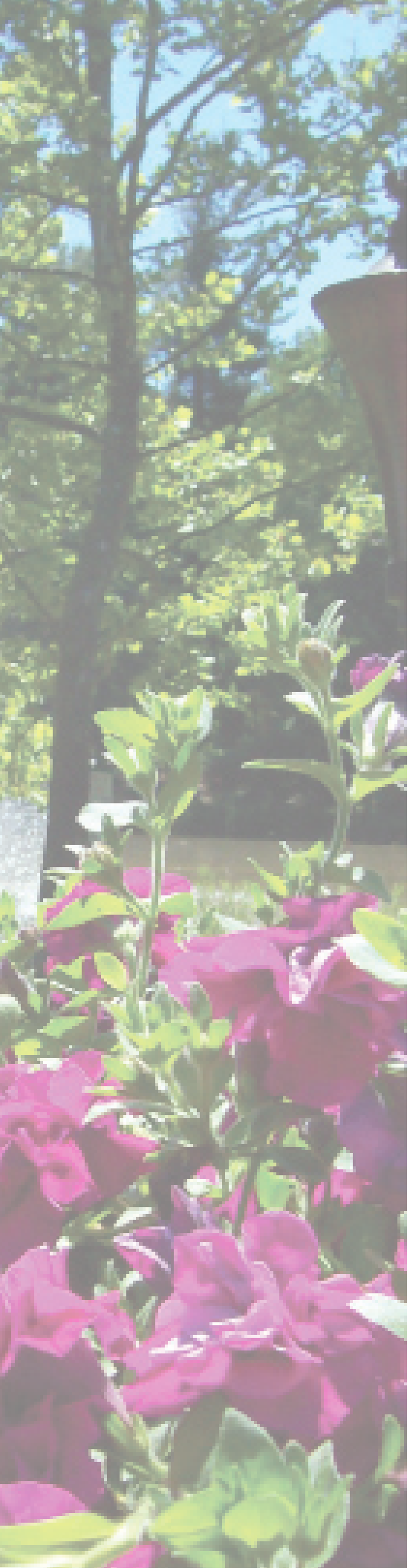


Green Ribbon Task Force

Hartford's Parks

Spring 2011

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Genesis of the GRTF: The idea of establishing the Green Ribbon Task Force has its roots in the One City, One Plan initiative, which identified both the importance of our parks to the quality of life in Hartford, as well as a broad civic concern that our parks are not being properly managed and cared for. We thank Mayor Segarra for recognizing this situation and establishing a task force to address it.

Process and Methodology: The work of the GRTF has spanned eight months commencing in August of 2010, and winding up with the issuance of this report in March of 2011. The GRTF held regular monthly meetings. At the outset three subcommittees were established: Maintenance, Finance, and Governance, each of which generally met twice between GRTF meetings. The subcommittees were comprised of task force members as well as several interested citizens who had a particular interest and knowledge in the focus of the subcommittee. The subcommittees spent the first two months gathering information on the Hartford park system, researching other comparable and relevant park systems, and conducting interviews. The second two months were directed towards developing and evaluating initial recommendations. During the third two-month period the subcommittees developed and vetted draft recommendations. Progress reports and discussions were made at the monthly GRTF meetings, and presentations and broader discussions were held at three public meetings. The final two months focused on writing, editing and publishing the final report. The GRTF recommendations were endorsed by the GRTF at a meeting held on March 17, 2011. The final report, in both printed and digital format, was presented to the Mayor March 21, 2011.

Acknowledgements and Thanks: This has been a volunteer effort by a group of individuals who care deeply about Hartford parks and want to do what's best for this great legacy. The process has been open, notice of meetings posted, and notes and minutes of meetings recorded. This has truly been a civic initiative with a singular focus on developing a series of recommendations that are in the best interest of the Hartford parks and for those who use and enjoy them. When implemented, it will position the City to properly maintain and care for this treasure.

As Co-chairs of the GRTF, Bernadine Silvers and Tyler Smith wish to acknowledge and thank all those persons who contributed to this effort. In particular, we wish to recognize the extraordinary effort of those persons who agreed to chair the three subcommittees: Jack Hale, Chair of the Maintenance Subcommittee; Michael Zaleski, Chair of the Finance Subcommittee; and Jill Barrett, Chair of the Governance Subcommittee. They led the research effort and were largely responsible for drafting the recommendations that form the body of this report.

We also want to acknowledge the other members of the GRTF, as well as those interested citizens who regularly participated in subcommittee and task force meetings for their important contributions:
Carl Bard
Charmaine Craig
Whitney Hatch
Penny Leto
Nancy Macy
Joe Marfuggi
Mary Rickel Pelletier

Also for their active involvement in subcommittee meetings:
Henry Hester
David Morin
Denise Best
Jeff Stewart
and
Andrew Woods

The City provided the staff support of Glendowlyn Hall, Kim Holden and Jonas Maciunas as well as and important information and guidance from various City staff:
David Panagore, Chief Operating Officer
Kevin Burnham, Director of Public Works
Sarah Barr, Director of Communications
Kathleen Palm-Devine, City Treasurer
Kejuan Dillard, Special Events Coordinator
Carlos Rivera, Director of Health & Human Services
Troy Stewart, Recreation Division Manager
John Timm, Director, Parks Division
Clarke King, President, AFSCME Local 1716

"Conventionally, neighborhood parks or park-like open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of cities. Let us turn this thought around, and consider city parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred upon them."

- Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Mayor Pedro E. Segarra
City of Hartford
550 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103

RE: **THE GREEN RIBBON TASK FORCE REPORT**

Dear Mayor Segarra:

It is with great pleasure and hopefulness that the Green Ribbon Task Force presents this report to you, the City Council, the citizens of the City of Hartford, and all those who care deeply about the well-being of one of Hartford's greatest and most cherished resources, its parks.

In the summer of 2010, shortly after you became Mayor, you embraced the idea of establishing a task force to examine the current condition of Hartford's parks with the specific objective of formulating a series of recommendations to better maintain and improve this great legacy. The Green Ribbon Task Force has taken your charge to heart. We have looked at the history of our parks, reviewed past studies, scrutinized the current condition of the parks, and compared Hartford parks and their management to other peer cities and comparable models.

These recommendations will require considerable political and civic will to implement, but we believe these are the steps that must be taken if we are to reverse the longtime decline of our parks and again make them a source of civic pride for our continued use and enjoyment.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernadine Silvers *Tyler Smith*

Co-Chairs of the Green Ribbon Task Force

Subcommittee Chairs: Jill Barrett, Jack Hale, and Michael Zaleski
Green Ribbon Task Force Members: Carl Bard, Carmaine Craig, Whitney Hatch, Penny Leto, Nancy Macy, Joe Marfuggi, Mary Rickel Pelletier.

Thanks also for the thoughtful input of all the Friends groups:
Bushnell Park Foundation
Friends of Colt Park
Friends of Elizabeth Park
Friends of Keney Park
Friends of Forster Park
Friends of Goodwin Park
Friends of Pope Park
Riverfront Recapture, Inc.
The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

We acknowledge Henry Hester, Patrick Pinnell and John Alexopoulos for their role as panelists in the first public meeting at the Mark Twain House, and to Linda Bayer for serving as facilitator of the second public meeting at the Parker Memorial Recreation Center

We wish to recognize all those interested citizens, who in addition to GRTF members, participated in various task force meetings and three the public meetings during the course of this effort.

References and Bibliography:
The following publications provided a valuable resource to the GRTF in researching Hartford parks and preparing this report. Please note that most of the statistical data and historical information cited in the report came from The Hartford Park Master Plan of 1992, or Renewing A Historic Legacy, The Park System of Hartford, Connecticut, 2007.

