue. The City is planning to invest in needed capital improvements and a new management structure over the next couple years. Investments and management are still being determined. During this transition and with newly renovated courses, it is an opportunity to revisit the fee structure as well. Some golf courses have alternate structures, such as charging by the hour, not by the round. Alternatively, the City could explore the benefits of a single fee, regardless of the number of

holes played. While the current plan is to manage the courses internally, it may ultimately be beneficial to explore partnerships. These could include partnering with a local fitness club to expand membership, working with nearby hotels to provide discounts for hotel guests, or expanding the uses to include Foot Golf<sup>3</sup> and attract new, non-golfers to use the course.

### **Marketing & Branding: Spreading the Word about Hartford's Parks**

In addition to physical renewing, Hartford's park system needs improved branding. Currently, many of Hartford's parks suffer from poor reputations. While maintenance and managements improvements are underway, positive marketing can help reinforce the message of transformation. Improving perceptions will help increase park activity and contribute to an improved sense of safety at parks.

While maintenance and managements improvements are underway, positive marketing can help reinforce the message of transformation.

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3 FootGolf is playing golf with a soccer ball. The American FootGolf League oversees the sport.

Improving branding includes upgrading physical signage as well as marketing events. MECA,<sup>4</sup> a division of Development Services, will play an important role in programming and advertising, by helping spread the word about up-coming events at parks. A coordinated event calendar is needed to publicize upcoming events, and MECA could be the coordinator of this resource.

Currently, many of the special moments in Hartford's parks remain hidden to most park visitors. There is a need to share the positive stories, rich history, and memorable places in Hartford. Park system maps that call out these key locations will encourage greater exploration of parks.

Accompanying these maps, physical signage will help improve park usage. Wayfinding signage within and

between parks (along bicycle routes, for instance) will welcome pedestrians and bicyclists into parks. iQuilt signage improvements underway Downtown provide an example of consistent wayfinding signage. The Connections section of this report suggests color-coding bicycle routes to create a memorable, interesting system. Within parks, improved signage will help set the tone for appropriate behavior. Rules should be clearly posted, and the message should be framed positively. Focus on good behavior rather than listing prohibited activities.

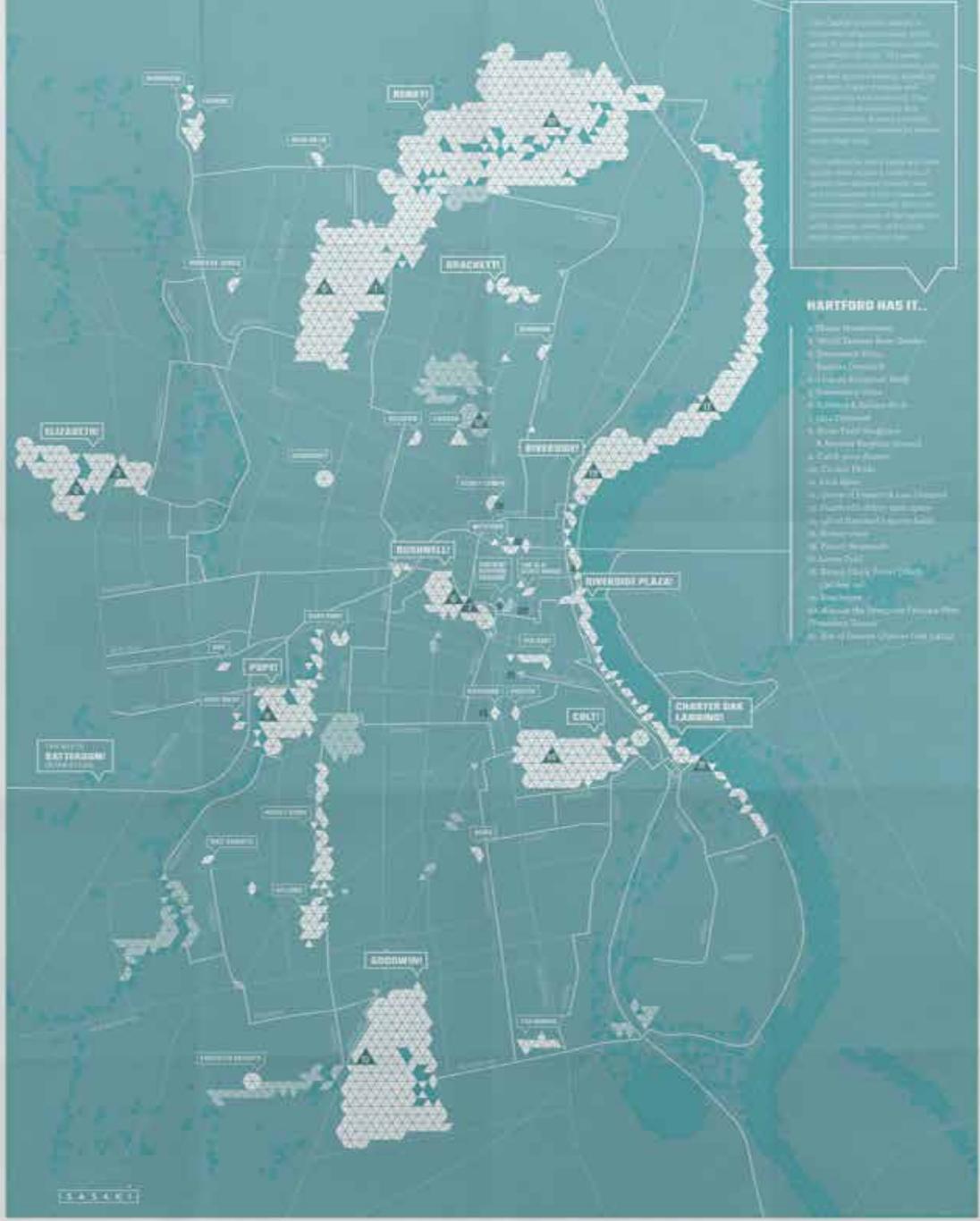
Together, improved messaging, signage, and other marketing tactics can create a consistent, high-quality brand for a parks system that people will want to come and enjoy.

## Signage, wayfinding, and maps can help visitors navigate the park system



CAPITAL CITY PARKS. GO EXPLORE.

# HARTFORD



A future connections map has been created as part of this process.

## Gateway Signage

Park entrances are the first impression for visitors. Signage at designated park entries plays a large part of making sure this first impression is positive. Signage should include the park name, large enough to be visible from a distance, as well as smaller, pedestrian-scale signage to explain park rules, hours, behavior, or other important information. Entrances should be welcoming for people who arrive at the park by foot or on bicycle. Signage is also a chance to demonstrate the overall Capital City Parks System identity. It should be consistent across the system, but can be adapted to special identity parks. For instance, each Identity Park could have its own application, while still feel like it's part of the same overall system. All neighborhood parks should share a similar style to signal that they are part of the overall network. The New York Park case study on the following page shows how different park identities can part of a consistent, unified overall brand.

Examples of park gateway signage around the country.



*Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA*



*Millennium Park, Chicago, IL*



*Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY*



**Successful Pedestrian Entrance: Pope Park**

# Signage and Branding Case Study:

## New York City Parks - Rebranding and signage design by Pentagram



Example of an overall graphic brand and how it can be adapted for different applications and customized for special parks.

### Sub-brands



### Consistent Brand + Diverse Park Identities



**Proposed Park Signage:** Modular system, so relevant information can be included for each park. Allows for horizontal or vertical orientation. All information is presented in a similar style.



# Implementation / 10 Year Action Plan

Over the next ten years, significant improvements in the Capital City Park system are achievable.

