

City of Stamford

Mill River Park Collaborative

FY 2021-22

BOR Fiscal Committee

Budget Presentation





Introduction

Mission: To run a world class urban park in the heart of Stamford that serves as both an oasis in city life and a vibrant, diverse, green-space that inspires sound environmental practices and learning.



Continuation of Park Services	Services Provided
Critical & Mandated	
Landscaping, Maintenance and Park Safety	Planting, mowing, tree care, irrigation, snow removal, cleaning, maintenance of hardscape and fixtures, safety patrol routes, and COVID protocols.
Public Programming	Free fitness programs, movies nights, arts & entertainment, Summer Day Camp, and nature based education programs.
Capital Development	Capital expansion of the Mill River Park from Tresser Blvd. down to Richmond Hill, and completion of the Whittingham Discovery Center, all in accordance with the Mill River Park Master Plan.
Other	
Brownstein Selkowitz Carousel Pavilion	Operate year round pavilion with carousel, snack bar and restrooms. Provide free public programs, drop in arts & crafts, and arts performances. Provide birthday parties and event space.
Steven & Alexandra Cohen Skating Center and Fountain	Manage co-located seasonal ice skating rink and display fountain. Ice Skating rink is the only ice rink open 7 days a week in season dedicated to recreational skating in lower Fairfield County. Also includes free skate lessons for underserved children.

Fiscal 2020-21 Highlights

Public programming was impacted the most by COVID-19. However, we still managed to provide the following through proper Social Distancing and other State, Local and Federal guidelines:

- Summer Movie Nights – offered 6 scheduled movies on Friday and Saturday evenings.
- Fitness Classes – provided a total of 50 free fitness classes running 4 days a week and had 1,018 participants.
- Carousel Rides – open on weekends. Extensive COVID cleaning to ensure public safety.
- Recreational Skating – had the highest skating turn out on record before the State closed the rink down due to controversial outdoor COVID regulation.
- Summer Camp – served 25 children. Partnered with Stamford Hospital to offer emergency childcare for First Responders.
- Summer and School Year Stewards Program – paid to employ 16 paid high school and college students all from Stamford.
- Landcare and Park Ambassadors – uninterrupted care, maintenance, and safety of the Park.
- Employment – employed 48 people year to date, of which 37 are residents of Stamford.

Phase 2: Middle Corridor



Whittingham Discovery Center



Playground Renovation





This is what is coming

Challenges anticipated in 2021-22

- The following areas may continue to face COVID-19 regulations:
 - Public programming and events such as Movie Nights, Fitness, and Pizza in the Park.
 - Services for school aged children such as Summer Camp, 4th Grade School Programs, Stewards Program, and Afterschool.
 - Recreational skating at the Ice Rink including Holiday Lighting and Winter Market activities.
 - Public use of the Fountain as a splash pad.
 - Public use of the Carousel Pavilion.
 - COVID-19 personnel safety, signage, and thorough sanitizing of public facilities.

- Park Expansion and Upgrades:
 - New and improved playground and comfort stations on west side of park.
 - Additional 5+ acres of park including walkways, seating areas and gardens.
 - Upgrades to the temporary dog run while completing concepts for a new and permanent dog park area.

Looking Ahead

- Continued challenges with expanded Park footprint and services:
 - Park Maintenance
 - Safety
 - Personnel
 - Programming
 - COVID-19 safety, signage and cleaning.

- Additional funding would expand the following areas:
 - Hiring of additional maintenance staff to service expanded acreage.
 - Expansion of the Park Ambassador/Safety Program.
 - Improvements in overall park maintenance and COVID protocols.

- Any significant budget reduction would impact the following:
 - Decrease in the level of park maintenance.
 - Reduction in the number and variety of free programs offered.
 - Reduction in the level of Ambassador/Safety program.
 - Slower pace of park improvement and expansion.



Mill River Park Collaborative

Operating Budget Funding Request Fiscal Year 2021/2022

2021/2022 Operating Budget

Total Request \$692,000

Mill River Park Collaborative is requesting financial support from the City. The City's contribution towards the Operating Budget will support our continued efforts and improvements with Community Programming & Outreach, Nature Based Education, Recreation, Park Maintenance & Beautification and Public Safety.

Contents

Cover Page	Page 1
1. Mission Statement, Vision and Timeline	Page 2
2. 2020 Accomplishments	Page 3
3. Organization Chart	Page 4
4. Operating Results Fiscal Year 2019/2020	Page 5
5. Projected Operating Results Fiscal Year 2020/2021	Page 6
6. Operating Budget Fiscal Year 2021/2022	Page 7
7. Most recent audited financial statements 2018/2019	Pages 8-11
8. Supportive Charts, Comments and Facts	Pages 12-16

Mill River Park Collaborative
Operating Budget Funding
Request Fiscal Year 2021/2022

Mission Statement

The board of the Collaborative includes representation from the City of Stamford, Stamford Partnership, Downtown Special Services District, the West Side and Downtown communities, Urban Redevelopment Commission, the corporate community and Stamford at large. The Collaborative was established as a public/private partnership that would “provide collaborative leadership in creating and sustaining a successful Mill River Park.”

Collaborative Vision

Our mission is to run a world-class urban park in the heart of Stamford that serves as both an oasis in city life and a vibrant, diverse, green-space that inspires sound environmental practices and learning.

