

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: [RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF ALDERS](#) of the City of New Haven authorizing the New Haven Parks Department to accept a grant in the amount of up to \$277,730 from the State of Connecticut's Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to create an inclusive community trail at East Rock Park College Woods.

Submitted by: Director of New Haven Parks Department

REPORT: 1682-10
ADVICE: Approval

BACKGROUND:

The area of East Rock Park totals 425 acres, making it the largest park in the city, hosting upwards of an estimated 20,000 park visitors per year; and there are 9,835 residents in the East Rock neighborhood. The Trowbridge Environmental Center, located in the 48-acre College Woods section of East Rock Park, is a gathering place to advocate for environmental awareness about the park's nature resources to residents and visitors. The center features natural history displays, historical information and educational programs for the community. The New Haven Parks Outdoor Adventure Program has a mission to provide access, outdoor activities, and place-based environmental education to the residents of New Haven within the city's parks. Our work fosters community engagement and builds partnerships through stewardship.

While New Haven has ranked well in terms of accessible amenities and reachable distance between parks and residents according to the scores from the Trust for Public Lands (2021), ongoing action is necessary to make our parks and trails more welcoming and accessible to people with disabilities, such as mobility limitations or neurodivergence. Many of the entrances to our Parks buildings, walkways, and trails are not easily accessible for all abilities, despite the need. There have been strides to create new, inclusive playgrounds such as the grass roots funded "Hannah's Dream" at East Shore Park in New Haven, and other regional towns feature ADA accessible playscapes and communication boards.

Currently, the College Woods section of East Rock Park is utilized by community groups, an adjacent public high school, college students, neighborhood residents, and New Haven Parks' Outdoor Adventure Program to host field trips for public school students across the city. When our Park Rangers hold programming here, the feedback from the public has made it evident there is a demand for improvements to make the walkways and trails leading to amenities and scenic areas more accessible to park users with disabilities. The city's Director of Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities conducted an informal accessibility assessment of College Woods in June 2025, and found the paths, trails, parking options and pathways from parking to trailheads and amenities offer limited accessibility to people with disabilities, due to the park's natural topography, layout, and waterways. It was recommended that accessible parking, a path from that parking to the amenities and a recreational trail be developed at the site to serve the full array of park users.

The creation of this inclusive community trail and amenities in this particularly popular section of East Rock Park would greatly improve and enhance this beautiful space for residents and visitors to enjoy nature and the glorious features that this area of college Woods has to offer. This accessible trail loop will provide better access to all regardless of physical ability while also promoting health and well-being, and environmental awareness and stewardship, as well as greater accommodation for the diverse

needs of the community who utilize this public space on a regular basis at the foot of one of New Haven’s signature parks. This \$277,730 Grant award from the State of Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) will allow Parks to create an inclusive community trail at East Rock Park College Woods.

The proposed accessible trail (Phase 1) is shown on the map below in orange. The grant will also fund planning for Phase 2 shown in yellow.

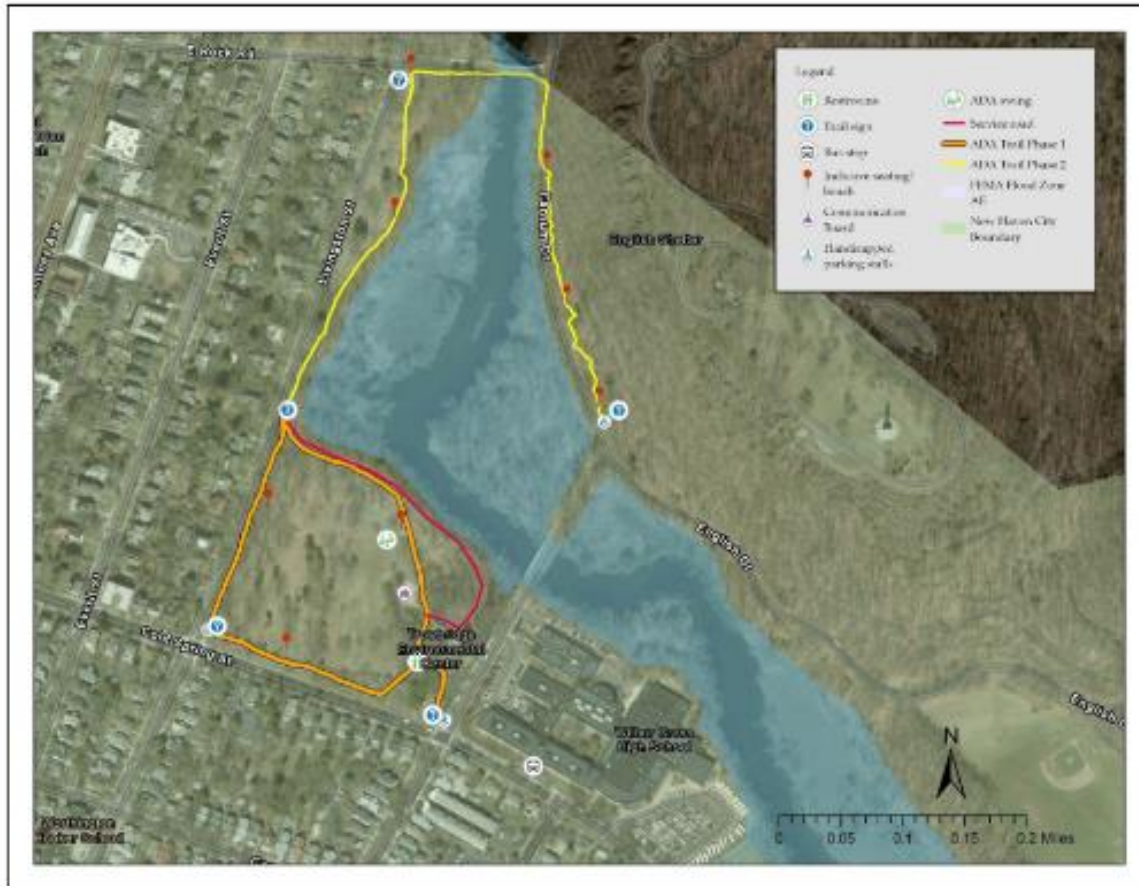


Figure 1. Proposed accessible trail loops. Phase 1 is in orange and Phase 2 is in yellow with new amenities as icons and the FEMA flood hazard zone AE displayed. The red section is the utility access road.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

[Vision 2034](#), New Haven’s Comprehensive Plan, includes the following goals and strategies:

Climate & Ecological Connections

Goal 3: Improve the condition of parks and open space and ensure that they are safe and accessible to all.

- Strategy 3.1: Make investments in the park system using an equity investment strategy.

Civic Services & Experiences

Goal 3: Ensure that City services and facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.

Goal 9: Expand and improve access to youth and recreation services

This award and acceptance of these grant funds will continue to expand and build out the City of New Haven’s Trail network providing new and exciting opportunities for residents to explore and interact with the natural landscape the City has to offer. It enables individuals with mobility impairments, and those who are neurodivergent equity in accessing trails and empowers all residents to utilize East Rock Park to engage in various park related activities and offerings. This trail and its anticipated improvements will align with best practices of trail design, construction, and ADA accommodations for all users. These accommodations can and will align with design standards set by PROWAG, the City of New Haven, and comply with the Americans with Disability Act.

ADVICE

Authorization of this Resolution aligns with the City’s Comprehensive Plan and the State of Connecticut’s goals.

ADOPTED: May 20, 2026
Ernest Pagan
Chair

ATTEST: _____
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Laura E. Brown
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Laura Brown
Executive Director, City Plan Department