

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name: Gill Creek Corridor Reforestation
Location: Hyde Park Lake to Upper Niagara River
Site Address: Niagara Falls
State: NY Zip Code: 1430
Minor Civil Division(s): City
County: Niagara
Project Proponent Property Interest (own, lease, easement or other): Owned by City of Niagara Falls

AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL

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PROJECT POINT OF CONTACT

Name: Thomas J. DeSantis Title: Acting Director-Planning, Environmental and Economic Development
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PROJECT NARRATIVE

Please attach material which responds to the following five (5) items in the order that they are presented.

1. In a brief paragraph, describe the project and its purpose, how and when it will be accomplished, and why it is important.
2. Referring to the Niagara River Greenway Plan, clearly document and describe how the proposed project will advance the Niagara River Greenway vision including the goals, principles, and criteria that define that vision.
3. Provide a Sources and Uses Budget. Identify all sources of funding and the amount of funding expected from each source. Identify and quantify funds that are already on hand or have been allocated for the proposed project. Explain how the project will be operated and maintained. Complete the Sources and Uses Budget for the proposed project and include the following:

| SOURCES OF FUNDS | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Loan #1 | \$ |
| Loan #2 | \$ |
| Grant #1: | \$100,000.00 |
| Grant #2 | \$ |
| Other Source #1: | \$ |
| Other Source #2 | \$ |
| TOTAL SOURCES OF FUNDS | \$100,000.00 |
| USE OF FUNDS | |
| Planning | \$ |
| Construction | \$100,000.00 |
| Acquisition | \$ |
| Administration | \$ |
| Operation and Maintenance / Year | \$ |
| TOTAL USES OF FUNDS | \$100,000.00 |
| TOTAL PROJECT COST | \$100,000.00 |

The City of Niagara Falls proposes to renaturalize the Gill Creek corridor between Hyde Park and the Upper Niagara River by replacing trees lost to disease, insect infestation, urban development and other causes, both natural and man-made. The City has undertaken an initiative to repopulate the city's urban forest with trees indigenous to the area. Up to this point, the initiative has focused primarily on street trees; this project seeks to expand the initiative to include the Gill Creek corridor beginning with Hyde Park and extending to the Upper Niagara River at the site of RiverView Heritage Park, the site of the Old Stone Chimney.

Over the course of many years, city Parks have suffered the loss of thousands of trees due to many factors. In the 1950's and 1960's the outbreak of disease and insect epidemics eradicated all the American elms which comprised most of our parks' tree canopy, particularly within Hyde Park. The elms were replaced with poplars which were fast growing but unfortunately relatively short lived. Beginning in the 1990's, the poplars were removed due to disease and their short life span.

Black weeping willows once dotted the shorelines of Hyde Park Lake. A virulent strain of fungus that produces a disease known as "willow blight" caused the disappearance of this species in the park with the exception of a few survivors found on the golf course. The city's urban forest is now under siege by the emerald ash borer which has devastated thousands of green ash trees throughout the city. Hyde Park, including the Golf Course, have



been especially hard-hit by the insect; an estimate of over six hundred ash trees are now dead or in a state of severe decline.

The goal of this project is to plant approximately five hundred trees within the corridor with an emphasis on Hyde Park and the RiverView Heritage Park, the site of the Old Stone Chimney. The planting plan will consist of three hundred deciduous trees and two hundred conifers. Trees to be planted will be taken from a list of fifteen major native tree species. The list includes deciduous trees such as the American beech, basswood, black cherry, black walnut, black

willow, red and sugar maple, northern pin oak, red and white oak, shagbark hickory and yellow birch. Coniferous trees may include eastern hemlock, white pine and white spruce.

Each site will have a developed planting plan specific to the area. The Hyde Park tree plantings will be the most diverse and will serve to restore riparian and in-stream habitats, stabilize the banks and improve water quality in Hyde Park Lake. The concept for the Upper Niagara River planting will focus on a reforestation/historical perspective.

