

Mill River: Thank you Mayor Malloy



For over 350 years the Mill River has been controlled by a series of dams. I have been asked to say a few words, since apparently I am the only person here old enough to remember when the river was free flowing in pre-colonial days. The most recent dam and walls were constructed for the Diamond Ice Company in 1922—commercial ice on the Mill Pond less than 100 years ago. (For any global warming doubters)

We traditionally have used the 1929 Swan Master Plan as the beginning of the movement to establish a Mill River Greenbelt and park. However, none other than Mayor Malloy discovered that as early as 1891 the idea has been first broached at a city meeting.

That the restoration of the River to a more natural riverbed unencumbered by walls and a dam is transformative cannot be over stated. While there are dams that have been removed in many places, it is almost unprecedented to have a river restored in the heart of an urban center as in Stamford's case with the promise of significant ecological and flood control benefits and a world-class park for all to enjoy.

Although the Mill River Park was first mentioned in 1891, again in 1929, and some land purchased and several early studies in the 1970s and 80s, it was not until the 1997 Sasaki, Mill River Corridor study, that the Park project took center stage. The Sasaki Associates study developed a vision and conceptual plan for the Mill River Corridor. In order to develop this vision and plan the consultant invited us to their office in Watertown, Mass to participate in an all day charette. I'll never forget that drive to Watertown, riding in the fast lane, with the driver, none other than Mayor Malloy. This trip made it clear that here was a Mayor fully committed to forging the vision for the Mill River project.

Shortly after the Sasaki study was completed in 1998, Mayor Malloy issued a white paper outlining the steps needed to implement the project. Included was a list of agencies and boards, local, state and federal that would have to somehow work together to make the Mill River vision a reality and I remember asking the Mayor how would we make this unprecedented cooperation happen. The Mayor responded by challenging all of us to work together. Through his encouragement and direct involvement, he enabled us to put aside any competing claims and move forward.

One of the steps required to bring the plan toward fruition was a Master Plan amendment. The amendment, approved by the Planning Board, was appealed to the Board of Reps. The Mayor personally appeared before the Board of Reps and with his usual brilliance, successfully demolished the arguments of the appellants.

Starting in 2000, Mayor Malloy personally lobbied the Federal Government to obtain support for the project. Through his efforts the Army Corps of Engineers prepared a feasibility study, which for the first time proposed the removal of the dam and walls and a restored river. I don't know how many times Mayor Malloy traveled to Washington to meet with congressmen, senators and the Army Corps to keep the project moving and finally, last year obtain the federal funds. This unprecedented direct involvement of the Mayor again showed his personal commitment to this project.

It is said success has many parents and many of the parents of this project are here today. But I can say with certainty that the restoration of the Mill River and the greenbelt would be years perhaps decades away if it were not for the leadership of Mayor Malloy. He combined those rare attributes of vision, and command of what it takes to get the mission accomplished. A little tenacity didn't hurt either. You challenged and inspired us to move this forward. For this we thank you.

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Robin Stein, Land Use Bureau Chief

