

**The Ribbon-Cutting
Special Souvenir Edition!**

THE OPENING OF Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park



AND THE STORY OF The Mamaroneck Greenway

VILLAGE OF MAMARONECK

Welcome to Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park

A park born of neighbors

This little book marks a big moment.

Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park is open—a new place to sit by the water, watch geese or ducks—or maybe even a heron—and remember that Mamaroneck's rivers belong to all of us.

It is the second pocket park on the Mamaroneck Greenway, a village effort to turn forgotten riverbanks into living parks. The first, the Rockland Pocket Preserve, proved what a hundred volunteers and native plants from neighbors' yards can do.

What follows is the story: the storm that changed us, the people who showed up, the plants that feed birds and butterflies, and the path unfolding along the Sheldrake and Mamaroneck Rivers.



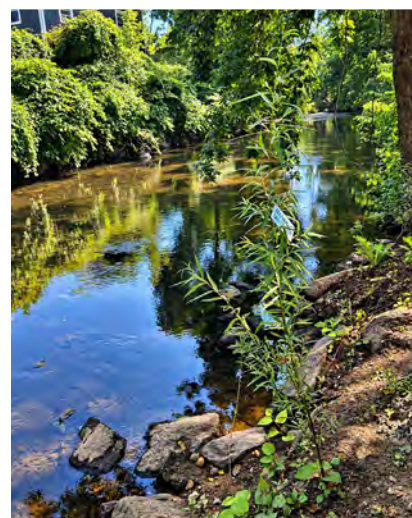
Small, but an oasis of native vegetation in an area with mostly paved-over commercial properties along Mamaroneck Avenue, and the dense Washingtonville neighborhood.



White snakeroot, a great wetland pollinator



The butterfly garden has flowering plants like asters, goldenrod, white boneset, black-eyed Susans, and bee balm



Black willows, pussy willow, ostrich ferns and red osier dogwood are some of wetland plants anchoring the shoreline

Brought to you by the Community

Green space where it matters most

Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park brings restored riverfront, native habitat and public green space to Washingtonville—a neighborhood hit especially hard by Mamaroneck's devastating floods. The park turns vulnerable land into a community asset, while native plantings help absorb stormwater, stabilize soil and restore the river ecosystem.



Digging out giant knotweed roots along the shore.



The Greenway is built by neighbors. From clearing invasive plants to planting native species, to imagining what's next, this is a village effort.



White wood asters and grasses. The cottonwoods that have "volunteered" will grow tall and absorb up to 200 gallons of stormwater a day.

An egret visits.



The Big Storms of 2021

August 21-23, 2021, Hurricane Henri:
4.4 inches of rainfall in 48 hours.

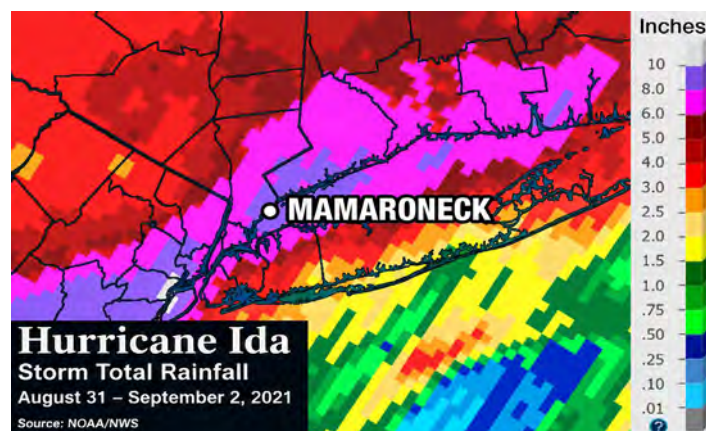
September 1-2, 2021, Hurricane Ida:
8.5 inches of rainfall in less than 12 hours.

Rain fell on ground that could not soak up any more and the Sheldrake and Mamaroneck spilled their banks. In the lowest streets—especially Washingtonville, known as the Flats—water rose 10 to 14 feet.

More than 500 homes were flooded. About 310 cars were lost. Roughly 150 water rescues were made by boat and by whatever would float. The firehouse took water. The First Baptist Church on Howard Avenue was gutted. Schools closed. Damage ran into the tens of millions; some estimates topped \$100 million.

No one in Mamaroneck who lived that night forgets it. Ida was the worst flood in living memory—far worse than 1955, 1972, 1975, 2007, Irene, or Sandy. It also became a turning point.