Deciduous trees will be 2" in diameter and balled and burlap-wrapped. Coniferous trees will be 5' tall and also balled and burlap-wrapped. Balled and burlapped trees have a survival rate and better growth rate than the direct planting of bare root stock in poor soil areas. Another advantage of balled and burlapped trees, particularly those planted along the Upper Niagara River is that they do not require staking in open, windy areas. Purchase and planting of the trees will be done over a two-year period commencing in the early Spring.

The City of Niagara Falls respectfully seeks funding for this valuable project as a means of furthering the goals of the Niagara River Greenway Commission. The anticipated amount needed to complete the project is \$100,000.

The Niagara River Greenway is a world-class corridor of places, parks and landscapes that celebrates and interprets our unique natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and heritage resources and provides access to and connections between these important resources while giving rise to economic opportunities for the region.

Reforestation of the Gill Creek Corridor and the RiverView Heritage Park will promote the Niagara River Greenway vision in several ways. Gill Creek is the primary water-based link from the Niagara River into the city. The corridor is currently overgrown with invasive species that are scheduled to be removed. Their replacement with native species is crucial to the ecological and environmental health of the Creek.

The RiverView Heritage Park was created with the relocation of the Old Stone Chimney. The site was cleared and partially paved to provide a foundation for the chimney and access for its visitors. However, the site is in dire need of vegetation. In an area that was once a dense forest, it is a stark reminder of how urbanization has affected the area. Visited daily by residents and tourists, the addition of healthy, native trees will accentuate the beauty of the River, provide shade to visitors and promote the ecological integrity of the waterfront.



Hyde Park, rich in natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and heritage resources is one of the largest publicly-owned parks in New York State, second only to Central Park in New York City. The park originated from land donated to the City by Charles B. Hyde in 1928 to be used as a public park. Additional land donations from Hyde's widow and the Niagara Falls Power Company resulted in the creation of a 580-acre park in the center of the city.

From spring through fall, residents and visitors to the area visit the park to utilize the recreational facilities or relax and enjoy the pastoral scenery and

wildlife that is abundant within the park. However, many of the majestic trees that were once prominent within the park have been lost due to disease, insect infestation and improper care. The replacement of these trees will restore much of the park's allure and contribute to a healthier environment.

Niagara River Greenway Commission Goals, Principles and Criteria

Excellence

Reforestation of the corridor and the RiverView Park will help to guarantee that the in-water and riparian habitats are restored, water quality is improved, and the beauty and aesthetic benefits of the area are preserved. The long-term effect will be to accentuate the beauty and serenity of the waterfront.

Restoration/Ecological Integrity/Promote Long-Term Sustainability

Reforestation of the area will stabilize the banks of the Creek and the Upper River, prevent erosion, restore riparian and in-stream habitats, decrease sedimentation and improve water quality. Additional trees will provide nesting and roosting habitat for a multitude of bird species and a variety of tree seeds and nuts will provide for food for wildlife.



Indigenous trees will be planted in order to preserve the ecological integrity and sustainability of the Creek and the Upper Niagara River. Balled and burlapped trees will be planted since it is possible to plant larger, hardier trees that ensure a better survival rate. Planting trees in this form also contributes to better adaptation to poor quality soil which is often found in this area.

Olmsted's Legacy

The reforestation of this corridor will contribute to the promotion of Olmsted's desire to preserve areas of natural beauty within urban settings. The planting of trees native to the area will ensure that residents and visitors alike have access to greenery within the urban setting long into the future as Olmsted envisioned.



Consistency with Principles: As evidenced above, this project is in accordance with the Niagara River Greenway principles of *Excellence, Sustainability, Ecological Integrity, and Restoration.*

Priority Status:

The primary focus of this project is to repopulate the native forest of the area. To that end, the City will satisfy the criteria of "*making use of native species to the maximum extent possible*". As previously indicated, the end result of the project will contribute to a major greenway goal of restoring the Niagara River ecosystem.