Over the next ten years, significant improvements in the Capital City Park system are achievable. This action plan details year-by-year steps for the system. Capital improvements are a significant part of this plan, but connectivity improvements and other actions are equally important.

5 principles guided the creation of this list and the prioritization over the next decade:

1. Generate return on investments
2. Protect the legacy
3. Reduce maintenance burdens
4. Improve connectivity
5. Improve safety, image, & neighborhoods

The first wave of projects can begin immediately; these are small-scale projects in Identity Parks that can begin generating revenue quickly. The first wave of neighborhood parks in the next year focuses on renewing oldest play elements and addressing safety issues across the system. While these capital improvements are underway, other critical immediate actions like hiring a grants writer and volunteer coordinator must also occur.

This sequence of Identity Park improvements in one year, followed by Neighborhood Park improvements

the following year is repeated over the next several years. The second and third Identity Park phases continues to prioritize revenue along with larger-footprint projects to upgrade park infrastructure and image. Neighborhood Park improvements focus on upgrades to active recreation parks in phase 2 and historic and passive parks in phase 3. Two demonstration environmental projects are recommended, which will reduce future maintenance burdens. All other upgrades and improvements are scheduled towards the end of the first ten years. These are “less urgent” actions that can wait a few years.

The connectivity plan is implemented in three phases over the next ten years. Phase 1 (years 1-2) focuses on bicycle lane and sharrows additions that can be implemented with only restriping (no changes to road beds); Phase 2 (years 2-3) includes additional bicycle lanes that will require slightly more effort. Phase 3 includes off-road trails and more difficult connections that will require more planning, design, and funding. Initial planning and design for high priority Phase 3 links should start now, with the bulk of construction scheduled for years 3-10. Wayfinding signage between parks should accompany connectivity improvements.

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**

**Immediate**

YEAR I

YEAR 2

**Short-term**

YEAR 3

YEAR 4

**IDENTITY PARKS I**

*quick wins: revenue generation, reducing maintenance, & improving image*

- > COLT 1
- > KENEY 1
- > BUSHNELL 1
- > POPE 1
- > GOLF COURSE IMPROVEMENTS - (KENEY & GOODWIN)

ON-GOING WORK BY RIVERFRONT RECAPTURE

**IDENTITY II**

*continuing to grow revenue, improve image, upgrade basics, & expand programming*

- > COLT 2
- > KENEY 2
- > BUSHNELL 2
- > GOODWIN 2
- > ELIZABETH 1
- > POPE 2

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS I**

*critical improvements to small neighborhood parks; environmental demonstrations for ecological health & reduced maintenance burdens*

- > ROBERTA JONES
- > HARRIET TUBMAN
- > ROCKY RIDGE 1
- > COLUMBUS 1
- > HYLAND - CAL RIPKEN FIELD
- > BLUE HILLS
- > CHARTER OAK MEMORIAL

> OTHER: IDENTIFY DOG PARK LOCATION

> SIGNAGE IMPLEMENTATION: Undertake system-wide park signage design project. Then update all signage system-wide simultaneously and in near-term if funding permits; otherwise, update signage park-by-park concurrent with park improvements

**NEIGHBORHOOD II**

*improvements to active recreation parks*

- > BRACKETT
- > COLUMBUS
- > POPE WEST
- > BOND ST.
- > ROCKY RIDGE II
- > HYLAND II
- > FORSTER HEIGHTS 1
- > NORTH BRANCH PARK RIVER
- > CRONIN
- > TURNING POINT MEADOW
- > RICE HEIGHTS WETLAND

**CONNECTIVITY**

**CONNECTIVITY PLAN PHASE 1**

**PHASE 2**

**PHASE 3A**

**PHASE 3B**

**CRITICAL CONNECTIVITY LINKS**

*create safe crossings between adjacent park areas*

**OTHER STEPS**

**OTHER CRITICAL ACTIONS**

*build the foundation for reducing maintenance, generating revenue, and improving internal coordination*

- > FORM PARK LEADERSHIP GROUP & BEGIN MEETING REGULARLY
- > HIRE GRANTS WRITER
- > HIRE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR
- > FORMALIZE AGREEMENTS WITH FRIENDS GROUPS
- > ADJUST FEE STRUCTURE
- > IMPLEMENT LOW MOW AREAS IN APPROPRIATE AREAS IN ALL PARKS
- > CENTRALIZE SCHEDULING FOR FIELDS

- > UNDERTAKE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY TO ADDRESS WATER QUALITY IN PARKS

**Mid-term**  
YEAR 5

YEAR 6

**Long-term**  
YEARS 7 - 10

**IDENTITY III**

*other improvements for image, recreation, programming, & revenue*

- > COLT 3
- > KENEY 3
- > BUSHNELL 3
- > GOODWIN 3
- > BATTERSON 1
- > ELIZABETH 2

**IDENTITY IV**

*other upgrades*

- > ELIZABETH 3
- > POPE 2
- > BATTERSON 2
- > BUSHNELL 4
- > COLT 4

**NEIGHBORHOOD III**

*improvements to historically significant parks & passive parks*

- > PORTER
- > KENEY TOWER
- > BARNARD
- > PULASKI MALL

**NEIGHBORHOOD IV**

*other upgrades*

- > WILLIE WARE
- > WEXFORD
- > FORSTER HEIGHTS 2
- > DELUCCO
- > LOZADA

**MID-TERM STREET IMPROVEMENTS**

*improve connections between parks and neighborhoods*

- > CROSSWALKS, SIDEWALKS, & ENTRANCES THROUGHOUT SYSTEM (WITHIN 1/4 MILE OF PARK ENTRANCES)
- > IMPROVEMENTS TO TRAFFIC ISLANDS AND SIMILAR OPEN SPACES TO MINIMIZE MAINTENANCE NEEDS

**10 YEAR ACTION PLAN**

# Phased Improvements by Park

## Identity Parks

### Colt

#### 1 - West End activation

- Reopen circulation
- Concession stand & playground (consolidate all play equipment to west end, and install new)
- Central service path
- Low mow terrace
- Renovations of maintenance structures

#### 2 - Sports & Circulation Upgrades throughout (*phased over 2 years to minimize disruptions to field use*)

- Improve entrances
- Upgrade both parking lots
- Dillon Stadium renovations
- Remove track
- Add outer circulation loop (shared path appropriate for service vehicles) and any other new paths
- All other field updates
- Any other basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Demo existing shade structure and replace with more appropriately scaled shade structure
- Low mow around rest of park perimeter

#### 3 - Expanded programming & revenue

- Restore ice/roller skating rink (revenue opportunity)

#### 4 - Historic Structures?

- Evaluate renovation of historic buildings (renovate if can generate sufficient revenue to more than cover cost of renovation)

### Keney

#### 1 - Revenue generation potential & critical improvements

- Clubhouse
- Entrances
- Tree maintenance (safety hazards)
- Low mow
- Waverly playground & court upgrades
- Golf course improvements

#### 2 - Woods activation, recreation renewal, & phase 1 Great Park Road

- Trail improvements throughout
- Install trailheads with trail maps & parking turnouts
- AdventurePark
- Great Park Road - Vine St / Woodland Loop (in coordination with management and security improvements)
- In Woodland - any required court/field renovations, remove tennis courts and renaturalize<sup>1</sup>
- Basic improvement (all 3 areas) – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

#### 3 - Upgrade rest of park circulation

- Complete Great Park Road throughout (in coordination with management and security improvements)

### Goodwin

#### 1 - Golf course upgrades & critical maintenance

- Golf course improvements
- Critical tree maintenance
- Fix any critical structural issues
- Low mow around ponds

#### 2 - Basic Circulation Improvements

- Remove 2 gravel lots
- Entrance improvements

---

1 Alternatively, if demand warrents, could renovate and repair tennis courts

### 3 – Additional circulation & recreation improvements

- Improve park loop path
- Expand native plantings
- Renovate playground / spraypad
- Regrade fields as needed
- Any other basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- All other updates

### **Bushnell**

\* Phasing could change depending on which features are implemented (future planning may result in changes, for example, to iQuilt recommendations).

