

**Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program  
City of Bristol, Connecticut  
Rockwell Park Revitalization Project**

Transformative renovations to replace, enhance, and increase equitable access to outdoor recreational amenities in a disadvantaged community park that have exceeded their lifecycles, are in critical condition and in jeopardy of being closed down.

**Project Narrative**

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**Project Sponsor & Contact Name and Email:** City of Bristol | Dr. Joshua T. Medeiros, Ed.D., CPRE Superintendent of Parks, Recreation, Youth & Community Services | [JoshMedeiros@bristolct.gov](mailto:JoshMedeiros@bristolct.gov)

**Name of Park/Property:** Rockwell Park (R-40, Parcel #11-208)

**Project Title:** Rockwell Park Revitalization

**Name of Property Title Holder:** City of Bristol, CT

**Project Property Address/Location:** Jacobs Street, Bristol, CT 06010

**Project City's 2020 Census Population (must be over 30,000):** 60,218

**Project site and community(ies) served listed by Census Tract number:** Bristol 08420 census tract #4055

**Select the Applicable Project Type:**

☐ Acquisition   ☐ New Development   ☒ Renovation   ☐ Combo Acquisition/Development

**Select the Applicable Project Result:**

☐ New Park   ☐ Expanded Existing Park   ☒ Neither Expanded nor New Park

**Indicate if the park or site was assisted through a previous ORLP, LWCF, Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) grant and/or was it obtained through the Federal Parks to Lands program:**

☐ ORLP   ☒ LWCF   ☐ UPARR   ☐ FLP   ☐ Park has not been assisted with any of these funds/programs.

List date of assistance, amount, and work funded/land purchased if assistance received:

Rockwell Park was funded \$655,400 by the Land and Water Conservation Fund through the State and Local Assistance Program for a redevelopment project in 1979. LWCF grant ID # Rockwell Park Grant 09-00323

**Project Summary (250-word limit):**

The Rockwell Park Revitalization project aims to transform the City of Bristol's largest active park situated in the disadvantaged/environmental justice census tract serving Bristol's West End. Rockwell Park offers a variety of recreational amenities that host thousands of guests and hundreds of diverse programs throughout the year. Unfortunately, these heavily utilized amenities are outdated, haven't been renovated in almost 20 years, incur significant annual maintenance costs, and are on the verge of being unusable.

With an anticipated total budget of \$3,860,000, the Rockwell Park Revitalization project is an essential project that will provide much needed enhancements to save and improve outdated amenities, create new recreational opportunities, and provide equitable enhancements that will make the park more accessible and inclusive for all.

Project elements were defined using community feedback and recreational needs assessment data gathered during a comprehensive parks master planning process in 2020. The project includes renovations to popular outdoor recreation amenities such as the splash park, playgrounds, outdoor pool and bathhouse, ADA trails and access improvements, construction of a new fitness track, Fraser Field ADA improvements, basketball court light installation, and 18-hole disc golf course improvements.

The Rockwell Park Revitalization project is central to the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Department mission to deliver high-quality services and facilities to improve quality of life of Bristol residents. The project directly aligns with both SCORP and ORLP's collective goals to provide new and significantly improved recreation opportunities in urban, disadvantaged communities lacking access to walkable outdoor recreation.

**Project Overview (2-page word limit):**

Rockwell Park is the City of Bristol's largest active park at 105 acres situated in the disadvantaged/environmental justice census tract serving Bristol's West End. The Park features an outdoor amphitheater that is used for free summer concerts and events throughout the year, a fishing lagoon and pond, an affordable outdoor swimming pool, the historic Muzzy Field Baseball Stadium where Babe Ruth played in 1919, which is now used by American Legion baseball as well as the New England Collegiate Baseball League; basketball courts; an off-leash dog park; a little league and girls softball complex; hiking trails with breathtaking views of the Pequabuck River; a nationally recognized 18-hole disc golf course; a fitness pad and para-fitness course; sand volleyball courts, picnic areas, a playground, skate park, splash pad, mountain bike trails, and a pump track.

Unfortunately, major renovations to the park have not been completed in nearly 20 years which has left the recreational amenities outdated and requiring frequent resources for maintenance and repairs on an annual basis. Maintenance costs are not sustainable as the amenities have hit their end-of-life cycle and need to be replaced. Additionally, some park features are not inclusive and accessible which require ADA site improvements to increase equity for all; a central goal for BPRYCS, SCORP, and ORLP.

