A Great City Deserves a Great Park
A Proposal to Develop a Stewardship Organization
For Roger Williams Park

Developed by
Providence Department of Parks & Recreation
Center for Ecosystem Restoration
Landscape Elements, LLC
Street Smart Consulting
A Great City Deserves a Great Park

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March, 2015

Providence Department of Parks & Recreation

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor
Robert F. McMahon, Superintendent

Prepared by Center for Ecosystem Restoration, Landscape Elements, LLC, and Street Smart Consulting
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MAP LEGEND
Traffic Circle
Primary Park Rd
Secondary Park Rd
Service Access only
Parked Walkway
Trails Unpaved

DIRECTIONS
From I-95 (S) - Take Exit 17 (Elmwood Av) - Left at light - 2nd left into Park
From I-95 (N) - Take Exit 16 (Elmwood Av / Roger Williams Park) - Bear right - Left at light - Park is 1/2 block on right

Information - Please call: 401.781.9400
Events, Botanical Center, Permits, etc. - 401.781.9450
Visit the City of Providence web site - www.providencelibrary.com/government/parks

Roger Williams Park and the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center and Gardens are owned and operated by the City of Providence.

THE LANDSCAPE
Roger Williams Park is primarily a designed man-made landscape based upon the concept of a naturalistic park. It is a park to be seen from its path and main system as a series of enticing vistas or scenic - the illusion of "being natural." Views, walls, topography and vegetation were all brought together and complemented with specimen trees, water, buildings, sculpture and monuments. Designed by Chicago landscape architect, Horace Wills Shear, Cleveland in 1876, the original 102 acres and subsequently acquired average stabling 432 acres today, reflect a bold design concept whose roots extend to the late 17th century English "picturesque garden" and later Urban Parks Movement in this country. The original plan was roughly carried out between 1878 and 1933 at great cost and remains largely intact today with the exception of incursions made by the Zoo in the 1850s and the Japanese Garden in the 1980s. The park was nominated and placed on the National Historic Register in 1974.

Executive Summary

Roger Williams Park has been called the “Jewel of Providence”—a historic landscape of rolling lawns, stately trees, serene ponds, and elegant buildings, featuring such well-loved attractions as the Roger Williams Park Zoo, Botanical Center, Natural History Museum and Planetarium, Carousel Village, and Swan Boats. At 435 acres, it is the largest area of public open space in Providence, the largest urban park in Rhode Island, and one of the largest municipal parks in New England. The Park receives 1.5 million visitors per year, including hundreds of thousands of people from other states, and is also a much-needed local amenity for 50,000 Rhode Islanders who live within a mile of the Park in Providence and Cranston.

Roger Williams Park is a local resource and a regional treasure, but it faces challenges in the near future. Even before the 2008 financial crisis, City and state funds for municipal open space were declining. Since 2008, federal funding sources have also declined dramatically. As Providence tackled its fiscal issues, the budget of its Department of Parks and Recreation was reduced, declining by more than 10 percent from 2011-2013. Fewer staff are available to maintain the Park, while aging buildings, mature trees and lack of capital investments have increased maintenance needs.

The Department has increasingly done “more with less” at Roger Williams Park, completing important improvements such as the Botanical Center in 2007 and a major storm water abatement project in 2012. However, current funding is inadequate to preserve and improve the quality of the Park’s landscape, infrastructure and assets.

Throughout the U.S., cities of all sizes have faced—and solved—the same problem. Citizens and park advocates have established independent stewardship organizations—often called friends’ groups or conservancies—to engage communities in restoring aging municipal parks. Many of these organizations are quite successful: raising funds for capital improvements and maintenance, developing outreach and programming, and advocating for increased resources.

In 2014, the Department hired Center for Ecosystem Restoration, Landscape Elements, LLC, and Street Smart Consulting to explore the potential for an independent stewardship organization for Roger Williams Park. We interviewed a dozen successful park stewardship groups across the U.S. to learn from their experiences, and met with more than 30 community leaders, experts, stakeholders, and senior Park staff in the Providence area to discuss needs and opportunities for Roger Williams Park.
Our research and discussions were truly inspiring. Throughout the U.S., park stewardship groups are working effectively, in partnership with municipalities, to leverage public funding with private resources. Here in Providence, there is tremendous affection for Roger Williams Park and an abundance of great ideas for improving it. We have worked to capture the best ideas from Providence and around the country in this report, synthesizing them in a proposal for a new organization to engage the greater Providence community in stewardship of Roger Williams Park. We suggest the Roger Williams Park Alliance as a working title for the new organization.

Based on our research, we recommend the Alliance be established as a 501c3 non-profit organization. A Memorandum of Understanding or similar agreement should be developed at the outset to guide the organization’s relationship with the City and define roles and responsibilities with respect to the Park and its management. The Alliance will raise funds, advocate for, and assist in managing and restoring the Park. Most important, the Alliance must create a sense of community and ownership around Roger Williams Park, and for this reason we suggest a membership-based organization.

We recommend a small, working board of directors, made up of individuals who are willing to devote resources, expertise or influence; and we suggest developing partnerships from the outset with foundations, corporations and others who can provide financial support or other resources. We strongly recommend that the Alliance work with the City to identify income streams, new or existing, that can be dedicated to the Alliance's operational costs, and suggest a number of possible ways to develop funding for capital improvements, special projects and programming. We envision an initial staff of two with a budget starting at $150,000 and increasing to $250,000 over the first several years.

There is much that the Roger Williams Park Alliance can, and should, do to revitalize the Park. During the course of this project, stakeholders, Park staff and experts expressed a number of significant concerns: that the Park lacks a clear identity; that its assets are not well known; that better coordination is needed among the institutions within the park; that it is disconnected from the rest of Providence; and that safety is perceived as a problem. In order to survive and prosper, Roger Williams Park must serve a changing community in a changing metro area, while retaining its historical integrity as one of the region's great cultural landscapes.

Lover's Retreat Bridge, near the Casino.
For the Park to thrive, the City and the Alliance must develop and implement, with the community, a shared vision for the future of Roger Williams Park. There is ample opportunity to improve the value that Roger Williams Park provides to the City, state and region, while remaining true to the Park’s original concept and honoring its historical importance. The Alliance should take the lead in engaging the community—locally, City-wide, and regionally—to create a new 10-year master plan for the Park, defining a future for the Park that serves the region’s needs in the 21st century while preserving its cultural and aesthetic integrity.

The master plan will provide a shared blueprint for the City, the Alliance, funders, stakeholders and elected officials as we work together to improve Roger Williams Park. However, the Alliance should not wait for completion of the master plan to begin its work. We suggest that the Alliance initiate a high-visibility program or project as soon as practicable, to begin generating momentum and enthusiasm for the revitalization of the Park and to demonstrate the value of the new organization. An appropriate first project for the Alliance is development of a new visitor’s center that recreates the historic Betsey Williams Barn.

In crafting its new vision for the Park, we recommend that the Alliance and City embrace the theme of Park restoration as central to the Alliance’s mission. Further, we suggest that the arts—both visual and performance—can provide an exciting, dynamic and unifying concept for the Park’s revitalization, aligned with Providence’s branding as the Creative Capital. The report details ideas for bringing more visual and performance arts into Roger Williams Park, with the goal of increasing interest, enthusiasm, visitation, and—ultimately—support for the Park and the Alliance.

Roger Williams Park is an outstanding resource for Providence, for Rhode Island, and for Southeastern New England. Providence faces substantial challenges in maintaining and improving the Park, due largely to the difficult fiscal environment. Yet there is an equally substantial commitment to the Park’s future on the part of the City, the Department, and the community of Park users. Establishment of the Roger Williams Park Alliance will focus this commitment toward revitalizing and sustaining Roger Williams Park. As the Park approaches its 150th anniversary, we believe it can continue to be a great asset and vital amenity to the City of Providence, and that the new Roger Williams Park Alliance will ensure its preservation and continued improvement, now and for future generations.

Establishment of the Roger Williams Park Alliance is the single most important thing that Providence can do toward ensuring the preservation and improvement of the Park.
1. Project Background and Rationale

1.1. About This Project

Every great city has a great park. What would New York be without Central Park, or Boston without the Common? There are 112 public parks in Providence—but the largest, best-known, most-visited and, from an architectural perspective, most important is Roger Williams Park.