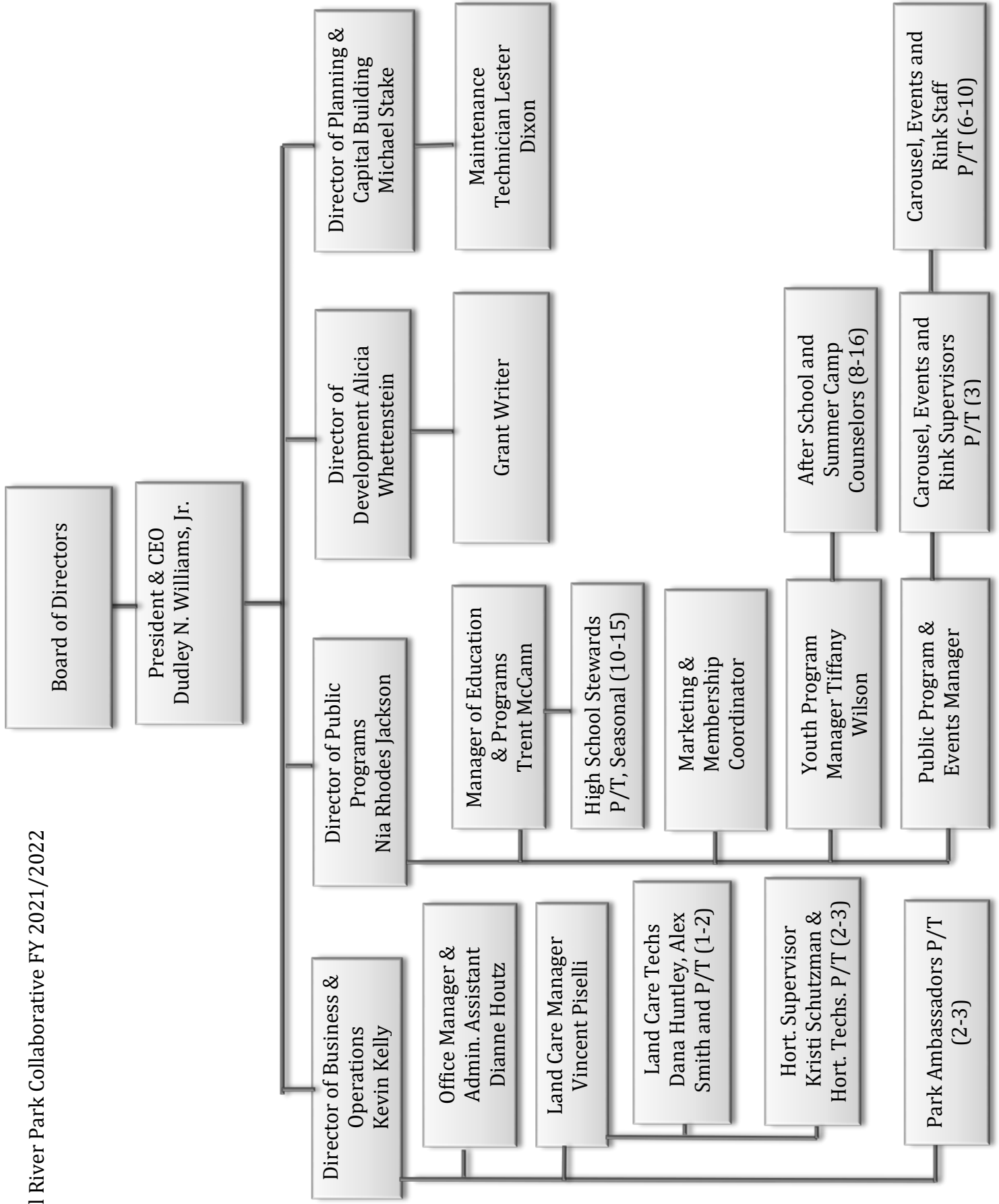
Mill River Timeline

- 1998 Sasaki Associates creates the Mill River Corridor Plan. The intent of the Plan was to create a green space in the heart of Stamford as a gathering place for citizens. Key recommendations from the plan:
 - Create 19 acres of new open space and restore an existing seven acres that would allow for large events,
 - Establish a public-private partnership to lead the effort
- 2001 Creation of Mill River Corridor Redevelopment District
- 2002 Creation of Mill River Park Collaborative
- 2005 OLIN Partnership hired to create Mill River Park Masterplan
- 2006 Mill River Playground designed by OLIN and Leathers & Associates. Construction was completed over the course of a week with 1,500 volunteers.
- 2009 Army Corps of Engineers river restoration and damn removal
- 2013 Opening of 12 acre Phase 1 site designed by OLIN Partnership
- 2017 Opening of Brownstein | Selkowitz Carousel Pavilion
- 2018 Opening of Steven & Alexandra Cohen Skating Center and Fountain
- 2019 Opening of the Pop-Up Park and Dog Park
- 2020 Break ground on Phase II of the Park from Tresser Blvd. to Richmond Hill Ave. and the Whittingham Discovery Center

2020 Mill River Park Collaborative Highlights



1. Partnered with the State Office of Early Childhood to bring Project 26 to Stamford, offering emergency care to the children of Stamford Hospital employees at the height of the pandemic.
2. Employed 26 local high school and college students through our Mill River Stewards High School Internship Program, Carousel and public programs at Mill River Park
3. Hosted over 75 free public programs from June – December including 4 free weekly fitness classes, movie nights, and a socially distanced Halloween celebration.
4. Served 25 children in the Mill River Park Summer Camp program.



Mill River Park Collaborative
Financial Statements
FY 2020 Projection - Pending Audit

	Comparison to Budget	
	Fiscal 2020 Actuals	Fiscal 2020 Budget
Revenues - Operationa		
Contributions - Restricted	\$ 286,000	\$ 129,500
Contributions - Unrestricted	127,619	160,000
Annual Appeal	141,200	130,000
Membership	18,600	17,000
In-Kind Contribution - Rent	72,521	-
Fundraising Event - Gala (Net)	200,743	285,000
Carousel & Rink Revenue (Net CGS)	70,390	149,575
Other Events - Oct. Fest, Pizza Park (Net)	3,962	75,000
City of Stamford - City Grant	662,000	662,000
City of Stamford - TIFF	754,715	675,000
Summer Camp & Project 26	100,644	110,025
Misc. Program Fees	47,969	54,950
Interest Income	637	500
Total Revenue	2,487,002	2,448,550
Expenses		
Salary & Wages	1,092,740	1,132,339
Payroll Taxes	92,245	93,281
Benefits & Other Compensation	74,990	96,236
Contract, Professional Fees, Outside Svcs.	174,934	209,800
Liability Insurance	83,829	79,904
Advertising	8,556	29,950
Technology Expense	39,155	45,168
Conference, Training, Travel & Meals	14,615	24,174
Depreciation	275,163	119,477
Utilities	4,066	14,400
Park & Playground Maint.	89,876	105,132
Rink & Fountain Maintenance	102,614	157,420
Equipment Lease	24,824	23,342
Postage	5,028	10,900
Printing	12,320	25,200
Rent	72,521	35,000
Service Charges	13,168	21,486
Supplies & Materials (Office & Park)	291,412	204,319
Telephone & Internet	14,945	16,022
Bad Debt - Ops	-	5,000
Total Expense	2,487,002	2,448,550
Net Operating Income	-	-
Other Income - Capital Contributions		
CC - Contributions (TIF, Corp., Ind.)	1,506,353	5,183,000
CC - Interest Income	20,277	7,500
CC - Gain/(Loss) on Investments	6,902	-
Total Other Income	1,533,532	5,190,500
Other Expenses - Capital Related		
CC - Conference, Training & Travel	-	-
CC - MRC Improvements	46,279	9,848,837
CC - Postage, Printing, Program, Misc	6,549	-
Total Other Expense	52,828	9,848,837
Net Other Income	1,480,704	(4,658,337)
Surplus / (Deficit)	1,480,704	(4,658,337)

