

Development of Riverfront Parks Hartford and East Hartford, Connecticut

Time Line, 1980 - 2018

1980

Public seminar at the Old State House focuses attention on ways to reunite Hartford with its River. Hosted by The Travelers Insurance Companies, the meeting is sponsored by the Downtown Council, the City of Hartford, Connecticut River Committee, Connecticut River Watershed Council, and the Hartford Architecture Conservancy.

1981

Riverfront Recapture, Inc. is created to develop a comprehensive plan to reunite Hartford with its Riverfront.

1982

A four-month study of the Riverfront's possibilities is published, inviting the community to help develop "a Riverfront Plan that works."

1983

The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund approves a joint application by the City of Hartford and the Town of East Hartford to design and construct initial physical improvements at three Riverfront sites.

1984

The Connecticut Department of Transportation agrees to restore public access to the Riverfront when it reconstructs I-91. Plans are completed for improvements to Hartford's Riverside Park, East Hartford's boat launch area, and a site beneath Charter Oak Bridge in Hartford.

1985

A new dock and scenic overlook are completed at Hartford's Charter Oak Landing. A gazebo and playscape are among the first improvements at Riverside Park.

1986

The Connecticut General Assembly makes its first authorization of funds to Riverfront Recapture for park development. Excursion boat service returns to Hartford. The first phase of East Hartford's Great River Park is opened for public use.

1987

Groundbreaking ceremonies launch the second phase of improvements at Great River Park, including a scenic overlook and lighting. Plans are completed for a new park at Charter Oak Landing.

1988

Construction begins for the public park at Charter Oak Landing. Architects are hired to develop a plan for a public space over I-91 that will restore access to the Riverfront.

1989

Dedication ceremonies open Charter Oak Landing, which includes the first portion of the riverwalk system. Floating docks are installed at Riverside Park, to facilitate expansion of Riverfront Recapture's community boating program.

1990

The Connecticut Department of Transportation accepts Riverfront Recapture's designs for a landscaped platform over I-91 and a pedestrian promenade on Founders Bridge. The Department guarantees the projects will be built as part of the highway interchange reconstruction. The first stretch of riverwalk in East Hartford, between the Bulkeley and Founders Bridges, is opened for public use. Master planning begins for a Windsor riverwalk.

1991

The Connecticut Department of Transportation awards a construction contract for the ambitious I-91 project that includes Riverfront Recapture's designs for restored access between downtown and the River. Construction also begins on additional improvements at Charter Oak Landing, as part of an expansion that will double the size of the park. A 12-state eastern regional bass tournament returns to the Riverfront for a second consecutive year, the first time that the competition has scheduled the same site in consecutive years.

1992

Construction begins on the I-91 project. Ceremonies dedicate new facilities at Charter Oak Landing, including a boat launch and wharf, a children's playscape, and a lighted riverwalk. Construction begins on the next phase of public improvements to Riverside Park. A national triathlon attracts 1,100 athletes for a competition that includes a swim in the river.

1993

Planning begins for riverwalks that will connect downtown Hartford with Riverside Park to the north and Charter Oak Landing to the south. Work is completed for Riverside Park improvements, including lighting, picnic areas, riverwalks, and additional parking. Riverfront Recapture expands its Community Boating Program with the addition of two eight-oared shells and creates a crew program at Hartford Public High School.

1994

Construction begins on the final phase of the original master plan for East Hartford's Riverfront. Improvements will include lighted riverwalks, a longer boat ramp and docks, an amphitheater, and a new entrance road to the park. Planning begins for a boathouse in Riverside Park to accommodate the growing Community Boating Program. The Windsor Town Council approves the master plan for Riverfront park development. Riverfront Recapture hosts a BASSMASTER Top 100 Tournament, which attracts a national field of professional and amateur anglers -- the first time a tournament of this caliber is held in the Northeast. The elevated section of I-91 in downtown Hartford is demolished, clearing the way for the landscaped plaza over the highway that will reunite the central city with its Riverfront.

1995

American Rivers selects Riverfront Recapture for one of its first "America's Most Improved Urban Rivers" awards, in the category of economic revitalization. The award recognizes the importance of Riverfront sporting events that bring visitors here to spend time and money. Federal funding is approved for a pedestrian bridge over Columbus Boulevard to connect Constitution Plaza with the I-91 platform that's in construction.

1996

Completion of East Hartford's amphitheater and southern portion of the riverwalk over the Hockanum River to the Charter Oak Bridge, opening pedestrian and bicycle access between Great River Park in East Hartford and Charter Oak Landing in Hartford. The Capitol Region Partnership, a consortium of regional organizations, convenes an Ad Hoc Riverfront Council to review the project's economic development potential and to recommend a management plan.

1997

The Ad Hoc Riverfront Council recommends a riverfront parks management structure that would involve the municipalities of East Hartford and Hartford, working in partnership with the Metropolitan District Commission and Riverfront Recapture.