Green Ribbon Task Force binder, assembled by the Planning Division, City of Hartford, in 2010 and included:

- *Booklet For Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Members.*
- *Park Advocate Handbook published by the National Recreation Association.*
- *The Expanded City Park System published by The Trust for Public Land.*
- *Gallery Guide – Celebrating Hartford's Parks – Park Visionaries prepared by the Hartford History Center of the Hartford Public Library, 2009.*
- *One, City, One Plan: Chapter 10, Parks Open Space & Natural Resources, 2010.*
- *One, City One Plan: Chapter 11 Parks & Open Space, 2010.*
- *One City One Plan prepared by the Planning Division, City of Hartford Development Services Department, 2010.*
- *Hartford Parks Master Plan prepared by LANDSCAPES, 1992.*
- *Renewing A Historic Legacy, The Park System of Hartford, Connecticut published by The Trust for Public Land, 2007.*
- *The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford: A Legacy of the Nation by John Alexopoulos, 1983.*
- *Jacob Weidenmann, Pioneer Landscape Architect by Rudy J. Favretti, 2007.*

Photographs were provided by Riverfront Recapture Inc., Friends of Elizabeth Park, John Alexopoulos, Andy Hart, Nancy Macy, and Jill Barrett.

Lastly we wish to thank Kristine Brynes for developing the graphic layout of this report, Lyn Walker for her editing of this report, and Lebron Press for printing this report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
GREEN RIBBON TASK FORCE REPORT (GRTF)

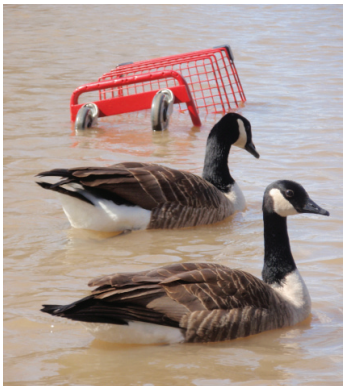
General Assessment and Core Recommendations **pg. 6**
Governing Principles *pg. 7*

Specific Recommendations:
Governance Recommendations *pg. 11*
Maintenance Recommendations *pg. 15*
Finance Recommendations *pg. 22*

Implementation Strategy **pg. 25**

A Brief History **pg. 29**

General Assessment & Core Recommendations



Background: In trying to capture the breadth of vision and grandeur of Hartford's great legacy of parks, it seems fitting to quote from the 1992 *Hartford Parks Master Plan* for two reasons. First, it is important to get this document off the shelf and re-present it as the most useful reference and guide for all those who, **today**, are engaged in the caring for and maintaining of our park system. Second, it describes in the most comprehensive and well-documented manner the creation of our park system in the mid-nineteenth century, the city's great investment in its parks through the early twentieth century, the city's successful management of this great asset for the first 100 years, and the protracted decline of the park system over the past 60 years.

"The City of Hartford park system is of both regional and national significance. This system is a blend of nineteenth and twentieth century public parks of varying sizes and types. Hartford's citizens brought the parks from idea to reality. It was one of the first cities in the nation to implement the values and inspirations of the early American park tradition in the provision and improvement of public grounds." Pg.5

"The parks of Hartford continued to serve the citizenry effectively through the 1920s prior to the depression." Pg.16

"The late 1950s and 1960s ushered in an urban renewal era that impacted Hartford's parks…Interstate 84 and 91 construction directly affected Pope Park, Riverside Park and Keney Park, decreasing the park landscape quality by introducing highway sights, sounds, and movement patterns into or adjacent to the park lands." Pg.18

"The 1970s saw a continued deterioration of the park lands and facilities as well as decreases in maintenance staff. The image of the parks had become deleterious to the City." Pg.18

"Hartford's parks are in crisis. The decay of infrastructure, natural systems and built elements is evident." (1992) Pg. i

---

Hartford's Parks Today: Sadly, Hartford parks have continued to decline. In 1992 Hartford had 78 park workers, many of them with specialized skills in park maintenance. By 2007 that number had dropped by 20 paid staff positions, and today it stands at 29. There has been a commensurate decline in parks and recreation funding by the City from $6.14 million in FY 2001 to $4.3 in FY 2006, to approximately $3 million in FY 2010.

The staffing and funding shortfalls were compounded by the ill-fated decision in 1996 to abolish the Parks and Recreation Department, placing park maintenance services under the Department of Public Works and placing recreational services under the Department of Health and Human Services.

Call to Reverse the Decline: Over the years the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission has worked to raise awareness of the on-going park problems as did the 2007 report by the Trust for Public Land, entitled *Renewing a Historic Legacy. Most recently,* in meetings as part of the city's public input process for *One City, One Plan*, Hartford citizens voiced their concern about the state of city parks and appealed to city government to make improving the management and maintenance of the park system a priority. The importance of reversing the decline of the Hartford park system was addressed in the 2010 publication of *One City, One Plan*.

The decision of Hartford Mayor Pedro E. Segarra to name a Green Ribbon Task Force (GRTF) to develop recommendations to improve management and maintenance of this great Hartford legacy gives further credence to an emerging civic mandate, embraced by city government, to begin the reversal of these past trends.

Critical Corrective Steps: The most telling benchmark documenting the decline of our park system is the dramatic reduction in staffing and funding. As pointed out in this report, the current staffing and funding levels fall significantly short of what is required to meet even the basic needs of the park system. That is why in our initial recommendations to the Mayor and city Council for FY 2011-12 the GRTF requested a modest increase in park staffing as a first step forward. (See the GRTF recommendations for FY 2010-11in the section **Implementation Strategy.)**

At the same time, the GRTF fully realizes that for the foreseeable future the city's budgetary constraints will not allow staffing and funding levels seen in previous decades. The city must do more with less. To do this, the Parks Division must introduce and implement fundamental changes that are both attitudinal and structural.

Governance Principles: The governance principles that need to be embedded into the administrative structure of the Parks Division are: **leadership, clarity, predictability, and accountability**. The Parks Division needs a leader who is knowledgeable in all facets of park management, skillful at leveraging community resources and volunteer supporters, and an effective administrator within city government. The general public needs to see clarity within administrative functions so one knows, for example, whom to contact for a specific function or need. Those working within the park system must clearly understand expectations and responsibilities; there needs to be a pro-active, rather than reactive, approach based on established maintenance and performance standards. Lastly, there needs to be accountability that comes with stronger leadership and supervision throughout the work force.

As it relates to operational structures, there must be strong, capable leadership at the top, and that leadership must also be responsive to an equally strong and qualified citizen base.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS: The GRTF has identified 42 recommendations that are noted in the **Specific Recommendations** section of this report. These recommendations are organized under the general headings of governance, maintenance, and finance. We recognize that restoring the Hartford park system will require a sustained effort over a considerable period. Many of the recommendations would be the natural byproduct of sound management principles and a strong organizational structure.

We have chosen to start our recommendations by re-asserting the **Guiding Principles** noted in the beginning of the *1992 Hartford Parks Master Plan*, *pg.3.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: *"The values associated with parks relate to their history, environmental quality, recreational potential and the unique role parks play in urban life. These principles are embodied in the text below.*

Parks help to make cities livable. *They provide a contrast to the built environment that surrounds them. The entire 2,200 acres of city parkland should provide maximum recreation to the citizens of Hartford.*

Parks should provide settings for people, in passive group and active recreational pursuits. *Park master planning focuses on daily and frequent uses, like walking, relaxing, bicycling, jogging, picnicking, sports activity, pleasure driving and the like. Parks are places for diverse recreational pursuits. In the recent past the development of Hartford's parks has focused on the provision of additional active recreation facilities paralleling the individual demands of health and fitness nation-wide. During the same period, passive and group use opportunities have not been adequately provided. In order to reach the broadest number of citizens, a diversity of use should be supported.*

Parks are the green spaces of the city. *They are places for citizens of all ages and abilities to enjoy the outdoors. People of all abilities should have access to parks through universal design that provides barrier-free environments to the maximum possible extent.*

A park outing of any duration or nature should be a high quality experience. *All evidence of dereliction and dysfunction should be addressed to assure that the physical appearance, visual quality and usability of the parks are positive.*

Hartford's parks are valuable cultural resources, places for the gathering of the city's people or for the enjoyment of individuals. *Many of the parks are significant historic places, given to the city by public spirited citizens, or developed in the name of early park advocates. This legacy is a public trust.*

Parks are valuable natural resources, improving city life through the provision of green spaces and places for plants and animals. *The large parks are habitats with potential for environmental education through individual exploration or organized programs.*

Parks are the core of Hartford's public, outdoor recreation space. *There are additional public and private lands that also provide recreational opportunities to portions of the city populace. The mission of providing recreation opportunities for city dwellers is a shared one, involving the public and private sectors. The city should become a more effective collaborator with park support groups, sponsors of public events, community schools, and others, to enrich recreational opportunities and improve the condition of parks while stabilizing costs."*

Noted below are five major changes that the GRTF believes would have a dramatic, if not transformative, impact in restoring Hartford's park system. Most are noted in each of the three Subcommittee recommendations, confirming the overlapping and interdependence of park maintenance, finance and governance. The core recommendations are:

- **Reunite Parks and Recreation Services:** The most precipitous decline in the management of Hartford's park system and services occurred after the Parks and Recreation Department was abolished in 1996, with park maintenance placed within the Department of Public Works (DPW) and recreational services placed within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These functions are entwined, interdependent and "bonded at the hip". They need to be together and should be reunited.

