

Environmental Impact Assessment – Westside Park
City of Paterson Urban Parks and Green Acres Grant Application

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

a. Briefly describe the total development project

The proposed project revitalizes a historic community park to both enhance existing natural features and park assets while also incorporating new aspects which reflect the recreational needs and desires of the surrounding community. Proposed improvements include the rehabilitation of existing recreational facilities including a state-of-the-art multi-purpose athletic field including a cricket field, revitalized tennis and basketball courts, baseball fields, pavilion, and playground, as well as the introduction of a new pedestrian multi-use path system, an additional children’s play area and garden, a picnic grove, an Overlook Grove located atop a ridge known as the ‘The Rocks’, a boat launch, and a new extended River Walk that will provide access to the Passaic River. The project will also enhance open green spaces within the park for passive recreation and incorporate stormwater mitigation measures to protect park assets from flooding.

b. State objectives of the project

Westside Park is in a low-income area of Paterson that lacks safe, appealing open space and recreational opportunities. Per New City Park’s GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping and data analysis, the zone within a 10-minute walk of the park has a poverty rate of 23% and serves 12,472 residents. The residents living in this zone have no other parks with recreational amenities within a ten-minute walk. Furthermore, according to the New Jersey Environmental Justice Mapping Tool, the Census Tracts surrounding the project location are considered Overburdened Communities (OBCs) due to the proportion of residents that are minorities, low-income, or have limited English proficiency.

The conditions of Westside Park are much deteriorated, however, it has many positive and redeeming features, such as its size, location, historical character, river views, and a substantial number of mature trees and can be rebuilt to regain its former status as a flagship park. The park’s essential elements are the “good bones” upon which to build for the future.

The City of Paterson is home to nearly 160,000 residents, making it the third-largest city in New Jersey. Approximately one quarter of all residents live in poverty, including 36% of children under the age of 18 and 22% of seniors ages 65 and over. The City’s poverty rate is significantly higher than the countywide rate of 14% and is more than double the statewide rate of 10%. Regarding race and ethnicity, Paterson is a highly diverse community with 64% of residents identifying as Hispanic, 23% as Black, 7% as White, 5% as Asian, and 1% as some other race. Paterson developed into a regional industrial center throughout the nineteenth century, however, its industrial prominence has significantly waned since its heyday. Today, in addition to significant poverty, residents suffer from blighted neighborhoods, violent crime, crumbling infrastructure, and a host of additional socioeconomic challenges that influence quality of life. According to the City Health Data Dashboard, Paterson residents also experience widespread poor health indicators

including obesity (38% of adults), lack of physical activity (42% of adults), and diabetes (16% of adults).

Demand is being driven by the state's constantly growing population. Between the 2010 and 2020 United States Census, the New Jersey population grew by 5.6%. Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of residents aged 65 years and over increased from 13% to 17%. Therefore, the State of New Jersey needs to invest in maintaining local parks and recreational facilities throughout the state which accommodate all types of users. Another New Jersey priority is promoting access to urban waterways. Many of New Jersey's most densely populated communities are located along riverfronts, including the state's three largest cities – Newark, Jersey City, and Paterson. Yet, urban communities are disconnected from these waterways due to lack of public access. Further, New Jersey's waterways have suffered from significant pollution over the years due to industrial land use and dense urban development. Westside Park seeks to promote direct access to the Passaic River via riverside walking/biking paths and the addition of a boat launch. Encouraging water-based recreation will further diversify the outdoor activities available to residents at public parks as well as foster a greater appreciation for Paterson's ecological resources, ultimately inspiring residents to take care of their community and their environment. Therefore, there are numerous aspects of the Westside Park Revitalization Project which bolster statewide outdoor recreation goals.

c. Fully describe multi-phase projects

N/A. This project is not multi-phase.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Describe existing environmental features:

a. vegetation

At 26.6 acres, Westside Park hosts a wide variety of tree species, including many very mature specimens throughout the park that will be carefully preserved and protected during construction activities. There are existing lawn areas and natural grass sport fields (all in deteriorated condition) as well as some pockets of denser vegetation.

b. wildlife, including State and federal threatened and endangered species and critical habitats

Westside Park is home to birds and woodland animals typical to the region. Great Blue Heron's can often be seen along the Passaic River corridor. NJGeoweb indicates no vernal habitat, vernal pools or freshwater muscle habitat within or near the park.

c. geology, topography and soils

The park is located within the Piedmont Physiographic Province and lies over a layer of Orange Mountain Basalt beginning at a depth of 100-150' and extending to a maximum depth of 3,700'.