Mill River Park Collaborative
Financial Statements
FY 2021 Projection

	Comparison to Budget	
	Fiscal 2021 Projection	Fiscal 2021 Budget
Revenues - Operationa		
Contributions - Restricted	\$ 150,000	\$ 267,500
Contributions - Unrestricted	173,002	125,000
Annual Appeal	142,500	140,000
Membership	20,000	20,000
Fundraising Event - Gala (Net)	110,000	230,000
Carousel & Rink Revenue (Net CGS)	21,837	72,000
Other Events - Oct. Fest, Pizza Park (Net)	-	15,000
City of Stamford - City Grant	562,000	562,000
City of Stamford - TIFF	700,776	700,776
PPP Loan Forgiveness	270,651	270,651
Summer Camp	61,650	65,650
Misc. Program Fees	9,550	25,000
Interest Income	750	750
Total Revenue	2,222,716	2,494,327
Expenses		
Salary & Wages	1,104,352	1,186,574
Payroll Taxes	84,483	98,119
Benefits & Other Compensation	75,163	89,450
Contract, Professional Fees, Outside Svcs.	138,167	173,850
Liability Insurance	91,448	92,423
Advertising	10,000	20,000
Technology Expense	29,152	36,533
Conference, Training, Travel & Meals	14,774	19,774
Depreciation	135,000	135,000
Utilities	10,382	11,881
Park & Playground Maint.	103,064	108,064
Rink & Fountain Maintenance	139,720	169,720
Equipment Lease	28,373	25,373
Postage	8,000	10,500
Printing	13,750	16,200
Rent	49,000	49,000
Service Charges	16,000	19,180
Supplies & Materials (Office & Park)	161,856	210,656
Telephone & Internet	17,500	17,030
Bad Debt - Operations Restricted	5,000	5,000
Total Expense	2,235,184	2,494,327
Net Operating Income	(12,468)	-
Other Income - Capital Contributions		
CC - Contributions (TIF, Corp., Ind.)	1,549,224	1,549,224
CC - Interest Income	5,000	7,500
CC - Gain/(Loss) on Investments	2,500	-
Total Other Income	1,556,724	1,556,724
Other Expenses - Capital Related		
CC - Conference, Training & Travel	-	-
CC - MRC Improvements	281,885	281,885
CC - Postage, Printing, Program, Misc	3,000	-
Total Other Expense	284,885	281,885
Net Other Income	1,271,839	1,274,839
Surplus / (Deficit)	1,259,371	1,274,839

Mill River Park Collaborative
Operating Budget FY 2022

	FY 2022 Budget
Revenues	
Contributions - Restricted	\$ 300,000
Contributions - Unrestricted	175,000
Annual Appeal	150,000
Membership	25,000
Fundraising Event - Gala (Net)	250,000
Carousel & Rink Revenue (Net CGS)	105,475
Other Events - October Fest, Pizza In The Park (Net)	24,000
City of Stamford - Grant	692,000
City of Stamford - TIF	725,000
Summer Camp	110,100
Misc. Program Fees	34,500
Interest Income	750
Total Revenue	2,591,825
Expenses	
Salary & Wages	1,223,825
Payroll Taxes	100,900
Benefits & Other Compensation	90,229
Contract, Professional Fees, Outside	188,050
Liability Insurance	96,066
Advertising	20,000
Technology Expense	35,500
Conference, Training, Travel & Meals	19,774
Depreciation	135,000
Park & Playground Maint.	109,829
Rink Maint.	169,720
Utilities	13,620
Equipment Lease	26,694
Postage	18,000
Printing	29,200
Rent Expense	53,250
Service Charges	19,500
Supplies & Materials (Office & Park)	217,638
Telephone & Internet	20,030
Bad Debt Exp. - Ops	5,000
Total Expense	2,591,825
Net Operating Income	-
Other Income	
CC - Contributions (Corp., Ind.)	1,650,000
CC - Interest Income	-
CC - Gain/(Loss) on Investments	-
Total Other Income	1,650,000
Other Expenses	
CC - Conference, Training & Travel	-
CC - Improvements (Discovery Center)	364,401
CC - Postage, Printing, Program, Misc	-
Total Other Expense	364,401
Net Other Income	1,285,599
Surplus / (Deficit)	1,285,599



Independent Auditors' Report

**To the Board of Directors of
Mill River Collaborative, Inc.**

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Mill River Collaborative, Inc. (the "Collaborative"), which comprise the statements of financial position as of June 30, 2019 and 2018 and the related statements of activities, functional expenses and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

Management's Responsibility for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America; this includes the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditors' Responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audits. We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The procedures selected depend on the auditors' judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the entity's preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control. Accordingly, we express no such opinion. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial statements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Opinion

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Mill River Collaborative, Inc. as of June 30, 2019 and 2018 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

**To the Board of Directors of
Mill River Collaborative, Inc.**

Page 2

Change in Accounting Principle

As discussed in Note 2 to the financial statements, during the year ended June 30, 2019 Mill River Collaborative, Inc. adopted new accounting guidance resulting in a change in the manner in which it presents net assets and reports certain aspects of its financial statements. Our opinion is not modified with respect to this matter.

PKF O'Connor Davies, LLP

July 7, 2020

Mill River Collaborative, Inc.

Statements of Financial Position

	June 30,	
	2019	2018
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,103,794	\$ 2,052,917
Certificates of deposit	1,018,537	1,319,146
Contributions and pledges receivable, net	1,106,624	1,617,340
Receivable from the City of Stamford	725,016	1,530,000
Prepaid and other assets	47,785	57,795
Property and equipment, net	6,849,774	804,321
Construction in progress	<u>1,498,587</u>	<u>4,697,457</u>
	<u>\$ 12,350,117</u>	<u>\$ 12,078,976</u>
 LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 1,035,977	\$ 1,011,839
Accrued payroll	41,028	29,146
Equipment loan	4,127	21,087
Line of credit	50,000	-
Note payable	<u>274,253</u>	<u>294,253</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>1,405,385</u>	<u>1,356,325</u>
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions	142,413	1,791,820
Net investment in property and equipment and construction in progress	<u>8,069,981</u>	<u>5,186,438</u>
Total Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	8,212,394	6,978,258
Net assets with donor restrictions	<u>2,732,338</u>	<u>3,744,393</u>
Total Net Assets	<u>10,944,732</u>	<u>10,722,651</u>
	<u>\$ 12,350,117</u>	<u>\$ 12,078,976</u>

See notes to financial statements

Mill River Collaborative, Inc.