- **Hire a Highly Qualified Parks Director:** To re-establish a strong sense of leadership within the Parks Division, the city needs to hire a highly qualified Parks Director based upon a comprehensive and well-conceived job description.

- **For Now Keep Parks and Recreation within DPW:** Where Parks and Recreation ultimately "lives" - whether as a re-established Parks and Recreation Department or as a division of DPW or as part of a new Department of Environmental Services – is a decision that should not be made until certain fundamental governance principles and operational structures are instituted and embraced by those entities and persons responsible for the oversight, maintenance and management of park and recreation services. There are several reasons for this. DPW currently has a capable director who is committed to improving park services. In the immediate future there will not be a significant number of new hires to meet the maintenance and recreational needs of the park system. However, there is the real likelihood, already at work, that more worker hours can be allocated to the park system by dual tasking the combined work force of parks and DPW on a seasonal basis and by allowing for flexibility in how those workforces are allocated. For the immediate future, parks and recreation services should remain in DPW.

- **Strengthen and Restructure the Hartford Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission:** In order to create a stronger citizen base and increased accountability, restructure the current Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission so that it has increased powers and responsibilities.

- **Establish a Department of Environmental Services:** We are beginning to see a reversal in practice and philosophy as it relates to the urban environment to one that is based on the principle of ecological stewardship. Not only is there a renewed appreciation for city parks, but there is greater recognition of the importance of preserving and enhancing green spaces, our tree canopy and reducing heat-generating, impervious surfaces. Long-held and fundamental DPW functions, such as storm water management, are being re-evaluated in the context of urban ecology. Moreover, there are increasing dollars available in the form of Federal, State and foundation grants for sustainable environmental practices. In the near future the City of Hartford should evaluate the benefits of establishing a Department of Environmental Services that would include a "greener" DPW, along with Parks and Recreation and other environmentally- related services and, if the benefits are there, proceed to do so.

End of Section

Governance Subcommittee
Recommendations

The GRTF Subcommittee on Governance was chaired by Jill Barrett. Regular attendees at the Governance Subcommittee meetings included: Jill Barrett, Penny Leto, Bernadine Silvers, Tyler Smith, Troy Stewart, and Glendowlyn Hall providing city staff support and with assistance from Patricia Johnson and Jeff Stewart.

General Observations: There is no established, clear statement of purpose, or allegiance to stated principles for administering and maintaining the city's park system. This absence is exacerbated by the general lack of a strong governance model and leadership at all staffing levels. The necessary communication and coordination between park maintenance services and recreational services is fractured and dysfunctional under the current, bifurcated management arrangement. The general public does not know where to go to get issues and questions addressed. The tremendous potential for volunteer citizen involvement is thwarted by a management structure that is not geared to fully utilize this resource and by municipal unions which do not fully embrace such volunteer services. For these reasons and those noted in the recommendations made by the Maintenance and Finance subcommittees, the Governance Subcommittee recommends some major fundamental changes and improvements to the way the City of Hartford park services are structured and managed.

The GRTF Subcommittee on Governance offers the following recommendations:

G1. The Legacy of Hartford's Parks: Nationally and locally, there is a renewed appreciation for our urban parks and recognition of their importance to the quality of life in our cities. This has been voiced and affirmed by the citizens of Hartford and so noted in the *One City, One Plan* adopted by the City in 2010.

Recommendation: Through active promotion, elevated priority and visibility, and increased financial resources, the city government, on a graduated but sustained program, needs to commit to restoring, rebuilding, and caring for our Legacy of Parks.

G2. Guiding Principles: The 1992 Hartford Parks Master Plan put forth a set of Guiding Principles. These principles sent a clear message as to how parks should be managed for passive as well as active recreation and for the preservation of green spaces.

Recommendation: The Mayor, with support of City Council, should formally reaffirm these Guiding Principles and direct all city staff engaged in park management to honor and abide by these principles.

G3. Park Recreational and Maintenance Services: In 1996, the responsibility for park maintenance was placed under the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the recreational services under Health and Human Services (HHS). These two functions, park maintenance and recreational services, have interdependent and intertwined functions. Separating them has lead to public confusion, dysfunction, and serious coordination problems.

Recommendation: As soon as practically possible, reunite park and recreational services as a single entity. In doing so, careful attention must be paid to integrating these two related but very different functions.

G4. Department of Public Works: There has been much discussion within the GRTF, this Subcommittee, and in general, as to where a unified Parks and Recreation Department should be located within the city's governmental structure: as a separate department (as it was prior to 1996), or under DPW, or within some new entity. The Subcommittee realizes that the parks and recreation functions will continue to suffer significant staffing shortages for the immediate future. We have also seen the increased utilization of dual tasking between traditional DPW functions and park maintenance services as a means to mitigate staffing shortages. While we acknowledge the possibility that park workers could on occasion be assigned to DPW functions and thereby further reduce staff availability to parks, this concern is outweighed by the real likelihood that more workers would be available for park services. We also have the very real concern that there are not sufficient city resources available to staff and equip a separate Parks and Recreation Department.

Recommendation: Parks and Recreation should be unified and remain within DPW for the immediate future, provided the city implements the two following recommendations.

G5. Leadership: The absence of a top level professional parks and recreation administrator who is capable and knowledgeable in all facets of park and recreation management is, in the view of the Subcommittee, one of the most glaring shortcomings within the current DPW staffing structure.

Recommendation: The city needs to proceed to develop a job description for a Parks & Recreation Director and move to hire such a person.

G6. Department of Environmental Services: The times demand that cities, indeed the world, re-evaluate how we manage our urban ecosystems. Increasingly we need to understand the interdependence between our built environment and our natural environment. Traditional attitudes and methods for managing storm water and pervious surfaces, such as streets and surface parking areas, a core focus of DPW functions, are being re-thought in the context of larger environmental issues. In like fashion, parks, green spaces, streetscapes and our urban tree canopy are being recognized as essential components of a sustainable urban environment. The Subcommittee believes that the once separate functions of parks and recreation and DPW are, in fact, intertwined and interdependent, and part of a larger whole. This belief is confirmed by the increasing call for, and availability of, governmental and foundation funding to support these new, sustainable environmental initiatives. Therefore the Subcommittee has endorsed the recommendation below.

Recommendation: The City of Hartford, perhaps with the assistance of a consultant team, should initiate a deliberate process to explore creating a "super agency" i.e. the Department of Environmental Services, which would house the Parks and Recreation Division, DPW and any other environmentally based city functions. This initiative should commence in 2013 with the goal of completing and implementing such a re-structuring in FY 2014-15.

G7. Hartford Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (HPRAC): The HPRAC has held a longstanding and important place as stewards of Hartford's Parks. For sustained periods, it has been the single most important advocate for the parks system. There have also been periods when it has not been effective or when its good intentions have not been heeded by city officials. This has been attributable, in good times, to the sheer force of will of HPRAC members or, in not so good times, to apathy on the part of the ity towards the HPRAC. The Subcommittee believes that the core problem with the HPRAC rests with the fact that it is "advisory". We also believe that there are several more functions that should fall within its jurisdiction in order to avoid undue outside influence on issues related to park management.