#### 1 – East End activation

- Pump House renovations as restaurant & event space
- Fix playground & water feature (turtles)
- Any other renovations in surrounding area

#### 2 – Basic upgrades

- Upgrade paths, lighting, benches, etc. throughout

#### 3 – Bushnell Gardens & Gold St realignment

#### 4 – Water Element

- Add water feature that recalls historic river element
- Prioritize low maintenance / low construction cost designs with minimal mechanical systems required (best if stormwater / rain gardens that collect water when rains – sustainability feature that cleans water and doesn't require as much maintenance as other water features)

### **Elizabeth**

#### 1 – East End upgrades

- Playground renovations, path & entrance upgrades, basketball court renovations
- Basic improvements (east end) – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

### 2 - Building renovations

- (Year 3 if grant successful, otherwise, shift project to “long-term”)

### 3- West End recreation improvements

- Resurface tennis courts, regrade baseball field
- Any necessary basic improvements (west end) – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

### **Pope**

#### 1 – Baby Pope renovation

#### 2 – Critical recreation upgrades (main park)

- Critical renovations to playgrounds, courts, and sports fields (main park)
- Low mow

#### 3 – Implement remainder of master plan

- Demo court remnants in High Mall, nature trails in Bankside Grove
- Upgrades / renovations of remaining play, court, or sports field elements (main park)
- Any other basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

### **Batterson**

#### 1 – Revenue generation

- Renovate buildings
- Identify 3rd party vendor for park (ex. Canoe/ Kayak rental)
- Expand programming opportunities & generate revenue

#### 2 - Trails & Buildings

- Expand nature trails throughout northwestern portion of park
- Renovate main buildings and demolish Caretaker's Cottage

# Neighborhood Parks

## Roberta Jones

- Upgrade playground
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

## Harriet Tubman

- Repair broken playground structure
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

## Rocky Ridge

1 – Play upgrades

- Playground renovation
- Convert building to open-air pavilion

2 – All other improvements

- Main ped/bike path
- Improve sports fields
- Add community garden
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, other park paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

## Hyland

1 – Cal Ripken field

2 – All other improvements

- Paths throughout, including Ridge Trail
- Add basketball court (south of play area behind daycare)
- Any other field/court upgrades needed
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, other paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

## Columbus

1 – Repair gate on small child play area

2 – All other improvements

- Improve central path
- Court and playground renovations
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

## Brackett

*\*ideally, pair with development on western portion; this project can be delayed to correspond with development*

- Renovations throughout, including basketball court, play, and basic improvements (fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.)

## Bond St.

- Add playground
- Basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

## Blue Hills

*Demolition should be done immediately before ready to construct new playground (avoid need to maintain large site without structure; potential for unwanted activity)*

- Demo existing building
- Create neighborhood park on southern half of site
- Sell/lease northern half as development site
- Low mow

## Forster Heights

1 – Basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.; Low mow

2 – Recreation upgrades: Court, playground, & spraypad renovations

**Turning Point**

- Demonstration meadow with expanded forest canopy

**Rice Heights**

- Wetland & educational nature trail

**North Branch Park River**

- Educational signage
- Nature trail
- Outdoor classroom

**Porter**

- Vegetation improvements - plant trees around outside of loop
- Opportunities for community garden, or educational garden linked to adjacent school (or opportunity for Grow Hartford to move here if current site on Main St by Barnard becomes developed)
- Basic improvements - fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

**Keney Tower**

- Improvements TBD (currently, separate master plan process is underway for this park)
- At minimum: install historic signage at entrance, undertake any necessary structural renovations to tower, and any basic improvements - fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

**Barnard**

- Improvements throughout (paths, paving, lighting, security camera, lawn, etc.)

**Pulaski Mall**

- Renovate western end

**Charter Oak Monument**

- Study potential improvements (evaluate whether stairs or walkway improvements are needed, whether monument should be relocated, etc.)

**Willie Ware**

- Upgrade fence
- Any required building renovations
- Add shade around seating
- Any required basic improvements - fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Low mow

**Wexford**

- Remove planters to improve sight lines
- Demo poor condition exercise and playground equipment
- Remove graffiti in non-allowed areas and add instructional signage
- Evaluate what kinds of additional programming make sense
- Any other basic improvements - fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

### **Cronin**

- Resurface basketball courts
- Center field improvements
- Any necessary basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.
- Perimeter path
- Swale along eastern edge
- Low mow

### **Delucco**

- Renovate basketball courts
- Any necessary basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

### **Lozada**

- Resurface basketball court, evaluate if demand exists for 2nd
- Any necessary basic improvements – fencing, benches, paths, security cameras, etc.

### **NO IMPROVEMENTS SLATED WITHIN NEXT 10 YEARS / ON-GOING MAINTENANCE OR EMERGENCY REPAIRS ONLY**

*These parks were recently fully renovated; no additional new construction foreseen for next ten years*

- Day
- Sigourney (with exception of adding sidewalk along western edge)

### **CONNECTIVITY CRITICAL LINKS (next chapter details connectivity plan)**

- Hyland to Rocky Ridge
- Pope Park: links between 3 areas
- Elizabeth: east/west link on Prospect Ave
- Colt: Groton St. entrance

### **MID-TERM STREET IMPROVEMENTS**

- Crosswalks, sidewalks, & entrances throughout system (within 1/4 mile of park entrances)
- Improvements to traffic islands and similar open spaces to minimize maintenance needs (see Barry Square and Campfield Green for prototypical recommendations for these kinds of spaces)

### **OTHER ACTION ITEMS**

#### **Dog Park**

In the short-term, a location for a dog park in Hartford should be selected. Options should be vetted with multiple departments, Friends Groups, and the community to determine a suitable location. Potential options could include parks like: Keney, Pope West, Pope - Bankside Grove, Turning Point, or Porter.

#### **Signage**

If funding allows, improve signage should be installed simultaneously across the full system in the near-term. Otherwise, signage improvements could be made park-by-park, concurrent with other improvements. In the near-term, a signage design project should be undertaken.





# Capitol City Connectivity Plan

Hartford has sufficient park acreage and amenities, but improved connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians is needed.

In the late 1800s, Olmsted's vision for Hartford's Park system was not just about the parks themselves. A series of parkways connecting the parks to one another and to neighborhoods was also a key part of his idea. Olmsted's idea was passed on to the twentieth century and detailed by the Board of Park Commissioners. The 1912 General Plan illustrates the concept of the connected greenways throughout the City. Bushnell functioned as the system's central hub, with parkways radiating outwards. These radial parkways intersected with a series of concentric greenways, ringing the city at different depths. Greenways along Park River and Connecticut River complemented the "hub-and-spoke" system and added additional connectivity. Westbourne Parkway, between Albany Ave and Keney Park gives a sense of

the planned character of these roads – wide, tree-lined boulevards with central landscaped medians.