In 2014, the Providence Department of Parks and Recreation hired Center for Ecosystem Restoration, Landscape Elements, LLC, and Street Smart to explore the potential for a stewardship organization for Roger Williams Park. Our purpose was to develop a detailed proposal for the establishment of an independent non-profit organization for the Park, drawing on the experience of cities elsewhere in the country, as well as the ideas of Park supporters here in Rhode Island.

We interviewed a dozen successful park stewardship groups across the U.S.; met with more than 30 community leaders, experts, and stakeholders in the Providence area; and met with senior Park staff to discuss needs and opportunities for Roger Williams Park. The results of these conversations are discussed in this report, while full interview notes and summaries are provided in the Appendices.

Based on this research, we developed recommendations for a new non-profit organization to support the City of Providence in managing Roger Williams Park. We gave the new organization the working title of the Roger Williams Park Alliance. Our recommendations suggest an appropriate mission and goals for the Alliance; outline an effective organizational structure; and detail a proposed budget. We recommend a number of partnerships that we believe will be essential to the success of the new organization, and identify numerous potential funding sources.

Drawing upon the experiences of successful park stewardship organizations as well as our discussions with interested parties locally, we describe needs and opportunities for the Roger Williams Park and its new Alliance. These include capital improvements, programmatic activities, and—perhaps most important—an initiative to reconnect stakeholders to the Park, create a community of Park users, and establish a shared vision for the future of the Park and its stewardship. Finally, we outline next steps in establishing the Roger Williams Park Alliance.

Taken together, these recommendations provide a blueprint for an organization and an approach that will revitalize Roger Williams Park and improve Providence’s environment, economy and quality of life. Establishment of the Roger Williams Park Alliance is the single most important thing that Providence can do toward ensuring the preservation and improvement of the Park.
1.2. Roger Williams Park: the “Jewel of Providence”

Roger Williams Park is one of the largest municipal parks in New England. The Park encompasses 435 acres, including more than 100 acres of ponds, 21 public sculptures, 7 miles of roads, and half a dozen historic bridges. The Roger Williams Park Zoo is the largest in New England, while the Park’s Natural History Museum and Planetarium is the only public facility of its kind in the region. Other well-loved attractions at the Park include the Temple to Music, Carousel Village, Botanical Center, Roger Williams Park Casino, Rose Garden, and swan boats. Nearly every Rhode Islander has fond memories and affection for Roger Williams Park—perhaps the best-known piece of public land in the state.

The original design for Roger Williams Park was developed in 1878 by Horace Cleveland, a colleague of Frederick Law Olmsted and fellow advocate of the Urban Parks Movement, the naturalistic school of landscape architecture that produced Central Park, Boston’s Emerald Necklace, and many other great 19th century American city parks. Roger Williams Park was conceived as a refuge from the din and smoke of Providence’s burgeoning industrial development, an escape for workers and others living in cramped tenements. Though conditions in Providence have improved dramatically over the past century and a half, the Park remains a welcome respite from the bustle and congestion of the City.

The process of developing Roger Williams Park began in 1871 when Betsey Williams, a descendent of Roger Williams, bequeathed her family farm to the City. The Park has been a work in progress ever since. Cleveland’s original plan for the Park was completed around 1882, but covered only 102 acres. During the 1890’s the City acquired the Park’s remaining acreage, dredged the lakes, and developed the Zoo, Museum, Boathouse and Casino. The Bandstand was completed in 1915 and the Temple to Music in 1924. During the Depression, the Works Progress Administration undertook extensive work in the Park, including construction of the Seal House and the Japanese Garden.

During the early 20th Century, Roger Williams Park was one of Providence’s most popular spots for arts, culture and recreation year round. The Park hosted an average of 1500 visitors per day—many arriving by streetcar—and as many as 15,000 on summer Sundays. In summer they came for concerts, boating, and trotter racing; in winter for ice skating and toboggan sledding. Annual events included a canoe regatta, hot-air balloon ascension, and fireworks on the Fourth of July. The Zoo was begun in 1892 and by 1900 had nearly 50 animal exhibits. Band concerts were enormously popular, with as many as 750,000 people attending per season. During the Depression and World War II, the Park offered low-cost entertainment and diversions for the working families of Providence, who had few other recreational opportunities.
The fortunes of the Park waned from the 1940’s to the early 1980’s as Providence residents, aided by new highways, migrated to the suburbs. Park attendance diminished and City investment in the Park declined as well. Federal grants helped to consolidate the Zoo in its present location in 1970’s and to restore the Casino and Bandstand in 1982, but significant park-wide capital improvements did not occur until the 1988-1995 period when City and state bond issues poured several million dollars into the Park—the largest capital improvement program in the Park's history. Roads were improved; the Zoo expanded significantly; a new Carousel was built; the Museum received a new roof, climate control system, and Planetarium; the City Mounted Command horse facility was built; and virtually all of the outdoor public sculpture was restored.

Improvements continue, albeit at a more gradual pace due to limited resources. In 2007 the City completed a spectacular new Botanical Center on the site of the old greenhouses. Thanks to the efforts of the R.I. Zoological Society and state bond issues, the Zoo has continued to develop new animal exhibits and veterinary facilities. In 2012, a major water quality restoration project, including shoreline restoration and storm water improvements, was completed with federal and City funding. The same project funded construction of the new Roosevelt Lake Recreational Walking Path, which replaced a decrepit section of boulevard.

In 2014 Rhode Island voters passed a referendum authorizing $15 million in general obligation bonds to be used for capital improvements at the Zoo and another $3 million for the Park. If issued, these will provide modest new funding for much-needed maintenance and repair of Park infrastructure.

1.3. Economic and Community Benefits

The Park attracts more than 1.5 million visitors annually, many from out of state. However it is a vital local resource for Providence (population 178,000) and nearby neighborhoods in Cranston, R.I. More than 50,000 people live within a mile of the Park, many in rental housing in low-income areas. In 2010, the Elmwood neighborhood, just north of the Park, had a median household income of about $29,000. This compares with a citywide average of $37,000, and is just over half the statewide average of $56,000.

Thirty-four percent of Elmwood residents live at or below the poverty level; more than 75 percent are minority, and more than half are Hispanic. For many of these residents, Roger Williams Park is the only accessible area of high-quality open space and outdoor recreation, and is the only public water access. In our small state, the quality of Roger Williams Park affects every Rhode Islander, and its care is a critical matter of environmental justice.
Nationwide and in Rhode Island, there is a crisis of childhood obesity and increasing awareness of the problems created by video fixation, sedentary lifestyles, and poor diets. Roger Williams Park offers numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation and physical activity, including public tennis courts, baseball fields, a public boat launch ramp suitable for kayaks and canoes, 10 miles of roads suitable for cycling, and miles of recreational walking and running paths, paved and unpaved. The Park offers City residents an opportunity to grow food for themselves and others: the community garden near the Botanical Center has more than 50 garden beds, and much of the food grown there is donated to local food banks. The quality and accessibility of Roger Williams Park's recreational opportunities and facilities is therefore a matter of public health for the City and the state.

Roger Williams Park also has the potential to be an important source of economic activity, growth and development for Providence. Tourism is the second-largest industry in Rhode Island (after health services), supporting 50,000 jobs and generating an estimated $5.75 billion in sales. The Park is already a destination for many visitors from throughout the state and region with the potential to attract many more. The Providence metropolitan area has a population of 1.6 million; combined with the southern portion of the Boston metro area (4.5 million total) we estimate that 3 million people live within an hour's drive of the Park. Interestingly, the population of the Providence metro area is greater than the population of the entire state of Rhode Island (1.05 million) due to the inclusion of populous Southeastern Massachusetts communities such as Fall River.

High-quality city parks generate a wide range of direct and indirect economic benefits. Direct income is generated through spending by park visitors, which in turn improves city tax revenues; taxes are also increased through parks' positive impacts on real property values. Parks' indirect economic impacts include quality of life benefits such as outdoor recreational opportunities, improved public health, cleaner air and cleaner water. A 2006 study of all Boston parks valued direct uses at $354 million annually or about $2.70 per visitor. At current visitation rates, this suggests that Roger Williams Park provides about $4 million in direct use value per year.