Recommendation: Restructure the HPRAC and rename it the "Parks and Recreation Commission". Give the Parks and Recreation Commission real and specific powers and responsibilities, and make it no longer an "advisory" body. The members would serve at the pleasure of the Mayor, with Council approval. The Parks and Recreation Commission would rule on issues related to the city's natural environment and parks, much in the same way the Planning and Zoning Board reviews and approves proposals related to the built environment. It would be comprised of persons with particular skills, such as landscape architecture, civil engineering, urban forestry, and facilities management. It would also have representation from park advocates, Hartford citizens, and collectively, the Friends groups, along with appropriate representation from the city. The senior park administrator would report to this group and be obligated to keep the Commission fully informed of park initiatives and issues. In turn, the Park Commission would have the authority to comment upon and evaluate the Parks and Recreation Division's success in maintaining the Guiding Principles, and overseeing long and short term park improvement plans. In addition, certain subcommittees could be charged with making recommendations to the Mayor and City Council regarding s such changes and improvements to parks and event and usage fees.

G8. Appointing Commissioners: An invigorated and effective Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission requires broad and sustained attendance at meetings. Yet, elected leaders have traditionally not appointed members to serve on the Commission in a timely manner. According to the Municipal Code, only the Mayor and Council can appoint new members or extend the terms of existing members to the Commission.

Recommendation: It should be incumbent on the Parks and Recreation Commission to establish a Nomination Subcommittee to solicit new membership, and make recommendations for nominees and for officer positions to then be submitted to the Mayor and City Council for their timely approval and appointment.

G9. Friends of Parks: The Friends groups play an important role in caring for Hartford parks. Not only do they act as stewards of their respective parks but they also contribute enormous amounts of needed volunteer services. In addition, some of these Friends groups have established foundations or raised considerable dollars to improve their park. The Subcommittee believes that modest steps could be initiated so that interests and energies of the Friends groups can be leveraged to the benefit of the entire park system.

Recommendations: Friends groups, collectively, should have representation on the reconstituted Parks and Recreation Commission, and the city should establish a more formalized working relationship with the Friends groups with respect to parks. This can be achieved through specific, non-financial contractual arrangements with Friends groups and regular, structured reporting relationships with the Friends groups.

G10. Information about Hartford's Parks: Despite Hartford's extensive and historic park system, information about the parks is virtually invisible to the public in basic areas of contact and content. Information on the parks and events, programs and operations is not readily available. There is no listing for parks in the telephone book, except for a direction to call 311. Even if an individual were to call 311, their inquiry would go through a referral process, or be referred to a call center that may be closed even during normal business hours. There is also limited information on parks within the DPW section of the website. The information posted does not display how citizens can connect to the parks, including most of the Friends groups.

Recommendations: Raise the profile of the parks by providing more and easier access to information about the parks and park functions. Establish a listing in the telephone book. Provide a navigation tab for parks on the city's website. Expand the range of information about Hartford's parks. Include links to Friends groups, and information on park events, projects, nature walks and other topics of interest.

End of Section

Maintenance Subcommittee
Recommendations

The GRTF Subcommittee on Maintenance was chaired by Jack Hale. Regular attendees at the Maintenance Subcommittee meetings included: Carl Bard, Jill Barrett, Denise Best, Charmaine Craig, Jack Hale, Henry Hester, David Morin, Tyler Smith, Andrew Woods, and Kim Holden, providing city staff support.

General Observations: The staffing and resources available for park maintenance, as with the city as a whole, have been in decline for decades. However, since becoming a division of the Department of Public Works (DPW) in 1996, the Parks Division has experienced, through lay-offs and attrition, continuous and deep cuts in manpower and funding. (Similar reductions have impacted the Recreational Division that is currently housed under Health and Human Services.) This has negatively impacted all facets of park maintenance: the fundamental inability to do all that need be done; the loss of skilled professionals and with them, the associated "institutional memory"; the lack of strong and visible leadership and supervision; inadequate and outdated equipment; the lack of maintenance standards and management systems. Yet, the extraordinary resource remains. Hartford does have a park system the number, size, quality and historical significance of which is truly special.

The GRTF Subcommittee on Maintenance offers the following recommendations:

M1. Workforce: Hartford has 29 dedicated park workers, or 23 per 100,000 residents. The U.S. average, according to 2010 Trust for Public Land figures, is 54 per 100,000 (although this is based upon larger cities with over 200,000 residents). Comparisons based on acres of parkland per worker yield similar results. Hartford has a very small workforce in park services. The 1992 Hartford Parks Master Plan indicated that the Parks and Recreation Department at that time had 78 staff people dedicated to the maintenance and operation of parks.

Recommendations: Progressively increase the dedicated park maintenance workforce to 65 to meet an average size capacity. In addition, the workforce should be diversified so that some workers normally work on weekends, reducing or even eliminating the need to fund weekend overtime. One possible way to expand the workforce with limited impact on the city budget would be to create a youth conservation corps or expand the existing program. The city should also consider a model tested in Springfield, Massachusetts, where low level repetitive work was contracted to private operators, and dedicated parks staff was moved into positions requiring greater experience, responsibility, and oversight.

M2. Supervision: Observation and reports from various sources indicate that minimal levels of supervision and staff support hinder optimal deployment of the labor force, especially when staff is asked to carry out tasks outside their normal responsibilities.

Recommendation: Address this problem by increasing staffing at the supervisory level. Provide additional supervisory training for current foremen and other supervisory personnel, and develop a clear set of strategies for deployment.

M3. Maintenance Standards: Although DPW park services staff work hard to stay ahead of their work load, the Subcommittee concluded that much of their work is reactive. Citizens have pointed out to the Subcommittee that maintenance is done on a "squeaky wheel" basis, and often in response to political pressure. Comprehensive maintenance standards and strategic plans would relieve much of this pressure.

Recommendation: DPW, perhaps in partnership with a consultant, should develop a comprehensive set of operational and result-oriented maintenance standards as well as processes for applying them to specific circumstances and conditions. In addition, the Department should adopt an asset-based management system with near and long term horizon lines to standardize inspections and maintenance of features such as roads, pathways, playscapes, furniture, and significant trees.

M4. Equipment: The fleet description provided by DPW indicates that the existing park maintenance equipment is generally rudimentary and, in numerous cases, at or near the end of their useful life. Utilizing state of the art equipment may require changes in staff job descriptions and training but could significantly increase production and performance.

Recommendation: Invest in new, improved equipment, but not before developing a detailed plan to identify the optimal equipment to carry out required functions. This effort to update and properly deploy equipment may require assistance from a consultant.

M5. Professionalization: Effective management and maintenance of a historic park system requires seasoned professionals experienced in park management and empowered to strategically move the system forward. In the past, Hartford parks were overseen by a director of parks, a superintendent of parks, and an operations manager. Only the superintendent position still exists. DPW also needs people with significant expertise in turf management and pond maintenance, although a contracting consultant could provide this needed expertise. There is the need for a staff person with substantial and wide ranging environmental management expertise in a position vested with significant authority over parks and green space.

Recommendation: In addition to a top level administrator, the City needs to retain the services of a landscape architect versed in park planning and sensitive to historic parks, a City Forester who is an experienced urban arborist, and persons experienced in turf management and pond maintenance. Such services could be provided on a contract basis. See Recommendation **M.16.**

M6. The Urban Forest: Hartford's urban forest blankets 26% of the city's land area according to two recent studies. As noted in the data collection and analysis method called UFORE (Urban Forest Effects), the value of our trees in 2007 was estimated at $590 million, and provided over $300,000 per year in direct benefits to the city through energy savings resulting from the natural cooling generated by the tree canopy, and health benefits resulting from improved air quality. This asset must be protected. Park forest areas need to be managed for optimal health,

eliminating invasive species, preserving wildlife habitat, managing storm water (and resulting water quality) and thinning stands for proper spacing, optimal species, and age diversity. The magnitude of this asset further strengthens the case for the need of a City Forester as previously recommended.

Recommendations: To assure that the city's tree canopy is maintained, expanded and cared for, the city must adopt the new tree ordinance and establish a tree fund for the planting of new trees and maintaining existing trees. The City Forester needs to be charged with the specific responsibilities of maintaining and expanding our urban forest and undertaking a tree inventory, including street trees, to provide a basis for future action.

M7. Volunteers: Volunteers can be a tremendous asset to the park system, focusing energy where it is needed, accomplishing tasks that are beyond the scope and capabilities of the work force, and developing a sense of pride and ownership of the parks. They must be welcomed, properly deployed, supported by staff, and well thanked for their efforts. This requires that a staff person focus a substantial portion of his or her time and effort to this purpose. Parks staff should work together with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, Friends groups and other volunteer organizations to develop and maintain a list of priority projects for volunteers.

