

Patrick-Murray Administration Announces Completion of New Gateway City Park in Fitchburg

FITCHBURG - September 7, 2011 - Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Undersecretary Philip Griffiths today joined with other state and local elected officials to celebrate the ribbon cutting of a new park in Fitchburg, thanks in part to \$1.5 million in grants from the EEA's Gateway City Parks Program. As part of Governor Patrick's annual commitment of \$50 million for land conservation, EEA created the Gateway City Parks Program in 2009 to develop and restore parks in urban neighborhoods. Over the past several years, the program has acquired, designed, restored, or built urban parks in 17 of the 24 designated "Gateway Cities" across the Commonwealth.

"Gateway City Parks projects, such as this one in Fitchburg, invigorate neighborhoods and improve the lives of urban residents across the state - preserving and improving outdoor recreational space for children, families and individuals to enjoy for years to come," said EEA Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "This project highlights the value the Patrick-Murray Administration places on parks and open space protection, and on the importance of strong public/private partnerships in effecting positive change in our cities."

Gateway Cities is a flexible program, providing municipal officials with a menu of funding options for all phases of park development. Funding can be used for activities and costs, such as brownfield assessment and cleanup, park planning and recreational needs assessments - including the development of Open Space and Recreation Plans - activities not previously eligible for state parks funding. Cities can also use the grants for acquisition, design and construction of parks, greenways and other recreational facilities.

Funding for this grant program comes from the Energy and Environment Bond Bill signed by Governor Deval Patrick in August 2008.

The revitalized land in Fitchburg - formerly home to a mill that burned down in the late 1980s - encompasses 5.5 acres on Sheldon Street along the North Nashua River. Its completion is the result of partnerships between EEA, the city of Fitchburg, the Trustees of Reservations, the North County Land Trust and the Nashua River Watershed Association. The Trustees, who helped negotiate the purchase of the property (which was funded by an earlier EEA grant of \$350,000), will play an ongoing role in the city's park management and maintenance efforts.

A conservation restriction ensures permanent protection and provides for public access not only to the new park, but for the purpose of developing a riverfront trail on a neighboring property. The park design was produced by landscape architects Brown, Richardson, and Rowe, who were retained by EEA to work with City officials, stakeholders, and the public to design the future park through a series of public meetings held in the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010.

"Funding for the Gateway City Parks Grant Program comes from the 2008 Environmental Bond Bill and it has proved to be an effective partnership between municipal and state government," said Rep. Stephen DiNatale. "This grant enabled Fitchburg to protect this location from future development and transform open space along the river into a beautiful park to be enjoyed by the residents of Fitchburg and surrounding communities."

The total cost of the construction phase of the project was \$1.2 million, with the balance paid for by the city of Fitchburg. Construction funded through EEA's grant and the city included site preparation; extension of a trail network; construction of a small parking lot; installation of picnic tables, benches, lighting and trash receptacles; creation of community gardens; and the planting of trees, shrubs and grass. WDC Construction, the former landowner, has donated an additional \$18,000 to establish a park stewardship endowment.

Future plans for the site include an amphitheatre and a pavilion.

To date the Gateway City Parks Program has provided over \$13.5 million for park creation and revitalization projects across the Commonwealth. In addition to construction, the grants have supported site assessment and cleanup, surveying, engineering and other services for future park creation or renovation.

In addition to the Fitchburg project, the program has also funded four other park construction projects in Chicopee, Lawrence, Pittsfield and Taunton this construction season.

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