



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
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Maxwell Webster, *Director*
www.newhavenct.gov



Justin Elicker
Mayor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GRANT NAME: CT Recreational Trails Program

DEPARTMENT: Parks

DATE: March 23, 2026

Funding request: \$274,730

Purpose:

The City of New Haven is home to over 2,200 acres of park land over 100 park sites. The New Haven Parks Department is committed to ensuring our parks, playgrounds, and green spaces are welcoming, inclusive, and places for all park users to enjoy. In fact, over 17 % of the City of New Haven is comprised of city parks, and 96% of residents live within a short distance from a park. Approximately 30% of the city's playgrounds and basketball hoops are located on public community schoolyards which is one of the highest park scores in the country (Trust for Public Lands, 2021). New Haven Parks is invested in being a gathering place that offers and facilitates free and low-cost outdoor recreational activities and programs for the local community and visitors. New Haven Parks works in partnership with the city's Youth and Recreation Department, local organizations, sports leagues, and Parks "friends" groups" to support community-based activities and programming for all ages and abilities.

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.



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New Haven has a significant population of residents with disabilities, with data from the 2020 US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), showing that New Haven County is home to 23.2% of Connecticut's residents with disabilities. The city's disability demographics are marked by high rates of financial hardship, with nearly 37% of people with disabilities in poverty (ACS, 2020). Further, data from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) for the 2023-2024 school year indicates that 16.3% of K-12 students in the New Haven School District have a disability.

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.