

EGC History 1952 – 2020

Supporting Our Community

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Reshaping the Community

Town Park, 1953 – 1972

(FGC of America Merit Award 1958, National Council of State Garden Club Award 1973)

Essex is a harbor town and historic ship-building town since before the War of 1812. It is five miles up the Connecticut River from Long Island sound, and its coves and marshes, hills and unspoiled waterfront endow it with much charm.

The main street runs the length of a peninsula to the river, and on its south side in the center of small shops, churches, banks and fine old sea-captains' homes is a tiny park which extends from the street to picturesque Middle Cove. This land, acquired by the Town in 1925 to be used as a park "forever for the pleasure of the people", was for nearly 30 years cared for only on the Main Street level with the back part, sloping to the Cove, an overgrown jungle of weeds and debris. In 1953, the newly formed Essex Garden Club made the Essex Town Park its first and continuing Civic Improvement project, and in years since has planted hundreds of trees, shrubs, bulbs, and plants. Picnic tables and benches were placed, and the Park has been the site of many town events such as Carol Sings and the Essex Garden Club's May Market.

In 1958 and Award of Merit was presented to the Essex garden Club from the Federated Garden Clubs of America for "completion of a splendid endeavor in restoring and planting Essex Park".

In 1968, the adjacent property, equal in size to the original park, was purchased by the Town for open space, and with the hope that the Essex Garden Club would rise to the occasion and incorporate the new land into one large park.

A former Garden Club member and president, a professional landscape architect, drew up a master plan. Working with the Town's Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Commission and the Board of Selectmen. Revisions were made and a final plan was approved allowing work to start in the spring of 1971.

In the spring of 1971, after the Town had torn down the house on the property and filled in the foundation, the Garden Club had the front half of the new area seeded and shrubbery planted. School children planted an Arbor Day Tree, and later, daffodil bulbs. Clearing of a large part of the new back area was done by the Town crew under the supervision of the Garden Club member that fall. The stumps were left until the property was ready for bulldozing.

The Essex Women's Club made Town park its Civic Improvement project for 1971, supporting the overall plan with money and interest.

The new master plan also went beyond expanding the Park and incorporating the new land. It called for relocating a parking area which had cut into the original park. Parking adjustments were made after a good deal of discussion about impact to local merchants.

In May 1972, with the Essex Garden Club footing the bills, the first large shrubs from the screening edge of the old parking lot were moved and watered by members all summer. The 20 year old giants survived. Other large shrubs, mostly laurel, not to be moved, were drastically pruned by Club members as part of “opening up” of the Park. In June, trees on the dividing lines between the old and new areas were selectively felled and the branches chewed up into wood chips and spread under the shrubs. In August, the old blacktop was removed, and two weeks later the bulldozer was pushing down to the water’s edge and burying huge stumps and debris and moving soil and rocks at a great rate. An old stone wall and some handsome old granite posts were lovingly hauled to other locations in town to further eliminate divisions between the properties.

The Connecticut Agriculture Extension Service field representative was most helpful, visiting the site and offering suggestions. Soil samples were analyzed, and in the grading, care was taken to not change soil levels around the big old trees being saved – not easy with the difference in levels which became more evident as work progressed. The bulldozer removed a sidewalk in poor condition and moved a tall hedge of fine lilacs to screen the new parking area. Piping which supplied water to the park had to be replaced, and a utility pole removed. In early September topsoil was spread and seed sown. Early fall rains produced a fine lawn.

Two small leaf linden memorial trees were planted.

The new park was now a village green open all the way to the waterfront, giving superb views of Middle Cove not only to those using the Park, but to those walking on Main Street or looking out from the shops. It invites usage and enjoyment as the old, cut-up and screened park was unable to do.

First recognition of the Essex Garden Club’s efforts came via a grant from a philanthropic organization in Middletown, CT. The award was its very first in a new program of rewarding civic improvement projects in Middlesex County.

There are other phases of the plan still to be carried out in future years; new paths to be made, the waterfront to be bulk-headed to enable small boats to tie up, an arboretum with each tree labeled (we have an unusual collection of mature trees) to be used to educate our members as well as the Essex Elementary School Children in our Junior Activities Program; but the initial phase is happily completed.

Sunset Pond, 1962

A joint effort of the Rotary Club, Garden Club, Women's Club, Essex Machine Works, Verplex Company, and Connecticut Light and Power to clean up the pond surround and plant 150 trees and shrubs enhancing the entrance to Essex and providing a recreation area for the public.

