

The Mill River Trail, a collaborative process and best practice framework for realizing an urban waterfront trail.

Topic/Theme: Urban Trail

Title: The Mill River Trail, a collaborative process and best practice framework for implementing an urban waterfront trail.

Goal

From concept to implementation, a collaborative, flexible and opportunistic approach helped facilitate the Mill River Trail, a truly multi modal facility for pedestrians, bikes and boats. By considering the project within the context of best practices for coastal access, this small pilot project has a big impact for New Haven and for the region.



Abstract

For decades, community groups in New Haven have sought to mitigate the barriers between neighborhoods and access to water, created by the footprint of highway infrastructure and polluted industrial zones. Long range plans such as the City of New Haven’s Trails and Greenway Plan, the 2014 Mill River District Planning Study, the 2017 Mill River Trail Framework designed by Reed Hilderbrand Architects and 2018 Mill River Watershed Plan laid out visions for the design and implementation. Meanwhile group of volunteers wielding machetes and trash bags to clean up the river-bank kick started the ground-work of building the trail. These efforts catalyzed the collaboration between local environmental groups, private property owners, and the City of New Haven.

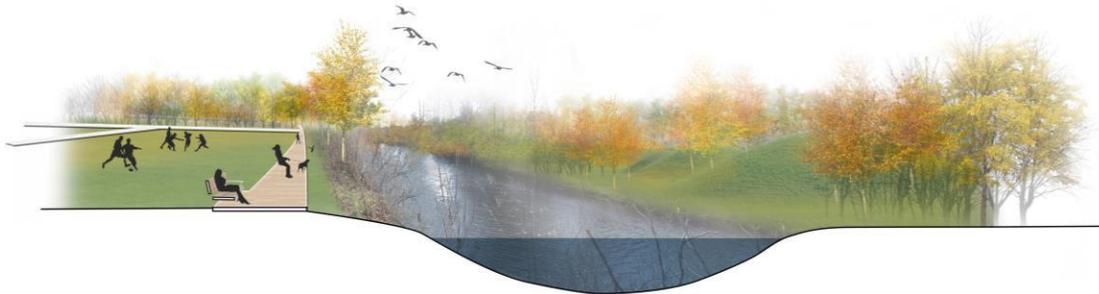
Phase I of the Mill River Trail, from Grand Ave to the Radiall site, funded by DEEP grant, managed by City Plan City opened in Aug 2019. A portion of the trail was built as part of with the District Project. In Spring of 2020, the remaining sections of the trail connecting to East Rock part will be installed by the city. An allied project by Save the Sound which focuses on water runoff begins the final leg to the Harbor, Along the trail a series of public art projects help spur the forward momentum.

The Mill River Trail will connect East Rock Park to the New Haven Harbor. The project is the perfect opportunity for creating design guidelines and a best practices framework along a previously established coastal easement. An important link in a larger trail network, the Mill River Trail provides alternative transportation opportunities and improves public access to the waterfront. Native plantings and riverbank bio-stabilization improve resilience and restore habitat. The last mile of the Mill River runs through an industrial district with a legacy of contamination. By bringing public attention and active recreational use to the Mill River, this project will support the health of New Haven residents and our local waterways.



Instructor Biographies

Aicha Woods is Executive Director of City Plan Department for City of New Haven. She has worked on major urban regeneration projects around the world including Liverpool One, UK and Saigon Harbor, HCMC, Vietnam in her prior career at Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects. She has a BA from UC Berkeley and M Arch from Yale. New Haven is her favorite city because of its amazing art and nature.



Contact Information

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CEU topics

- *The importance of coastal management ordinances and public access easements.* Forward-looking land use regulations have the potential to embed and institutionalize opportunities for the future even before the means to carry out projects are available.
- *The importance of good design.* Investing in design and setting standards will bear benefits well beyond the project at hand.
- *The community engagement process.* The Mill River Trail project utilized multiple strategies for inclusion in planning, including site walks, community meetings, social media, and opportunities for volunteer involvement in the creation of an Urban Oasis.
- *Collaboration between City departments and stakeholders.* The Mill River Trail project involved the collaboration of engineers, landscape architects, planners, and professionals with various other areas of expertise. The City convened a committee to steer the project including community members, City employees, and designers.
- *The value of the local site plan review process.* While applying for and obtaining local coastal site plan and inland wetlands and watercourses approval for the Mill River Trail seemed cumbersome at first, the process helped to test design assumptions, resulting in a more robust set of construction documents. Presenting the plans for the trail to the City Plan Commission allowed for increased public exposure and vetting.
- Insights on implementation, the bid process, and the construction process, .