## EXISTING GAPS IN CONNECTIVITY

Park system improvements, however, focused on individual parks, and the connective links were never implemented as envisioned. Today, the parks are generally well-connected via the road network in Hartford, although interstate and rail lines visually block some parks, especially Riverside and Charter Oak Landing. Connectivity by other modes of transportation is more limited. Bike and pedestrian access are especially important because a demographics analysis showed that many families in Hartford do not own a vehicle. Additionally, bike

“A system of parkways to link the city’s parks was a major objective. . . .[but] the parkway concept was most likely subordinated by the development of the parks themselves and was never fully achieved.”

1992 Parks Master Plan, page 10

and walkability is a factor in encouraging healthy neighborhoods and lifestyles.

As illustrated by the needs assessment, Hartford has sufficient park acreage and amenities, but improved connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians is needed so all residents can easily reach the resources. Access to neighborhood parks should be safe and easy by either foot or by bicycle for users of all ages. Bicycle links between the denser, central neighborhoods (where park acreage is lacking compared to other

neighborhoods) and regional parks on the edges of the city are needed as well. Additionally, many of the City’s amenities are concentrated in several large parks, such as the fields at Colt Park. Improved bike access to these resources will help to ensure equitable access to some of the more in demand amenities in the system.

The existing riverfront path along the Connecticut River is an asset, but greater trail and bike lane connectivity is needed across the system. Today,





Hartford has a few stretches of bicycle lanes, but they are scattered across the city and disconnected from one another, diminishing user experience. Sidewalks are almost always present on city streets near parks; yet, crosswalks are sometimes missing.

Connectivity within the parks is in need of improvement as well. Many pedestrian and bicycle entrances are blocked, gated, or otherwise unwelcoming. Signage is frequently lacking, overlapping, or unclear. In many instances, it is unclear to potential park visitors whether they are allowed to enter. Currently, jersey barriers are used to block entrances to vehicles, but the result is the appearance that all modes of transportation (and people) are banned. Blocked trail entrances are common, especially in Keney. Several of the larger parks have walking or hiking trails, but trail entrances often lack signage, and park trail maps are usually not available.

At the level of each individual park, many sidewalks within parks are in poor condition. Deteriorated surfaces are problems throughout the park system. Few parks have sidewalks wide enough to accommodate necessary service or emergency vehicles, so these vehicles choose their own paths across lawns and over tree roots. This behavior leads to erosion, damaged vegetation, and ruts. Multiple public comments focused on the need to eliminate driving and parking on grass in parks. Bushnell was frequently cited as a location where these kinds of activities were occurring. The lack of service roads is particularly problematic in Bushnell, where city-wide events require truck access for service.

There are many places in the city where additional connections could be created on already existing flood control land, utility easements, city- and state-owned property, and the riverfront to enhance connections.



# Connectivity Community Feedback

- Create well-maintained paths with welcoming entrances
- Improve signage and create trail maps
- Reopen closed roads, especially in Keney
- Increase bicycle and public transit connections between parks
- Increase connectivity along the Connecticut and Park Rivers

## MyHartford Connectivity Maps

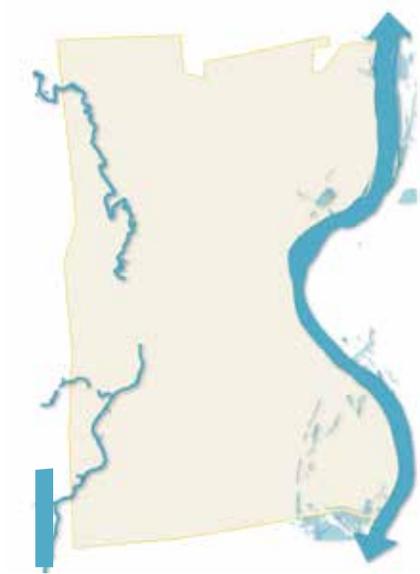


**Bicycling**



**Walking**

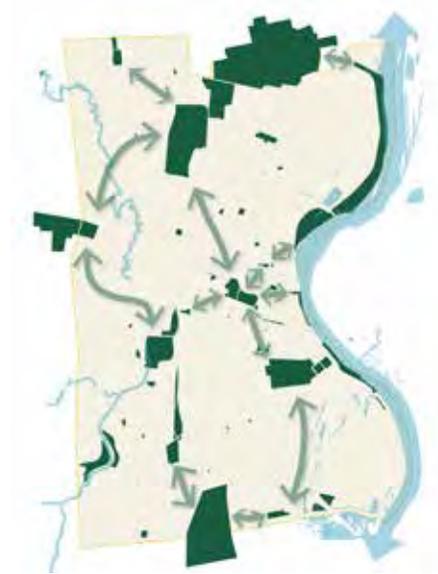
## Three Types of Future Connections



Connect along the rivers



**2** Connect parks with neighborhoods & one another



**3** Improve connectivity within parks

Building on the “ring of parks” as well as capitalizing on the waterfronts, the connectivity plan implements the historic idea of connectivity along Hartford’s rivers,

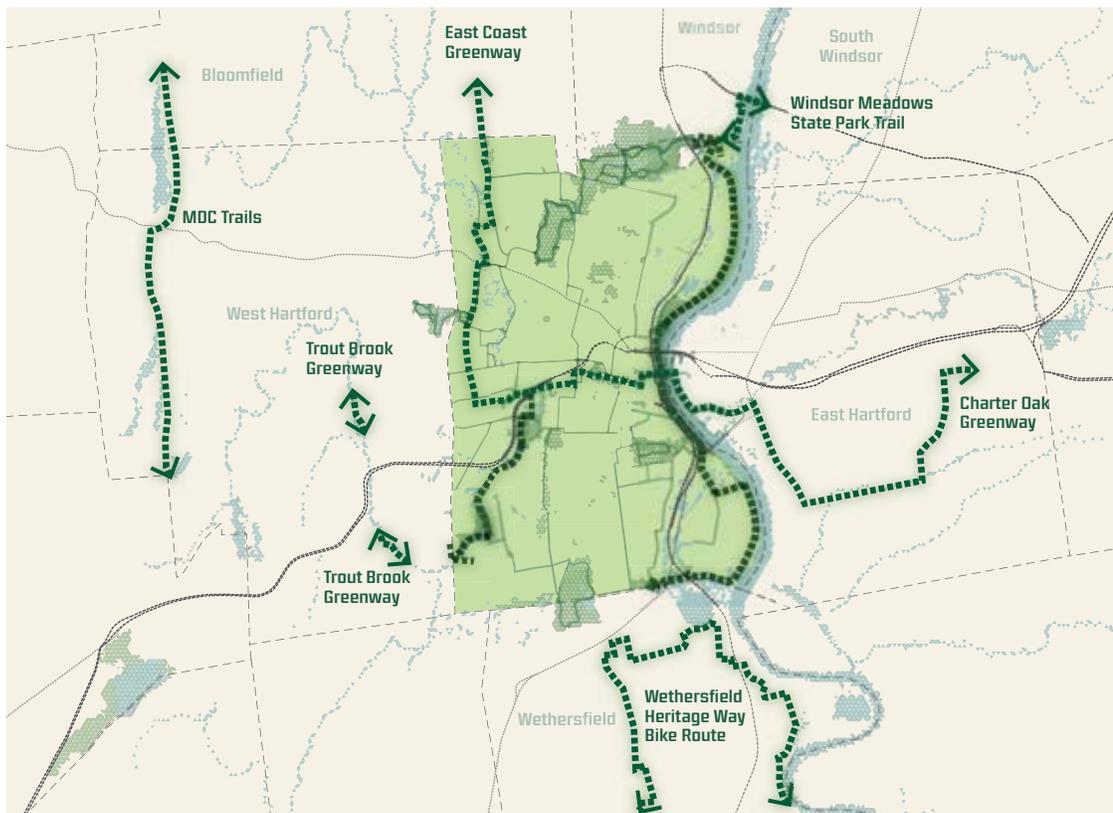
## FUTURE CONNECTIVITY PLAN

Through the planning process, the future connectivity plan has generated a tremendous amount of excitement among the community. The connectivity plan unites many of the goals of the Capital City Parks Guide.