The Town of Essex, situated on the Connecticut River, runs back over a fairly narrow strip of hilly countryside. It is divided into three districts: Essex, Centerbrook and Ivoryton. Near the Essex-Centerbrook line is a spring-fed pond, of about an acre, in which generations have fished and on which generations have skated under arc lights donated by the Connecticut Light and Power Company, the cost of illumination being paid for by various local organizations over the years. The Essex Sportsman's Club has had the state stock it for fishing, especially for the use of the younger set, who this year have been coming in large numbers, now that the land has been cleared and the pond is easily accessible. This pond is now the property of the Verplex Company and will be a prominent feature of the approach to the Town from the new Route 9.

Last fall the Essex Rotary Club decided to make a project of cleaning up the scrub growth, weed trees, honeysuckle, etc. which were generally taking over most of the land surrounding the pond. Permission to do this was easily obtained from the Verplex Company and a ten-year, non-profit lease has been offered by them to the Town.

As soon as word of the project became known, the Essex Garden Club decided to make this part of their 1962 Civic Improvement Program and offered to supply some trees and shrubs, the Connecticut Light and Power Company, whose property lies just to the west of this pond, had their Arborist draw up a guide plan for the development of this area. The President of Essex Machine Works, whose land borders the east side of the pond, offered to plant trees and shrubs on that side of the pond and will correct the sewage drain from the tile field. Gifts of 40 dogwoods, three Mountain Ash, 24 blueberries, one larch, three Ilex verticillata, have been received from other interested townspeople. The Garden Club immediately agreed to pay for the planting of these gifts. A Coordinating Committee, composed of members of the Rotary Club, the Garden Club and the Woman's Club was formed to administer the plan, thus assuring that the basic idea of the plan will be carried out without any duplication of effort. A period of approximately five years has been allotted for its completion. This Committee will also assure that any changes or modifications of this plan will contribute to the most advantageous use of the area by the public.

The Rotarians worked last fall and this spring cleaning up the area, getting it ready for the plantings and putting in the road and parking areas on the south side of the pond.

The Junior Activities Committee of the Garden Club is working out plans to use part of the area for junior gardening in cooperation with the public school.

The Garden Club put in nine hemlocks and seven dogwoods in the parking area section, 25 rugosa roses along the approach road and West Avenue as well as three weeping willows at the head of the pond.

The Essex Machine Works planted ten laurel, six shadblow, ten Ilex verticillata and nine assorted kinds of viburnum on the east side of the pond for the beginning of a bird sanctuary.

In all a total of 150 trees and shrubs will have been planted to reclaim this spot to make it a beautiful welcome to those coming to Essex and also to make this area a place to be even more thoroughly enjoyed by future generations of people and wild life in our community.

Town Entrance, 1976 (FGCCT Civic Achievement Award)

A ten-year landscaping plan to enhance the entrance to Essex was completed in two years through the enthusiastic efforts of the entire club resulting in the planting of 174 trees and shrubs at the Route 9 Exit 3 entrances to Essex.

The Civic Improvement Committee of the Essex Garden Club realized the approach to the town of Essex could be improved with a landscape plan beautifying the exits off Route 9.

A letter of inquiry was written to the State Department of Transportation in early January 1976 which was referred to the State landscape Supervisor.

On January 26, 1976 permission was granted by the State Department of Transportation to complete the plantings. All the trees and shrubs were taken from a limited list provided by the State Highway Department so that the plantings would withstand automobile emissions, highway pollutants, and require minimum maintenance, as well as enhance the proposed sites.

Late March 1976, the State Department of Transportation and the Town Road Maintenance crew of Essex removed unsightly macadam from Area 2 in preparation for landscaping in the fall. Local nurserymen provided valued help and advice to the club.

Area 1 was planted April 1976 with five *Pinus Strobus*, two *Malus Dogo* and one *Malus Carmine*. In the judgement of the Civic Improvement Committee this area was most important to the public. Area 2 was landscaped in October 1976 with 50 *Euonymus Alatus Compacta*. Area 3 was planted in October 1977 with 38 *Junipers Horizontalis*, 12 *Vaccinium Corymbosum* and five *Crataegus Phaenopyrum*. Area 4 was planted in October 1977 with three *Cornus Florida*, 38 *Forsythia Suspensa* and 20 *Juniperus Horizontalis*.

The committee had originally planned a ten-year planting program but with all the members of the club working enthusiastically on the fund-raising at May Market and all other phases of the project the club was able to complete the project in two years.