In 2020, the city engaged in a comprehensive system-wide master planning process that gathered community input and priorities through stakeholder focus groups, interviews, online surveys, statistically

valid survey mailed to Bristol residents, site analysis, market analysis, and additional needs assessment tools to help set department priorities for the next 5-10 years.

Aligned with priorities established in the 2020 Parks Master Plan, the Rockwell Park Revitalization Project aims to provide transformative renovations to the park. These include:

- **Splash Park Renovation:** The existing splash park is highly used and one of the parks most popular features in the summer, serving as a critical cooling station for Bristol residents impacted by heatwaves. However, the park is nearly 20 years old and reaching the end of its lifecycle with frequent mechanical issues, expensive part replacements and water costs associated with leaks and other faults. Often these issues result in lengthy shutdown periods during peak season, increasing health inequities. A modernized splash park will enhance user experience and result in annual operational cost savings. The new splash park features will include a variety of unique rain features, fountains, and an ADA accessible pad. The splash park will be comparable to a new splash park being included across the city at Page Park. Once awarded funds, a vendor will be engaged to design the specific elements to be included at Rockwell Park.
- **Playground Renovation:** The playground space is one of Rockwell's most active areas that draw in thousands of families each year. The equipment is reaching the end of its lifecycle with elements for which replacement parts are no longer available. This aspect of the project will revitalize the playground space, creating a fully inclusive and accessible playground for everyone to enjoy. Conceptual designs from Page Park design photos are attached to demonstrate comparable conceptual designs that will be used for Rockwell.
- **Rockwell Pool & Bathhouse Improvements:** The Rockwell Pool is a popular destination in the West End to walk to and cool off during the sweltering summer days with over 5,300 visitors in 2023. This is an essential amenity at Rockwell Park in order to provide a safe space for families to cool off. Over 500 youth learn to swim at Rockwell Pool each summer through our popular American Red Cross Learn to Swim Program. Learning this lifelong and lifesaving skill helps reduce the risk of drowning which is at an all-time national high, particularly among historically disenfranchised racial and ethnic groups. This portion of the project involves resurfacing and sandblasting the pool shell to extend its life. Additionally, upgrades will be made to the bathhouse facilities, including the showers and locker rooms that support the pool.
- **ADA Trails & Access Improvements:** Access to all park features is a department priority because we believe everyone should be able to use great parks. This portion of the project completes major accessible pathway improvements at the amphitheater, picnic pavilion and bocce courts, and along the trails at the Pequabuck River.
- **New Fitness Track:** In 2021, American Rescue Plan Funds were used to build a brand-new fitness park and parafitness course to provide free, equitable access to state-of-the-art workout equipment benefiting families that can't afford private gym memberships or have the transportation to get there. The fitness track offers an additional activity that will provide a full loop around the parafitness course, thus creating a complete fitness experience for park users. The loop will be ADA compliant so everyone can improve their health and wellness at the parafitness course.
- **Fraser Field ADA Improvements:** The Fraser Field complex provides 3 hardball and 1 softball fields for use by the Bristol Little League and Bristol Girls Little League Softball programs. This portion of the project includes constructing paved accessible routes to all the fields, accessible spectator seating areas, and dugouts/team areas within the park at Spruce Street and Divinity Street; provides for a flush-accessible route to an overhead pavilion concrete slab; installing code compliant

accessible parking spaces, signage, and accessible routes to the flagpole area behind the Hardball Field #1 outfield; and installing concrete pads at all dugouts/team areas. The project also includes the renovation of the 3rd base dugout at Hardball Field #2 that appears to be settling, and upgrading the bleachers to meet current safety codes.

- **Basketball Court Light Installation:** Basketball is a popular recreational activity for youth in Bristol's West End. Presently, there are no lights for the courts so at dusk all play suspends and youth leave to find other activities. This project calls for the installation of a Musco Lighting system that would allow the courts to stay lighted beyond dusk, providing a positive youth development activity to keep kids out of trouble. The project advances the department's goals to expand recreational access and advance equity around all recreational amenities.
- **18-Hole Disc Golf Course Improvements:** The Rockwell Park 18-Hole Disc Golf Course is a premier attraction for disc golf enthusiasts across the city and in the greater New England region. Nestled in the beautiful Rockwell woods, the course supports varied levels of difficulty and hosts hundreds of recreational users and regional tournaments each year. This portion of the project would support the restoration of trail markers, tee boxes, and other course improvements for better safety and access.

