

Executive Summary

Worcester, Massachusetts is home to 60 green spaces that encompass a total of 1250 acres (The City of Worcester, n.d.). With that comes the responsibility to maintain these green spaces so that they are safe and attractive for the general public. However, due to the minimal budget the parks department have, parks in Worcester suffer from maintenance and management issues. As a result, numerous volunteer groups have taken initiative in the upkeep and management of Worcester's parks. However, none of these organizations are professionally staffed or widely recognized.

For these reasons, Park Spirit of Worcester, Inc, a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to protecting, promoting, enhancing, and advocating for Worcester City Parks, took the initiative and collaborated with Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Worcester Community Project Center to create an Elm Park Conservancy. The conservancy would be a professional organization with a strong board and staff members, that will ensure the maintenance and management of Newton Hill section of Elm Park, Salisbury Park and potentially other Worcester parks. We worked with Park Spirit to assist them in the planning and design of the Elm Park Conservancy (EPC).

Methodology:

Our goal was to ensure the sustainability of Elm Park by developing a framework for creation of an EPC that includes a funding mechanism, management team, and volunteer engagement plan. In order to achieve our goal, we developed the following objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of the current funding, management and volunteer structure of Elm and Salisbury parks and Park Spirit of Worcester, Inc.

2. Identify and evaluate existing frameworks of successful conservancies in the U.S.
3. Assess the local climate for conservation organizations in Worcester, Massachusetts
4. Analyze interview data and develop a framework for the Elm Park Conservancy
5. Gain support and feedback from the City of Worcester government.

In order to achieve our first objective, we requested and reviewed certain documents and information regarding current funding sources, organizational structure, and volunteer practices provided to us by our sponsors.

In order to develop a framework for the EPC, we next needed to identify common structures, volunteer practices and funding practices that contribute to the success of conservancies in the U.S. We began our research with conducting content analysis on the official websites and available documents of **42 conservancies from 16 different states, and Washington D.C.** We collected and sorted data by inputting the information gathered into a 16 parameter matrix.

We then **conducted structured interviews with representatives from 22 of the 42 conservancies we researched** (20 of which we analyzed further) to fill gaps of information. We analyzed the interview responses and compiled them into a more detailed matrix. We later broke down the two matrices into 18 more focused matrices. From these matrices, we were able to identify commonalities between the 20 conservancies. We also conducted structured interviews with local nonprofit conservation organizations in order to accomplish objective 3.

The data analysis technique we utilized for this project was **grounded theory**. Using the commonalities between conservancies we identified from the matrices, we

first drafted a preliminary framework for the EPC based solely on the common conservancy practices found in from our research on conservancies nationwide. We then considered Park Spirit's current structure, funding capacity, and volunteer strategy, as well as the information gathered from the Worcester nonprofit interviews. After incorporating those factors into our structure, we asked our sponsors for their feedback, and made further adjustments to the structure.

We then conducted interviews with representatives from the Worcester Parks Department and Worcester City Council and had a brief discussion with City Manager Edward M. Augustus on the possibility of establishing a conservancy for Elm Park. Following this meeting, the Office of the City Manager scheduled a meeting between Park Spirit, the Parks Department, and the Law Department in order to begin the process of creating a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Worcester and Park Spirit of Worcester. The meeting took place at the end of the project and wheels were put in motion.

The Phases of Development of an Elm Park Conservancy:

The features, responsibilities, and characteristics of conservancies and the land they preserve vary greatly across the U.S. We developed a three phase, seven step process for the formation of the Elm Park Conservancy, pictured in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1: The Phases and Steps of the Development of the EPC

Step 1: Develop a vision

From our content analysis and interviews **we found that developing a clear vision with an explicit explanation of the purpose of forming a conservancy is essential to its success.** Also we recommend that Park Spirit develop a strategic plan that encompasses at least the next five years. Consequently, we recommend that Park Spirit begin **the EPC by developing a clear vision and a strategic plan that is aligned with the Parks Department plan for Elm Park.**

Step 2: Establish an Agreement with the City of Worcester

We found that 100% of the conservancies we interviewed had some level of collaboration with their respective city. Having a formal agreement with the city government is crucial to ensuring a strong Public-Private Partnership. In order for the EPC to be successful, we recommend Park Spirit establish an agreement with the city of Worcester.