By building on the early idea of a “ring of parks” as well as capitalizing on the City’s waterfronts, the connectivity plan first and foremost implements the historic ideas of connectivity along Hartford’s rivers, the Connecticut and the Park River. To do this, the plan recommends improving and amenitizing existing trails between Charter Oak Landing and Riverfront Plaza, as well as extending the riverfront trail north and south, as allowable. This process should be

coordinated with Riverfront Recapture. Given the costs and coordination needs within a levee system, the Connecticut River trail expansions will happen slowly over time. Along the City’s other river system, the plan intends to extend and add trails along the North and South Branch of the Park River. Along the North Branch, an off-street, shared-use pathway will run next to the street.

The connectivity plan also creates connections for bikes and pedestrians between the major identity parks, as well as from the parks to the two rivers. Connections to surrounding neighborhood and nearby schools have also been considered.



Regional  
Links

## Park Roads

Like many historic parks, another important feature of Hartford's largest identity parks are the vehicular road systems within them. At nearly 700 acres in size with an internal golf course, Keney is exemplary of a park that requires thoughtful, pedestrian and bike friendly vehicular access within it. Elizabeth Park and Goodwin Park are also key parks for road improvements.

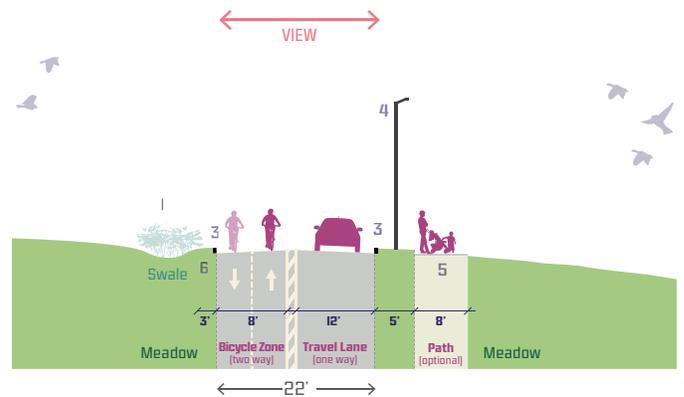
Due to recent safety concerns, many portions of Keney's internal road system have been blocked off or transformed to one-way roads. The priority for design of circulation in the parks should be to balance all users: vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians (and in Keney, hikers and horses). Central Park in New York and Shelburne Farms in Vermont are both examples of parks in varying conditions - urban and rural - where the park roads are a gracious, additive part of the park experience.

Keney Park is large and differentiated, with distinct areas and very different road conditions. Traversed by a curvilinear road, today there is no designated space for bicyclists. Similarly, there are few designated parking spaces along the road, resulting random parking along the road that detracts from a sense of safety. Poor drainage and improper parking have both deteriorated the road edge and the adjacent vegetation.

The design of the road throughout should reflect the different conditions and the context: the presence of forested areas alongside, an open meadow condition, or a threshold between the two. In each design, dedicated space is provided for bikers, pedestrians, and vehicles, with differentiation through curbed edges. Planted swales are provided alongside to better manage stormwater run-off and improve drainage.



Forest Road



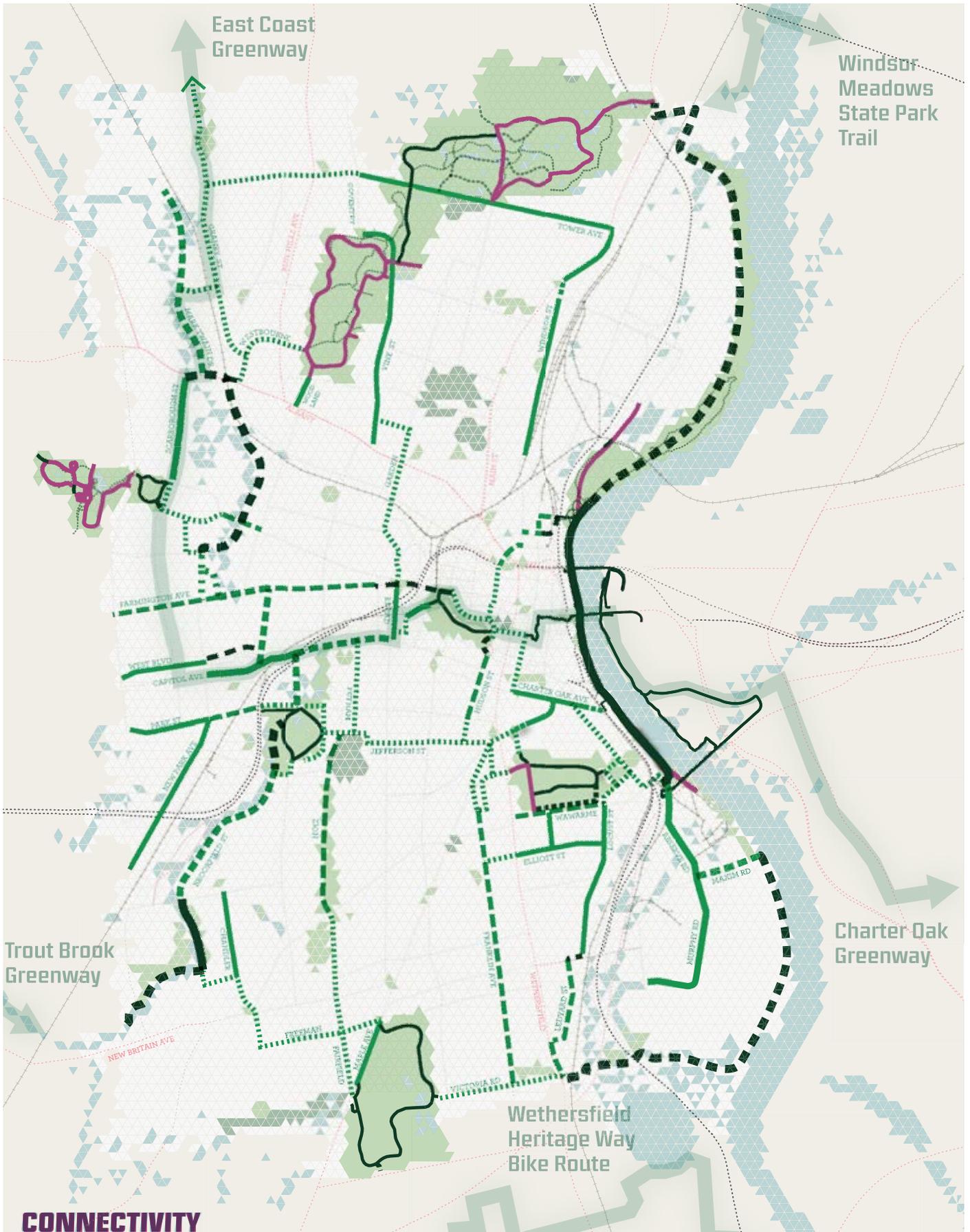
Meadow Road



**Threshold Road**

**Park Road Characteristics**

1. Swales on slopes draining toward road
2. Dense, low planting along forested edges discourage parking
3. Curbs on open edge
4. Dark sky lighting
5. Paths sited along open edge
6. Swales are set back from curb to reduce erosion behind curb



## Connectivity Types

Given Hartford’s complex, urban street system, a combination of bicycle lanes, sharrows (lane shared by cars and bicycles), and shared use pathways will all be used. (See image to left for a map of recommended lanes.)

