

Parks Commission

2011 Overview

Our Staff

Full-time Parks Director Geoff Beyer, and Part-time Parks & Trees Assistant David Brunell completed several major park improvements this year, with the help of numerous volunteers, Vermont Department of Labor trainees, and 2 full-time (temporary) AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA members

VISTA Member

After a two-year hiatus, the Parks Department was again able to secure federal grant funding for a full-time position through the AmeriCorps VISTA Program (Volunteers in Service to America) Greg White was hired to serve in this 12-month position, which is split between the Conservation Commission and the Parks Commission Greg's work will focus on river and riverbank protection, invasive plant management, developing community gardens in underserved areas of the City, and leading trainees and volunteers in maintaining and improving the parks

AmeriCorps Member

The Parks Department was also successful in securing funding for a new AmeriCorps member Byron Garcia started in a summer position last June, and was awarded an 11-month position in September Byron has assisted with numerous projects, including storm damage restoration projects, invasive species management, tree work, and construction of the new National Life Trail Byron's position extends through July of 2012

Two Major Storms

This year has seen many new opportunities and challenges for Montpelier's Parks system The parks were not spared from the damages wrought by spring flooding and Tropical Storm Irene Twice this year, the Peace Park and adjacent bike path were under 4 feet of water, and more than 100 cubic yards of the Peace Park were simply washed away The sudden surge of rain on already rain-soaked ground washed out more than 30 culverts and two bridges throughout the parks system Over 40 downed trees blocked access to trails and roads Park crews spent many hours restoring the parks in 2011, and restoration work will likely extend through next summer as well

Invasive Plant Management

In 2011, park staff and volunteers continued ongoing efforts to eradicate and control invasive plants in both Hubbard and North Branch Parks After years of hard work, Hubbard Park's invasives are now nearly under control Bishop's weed remains a problem,

but Japanese barberry and non-native bush Honeysuckle have nearly been eliminated from within the park boundaries Invasives continue to maintain a large presence in North Branch Park, but with help, we are making progress A new source of volunteer assistance this year came from the students at River Rock School, who set up research projects on controlling invasives In 2012, we plan to secure funding for educational signs that describe the problem and educate park users about our efforts to control invasive species and what landowners can do to help prevent their spread

Partnering with Schools

Fourth and Fifth-grade teachers at Union Elementary School, with assistance from parents and Parks staff, continued a program in Hubbard Park this year to educate students about natural history and involve them in community service This program provides a great opportunity for students to learn about the ecology of our parks, what it takes to manage a park, and take part in service projects to help improve the parks, including trail and road maintenance and litter removal
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National Life Trail

Late last winter, National Life Group granted approval for construction of a new pedestrian trail starting at the intersection of Northfield Street and Memorial Drive, crossing some City land, and eventually terminating near the large parking lot at National Life's hilltop business campus Not only does this new trail provide a useful and popular link between National Life and downtown for thousands of National Life and State employees, but it also connects to an extensive network of popular walking trails that already exist on National Life property Therefore, it will provide a useful recreation and transportation link for residents of the City's southwest corner Vital assistance for this project came from the Vermont Department of Labor (who provided numerous job trainees), the International Volunteers for Peace, and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) This monumental project involved moving tons of stone and gravel up a steep hillside to create a durable, functional, and beautiful stone stairway Work on the trail will continue in 2012

National Life Community Garden

National Life has also given the go-ahead for creation of a new community garden space on their property off Northfield Street This approval was granted to Apple Corps and the Parks Commission / Conservation Commission's joint "Garden Park" initiative, which is working to provide community gardens to

more neighborhoods citywide Gardeners interested in signing up for a plot at the new community garden, especially residents of the Northfield Street and Berlin Street neighborhoods, should call the Parks Office at 223-7335

Permaculture Planning

Last spring, the Apple Corps working group of Transition Town Montpelier brought a proposal to the Parks Commission to establish a permaculture orchard on the lawn surrounding the Hubbard Park Tower Geoff and the Commission have an interest in maintaining low-growing trees and shrubs around the Tower to preserve the impressive views from the top The proposal from Apple Corps was seen as a potential way to help accomplish this goal This proposal received support from many community members, but also met some resistance from others After a public meeting on the topic, the Parks Commission formed a subcommittee to evaluate the concerns that were raised, as well as to explore other possible designs that might incorporate both native and domestic fruits and nuts for the benefit of both people and wildlife, without blocking views from the Tower The subcommittee's work is ongoing, and interested residents are encouraged to get involved

Other Projects

With a broad volunteer labor base this year, we were able to complete an impressive and wide variety of projects, including a substantial amount of trail restoration in the north end of Hubbard Park, rebuilding a section of wall on the Statehouse Path, sponsoring the Enchanted Forest event in October, and installing updated park trail maps on new welcome signs at several Hubbard Park entrances

Park Planning

In August, the Parks Commission began a new initiative to comprehensively examine the City's landscape, and identify priority areas for the potential creation of new parks, trails, and greenways The Commission has created a GIS map and drafted a written document that identifies and describes these priority areas We hope that these documents can guide future decision making as the City considers where to make investments in new parks and park-related infrastructure Our overarching goal is to ensure that all residents have easy access to nature-based outdoor recreation

Stonewall Meadows area park

Late in 2010, the City Council approved the acceptance of 7 acres at the end of Hebert Road from the Stonewall Meadows Recreation Association as a new City Park This property

consists of a 1-acre flat mowed field, and approximately 6 acres of abandoned pasture and early successional forest. The property includes an existing small network of walking trails that has been used for many years by residents of the local neighborhood. For the immediate future, the Parks Department plans to maintain this new park in more or less its current condition, with a focus on low-impact outdoor recreation.

Park Commission

In March of 2011, Emily Boedecker began a 5-year term on the Parks Commission. In March of 2012, Leigh Seddon will be stepping down from the Parks Commission after 15 years of dedication to protecting and improving Montpelier's parks. The Commission would like to thank Leigh for his years of leadership and careful guidance, and for founding the Friends of Montpelier Parks in 1997.

Volunteers

The Commission would also like to thank the many volunteers and organizations that helped us to accomplish so much this year. These partners included another great group from the International Volunteers for Peace, a number of classes from local schools, a summer VYCC crew, a school VYCC group, the Vermont Department of Labor, and numerous individual citizens who contributed their time and expertise. Citizen support for Montpelier's parks is always appreciated, and donations help us to leverage additional support and grants from a variety of sources. If you would like to contribute to the Parks or assist in any way, please contact Geoff Beyer at the Parks Office (223-7335) or speak with a Parks Commissioner.

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For information on Montpelier's parks, including maps and natural history information, please visit the Parks web site: <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/department/81/Montpelier-Parks.html>. The Parks Commission appreciates and welcomes comments or suggestions from residents as we continue our work of protecting and improving Montpelier's park and trail system.

Aaron Brondyke, *Chair*

Emily Boedecker, *Commissioner*

Lyn Munno, *Commissioner*

Cara Robecheck, *Commissioner*

Leigh Seddon, *Commissioner*