Note -

Area 1: Northwest corner of Route 154 and Route 153 intersection

Area 2: Northwest area of Route 154 intersection with Exit 3 off Route 9 North

Area 3: Southwest area of Route 154 and Route 153 intersection

Area 4: Southeast area of Route 154 intersection with Exit 3 off Route 9 South

Essex Library Landscaping, 1980 (FGCCT Civic Achievement Award)

The Essex Garden Club was asked by the Essex Library Association to present a landscaping plan for the new Essex Library. Through a coordinated effort landscape designs were reviewed and implemented to establish a new landscape including trees, shrubs, perennials, and sod enhancing not only the Library property but the main thoroughfare into town.

The location of the library, sited next to Town Hall, is on the main thoroughfare into town giving an added significance to the project.

The Essex Garden Club agreed to undertake the project, and the ten member Civic Improvement Committee assumed responsibility for carrying it out. A landscape designer was asked to submit a plan which would be pleasing to the eye in all seasons, horticulturally appropriate to its environment, and as maintenance free as possible. It is important to note that horticultural materials used in the plan were not the usual specimens found in public grounds landscaping.

The Essex Library Association and Garden Club approved the plan. The first step in implementation was to have a professional tree company prune and shape all the existing trees and shrubs which were to be incorporated into the design plan. After receiving bids from several nurseries, one was selected, and work proceeded. It was expected that the project would be completed in late spring of 1980. Due to delays in driveway and sidewalk construction, the bulk of the landscaping took place in the fall of 1980. By the end of September, the planting of sod, foundation shrubs and specimen trees was completed. In keeping with good horticultural practice, the planting of dogwood trees and certain shrubs was deferred until spring 1981. All the beds were heavily mulched, and all plants received an anti-transpirant spray to protect them from loss of moisture due to winter wind and sun damage.

The Garden Club's May Market is the fundraising event that provides monies to undertake special projects such as the Library landscaping. Every member of the club participates in this annual activity. The May Market proceeds also provide for a Memorial Tree Fund which is used to plant trees dedicated to the memory of deceased members. Some money from this Fund was used in the Essex Library planting to plant a Skyline Thornless Honey Locust in memory of Mrs. Robert I. Carter a founder and the first President of the Garden Club from 1952 – 1954.

In addition, the Garden Club was honored and gratified to receive a grant from the Rockfall Corporation for the Club's efforts in providing landscaping for the new Essex Library.

Plantings at the Essex Library:

Malus Sargentii – dwarf

Azaleas “Delaware Valley” – white

Midget Boxleaf Yew (*Taxus baccata adpressa* ‘Fowle’)

Pyracantha (*F. coccinea lalandi*)

Mountain Andromeda (*Pieris floribunda*)

Azaleas ‘Blaauw’s Pink’

Redvein Endianthus (*Enkianthus campanulatus*)

Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*)

Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)

Japanese Andromeda (*Pieris japonica*)

Viburnum Sieboldi

Big Leaf Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei vegetus*)

Shadblow (*Amelanchier Canadensis*)

Thornless Honey Locust ‘Shademaster’ (*Gleditsia triacanthos inermis*)

Blue Hollies (*Ilex meserveae* ‘B.P.’)

Pratt House Herb Garden, 1981-1983

The Essex Garden Club, through its Herb Garden Committee, began a two-year restoration project for the Essex Historical Society's Herb Gardens at the Pratt House. The project's purpose was educational and served to beautify the historic 1734 Essex farmhouse. Plantings included a mix of 45 culinary and medicinal herbs totaling over 100 plants.

The Essex Garden Club's involvement in the Pratt House Herb Garden has developed over more than a decade. It has been an ongoing educational project excelling as a horticulture classroom for the Garden Club and for the wider community through visitors to the Pratt House Museum.

In 1981, when the Essex Historical Society leased the Pratt House from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, the Historical Society requested that the Herb Garden Committee restore the gardens to reflect the 1734 period of the front and main section of the house which contains the museum. Both organizations were fortunate to have Professor Rudy Favretti, of the University of Connecticut and an authority on restoration gardens, as an advisor on the historical background and the kind of plants used in gardens of this period.

The plans needed no professional drawings. The beds on either side of the front door were simplified. A stone walkway was laid crossing the front entrance stonework. Sod was installed to connect the west side lawn to the east side lawn, interrupted only by the stone walk. The Herb Garden remained in its original location on the east side of the house ending at the kitchen door of the museum. The gardens, both front and side, were completely redone. There were forty-five different varieties of culinary and medicinal herbs planted.

The Herb Garden Committee asked an additional 22 members of the Garden Club, members of the Historical Society, as well as other interested people in the community for their help with the project. They responded by giving their time, gifts of plants from their gardens, as well as monetary gifts for stonework and sod.

The project began in April 1981 and enough was accomplished to show walks, sodding and fledgling gardens in that first year. The second year, 1982, the gardens put forth a fine display for the opening of the Pratt House Museum in June. Small bouquets of herbs were arranged by committee members for use in the museum throughout the season.