The U.S. Rowing Association brings its national convention to Hartford and sets U.S.R.A. attendance records. An international panel of jurors selects Riverfront Recapture as the winner of The Waterfront Center's Top Honor Award for Excellence on the Waterfront.

1998

Unique partnership agreements give Riverfront Recapture responsibility for managing Riverfront parks in Hartford and East Hartford. The Metropolitan District Commission agrees to maintain the Riverfront parks, at its expense, and fund a park rangers program that Riverfront Recapture administers. The management plan is hailed as a national model for urban parks.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving awards Riverfront Recapture a grant of \$1 million over four years to help the organization build the internal capacity to take on parks management responsibilities.

The Greater Hartford Jaycees commits \$500,000 to launch a fund-raising campaign for a boathouse for Riverfront Recapture's Community Rowing Program.

The world's richest sports fishing competition, the Wal-Mart Forrest L. Wood Open, brings its \$1 million tournament to the Riverfront.

President Clinton designates the Connecticut River one of 14 American Heritage Rivers.

1999

Riverfront Plaza opens, reconnecting downtown Hartford with the Connecticut River. Grassy terraces descend to the Riverfront, creating amphitheater seating for 2,000 people and a dock at the base of the terraces brings excursion boat service into downtown for the first time in more than 60 years.

A pedestrian promenade on Founders Bridge links Riverfront parks in Hartford and East Hartford.

A "walkabout" around a Bulkeley Bridge abutment on the Hartford bank restores pedestrian access between downtown and the century-old Riverside Park, to the north.

2000

Construction begins on the Columbus Boulevard Bridge and ramp to Constitution Plaza that will greatly enhance pedestrian access between downtown Hartford and the Riverfront.

The Mark Twain restaurant boat begins operations out of State Street Landing.

A permanent canopy is erected over the stage at the base of the downtown terraces. Riverfront Recapture's first capital projects campaign raises funding from corporations, foundations, and individuals for the canopy and a proposed boathouse for the community rowing program.

The American Society of Landscape Architects presents its top design award to Riverfront Recapture for Riverfront Plaza.

2001

Columbus Boulevard Bridge opens, creating direct, plaza-level pedestrian access between downtown Hartford and the Riverfront.

Construction begins on Greater Hartford Jaycees Community Boathouse in Riverside Park.

Connecticut General Assembly authorizes \$3.9 million for additional Riverside Park improvements and riverwalks.

2002

Boathouse opens to great fanfare. Adult classes are fully booked and high school program triples in size. Second floor community room hosts more than 50 events between June and December.

Construction begins on Riverwalk Downtown connection between Founders and Bulkeley Bridges on Hartford's Riverfront.

Capital campaign exceeds goal of \$5.2 million for boathouse and downtown performance space.

2003

Riverwalk Downtown opens to the public, creating a riverwalk connection between Founders and Bulkeley Bridges in Hartford.

Air-conditioning added to boathouse community room, making it more marketable for weddings and other private events during the summer months. A total of 102 private events were booked for the space.

The Riverfront parks' value as catalysts for economic investment becomes clear, with more than \$1 billion worth of development projects in construction – or in final design – on sites within walking distance of the Riverfront. Projects include the Connecticut Convention Center, hotels, apartments, offices, and a retail/entertainment complex. The Connecticut Center for Science & Exploration, planned for a site immediately adjacent to Riverfront Plaza, has set a goal of opening in 2007.

2004

The Riverfront Adventure Challenge Course in Riverside Park is expanded with construction of a climbing tower and additional new elements.

Permits are received for Riverwalk North, the paved, lighted connection from the north side of the Bulkeley Bridge into Riverside Park. The project, which also includes extensive landscaping around the boathouse, will move into construction in 2005.

A new dinner boat, *The Lady Katharine*, takes over downtown's State Street Landing and introduces a blend of dockside dining and river excursions.

2005

Lincoln Financial Group and the Greater Hartford Arts Council announced plans for a \$500,000 gift to create a sculpture walk within the Riverfront parks in Hartford and East Hartford. The 15 pieces of sculpture will have themes related to Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy.

Ground is broken for Riverwalk North and Riverside Park improvements that will include construction of courtyards and landscaping around the boathouse and a new boat launch. Riverwalk North will reconnect Riverside Park and downtown Hartford, restoring public access that was part of the original park plan in the 1890's.

2006

Riverfront Recapture celebrates its 25th anniversary with a series of special events, starting with a season kick-off concert featuring the Four Tops, who had a Top Ten hit recording in 1981, when the organization was created.

The first five pieces of the Lincoln Financial Group Sculpture Walk are installed in locations outside the floodplain, such as Riverfront Plaza and the Founders Bridge promenade. Pieces in the floodplain, which require more extensive permitting from various agencies, will be installed in 2008.

The Hartford Belle, a smaller, more informal excursion boat, offers an additional option on the river – including trips under the Bulkeley Bridge into Riverside Park.

2007

Construction is completed on Riverwalk North and Riverside Park improvements – which immediately draw impressive numbers of visitors. The Greater Hartford Marathon revised its course to include Riverwalk North and more than 8,000 runners enjoyed the new views.