The Knox Parks Foundation currently has a well-developed and successful program of volunteer recruitment, support and management. One aspect of a full-scaled program could be to expand the role of the Knox Parks Foundation.

Colleges and trade schools in the area provide plentiful opportunities for productive internships that could supplement park services. The Parks Division should be encouraged to take advantage of this resource and be given the training and support necessary to successfully recruit and manage interns. Creation of a youth conservation corps or expansion of an existing program would be another way to augment park services and instill a sense of pride and stewardship in those young volunteers.

Recommendations: The city should take the necessary steps to maximize the utilization of volunteer services and dispel the notion that volunteers are taking jobs away from city employees. This may be achieved by the city committing to the current, minimum staffing levels, provided that with new hires, the unions accept the binding provision to support expanded park volunteer programs. In addition DPW needs to assign a staff person who will spend a substantial portion of his or her time coordinating and supporting volunteer initiatives.

M8. Maintenance Deficits: Inadequate maintenance has led to "maintenance deficits" i.e. areas where significant work must be done to bring elements of the parks up to conditions that are usable and maintainable under normal circumstances. Examples include lack of tree pruning, weak lawns and playing fields, deterioration of water quality and the environment of the park ponds, non-functional plumbing and lighting, outmoded and unsafe playground equipment, and rutted, muddy areas next to walkways due to vehicle traffic.

Recommendation: These deficiencies need to be noted as one component of an asset management system (see maintenance standards) and then addressed as part of an established work plan.

M9. Staff Training: As a result of the general reduction of the work force within DPW and Park Services in particular, there are substantial skill and knowledge deficits among park staff. For example, Subcommittee members saw no evidence that anyone within the Department has significant turf management expertise in spite of the hundreds of acres of lawns, playing fields, and meadows within the park system. As an illustration of this shortcoming, the city now has access to large quantities of leaf compost, a wonderful top dressing that can significantly improve the condition of lawns, but it has not been used for that purpose. Park Services also has operated under the assumption that if a person "knows the job" he or she should be able to supervise others in that work. In fact, effective supervision is a skill in itself. Workers moving into supervisory positions must receive appropriate training and support.

Recommendation: Provide more opportunities for "upward mobility" within the department. Workers seeking these opportunities should be supported through effective training. Maintenance staff must also be trained in peripheral aspects of their work in order to avoid damaging plantings and structures. For instance, mowing crews need to learn how to work properly around historic headstones and monuments in cemeteries, and they must learn to recognize the difference between ornamental plantings and the weeds they may be asked to cut. Waste collection crews must learn the impact of repeatedly driving their trucks across turf areas. Staff training should also be viewed as a key component of succession planning, and a critical aspect of effective long-term management.

M10. Job Descriptions and Organizational Structures: The Subcommittee felt that the current staff job descriptions are lacking in two fundamental ways: they are not keyed to the larger goals of the Park Division, nor are the specific descriptions of tasks linked to performance standards. Conversely, some position job descriptions are so loaded with responsibilities that no one individual could fulfill the job description. For example, the job description for the Parks Superintendent is a catch-all position that includes everything from budgeting to emergency response to tree hazard assessment.

Recommendations: As the Park Division expands, job descriptions must be rewritten to more appropriately align staff skills, roles, and responsibilities with the overall goals of the Division. Creation of new goals for park services requires new job descriptions that make achieving those goals an explicit responsibility of the staff person. In addition, each such staff person should be provided adequate time and necessary support to accomplish those goals and should be regularly evaluated. Current staff should be offered training and opportunities to move into positions of higher responsibility. At the same time, a system of annual performance evaluations should be instituted to ensure that proper alignment is established between tasks and goals.

M11. Seasonal Staff and Contract Workers: Financially, the city cannot maintain a workforce of full time workers capable of meeting peak demand and also use that workforce efficiently and effectively during times of lower demand. Attempting to do so leads either to a culture of laxity during low demand times or an excessive reliance on overtime work during high demand periods. Because park maintenance work is inextricably tied to natural processes and annual variability (mowing, snow clearing, leaf removal, etc.), it is obvious that there is value in being able to adjust the size of the workforce to meet seasonal needs.

Recommendations: Continue to utilize seasonal workers as one method to achieve staffing flexibility. On a carefully managed basis, and through an open bid process, contract with private vendors for peak load, seasonal work. As previously recommended, a youth conservation corps could also assist with seasonal peak demand, as could workers from the Community Court, if properly managed and supervised.

M12. Maintenance of New Park Facilities: Each new development or facility in a park carries with it specific new maintenance loads that must be accounted for. For example, a new playscape will require regular inspections for damage, increased trash collection, regular replenishment or repair of cushioning material underneath, and frequent graffiti removal.

Recommendations: For each new facility or park development proposal, include a "maintenance impact plan", indicating the nature and cost of the additional maintenance required. Attention should be given to well-planned and well-designed sidewalks and parking pads to accommodate event set-up in the larger, busier parks. Put in place a process to monitor warranties on contracted development work.

M13. Parks as Ecosystems: Parks are more than public areas for passive and active recreation. As the city's principal green spaces, they play a broader environmental role, absorbing rain water, supporting trees, and offering ecosystems that support all kinds of life and health. Managed only for recreation, park forests may become overrun with invasive species. Lawns and paved areas may drain into sewers instead of being managed for on-site absorption. Ponds may become sickly puddles, and opportunities to harbor diverse wildlife may be lost. A recent Trinity College study detailed the important roles of raptors in Hartford parks and green spaces. Parks and other green spaces also are the locations of critical and sizable segments of our valuable and aging urban forests.

Recommendation: DPW and the Park Division, as the principal stewards of our urban ecosystems, need to implement policies and procedures that are consistent with "state of the art" sustainable design practices.

M14. Sustainable Parks: Parks can be maintained in environmentally and financially sustainable ways. For instance, on-site management of storm water reduces the burden on overloaded and aging storm sewers and can often result in more interesting landscapes and habitats (e.g. rain gardens, swales, or artificial marshes or ponds). Properly managing our forested areas by removing invasive or undesirable species or thinning of trees for optimal health and growth will improve the environmental effectiveness and value of the city's tree canopy.

Another example would be in maintenance of lawns. DPW currently has access to hundreds of cubic yards of leaf compost each year. Properly applied to lawn areas, this compost can lead to healthier, stronger lawns with minimal cost except for a spreader.

Recommendation: Much as the city has done by establishing the position of energy manager to introduce energy conservation practices and systems into the city's built environment, the city should have a professional to manage and oversee the city's natural environment.

M15. Case File Systems: The Subcommittee was told that the city currently operates with low-level technology and incompatible management systems (311, MUNIS) that do not communicate efficiently. As a result, communications that ought to be connected between departments remain in "silos". Given the limited staffing, this severely reduces the effectiveness of staff and crews. Investment in more advanced equipment (whether field equipment, vehicles, or office technology) could substantially improve productivity and efficiency.

Recommendation: Based on a cost/benefit analysis, the city should adopt a and MUNIS based 311 system, or invest in a single accountability technology system that would connect various city departments and functions.

M16. Regional Cooperation: The 1992 Hartford Parks Master Plan pointed out the potential value for regional cooperation in park maintenance. For example, pond maintenance, forest management, monument preservation and field restoration are needs common to all area towns and require the attention of a specialist, but on a periodic basis. Similarly, equipment such as compost spreaders and tub grinders are needed by all parks departments, but not on a full time basis.

Recommendation: The city should initiate discussions with surrounding towns on the cost/benefit of retaining on a shared cost basis, or on a private contract basis, these specialized park services and, likewise, the leasing or purchasing of specialized equipment.

M17. Standardization of Park Components: Park maintenance workers are challenged when park furniture, equipment and fixtures encompass a range of designs and require an equally wide range of maintenance methods and replacement parts. Because benches, lights, playground equipment, trash cans, pond aerators and other items are currently so varied, a worker sent to service them can hardly be expected to have all necessary parts, tools or working knowledge of repair procedures to properly make the necessary repairs or replacements. That being said, the Subcommittee notes that the 1992 Parks Master Plan warns against adopting a single standard for each such item. For example, designs that are appropriate around the athletic fields in Colt Park would not necessarily be appropriate in the more formal, historic grounds near the Elizabeth Park gardens.