The project has become an excellent source of information for area gardeners in planning, planting and in the use of herbs. Each plant variety has a marker giving the botanical name, common name, and the uses for the plant. Each visitor to the museum is given a leaflet prepared by the Herb Committee, listing the various plants including a suggested reading list.

In June 1982, the Historical Society opened the museum to groups of local school children for special tours. The gardens were of great interest because they gave a glimpse into a time in New England when

each family had to produce much of its own food and other necessities. The early herb gardens were both utilitarian and esthetic. They brought color and fragrance to the senses, flavor to the table, and healing to the body.

The culmination of the two year project will come on June 16, 1983 when the Pratt House Herb Garden will be one of the educational exhibits at the Essex Garden Club's Flower Show, "A Sentimental Journey".

Plantings:

Basil	Garden Heliotrope	Rosemary
Bee Balm	Germander	Rue
Borage	Grass Pinks	Sage
Butterfly Weed	Hermercallis	Salad Burnet
Chamomile	Horehound	Santalina
Chives	Lamb's Ears	Sweet Cicely
Clary Sage	Lavender	Sweet Marjoram
Comfrey	Lemon Balm	Tansy
Convallaria – Pink and White	Lemon Verbena	Tarragon
Costmary	Lovage	Thyme
Dill	Mullein	Vince – Blue
Gas Plant	Narcissus Poeticus	Viola – Blue
False Indigo	Oregano	Winter Savory
Feverfew	Peony	Wild Strawberry
Flax	Plantain Lilies	Yarrow
Foxglove	Palonia Officinallis	

Town Hall & Essex Library Landscaping, 1990

The Essex Garden Club managed the trimming of existing trees and shrubs, as well as the replacement of overgrown shrubs around Town Hall, the tennis courts, and the Library. Plantings included a hundred early blooming bulbs to complement the shrubs.

The Essex Garden Club undertook the project of re-landscaping the Essex Town Hall and the Essex Library. The Town Hall is located on the main thoroughfare into the center of Essex with the tennis courts and parking lot behind it. Essex Library is across Grove Street. Located as they are this area becomes a significant civic center and is the focus of a great deal of activity for the townspeople.

The ten member Civic Improvement Committee assumed responsibility of carrying out this project. To start with, an evaluation of existing landscaping and plantings was necessary. A plan was laid out in the spring of 1989 and completed in the spring of 1990. First, all the existing trees and shrubs which were to be incorporated in this plan were pruned and shaped by a professional tree company.

The Town Hall had been landscaped by the Essex Garden Club in 1965 and many of the shrubs at the front entrance had become overgrown. These were removed and were replaced with smaller evergreens in keeping with the original plan. Brick edging was laid across the front of the planting beds. Two hundred tulips and daffodil bulbs were planted in the fall of 1989.

The rear entrance to Town Hall is used a great deal due to its proximity to the parking lots. Its appearance is, therefore, as important as that of the front entrance. The plan was to remove several shrubs and replace them with new plantings.

A raised planter separates the tennis courts from the parking lot. It faces south and had received severe damage from the heat and drought of the past summers. It was necessary to replace all plantings with varieties more tolerant to these conditions. One hundred early blooming bulbs were planted in the fall of 1989. The plantings along the street side of the tennis courts, previously planted by the Garden Club, were groomed and mulched. The Essex Rotary Club donated and planted spruce trees along the other two sides of the tennis courts.

Ten years ago, the Essex Library Association constructed a new building in this area, and at the time, the Essex Garden Club was asked to do the landscaping. Despite yearly tree care and continued attention, the landscaping needed renewal. Overgrown and damaged shrubs were removed and replaced by new plantings, following the original plan as nearly as possible.

Plants and Shrubs planted:

Boule de Neige Rhododendron
Girards' Leucothoe
Mixed tulips and daffodils
Robusta Juniper
Grey Owl Juniper
Winterberry
Cotoneaster
Shore Juniper
Potentilla
White Delaware Valley Azalea
English Yew
Hybrid Rhododendron 'Scintalation'
Blue Princess Holly
Blauws Pink Azalea
Pfitzer Juniper
Ilex Helleri
Andromeda

Town Park, 1991

Since the 1970's, and working with the Essex Tree Committee, many trees have been planted, some in memory of loved ones. In 1991, in conjunction with the Rockfall Foundation, the Garden Club documented all the trees in the park, some of which were choice, some quite rare, and many date back to the 1800's. Shrubs, bulbs, and flowers have been planted over the years. Picnic benches and tables have been placed, and a gazebo has been built and presented by the Lions Club. A Town sign outlining Essex's history was erected.