Federal funding followed for the long-planned



Purple = +8 inches

Army Corps project to widen and deepen the channels. At the same time, neighbors asked a quieter question: Could the leftover scraps of riverbank become parks that hold water, grow habitat, and give families a place to stand after the water recedes?



The Mamaroneck River lifted up this shipping container near Nostrand Avenue and pushed it past the railroad and Halstead Avenue bridges, all the way to the Anita Lane Bridge, where it blocked and further slowed down the water.

CBS News

After the Deluge

The residents speak

We had seven feet of water in our basement... it was trickling in but once those doors broke open in the basement we then realized this was really serious and like nothing we'd ever seen before... It's sad, I grew up here. Do I want to stay, yeah, it's the house my father built, but I can't see living here...

Patti Trifiletti, generational Village resident

This house is a fourth generation house, it was my great grandparents'... So the water in the basement hit the ceiling of the basement in its entirety so that's seven to eight feet...

Laura Abbate, generational Village resident



By the time I got here it was just destroyed I didn't know what to do... I threw my hands up, 15 years in business, that's it I'm done... Overall we lost around \$150,000 worth of equipment...

Dean Bellantoni, UFC Gym owner



In a matter of an hour and a half or so, the water came over this fence, up to about here, so it's over my head... my son opened our basement door and he

let out a scream like I've never heard before...

Bernie Camarda, lifetime Village resident

Many arrived at the high-school shelter pulling wheeled suitcases containing whatever they had managed to grab before fleeing... Some didn't have much more than socks.

Jeff Edwards, *Patch* staff reporter/editor, at the Red Cross shelter at Mamaroneck High School, where 125 displaced residents spent the night after Ida.

CBS News



ABC News

THE IMPACT

14 feet

Maximum reported flood depth in Mamaroneck

500+

Homes affected

310

Vehicles destroyed

1

Village resident lost his life

\$100 million

Estimated local damage



Iohud.com



Iohud.com



Kena Betancur/AFP via Getty Images

The Greenway Idea

The Mamaroneck Greenway plan evolved over several years.

From pollinators to flood protection

Before Hurricane Ida, Mamaroneck's Committee for the Environment (CFTE) was already looking at underused Village land as potential pollinator habitat. Ida changed the scale of the question. Under then-Chair Ellen Silver, the committee began asking whether degraded riverfront and floodplain land could be restored as **green infrastructure—absorbing floodwater while creating healthier habitat and public space.**

In February 2022, committee members walked the river corridor from Rockland and Fayette Avenues along the Sheldrake to Ward Avenue Bridge. The beginnings of a Greenway were taking shape.

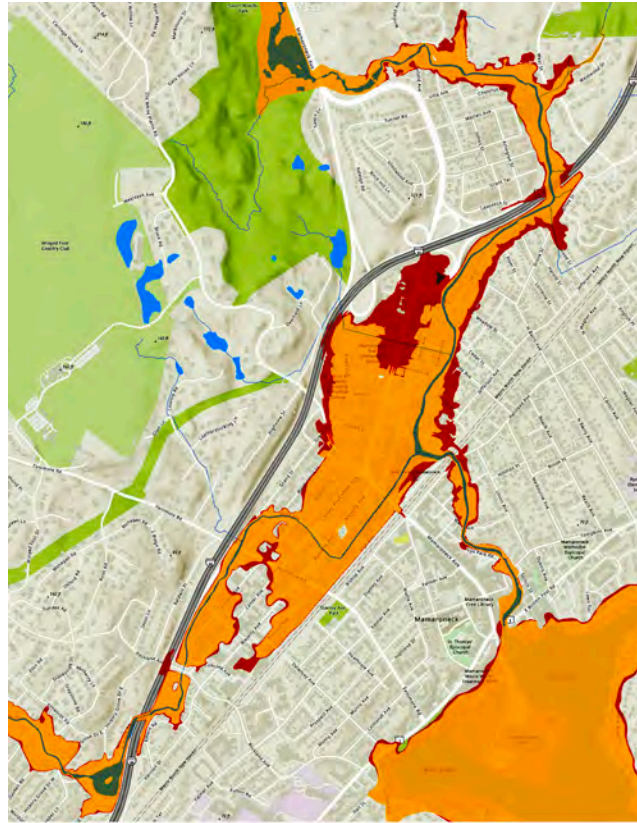
Let the floodplain do its job

The idea was to restore the Village ecosystem by removing erosion-causing knotweed, tree-strangling vines and other invasive plants; restore native trees, shrubs and groundcover; and give floodplains more capacity to **hold water, filter pollutants, stabilize soil and support wildlife.**

At the same time, neglected riverfront could become an asset for residents—providing walking routes and passive recreation, particularly in neighborhoods underserved by parks.