On-street bicycle lanes allocate dedicated space within the roadway to bicyclists. They need to be clearly painted and then maintained. This allows the striping to visually narrow the travel lane thereby reducing vehicle speeds. The on-street lanes provide riding space for bicyclists by moving traffic away from edge of roadway and nearby sidewalks.

Sharrows are shared lanes between vehicles and bicyclists. Through special markings, they assist bicyclists with positioning on the roadway and alert road users of the location bicyclists are likely to occupy. The painted lanes encourage safe passing of bicyclists by motorists and reduce the incidence of wrong-way bicycling by ensuring bicyclists travel with the direction of traffic.

### Legend

-  Park road
-  Park path / sidewalk
-  Shared use pathway - existing
-  Shared use pathway - proposed
-  Trail
-  Bicycle lane - existing
-  Bicycle lane - proposed
-  Sharrow - proposed
-  Entrances - major
-  Entrances - minor



Regional trail

A shared use path is physically separated from vehicular traffic by a curb, median or routing that is independent of a street network (often through open space). Typically these facilities allow for shared use by bicyclist, pedestrians and skateboarders or rollerbladers. Shared use pathways tend to be recreational in nature, although they are sometimes used for commuting and daily trips. The Riverfront trails and Keney Park trails are examples of existing shared use paths today.

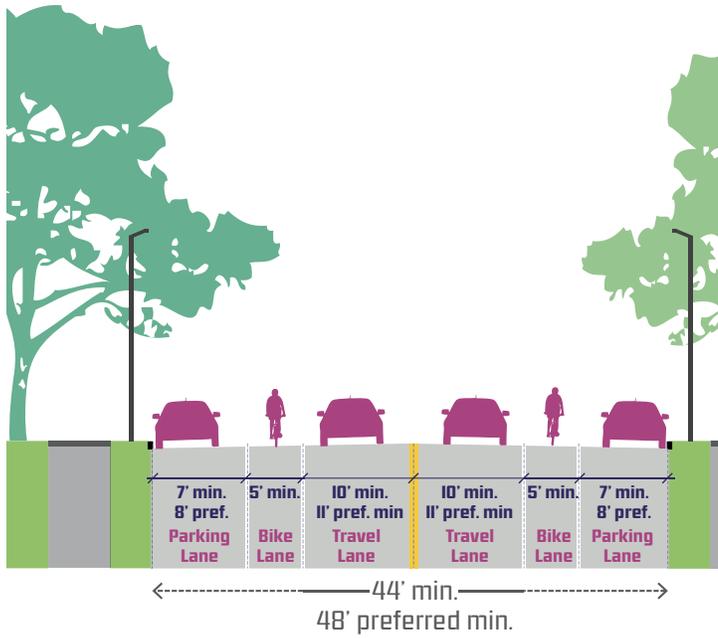


Sharrows

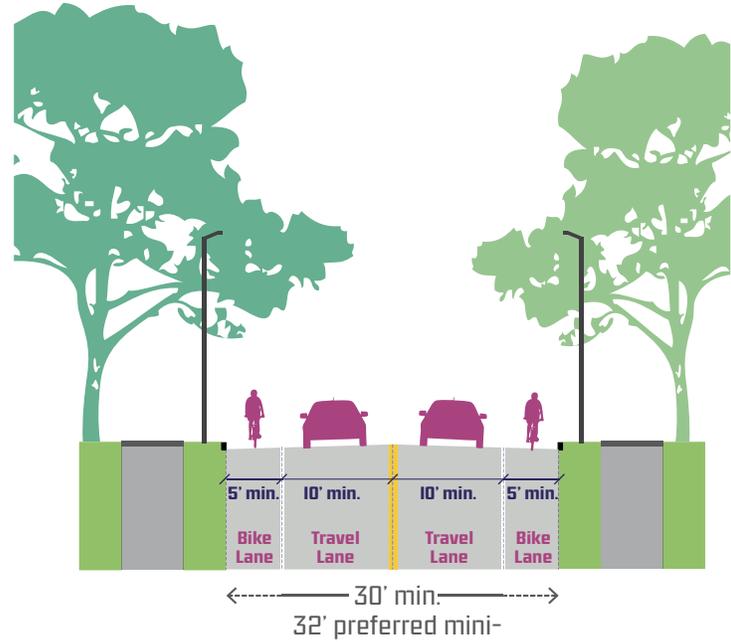


On-street bike lane

# Connectivity Standards: Bicycle Lanes Integration

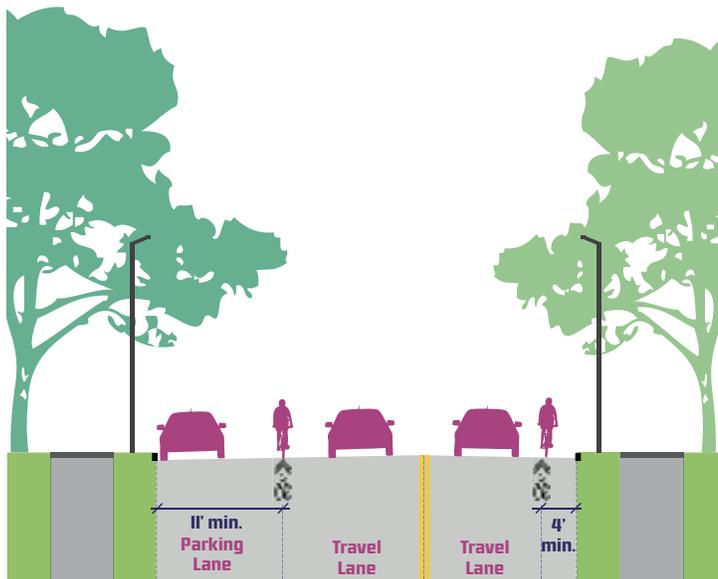


BIKE LANE: STREETS WITH ON-STREET PARKING



BIKE LANE: STREETS WITHOUT ON-STREET PARKING

## On-street bike lane



Sharrow



Shared Use Path

# Industry Standards for Bike Lanes

## On-Street Bicycle Lanes

- Use on collector and arterial roadways, or on high volume local streets.
- 4' width w/o curb, 5' width with curb -AASHTO
- When placed adjacent to on-street parking, the left hand lane stripe (the stripe that separates the bicycle lane from the travel lane) should be a minimum of 12 feet from the curb. If parking volumes are substantial or turnover is high, such as downtown locations or streets with metered parking, increase to 13 feet so as to avoid collisions in the door zone.
- Pavement markings: 500' maximum spacing, can be used more frequently in dense urban settings. -MUTCD
- Use "Bike Lane" signage at the beginning of the lane and spaced every mile or at significant intersections.
- Bike lanes should be installed on both sides of roadway to discourage wrong direction riding.

