

# East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

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Sea To The Green

**Proposal of April 2003 (last rev. 10/11/03)**

**Subject:** Andrews Field and Pond area (a city-owned wetland and former swamp)

**Proposal:** Establishment of a new City of Norwalk park, with playground and bird sanctuary. It would involve the restoration of the pond, reestablishment of the brook and enhancement of the surrounding area that includes the field and parking lot

**From:** The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (Laurel Lindstrom, president; Marie DeLeo, Beautification & Parks chairwoman; Diane Lauricella, League of Women Voters Norwalk Environmental Committee)

## HISTORY

Andrews Field, a city-owned 16.4 acre parcel of land created for the purpose of providing additional sports facilities for Norwalk High School (NHS), is no longer functioning as the school's main sports field. It was created in the tradition of the 1960's through 1980's by filling a wetland area, in this case an irregular circular area off County Street bound by Sunlit Drive, Alrowood Drive, Rome Street and Walter Avenue. As time has passed nature has begun taking back portions of the parcel.

When the city took possession of the land approximately 30 years ago it was swampland. The area was a prime example of a New England forested wetland, bog and pond, with one or more brooks present. The 'swamp' was, and still is, fed by upwelling ground water, rain and streams.

The original plant growth consisted of various types of trees (red maple, oak and ash), wetland plants (pond weeds, bulrush, sedge, marsh marigolds, skunk cabbage, yellow flag and ferns) and other types of plants that fed and housed a diverse group of animals, fish, turtle, and birds. Migratory birds and water fowl included black ducks, wood ducks, mallards, great blue herons, great egrets and snowy egrets, red-headed woodpeckers, purple finch, hawks, swamp sparrow, and redwing blackbirds. All of these creatures, and more, currently still use and live in Andrews field and pond.

## CURRENT STATUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The area, which is situated in a residential neighborhood adjacent to a heavily urbanized area, consists of a submerged ball field that has reverted to a shallow pond, a parking lot, and a sports field and track.

The area receives high volumes of storm water runoff which carries with it pollutants such as sediment (from road sanding); nutrients (from atmospheric deposition, lawn fertilizers, etc.); and trash (everything from common litter to shopping carts and tires).

The abutting properties, east and southeast, are often flooded because of poor drainage. Problems associated with flooding, such as odor and property damage, are occurring.

The main brook, known as North Brook, has vanished because it was diverted at the time that the land was filled into a drainage pipe that is still in place.

The primary impacts on the pond are from sediment, which has allowed the area to continue to fill in and has further reduced its depth; nutrients, which feed the growth of algae and aquatic weeds; and trash, which diminishes the pond and its surrounding area's aesthetic appeal. The filling of the pond, caused by the sediment loading, has contributed to weed growth and increased water temperatures by allowing sunlight to penetrate to the pond bottom. The pond and portions of the field area are being invaded by invasive plants that pose a serious threat to biological diversity and subsequently render the pond unappealing and inhospitable.

The entryway to the field is also uninviting, lacking landscaping or any aesthetic additions. The graffiti-marred storage trailers and building, sneaker-strewn overhead wires, the rats' nests and overgrown vegetation are ugly barriers to those that might use the park. The parking lot, that is used by the school band for practice in addition to use by vehicles of all types (buses, tractor trailers and cars), has no sound or visual barriers between it and the surrounding commercial and residential areas. Also, with inadequate physical or security barriers dirt bikers enter the field at various locations and vandalize the wetlands adjacent to the pond.

Since there is no park in this section of the city the families that reside in several hundred nearby homes, and the seniors that live in Kingsway residence, have no neighborhood park to which they can go.

## **PROPOSAL**

The Andrews field parcel is a small but very valuable natural resource that can be preserved, protected and maintained as a community project. A new city park that includes a bird sanctuary, brook, pond, picnic area and playground will be created.

The athletic field was named for Joseph Andrews, a Norwalk school teacher and Norwalk's first Director of Recreation & Parks. The new park will retain his name and be known as Andrews Park.

The process of changing Andrews Field into Andrews Park would begin with the restoration of the pond and the reestablishment of the brook. A bird habitat, nature walks, community gardens, fitness trails, educational programs and a children's playground could become focal points for diversification of usage. Students (of Norwalk High School, Naramake Elementary School and Nathan Hale Middle School), residents (from nearby houses and senior housing), employees from shops and offices on and around Westport Avenue, and nature lovers in our community would be the expanded users.