Working with nature

This approach was becoming mainstream flood-management practice. The Army Corps of Engineers' 2021 international guidelines on **Natural and Nature-Based Features for**



County data shows the Village's flood plain. Orange areas are prone to frequent flooding. Extreme flooding expands to the red areas.

Flood Risk Management documented the advantages of working with natural systems, although its older flood-control proposal for Mamaroneck predated this shift.

New York State DEC was moving in the same direction: nature-based infrastructure can complement engineered flood protection, delivering environmental benefits and be more cost effective in the long term than hardscape in a time of climate change.

Mamaroneck's own Local Waterfront Revitalization Program also provided an important planning foundation.

Rethinking Columbus Park

One early idea was for the Jefferson Avenue parking lot in Columbus Park, the confluence of the Sheldrake and Mamaroneck rivers. The Corps' 2017 plan proposed a **390-foot-long underground diversion culvert** beneath the paved floodplain.

Flood Mitigation Committee Chair Tony Gelber and CFTE member Kate Dehais proposed a "tweak:" to turn the impermeable parking area into floodable parking by removing the pavement and lowering the entire area by 3½ to 5 feet, with a restored wetland shoreline. The buried diversion culvert would be daylighted, becoming an open-air, landscaped culvert **achieving the same flood control results while being environmentally beneficial, easier to maintain and likely less expensive.**

The Village board passed a resolution of support to propose the "tweak" to the Corps in July 2022, who were receptive to this approach. A similar idea subsequently appeared in the DEC-commissioned **2023 Flood Mitigation & Resilience Report**, which informs current Village flood planning.

Rockland: an idea becomes a park

Meanwhile, CFTE identified an unused piece of Village land at Rockland and Fayette Avenues on the Sheldrake. Beneath dense invasive growth they found native plants, including jewelweed, and a large stand of milkweed.

Beginning in October 2022, **more than 100 volunteers** removed mountains of invasives, liberated mature trees from vines, and planted hundreds of native plants. The **Rockland Pocket Preserve** demonstrated on a small scale what riverfront restoration could accomplish.

Mapping the land

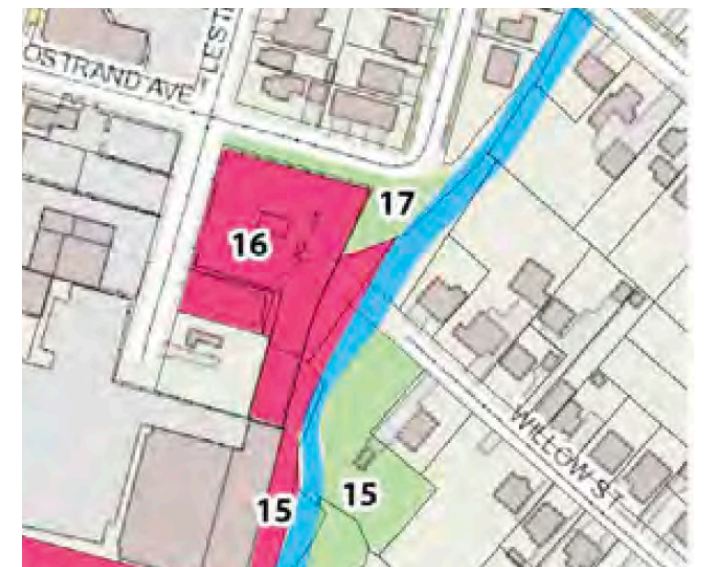
CFTE then surveyed the riverfront properties east of I-95, mapping ownership and evaluating habitat, mature native trees, invasive species and opportunities for restoration.

The investigation included **I-95 itself**. CFTE calculated that the highway represented **28.2 acres of impervious surface in the floodplain**, with unfiltered stormwater draining straight into Mamaroneck's rivers. CFTE estimated that roughly **6.5 million gallons of runoff** came from that surface during Ida.