As an economic development strategy, Providence's comparative advantage is that it offers an affordable, high-quality alternative to the Boston metro area for businesses and residents, within commuting distance of Boston. Quality-of-life amenities and family destinations such as Roger Williams Park, if well-maintained, safe, and engaging, have the potential to contribute significantly to the attractiveness of Providence as a place to live, work and visit, generating revenue and prosperity for businesses, government and individuals throughout Providence and Rhode Island.
1.4. Costs and Needed Improvements

The Park is operated and maintained by the Providence Department of Parks and Recreation and is primarily funded by the City. The Zoo is operated by a separate non-profit, the R.I. Zoological Society, and receives both direct funding and indirect support from the Department, in addition to funds raised through gate fees, donations and other sources. Other Park institutions (the Museum of Natural History and Botanical Center) are operated and funded within the Department’s budget, while concessions, use permits and fees provide external revenue to offset City costs for maintaining the Park.

Of the $4.4 million budget for Roger Williams Park, more than half is spent on direct and indirect support for the Zoo. Another $900,000 is spent on the Museum and the Botanical Center, while less than $1 million is spent on direct Park maintenance. Concessions, permits and fees generate $500,000 in revenue, most of which is restricted to the Botanical Center and the Casino. All Zoo income is used by the Zoo Society, and provides no support for Park operations or City budgets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Funding for Roger Williams Park, 2013</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Casino</td>
<td>$30,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>$385,856</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botanical Center</td>
<td>$511,724</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subtotal, Park Institutions</td>
<td>$928,080</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Maintenance</td>
<td>$790,418</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subtotal, All Park Costs</td>
<td>$1,718,498</td>
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<tr>
<td>City direct &amp; indirect support for Zoo</td>
<td>$2,638,587</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total, Roger Williams Park City Funding</td>
<td>$4,357,085</td>
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<th>Earned Revenue for RWP, 2013 (exclusive of Zoo)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Carousel Village Lease</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frozen Lemonade Lease</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddleboats Lease</td>
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<td>Tennis Court Lease</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botanical Center Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botanical Center Admissions</td>
<td>$22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Natural History Admissions</td>
<td>$99,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple to Music &amp; Other Park Permits</td>
<td>$63,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino Event Revenue</td>
<td>$126,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, Roger Williams Park Revenue</td>
<td>$506,000</td>
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</tbody>
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Even before the 2008 financial crisis, City, state and federal funds for municipal open space were declining; since 2008, federal funding sources in particular have declined dramatically. As Providence tackles its budget deficit, the budget of the Department of Parks and Recreation was reduced, declining by more than 10% from 2011-2013. In addition to Roger Williams Park, the Department is responsible for 112 other parks, all of Providence's street trees, and the City's summer lunch program.

Fewer staff are available to maintain the Park while aging buildings, mature trees and lack of capital investments have increased maintenance needs. The Department has increasingly done “more with less” at Roger Williams Park, and has undertaken major improvements as funding allowed. However, current funding levels are inadequate to preserve the quality of the Park's landscape, infrastructure and assets. Moreover, the recent budget cuts have forced reductions in City services at the Park. The City no longer maintains trash barrels in the Park, contributing to litter problems, and in 2014, City rangers who were formerly stationed at Roger Williams Park were dispersed to parks throughout the City, reducing security coverage at Roger Williams.

In 2014 the Rhode Island Foundation commissioned an inventory and engineering assessment of Park buildings and other “hard” infrastructure such as roads and benches. This study (included as Appendix D to this report) estimated the cost of needed repairs to existing infrastructure at $8.2 million. This includes $4.5 million in road and bridge repairs; $700,000 for benches, monuments, and other Park elements; and $3 million for buildings, including scheduled repairs at the Museum, Bandstand and Seal House. The Park's “green infrastructure” is also in need of improvement: turf areas are in need of repair; additional tree maintenance is necessary, and additional water quality restoration measures are needed.

In addition to restoration, maintenance and repairs, new improvements—such as wayfinding signage—are needed in order for the Park to continue to serve the needs of an evolving metropolitan area. Many of these maintenance and improvement needs are discussed in greater detail under Sections 2 and 3, below, as opportunities for the new organization.

1.5. Challenges of Identity and Location

For this project, we spoke with dozens of civic leaders, community activists, and park advocates, in Providence and throughout the U.S. Through these discussions it became apparent that Roger
Williams Park’s greatest challenge is that it lacks a clear identity and following. For example, many Rhode Islanders think of the Park as just the Zoo; even in Providence, many residents and even visitors are unaware that Roger Williams Park is owned and maintained by the City. Some long-time Providence residents we interviewed for our research had never been to the Natural History Museum.

Unlike Central Park or Boston Common, Roger Williams Park is removed from the downtown area. The Park borders Cranston to its south and east, and is walled off from the Providence neighborhoods to its west by large highways. The Park was built primarily as a recreational area for City residents; today, it is a regional destination and a local resource, but must compete for visitors and funding with other recreational opportunities and activities that weren’t available in 1900. The city, the region and the landscape have changed profoundly since Roger Williams Park was built, as has society’s relationship to public lands and open space. And although the Park is now a regional destination, its maintenance and improvement are still funded primarily by the City.

1.6. Need for a Stewardship Organization

Throughout the U.S., cities of all sizes have faced—and solved—challenges very similar to those confronting Roger Williams Park. Citizens and park advocates have established friends’ groups or conservancies to engage communities in Park stewardship—raising funds for capital improvements and maintenance; developing outreach and programming; and advocating for resources. Many of these organizations have been very successful, working in close partnership with municipal governments to restore, improve and maintain city parks. In fact, Roger Williams Park is unusual as one of the few major municipal parks in the U.S. that does not, at present, have its own independent, non-profit stewardship organization.

A new stewardship organization is needed to support the Department in restoring, maintaining and improving Roger Williams Park. Such an organization has the potential to significantly increase funding—capital and operational—to maintain and improve the Park. Equally important, an independent non-profit organization can provide advocacy, promote civic involvement and encourage volunteerism in ways that municipal government cannot. A new organization will engage the community in stewardship of Roger Williams Park—now and for the future. Roger Williams Park is a Victorian-era park with primarily 20th century infrastructure. To survive and prosper, the Park must meet the needs of 21st century Providence. The new Roger Williams Park Alliance will bring together Park users, municipal officials, and other stakeholders in creating a future for Roger Williams Park that provides the greatest benefits to the Park and the City while preserving one of Rhode Island’s great cultural treasures.
2. Summary of Findings

2.1. Successful Models in Other Cities

We interviewed 13 park stewardship groups in the East and Midwest, focusing primarily on groups concerned with municipal parks in mid-sized cities. The smallest, Friends of Deering Oaks in Portland, ME, has a budget of $20,000 and is run entirely by its board of directors without paid staff. By contrast, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy has an annual budget of $5 million and a staff of nearly 40. Several of the groups interviewed support parks of less than 100 acres (Bushnell Park Foundation in Hartford, Friends of Deering Oaks, and Fort Tryon Park Trust in New York City); others provide stewardship for thousands of acres (Madison Parks Foundation in Madison, WI, and Fairmount Parks Conservancy in Philadelphia). All the groups interviewed were generous with their time and optimistic about the prospects for a new organization to support Roger Williams Park.

Interestingly, most of these organizations provide stewardship for parks that have separate, independent 501c3 institutions within them, much as Roger Williams Park is home to the Rhode Island Zoological Society’s Roger Williams Park Zoo. Franklin Park in Boston, Fairmount Park in Philadelphia and Forest Park in St. Louis all have independent zoos located within them. Fairmount Park also has the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Franklin Institute and several other large non-profit institutions, while Forest Park is home to the St. Louis Art Museum.