Statements of Activities

	Year Ended June 30, 2019		Year Ended June 30, 2018	
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions
OPERATING REVENUE AND PUBLIC SUPPORT				
Contribution and grant revenue	\$ 368,426	\$ 408,295	\$ 208,939	\$ 235,555
Bad debt (loss) recovery for uncollectible contributions and pledges receivable	47,525	-	-	(8,250)
City of Stamford - operating revenue	662,000	-	640,000	-
City of Stamford - tax increment revenue	725,016	-	1,630,000	-
Special events, net of direct donor expenses of \$329,861 and \$323,051	236,806	-	334,122	-
Mill River program income	224,909	-	170,451	-
Investment income	-	30,051	-	11,575
In-kind rent	63,703	-	86,417	-
Net assets released from restriction	<u>1,450,401</u>	<u>(1,450,401)</u>	<u>4,496,466</u>	<u>(4,496,466)</u>
Total Operating Revenue and Public Support	<u>3,778,786</u>	<u>(1,012,055)</u>	<u>7,566,395</u>	<u>(4,257,586)</u>
EXPENSES				
Program	2,179,862	-	1,467,669	-
Management and general	191,448	-	100,513	-
Fundraising	173,340	-	200,144	-
Total Expenses	<u>2,544,650</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,768,326</u>	<u>-</u>
Change in Net Assets	1,234,136	(1,012,055)	5,798,069	(4,257,586)
NET ASSETS				
Beginning of year	<u>6,978,258</u>	<u>3,744,393</u>	<u>1,180,189</u>	<u>8,001,979</u>
End of year	<u>\$ 8,212,394</u>	<u>\$ 2,732,338</u>	<u>\$ 6,978,258</u>	<u>\$ 3,744,393</u>
				<u>\$ 10,722,651</u>

**Mill River Park Collaborative
FY 2021/2022 Revenue & Funding Sources**

- 1. Contributions & Fundraising represents 35% or \$900k of our Operational Funding:**
 - **Corporate and Foundation Contributions 19%**
 - NAA
 - Corp. Annual Appeal
 - **Individual Annual Appeal 17%**
 - **Membership 3%**
 - **Annual Gala Event 28%**
 - **Corporate and Foundation Restricted Program Contributions 27%**
 - Sponsored Fitness Programs
 - Sponsored Movie Nights
 - Sponsored School Year & Summer Stewardship Program
 - Sponsored Playground Entertainment
 - Sponsored Stamford Next Initiative
 - Sponsored Education Programs
 - Sponsored Carousel Programs
 - Sponsored Ice Skate Programs
 - **Individual Restricted Program Contributions 7%**
 - Sponsored Horticulturalist
 - Sponsored Halloween Parade
- 2. City of Stamford Operational Grant represents 27% or \$692k of our Operational Funding**
- 3. City of Stamford TIF represents 28% or \$725k of our Operational Funding**
- 4. Fee for Service represents 11% or \$275k of our Operational Revenues:**
 - **Carousel Revenue 30%**
 - Ticket Sales
 - Birthday Party Rental
 - Private Party Rental
 - Concessions
 - **Skating Rink Revenue 8%**
 - Ticket Sales
 - Skate Rental
 - Skate Sharpening
 - Birthday Party Rental
 - Private Party Rental
 - Private Skating Lessons
 - Concessions
 - **Education, Outreach, Programs, Summer Camp & Events 62%**
 - Spooktacular Event
 - Cornhole League
 - Winter Horse Drawn Carriage Rides
 - Pizza in the Park
 - Octoberfest
 - Summer Camp
 - After School Programs
 - Education & Nature Walks
 - Cultural Events
 - Park Permits (STEM, Public Protests, Etc.)

Mill River Park Collaborative
Fiscal 2020/2021 Budgeted Positions

Mill River Park Collaborative FY 2020/2021 Current Staffing	
Filled Positions	
Title of Position	Effective Date
President & CEO	7/1/2020
Dir. Of Public Programs	7/1/2020
Dir. Of Business & Operations	7/1/2020
Dir. Of Development	7/1/2020
Dir. of Construction & Planning	7/1/2020
Manager of Education & Programs	7/1/2020
Public Program & Events Manager	7/1/2020
After School & Summer Camp Manager	7/1/2020
Office Manager & Administrative Assistant	7/1/2020
Land Care Manager	7/1/2020
Landcare Technician 1	7/1/2020
Landcare Technician 2	7/1/2020
Horticulture Supervisor	7/1/2020
Landcare Technician & Custodian	7/1/2020
Park Ambassadors 2	7/1/2020
College Interns/Program Asst.	7/1/2020
Summer Stewards	7/1/2020
Summer Camp Counselors	7/1/2020
School Year Stewards	9/1/2020
Event Staff - Seasonal	7/1/2020
Carousel & Rink Staff - Seasonal	7/1/2020