## Sharrows

- Roadway speed limit of 35 mph maximum -AASHTO
- 10,000 ADT or less preferred on roadway where shared travel lane is less than 14'
- Space sharrow pavement markings 250' or less, increase frequency of use in complex urban areas -MUTCD
- The center of sharrow marking should be located 4' from edge of roadway if no parking is present and a minimum of 11' from the edge of roadway where on-street parking is present -MUTCD
- Use "Share the Road" signage where adequate lane width exists for side-by-side auto and bicycle travel-AASHTO
- Use "Bikes May Use Full Lane" signage where lane width is inadequate for side-by-side auto and bicycle travel -AASHTO

## Shared Use Pathway

- 8' wide minimum, 10-12' wide preferred
- Bi-directional travel is preferred
- Minimize roadway and driveway crossings
- Sign for permitted uses

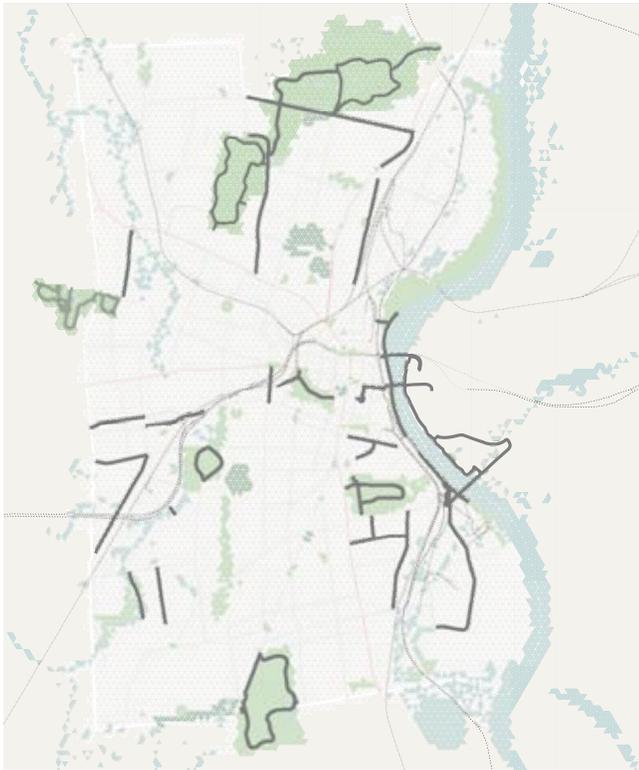
## CONNECTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The connectivity implementation strategy has been designed to address easily implementable, low cost connections in the first phase, in order to demonstrate success. These routes do not require modifications to existing roadways or parking, and can be accomplished immediately. Middle and later phases address routes that are more complex. These routes may require modifying roadways, additional planning studies, easements, property negotiations, and more substantial construction. The Downtown North plan proposes additional connections along

Albany Ave. and better access into the riverfront trail system. These connections would be assets that would augment the system, but they are assumed to be longer-term than the 10 year routes shown in this plan.

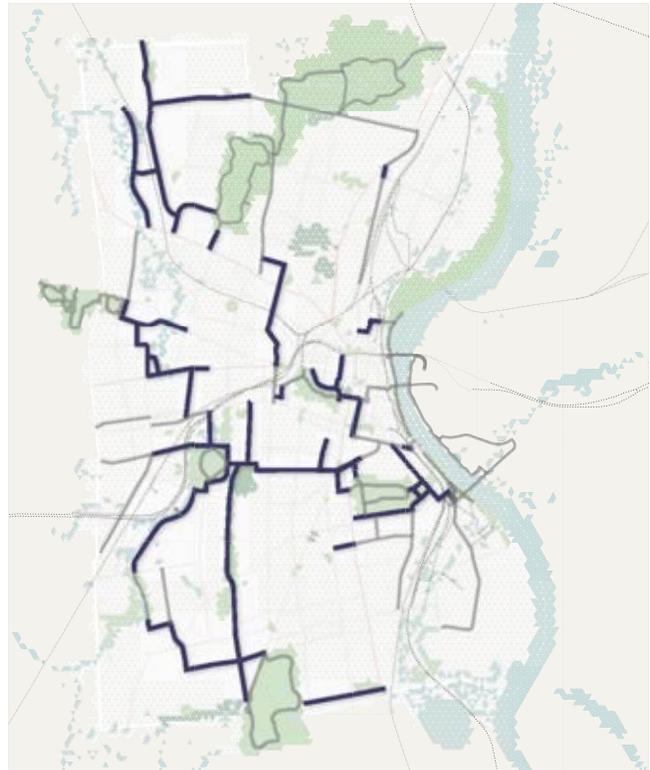
- Existing
- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Phase 3 - High Priority
- - - Phase 3 - Long-Term

### Existing Conditions



- Existing CT River loop near Downtown is an asset
- Closed roads within parks
- Blocked trails and entrances
- Entrances are not always welcoming, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Existing bicycle lanes do not form a connected network

### Phase I



- Routes that can be implemented in the next 1-2 years at low cost.
- Includes sharrow routes and bicycle lane routes that do not require significant modification to traffic lanes or on-street parking

## Critical Long-term Implementation Steps

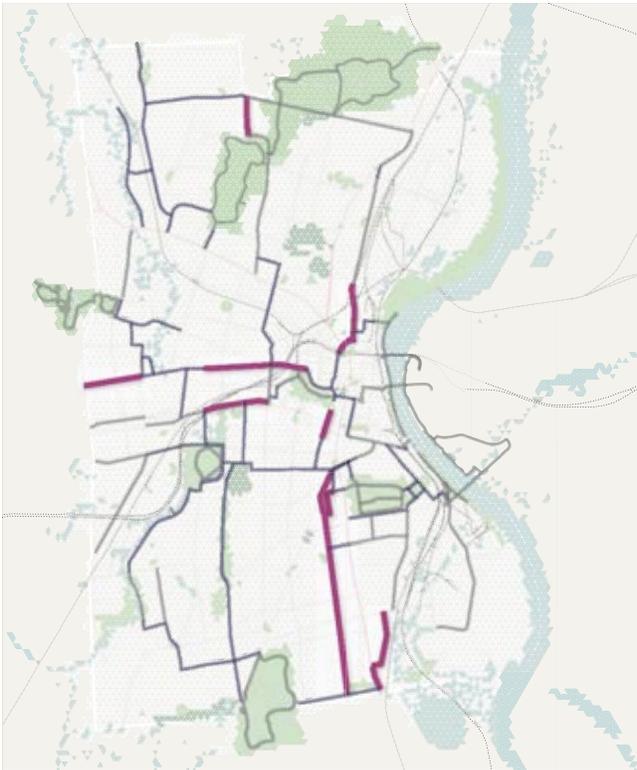
High priority phase 3 projects (critical gaps):

- Bicycle connection through Pulaski Circle
- Pathway to Riverside Park Bridge
- Riverfront connection to Charter Oak Landing
- Albany Avenue pathway
- Airport Road pathway
- Keney Park/Windsor Meadows/Riverside Park connection

Longer term phase 3 projects:

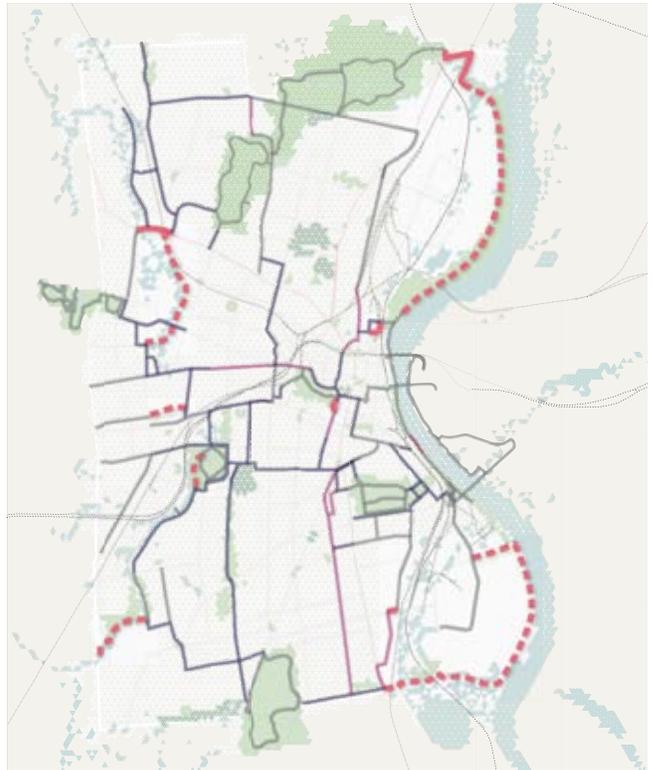
- North and South Branch Park River Trails
- South Meadows Trail
- Pope Park Trail
- Improvement of Riverside Park Trails