The Park is now a site of town events such as the Summer Wednesday evening concerts, the farmer's market, craft fairs, the Lobsterfest and the Garden Club's May Market.

You will still see members of the Essex garden Club hard at work cleaning up the park, pruning and caring for the trees and other plantings as well as funding maintenance of the grounds.

Trees identified and labeled:

Horse Chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*
Japanese Maple, *Acer palmatum*
Gray Birch, *Betula populifolia*
Flowering Dogwood, *Cornus Florida*
Sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*
Small-leaved European Linden, *Tilia cordata*
Flowering Crab, *Malus cultivar*
Sourwood, *Oxydendrum arboretum*
European White Birch, *Betula alba*
Saucer Magnolia, *Magnolia soulanglona*
Sugar Maple, *Acer saccharum*
Norway Spruce, *Picea abies*
White Pine, *Pinus strobus*

Black Walnut, *Juglans nigra*
Flowering Plum, *Prunus cultivar*
Tulip Tree, *Liriodendron tulipifera*
Scarlet Oak, *Quercus coccinea*
Weeping Birch, *Betula alba youngii*
White Fir, *Abies concolor*
Japanese Dogwood, *Cornus kousa*
American Beech, *Fagus grandifolia*
Pagoda Tree, *Sophora Japonica*
American Basswood, *Tilia Americana*
Weeping Willow, *Salix hybrid*

Elementary School Landscaping, 1992

The Essex Garden Club coordinated with the School Board and Town to design and establish landscaping for the newly expanded Elementary School in Centerbrook. Plantings included over 70 trees and shrubs in four areas around the school property.

The Essex Garden Club, in keeping with a long-standing tradition of supporting civic beautification, offered to provide extensive re-landscaping of the main entrance of the newly renovated and expanded elementary school. The school faces north and fronts on Main Street in Centerbrook, one of the three villages in the town of Essex. This road is a well-travelled connecting link between the three villages.

This school expansion project represents the largest capital investment authorized by the town in more than 25 years with a budget of \$6.25 million. All new construction is on the back (south) side; interior renovations were throughout. Work was commenced in 1989 and was scheduled for completion in spring 1992. In 1991, the Garden Club authorized the Civic Improvement Committee to meet with school officials to determine the landscaping needs for the facility. The school requested landscaping help with the front entrance area, which received minimal attention in the contractor's plans due to required budget cuts.

A complete review of the entire area was conducted with the school. Safety features are a prime consideration – maintain a line of sight from the parking area on the west side of the building to the entire access circular driveway in front, preserve open view from all windows, eliminate shrubs under emergency fire exit windows and provide a safe location for the two existing bicycle racks. A secondary consideration – durability and ease of maintenance of plantings. A proposal was also made to replace the proposed cut stone under the bicycle racks with a cement walkway. The plan was approved by the Club Board and School Board and work started and was completed in April 1992. The four areas planted were: "A"-Center Courtyard, "B"- North face of the west wing, "C"- East classroom wing, "D"-North face of classroom wing.

Plantings included:

Rhododendron 'Delaware Valley'

Rhododendron 'Stewartstonian'

Rhododendron 'Olgo Mezitt'

Rhododendron 'English Roseum'

Rhododendron 'PJM'

Gleditsis tricanthos var ineris 'Skyline'

Viburnum tomentosum 'Snowball'

Prunus cerasifera 'Thundercloud'

Kalmia latifolia 'Red Bud'

Juniper chinesis var chinesis 'Aurea'

Taxus x media 'Hatfieldii'

Juniperus chinesis 'Robusta Green'

Malus 'Snowdrift'

Cedrus atlantica 'Glauca'

Ilex crenata 'Helerii'

Response to the landscape beautification was enthusiastic. Letters came from students, teachers, school officials and Town officials complementing the Garden Club. Subsequently, the school staff and students arranged a "Show and Tell" presentation at the school for the Garden Club's October meeting.

Tours and demonstrations, particularly the use of computers (even for Kindergarteners) were an education for our members.

Essex Landfill, 1994

This project originated with a proposal to the Essex Garden Club by the First Selectman to plant a pine tree buffer at the closed landfill in Essex. Garden Club members met with a local Landscape Architect and the project grew in scope to include not only planting design but also environmental, community and regulatory considerations inherent to a post-closure landfill. The Rockfall Foundation of Middletown, CT provided a grant for the design services to complete the Master Plan for the Essex Municipal Landfill. This three-acre parcel was purchased by the Town in 1938 and operated until 1984. Final capping and reseeding was completed in 1987-1988. The area is now a site for leaf recycling.

