



# CIRCA Report Cover Pollinator Pathway Climate & Equity Grant

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Pollinator Pathway



Connecticut Institute for Resilience  
and Climate Adaptation

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Pollinator Pathway

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## **Pollinator Pathway Final Report Narrative**

### **Summary:**

The Pollinator Pathway project funding was the catalyst that launched a collaboration between Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT), Norwalk Tree Alliance, Norwalk River Watershed Association, and Stepping Stones Museum for Children. We created a detailed planting plan and four workshops covering topics about the importance of native trees and shrubs in a coastal urban environment. Along with the educational component of the project, 10 native trees, 31 shrubs and hundreds of wildflower plugs were installed along a barren stretch of the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) in Norwalk, Connecticut by students interning at Stepping Stones Museum for Children. The habitat restoration activities took place throughout the month of August in an area between a four-lane Highway and the Norwalk River. The completed project now provides habitat for pollinators, shade along an asphalted section of the NRVT, will slow stormwater runoff, reduce flooding, and improve air quality and wildlife habitat. During the planting events, student volunteers learned to properly plant trees, shrubs, and plugs, why native plants are key to the survival of local pollinators and other wildlife, and how trees help improve the city's climate resiliency. The biggest lesson learned was how to meet the inevitable challenges despite months of careful planning. We learned the value of persistence and the power of collaborating to accomplish our goals. By communicating with our stakeholders, getting creative with solutions, and remaining optimistic, the project resulted in great success.

### **Grant Project Activities:**

During this project, we developed planting plan and workshop outline with Stepping Stones Museum, held meetings with Stepping Stones Museum staff at the museum, created outreach materials for Stepping Stones Museum staff, attended a Job Fair at Norwalk Community College to find an intern to hire, held interviews, and hired an intern from NCC, facilitated site walks along the trail, designed planting plan of the area, tagged trees and shrubs to be purchased at Courville Nursery, researched and purchased mobile watering carts, created educational materials and held workshops during the planting events on the trail, created labels for trees, and watered and monitored the trees. The workshops were held at the planting site, which is located along the Norwalk River Valley Trail in Norwalk, across from Stepping Stones Museum. This is located behind the old YMCA building, and between the Norwalk River and the four-lane Route 7 highway.

### **Grant Project Outcomes:**

Through the grant project activities, we successfully planted and watered 10 trees, 31 shrubs, and a section of wildflowers along the Norwalk River Valley Trail. In addition, we engaged eight high school students during our four planting events that

included educational workshops with each event. We planted three Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*), five American Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), two American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), eight Red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), eight Arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*), seven Mountain Witch Alder (*Fothergilla major*) and seven Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*). We also planted wildflower plugs donated by the Highstead Foundation in Redding, CT and Hilltop Hanover Farm in Westchester County, NY including, Calico Asters (*Symphytotrichum lateriflorum*), Wrinkleleaf Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*), Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*), Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*), Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), and Fringed Sedge (*Carex crinita*). Our goal was to support the restoration of native tree canopies and gardens in South Norwalk to provide habitat for wildlife, to cool air and surface temperatures, and to absorb carbon emissions. We met our goal, and the impacts will continue to grow as the habitat grows.

In addition, a great partnership between the Pollinator Pathway, Norwalk River Watershed Association, Norwalk River Valley Trail, the Norwalk Tree Alliance, and the City of Norwalk and Norwalk Department of Public Works (DPW) has formed. In the past, working with the City of Norwalk hadn't always been easy and support for projects was limited. When showing DPW the outcome of this project, we were met with excitement and enthusiasm. This sparked additional plantings along the trail and in Norwalk, including 10+ trees further up the trail from our project. The partnership continued to blossom and an additional 20 trees and 40 shrubs have been planted along the trail. The partnership with the Norwalk Tree Alliance has also led to further plantings at a separate site that NRWA and Pollinator Pathway have been restoring, Woodward Avenue Park in Norwalk, with 11 trees being added there. These exciting partnerships have led to city-wide restoration, and we are thrilled to continue the resiliency and restoration plantings.

### **Capacity-Building Progress:**

During the planting events, student volunteers learned why native plants are key to the survival of local pollinators and other wildlife and how trees help improve the city's climate resiliency. A 2018 WestCOG study showed Norwalk's tree canopy of 39.2% to be the most depleted in Southwest CT, and at the proposed project site it is even lower (<15%). That study also showed Norwalk as having the highest percentage of impervious surface, 32%, in the region. At the site the coverage is 51%-75%. This project added trees and vegetation to an area of the city identified in the WestCOG study as a priority for tree canopy restoration.

People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change. The disproportionate and unequal impact the climate crisis has on people of color and low-income communities is known as the climate gap (Morello-Frosch, R., Pastor, M., &

Shonkoff, S. B. 2009). Norwalk is 27.9% Hispanic, emphasizing the need to address the climate gap here and work with the community towards an equitable solution. (DataUSA). This project allowed the Pollinator Pathway to create new educational content in English and Spanish, teach students how to plant trees and shrubs properly, and share with them the importance of trees to climate and biodiversity resiliency. By planting to restore the tree canopy along the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) in this historically underserved and heavily urbanized area, we are connecting pathways and people in new ways.