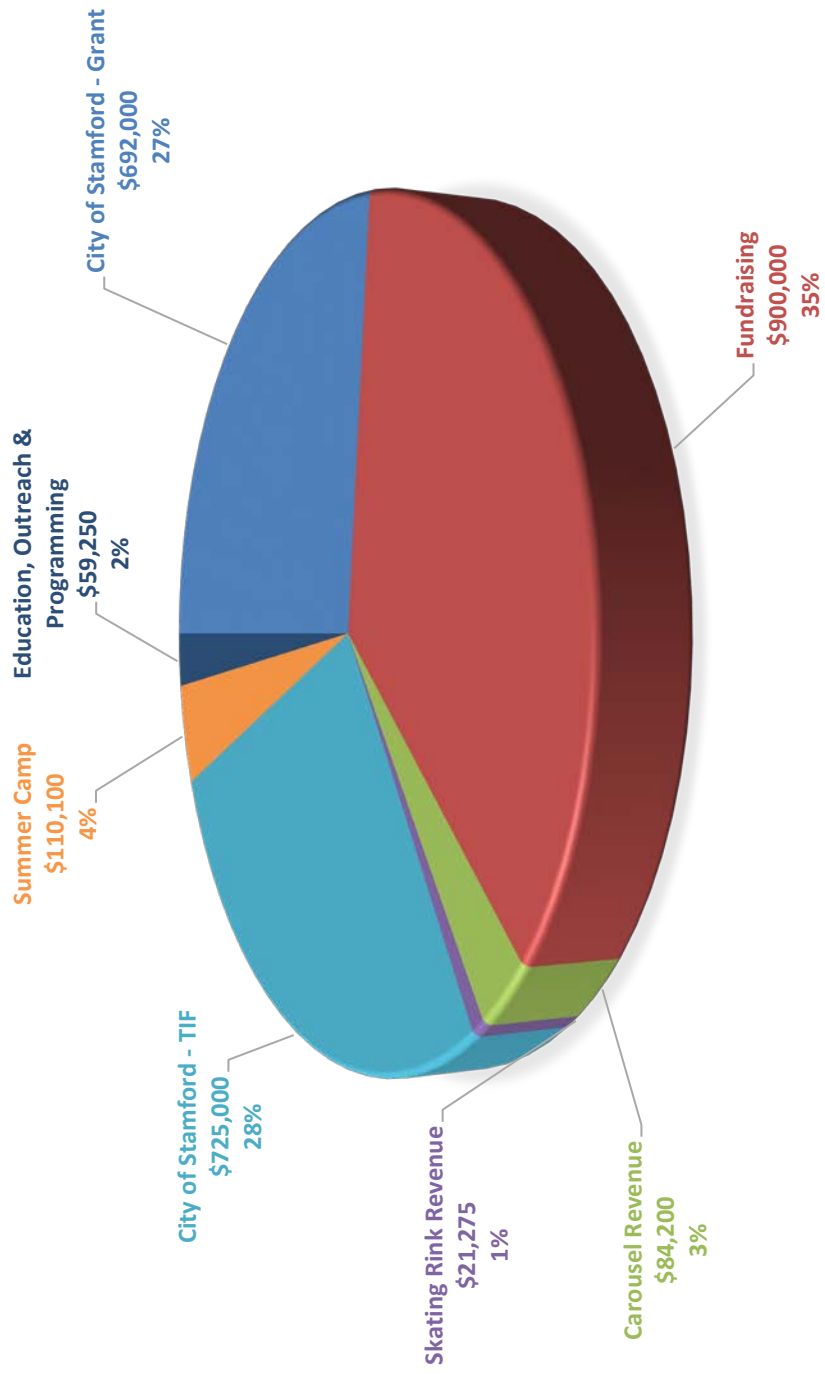
Open Positions	
Title of Position	Status
Marketing & Membership Coordinator	Open
Seasonal Hort. Technicians	Open

Mill River Park Collaborative FY 2021/2022 Projected Staffing	
Filled Positions	
Title of Position	Status
President & CEO	Filled
Dir. Of Public Programs	Filled
Dir. Of Business & Operations	Filled
Dir. Of Development	Filled
Dir. of Construction & Planning	Filled
Manager of Education & Programs	Filled
Marketing & Membership Coordinator	Filled
After School & Summer Camp Manager	Filled
Office Manager & Administrative Assistant	Filled
Land Care Manager	Filled
Landcare Technician 1	Filled
Landcare Technician 2	Filled
Horticulture Lead Gardener	Filled
Landcare Technician & Custodian	Filled
Park Ambassadors 2	Filled
Event Staff - Seasonal	Filled
Carousel & Rink Staff - Seasonal	Filled

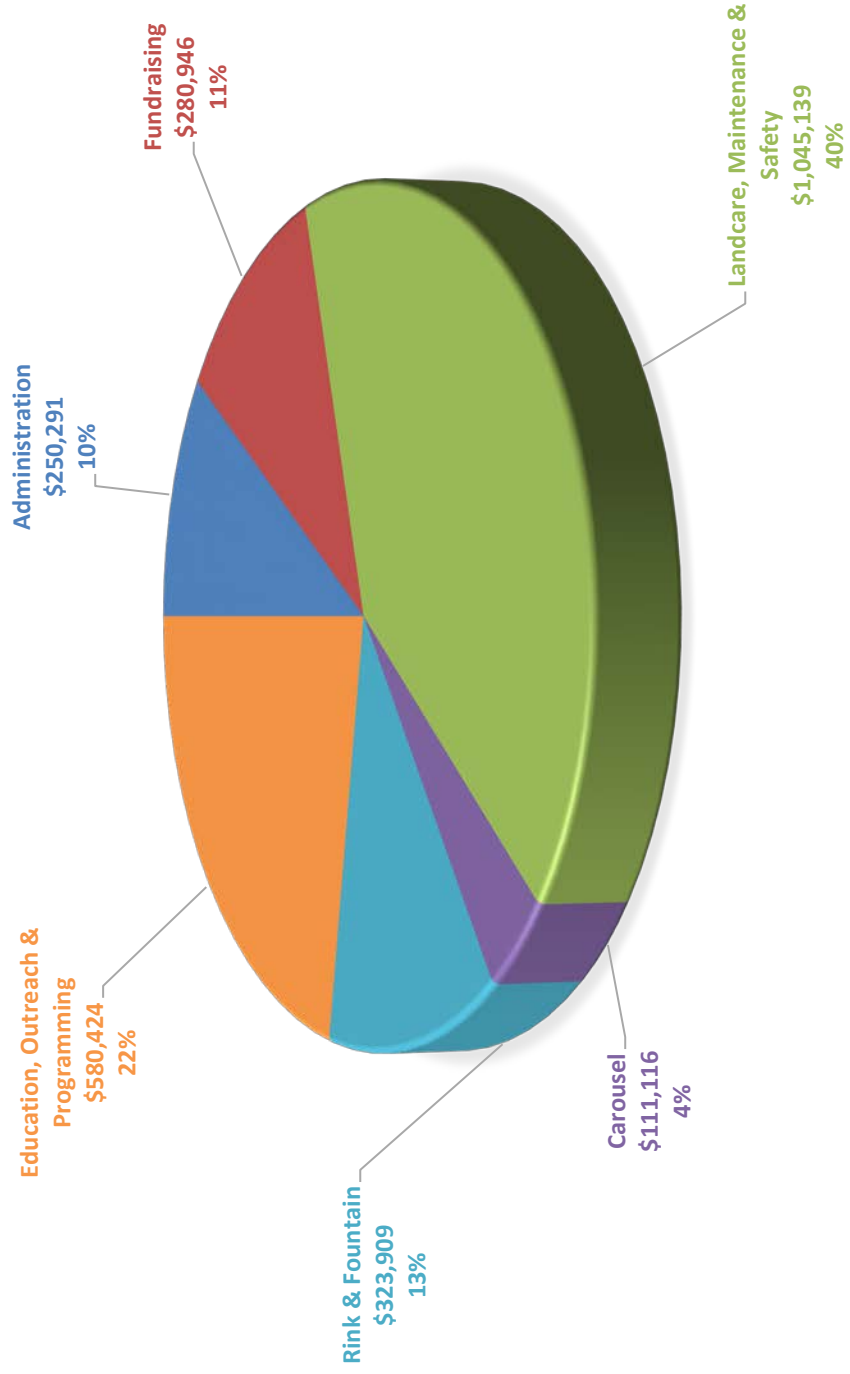
Open Positions	
Title of Position	Status
Marketing & Membership Coordinator	Open
Public Program & Events Manager	Open
Horticulture Technicians - PT Seasonal	Open
Landcare Tech(s) - PT Seasonal	Open
Summer Camp Counselors	Open
College Interns/Program Asst.	Open
Summer Stewards	Open
School Year Stewards	Open