The Pre-design Phase: Site Analysis and Research

The site offers panoramic distant views of the surrounding landscape to the north, east, south, and west. It is particularly significant from the standpoint of an interpretive use because of its proximity to other waste removal functions; the regional solid waste transfer station, the town recycling and bulk waste disposal areas, the town leaf composting area, the new regional recycling transfer station and a privately owned auto salvage yard. In the near future the town will be adding an additional bulky waste facility of approximately ten acres to the northeast of the landfill site. All these areas speak to the treatment of disposal of waste and garbage in our society. To the east, the Canfield-Meadow Woods nature preserve dominates a green/wooded ridge.

Our site analysis reveals the side slopes of the landfill are approximately a 2:1 (50%) gradient with a well-established cover of grasses and wildflowers. Woody species are becoming established as well on the western and northern slopes and the southeast corner of the landfill. The southern and western slopes of the site show some erosion furrows which will require some attention. Existing vegetation are of an early successional variety: grasses and dry meadow flowers coexisting with woody plants, including some invasive species. Soil samples taken from four different areas of the site were tested at the Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven. The results reveal soil types that are a mixture of silt loam and sand. The organic matter content is moderate with pH low and nutrient content generally low.

We have spoken with a Rutgers Biologist and Director of the Freshkills Landfill Project in Staten Island, NY which a recent article in Landscape Architecture (Oct 1993, "Engineering Nature", James Krohe Jr.) cited as having "mountains of trash – 4 mounds ranging in height from 180 – 400 feet,...considered by some measurements to be the world's largest artificial landform. It has now become a laboratory for landfill restoration techniques."

The biologist said that the landfill soil will tend to be extremely dry and more than likely have a very low pH. He suggested that we select native, early successional plants that grow in well-drained areas, species whose seed is easily spread by birds and other wildlife. Dry meadow wildflowers are also a good choice. The Sumac and Locusts already present on site are good indicators of the succession process occurring. Additionally, he commented that we add soil amendments and organic matter to the site; we will recommend using leaf compost collected on site. It is also important that the plants selected for

installation should be both native and non-invasive. Invasive species should be removed with minimal disturbance to the soil.

It is interesting to note that in the biologist's opinion a landfill, especially one of our size, will have dissipated most of its methane gas after eight years of closing.

The Master Plan

A Master Plan was developed to take advantage of the site (its natural and built context) as a visual as well as a learning experience. In addition, ecologically sound principles and practices will be used in the plan. Only recycled, recyclable or reclaimed materials are to be used for site furnishings, signs, and pavements.

A primary challenge of the site is its topographic nature; extremely steep hillsides leading to a narrow ridge top, from which the excellent panoramic views of the surrounding area can be seen. Bringing people onto the site is facilitated by a mowed grass path, looping up the side of the landfill, thus making a formerly steep hillside into a pleasant walk. In addition to its functional role, the 4' – 5' wide meandering path winding up the hillside symbolizes the actual process of the evolution of the landfill: a broad swath of land becoming increasingly compressed and higher as the decades pass until its closing and eventual reclamation by nature. Each loop of the path represents a decade in the life of the Essex Landfill, and at each loop the visitor will find a sign with information about that particular decade in the life of the landfill, beginning with the 1930's and ending with the 1980's.

The small concrete block building at the southwest corner of the landfill will be "recycled" as an entry/information pavilion, providing sheltered space for certain interpretive elements of the landfill experience. Inside, visitors will find interpretive brochures, a history of the site and a display of products produced from recycled materials. Here, also, minimal parking will be provided without disturbing the gradient of the site. We will explore the possibilities of using the existing asphalt road in future paving for the new parking area.

As one reaches the top of the path, there is an incomplete circle of benches suggesting the never completed process of succession in nature. The attenuated mowed lawn provides a place to walk along the ridge and refer to the context of the site: the many waste disposal functions nearby, from a regional transfer station and municipal recycling facility to a newly opened bulky waste landfill and an automobile graveyard/salvage operation. The sign at the edge of the circle will display a map to orient the visitor to these neighboring facilities.

Views to the northeast provide a visual connection back to nature and the wooded ridge of the Canfield-Meadow Woods nature preserve. Incidental to these views of the natural more pristine landscape is the angle of opening of the circle of benches. At this point, a physical connection to the Nature Preserve is not possible due to adjacent property restrictions. Native plantings will help define the space of the lawn and punctuate the rhythm of the meandering pathway, while contributing to the biodiversity of

the site. The recommended palette of plants includes: Eastern Red Cedar, Pasture Rose, Gray Dogwood, Sumac, Shadblow, Black Locust and Hackberry. The remainder of the landfill will be left alone to proceed in ecological succession, a process that may be studied and perhaps documented by local students. Human intrusion will be limited to mowing the path and lawn, annual mowing of the meadow areas and weeding out invasive species.

