



In 2024, Fairmount Park Conservancy brought vital energy and resources to Philadelphia's park system, building on our vision to create a vibrant, high-quality, and equitable park system for all. Our team led over 4,800 volunteers in stewardship efforts in parks citywide and our public programs and activation events engaged more than 16,500 participants in 121 events.

Through capital projects and historic preservation efforts, building and restoring forests and trails, developing and implementing innovative public programs, and providing support and resources to 141 neighborhood parks and thousands of volunteers around the city, we continue to provide Philadelphians with even more opportunities to gather together, build community, and engage with and care for our parks and green spaces.

This year, in collaboration with a coalition of other city organizations, the Conservancy and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (Parks & Rec) began the extensive and meaningful work of implementing the Philly Tree Plan, a ten-year strategic plan to equitably grow, maintain, and protect Philadelphia's urban forest.

FDR PARK

Each year, the Conservancy, in partnership with Parks & Rec, delivers tangible progress towards implementing the grand vision of the FDR Park Plan. Our team continued to lead capital improvements and celebrated big milestones in the Gateway Phase, Picnic & Play Phase, and Nature Phase. The Anna C. Verna Playground, which was completed in 2023, received recognition in Philadelphia Magazine’s annual “Best of Philly” issue for “Best Playground” and celebrated its one year anniversary of opening in October.

As part of the Gateway Phase at FDR, the Conservancy broke ground on the \$6 million Gateway Plaza in April, with 2024 improvements including: 81 new native trees, 25 new shrubs, and over 12,000 perennial and grass/fern plugs planted as well as construction of rain gardens featuring native plants and flowering understory canopy to absorb stormwater and new plazas formed in the shapes of the park’s iconic lakes. In November, we celebrated a significant project milestone with the installation of custom-made park signage in the form of 6’6” steel letters spelling out “FDR.”



FDR Gateway Plaza sign installation

Creating space for a multitude of youth sports and gathering places for families is a priority of the FDR Park Plan. In May, the Conservancy embarked on the initial work of the Picnic & Play Phase, an historic investment in a sustainable and inclusive future of FDR Park. The first stage of the Picnic & Play Phase is elevating the park’s surface and constructing stormwater management systems to address persistent flooding in the area. Future stages of work will bring basketball courts, picnic groves, play areas, and multipurpose fields to the western half of the park. Inspired by the multi-sport excitement of the summer Olympics, the Conservancy hosted a Family Field Day at FDR’s Boathouse Lawn in August, along with partners Philadelphia Youth Sports Collaborative, Unity in the Community, What’s Up Philly, and Parks & Rec. Hundreds of families joined the fun, participating in sports activities for children of all ages, face painting, balloon sculptures, and music; the Family Field Day offered a preview of the park’s future as a hub for recreation, community, and nature.

After planting 7,000 trees and 1,700 bushes and woody shrubs in fall 2023, the park’s new 33-acre tidal wetland experienced its first full spring and summer of growth in 2024, showcasing a rich, diverse ecosystem and creating new habitat for a variety of native bird, mammal and fish species. The tidal wetland is the first project to be completed in the Nature Phase of the FDR Park Plan. In 2024, the Conservancy continued to work with the design team on other projects in the Nature Phase, completing a 2-acre emergent wetland and developing the site designs and coordinating with regulatory agencies to streamline permitting and approvals in the coming year.



Family Field Day at FDR



Tidal wetland created by PHL Airport

JOHNNY SAMPLE RECREATION CENTER & COBBS CREEK ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

As the project lead for the Johnny Sample Recreation Center and Cobbs Creek Environmental Center Rebuild project, the Conservancy's Capital Projects team managed construction at the two properties in 2024. In the spring, construction wrapped up at the Environmental Center, which included HVAC system upgrades, a replaced roof, safety infrastructure and lighting, and new amenities such as custom millwork and new reception area furniture. Additionally, the Conservancy worked with three PowerCorpsPHL crews to plant 240 bare-root trees and shrubs along the Cobbs Recreation trail located behind the Environmental Center.



Construction underway at the Johnny Sample Recreation Center, Photo Credit: Rebuild

As part of the renovation, the construction team finished demolishing the old building addition, which will be rebuilt and upgraded with new multipurpose spaces, a new lobby, and a new flex space designed for boxing and other new and existing athletic programs. In the spring, construction crews began laying the foundation, constructing the retaining wall for the new building addition, and re-grading the site for the new outdoor gathering space. By the fall, the construction team had completed building the steel structure and pouring concrete slabs for flooring, creating the "bones" of the new building addition. The team installed the concrete masonry walls for the building addition and removed the old roof from the gym building to prepare for the new roof installation which occurred over the fall months.