Structure and Focus

All the organizations interviewed are 501c3 non-profit corporations and most, but not all, are membership organizations. Beyond these similarities, there was considerable diversity. All engage to some extent in communications, programming, fundraising, and capital improvements; however, some are more oriented toward advocacy and programming, while others focus more on fundraising and capital campaigns. Franklin Park Coalition in Boston, for example, is essentially a grass-roots organization focusing primarily on programming, advocacy and volunteer-based projects. The Coalition has a staff of four (two full-time and two AmeriCorps members), a budget of $240,000, and a board of directors made up of local community advocates and Park users. By contrast, Bushnell Park Foundation initially focused almost exclusively on capital campaigns for park improvements, and is only now beginning to develop programming and membership. The foundation’s board is made up of business leaders, attorneys and representatives of civic organizations. The most dynamic organizations surveyed seemed to be those with diverse activities, engaging in programming, advocacy and outreach as well as fundraising and capital improvements.
Relationship to Host Cities

City park stewardship organizations differ widely in their relationship to municipal government and parks departments. Some, like the Franklin Park Coalition, have no formal connection to the municipality; others have a formal memorandum or cooperative agreement in place with the city (Forest Park Forever in St. Louis; Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy). Most of the organizations interviewed expressed some tension with municipal government—this is to be expected, as stewardship groups exist in part to influence municipal priorities and expenditures. The most successful organizations, however, have a productive working partnership with municipal government, valued by both the organization and the municipality. In most of the organizations interviewed, one or more municipal official serves as an ex-officio board member. In a few cases, there was no city representation on the board, and in only one case, Prospect Park Alliance, Brooklyn, NY, a municipal employee also serves as an employee of the stewardship group.

Funding

There are some commonalities in funding sources and strategies among organizations surveyed, and some significant differences. Nearly all the organizations we looked at rely on major fundraising events, community or family foundations, and corporate sponsors for a significant portion of funds raised. Spring “hat luncheons” are one popular type of fundraiser; the larger organizations surveyed have many such events throughout the year, geared toward different types of funders and funding levels (Fairmount Park Conservancy in Philadelphia, for example, hosts fundraising mixers for young professionals, which do not raise as much money as some other events, but help engage the next generation of park funders).

Several of the organizations surveyed have partnered with state or local government to develop new revenue streams for park management or improvement. Fairmount Park Conservancy, for example, is working to develop eligibility for a Pennsylvania program that allows corporations to earmark a portion of their state income tax for community development corporations. Forest Park Forever in St. Louis worked with the city to develop a $30 million bond issue for park capital improvements, which will be paid back in part by sales taxes. Forest Park Forever was one of several organizations that have, or are working to develop, large endowments to fund park maintenance and improvements.

Some stewardship organizations generate income from facility rentals (for example Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, which controls and rents several city plazas for special events) or concessions such as restaurants or bike rentals (Fairmount Park Conservancy, for example, rents locker space for runners in its visitor center). Revenue from these activities generally

The most important themes that emerged from conversations with Roger Williams Park staff were that the Park needs more outreach, and public engagement.
covers the facility’s operational costs but does not generate much profit. Nevertheless these activities often serve important functions for the organization: increasing park visitation, raising the organization's profile, and providing value to park users.

**Programs and Activities**

Most of the organizations surveyed engage in park restoration and major capital improvements. Although most use capital campaigns to raise private funds for these types of projects, the use of public funding, and the funding relationships with the municipality, vary widely. In some cases, funds for capital improvements are raised entirely by the organization (for example, Bushnell Park Foundation); in others, the friends' organization raises match for state or federal grants (Friends of Deering Oaks); in still others, the organization funds and manages the project, with contributions from state, federal or municipal government (Fairmount Park Forever, for example, developed and managed the $4 million Hunting Park Revitalization Project and $5 million restoration of the Fairmount Water Works). Among the larger friends’ organizations, such capital improvement or restoration projects may support a number of staff.

Programming is a major focus area for most of the organizations we looked at, and is extremely diverse, including concerts, festivals, fitness activities, athletic competitions, educational activities, etc. Some of these events and activities are significant fundraisers; others simply cover costs, but carry out the organization’s mission; many support staff salaries. Many of these events are important in increasing visitation, engaging park users, and raising the profile of the friends’ organization.

**Lessons for the Roger Williams Park Alliance**

Despite the diversity of park stewardship organizations around the country, we found that the most successful organizations share a number of commonalities that the new Alliance would do well to emulate:

- A focus on engaging park users, increasing visitation and building community through outreach, public programming, membership, volunteerism and advocacy. These functions create a base of good will, awareness and stewardship for the park among stakeholders, potential funders and public officials.
• A focus on park improvement and restoration, increasing the value of the park for all users, and demonstrating the capacity of the organization.

• A good working relationship with the municipality, generally through a formal agreement and ex-officio board participation by municipal officials.

• A collaborative vision for the future of the park—generally through a plan or other guiding document.

• A close relationship with one or more community foundations, family foundations or other funding organization to provide a reliable base of support, often through an endowment.

• Notwithstanding the foregoing, a diverse funding base including small donors, large donors, corporations, and ideally, funding support from the city and/or state.

### Stewardship Organizations Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Metro Population</th>
<th>Park Acreage</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Board</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy</td>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>1.2 M</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>$4 M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushnell Park Foundation</td>
<td>Hartford, CT</td>
<td>1.2 M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>&lt;$100k</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1 (p/t)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Deering Oaks</td>
<td>Portland, ME</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>$20k</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairmount Park Conservancy</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>1.5 M</td>
<td>10,200</td>
<td>$1.2 M</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Park Forever</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>2.9 M</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>$2.3 M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Tryon Park Trust</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>23 M</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Park Coalition</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>4.5 M</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>$240k</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Harkness Memorial State Park</td>
<td>Waterford, CT</td>
<td>1.2 M</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>$50k</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Parks Foundation</td>
<td>Madison, WI</td>
<td>568,600</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olmsted Parks Conservancy</td>
<td>Louisville, KY</td>
<td>1.2 M</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>$600K</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7 + 4-12 seasonal</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>2.7 M</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>$5 M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect Park Alliance</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>8.5 M</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>$10.5 M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>75+ seasonal</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2. Discussions with Park Staff

On May 21 and June 18, 2014, we met with Roger Williams Park senior staff to discuss needs and opportunities for the new organization. Staff participating included the Superintendent of Parks, Director of the Botanical Center, City Forester, Deputy Director for Recreational Services, Fiscal Director, and Park Manager. We met separately with the Director of the Museum of Natural History and Planetarium on June 25.

Park staff were enthusiastic about a new organization for Roger Williams Park and offered many ideas for programmatic activities and potential sources of funding. They were frank about current problems in the Park, and identified a number of ways in which the new organization could help address these challenges.

Perhaps the most important themes that emerged from these conversations were the idea that the Park needs much better outreach, information, and public engagement; that the institutions within the Park could be better coordinated; and that there could, and should, be much better connections with universities, non-profits and other external institutions. The Park has no visitor’s center or its own comprehensive website where one can access a complete calendar of events in the Park. There is no convenient location where visitors can obtain a map of the Park. The Park’s assets—with the exception of the Zoo—are not nearly as well known among the public as they should be. Staff sees a need for more programming in the Park—all programming is now sponsored by the individual institutions within the Park or by external organizations. Roger Williams Park lacks institutional identity, which the new Alliance would be well positioned to create.

Park staff recognize that coordination with the Zoo may be difficult, since the Zoo has its own marketing and outreach initiatives and little incentive to work with other Park institutions or staff. However the Museum and Botanical Center would benefit greatly from any efforts to raise the Park’s profile and visitation, and Park staff are eager to work together to accomplish this.

We discussed the need for low-cost, family-friendly activities in Providence—a need that Roger Williams Park is well-positioned to fill. Staff proposed hosting a fall “Family Fun Day” at the Park that might be the first big public event for the new Alliance.

We also discussed planning, landscape and infrastructure needs at the Park. Staff agreed on the following needs, opportunities and priorities:
• The master plan is needed to bring together the community and stakeholders to develop consensus around the future of the Park; reconcile current and future uses with the historic landscape; and establish priorities for the new organization.

• There is a pressing need to improve pedestrian circulation and safety, particularly between the Zoo, Natural History Museum and Botanical Center. Sidewalks should be added or moved as necessary and traffic planning integrated. Blackstone Boulevard in Providence may serve as a model.