Positions Removed	
Title of Position	Status
Development Manager	Removed
Landcare Supervisor	Removed
Facilities Manager	Removed

MILL RIVER PARK COLLABORATIVE SOURCES OF REVENUE FY 2021/2022



MILL RIVER PARK COLLABORATIVE OPERATING EXPENSE BY BUSINESS AREA FY 2021/2022



MRPC - City Historical Funding

Year	City Grant Funding	Operating Budget	% of Exp
FY 13	150,000	848,974	18%
FY 14	250,000	1,048,198	24%
FY 15	350,000	1,253,776	28%
FY 16	400,000	1,178,996	34%
FY 17	575,000	1,364,638	42%
FY 18	640,000	1,562,150	41%
FY 19	662,000	1,825,034	36%
FY 20	662,000	2,277,665	29%
FY 21	562,000	2,467,050	23%
FY 22	692,000	2,561,825	27%
Total	4,943,000	16,418,306	30%



Connecting
People and Nature

A paved path winds through a lush green park. On the left, a river flows through a naturalistic landscape with tall grasses and reeds. On the right, a person is sitting on a bench under the shade of large trees. The sky is clear and blue.

IMPACT REPORT
November 2020



In 2020, amid the challenges of COVID-19, the Mill River Park Collaborative continues to serve the Stamford community through the Mill River Park and programs. The Park has remained open since day one of the crisis, serving as an oasis for Stamford-area residents. We are proud to offer a vibrant, diverse green space that can provide a respite in nature for so many during this difficult time. Located in the center of Stamford, we provide a bridge between the east and west sides of the city and serve as a connector north to south. Even now, we are connecting the whole Stamford community with nature through safe, supportive community engagement.

Despite the many trials we have faced during the COVID-19 crisis, our incredible team has worked hard to adapt and maintain our keystone programs, and has innovated and expanded our services to meet the urgent needs of the Stamford community. By quickly implementing critical safety measures, we have been able to keep our most essential programs and services on schedule and moving forward. We are grateful for your support in this critical time in our Park's history.

CHANGING LIVES

Mill River Park Collaborative has been determined to keep the Park open and our services available because we know that our programs have a multiplier effect, providing safe, quality, and educational nature experiences while also providing much needed support for Stamford's working families — many of whom are low income. There is overwhelming research to support the positive effect of urban green spaces on the health of residents:¹

- Spending time in green space can lower heart rate, blood pressure, and stress levels while improving mood and encouraging physical activity.²
- Exercise, particularly when done outdoors, can greatly improve mental health³ — but simply spending time in green spaces, like Mill River Park, can boost overall well-being.
- Young people, particularly those in urban areas, often suffer an alienation from the natural world. This is especially worrisome given the fact that the environmental field is considered one of the fastest growing employment areas, and people of color and from low-income, urban populations are underrepresented in the industry.



- Recent studies have highlighted the tremendous benefits that experiential, environmental opportunities have on children, in particular those who have limited access to outdoor educational opportunities.⁴
- Outdoor education not only supports healthy child development and encourages physical activity, but it also increases academic performance and civic attitudes.⁵

By offering young people experiential, environmental opportunities, Mill River Park is providing a sense of connection with the community and with the natural environment. Now more than ever, our goal is to continue to create important connections with nature and provide unique, environmental learning opportunities for those who need them most.

IMPACT PROGRAMS

COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for the Collaborative's impact programs, but thanks to the unwavering support of our generous community of donors, and with some adjustments, we have continued to provide high-quality programming to the Stamford community.



Stewards High School Internship

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the 2020 Mill River Park Stewards High School Internship Program was as successful as ever. Although we've had to make some adjustments to the program to account for everyone's safety, the Stewards Program remains an important outreach to high school students. The Stewards Program introduces high school students in Stamford to careers in environmental conservation and stewardship, and provides them with the "soft skills" necessary to successfully navigate work environments. We made necessary adjustments to the program to ensure the safety of our Stewards and staff during the pandemic:

- We accepted a smaller group of just eight Stewards, as compared with the usual 12-15;
- We required Stewards to wear masks at all times and maintain a safe physical distance whenever possible, and;
- We revised our field trip schedule to avoid public transportation and trips into New York City.

It was evident from day one that the 2020 cohort was bright, passionate, and eager to leave their footprints on Mill River Park for years to come. Every day they arrived ready to take on the challenges presented to them — whether it



A Steward Standout: Jessica's Story

Jessica Saturne began her journey as a Mill River Steward in the summer of 2016. As a standout member of the program, our Program Director did not hesitate to recommend Jessica when the Park was hiring staff for the newly opened Carousel Pavilion the following year. In 2018, Jessica graduated from Stamford High School, and since then, she has become a valuable member of the Mill River Park team by helping facilitate the Stewards Program.

As an exemplary graduate of the Stewards Program, Jessica was our Program Director's first choice to assist in program facilitation this summer. She jumped at the opportunity to help lead the program and has proven all summer that she was the right choice for the job. With a deep knowledge of conservation practices, Jessica has been instrumental in educating the Stewards about their role in the Park. Her experiences as a former Mill River Steward, and as an ongoing staff member at the Park, has prepared her for the wide range of challenges and opportunities that this unique summer has provided.