Recommendation: Based on review and oversight by the proper park governance entity (see Governance Recommendations), the city should adopt a menu of 2 or 3 standard designs for each type of park furniture from which selections can be made to apply appropriately to specific locations.

M18. School Grounds Maintenance: In a city the size of Hartford, it makes little sense to support a separate capacity to maintain parks, street medians and school grounds and fields. In research done by the Governance Subcommittee, we learned that all school grounds in the city of Springfield, MA are maintained by their parks department and that this has proved to be a well functioning and cost effective approach. Not only does this consolidate maintenance, but it allows the city to apply for park related grants for the purpose of improving school grounds.

Recommendation: The Springfield model deserves further study and should be adopted by Hartford if it is cost effective.

M19. Illegal Dumping: Illegal dumping of trash in parks is a persistent and disheartening problem, particularly in Keney Park, but also in Goodwin, Pope, and elsewhere. Secluded park areas are particularly attractive for people who either lack access to appropriate disposal options or don't wish to pay the dumping fees at designated places.

Recommendations: The city should impose increased fines, improve surveillance, and initiate more aggressive enforcement by giving selected DPW staff authority to issue citations for illegal dumping.

M20. Golf Course Management: The two municipal golf courses occupy significant acreage in Keney and Goodwin Parks but operate as independent entities.

Recommendation: As new sustainable standards and practices are developed for the park system as a whole, the golf course management firms must be required to adopt similar standards and practices.

M21. Respecting Our Parks: An important part of improving our parks must be intensive education of park users and city staff about the value of parks and appropriate behavior within them. HHS and DPW staff and event sponsors are frequently seen driving and/or parking vehicles on turf areas, destroying lawns, compacting soil, and creating further maintenance tasks.

Recommendations: This practice must stop. Event sponsors must be informed of city policies related to vehicle access. City staff must be held to respect these policies. Citizens must be encouraged to avoid littering. DPW staff needs to enforce these policies and have authority to issue citations and seek payment for damages from responsible parties.

M22. Value of Burial Grounds: While city cemeteries have not been a focus of GRTF's work, burial grounds have had a significant historical relationship to the city not only as cemeteries but also as places of rest and reflection. Currently Hartford cemeteries are near capacity, which will soon result in Hartford residents having to purchase space in cemeteries outside the city limits. This is a burden on city residents who wish to maintain memorials. As the "baby-boomer" generation ages, the need and value of accessible, well-managed, burial space within city limits will increase.

Recommendation: Explore the design, construction and long-term management of high-density urban burial facilities, such as columbaria, and how existing city cemeteries, many of them under the management of the Parks Department, might provide this need.

End of Section

Finance Subcommittee
Recommendations

The GRTF Subcommittee on Finance was chaired by Mike Zaleski. Regular attendees at the Finance Subcommittee meetings included: Whitney Hatch, Joe Marfuggi, Mary Rickel Pelletier, Nancy Macy, Tyler Smith, Michael Zaleski, and Jonas Maciunas, providing city staff support.

General Observations: The City of Hartford spends significantly fewer dollars per acre on its parks than most cities. This was pointed out in the 1992 Hartford Parks Master Plan and the 2007 Trust for Public Land study, Renewing a Historic Legacy. This decline in funding and staffing continues to this day, leaving our park system underfunded and the city incapable of properly maintaining this extraordinary asset. The city is fortunate to have such a large and expansive parks system but must appropriate proper funding to allow for the care and maintenance of its parks system.

The GRTF Subcommittee on Finance offers the following recommendations:

F1. Strong Centralized Park Administration: While there are many people who work in and around the parks system, there is no one city employee who is knowledgeable about all aspects of the parks and can appreciate how they are interrelated. The city parks system would benefit from a manager who is familiar with park management and administration and who is publicly perceived as the chief parks official. This would improve communication and public confidence and foster more collaboration among employees who have responsibility or authority over the various aspects of the parks system.

Recommendation: Hire a park director, or "park czar", who is knowledgeable and capable in all aspects of managing, planning and caring for our park system and who would be responsible and accountable for all functions related to the management of the park system.

F2. Grant Funding: There appear to be increased opportunities to secure public and foundation grants related to urban ecology and sustainable urban ecosystems which are not being aggressively pursued by the city. Currently grant applications for park related funding are completed by individuals in the Grants Management Office or by a "Friends" group on behalf of a specific park. Applications for grants are sent to the city or are referred to the grants office by city employees, elected officials, Friends groups or others. To our knowledge, there is no city staff person who is actively, regularly and specifically pursuing park funding opportunities.

Recommendation: Increase the capacity to pursue and secure grant funds for parks and the urban eco-system. The chief park administrator needs to have direct responsibility, working through a dedicated grant writer within the parks department or the Grant Management Office, to aggressively pursue grant and funding opportunities.

F3. Development of a Non-profit Entity: Currently an individual cannot make a tax-deductible contribution to the parks system, as the donation would have to be received by the City of Hartford. A separate 501(c)(3) entity that can receive funding for the benefit of the whole parks system would be advantageous.

Recommendation: Establish an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit entity and explore the feasibility of adapting the City Parks Trust Fund to serve as the entity capable of soliciting and receiving contributions.

F4. City Parks Trust Fund: The City Parks Trust Fund is an extraordinary and precious parks asset. On the investment side, it has been well managed. By ordinance, the annual interest generated from the fund is used to fund capital and beautification projects in the parks. Improvements to the management structure of the Park Trust Fund, both in terms of safeguards as to how funds can be accessed, distributed and utilized, as well as more creative mechanisms for investing in sustaining our park system, should be explored.

Recommendation: Establish an independent board - perhaps through the Finance Department or a re-constituted Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC), or Park Trust Fund Board of Trustees, or a combination thereof, with the appropriate checks and balances, to oversee and manage the policies, procedures and planning strategies related to the Parks Trust Fund and the proposed new 501(c)(3) non-profit entity. This Board could also begin to create multi-year budgets for Trust Fund planning purposes in conjunction with a reconstituted PRAC.

F5. Regional Use of City Parks: Events in several high profile city parks bring in tens of thousands of visitors from suburban towns and the region. While there may be an economic benefit resulting from these events, the entire cost of operating and maintaining these parks is borne by the city. The Hartford Courant recently called for exploring the idea of a regional parks system. The newspaper cites the Riverfront Recapture model as one that has been successful. The city currently has relationships with several adjacent towns and has shown a willingness to work with others. However, it is important to establish reciprocal terms of collaboration for the use of Hartford parkland and recreational facilities. For example, the city recently renewed an agreement with the Town of Avon to allow for high school rowing teams to use Batterson Park free of charge.

Recommendation: While discussions of regional cooperation have yet to yield significant results, the city should encourage this exchange and look for a payment or other reciprocity in cases like this one. Continue to push for regional solutions to parks funding challenges and work with the state to establish a 'regional asset district' that would provide regional funding for destination parks like popular city parks.

F6. Economic Impact of Events: While the larger economic impact of many events in city parks cannot be disputed, most events bring very little direct economic benefit to the city government. Fee waivers requested by event producers and routinely approved by city Council encourages overuse of many of the larger parks often with very little or no return to the city. The special event permit application has a page that specifically asks if the event producer will be requesting a fee waiver. Serious thought should be given to whether the impact that special events have on the parks is worth the cost of damage to the parks and increased maintenance.

Recommendation: The issuing of event permits should be based on a cost/benefit analysis and should not be approved if there is no meaningful benefit to the city. The granting of fee waivers should not be routinely granted, and the permit process should not encourage it.

F7. Billings for Event-Related City Services: The collection system used by the city for special events in city parks, as well as the use of athletic fields by area leagues, seems dispersed among city departments and is inconsistent and inefficient. The city needs to have a fair and efficient method of billing for city services consistent with the costs of particular events and the post-event repairs and clean-up.