It is hoped that this facility will be used for educational and interpretive purposes. As an example of “recycling” a parcel of land previously “thrown away”, further generations may visit the site to learn about reducing the impact of solid waste on our landscape.

The plan was not implemented. The space is used for leaf composting.

Compost Project, 1996 (FGCCT Achievement Award – Junior Activities)

The Junior Activities Program names “Protect Your Environment” (PYE) was a hands-on collection of school projects in the Essex Elementary School with the goal of getting children involved in helping conserve our natural resources.

A pilot program was started in April 1996 to recycle and compost the school cafeteria wet garbage. This was initially proposed as a project to involve all students in the school. Showing them that they can make a difference in protecting the environment. School Board approval was given, and the Garden Club started the program with all 3rd to 6th graders.

Students were asked to dump their lunch trays into four bins: milk cartons/juice boxes, paper goods/plastics, meats/fatty foods, and vegetables/fruits/breads.

Arrangements were made to have a local pig farmer take away the meat scraps. Two lunchroom volunteers helped and the program was seen as a success. The program was well received by the teachers as an extension of their ecology and compost curriculum. A few 6th graders would stop by after lunch periods and take the vegetables/fruit/bread scraps out to the compost drum. The Garden Club purchased an 18 bushel compost drum for the school. The drum is turned by students at least three times daily. The compost will go to the pig farmer once it is at maximum capacity.

Islands and Senior Housing in Centerbrook, 2003-2004

The Civic Improvement Committee completed the design and planting of two traffic islands in Centerbrook, and the installation of a fence and planting in front of the Essex Senior Housing Center in Centerbrook. Plantings included 60 Bar Harbor Junipers and 300 Dutch Master Daffodil bulbs.

Essex Town Green, 2006/2007 (part of Streetscape Project)

The Garden Club installed plantings to complement the Blue Stone patio area installed by Parks and Recreation Committee. The concept was to plant a garden along the south boundary of the park to demonstrate a variety of plants that can be grown along the water's edge instead of grass to provide a buffer to help reduce nutrients from flowing into the river/water and to provide a safety border between the edge of the slope and lawn. The location called for plants that were shade tolerant, native mixed with historically appropriate ornamentals, a maximum of three feet tall, plants that provide color and interest throughout the seasons, and easily grown perennials with a few annuals for longer color.

Veteran's Memorial Hall Landscaping, 2019

At the conclusion of the 2018 Memorial Day Parade the Essex Veteran's Memorial Hall approached the Essex Garden Club (EGC) about help making the parking median look more decorative. The EGC Board discussed how projects like this aligned with our mission of beautification and unanimously agreed to design and fund the project. One of the EGC designers stepped up to create a design and coordinated purchase of the plants required to install the planned design. The design and selection of plants are not only location appropriate but are also designed to bloom red, white, and blue around the time of Memorial Day.

A call went out to the club members for help planting. Several members and their partners met at the hall, and along with some Vets the installation was completed in a day. The beautiful design is truly a major addition to the Hall's parking area and will hopefully bring enjoyment for years to come. A photo and story were published in the Valley Courier.

A total of 93 plants/shrubs were installed.

Plantings included:

26 - Liriope muscari 'Big Blue'

24 - Buxus microphylla 'Sprinter'

14 - Hydrangea m forever & ever 'Together'

10 - Astibe arendsii 'Bridal veil'

8 - Hydrangea que 'Snow queen'

4 - Hydrangea pan 'Fire light' tree

6 - Monarda sb "cherry pops"

Dickinson Park Planting, 2019

Around 2013 a few members formed a group called “The Dickinson Park Group” and made the little park their responsibility to keep clean, weeded and generally kept. The group would work on appointed days for fall and spring cleanups, and periodically do what was necessary to keep the park looking spiffy.

The Essex garden Club (EGC) had not invested any money in the park since before 2012. The group would bring plants from their home gardens to spruce things up from time to time.

When a club member moved out of town, she gave the EGC a gift of \$200 to plant something “special” in Dickinson Park. That triggered the group’s imagination about what the little park could be. The Treasurer indicated that there was money in Civic for improvements, and it was agreed to add \$1,000 to brightening up the little park. One of the Club’s Designers drew up a plan, coordinated the purchase of plants and lead a group of members to plant flowers, bushes and a coral bark maple. Holes were dug and plants were installed with identifying tags.

Dickinson Park is now a “show piece” and ready for visitors to come, admire, and enjoy.