If some highway runoff be retained, it would remove pressure from Mamaroneck's humble rivers being used as stormwater sewer pipes.

From parks to a greenway

In November 2023, Dehais and then-CFTE Chair David Freeman presented the **Mamaroneck Greenway plan** to the Village Board, who supported CFTE in seeking planning assistance from Long Island Sound Partnership, an effort that was successful.



In preparing the Mamaroneck Greenway proposal, the ownership and status of every riverside lot was meticulously researched. The lot at Nostrand and Howard (17), was identified as a potential park site.

The First Big Test— The Rockland Pocket Preserve

The park that proved it

Before October 2022, this was leftover land in an industrial stretch—glass, debris, knotweed, mugwort, and a sea of vines so thick you could not see the Sheldrake. That October, over 100 volunteers came together to clear invasive plants, remove debris and restore the riverbank at Rockland Pocket. Over many workdays, neighbors, students, families and local organizations donated



An overgrown, unused lot of Village land has been converted into a park that welcomes neighbors and workers from the local Industrial Area. Even a small public space allows people to connect and share the beautiful wildlife and watch the river flow.



The Village commissioned the sign which was then installed by the Parks Department.

and planted native trees, shrubs and perennials, and laid out the paths. Parks then installed benches and large native trees. What was once a neglected lot is now a vibrant park for people and wildlife.

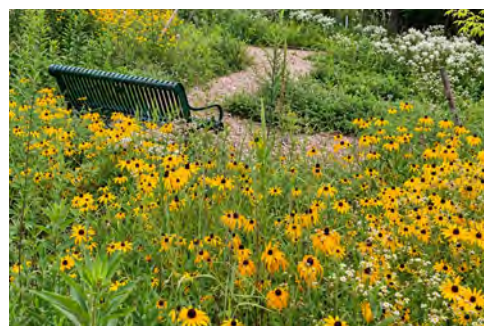
Then the park did what parks are supposed to do. People sat. Children came. Ducks, geese, osprey, turkey, heron, deer, and even a fox came to visit. Butterflies found the milkweed. Families who live in the industrial area—who had no green space and no river access—suddenly had both.



The October 18, 2023 opening of the Rockland Pocket Preserve. It was the Village's first new park since the opening of Bub Walker park in 1980.



Before. A vast tangle of deep-rooted invasives hostile to native species and not exactly friendly to humans, either.



After. Controlled chaos. Nature runs wild, but feeds the insects and in turn the birds. Winding paths and benches welcome the community.

The Volunteers Who Made it Happen

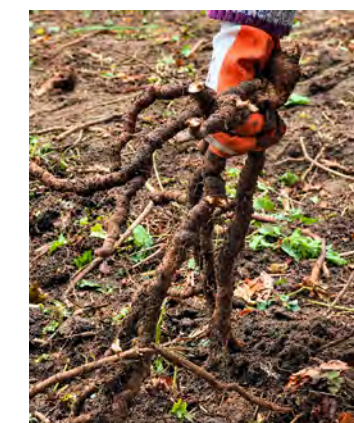


Ellen Silver and the CFTE showed up.



The big dig

Volunteers dig out knotweed and wrestle with the thick, sprawling roots of porcelain berry. Cutting the vine isn't enough—it can vigorously resprout from roots left underground, making complete removal a real workout. Porcelain berry races up trees and shrubs, smothering native plants beneath dense blankets of foliage.



Expert gardeners lend a hand.



Contributing, learning, then off to college.



Working and making new friends.



Scouts come to learn and help.

Native Plants are Essential to Native Life



Native plants make a difference

Native plants provide the food and habitat that local bees, butterflies and other pollinators evolved to depend on. In return, pollinators fertilize flowers, producing the fruits, seeds and nuts that sustain birds, wildlife—and us.

Native plants also support caterpillars and songbirds, build healthier soil, absorb stormwater and reduce erosion. Together, native plants and pollinators create a richer, more resilient ecosystem from the ground up.

Birds, caterpillars, and a healthier web of life

Most birds cannot raise young on seeds alone. About 96 percent of North American land birds feed caterpillars and other insects to their chicks.

A nest of baby birds needs 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars before the birds are strong enough to fly away. Those caterpillars can only thrive on the plants they evolved with.

Oaks species are champions around the world, including in our local ecosystem, hosting many hundreds of moth and butterfly species. Native cherries and willows follow close behind.