When asked to summarize her experience, Jessica said, "My years with the Mill River Park Collaborative have been very eventful and exciting. With the amazing staff that I had the opportunity to work with, I've been able to grow as an individual and become more appreciative of the Park, and their values that I now share."

In addition to her work at Mill River Park Collaborative, Jessica attends the University of Connecticut. She is currently a rising junior majoring in Business Administration.



was cleaning up after a tropical storm, weeding through 100-degree days, or managing social distancing guidelines while cleaning out the river.

We accomplished a great deal with this cohort and they were immensely helpful in furthering the ongoing conservation practices and strategies laid out by Mill River Park Collaborative's land care staff. The Park was in need of the additional assistance because COVID-19 has prevented our usual influx of labor support from volunteers. The Stewards provided critical support in tackling large, essential maintenance projects throughout the Park. By the end of the summer, the Stewards had deepened and expanded their knowledge and appreciation of conservation, and we are proud to report that all of the Stewards have expressed interest in continuing to be involved with Mill River Park throughout the school year with the extension of the Stewards Program.

Summer Camp

Mill River Park Day Camp is an outdoor summer camp focused on environmental education and outdoor recreation for ages 5-14. Daily activities include hands-on environmental education, athletics, exploration, and creative arts. Our 2020 program was held June 29 through August 14.

In 2020, we made a number of adjustments to our camp program to create a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, most specifically by reducing the number of campers we could accept. We did daily temperature checks of campers, increased deep cleanings of our Carousel Pavilion and increased the sanitizing of equipment. We served 26 unique campers with an average weekly attendance of 20 participants.

One third of campers were on financial aid.

We continued our partnership with the Starfish Connection mentoring program and served four of their young people by providing four weeks of camp each. This year, we also had one student placed by the Stamford Public Education Foundation.

Some of our 2020 summer highlights include:

- STEM learning with a certified elementary school educator
- A continued successful partnership with Stamford Hospital's KIDS' FANS (Fitness and Nutrition Services) program, which provides nutrition-based cooking classes for campers on a weekly basis
- Our ever-popular "Wheels Club," which allows campers to bike, scooter and Rollerblade around the Park
- Outdoor Exploration, including fishing in Mill River

- Daily sports and recreational activities including soccer, handball, soft-stick lacrosse, water play and games
- Crafts and creative arts on a daily basis

Fourth Grade Program

With the onset of COVID-19, we adapted our elementary science enrichment program by delivering our spring lesson via an interactive Zoom session.

- More than 250 elementary students across the Stamford district joined us for an experiential STEM lesson in their own homes.
- The final lesson of the three-part curriculum investigated the macro and vertebrate creatures living in the park river.
- Students also discovered the variety of flora and fauna in our freshwater ecosystem.



COVID-19 EMERGENCY PROGRAMS

Emergency Child Care

To slow the spread of COVID-19, Governor Ned Lamont closed all Connecticut schools in March 2020; local agencies such as child care facilities, libraries, youth centers, and other regional programs also closed or significantly reduced their services. These widespread, necessary closures left essential workers scrambling to find child care so they could continue to go to the jobs that keep our community functioning and safe.



In response to this urgent need, Mill River Park partnered with the State of Connecticut, Stamford Hospital, and Dalio Philanthropies' Project 26 Initiative to launch an emergency child care program. Mill River Park was able to quickly convert our Carousel Pavilion into an emergency child care facility for essential workers, from health care workers and hospital cleaning staff to grocery store employees and pharmacy workers — anyone who was qualified to participate.

Our small-scale, high-quality, emergency child care program provided safe, meaningful support and attention to the mental and emotional well-being of these children as they navigated these tumultuous times. New research from the CDC suggests that people of color are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19.⁶ The increased risks of infection for low-income people means that we need to do all we can to provide a safe and supportive place for these particularly vulnerable children. Providing a small class size within the refuge of Mill River Park's natural beauty has given working families peace of mind knowing that their school-aged children are receiving the best possible care and receiving assistance with their online school learning. Thanks to the partnership with the State of Connecticut, Stamford Hospital, and Dalio Philanthropies, we were proud to offer 10 positions in our program

FUTURE PLANS

Expanding the Stewards Program

Mill River Park Collaborative has initial funding to expand our Stewards programming to include programs catered to a wider range of age groups.

Our Green Team program will introduce rising 8th and 10th graders to Mill River Park's horticulture and conservation skills, as well as hone their teamwork and communication abilities. In addition to the labor-intensive tasks that this group will be charged, they will also be trained to identify the flora and fauna found in and around Mill River Park, with a focus on native species. The Green Team program will provide important preparation for entering our hallmark Mill River Park Stewards Program.

After completing the Green Team and Stewards Programs, students will be eligible to apply for our Docents Program. These rising high school juniors and seniors will be the face of Mill River Park at events and on busy weekends. In this paid position, students will bring to life their passion for Mill River Park, and the local natural wonders we have to offer, through providing activities for children and families, answering questions, and passing along their knowledge to park visitors. Docents will be tasked with designing "discovery

carts," where they will be able to demonstrate their knowledge to the public in an engaging way. Additionally, these students will act as counselors for our youngest Green Team members.

Henkel Researchers' World Program

In partnership with the Henkel Corporation, Mill River Park is piloting a new STEM education program called Researchers' World. This innovative pilot offers outdoor and at-home STEM education lessons for Stamford students, ages 8-10.

Our pioneering program engages Stamford youth with hands-on, interactive experiments created to inspire curiosity in science, while raising interest, participation, and achievement for all students. The Researchers' World program utilizes Henkel's sustainability-focused, experiential science lessons to help equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the STEM curriculum that awaits them in high school. The take-home lessons also include elements of fun, designed to spark a love of STEM learning.

Mill River Park After-School Care

Building on our successful Summer/Vacation Camp, the Collaborative is moving forward with the necessary certifications to offer year-round after-school care. Mill River Park's After-School Care program will initially be housed

in the Carousel Pavilion and then move to the Whittingham Discovery Center in 2022. The program will utilize the Park landscape for enriching, out-of-school experiences with a unique focus on hands-on STEM learning.



CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

The Whittingham Discovery Center

We are proud to share that we have broken ground on the Whittingham Discovery Center. This state-of-the-art complex on the east side of the park is committed to environmental education and fun! At 11,000 square feet, the Discovery Center will be a hub of free recreational and environmental education opportunities in Stamford. Its construction will add to the activation of the Park with year-round programs and services.