• There is an opportunity and need to improve the walking trail system along the water’s edge, by adding signage, developing maps, installing erosion control, improving walking connections in the park, and eliminating dead-ends.

• Staff suggested that the City consider reducing the number of Park entrances. (There are now 21.)

• Improve the Park’s connection with Downtown Providence—through greenway development, improved RIPTA connections, or other means.

• Develop a loading dock at the Natural History Museum to allow the museum to host traveling exhibits, which it is currently unable to do.

• There is a need to improve public safety and reduce crime at the Park through improved lighting, increased parolts and other security measures.

Our discussions with Park staff are fully detailed in the discussion notes provided as Appendix B to this report.

2.3. Interviews with Key Stakeholders

During summer and fall, 2014, we interviewed about 20 key stakeholders regarding needs at Roger Williams Park and the potential for a new organization to assist the City with its stewardship. These included business and non-profit leaders, elected officials and staff, educational leaders, and federal and state officials. Like Park staff, these experts and stakeholders were very supportive of the Alliance idea. Also like staff, they generally agreed that Roger Williams Park is an outstanding resource, but that it lacks institutional identity, needs additional resources, and would benefit from improved stewardship.

Several informants suggested that the Park’s facilities and uses are in need of updating in order to better meet contemporary visitor needs. These individuals tended to place less importance on historic preservation, and more on determining how best to use the Park in its present-day landscape—physical, environmental and cultural. In this
way they differed from Park staff and suggested a key challenge for the new Alliance—how best to reconcile the goal of historic preservation with current uses and demands of stakeholders and potential visitors. For example, Joe Masino of Congressman Langevin’s office suggested increasing athletic events and uses to bring more young urban professionals into the Park, while Margherita Pryor of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency suggested using the Park as a demonstration site for climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability, building on the water quality restoration project completed by the City in 2012.

Like Park staff, informants recognized the need to better connect the Park with the City. Rep. Art Handy suggested improving public bus service into the Park, and discussed the idea of redeveloping the Park’s main entrance at Broad Street. Improved connections with the City may be cultural as well as physical. Several informants discussed the idea of developing an art theme at the Park, such as public art installations, arts competitions, or public performances, building on Providence’s branding as the “Creative Capital.” Rep. Handy also suggested that cultural connections with the Park could be developed through outreach to churches or other faith communities.

Much of the discussion with key informants focused on funding. While informants offered many ideas, they were frank about the fundraising challenges that the Alliance will face. State, federal and municipal funding for public lands is lower than it has been in decades, and federal legislators are no longer able to secure earmarks for local projects. Declining government funding has increased demands for corporate and foundation funding, but Rhode Island has a limited pool of these kinds of funders, many of which are already funding the Zoo and may be less willing, therefore, to fund another non-profit working in the Park. To secure corporate funding, the Alliance will need to demonstrate value through brand visibility, naming rights or other means.

Rep. Handy also suggested meeting with state senators and representatives to request legislative grants to assist with start-up funding for the Alliance. Complete notes from discussions with key informants are provided as Appendix C to this report.
3. Recommendations

3.1. Establishing the Roger Williams Park Alliance

Our discussions with Park staff and key informants in the community provided a great deal of insight regarding needs and opportunities at Roger Williams Park, while our interviews with park stewardship groups around the country provided examples of organizations that are effectively assisting municipalities in addressing challenges in park management. Based on this work, we offer the following recommendations for establishing the new Roger Williams Park Alliance.

Purpose

The new organization’s goals and mission should be broadly drawn, but should acknowledge that the City retains primary responsibility for management and maintenance of Roger Williams Park. The language should emphasize the Alliance’s responsibility for work that is supplemental to, rather than redundant with, present City responsibilities regarding the Park, but should be general enough to allow the Alliance to support nearly every aspect of Park management. We recommend an organizational mission and goals similar to the following:

Bridge between Willow and Pleasure Lakes.
Mission

The mission of the Roger Williams Park Alliance is to restore, improve and protect Providence’s greatest public park by providing leadership, advocacy and funding, working in partnership with the Providence Department of Parks and Recreation. We will engage all who use and value Roger Williams Park to ensure that it remains an environmental, cultural, and economic asset for Providence, the state and the region, now and forever.

Goals

The Roger Williams Park Alliance will support the City of Providence in maintaining and restoring Roger Williams Park by:

- Engaging stakeholders, in Providence and throughout Rhode Island, in Park stewardship;
- Raising the profile of Roger Williams Park throughout the region;
- Raising funds for Park restoration and maintenance;
- Providing outreach and programming;
- Developing and managing special projects;
- Advocating for Roger Williams Park at City, state and federal levels;
- Developing and implementing a Park master plan, reflective of the community’s needs and wishes for its future; and
- As resources allow, assuming specific operational and/or management responsibilities.

Founding Documents

The Alliance needs to create its organizational documents, including articles of incorporation, bylaws, and conflict of interest policy, which will govern most of the Alliance’s operational procedures and policies.

Horse racing was a popular pastime between 1910 and 1930. The tracks and stables were located where the Zoo now stands.
3.2. Organizational Structure

501c3 Non-profit Organization

All of the friends’ organizations interviewed for this project are incorporated as federal 501c3 non-profit organizations. This structure provides many advantages for an organization of this kind. It is eligible to receive nearly all types of federal, state and private grants. Corporate and individual donations are tax deductible. A 501c3 can hire, fire and enter contracts more quickly and easily than a municipality, and can allow for paid membership. Finally, 501c3 incorporation will provide a degree of fiscal separation from the City budget and will ensure independent oversight, which donors often prefer. Establishment of a 501c3 organization may take several months and usually requires assistance of an attorney. We suggest seeking pro-bono assistance from a local law firm.

Initial Fiscal Agent

In order to make the organization immediately operational while establishing the 501c3, we recommend requesting assistance from the Partnership for Providence Parks to serve as an interim fiscal agent. Another advantage of this arrangement is the ability to convene an informal working group to develop the organization before creating a legal board of directors. If the Partnership is unable to provide fiscal agency, another 501c3 should be found to serve in this capacity.

Board of Directors

In our discussions with friends’ groups and parks conservancies around the country, we found that board size varies widely among these organizations, from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of around 35, including officers. Some have executive committees, others do not. Most have non-voting ex-officio board members representing municipal government; in most cases these are representatives of the city parks department, although in a few cases it is a governor or mayor who delegates participation on the board. We recommend that the founding board of the Alliance should be fairly small (10-20 members). Members should be selected for expertise, funding connections, and/or community connections. We recommend the Superintendent of Parks serve as a non-voting ex-officio board member, and recommend considering the executive director of the Partnership for Providence Parks for ex-officio status as well (although perhaps with voting rights). Other potential board members are discussed under “Partnerships,” below. We suggest an executive committee of board officers with a development subcommittee. The Board of Directors should meet monthly during the first few years.
Membership

Many stewardship groups or conservancies are membership organizations, and most have varying levels of membership, ranging from a few dollars to thousands. Membership can provide a valuable base of non-restricted operational funding and, equally important, serve to engage stakeholders in park stewardship and advocacy. We suggest that membership levels for the Alliance range from $35 to $1000 or $10,000, and that the organization provide premiums for various levels of membership. The Alliance should consider discount memberships for students and senior citizens, and VIP events or privileges for higher membership levels.

 Volunteers and Interns

We recommend that the Alliance develop an active volunteer program, and that it make the most of volunteers and interns. Volunteers need not be members but should be recruited for membership, while members should be encouraged to volunteer. Under many grant programs, volunteer time is eligible for use as non-governmental match funding, and was valued at $23.53 per hour in 2013. Volunteers and interns can staff a visitor center or information kiosks; give tours to visitors; assist with gardening and land management; provide administrative support; provide Park cleanups; and offer many other forms of support to the new organization. Interns can be drawn from local schools, particularly universities such as Brown or the University of Rhode Island which offer undergraduate and masters programs in environmental science, landscape architecture and other related fields. Volunteer and internship coordination can require significant resources on the part of the organization. In developing these programs, the Alliance should weigh benefits and costs, particularly as regards paid staff time, to ensure that the organization derives sufficient value from these programs.