The site's primary topographical feature is an elevated feature known to the community as 'The Rocks' overlooking the Passaic River. This geologic formation is a Late Wisconsinan Glacial Delta Deposit formed during the late Pleistocene, late Wisconsinan Geologic Period.

The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** Soil Mapping identifies three soils on the property. The majority of the developed area of the park adjacent to Totowa Avenue is comprised of Urban land-Riverhead Complex soils. The other significant soil type is Holyoke-Rock outcrop complex, located in the upper section of the park along Preakness Avenue. The Rock outcrop-Holyoke Complex comprises the smallest area, that of 'The Rocks' as described above in the geological description of the park. More details information is provided below for the two largest soil groups within the park:

Urban land-Riverhead Complex, 3 to 8 percent slopes

Typical Soil profile:

A - 0 to 10 inches: sandy loam

Bw - 10 to 26 inches: gravelly sandy loam

BC - 26 to 36 inches: gravelly sandy loam

C - 36 to 60 inches: gravelly sand

Slope: 3 to 8 percent

Drainage Class: Well Drained

Holyoke-Rock Outcrop Complex, 3 to 15 percent slopes

Typical Soil profile

Oi - 0 to 1 inches: slightly decomposed plant material

Oa - 1 to 3 inches: highly decomposed plant material

A - 3 to 5 inches: silt loam

Bw1 - 5 to 14 inches: silt loam

Bw2 - 14 to 18 inches: loam

R - 18 to 80 inches: bedrock

Slope: 3 to 15 percent

Drainage class: Well drained

d. *water resources/hydrology*

Westside Park is situated within the Passaic River Lower Watershed Area and is included within the Lower Passaic and Saddle Watershed Management Area. The site is located along the Passaic River, approximately ½ mile upstream of the famous Great Falls. The Molly Ann Brook, a tributary of the Passaic, runs through the middle of Westside with a pedestrian bridge linking the east and west sides of the park. Neither watercourse is designated by the state as Category 1 in the project area. The majority of Westside Park is located within a floodway. The proposed project will include stormwater best management practice improvements (BMP's) to reduce runoff within the park and provide the community with greatly improved access to the Passaic River.

e. *historic/archeological resources*

Westside Park is a locally designated historic park and has provided outdoor recreational opportunities to the Paterson community since 1889. The Van Houten House (ca. 1741), the oldest structure in Paterson, NJ, is centrally located within the park and listed on both the State and

National Registers of Historic Places. The house was severely damaged by fire in 2019 and will be stabilized and protected until it can be fully restored.

f. transportation/access to site

The park site is accessible by car, public transportation, bicycle and walking via sidewalk. The main entrance to Westside Park is located on Totowa Avenue between Berkshire Avenue and Linwood Avenue. A secondary park entrance, that also serves JFK High school, is located on Totowa Avenue near Rossiter Avenue. NJ Transit stops along Wayne Avenue are within walking distance of park entrances. There are two parking lots within the park and parking is permitted along Totowa Avenue adjacent to the park. The county-owned pedestrian bridge (PC19) which crosses the Passaic River, connecting the park to McBride Avenue, has been deemed unsafe and is closed indefinitely.

g. adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood

Westside Park is located in a dense low-income residential area of Paterson which is considered an Overburdened Community (OBC) due to the proportion of residents that are minorities, low-income, or have limited English proficiency.

JFK High School is directly adjacent to the park (the school property was originally of the park property) and the students will benefit greatly from the improvements to the park.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

a. Discuss all affected resources and the significance of each impact

This project includes the renovation of existing park features and partial redesign of existing park vehicular/pedestrian/bike circulation for safety and maintenance purposes. The project does not propose changes to existing grades or drainage pattern and will include minimal tree removals. A tree inventory and assessment are planned that may recommend removal and replacement of dead/diseased trees. Impacts to the park will be positive, not negative.

b. Discuss short-term and long-term project impacts

In the short-term, the proposed project will meet immediate outdoor recreation needs, as identified by the residents of the highly underserved urban neighborhoods surrounding Westside Park. Paterson is a very densely developed city, and therefore its residents rely on public parks and programs to meet their recreational needs. Further, as a vast majority of residents are low income or very low income, there is even more severe need for such facilities, as private recreation facilities and programs are inaccessible. As noted in our Project Narrative and demonstrated on the attached map, there are no other outdoor recreational facilities serving this target community.