Focus Area: The location of this project falls within the core area of the Greenway boundaries. Improvements to the corridor will demonstrate visible results of the Greenway mission and contribute to the overall success of the Plan.

Implementable, Economic Viability and Local Sponsor: City administration has pledged manpower to complete the necessary tasks to restore the corridor to its previous state of pristine natural beauty and

serenity. As the local sponsor, upon completion of the project, the City will consistently budget the necessary funding to maintain the health of the trees.

Consideration of Other Planning Efforts: This project represents priorities cited in the "Upper River Recommended Project" in the City of Niagara Falls' *Niagara River Greenway Vision and Project Proposals - #31 Restore Hyde Park and Hyde Park Lake; #32 Improve Gill Creek as a connection and its ecological function.*



The City recently partnered with the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper for the installation of a "Living Shoreline" demonstration project that included the restoration of 600 linear feet of shoreline along Hyde Park Lake. The restoration included the planting of more than 1,300 native plants, including trees, shrubs, perennials and aquatic vegetation along the shoreline that will help prevent erosion, improve water quality, and provide

important wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

The City is in the planning stage of expanding the boundaries of the demonstration project to include all lake shoreline appropriate for riparian intervention as well as immediate shoreline within the riparian zone of Gill Creek. This project will further contribute to restored ecological health and environmental sustainability.

Gill Creek Trail is also in the planning stage. The trail will connect Hyde Park and Gill Creek Park and end at Buffalo Avenue. Development of this Trail will improve access to the waterfront district from nearly a mile upstream using the Gill Creek tributary. It provides for a safer, more intuitive linkage between the parks and the nearby business district and promotes recreation and healthy lifestyles residents.

The City is currently working with its consultants and a steering committee to develop interpretive materials for the Old Stone Chimney, located at the newly developed RiverView Heritage Park. The Park was established by the New York Power specifically to house the Chimney.

Clear Benefits: The reforestation of the area will not only improve the aesthetic beauty of the area but will contribute to a healthier environment.

Environmental Setting/SEQR Compliance

All work will be completed with minimal disturbance to the environmental setting. The City of Niagara Falls Department of Planning and Environmental Services will work with all other public agencies to secure all necessary permits and approvals (i.e. NYSDEC, ACOE).

Project Schedule

Planting is set to begin upon receiving a determination of consistency from the Commission and will be done over a two-year period.

Budget

| SOURCES OF FUNDS | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Loan #1 | \$ |
| Loan #2 | \$ |
| Grant #1: | \$100,000.00 |
| Grant #2 | \$ |
| Other Source #1: | \$ |
| Other Source #2 | \$ |
| TOTAL SOURCES OF FUNDS | \$100,000.00 |
| USE OF FUNDS | |
| Planning | \$ |
| Construction | \$100,000.00 |
| Acquisition | \$ |
| Administration | \$ |
| Operation and Maintenance / Year | \$ |
| TOTAL USES OF FUNDS | \$100,000.00 |
| TOTAL PROJECT COST | \$100,000.00 |

The total cost per tree is estimated at \$200, but final costs will not be determined until bids have been solicited and evaluated.

**Not shown on the budget are the amounts that will be required for the annual maintenance of the site by the City. These figures are dependent upon union*

contracts and the ever-changing costs of goods and services. The City will routinely fund the regular maintenance of the site.

Describe the measures taken at the local level to gain community and government support for this project (hearings, petitions, public surveys, resolutions of support or other methods). If this project has been cited or described in a local planning document or some equivalent thereof, attach copies of that documentation highlighting the sections that are relevant to the proposed project. Describe the role of municipal agencies, stakeholder groups, consultants, volunteers or others who will be involved in the proposed project.