Staffing

Staffing levels for independent park stewardship organizations vary widely, as noted above. We suggest that the Roger Williams Park Alliance will need a minimum of two staff for its first few years: an Executive Director responsible for fundraising, communications, marketing, board development, organizational oversight, planning and management; and a Volunteer Coordinator, responsible for volunteer recruitment and oversight as well as administrative duties such as database management, membership and office oversight. We suggest a salary of $60,000 for the ED and $40,000 for the Coordinator. The Alliance should look toward adding a Development Director or Development and Communications Manager as soon as funding allows; $50,000 would be an appropriate salary for this position.
3.3. Budget & Funding Sources

An organization as described above (with two staff) would initially require about $150,000 per year for operations alone. We suggest that the organization work to secure base operational support from a single donor, or several large donors, at about $100,000 per year for the first three years, and look toward raising additional funding through the kinds of activities outlined elsewhere in this report.

As the organization grows its income, it will be able to invest an increasing amount in Park programming and improvements. Following are proposed strategic budgets for the Alliance in Years 1, 2, 3, and 10. These budgets assume that the City will initially provide the Alliance with office space as an in-kind contribution.

These strategic budgets are rough projections that will be refined through the organizational planning processes discussed below.

### Roger Williams Park Alliance, Strategic Budget Years 1-5 (Thousands of Dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Support: Major Donor(s)</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Fundraisers (2 per year)</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other revenue: membership, small grants, sponsorship income, etc.</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director Salary + Fringe</td>
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<td>$75</td>
<td>$75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator Salary + Fringe</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Expenses: Fundraisers, contractual, office costs, etc.</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Costs &amp; Income by Year</strong></td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Income by Year: Park Improvements &amp; Carry-Over</strong></td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Roger Williams Park Alliance, Strategic Budget Year 10 (Thousands of Dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base Support: Major Donor(s)</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Fundraisers (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other revenue: membership, small grants, sponsorship income, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project grants: Park Improvements</td>
<td></td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries &amp; Fringe: 5 staff</td>
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<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Expenses: Fundraisers, contractual, office costs, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Costs &amp; Income Year 10</strong></td>
<td>$1 M</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Income Year 10: Park Improvements &amp; Carry-Over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4. Partnerships

Strong partnerships will be essential to the success of the new organization. Many of these will be developed as the organization is formed; others will come together later, as opportunities arise. Organizations with which the Alliance should consider partnerships from the outset are:

**Providence Department of Parks and Recreation**

The new Alliance must work in partnership with Providence Parks. Elsewhere, some park friends’ groups have written agreements with their host municipalities, while others do not. We suggest developing a brief Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the new organization and the Department, defining shared and separate roles and responsibilities between the two organizations. The MOU should initially be for one year, so that it can be revised and improved as need be; eventually it can be for a five or ten-year term. The MOU should identify Park revenue streams and other financial arrangements between the two organizations, such as in-kind or funding support from the Department, including staff and board relationships. As noted above, we recommend that the Superintendent of Parks serve as an ex-officio member of the Alliance’s board.

**Institutions within Roger Williams Park**

A strong partnership among the Alliance and the two City-run educational institutions in the Park—the Museum of Natural History and Planetarium, and the Botanical Center—will benefit all three organizations, providing opportunities for coordinated fundraising, outreach and programming. The Alliance will help the Museum and Center increase visitation, and will benefit from use of these institutions’ facilities for fundraising events. There are many opportunities to develop special programming that will generate revenue for the Alliance and the partner institutions as well, as discussed below. Further, the Alliance should work cooperatively and strategically, rather than competitively, with the Museum, the Botanical Center, and the Botanical Center Conservancy to develop new members, volunteers and donors. The Alliance should consider placing representatives of the Museum, Botanical Center, and Botanical Center Conservancy on its board as voting or non-voting ex-officio members.

**Roger Williams Park Zoo**

The Zoo offers the potential for a partnership that would similarly benefit both organizations; however, as a larger 501c3 that raises $5.8 million per year (plus City contributions), the Zoo has less of an incentive...
to partner with the Alliance. The Alliance should seek the assistance of the Department in developing a mutually beneficial arrangement with the Zoo. Ideally, this would include development of a day pass for all the attractions in the Park that will provide revenue to all Park institutions and concessions, including the Zoo and Alliance. As with the other Park institutions, a representative of the Zoo may serve on the Alliance’s board as a voting or non-voting ex-officio member.

**Partnership for Providence Parks**

As mentioned above, the Partnership may be able to serve as a 501c3 fiscal agent for the Alliance during its formative stage. Whether or not that particular arrangement is used, the mission of the Partnership is closely aligned with that of the Alliance, so it is essential that the two organizations work together and avoid competition for funding and other resources. As mentioned above, we recommend that the Alliance consider placing the executive director of the Partnership on its board, either as a voting or non-voting member. At a minimum, the two organizations should coordinate closely to take advantage of similarities in their respective missions.

**Community Foundations**

We recommend that the new organization develop a relationship early on with one or more community foundations or other major private funders. It would be appropriate for a foundation representative to serve on the Alliance’s board of directors as a voting member, and to be involved in development of the organization.

**Businesses**

We recommend that the Alliance develop corporate partners from the outset. Corporations may serve as a source of direct funding or may assist with fundraising; they may also provide in-kind support such as membership premiums and marketing assistance. The Alliance should first look toward large corporations with a strong presence in Boston or Rhode Island, and should also seek to develop a community of local business supporters. In particular, restaurants and retail businesses within a mile of the Park have a strong incentive to improve the Park’s image and identity, increasing Park visitation and local business receipts. For larger corporate sponsors, the City and the Alliance will need to determine the degree to which naming rights are appropriate within the Park. There are many opportunities to take advantage of this potential revenue source.
Arts Organizations

Elsewhere in this report we discuss potential areas of activity for the Alliance, suggesting that performance and visual arts can provide an exciting new thematic focus for Roger Williams Park. The Alliance should consider partnerships with arts organizations and institutions such as RISD, AS220, the Steel Yard, WaterFire, Trinity Rep, Rhode Island Film Festival, and others to collaborate in developing art installations and programming in the Park.

Environmental Agencies

State and federal environmental agencies, particularly the R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, have funded major projects and programs in Roger Williams Park and other Providence parks. Water quality management, storm water abatement, and invasive species management all offer high potential for collaboration and partnership with these agencies. The Alliance should develop partnerships with these organizations from its inception, and can consider agency personnel as ex-officio board members. The Alliance should also explore partnerships with environmental non-profits such as the Audubon Society of Rhode Island that may be interested in collaborating on programming and grants, particularly in the area of environmental education.

Educational Institutions

Universities in particular provide opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships with the Alliance. Undergraduate or graduate students can provide project or program support through internships, community service requirements, thesis projects, etc., while gaining valuable experience. For example, marketing students would be helpful in surveying Park visitors to better understand user demographics, while students of landscape architecture could assist with development of the Park master plan.

Other Non-Profit Organizations

A number of other non-profit organizations in the Providence area offer opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships. For example, Serve Rhode Island organizes volunteer cleanups in the Park, while the Urban Ponds Procession sponsors an annual event focusing on water quality. Many of these organizations are already working with Partnership for Providence Parks or the Department. The Alliance should take advantage of these relationships to advance outreach, engagement and fundraising.
3.5. Programs and Activities

**Guiding Documents**

We recommend that the Alliance develop a three-year strategic plan during its startup phase. This document will serve as a vehicle for developing consensus around organizational directions during its crucial startup period. The strategic plan will describe the Alliance’s purpose and vision, laying out goals, deliverables and timelines. It should incorporate a brief operational plan that projects the organization’s budget over the first 3 years, and a development plan that identifies major funding sources and targets. A marketing and communications plan should be developed within the first few years to establish branding, identify audiences, and describe messaging goals and strategies.

One of the first activities of the newly established Alliance should be the development of a master plan for the Park, bringing together the community of Park users and stakeholders to develop a shared vision for the future of the Park and a 10-year strategy for accomplishing this vision. The master plan will be a living document that is revisited and revised every few years. Existing Park plans such as those for water quality improvement and infrastructure improvement should be incorporated into the master plan, which should also identify future planning needs such as a Park traffic study and transportation improvement plan. As noted elsewhere in this report, successful park stewardship organizations in other cities have found the master planning process to be essential in rallying stakeholders and funders around the cause of park restoration and improvement.

