

Baker-Polito Administration Opens Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail

State to Increase Recreational Opportunities for People of All Abilities

WATERTOWN- July 21, 2016 - Continuing a commitment to increase access to the Commonwealth's state parks system, the Baker-Polito Administration announced today the grand opening of the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail. The occasion highlighted an official ribbon cutting of the parkland by Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton, DCR Commissioner Leo Roy, Perkins School for the Blind President David Power and other stakeholders.

"Increasing access to the Commonwealth's natural, cultural and recreational resources for people of all abilities to enjoy remains a high priority of our administration," said Governor Charlie Baker. "I am excited for the opening of the Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail, where visitors can appreciate the seamless blending of the park's features with the natural surroundings for years to come."

"The Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail is a valuable recreational asset that will not only become an important resource within the community, but also the region as a whole," said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. "This park will serve as a shining example within Massachusetts' state parks system, and I am thrilled for the generations of people who will truly benefit from their experience visiting the Braille Trail and Sensory Garden."

The Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail was designed by Sasaki Associates and Chester Engineers under the supervision of the DCR, with the assistance of Perkins School for the Blind, and offers a rare opportunity to reconnect the community to its riverfront. The Braille Trail is a quarter-mile looped trail within the Watertown Riverfront Park, surrounding a specially designed sensory garden, which features a number of structures, such as benches, stone walls, a Mishoon (canoe-like) boat, and a musical marimba bench specifically designed to look like a xylophone to allow visitors to strike wooden slats to play music. The sensory garden's elements incorporate several senses including touch, hearing and smell.

"Providing access for people of all abilities to outdoor recreational opportunities remains a vital component for the growth and development of both the mind and the spirit for us all," said EEA Secretary Matthew Beaton. "The Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail will serve as an excellent model for how parklands can be constructed in a way that allows us all to experience our natural world."

Additionally, the Braille Trail includes a guide wire along the trail to assist visitors with impaired vision. Different types of beads strategically placed along the wire will indicate the location of both Braille interpretative panels and seating. Also along the trail are ten interpretive features on granite posts written in both English and braille.

"By working together, state government is able to leverage private dollars for incredible important projects, such as the Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail," said DCR Commissioner Leo Roy. "I want to thank our many partners for their efforts that assisted in bringing this project to fruition. The Baker-Polito Administration will continue to foster such public/private partnerships in order to benefit us all."

"The Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail invites everyone – sighted and blind – to access nature in our community and connect to the Charles River," said Perkins School for the Blind President and CEO Dave Power. "Perkins is proud to have contributed to the creation of the park that will serve Perkins students and Watertown residents far into the future."

The Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail completes a critical link in the regional Charles River Reservation

system. The \$1.5 million public/private partnership project received incredible support from state and local officials, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders including the Perkins School for the Blind, the Town of Watertown, the Bilezikian Family Foundation, the Solomon Foundation, the Watertown Disability Commission, the Watertown Community Foundation and the Friends of the Watertown Waterfront.

“The restored Riverfront Park is a gem and the Braille Trail is its most brilliant facet,” said State Representative Jonathan Hecht (D-Watertown). “Bravo to the DCR, the Solomon Foundation and other private donors, Mitch Ryerson, D&C Construction, and the many local officials and residents of Watertown who have worked so hard to make it a reality.”

“I am very grateful to the Solomon Foundation and to the Perkins School for their generosity and initiative and to DCR for making this very special project happen,” said State Senator William Brownsberger (D-Belmont). “I am also very grateful to Simmons College for their funding for additional work on the Watertown banks of the Charles. Representative Hecht is especially to be commended for his long commitment to improving these parklands.”

Importantly, the Watertown Riverfront Park and Braille Trail is easily accessible for the public to visit and enjoy. Located at the intersection of Charles River Road and Irving Street in Watertown, the park is just two blocks away from Perkins School for the Blind. Additionally, the DCR has installed a signalized pedestrian crossing sign at the intersection to provide the public and the students at the Perkins School for the Blind safe access crossing the street into the park.

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