

# A Grant has been awarded to Improve Ross C. Mathieu Nature Trail in Pulaski Park



*The grant was in the amount of \$22,893 to rehabilitate and improve the Ross C. Mathieu Trail*

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has awarded New Bedford's Department of Parks Recreation and Beaches a grant in the amount of \$22,893 to rehabilitate and improve the Ross C. Mathieu Trail in Pulaski Park. The City sought this state funding to support its collaboration with Mass in Motion New Bedford (MiM NB), the Casimir Pulaski Elementary School and Youth Build to restore and improve the

nature trail.

The Ross C. Mathieu Nature Trail is located in the northern section of New Bedford and occupies the majority of the 14-acre Pulaski Park, containing a trail system approximately 1 mile in length that meanders through forested wetlands.

In 1996 the trail system was established in memory of Ross Charles Mathieu, a former Pulaski School student. Initial work on the trail was accomplished under the direction of Robert Rocha of Coalition for Buzzards Bay with partial funding from several local supporters, including the teachers of the Pulaski School.

During the spring and summer of 2014, stakeholder groups, families and neighbors began to clear portions of the trails and complete an assessment of the scope of work needed to rehabilitate the trail system. It was determined that several bog bridges needed replacing, the outdoor classroom needed repairing, more trail clearing was necessary and new signage should be developed and installed.

As part of the project, new trail connections to the park proper, the school and the neighborhood to the north will be created to enhance the recreational experience and create more opportunities for trail use. The new connection to the school will allow the school community better access to the outdoor classroom. The new connection to the neighborhood to the north will serve as a Safe Routes to School trail.

This project is a great opportunity to add another Safe Routes to School (SRTS) site in the City of New Bedford, fulfilling the goals of MiM NB and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to increase opportunities for students to walk to and from school, increase physical activity and reduce traffic congestion at the start and end of the school day. The enhanced trail will provide parents living in the Sassaquin neighborhood off Pequot Street an alternative to driving their

children around the woodland area and dropping them off at school. MiM NB will lead the effort in coordinating school staff and resources to create a walking school bus connecting students living in that neighborhood to the school. Walking school buses have been shown to increase student attendance and provide a safe means for incorporating daily physical activity. SRTS is a national initiative to get children and families moving and active.

The first stage of work will begin this fall with an assessment of the construction needs related to the bog bridges. YouthBuild will clear trails, recreate the outdoor classroom space, and construct the bridges and other amenities. The final phase of the project will be the installation of the bridges and interpretative signage.

Director of Parks, Recreation and Beaches Mary Rapoza said the project to develop a new brochure with a current trail map, along with the newly created bog bridges, properly cleared pathways, and new trail connections will make the Ross C. Mathieu trails easier to navigate and more inviting to city residents. "All residents will have access to a high-quality nature trail system they can enjoy. It will serve as an escape from urban life without leaving the city limits. This project will help to better connect students and residents with their environment," Rapoza said.

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