For all the benefits a master plan will provide, the work of the Alliance to improve the Park should not wait for its completion. In our discussions with park friends’ organizations, several of the most successful advised us that the new organization should make a splash with a high-visibility, high-impact project right away, to show results within the first year or two of the organization’s existence and begin generating momentum and enthusiasm around the organization and its opportunities. This might be a highly visible capital project, a major public event, or both. As a first capital project for the Alliance, we suggest recreating the historic Betsey Williams Barn as a new visitors’ center for the Park.

**Organizing Themes**

The great city planner and architect Daniel Burnham—a contemporary and sometime collaborator of Horace Cleveland—famously said, “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work.” The Alliance should early on identify themes for its work that express “big plans.”
One such idea is restoration. The theme of restoring Roger Williams Park to its former grandeur is a compelling idea on which to build a capital campaign and, indeed, a movement. Many other park stewardship organizations have been built around the mission of Park restoration; in fact many, if not most, were formed expressly for this purpose. For example, Forest Park Forever in St. Louis focused for its first ten years on a campaign called "Restoring the Glory," completed in 2003, which developed a master plan and raised $10 million to restore several iconic areas of Forest Park, including the 1904 World’s Fair Pavilion. Similarly, the Alliance should place restoration of Roger Williams Park at the center of its mission—recognizing that the restoration of historic features must be balanced with new uses of the Park.

The idea of the Park as a space for public art—performance and visual—is a new direction that can also serve as an organizing theme for the revitalization of the Park. This theme is complementary with the idea of restoration, aligns with Providence’s branding as the “Creative Capital” and will help the Park establish a unique identity among the region’s parks. The size of the Park, its water features, and facilities such as the Bandstand and Temple to Music, are well-suited to visual art installations and performance arts events, which can substantially raise the public profile of the Park while providing significant outreach, funding and partnership opportunities for the Alliance.

While it can be misleading to compare Providence with New York City, we should note the importance of Shakespeare in the Park and Summerstage in the revitalization of Central Park. Today, there are no truly comparable events in Providence. With more than 3 million people within an hour’s drive of Roger Williams Park, there is undoubtedly a ready market for arts events and installations in the Park. Some capital improvements will be necessary, particularly to host large performance events. The following sections included a number of ideas that expand on this theme, and provide further detail on the improvements that may be required.

Programmatic Activities

To secure the Park’s future, the new organization must connect the Park with the regional community of users, engaging them in realizing a vision for the Park that serves today’s needs while preserving the Park’s historical integrity. The first and most important work of the Alliance, therefore, is community-building, using all the tools at its disposal to generate interest, engagement, ownership and stewardship of the Park.

Of course, the Alliance’s particular activities will be determined by its leadership, members, and funders, working with the Department and other stakeholders. Based on our research, we recommend several major
areas of focus, and a number of potential activities, that will provide value to the Park and its stakeholders while building a firm foundation for the Alliance. This section of the report presents and discusses these ideas; we hope and expect it will serve as a springboard for the new organization, its management and stakeholders.

We offer ideas for consideration based on our research and discussions, recognizing that the Alliance’s programs are likely to begin modestly, growing over time based on the interests of the Alliance’s leadership, members, funders, and other stakeholders.

- **Major visual arts events**: These may include an annual arts festival, annual arts competitions, and temporary installations. Many cities now host “Art in the Park” events. We suggest taking advantage of the Park ponds for floating or environmental sculptures.

- **WaterFire**: The Alliance should seek to partner with WaterFire Providence to install and host “WaterFire at the Park.” This can be an annual event and can be combined with another arts event for greater impact.

- **Performance arts**: Roger Williams Park offers an excellent opportunity to host Shakespeare in the Park, summer concert series, or other performance events at the Temple To Music, Bandstand or other locations.

- **Outdoor movies at the Temple to Music**: Perhaps in partnership with the Providence Film Festival, would be relatively inexpensive to host and can greatly boost the Park’s visibility.

- **Annual Harvest Festival**: A family-friendly event, partnering with local farms and other organizations.

- **Dragon boat races**: In September, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council hosts the annual Taiwan Day Festival and Dragon Boat Races in Pawtucket. The Alliance may be able to partner with the Council to host additional races on the Park ponds, perhaps in the Spring in the Temple To Music area.

- **Water quality monitoring and restoration**: In 2012 the Department completed major stormwater, shoreline restoration and water quality improvements to the Park ponds. Continued monitoring and restoration are necessary. This is an appropriate role for the Alliance; however, the organization should identify funding sources for this work, which can require considerable resources.

- **Exercise programs**: Popular at many parks and can help drive membership and stewardship, perhaps in partnership with local yoga studios, sporting goods stores, or other fitness-related businesses.

- **Bicycle and boat rentals**: Many other park stewardship organizations rent bicycles or boats for use by Park visitors, either directly or
through a concession. The swan boats at Roger Williams Park are managed through a concession with the Department; however there is an opportunity to rent canoes or kayaks, and bicycles as well. At other parks, these kinds of activities generate only modest revenues, but help to increase park visitation and engage visitors in park stewardship.

- **Car-free Sundays**: Central Park, Rock Creek Park and many others close roads on Sundays to enhance recreation and public use of the park.

**Fundraising Activities**

Through our discussions with park stewardship groups in other cities, we found that the most successful organizations take advantage of diverse sources of funding. The following list includes fundraising approaches used elsewhere, as well some new ideas specific to Roger Williams Park that may offer opportunities for the new Alliance.

- Capital campaigns;
- Annual appeal campaigns;
- Crowd funding for small capital projects;
- Membership at several levels, ranging from very modest annual cost to prestige memberships with special privileges or benefits;
- Business memberships;
- Organizational development grants;
- Project grants (for example, landscape improvements, storm water installations, and short-term programs);
- Canoe and kayak race fundraiser;
- Walkathons, road race fundraisers;
- Hat luncheons, evening events;
- Corporate sponsorship / naming rights;
- Day pass for all Park activities;
- Parking or user fees;
- Percentage of fees for tickets to the Zoo, Natural History Museum, Planetarium, Botanical Center;
- Voluntary donations as add-ons to ticket fees;
- Special exhibit fees at Park institutions;
- Percentage of permit fees for use of the Casino, fundraising walks and runs, etc.;
- State bond measures;
- State budget line-item support;
- Legislative grants.

The Alliance's development plan should explore and prioritize these and other potential funding sources.

**Advocacy**

One activity that is integral to the Alliance's purpose is advocacy. As a 501c3 organization, the Alliance can, and should, advocate at all levels of government for funding and resources to restore, maintain and preserve Roger Williams Park. The Alliance's advocacy need not be limited to work within the boundaries of the Park but should pertain to any area of public policy with the potential to affect the Park at the City, state or federal level. For example, the Alliance would be well served to advocate for state funds for open space and historic preservation, and for funding regulations that will ensure eligibility of projects for the benefit of the Park.

### 3.6. Capital Improvement Projects

There are numerous needs for capital projects to restore and upgrade Roger Williams Park’s buildings, roads, trees, water quality, and other assets. The Natural History Museum is a French Chateau style building, designed by architects Martin and Hall in 1896. As noted above, in 2014 the Rhode Island Foundation commissioned an inventory and assessment (Appendix D) that identified $8.2 million in needed repairs and improvements to existing Park infrastructure. The master plan described above will place these potential expenditures in the context of all work needed in the Park and establish priorities among them. For example, the inventory identifies $2.2 million in needed road repairs; however the transportation plan may indicate that some roads are better removed than repaired. Conversely, a comprehensive, stakeholder-based master plan will undoubtedly identify new infrastructure or development needs that were not included in the assessment.
While the master plan will be important in identifying Park needs and setting priorities, some of the most pressing needs at the Park have already been identified and need not wait for the plan. Repair of existing buildings, development of a visitor center, and additional storm water improvements all fall within this category. Following is an initial list of potential capital improvements that should be considered by the Alliance, either within or in advance of the master planning process.