## ORLP Project Review Criterion

### Criterion 1 – Project Merit (50-points)

Response:

#### **Nature-Based Park**

Rockwell Park is a nature-based park which includes many natural green and blue spaces such as a protected wetlands marsh with boardwalks, the Pequabuck River, an extensive outdoor trail system, and over 50 bilingual signs to educate park users about climate change, littering, and the importance of environmental stewardship. The Rockwell Park Revitalization project enhances the natural space by improving the quality of existing active recreational amenities that are disbursed throughout the natural environment. ADA site improvements provide greater access for all people to enjoy and appreciate the natural beauty of the park. Additionally, landscaping will be included to frame the new amenities throughout the park which will include new tree and shrubbery plantings, natural landscaping, erosion control protecting natural areas, and removal of existing invasive species.

#### **Additional Benefits to the Disadvantaged Community**

Rockwell Park is heavily used by disadvantaged youth that rely on the park for engagement during the after-school hours and summer months. Enhancements to the park provide improved experiences which will keep them engaged in positive activities rather than illegal and dangerous activities. For example, the

basketball courts are one of the more popular features for this demographic and by providing lighting at the courts, area youth will be able to play longer instead of seeking alternative activities once it gets dark. This is especially important in New England during the spring and fall months when it gets dark earlier in the day. Additionally, the development of new amenities such as the fitness track will expand the existing fitness course to provide new health and wellness opportunities. Personal training and fitness programs will be offered to at-risk youth to help develop healthier lifestyles. Finally, the park is easily accessible for local residents and youth from the neighborhoods as a result of connected trails, paths and sidewalks away from dangerous roadways. ADA improvements will increase the accessibility of the park to all residents and visitors.

### **Process for Proposal Development**

The process for development of the Rockwell Park Revitalization project began in 2020 during the master planning process. Over a dozen stakeholder and public meetings were held with over 1,000 attendees, as well as focus groups, and interviews to help understand the needs of our park users. Both a statically valid mailed survey and online surveys were used to collect data from over 400 residents which allowed us to receive general community feedback and specific feedback from neighbors surrounding Rockwell Park. Community feedback was married with national recreational trends and an in-depth site analysis included within the 2020 Parks Master Plan: [5289 f bristol master plan reportrcompressedcompressed.pdf \(myrec.com\)](https://www.bristolct.gov/5289/f/bristol-master-plan-reportrcompressedcompressed.pdf). Engagement and planning services were provided by Activitas and Pros Consulting in conjunction with City staff.

### **Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts**

To date, the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Department has collaborated with many partners in order to position this grant application and overall project for success. This has included support by the City Grants Administrator, the engineering staff in the Department of Public Works, as well as a number of park stakeholder groups. In addition to community engagement meetings held during the Parks Master Plan process in 2020, specific focus groups were held with key park groups including the Greater Disc Golf Association, Bristol Little League and Bristol Girls Little League Softball Association, and Bristol Boys and Girls Club to help develop priorities for this project. In 2024, these groups were re-engaged to ensure the project elements remain a priority and many of the organizations have provided letters of support as part of this application package. Additional community engagement meetings are scheduled as part of the project development timeline to ensure the voices of users are continued to be uplifted and a part of the process.

### **No Risk of Gentrification**

There is no risk of park improvements creating gentrification of the Bristol West End. The West End remains a heavily low-income area of the city. The neighborhood is supported by the West End Association which helps create and maintain a safe, friendly, family-oriented neighborhood that is filled with thriving businesses, convenient public transportation, attractive amenities and activities. The group works with neighbors to provide ongoing care for their homes, businesses, parks, river, and each other.

## **Criterion 2 – Technical Excellence (50-Points)**

Response:

### **Alignment with SCORP**

The Rockwell Park Revitalization project most closely aligns with the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) goals 1 and 2.