This project has been cited in **POLICY AREA 4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND OPEN SPACE RESOURCES** of the City's *Comprehensive Plan for the City of Niagara Falls, USA - 2009*. This policy recognizes the importance of preserving, conserving, and recognizing the city's environmental and natural resources.

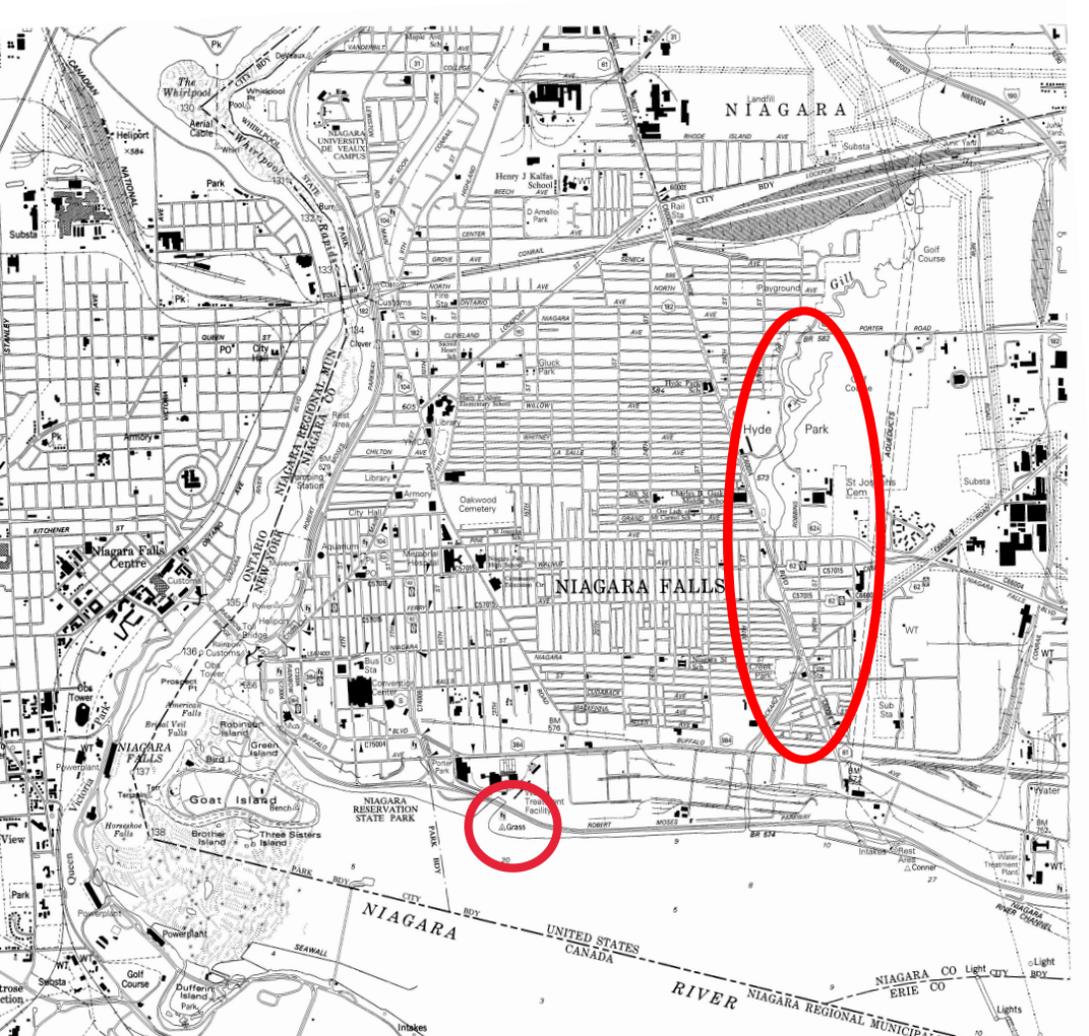
Describe and document the environmental setting and existing conditions at the proposed project site. If you are not the owner of the property include a letter(s) or resolution(s) evidencing support for the project by the owner. Provide photographs, conceptual plans and drawings that show the site as it presently exists and how the site will change with the addition of the proposed project. Describe how your project will comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). The existence of wetlands, significant upland and aquatic habitats, and plant or animal species that are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered should be noted. Explain how such natural resources will be protected and/or enhanced. Cite any relevant project-related studies.