Plant natives, and you not only get flowers, you also get bees, butterflies, beetles, then wrens and warblers, then maybe even a heron.



A Natural Partnership between the oaks and the blue jays

Oaks produce acorns—nutritious, long-lasting food that blue jays eagerly collect in fall. Jays can carry hundreds of acorns to hidden caches, remembering many of the spots months later.

Some of those acorns are never recovered. They sprout into new oak trees, helping forests spread and renew. In return, oaks provide blue jays, and many other animals, with food, shelter, and nesting sites.

A lifeline for a legendary butterfly

Monarch butterflies depend on milkweed for survival. It is the only plant their caterpillars can eat, making every patch of milkweed a potential monarch nursery. At the Rockland Pocket, and now at Nostrand-Howard,

plentiful milkweed gives migrating monarchs a place to lay their eggs and a new generation a chance to grow. Protecting these native plants helps sustain one of nature's most extraordinary migrations.



The Invaders

Invasive species set us back. But we are learning how to manage them.

Invasive plants like Japanese knotweed take over riverbanks. They crowd out native species, reduce habitat for wildlife, and accelerate erosion, worsening flooding.

Beautiful—but not so beneficial

Many familiar garden favorites—butterfly bush, English ivy, burning bush, and Japanese barberry—are non-native, and invasive. They may be pretty, but they don't support native insects and spread to wild areas, damaging those ecosystems.

A lawn or a row of exotic shrubs can look tidy and appealing, but contribute nothing to the food webs. About 14 percent of native plant groups support roughly 90 percent of the caterpillars that keep the food web running. That is why the Greenway plants oaks, willows, spicebush, and milkweed instead of merely decorative plants.



Volunteers valiantly dig out huge stands of Japanese knotweed that had taken over much of Nostrand-Howard. Native species have reclaimed it.

Japanese knotweed—Godzilla!

Cut it down and it comes back. Dig it up and the smallest pieces can start new plants if you're not careful. Floods carry fragments downstream, helping this remarkably stubborn invader conquer new territory.

Mugwort—the house guest who won't leave

Mugwort spreads underground through an extensive network of rhizomes and is extremely hardy.

Tree-of-heaven—the tree from hell

Despite the heavenly name, this fast-growing tree is a ruthless neighbor, and is host to the dreaded Japanese lantern fly.

Japanese barberry—the tick motel

Often planted as a suburban hedge, barberry forms dense, thorny thickets that crowd out native plants. This creates the cool, humid conditions that blacklegged ticks and white-footed mice, the hosts for Lyme's disease, love most.



Numbers of spotted lantern flies explode when they find a tree of heaven.

Helping Nature Help Us All

A village and a flood plain



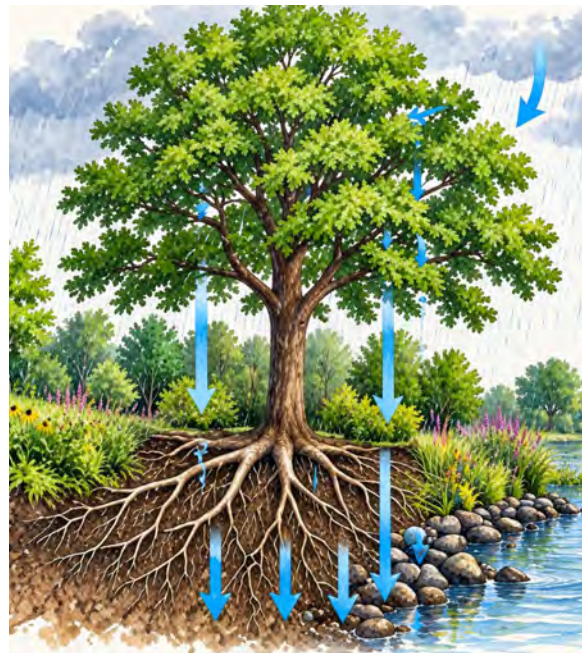
Bird feeder for every season

An oak tree, like this red oak growing beside the Mamaroneck River near the Anita Lane Bridge, can support over 500 different species of butterfly and moth caterpillars. This is important because baby birds need thousands of caterpillars to grow large enough to fledge.

Loss of native habitat is why there are 30% fewer birds in the United States than there were in the 1970s. Since clearing invasives in both Rockland and Nostrand, volunteers have observed many dozens of native saplings emerging, great news for flood control and the recovery of our ecological balance.