**New Facilities and Improvements**

- **Visitor Center Development:** As noted above, the Park is in dire need of a central location to serve as a first stop for visitors, provide information about the Park and, equally important, present the Park as a coherent whole. The center should be located near the Park’s main gate on Elmwood Avenue. Betsey Williams Cottage is well situated for this purpose; however it would be difficult to reconcile its historic preservation needs with contemporary access requirements. We suggest a new building that visually recreates the historic barn or carriage house visible behind the cottage in old photos. The new structure would be designed to provide full access for visitors, space for smaller public events, and offices for the Alliance.

- **Temporary Information Kiosk:** While the new visitor center is being developed, the Alliance should establish a temporary information kiosk, which can be designed for relocation to the west side of the Park once the new center is opened.

- **Water Quality Restoration:** As mentioned elsewhere in this report, in 2012 the Department developed a comprehensive water quality restoration plan for the Park and completed nearly $1 million in improvements, including five major stormwater infiltration areas. Additional water quality restoration work is needed, including installation of a stormwater infiltration area beneath the ornamental bridge by the Casino. The Japanese Garden is also in dire need of water quality improvement.

- **Temple to Music Facility Improvements:** Permanent bathrooms and dressing rooms would improve the suitability of the Temple To Music area for large performance events. The Alliance and City should consider developing such a facility underground to the north of the Temple, where it would have the least visual impact.
• **Seal House Restoration and Art Installation:** The former seal house should be repaired and renovated for re-use. A life-size sculpture of sea lions on the platform in Roosevelt Lake would honor the original Roger Williams Park Zoo. The restored Seal House may also be suitable for use as a visitor center and/or Alliance office.

• **Main Gate Improvements:** The main entrance to the Park off Elmwood Avenue is in need of improvement and redesign to better identify the Park, and to accommodate visitors arriving on foot or by bus as well as by car. The Alliance and the City can consider working with the Zoo to develop a new public entrance for that facility at this location, and should work with RIPTA to develop a bus stop here.

• **Transportation Improvements:** The Park has too many entrances (21) and too many paved auto roads. The roads are too convenient for commuters who speed through the Park and, in many areas, too dangerous for pedestrians. The excessive width and extent of roads in the Park increases runoff that pollutes the Park ponds. Following development of a transportation plan, the City and Alliance should consider reducing pavement in the Park, reducing the number of road entrances, and installing pedestrian improvements.

• **Wayfinding Signage:** The Park is in dire need of improved signage to direct visitors around the Park and, equally important, provide a unifying visual element that enhances the Park’s identity.

• **Trail Development:** The Park has miles of informal trails along the water’s edge. These should be signed, mapped and better connected to reduce dead ends. The Alliance should consider partnering with local art institutions or individual artists to develop an Art Trail or trails through the Park to increase interest and build on the recommended arts theme.

• **Natural History Museum Loading Dock and Improvements:** Development of a loading dock at the Natural History Museum would allow it to partner with other natural history and science museums throughout the country and the world to share exhibits, greatly increasing interest, visitation, and income for the Museum and potentially the Alliance as its partner. This project would fit well with corporate sponsorship.

• **Nature Center:** The Alliance and City should consider partnering with a local environmental education organization such as the Audubon Society of Rhode Island to develop an urban nature center at the Park.

• **Fish Passage Restoration:** Restore Bellefont Brook in Cranston and provide fish passage to restore migratory herring runs into Roger Williams Park Ponds from the Pawtuxet River.
4. Proposed Implementation Schedule

The process of developing the Roger Williams Alliance will be determined by its first directors, early funders, Park stakeholders and the City. To assist in start-up planning, key initial tasks and a proposed first-year timeline are provided below. The schedule is ambitious and may need to be adjusted to take advantages of new opportunities and ideas, as well as to address the obstacles and delays that are inevitably encountered in any complex undertaking.

- **Establish a temporary fiscal sponsor:** The Alliance should secure a fiscal agent or sponsor as soon as possible, in order to begin fundraising in advance of 501c3 formation.

- **Create an on-line presence:** The Alliance should establish a working website, Facebook page, and single point of contact immediately.

- **Convene potential supporters/Interim Board of Directors:** Over the first several months the Alliance should convene potential supporters, particularly those with the potential to become temporary or permanent board members, funders and volunteers.

- **Hire executive director and coordinator:** We suggest hiring the director as soon as funds are available, and allowing the director to hire his/her staff.

- **501c3 incorporation:** As noted above, establishment of a 501c3 organization may take several months and usually requires assistance of an attorney. We suggest seeking pro-bono assistance from a local law firm.

- **Develop organizational documents:** In order to begin establishing a 501c3, the core group will develop organizational documents such as the articles of incorporation, bylaws, and conflict of interest policy, which will govern most of the Alliance’s operational procedures and policies.

- **First fundraising event:** We recommend that the Alliance use a winter or spring fundraiser at the Casino or Botanical Center to publicly launch the Alliance and begin raising funds.

- **Develop membership and outreach:** The Alliance should begin developing membership as soon as possible. Initially this will be an informal list of donors and other contacts, to be rolled into a formal membership upon establishment of the 501c3. Outreach should be coordinated with development activities in order to maximize the impact of each.

- **Master plan:** While the work of the Alliance cannot wait for completion of the master plan, the plan will be essential in setting priorities for the Alliance and the Park. Moreover, the master planning process will engage stakeholders in Park stewardship and communicate the
Alliance’s mission and purpose. As noted, the master plan should incorporate existing plans such as the Park’s water quality restoration plan and infrastructure assessment, while outlining additional planning needs (such as a traffic study and transportation plan). We propose a 10-year horizon for the master plan.

- **First capital campaign**: As noted above, it is important that the Alliance embark on a high-profile project as soon as possible in order to generate enthusiasm and communicate the potential for the new organization. Development of a visitor center, installation of signage, or renovation of the Seal House are all exciting projects that would raise the initial profile of the Alliance.

### Start-Up Schedule, Roger Williams Park Alliance

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<th>Task</th>
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<td>Establish temporary fiscal sponsor</td>
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<td>Create on-line presence</td>
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<td>Convene potential supporters</td>
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<td>Develop organizational documents</td>
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<td>Develop membership &amp; outreach</td>
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<td>Hire executive director</td>
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<td>501c3 incorporation</td>
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<td>Hire coordinator</td>
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<td>Develop First fundraising event</td>
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<td>Begin first capital campaign</td>
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A toy railway at Roger Williams Park carried children through tunnels and around the Park; it was constructed in 1947.

Japanese Garden, constructed by Works Progress Administration in 1936.
5. Conclusions

Establishment of the new Roger Williams Park Alliance will present significant challenges. Some of these are foreseeable; others will surely come as a surprise. The economic factors that make the Alliance necessary also create potential obstacles. Rhode Island is slowly recovering from the 2008 financial crisis, but remains a limited funding environment. For many years the state relied heavily on federal funding, including earmarks, transportation enhancement grants, and block grant dollars for environmental projects; these sources are either at historically low levels or, as in the case of earmarks, completely gone. The decline in federal support has increased competition for modest state and private funding among the state’s non-profit organizations, while the impacts of the recession increased the need for social services and lessened the apparent urgency of environmental projects. Over the past two years, Providence clawed its way back from the brink of bankruptcy, but continues to face a multi-million dollar shortfall in 2015. The Roger Williams Park Alliance is being born into a harsh fiscal climate.

Like an individual, however, an organization must make the most of circumstances that are not of its choosing. And the new Alliance will have the greatest asset a non-profit organization can have: a clear and important mission. There is no other piece of land for which Rhode Islanders have as great an affection as Roger Williams Park; and more so than in other states, Rhode Island is still something of a single community around Providence. Our small size is both a limitation and an asset. Moreover, Rhode Islanders have consistently expressed strong support for funding environmental improvement and public lands.

It is up to the new Roger Williams Park Alliance, its first board, founding members, early funders and initial staff to make the most of this remarkable opportunity. We are confident that Rhode Island will rise to the occasion, and we are certain that, with the help of the new Alliance, Roger Williams Park will remain the state’s grandest, most beautiful and best-loved municipal park.