The project site has been tested for environmental soundness. The current condition of the project area ranges from severe overgrowth such as the immediate area surrounding Gill Creek south of Hyde Park Lake are severely overgrown to other sparsely vegetated areas along Hyde Park Lake and the RiverView Heritage Park.

REFORESTATION SITE





7.4 POLICY AREA 4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

General Policy Statement:

It is the City's policy to preserve, conserve, and recognize the environmental and natural resources of the City in a manner that contributes to the City's overall quality of life, enhances public health, and fosters appropriate development. In order to achieve this, the City will (see also Figure 22):

Policy 7.4.1 Limit the potential for cumulative and secondary impact of development and other activities on water, air, and land quality and quantity.

Action 1 *Ensure that proposed development or redevelopment is subject to development review that seeks to protect important environmental areas or resources.*

Action 2 *Devise a citywide tree program for the protection, replacement, and maintenance of city trees.*

Action 3 *At a minimum, ensure that the City's thresholds and standards for evaluating impacts to natural resources are consistent with those set forth by the federal, county, and state agencies with jurisdiction over such resources.*

Policy 7.4.2 Provide connections and public access, where appropriate, between development and natural areas, parks, and recreation areas within the City, as well as to regional connections of these resources outside of the City.

Action 1 *Devise an open space and recreation plan that outlines the City's goals for specific open spaces and recreational areas and looks to provide connections between these resources.*

Action 2 *Improve Gill Creek as a ecological connection*

Gill Creek should be strengthened as an important environmental resource and connection between Hyde Park and the Upper Niagara River. The creek is one of only two water-based links from the river into the city and could be better integrated within the city's open space network with new plantings and a natural environment emphasizing its ecological functions. A walking and cycling route between Hyde Park and the river should be developed perhaps adjacent to the creek. New, designed open space connections can be created by extending Hyde Park to Gill Creek and extending the power conduit ROWs linking Hyde Park and Gill Creek to the waterfront.

7.9 **POLICY AREA 9 WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT**

Policy Statement:

After decades of technical planning and public discussion, Niagara Falls is on a firm foundation for immediate action. City projects put forth in our award-winning Achieving Niagara Falls' Future: Waterfront Agenda are feasible, have citizen support and, taken together, will have transformative impact for the City of Niagara Falls. The strategy that connects our waterfront projects is driven by three base principles:

- *First, re-connect Niagara Falls – its downtown and neighborhoods alike – with the Niagara River waterfront.*
- *Second, repair and improve both, the natural environments for greater ecological function and benefit, as well as the urban environments for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.*
- *Third, develop the means to tell the compelling stories of the city and region to build the visitor industry and create meaning for those who live here.*

It is the City's policy therefore, to reconnect the City to its waterfront and to protect and enhance the City's waterfront resources. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies, which are consistent with all relevant New York State Coastal Management policies as written in the City's draft Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP):

Policy 7.9.1 Develop the Niagara waterfront, the Falls, Gorge and River, as a great public space of international significance.

Action 1 *Lead in the development of the Niagara River Greenway*

Action 2 *Lead in the development of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area*

Policy 7.9.2 Encourage waterfront development that supports an active, urban waterfront by offering a mix of uses, public access, and connections to other land uses – such as nearby neighborhoods, greenways, trails, etc.