By working with Stepping Stones to plant urban street trees, we are not only working on shading Norwalk, but we are also bringing attention to the NRVT which is a way for people to bike or walk to the train stations, a key to decarbonization in this commuter area. This section of the trail was recently connected to other parts of the trail, providing new access to the Sono train station, and attracting thousands of walkers, joggers, and bikers. The project serves as a pilot for future Pollinator Pathway partnerships in urban BIPOC communities and has been shared with more than 300 other Pollinator Pathway towns across the country with the goal of inspiring new partnerships. It has helped launch the DEIJ initiative laid out in the Pollinator Pathway Strategic Plan.

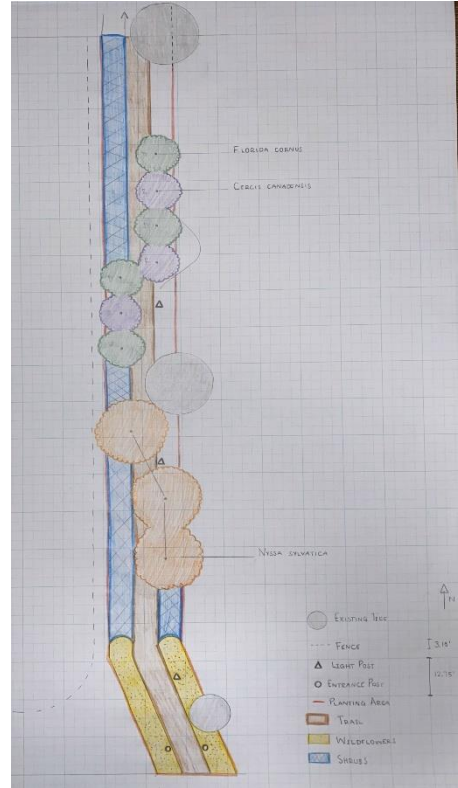
The project was also extremely helpful in connecting us with CIRCA and its resources. We attended a training demonstration of the Climate Change Vulnerability Index web viewer and the CT Environmental Justice Screening Tool web viewer. We are now using the GIS maps documenting the climate issues in this area, for example, and can now share these tools with other Pollinator Pathway organizers in CT. We also connected with Norwalk Common Council member Diana Revolus and Jalin Sead, newly elected to the City Council in November 2023. Diana and Jalin represent the area of focus during this grant, so it was great to connect with them, show them the project, and gain their support for more tree planting. We also worked closely with the City of Norwalk and our other partners, as mentioned above, and have continued planting in Norwalk.



Above: Jayme at the Norwalk Community College Career Fair with Donna (not pictured) where they found intern, Andres Palmer.

Right: Planting plan for NRV site.

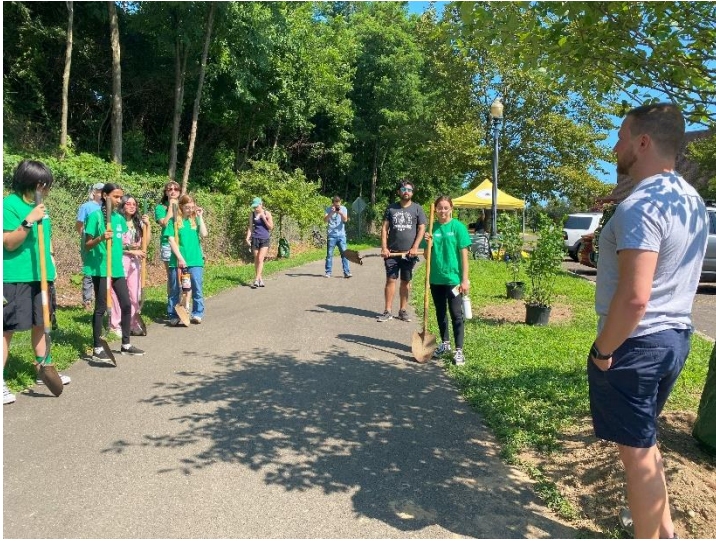
Below: Watering carts being used at the site.





Pollinator Pop Up providing an introduction to pollinators for YES2 Volunteers.





Jeff Scherr from the Norwalk Tree Alliance and Jayme providing an introduction to planting trees and shrubs for YES2 Volunteers.





Andres carrying a bag of compost after placing the shrubs where they should be planted.



A YES2 volunteer digging a hole.



A YES2 volunteer planting a shrub.



Andres teaching the YES2 volunteers.





Above: The strip for wildflowers, before and after they were planted.  
Below: The wildflowers being planted.



Volunteers working along the NRVT, planting shrubs.





From left to right: Jayme Soyak (Pollinator Pathway project coordinator), Diana Revulus (Norwalk Common Councilor member), Jalin Sead (running for Common Councilor this year), Andres Palmer (Pollinator Pathway intern), Donna Merrill (President of Pollinator Pathway), YES2 Volunteer, and Myra Peffer (Sr. Manager of YES2 Program).

Before & After



Before & After

