

Press Release  
December 6, 2019

### **A Bridge for all Seasons and all Abilities**

By the Norwich Trails Committee

In the middle of Norwich's trails network, across the road from the town's most popular trailhead parking lot at Parcel 5, was a bridge spanning the Charles Brown Brook. Most people in town didn't know that it existed, and those who did took it for granted. The bridge withstood over 100 years of floods, including Tropical Storm Irene and the flood of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.



Bridge over Charles Brown Brook before 2018 collapse (Photo: P. French)

This bridge connected the Parcel 5, Brookmead, Blue Ribbon and Gile Mountain Trails on the east side of the brook with the Bill Ballard, Brown Schoolhouse, Burton Woods, Cossingham and Appalachian trails on the west side.

Suddenly in July, 2018 the bridge collapsed, severing the Norwich trails system in half.



Collapsed bridge severed the Norwich trails network. (Photo D. Hardy)

The Norwich Trails Committee has been working to replace the bridge to reconnect the town's trails. We are applying for a \$50,000 Recreational Trails Program Grant, which would become the core funding to pursue matching funding from other sources. These grants require a demonstration of public support.

*This is where you can help.* The Norwich Trails Committee asks that you support the following article on the town warrant, which was *approved unanimously* by the Norwich Selectboard:

**Article:** Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich increase the gross spending general Town budget for FY21, July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, by \$80,000 for the replacement of a bridge for the Brown Schoolhouse Road trail extension over the Charles Brown Brook that collapsed in July, 2018 with a requested reimbursement up to \$50,000 from a Recreational Trails Program Grant, and authorize a loan to be paid over a term not to exceed five (5) years?

Absent a "yes" vote on this article showing public support at Town Meeting on March 3, 2020, the grant funding agencies are unlikely to support this project.

You may wonder, "Why should I be interested in replacing a bridge that I didn't even know existed?" Here are some points to ponder:

- *Handicap access:* We are planning to create a parking space and turnaround for handicap access to the bridge. Those with limited mobility will be able to enjoy natural surroundings not afforded by trails and parks elsewhere in Norwich.
- *A new and healthy experience for you:* If you haven't sampled Norwich's trails, this bridge will be a way to enjoy access to shorter segments of the Bill Ballard Trail.
- *Access to Norwich's "Grand Canyon":* The bridge will be the closest access to a scenic cascade so named by Bill Ballard, himself.



- *Emergency access across the brook*: The bridge is designed to provide ATV access to allow rescue of an injured hiker or support fire suppression on the opposite side of the brook that was severed with the collapse of the old bridge.

Replacing the bridge with a handicap-accessible structure like this:



Conceptual view along bridge, looking toward Parcel 5 (Graphic: S. Flanders)

Will allow users of all abilities to enjoy the view at this location:



Recent view upstream near the bridge location (Photo: S. Flanders)

We are looking for your vote of support in March! Please help us secure grants to offset the cost of restoring a bridge at this historic location, which provides a natural experience for people with mobility handicaps, access to the nearby Bill Ballard Trail for those who enjoy shorter hikes, and rejoins the two major trail networks on either side for those who range further.