Step 3: Create Organizational Structure

We recommend that Park Spirit transition into the EPC by taking on the responsibility of the maintenance of the Newton Hill section of Elm Park and

changing its name to the EPC. We also recommend that the EPC structure include a Board of Directors as the governance body, with the five committees working under the Board of Directors as pictured in **Figure 2**.

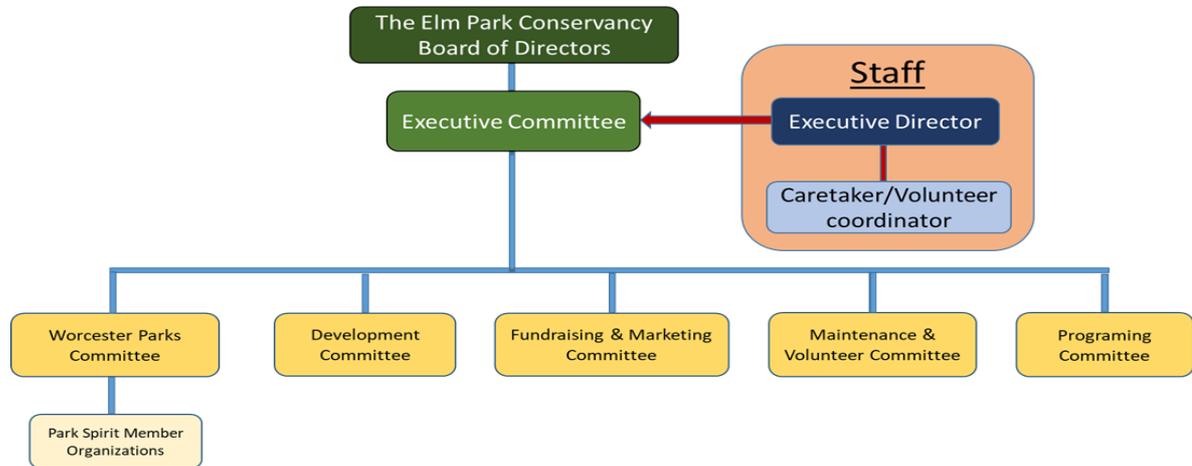


Figure 2: Proposed Structure of the EPC

Step 4: Recruit Board Members

We found that in order to be successful, a conservancy should have a board of directors made up of individuals from diverse skillsets, the most important of which being fundraising. We recommend Park Spirit recruit one or more individuals of each of following skillsets: lawyers, financial experts, marketing experts, fundraising experts, politicians, business leaders, community leaders, and forest management experts.

Step 5: Hire a Staff Member

We found that almost all conservancies began their formation with the hiring of an Executive Director. This person is mainly responsible for fundraising and the day-to-day management of the conservancy. Therefore, we recommend Park Spirit hire an Executive Director with fundraising expertise.

Step 6: Develop a Funding Strategy

We found that common funding practices among the conservancies not heavily supported by their city government include: holding annual galas, multi-level

membership programs, soliciting for corporate and individual donations, and regularly applying for grants. **We recommend the EPC implement these practices.**

Step 7: Develop a Volunteer Strategy

The most common volunteer sources of the twenty conservancies we interviewed are corporate, high school or college students, gardeners, nearby residents, retirees, and friends groups. Since corporations and schools are the most common significant sources of volunteers and can be well applied to the location of Worcester, **we recommend that the EPC offer volunteering opportunities for corporate groups as well as high school and college student groups.**

Finally, we developed the Elm Park Conservancy framework that includes potential funding practices, volunteer practices, and an organizational structure.