Recommendations: Strengthen the Finance Department so that billings can be centralized, invoices promptly generated, and outstanding invoices pursued for payment. Event sponsors that fail to pay the city for fees and services provided should not be granted future permits until billing matters are resolved. Also, improve the system of securing athletic fields for games hosted by local and area athletic leagues and provide verification of field use and clean-up after games.

F8. Revenue from Parks: Some city parks generate revenue, others do not. This revenue may be generated through leases or fees. The parks' natural resources may also represent a potential revenue source. Most revenue generated from the parks is returned to the city's general fund and is not used for the upkeep and maintenance of the parks.

Recommendation: Undertake a comprehensive assessment of all park revenues and potential park revenue. Develop guidelines for event programming and usage fees that are consistent with the associated costs. Introduce a balanced strategy to allow a portion of the revenue generated in parks to remain in the parks budget.

F9. Staffing: The Department of Public Works (DPW) has endured annual budget cuts that have pared the staff to the point where DPW cannot meet the maintenance needs of the park system. While the Maintenance Subcommittee will weigh in more specifically on staffing levels for the parks, the Finance Subcommittee believes asking 29 parks employees to properly maintain 17 parks totaling some 2,200 acres is unreasonable.

Recommendation: Additional funding should be allocated to increase staffing in the Parks Division.

F10. Compatible Urban Development: Attractive, safe and well maintained city parks will increase surrounding real estate values and make the city more attractive and livable. It can also produce significant increased tax revenue to the city. In like fashion, new parks, greenways and boulevards can also stimulate new development.

Recommendation: Through its Department of Development Services, the city should actively pursue and encourage appropriate and compatible development around established parks. It should also look for opportunities to create new open space that will invite appropriate new development. Inversely, the city must be vigilant and guarded about relinquishing or selling existing park land for short-term economic gain.

End of Section.

Implementation Strategy

The Green Ribbon Task Force shares the conviction that the recommendations of this task force be acted on, and to do so requires a well- defined implementation strategy keyed to a timeline. We do not want this to be yet another report that sits on a shelf. To that end, we wish to put forth some initial thoughts on bringing these recommendations to reality.

To start this process, we suggest that the city hold a series of public meetings to discuss the proposed recommendations. This will allow Hartford citizens to gain both a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the recommendations as well as the opportunity to discuss and debate their merit. Such gatherings will also generate the necessary momentum to propel this effort forward.

In framing an implementation plan, it is helpful to look at the general nature of the proposed recommendations. Yes, several of the recommendations which relate to staffing, equipment and management systems will require a significant influx of financial resources. While some funds may come from a reallocation of current available dollars to parks and recreation services, they will not be nearly enough to meet the stated need. The new dollars required will be in large part dependent upon economic forces the city does not control, and may be slow in coming.

That said, a majority of the 42 recommendations noted in this report can be put in place without additional, new funding. Several of the fundamental recommendations relate to the single concept of leadership. With strong leadership at the top, an operational commitment to clarity, predictability and accountability can be instilled in personnel at all staff levels.

Likewise, several of our recommendations can be achieved through the introduction of “best practices” with respect to maintenance standards, job descriptions, workforce training, staff flexibility and “asset management” policies, and are not fiscal dependent.

Several key recommendations will require restructuring of governance bodies, reorganizing certain city functions, creating new entities and appropriate oversight mechanisms, and negotiating more flexible work rules with city unions. This will require a sustained and determined administrative effort but also does not represent a major financial obligation.

To implement these recommendations, the Mayor’s office must take the lead in directing staff to carry out the recommendations within a specified timeframe. We suggest that the Council’s Public Works, Parks, and Environment Committee serve as an oversight body, and that the city’s Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the pertinent department heads, most notably the DPW Director, report regularly to the Mayor and Council Committee on progress implementing these recommendations. Given this general operational framework, we recommend the following sequence for implementation.

Implementation Plan

YEAR 1

Step 1: Complete the implementation in FY 2011-2012 of the four recommendations noted as "first steps" in the January 23, 2011 letter to Mayor Segarra from the GRTF.

1. Hire a top-level parks administrator/planner capable of leading the park service's enterprise and planning for the rejuvenation of the park system.

2. Hire a grant writer experienced in seeking and obtaining park related grants.

3. Add the equivalent of one crew of workers to park services, and establish these employees as a weekend crew that will customarily work on Saturdays and Sundays, when park use and park volunteer activities are greatest.

4. Hire a landscape architect/planner sensitive to historic landscapes as well as the demand of current uses in order to evaluate, develop, and oversee all park development and renovation projects.

Taken together, these recommendations add professional level staff that will be able to oversee future development and improvements. The parks administrator will focus park services, set directions, and supervise future consultant contracts. The grant writer will lessen the budget load for future development. A single new crew of workers will significantly reduce the need for overtime and substantially enhance services before any of the more significant changes would occur in park services.

Step 2: Based upon the outcome of the public meetings on the GRTF report, prioritize the recommendations and develop a more detailed schedule for implementation.

Step 3: Put in place all the necessary resources needed for the full reunification of Parks and Recreation as a unified entity within DPW with the goal of having it fully operational early in year 2.

Step 4: Create a 501(c)(3) entity to receive donations for the park system that would be established and available by the end of year 2.

Step 5: With the assistance of the grant writer, develop a multi-year strategy to apply for and secure new sources of governmental and foundation funds for the parks and park related functions.

Step 6: Pass the tree ordinance with the goal of having it staffed, funded and operational in year 2.

YEAR 2

Step1: Continue to build the overall park services work force with the goal of bringing it to full strength within 5 years. (Based on current circumstances, our research indicates that number should be 65 persons.)

Step 2: With the parks administrator on board, introduce policy and procedural goals such as maintenance standards, asset management systems, personnel training and redeployment, hiring or contracting for specialized services, planning for volunteer engagement, staff accountability systems, and equipment planning.

Step 3: Working with Corporation Counsel, the City Council, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and Parks and Recreation administration and staff, draft a revised ordinance to define the role and responsibilities of an empowered Parks and Recreation Commission.

Step 4: Upgrade and manage the City's website as it relates to Hartford parks, park and recreation activities and resources. Make it easier and more accessible for the general public to know about the parks and the programs and activities offered.

Step 5: The formation of a new 501(c)(3) entity to receive tax-deductable gifts to the Hartford parks system should be prominently displayed on the website, and promoted by the City.

Step 6: Purchase parks and recreation related software which will allow the city to automate permitting and tracking of field events, scheduling, invoicing, payments and maintenance information.

YEAR 3

Step 1: Continue to rebuild the Parks and Recreation workforce.

Step 2: Identify programs and strategies to engage Friends groups and expand volunteer and youth corps services.

Step 3: Fully activate the Parks and Recreation Commission by appointing Commission members, filling subcommittees, and providing the necessary staff support.

Step 4: With the assistance of a consultant team, begin the process to evaluate the creation of a Department of Environmental Services that would include the functions of Parks and Recreation and a "greener" DPW. If such a step proved functionally advantageous, performance enhancing, and brought economic benefits and economies of scale, the City should proceed to plan for the creation of a Department of Environmental Services.

Step 5: Fully assess the progress for years I through 3, and make the necessary course corrections to achieve the stated goals.

YEARS 4 and 5

Step 1: Bring the overall work force to full strength.

Step 2: Expand volunteer training, services and programs.

Step 3: If approved, put in place the Department of Environmental services.