The Sheldrake and Mamaroneck rivers cut through the Village on their way to the harbor and Long Island Sound. For generations they were straightened, walled, hidden behind industry, and their floodplain paved over. Storm water had fewer places to be absorbed. Neighbors had fewer places to enjoy the river.

Only about 4.4% of village land is open space—far less than nearby Larchmont and Scarsdale. The Greenway addresses the imbalance with a simple idea: turn the land we already own along the rivers into a 22-acre, 3.1-mile chain of parks.



Rain is intercepted by leaves

Water soaks into soil

Tree roots stabilize the river bank and take up water

Healthier rivers and cleaner water

Green infrastructure works

Plants, soil, and floodable parks slow water down, hold it, and clean it. They are also beautiful. Restoring a bank with native plantings is often more cost-beneficial, and far kinder to the eye than cement.

A mature native tree can absorb about 100 gallons of rainwater per day.

The Greenway Connects Us

The Greenway will create 3.1 miles of pathways along Mamaroneck's rivers, for a total 22 acres of parkland.

It will offer connectivity for pedestrians along the rivers and the downtown core, enhancing our quality of life.

It will provide nature-based flood mitigation, filtering out pollutants before they enter the rivers and the Long Island Sound.

It will restore wetland habitat along our rivers, storing carbon by protecting mature trees and rejuvenating wetland soils.

It will create open green space with access to nature in our neighborhoods, and provide outdoor classrooms for people of all ages to learn about nature.



Come Watch the River Flow



What the Future Holds

Murphy Brothers Contracting, at Fenimore and Waverly Avenues, marked on their corner window how high the floodwaters rose during each of Mamaroneck's three major storms.

April 16, 2007 (Nor'easter): ~ 2.5 to 3 feet

This represents a typical mid-thigh to waist-high level of standing water on the street corner.

August 28, 2011 (Irene): ~ 4 to 4.5 feet

Water at this level would completely submerge a standard car's hood and reach chest-high on an average adult.

September 2, 2021 (Ida): ~ 5.5 to 6 feet

At this historic peak, the intersection experienced catastrophic conditions where the floodwaters completely crested above standard sedan roofs and reached the first-floor ceilings of local structures.

These are the early days.

After Ida, the Murphy Brothers Contracting firm painted the blue lines on the corner window of their building, seen in the picture on the right. Each shows the high watermark of the floods that caused devastating damage to them and to the entire area.

The Ida line sits at nearly 6 feet. The store sits 8 feet higher than the lowest point in the area, which recorded 14 feet of flooding.

The double strike of Henri and Ida was a freak meteorological catastrophe. But the trend is clear. More powerful storms can be expected.

There's nothing we can do to affect the weather that will be coming at us in the future. But we can prepare. The Village is working on a plan with the Army Corps of Engineers and others to speed the flow of the Mamaroneck and Sheldrake rivers during floods.

The Greenway's natural defenses are part of the solution to flooding. Deepening and widening rivers can only do so much. Protecting and restoring open green space gives water a place to go, to be safely held and absorbed.



Courtesy of Kurt Coble

The window of the Murphy Brothers Contracting office on the corner of Fenimore and Waverly avenues in 2023.

Thank you!

Our heartfelt thanks to all the many volunteers who showed up in all kinds of weather to pull out weeds, dig holes, drag wood chips, and much more backbreaking labor. The community owes you.

And to our public servants...

Many thanks also to all the current and former public servants at all levels whose participation and support helped the Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park become a reality.

Village of Mamaroneck Mayor Sharon Torres, Deputy Mayor Nora Lucas, Trustees Ellen Silver, Dan Kushnick and Maria DeRose, Manager Kathleen Gill, Parks & Recreation Department, Department of Public Works

How you can help

To volunteer, sign up through our “Learn, Weed & Plant” program.



Join us!

If you're interested in a deeper and ongoing role supporting the environment and the Mamaroneck Greenway, consider applying to the Village Committee for the Environment. Reach out to: cfte@vomny.org

Learn more about the Mamaroneck Greenway



Or contact cfte@vomny.org



Give someone a place in the park

Sponsor a bench at Rockland Pocket Preserve or Nostrand-Howard Riverside Park and dedicate it to someone special. Each donated bench carries an inscribed plaque honoring the person or people of your choice—and gives the whole community a beautiful place to sit, rest and enjoy the park.



A lasting dedication. A gift everyone can share.