In the long-term, the proposed project will support improved maintenance of Westside Park. The re-design will include a long-term maintenance and stewardship plan which guides the city in maintaining outdoor recreational facilities and protecting natural features of the park to ensure that the proposed project provides benefits for many generations to come. Further, the completion of the Westside Park Revitalization Project will mark significant progress towards implementing the City's *Parks and Open Space Vision Plan*, which defines a long-term strategy for investing in the

city park system to ensure that all residents have adequate parks and open space within a half-mile, or ten-minute, walk of their home. By renovating just one of Paterson's flagship parks, we will show our residents that we are committed to investing in the changes that they want to see in their neighborhood's parks.

c. Discuss anticipated increase in recreation and overall use of site over time

Increased visitation is anticipated following the implementation of the significant proposed improvements, which will create a much more inviting, attractive and usable public space. More regular visitation by the community, along with the introduction of new lighting and improved sightlines, will create a safer environment for all park-goers that should only further increase park use.

d. Identify adjacent environmental features that may be affected by the proposal

We do not anticipate that improvement project will adversely affect adjacent environmental features. Buffer Areas along the Passaic River and Molly Ann Brook will be protected and enhanced with native vegetation and interpretive signage will be provided for public information. Existing access to the Passaic River is not ADA compliant and this project proposes to provide an accessible point of access for put-in/put-out kayak and canoe access for the public.

e. List any permits required for project and brief status (i.e., waterfront development)

The proposed project will require the following permits:

- NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Flood Hazard Area Individual Permit – This permit is required for projects within flood hazard areas.
- NJDEP Freshwater Wetlands GP19 – These permits are required for projects impacting transition areas of freshwater wetlands.
- Transition Area Averaging Plan (N.J.A.C. 7:7A-8.2) – Transition Area Waiver for Redevelopment [N.J.A.C. 7:7A-8.3(f).
- Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan Certification by the Hudson, Essex and Passaic Soil Conservation District -This permit is required for development projects within the Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District.
- NJPDES (NJ Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Construction Activities Stormwater General Permit – This permit authorizes certain point source discharges from certain construction activities.
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Nationwide Permit 36 – Boat Ramps*

*We are awaiting final confirmation from USACE for applicability of this permit to our project.

The City will apply for all permits by the summer of 2023.

f. For development that would impact an undisturbed portion of the project site, the local government must submit a Natural Heritage Data Request Form to the DEP's Office of Natural Lands Management (form available at the website or by writing to Natural

Heritage Program, PO Box 404, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0404). Please attach and discuss the results of the search.

The project site is an existing park that is fully developed.

g. Discuss if/how the project may be impacted by sea level rise and any related design considerations.

Given that Westside Park is located within a floodway, sea level rise could lead to a somewhat increased frequency of flooding. Managing stormwater is crucial to protecting the proposed investment in the park. Tree planting throughout the park, improvement of the riparian zone along the Molly Ann Brook, the introduction of meadow areas for bio-infiltration, permeable paving, and modified site grading will all contribute to protecting the overall watershed in addition to the site itself.

Providing access to the Passaic River via the new boat ramp and River Walk will also contribute to the preservation of the river as a natural resource. Collective concern for the health of the river will only grow as the community engages the water and its shores once again.

4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

a. Identify alternate sites

Westside Park, which is located within a densely-populated and low-income neighborhood lacking other recreational facilities, is a truly unique park space in Paterson. The wide variety of active and passive recreational activities accommodated in this very large park, as well as the access to the Passaic River the park provides, is not (and cannot be) replicated elsewhere.

b. Discuss alternate levels and types of development

The plans to revitalize Westside Park are comprehensive and the City intends to improve the entire 26.6 acres. There are no alternate sites that could similarly serve the local community's needs, therefore, a new park development or redevelopment of another park are not viable options.

c. Compare environmental impacts of each alternative

N/A. There are no alternatives to compare.

5. MITIGATING MEASURES

Describe the measures that will be undertaken to mitigate adverse impacts.

Measures and precautions to be taken to mitigate adverse impacts include, but are not limited to, the installation of silt fencing during and after construction, soil and sediment control measures, and significant landscaping improvements including replanting any plants removed as part of the construction. Additionally, this project will comply with any and all rules and regulations promulgated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and/or other regulatory agencies regarding building, remediation, and environmental conservation, and to the attainment of all necessary permits for building, remediation, and soil conservation as needed.

6. AUTHOR(S) AND QUALIFICATIONS

Charlie Cunion, LLA

NV5, Principal Landscape Architect, +20 years industry experience

Bryan VanderGheynst, PE, CFM

NV5, Supervising Engineer, +20 years industry experience