- *Goal 1: Provide equitable and sustainable access to outdoor recreation in Connecticut.* The improvements proposed in this project all center around equity. We are creating ADA accessible and

inclusive trail systems that allow everyone to get out and enjoy the beautiful outdoor views at Rockwell Park which aligns with *Strategy C: Increase accessibility by reducing real and perceived barriers to visiting outdoor recreational facilities*. The lighting of the basketball courts creates equitable use of park amenities. ADA improvements at Fraser Field provides hundreds of youths and their families with inclusive pathways and features to improve the Little League experience. Improvements at the pool are essential to provide a space for low-income families to stay cool during the summer and support swim instruction in a time when national drowning rates are at an all-time high. Continued involvement of neighbors, anticipated marketing campaigns throughout the project as well as new programs that will be offered at the park helps achieve *Strategy B: Increase awareness of and accessibility to outdoor recreational opportunities by implementing public outreach campaigns geared toward traditionally underserved populations*.

- *Goal 2: Enhance visitor experience and tourism by providing welcoming, safe, and well-maintained outdoor recreation areas and recreation amenities*. The proposed renovations will be transformative to Rockwell Park and improve the overall condition of one of the largest and popular public parks in the greater Hartford area. This is in direct alignment with *Strategy A: Improve outdoor recreation infrastructure to increase access and add amenities that serve diverse populations*. Many of the park features including the skate park, disc golf course, and bike trails are destination spots for both residents of Bristol and surrounding communities as well as out of state travelers. Renovations of outdated, unsafe, and unattractive amenities aligns directly with the goal of providing an enhanced visitor experience. Specifically, these improvements reduce maintenance costs and allow us to utilize resources in other areas as defined in *Strategy E: Increase resources to repair, improve, and replace infrastructure and recreational amenities that support the public's use of facilities*.

#### **Support of other Park Improvement Projects**

The Rockwell Park Revitalization project advances park improvement goals established and outlined in the 2020 Parks Master Plan and adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners in 2021. Improvements align with long-range enhancements that are expected at the Hoppers-Birge Pond over the next few years in order to improve connectivity and support greater walkability and bikeability for the West End. Streetscapes and sidewalks projects in the West End compliment the renovations being proposed for Rockwell Park in order to improve accessibility and access into the park.

#### **Status of Planning**

The Rockwell Park Revitalization is 90% shovel ready and awaits appropriations in order to move forward with professional vendors to complete the work. The ADA trail system and fitness track improvements are in design and development phase. Design and construction documents will be completed in-house by Department of Public Works engineers later this spring. Once funding is received the separate elements of the project will be placed out to bid and construction will commence once contracts are signed.

#### **Non-recreational Features**

There are no non-recreational features within the project boundaries nor any leases or easements not associated with a recreational amenity.

#### **Proposed Budget Estimates**

The proposed budget estimates were provided by industry experts and reflect anticipated costs associated with all aspect of the renovations. Quotes from vendors and licensed engineers have been secured and reflected in the project budget with a slight increase to reflect inflation.

#### **Qualification of Project Managers**

As with any municipal project, there are many individuals that will be involved to ensure the projects success. The project manager will be the Superintendent of Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services, Dr. Joshua Medeiros. Dr. Medeiros has nearly 20 years of experience in parks and recreation

management with a Master's Degree in Recreation Administration from Southern Connecticut State University and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Hartford. Dr. Medeiros has managed dozens of capital improvement projects throughout his career ranging from an \$18 million dollar wholesale park revitalization project, \$4.1 million dollar pool renovation, \$1 million dollar baseball stadium renovation and much more. Dr. Medeiros serves on the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Board of Directors and is Chairman and Faculty Member of the NRPA Director's School. Dr. Medeiros will be supported throughout the construction and grant administration process by Dr. Dawn Leger, the City's Grants Administrator, and Nancy Levesque, City Engineer and her team of certified engineers. Dr. Leger holds a Ph.D. in Urban Planning from Columbia University and has extensive experience managing grants for academic and municipal projects. Nancy Levesque is a licensed Civil Engineer, graduating from the University of Connecticut in 1995. She has served as City Engineer since 2018 and supports technical aspects of the project.

Once completed, the park will be maintained by a professional park maintenance team of nearly 20 full-time employees with wide-ranging expertise, certification, and credentials including turf management, Certified Pool Operators, and Certified Playground Safety Inspectors. An annual operating budget approved by the Bristol Board of Finance, as well as over \$500,000 of annual trust disbursements, support the long-range maintenance and upkeep of Rockwell Park.