Once built, the Discovery Center will be the largest building in the Park, and will serve as the hub for operations, recreational and educational programs and public services. The Discovery Center will house an amphitheater; an environmental exhibition space containing fish and other living park wonders; three Urban Ecology Classrooms (UEC); a café; a rooftop garden observation deck; and outdoor patios and sitting areas.

The Whittingham Discovery Center is the ultimate manifestation of the Mill River Park vision.

The creation of the Discovery Center will build on the success of Mill River Park's youth science education programs and broaden the platform for delivering hands-on, curriculum-based, outdoor, environmental education programs, with dedicated programs on biodiversity, ecosystem services, stream ecology, watersheds, urban environmental impacts, geology, weather, and climate.

Most importantly, we will have the capacity to expand our Fourth Grade Program to all fourth grade students and to other grade levels in Stamford, with a curriculum based on best practices supporting environmental science learning to enrich the lives of the children in our community, particularly children who have lacked the opportunity to appreciate the natural environment.



Renovating the Middle Corridor

To fulfill our Park vision, we are extending the park further south toward the Long Island Sound; we are beginning renovations on the Middle Corridor of the park, from Tresser Blvd. to Richmond Hill Ave. Crews have already begun removing dead trees and invasive species, like the Norway Maple, in the past few weeks. Over the next month, you will see progress as our teams regrade the riverbank and plant thousands of new perennials, shrubs, and trees.

Playground Renovations

One of the most beloved features of the Park, the Mill River Park Playground, was built in 2006 by 1,500 volunteers over five days. In the coming months, the playground will get a complete rebuild with new modern equipment, a splash pad, comfort stations, benches, and picnic tables.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our Commitment to Fitness: Mill River Park Fit Club

We have continued to offer our ever-popular Fit Club classes, including Sunrise Yoga, Zumba, and Bollyfit. Classes are held outdoors in the beautiful setting of the Park, with plenty of room for class participants and instructors to maintain a safe distance.

Our free fitness programming fosters community in the Park and provides a safe space for people to connect in nature while creating lasting connections to one another and improving their mental health. Thanks to our partners, our Fit Club programming has become a cornerstone of the physical, mental, and spiritual health, as well as the social well-being of the residents of Stamford.

Our diverse offerings provide something for all fitness levels and has made Mill River Park the go-to outdoor center in Stamford for free fitness programming in nature – especially with the widespread gym closures during the pandemic. All our Fit Club classes remain **FREE OF CHARGE** and open to the public. For safety reasons, we now require advance sign-up and all participants must sign a waiver before exercising. In the past year, our fitness programs have served 1,933 residents.



The Carousel & Skating Rink

After a brief closure, we reopened the David & Marian Nissen Carousel in September. The stunning Carousel has 30 handcrafted animals, from festive horses to more whimsical options including a rabbit, frog and seal — inspired by local Stamford-area wildlife. Our team is providing socially distanced rides on the Carousel, with regular deep cleaning to ensure the safety of all patrons.

During the winter months, we are also excited to offer Stamford residents an opportunity for fun, outdoor ice skating at The Steven & Alexandra Cohen Skating Center. The ice rink will open on November 21 with special safety measures to ensure the safety of all our skaters and staff. We will continue to provide skate lessons and open skate times for kids and families in our neighborhood. Visit our website (millriverpark.org) for additional details about all of our park activities.



Halloween

Since 2013, Halloween has been a favorite community event at Mill River Park. This year, in response to COVID-19, Mill River Park Collaborative was proud to host a socially distanced Halloween Scavenger Hunt. Families downloaded an app and completed a host of fun tasks throughout the Park, such as discovering native flora and fauna as well as visiting park landmarks. Upon completion, children received a treat bag full of goodies and their very own

pumpkin. Visits were purposefully staggered over two weekends and resulted in more than 500 goodie bags and pumpkins! Plus lots of smiles.



JOIN MILL RIVER PARK COLLABORATIVE

Thank you for investing in Mill River Park. Together, we will make Stamford a greener and greater place to live, work, and grow. For more information on how to get involved, contact Alicia Wettenstein at alicia@millriverpark.org.

Our mission

Founded in 2002, Mill River Park Collaborative is a 501(C)3 nonprofit tasked with overseeing the design, construction, maintenance, and programming for Mill River Park in Stamford, Connecticut. The cornerstone of the Collaborative is connecting people and nature through community engagement. Our vision is a park that serves as both an oasis in city life and a vibrant, diverse green space that inspires sound environmental conservation practices and learning.

¹ Hon K. Yuen, Gavin R. Jenkins, "Factors associated with changes in subjective well-being immediately after urban park visit," *International Journal of Environmental Health Research* 30, no. 2 (2020), 134-145.

² Qing Li, *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018).

³ Karmel W. Choi, Chia-Yen Chen, Murray B. Stein, et al., "Assessment of Bidirectional Relationships Between Physical Activity and Depression Among Adults," *JAMA Psychiatry* 76, no. 4 (2019).

⁴ Leyla E. McCurdy, Kate E. Winterbottom, Suril S. Mehta, et al., "Using Nature and Outdoor Activity to Improve Children's Health," *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care* 40, no. 5 (2010), 101-118.

⁵ American Institutes for Research. "Effects of outdoor education programs for children in California," Palo Alto, CA, (2005); Alan Peacock, et al. "Changing Minds: The Lasting Impact on School Trips," *The Innovation Centre, University of Exeter* (2006).

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity" (2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.







Board of Directors

Arthur Selkowitz
Chairman

Arnold M. Karp
Vice Chair

Robert M. Phillips
Vice Chair

Robert Granata
Treasurer

Don Brownstein
Secretary

Ralph Blessing

George Boyce

Sandy Goldstein

Emily M. Gordon

Robin Graham

Nicole S. King

David Kooris

Noah Lapine

Thomas Madden

Fatima Mawji, MD

Mark McGrath

Frank Mercede

Shelly Nichani

Steve Osman

Michael Pollard

Matt Quinones

Ryan Salvatore

J.J. Sendelbach

Jim Shapiro

Camille S. Spaulding

Jon Winkel

Nate Zubal

Senior Staff

Dudley N. Williams, Jr.
President & CEO

Nia Rhodes Jackson
Director, Visitor Experience

Kevin Kelly
Director, Business Operations

Mike Stake
*Director, Construction
& Capital Planning*

Alicia Wettenstein
Director, Development

MILL RIVER PARK COLLABORATIVE

**1010 WASHINGTON BLVD, SUITE 101
STAMFORD, CT 06901**

203.989.0321

MILLRIVERPARK.ORG