Plantings for Dickinson Park include:

Athyrium nipponicum ‘Pictum’
Heuchera ‘Plum Pudding’
Heuchera villosa ‘Caramel’
Astilbe arendsii ‘Bridal Veil’
Astilbe ‘Montgomery’
Brunnera macrophylla ‘Jack Frost’
Lamium ‘Orchid Frost’
Phlox sub. Spring ‘White’
Helleborus Frostkiss ‘Penny’s Pink’
Cornus sericea ‘Baileyi’
Cornus sericea ‘Flaviramea’
Kerria japonica
Viburnum plicatum tomentosum ‘Mariesii’
Virburnum carlesii ‘Sugar N’Spice’
Acer Palmatum ‘Sango Kaku’
Narcissus ‘Sentinel’
Crocus ‘Peter Pan’

Pratt House Pollinator Garden, 2020

Looking at this beautiful setting, the Essex Historic Society began thinking about ways to bring interest to what had been a community garden while benefiting the community. Through a variety of conversations - a group of individuals representing the Essex Historic Society, Essex Land Trust, Essex Garden Club (EGC), Essex Sustainability Committee and River COG came together and began planning a new garden.

With the help of a local landscaper and volunteers from the community, the overgrown area was cleared of grasses and weeds. Beds were established with mulched pathways between. Volunteers from the EGC designed the plant layout and plant selection. Volunteers from the organizations and community planted almost 200 plants creating a selection of 40 different varieties of natives and perennials known to benefit native bees, birds, and butterflies.

The project fits in with the growing concern to help support our food chain by providing pollinator pockets with the hope of establishing a pathway in the Northeast. The emphasis is on native plants. The plan includes good forage plants for caterpillars, and nectar plants for local pollinators.

We were also able to incorporate some period appropriate (1700's) natives that are still available today, creating a connection with this historic site. These include: Cardinal Flower (Blue & Red), Wild Lupine, Black-eyed Susan, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Wild Columbine and New England Asters.

The garden's diverse plantings provide blooms across three seasons, critical for successful pollinator support and migration.

Fun Fact:

This is just the latest in a long line of designs using this space for farming or farm support for 300 years.

Ongoing Beautification

Current Maintenance (start dates):

Essex Library Weekly Flower Arrangement, c. 1955
The Essex Green (Town Park) Clean Up Days, plantings and maintenance, c. 1958
Garlic Salt Production, c. 1959
Merchant Window Boxes – Spring planting c. 1964-1981. Providing plants c. 1981
Foot of Main Island, c. 1970 (replanted 1999)
South Main Island, c. 1970 (replanted 1999)
Silent Patrolman, c. 1982 (replanted 1999)
Merchant Window Boxes – Winter Holidays c. 1982
Town Hall Planters, c. 1986
Dickinson Park, c. 1994
Arbor Day- Plant a Tree, c. 2012
Pratt House Kitchen Garden, c. 2013
Pratt House Pollinator Garden, 2020

Provide Annuals:

Essex Fire Department
Essex Landfill & Recycling Center
Centerbrook Post Office
Ivoryton Post Office
Essex Post Office
Centerbrook EMS
Ivoryton Village Gardeners
Ancient Order of Weeders for Route 154 Islands

Awards

1957 – FGCCT Conservation Award, Festival of Flowers Award, Junior Activities Award, & Yearbook Award

1958 – Federated Garden Clubs of America Merit Award, Town Park Project

1973 – National Council of State Garden Clubs Certificate of Distinguished Service, Town Park Project

1976 – Flower Show Educational Exhibit, Pink Appreciation Award, Herb, and Kitchen Garden

1978 – Federated Flower Show, Superior Schedule, and Horticulture Awards

1983 – FGCCT Civic Achievement Award, 2-year restoration project Pratt House

1984 – FGCCT Yearbook Award, 2nd Place, Class IV (*65 - 99 members*)

1989 – FGCCT Civic Development Award

2006 – The National Garden Clubs, Inc. New England Region, Certification of Participation, The Garden of Youth Unified Project – Sprouts

2006 – FGCCT Tapestry of Design Citation, Reflecting the National Garden Club's theme

2007 – FGCCT Certification of Affiliation of Clubhouse Junior Club with FGCCT

2012 – FGCCT Yearbook Award, 3rd Place, Class IV (*over 100 members*)

2014 – FGCCT Yearbook Award, 1st Place, Class IV (*over 100 members*)

2015 – FGCCT Yearbook Award, 2nd Place, Class IV (*over 100 members*)

2018 – Yearbook Achievement Award, 1st Place, Class IV (*over 100 members*)