The parking area would still be a community gathering place for select activities, in addition to use for parking. But the lot would be bound by a landscaped walkway and screened with native Connecticut trees and vegetation.

The resulting park will restore a long-impacted habitat for wildlife, wetland species and water creatures, including many endangered and threatened species. It will also enhance area property values and allow for greater diversity of public usage.

Several organizations that have goals and missions that coincide with this vision of Andrews Park

are potential collaborators for the project.

This project is perceived as very marketable to grant-making organizations. We are also asking for consideration and assistance from the city departments and commissions that have shared interest and responsibility in habitat restoration and park management.

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association has divided the project into four phases, with a projected timeline, that will be expanded to become a comprehensive **Master Plan for Andrews Park**.

**Phase 1: (Year 1)**

The following seven steps can be accomplished simultaneously

1. Identification of applicable city agencies as **Collaborators** to assist professionally with project
  - Conservation Commission
  - Recreation and Parks Department
  - Mayor's Office
  - Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee
  - Planning and Zoning Department
  - Public Works Department
  - Public Schools
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - Health Department
  - Tree Advisory Committee
  - Historical Commission
  - Common Council Committees
    - Recreation & Parks
    - Public Works
    - Land Use & Building Management
  
2. Identification of other entities as **Collaborators** that could assist with project
  - East Norwalk Neighborhood Association
  - League of Women Voters of Norwalk Environment Committee
  - Connecticut Policy & Economic Council – City Scan
  - Preserve the Wetlands
  - Norwalk River Watershed Association
  - Land Trust
  - Maritime Aquarium
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Corporations
  - SONICC
  - Audubon Society
  - Garden Club
  - PTO
  - After School Alliance
  - Boy Scouts & Girl Scouts

- Norwalk High School Alumni
  - Kingsway Senior Housing
  - New Canaan Nature Center
  - State elected officials
  - Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
  - U. S. Department of Fish and Wildlife
3. Formation of an Andrews Park Committee appointed by the Mayor that includes:
    - Members of the ENNA
    - Members from city departments
    - Member from the Common Council
    - Members from the Community and Neighborhood
  4. Community and neighborhood involvement
    - Public workshops to introduce project and gather ideas
    - Press coverage and publicity
    - Formation of 'Friends of Andrews Park'
  5. Habitat restoration and reestablishment
    - Identification of funding sources, grant availability and corporate sponsorship possibilities
    - Identification of no-cost professional assistance from the State of Connecticut and from nonprofit agencies
  6. Site assessment
    - Review of drainage pipes and watercourses, past and present.
    - Modified historic research to ascertain past use, dating back to turn-of-the-century, including Partial Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
    - Natural Resource Inventory to assess flora and fauna, and their condition
    - Zoning survey
    - Soil survey
    - City Scan initial assessment, and subsequent assessments to document change
  7. Engineering, sanitation and security
    - Drainage studies and proposals for improvement
    - Short-term remedial work based on City Scan, review and follow-up for long-range planning

**Phase 2: (Years 2 – 4)**

- Restoration of pond and brook (North Brook) on eastern portion of land.
- Restoration of perimeter of larger field in western portion, including all of the adjacent wetlands that border the surrounding residential properties.
- Enhancement of portions of the entrance area and outer borders of the parking lot by incorporating a “greenway” that includes a natural walkway. This will allow for greater usage by residents and make the parking lot a cohesive part of the park.
- Planting of native trees, shrubs and vegetation.
- Addition of security measures that address vehicular access, lighting, dumping and vandalism.

- Measures of success

**Phase 3:** (Years 5 – 6)

- Establishment and construction of pedestrian usage areas, including a children's play ground, a picnic area, and a non-invasive walkway through portions of the wetland.

**Phase 4:** (Years 7 – 10)

- Restoration of main field to bird habitat and wetland when field is no longer usable as a sports facility.
- Continuation of the natural walkway and completion of the greenway entrance area.
- Measures of success

**Note:** Phases 2 through 4 will be modified and expanded based on outcomes of Phase 1

**ATTACHMENTS AND REFERENCES (available by contacting the ENNA)**

1. Aerial map
2. Webpage photo display & history: [http://calmtraffic.org/andrews\\_pond\\_&\\_field.htm](http://calmtraffic.org/andrews_pond_&_field.htm)
3. Site plan sketches (Pre-filling of wetland, Current, Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, Phase 4)