Boathouse Row relighting ceremony

BOATHOUSE ROW RELIGHTING

After going dark for nearly one year, on March 7, the Conservancy and Parks & Rec hosted the official Boathouse Row Relighting Ceremony at the Fairmount Fish Ladder on MLK Drive. The \$2.1 million project completely replaced the outdated, failing lighting system, which struggled with significant connectivity challenges, regular power outages, and mounting issues. Modernizing the system with new LED lights and durable housing boxes to protect it from weather and wildlife not only restored the row's enchanting ambiance but has also created exciting opportunities for sustainable maintenance through revenue-generating lighting partnerships.

The new lighting system offers more flexibility for light shows than ever before, with 16 million potential color combinations, and can dance, sparkle, and fade along the boathouses. The lights highlight the unique architectural features of the historic structures, especially during evening hours. The Boathouse Row lighting project stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, the importance of symbols that bring us together, and the unique, resilient spirit of Philadelphia. Through dedication, perseverance, and the crucial support of donors, this cherished landmark has been revitalized, ensuring its legacy endures for years to come.

CENTENNIAL DISTRICT, WEST FAIRMOUNT PARK

The Conservancy continued to engage community members in the Welsh Fountain landscape in 2024 through two community outreach events for the Centennial Gateway project in April and June and hosted activations like “Friday Flicks at the Fountain” community movie nights, Pride in the Park: Philly’s LGBTQ+ Field Day in June with 12 local LGBTQ+ athletic and social groups, and Harvest Festival, a free, family-friendly event featuring a hay maze, arts and crafts, music, and food kicking off the fall season in September. Continued engagement and programming in this landscape contributes to a safe and welcoming park experience for all.

The design team for the Welsh Fountain Gardens project completed the design development phase, advancing the project design to incorporate community feedback gathered at the outreach events. Community interests and feedback for the Welsh Fountain landscape included interactive water/play features for families, intergenerational spaces, artwork, and temporary activation and event space.



Community engagement for the Centennial Gateway at Welsh Fountain project



West Park Harvest Festival

TROLLEY TRAIL AND SKEW ARCH BRIDGE

In 2024, the Trolley Trail, a four-mile loop trail that follows the approximate path that the old Fairmount Park Trolley traveled through West Fairmount Park, received recognition in Philadelphia Magazine’s annual “Best of Philly” issue as “Best New Trail.” The Conservancy continued targeted improvements and restoration projects along the trail throughout the year.

The Conservancy engaged a subcontractor to construct three additional trailheads to the Trolley Trail – an improved trailhead at the Chamounix Mansion entrance with an accessible gravel path and bike rack, a new trailhead at Ford Road, and a third at the base of Belmont Plateau – which was completed by October. In the fall, the Conservancy’s historic preservation team implemented stabilization repairs to the Skew Arch Bridge along the Trolley Trail nearest to the trailhead at Chamounix Mansion, worked with volunteers to remove vegetation overgrowth from the bridge surface structure and granite abutments, and completed brick replacement repair and pointing at the Skew Arch Bridge through October and November.



Skew Arch Bridge restoration work along the Trolley Trail

PARK STEWARDSHIP & LOVE YOUR PARK

Launched in 2012, Love Your Park takes place in the spring and fall as a city-wide cleanup and celebration of public parks throughout Philadelphia. In 2024, the Conservancy, Parks & Rec, and Park Friends Groups hosted Love Your Park Week from May 11 to 19, inviting residents citywide to join in the care and stewardship of their neighborhood parks. Over 1,400 volunteers took action across Philadelphia to clean up and care for 110 participating parks. Volunteer crews collected 939 bags of trash, composted 1,228 bags of leaves, and planted 141 trees and 459 shrubs and flower bulbs! Stinger Square in South Philadelphia hosted the signature project for Love Your Park Week. More than 100 volunteers and PowerCorpsPHL corps members joined the Conservancy, Parks & Rec, and the Friends of Stinger Square to help prepare the park for the busy spring and summer seasons by planting trees and flower bulbs, raking leaves, mulching, sweeping, and picking up trash.



Love Your Park Spring

Love Your Park Fall Weekend was held November 8 to 10 at 106 registered parks across Philadelphia. Park Friends Groups organized 110 events for the fall weekend of service and engaged over 1,800 volunteers to help remove trash, rake leaves, plant flower bulbs and trees, and clean up after a busy summer season. Over the course of the weekend, volunteers planted 309 trees and 4,600 flower bulbs, collected 618 bags of trash, and collected over 2,801 bags of leaves and organic debris for composting. The weekend's signature project was held at Cliveden Park in Germantown where more than 100 volunteers and PowerCorpsPHL corps members joined the Conservancy, Parks & Rec, and Friends of Cliveden Park and event sponsors PECO and Weavers Way.