### Phase 2



- New bicycle lanes that might require modification to traffic lanes and on-street parking
- Could be accomplished in 2 to 3 year period
- Example: Bicycle lanes on Farmington Avenue

### Phase 3



- Routes that require additional planning, design, and substantial construction
- Example: Riverfront pathway from Downtown to Charter Oak Landing
- Begin planning and design now with construction over a 3-10 year period.

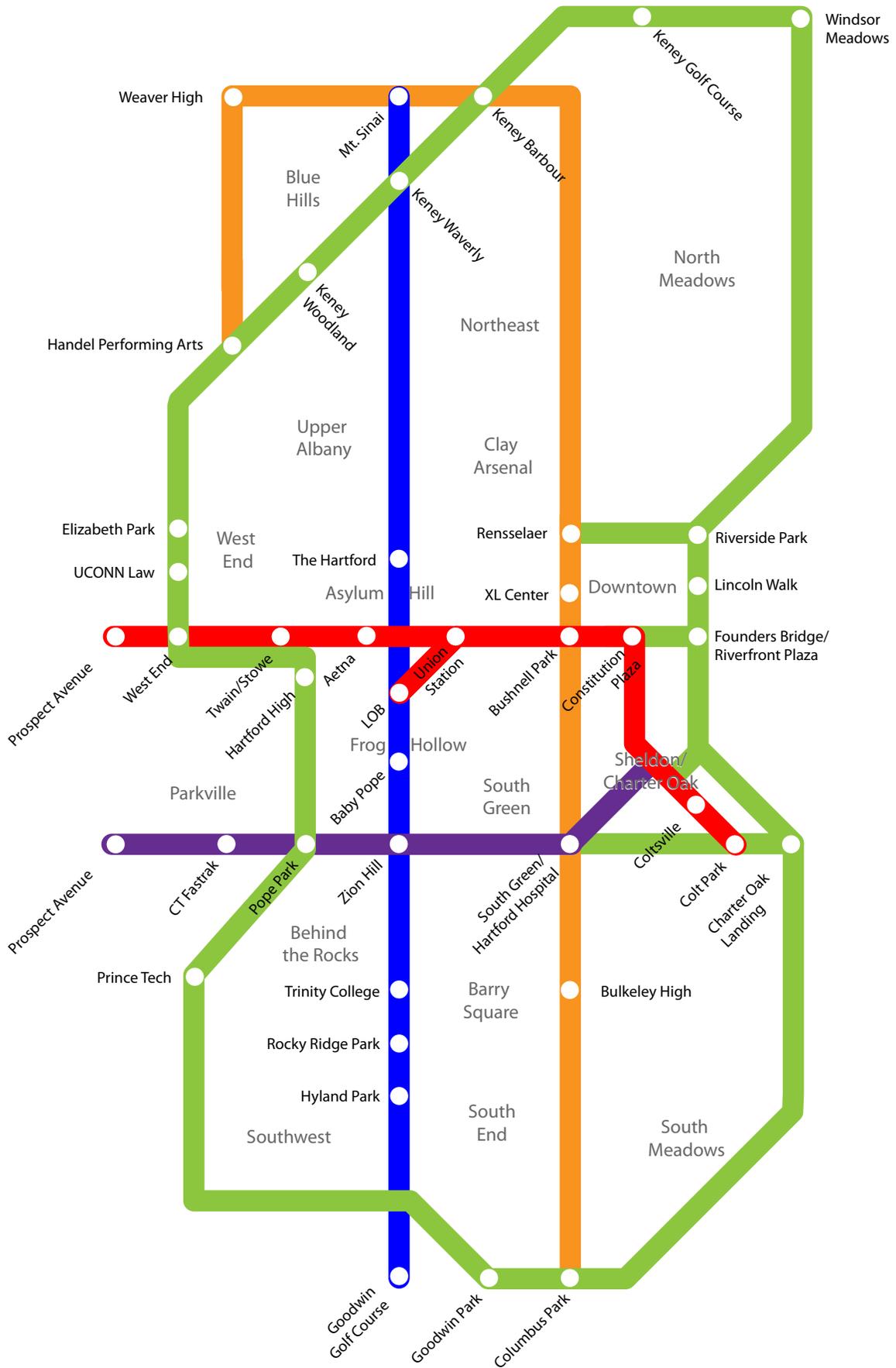
## CONNECTIVITY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Equally important to the physical implementation of the connectivity plan is the communications strategy to help the community get to know the new system. The system needs to be easy to use to novice and seasoned bikers alike. The plan recommends implementing a clear wayfinding and route system. Building on iconic subway maps in Boston or New York, Hartford future bike routes are branded by color. The system is adaptable, but suggests giving clear identity and ease of use to the green loop, the red downtown connector, and the orange or blue parallel north-south links.

This color system can be integrated into the street stripings delineating bike lanes and sharrows as well as navigational signage. Signage should give clear information about distances, destinations, park access, and accessible modes.



Integrate color route system to street implementation



Color-code and brand routes for clear navigation



-  regional
-  community
-  natural area
-  neighborhood
-  mini

# Future Conceptual Plans

Hartford's park system is imagined as a connected system of individual parks; the quality and amenities in each helps create a successful system.

The Hartford park system is comprised of nearly 2,000 acres of parks, ranging in size from small pocket parks under an acre to up to approximately 680 feet at Keney Park. Many of the recommendations in this guiding document - such as departmental organization and connectivity - benefit the system as a whole. Yet, it is also important to consider the individual aspects of each park independently. While they work together to create the Capitol City Parks network, the usability and quality of each must also be measured on its own.

Each park has been evaluated through principles that reinforce the goals of the Parks Guide to:

- Restore historic plans
- Reduce maintenance needs
- Clarify circulation
- Create social spaces
- Improve a park's relationship to its context
- Create revenue generation opportunities (for Identity Parks)

For the purposes of future park design and implementation, the parks have been considered as "Identity Parks" and "Neighborhood Parks."

Identity parks are the major, historic parks that create identity for the overall system, host all members of the community, and have opportunities to generate revenue that can broadly benefit all parks in the system. These include existing landmarks like Bushnell or Keney Parks, as well as potential new district ideas like the Park River District. Neighborhood parks include smaller spaces that meet the needs of specific groups, such as a neighborhood, a historic site, or a small open space.

The priorities for all parks begins with the need to bring up the basics and strengthen safety. The concept plans target physical improvements that re-build the foundation: safe sidewalks and durable amenities. Identity parks have the possibility of playing a critical role providing revenue for improvements system-wide. A second priority is to implement revenue-generating investments in large parks to build funding that supports the whole system. Finally, the most important capital investments are those that are a double win, by both improving existing conditions and reducing future maintenance. Recommended standards for park furnishings and amenities are included in the technical appendix.