Attendance in the Riverfront parks continues to grow – and sets a new record of 914,000 visitors.

2008

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Bulkeley Bridge, which has earned a place on the National Register of Historic Places, Riverfront Recapture and the Connecticut Department of Transportation illuminate the bridge's stone arches with colorful LED lighting that eventually will become permanent.

2009

The Connecticut Science Center, Riverfront Plaza's newest neighbor, brings even more visitors to the area.

The Riverfront Dragon Boat and Asian Festival expands to a two-day event, attracting hundreds of out-of-state competitors as well as local teams.

The City of Hartford, through the Greater Hartford Arts Council, funds a way-finding signage program for the Hartford Riverfront parks.

2010

The 16th piece of art in the Lincoln Financial Sculpture Walk at Riverfront is dedicated on Mortensen Riverfront Plaza.

Way-finding signs are installed in the Hartford Riverfront parks. Funding will be sought for similar signs on the East Hartford Riverfront.

Riverfront Recapture sets an attendance record with more than 960,000 people coming the Riverfront to enjoy the parks and the many festivals, concerts, and sporting events.

2011

Planning continues on design and permitting for the Riverwalk South project that will connect the downtown Riverfront to Charter Oak Landing – completing a three-mile continuous loop of riverwalks on both banks of the river between Founders and Charter Oak Bridges.

Riverfront Recapture hosts the U.S. Rowing Association annual convention which brings 650 rowers to Hartford for 3 days of convention activity.

2012

After 10 years of operating the boathouse banquet business, Riverfront Recapture outsources all private event contracts at the boathouse to Ascot Catering.

In September, a stone bench outside the boathouse is unveiled in tribute to the visionary men and women who founded Riverfront Recapture in 1981 and the organizations first chairman and president, Rory O'Neil and Jack Reige, respectively.

The board and staff embark on a marketing and branding effort with Pita Communications to develop strategies to communicate more effectively with the public about what's available at the Riverfront. The project is funded by a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

2013

The Town of East Hartford completed a dike stabilization project behind Riverpoint Condominium in Great River Park. The line of steel sheets replaced wooden pilings that no longer provided the needed stability or erosion protection required by the United States Army Corp of Engineers.

2014

The trails north of the boathouse in Riverside Park are expanded providing more options for enjoying the flood plain forest and river.

After several years of discussion with the State and meetings with stakeholders, Riverfront Recapture receives a \$1.5 million grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for the Riverwalk South & Gateway project. The funds will be used for design and permitting as well as minor temporary improvements within the project area.

In late 2014, Riverfront Recapture is awarded a multi-year grant from the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation for improvements to the stage and canopy at Mortensen Riverfront Plaza: replace the canopy fabric, clean and re-paint the structure, upgrade the lighting to LED, and restore the sound system.

2015

Utilizing the State's Neighborhood Assistance Act Tax Credit program, Riverfront Recapture begins upgrading the park lighting to LED in an effort to reduce maintenance and cut utility bills for the City, Town, and State. More than 200 of the decorative light poles are upgraded in phase I of the project.

In May, President and CEO Joe Marfuggi retired after 29 years at the helm of Riverfront Recapture. Mike Zaleski, former Executive Director of the Hartford Business Improvement District, takes control with energy and purpose.

2016

After much anticipation, the Lincoln Financial Sculpture Walk mobile tour is launched; Doris Kearns Goodwin narrates stories about Lincoln's life and legacy, information about artists and the sculptures, as well as excerpts from her book, *Team of Rivals*.

Improvements are made in Hartford between Mortensen Riverfront Plaza and Charter Oak Landing finally providing a link between the two park areas. The stone dust and partially paved walkway are temporary measures intended to improve visitor experience while the main project continues its evolution into a flood control project (with the originally intended riverwalk) during the design and permitting process.

The second phase of the lighting project is completed with another 170 plus decorative light poles upgraded to LED. The City, Town, and State all benefit from significantly reduced electrical expenses.

2017

Riverside Park hosted the 2017 National Cyclocross races in January as competitors from across the United States raced on mud, snow, and ice throughout the park on a 1+ mile course.

Additional temporary improvements made to the Riverwalk South & Gateway project area including the removal of invasive plants, cutting dead and diseased trees and pruning others to expand the river view.

The City of Hartford and Riverfront Recapture receive Federal Highway Administration Transportation Alternative Program funding to design and build a Riverwalk extension from Riverside Park to the Town of Windsor. The extension will add more than 2 miles of paved walkway to the park system.

2018

A 40.1 Kwh photovoltaic array was installed on the Boathouse roof, supported by contributions and NAA Tax Credits, should produce about 85% of the building's electricity. In addition, Riverfront Recapture and Eversource Energy execute a 15 year Zero Emission Renewal Energy Credit contract which earns Riverfront \$103 for every thousand Kwh of power produced.

Phase II environmental study completed for potential Russo property acquisition.