Each year, the Conservancy and Parks & Rec also provide support to the Park Friends Network (PFN) representing 141 neighborhood parks and community gardens through quarterly meetings, skills workshops, equipment loans, and small grants for physical improvements and special events. In 2024, the Park Stewardship team hosted four Park Friends Group meetings, engaging an average of 67 park friends per meeting, led four interactive workshops on topics such as fundraising, tree convening, grass and lawn care, and the city budget, and increased PFN social gatherings by hosting four Park Friends Meetups at various Parks on Tap locations throughout the summer and fall. The Conservancy awarded \$67,500 to 87 Park Friends Groups to support small-scale park improvements and host 38 outdoor movie nights.



Love Your Park Spring Signature Site at Stinger Square



Love Your Park Fall Signature Site at Cliveden Park

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Our Volunteer Program brings volunteer opportunities to individuals, groups, and organizations in support of West and East Fairmount Park, Cobbs Creek Park, FDR Park and other parks within the Park Friends Network. Through the Volunteer Program, 1,587 volunteer participants joined the Conservancy across 79 volunteer events, totaling 4,250 volunteer hours in 2024. Volunteers helped remove invasive species, pick up trash, tend trees, maintain trails, and more. The total impact from these committed volunteers included planting 196 trees and 549 shrubs, tending 820 trees, removing 8 tires and 425 bags of trash from parks, spreading 113 cubic yards of mulch, and collecting 961 brown bags of organic debris to be converted into mulch. From April to November, our Corporate Stewardship Program organized and hosted custom volunteer events for 32 corporate groups and organizations, bringing corporate teams together for civic service and team-building while volunteering their time in support of Philadelphia's park system.



Braskem & Philadelphia Eagles Volunteer Workday

In April, the Conservancy celebrated the graduation of 11 volunteer leaders from our Volunteer Leadership Program. These dedicated individuals in the 2024 volunteer leader cohort attended weekly trainings throughout March, led by our Volunteer Program Manager. The weekly training sessions taught the leaders about the Conservancy's mission and the multitude of programs we manage, and provided skill-sharing opportunities including CPR training. The Volunteer Leaders served as representatives for the Conservancy throughout the year, bringing additional capacity and energy to our critical work creating high-quality, equitable green spaces citywide.



We Walk PHL, Wharton Square

WE WALK PHL

We Walk PHL is a partnership program between Philadelphia Department of Public Health, the Conservancy, and Parks & Rec that seeks to promote positive health activity and outcomes, increase the use of Philadelphia's park system, and create opportunities for people of all ages to pursue fitness goals while meeting their neighbors. The program hosts guided walks, held during eight-week spring and fall sessions that are led by walk leaders recruited from the communities surrounding the parks. In its eighth year, We Walk PHL expanded to 29 locations, engaged more than 2,300 walkers, and grew to more than 5,800 members on its social media, garnering over 150,000 post views, 15,000 comments, and 93,000 reactions. In 2024, We Walk PHL

engaged 2,317 participants in recurring walking events held throughout the spring and fall. The spring season turned out 1,267 participants attending walking events at 20 park locations and the fall season had 1,050 participants at 29 park locations, marking a large expansion of the program to new locations.

In recent years, We Walk PHL has expanded program offerings to include educational experiences and local adventures that strengthen community connections and promote safe, welcoming, and inclusive experiences in Philadelphia's green spaces. This past year, We Walk PHL hosted We Walk We Row with BLJ Rowing and GirlTrek PHL, led a pop-up walk in the Wissahickon with guest walk leaders Andrea Lawful Sanders and Coach Audra of Beautiful Strong Fitness Studio, connected residents to free learn-to-ride and group bike ride opportunities with Indego Ambassadors events, and collaborated with Farm Philly Carousel House community engagement initiatives, wellness events, and social mixers with workshops, farm fresh food demonstrations, and bounce fitness and yoga. These opportunities also help build new connections to park stewardship and volunteering with the Conservancy.

REIMAGINING THE CIVIC COMMONS

Reimagining the Civic Commons is an ambitious national initiative demonstrating that strategic investments in public spaces can connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust and create more resilient communities. The initiative got its start in Philadelphia, piloted locally in 2015 with support from Knight Foundation and William Penn Foundation before launching on the national scale. In 2024, the Philadelphia Civic Commons partners – the Conservancy, Parks & Rec, Bartram’s Garden, Centennial Parkside CDC, and Strawberry Mansion CDC, were awarded a grant through Civic Commons 3.0 to continue leveraging and strengthening local and municipal relationships to offer community-responsive programming in shared public spaces, inviting residents to enjoy, connect, and share ownership in their local park.