Action 1 *Restore, revitalize, and redevelop deteriorated and underutilized waterfront areas.*

Action 2 *Facilitate the siting of water-dependent and water-enhanced uses on or adjacent to coastal waters, and give priority over non-water-related uses along the river shore.*

Action 3 *Protect, maintain, and increase the level and types of access to public water-related recreation resources and facilities.*

Action 4 *Encourage the location of development in areas where public services and facilities essential to such development are adequate.*

Action 5 *Create a bicycle and pedestrian trail system along the waterfront that provides intuitive access to and from the City proper.*

Policy 7.9.3 Protect, enhance or restore the unique qualities and characteristics of the Niagara River —as the fundamental building block and encourage development that only complements this resource.

Action 1 *Protect and restore Significant coastal and wildlife habitats whenever feasible.*

Action 2 *Protect, restore, or enhance scenic views and vistas, which contribute to the overall scenic quality of the coastal area.*

Action 3 *Minimize the damage to natural resources from development activities, particularly the introduction of hazardous waste and other pollutants.*

Action 4 *Conserve and protect agricultural lands in the State's coastal area.*

Policy 7.9.4 Create a Heritage Corridor Framework to develop, interpret, link and promote a wide range of natural, historical, cultural, architectural and other attractions as a regional destination to extend visitation in the Niagara Region.

Policy 7.9.5 Activities or development in the coastal area will be undertaken so as to minimize damage to natural resources, property from flooding, and erosion by protecting natural protective features

Policy 7.9.6 Develop attractive and understandable modes of access along the entire waterfront that establish clear links between destinations.

Action 1 *Protect, maintain, and increase the level and types of access to (public, water-related) recreation resources and facilities.*

Policy 7.9.7 Mining, excavation or dredging in coastal waters shall not significantly interfere with the natural coastal processes.

Policy 7.9.8 Best management practices will be used to ensure the control of storm-water run-off and combined sewer overflows.

Action 1 *Non-point discharge of excess nutrients, organics, and eroded soils will be minimized*

30. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Hyde Park Boulevard to Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard C.6

Extend Hyde Park Boulevard to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection. This will provide access to the proposed Intake Park, discussed above, as well as create another new access point for the waterfront trail, and connect the trail to adjacent neighborhood streets. The intersection will also help slow traffic on the reduced parkway.

31. Restore Hyde Park and Hyde Park Lake

The City's premier park and set of recreational facilities

32. Improve Gill Creek as a connection and its ecological function

Gill Creek should be strengthened as an important physical connection and new green structure opportunity linking Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods to the Upper Niagara River at the proposed upgraded Intake Park. The creek is one of only two water-based links from the river into the city and could be better integrated within the city's open space network with **new plantings and a natural environment emphasizing its ecological functions**. While connection to the river may be very long-term proposition, at least part of the creek corridor should be improved to include an accessible walking trail.

33. Utility R-0-W's as a connection and new green structure

NYPA conduit lands and lands owned by National Grid should be improved and incorporated into a useful part of the new open space network of new green structures. In this instance expanding Hyde Park's recreational and ecological footprint east and south. This new reach used to establish an accessible walking and cycling route linking Hyde Park and Gill Creek to the waterfront.

34. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Parkway at Portage Road C.7

Extend (and turn) Portage Road to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway and waterfront trailhead at a new city-style at-grade intersection. This extension and intersection will provide new access between the trail and city neighborhoods and further calm traffic on the downgraded Parkway. It will also provide access for interpretive facilities at the Adams Plant (above) and to the proposed RiverView Park (below).

35. RiverView Park: birding area and overlook C.8

One of the richest and most promising redevelopment sites on the upper river, ironically, is often referred to as the "spoils pile." The site is strategically located on the broad upper reach of the river, and it is large enough to accommodate an ambitious and varied program of recreation, education, historic interpretation, and visitor orientation.

This program should feature a proposal such as the Audubon Society/ Buffalo Ornithological Society's idea for The Bird Observatory, taking advantage of the Upper River's status as a world-class birding area. It can also accommodate historic interpretation of the Adams intake canal and "Old Stone Chimney" and interpretation of NYPA's working boat docks.