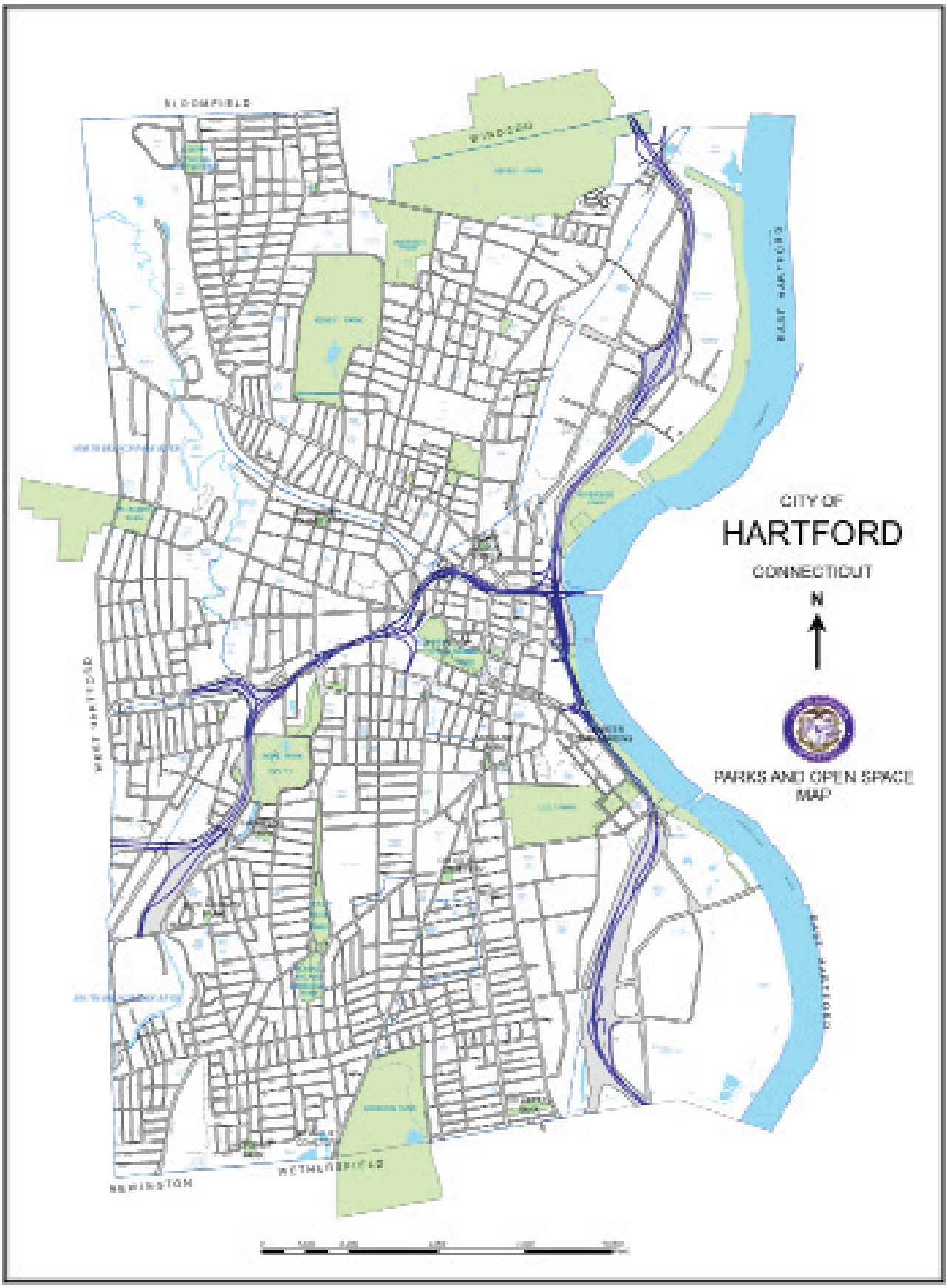
BY END OF YEAR 5

Step 1: Have a reconstituted Parks and Recreation Commission and associated subcommittees appointed, staffed and functioning.

Step 2: Have the Parks and Recreation Division fully staffed, properly equipped and well managed.

Step 3: Have the Department of Environmental Services in place and fully operational.

End of Section


CITY OF
HARTFORD
CONNECTICUT
N
PARKS AND OPEN SPACE
MAP

A BRIEF HISTORY

About Hartford's Parks: As was typical of early New England villages, land was often set aside for common use. Such was the likely case for South Green, which served as a "village green" since shortly after Hartford's founding in 1635, and survives today as a park. But it was the acquisition by the City of Hartford in 1853 of 39 acres of land along the Park River that put Hartford at the forefront of the 19th century park movement. Inspired by the vision of Horace Bushnell, this marked the nation's first publicly financed park. Over the next 60 years Hartford would acquire, design and maintain an urban park system that would become the envy of a swiftly industrializing country.

As Hartford's population rapidly increased through the balance of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, acquisition of new parklands became a major civic initiative. In one 15 month period in 1894 and 1895, Hartford added over 1,200 acres of parkland which were acquired either through gifts of civic-minded benefactors or through the issuance of bonds. Included among these acquisitions were what remain today as the City's major parks: Elizabeth, Keney, Goodwin, Pope, Riverside and Colt. This deluge of new park lands was embraced as Hartford's "Rain of Parks".

A Board of Park Commissioners comprised of notable citizens oversaw the acquisition and planning of this major park expansion, as well as the maintenance of the park system. The landscape architecture firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot, later renamed the Olmsted brothers, along with Theodore Wirth, had the greatest influence in shaping the design of Hartford's park system. Not only were they engaged in the design of most of the larger parks, but they developed a comprehensive vision for Hartford's unified system of parks that ringed the city. Included in this Rain of Parks were plans for a system of parkways and boulevards intended to link the major parks. While this idea was never fully realized, it has re-emerged a century later as a still powerful concept. It was also during this period that many of the City's smaller parks were created. These included Sigourney Square, Rocky Ridge, and Hylans Park.

The first half of the twentieth century saw the addition of smaller playgrounds and memorials such as Keney Tower in 1924, and Charter Oak Memorial in 1939. The last major parkland acquisition by the City was Batterson Park in 1928, which lies outside the City boundaries. It was transferred to the park system from the City of Hartford Water Company. This property was no longer needed for watershed as the water company functions were being transferred to the new and much larger regional Metropolitan District Commission.

Most of the original, major parks had been designed as places for passive recreation and informal social gathering. But the twentieth century brought an accelerated demand for active recreational facilities as well. As a result, provisions for a variety of seasonally based sports were introduced into the parks such as baseball, lawn bowling, croquet, ice skating, sledding, boating, swimming, horseback riding and golf. The intensified, active use of the parks put increased demands and strain on the maintenance of the park system.

Physically and symbolically, the pivot point marking the beginning of the decline of the Hartford park system came with the floods of 1936 and 1938, and the subsequent burying of the Park River in the 1940's which so dramatically changed the character of Bushnell Park. The ensuing decades produced a protracted decline in the care and maintenance of Hartford parks. This was further exacerbated by the Urban Renewal era of the 1950's, 60's and 70's that effectively dismissed the idea of " the livable city", and promoted a suburban exodus with the construction of highways that were often run through or adjacent to established city parklands. Hartford was particularly impacted by the construction of Interstate I-91 which cut the City off from the Connecticut River and Riverside Park,

Interstate I-84 which separated North Hartford from the Downtown and also cut off the western edge of Pope Park. At the east edge of Bushnell Park land was taken for the creation of Pulaski Circle to accommodate the Whitehead Highway which flooded the perimeter of Bushnell Park with automobile traffic.

Though now much in need of attention and care, the park system remains one of Hartford's greatest and most valuable assets. There are thirty-one parks that comprise approximately 2000 acres of open space within the City limits. Half of this area is distributed among the City's seven larger, more prominent parks: Keney, Elizabeth, Goodwin, Pope, Colt, Riverside and Bushnell. There are twenty-four smaller neighborhood parks, playgrounds, memorials, and six City owned cemeteries. Another 917 acres of parklands are located outside the City limits: Batterson Park comprises 585 acres located in Farmington and New Britain, and sections of Elizabeth, Keney and Goodwin that extend into the adjacent towns of West Hartford, Bloomfield and Wethersfield.

A significant addition to Hartford's parks was initiated in 1980, with a civic gathering at the Old State House. This meeting led to the formation in 1981 of the non-profit entity, Riverfront Recapture, Inc. (RRI), committed to reuniting Hartford with its riverfronts. The resulting "work of a generation" led by a determined and dedicated group of "believers", and supported by area corporations, foundations and nonprofit groups, developed a plan to recapture Hartford's and East Hartford's riverfront. Supported with funding from the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the State of Connecticut, a network of parks was created, highlighted by the opening in 1999 of Riverfront Plaza, which reestablished the historic connection between Downtown Hartford and the Connecticut River.

Concurrently, a landmark maintenance agreement, hailed as a national model, between RRI, the municipalities of Hartford and East Hartford and the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) was approved by the MDC member towns. Today, RRI attracts upwards of a million visitors annually to its parks, through casual and repeat visits and an active and well-managed event calendar.