In West Fairmount Park, the Conservancy hosted the West Park Harvest Fest, a family-friendly weekend celebrating the first days of fall with a hay maze, kid-friendly arts activities, food trucks, and a movie screening. In East Fairmount Park, Parks & Rec partnered with Strawberry Mansion CDC and the Conservancy to reactivate a “Teen Takeover” series at the park’s Mander Recreation Center. Each weekly meetup featured music, games, and food, and the series concluded with a teen-selected movie screening. In Bartram’s Garden, events and programming – including fishing activities – invited residents to engage with the Schuylkill River in preparation for the completion of FloatLab, a river access and art installation currently in development with Mural Arts Philadelphia.

In October, Philadelphia hosted the ninth Reimagining the Civic Commons Studio, an immersive conference that welcomed more than 100 public space practitioners from across the U.S. to tour Philadelphia and share ideas. The Conservancy was proud to serve as the local convener of this conference, organizing visits to our core park geographies and participating in several tours and speaking programs.



Civic Commons Studio #9 Speaking Program



Civic Commons Studio Walking Tours



Civic Commons Studio Walking Tours

LAND CARE

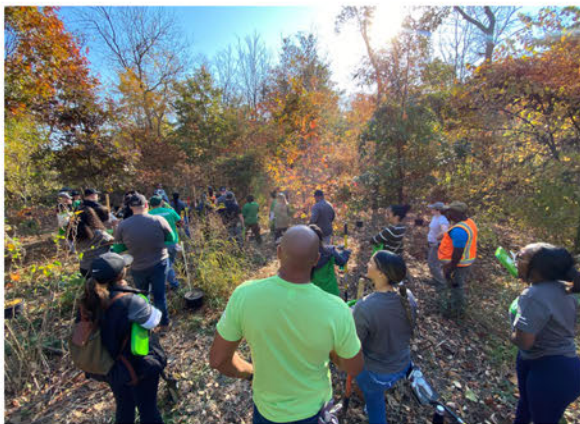
The Conservancy and Philadelphia Park & Recreation work in partnership to manage, maintain, and restore hundreds of park acres on an annual basis. The Natural Lands team members have been conducting reforestation tree plantings and managing invasive species at 24 sites in Cobbs Creek, West Fairmount Park, East Fairmount Park, and FDR Park. The team also continued to strengthen its partnership with PowerCorpsPHL, providing training and education opportunities on natural lands stewardship, tree care, and urban forestry practices. In total, the Natural Lands team planted over 2,200 trees and 1,400 shrubs this year.



Haddington Woods Reforestation

In 2024, the Natural Lands team continued to build healthy tree canopy in Haddington Woods as part of a multi-year urban reforestation effort. Working with Parks & Rec and PowerCorps PHL crews, the Conservancy planted 358 trees and 81 shrubs that will serve as a year-round visual, auditory, and general debris and chemical screen to protect sensitive and young plantings within newly reforested areas of Haddington Woods. The planting utilized climate-adaptive mixed pine species and a mixed hardwood and shrub component for diversity.

At FDR Park's Pattison Lagoon, our team built on the ecological restoration efforts along the buffer of the lagoon that started in 2023. Located along the northern boundary of the park, between the Anna C. Verna Playground and future FDR Welcome Center, Pattison Lagoon has endured years of habitat degradation, pollution, and invasive species growth. Removing invasive species and planting natives in their place will provide higher-quality, native habitat and improve the lagoon's water quality over time. In the spring, the Conservancy led volunteers in invasive species removal and planted over 200 live stakes of silky dogwood, elderberry, sandbar willow, and black willow, and in the fall, planted 2,550 herbaceous plugs, 29 trees, and 32 shrubs.



TD Tree Days planting in Haddington Woods

PHILLY TREE PLAN

The Philly Tree Plan, released in 2023, is Philadelphia's first-ever urban forest strategic plan. In support of citywide equity and sustainability goals, the plan sets a 10-year strategy to grow, protect, and care for Philadelphia's tree canopy and establishes new ways of working with residents to combat climate change. The focus of the Philly Tree Plan is increasing the tree canopy through equitable distribution in every neighborhood of the city, prioritizing vulnerable and underserved communities which are disproportionately affected by lower percentages of tree canopy.

In 2024, the Conservancy, in partnership with Parks & Rec and a coalition of partners, began implementation of the Philly Tree Plan. Through the TreePhilly program, our natural lands work, and Love Your Park service days, the Conservancy and Parks & Rec have continued the on-the-ground efforts to grow the urban tree canopy as well as increasing the reach of our community forestry work, expanding our critical work towards the equitable growth of Philadelphia's tree canopy within the seven priority zones outlined in the Philly Tree Plan. The TreePhilly program planted and distributed 1,050 trees to communities in 2024. By working with community leaders and small neighborhood-based groups over several planting seasons, the team has been able to sustain and grow its impact through long-term partnerships and refined approaches to community engagement in priority regions as identified in the Philly Tree Plan. The Conservancy is also engaged with a working group tasked with commissioning a comprehensive assessment and monitoring protocol for Philadelphia's natural lands.