

The Spicket River Greenway: Building Community Capacity to Renew an Urban Natural Resource

The Spicket River Greenway Initiative is a multi-faceted effort to revitalize Lawrence's 2.5-mile stretch of the Spicket River, the sole natural feature in North Lawrence. As a community based non-profit organization, Groundwork Lawrence is dedicated to guiding the development and stewardship of the Spicket River Greenway. By catalyzing ongoing cleanup, enforcement, education and advocacy activities, Groundwork seeks to foster community-wide commitment to developing and maintaining this network of pathways that will ultimately connect neighborhoods, parks and underutilized open spaces alongside the river.

The Spicket River Greenway project aims to improve public health while creating a critically-needed recreational resource for city residents. Rates of obesity, asthma, and diabetes are at currently epidemic levels in Lawrence. The Spicket River suffers from long-term neglect of its physical and ecological well-being, and has become a fenced-off, debris-strewn, overgrown, flood-prone, essentially hidden natural area. North Lawrence, home to the highest concentration of youth in the city, offers the least amount of open space per capita. Brownfields sites along the Spicket River are currently underutilized. Sustainable development of the Spicket River Greenway could dramatically reverse such trends.



Groundwork Lawrence's other project areas both support and inform the Spicket River Greenway Initiative. The **Parks Improvement Plan** work, completed by Groundwork Lawrence in cooperation with the [City of Lawrence](#), includes the installation of new benches and trash receptacles in parks across the City, including those along the future Greenway. The **Brook Street Park** project, which has involved local residents' planning and facilitation of the remediation and reuse of a Brownfield site



adjacent to their homes as a neighborhood park, will provide a significant new open space along the Spicket River Greenway. The [Reviviendo Gateway Initiative](#), in providing a strategic framework for making comprehensive community investments, paves the way for planning and developing the Spicket River Greenway. The **FEMA Site Park** [hotlink to FEMA Site Park page] project, also involving a community-driven planning and design process, will bring another riverside park online in the Arlington neighborhood, adjacent to [Central Catholic High School](#). The **Skate Park** [hotlink] planning and design work at the park adjacent to the Misserville School, also on the Spicket River, has culminated in 100% construction documents

that await funding for full construction. The [Reviviendo Gateway Initiative](#), in providing a strategic framework for making comprehensive community investments, sets the stage for planning and developing the Greenway.

New opportunities for community-based development and stewardship of the Spicket River are constantly emerging. Groundwork has initiated partnerships with business owners across the city to support the Greenway. Increasing numbers of residents and other stakeholders within the City, youth in particular, have shown great interest in enhancing the Spicket River's potential as a recreational asset. These advocates have collectively participated in numerous river-related activities, including:

Development of a **Greenway concept plan [hotlink to Greenway map]** (Spring 2001)

- A study and inventory of animal species inhabiting the Spicket River, conducted by local middle school students as part of the Groundwork Green Team program (Summer 2002)
- Scouting missions conducted by the [National Civilian Community Corps](#) to document pollution and debris in and along the river (Summer 2002)
- The annual **Spicket River Cleanup [hotlink]**, attended by hundreds of people each year, have resulted in the removal of over 40 tons of debris from the river's edge (Fall 2002 – Fall 2005)
- Two [Urban RiverVisions](#) community design sessions, sponsored by the state [Executive Office of Environmental Affairs](#) (Fall 2002)
- An inventory of parcels and land uses adjacent to the Spicket River, completed by [Tufts University](#) graduate students (Spring 2003)
- The Spicket River Paddle-A-Thon, a community event to raise funds for the Greenway and give people an opportunity to experience the river (Summer 2003)
- Eight Ecological Rapid Assessments, conducted by the [Urban Ecology Institute](#) and students from Lawrence High School on key parcels along the river (Summer 2004)
- Social surveys about residents' attitudes pertaining to open space and recreational opportunities in and along the Spicket River (Spring-Summer 2005)
- The **Clean Spicket Campaign [hotlink]**, an awareness-raising agenda pertaining to anti-dumping laws; included the design, fabrication, and installation of 10 signs identifying the Spicket River and relevant anti-dumping ordinances (Fall 2005)
- [World Water Monitoring Day](#) on October 18, 2005 was commemorated in Lawrence by the Groundwork Lawrence Green Team in conjunction with representatives from the EPA New England Regional Laboratory, who came to Lawrence for the afternoon to test water in the Spicket River, and to hold a press conference to raise public awareness about water quality issues (Fall 2005)



Engaging the community in these activities has led to the assembly of the **Spicket River Task Force**, [\[hotlink\]](#) a growing cadre of residents, business owners, lawyers, engineers, and city and state employees dedicated to the pursuit of developing, enjoying, and maintaining the Spicket River as a sustainable community asset. Groundwork Lawrence, [Arlington Community Trabajando](#), [Urban Ecology Institute](#) and the Task Force are working to pique public interest in and awareness about the Spicket River's existence, current condition, and recreational potential in a variety of ways. Additional cleanups and tree trimming days are always being planned, construction of new riverside parks at the **Brook Street Park** site and the **FEMA Site** mean that crown jewels of Lawrence's Spicket River Greenway are closer to reality than ever! With numerous grants pending and more to pursue, Groundwork is continuing to develop the capacity of the Task Force and assemble the resources needed to make the vision of a Spicket River Greenway a reality.

Groundwork Lawrence Role:

- Project catalyst
- Conceptual planning and design
- Partnership development
- Fundraising
- Volunteer involvement
- Community involvement

Project Impacts:

- Comprehensive conceptual plan identifies priorities for current and future riverfront open space development
- Greater public awareness about the Spicket River and water quality issues
- Community-wide support for Greenway continues to grow
- Hundreds of volunteers engaged in river-related activities each year
- Spicket River has become an outdoor "learning lab" for local youth involved in ecological monitoring projects
- Over 40 tons of debris removed from riverbanks through volunteer cleanups to date
- \$3.7 million in funds leveraged (expended or committed) for development of new parks and open space along the Spicket River since 2003

Project Funding:

- [Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust](#)
- [NiSource](#)
- [Essex County Community Foundation](#)
- [Clippership Foundation](#)
- [Massachusetts Environmental Trust](#)

Project Partners:

- [Arlington Community Trabajando](#)
- [Central Catholic High School](#)
- [City of Lawrence](#)
- [JSI Center for Environmental Health Studies](#)
- [Lawrence CommunityWorks](#)
- [Lawrence High School](#)
- [Urban Ecology Institute](#)