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Blog

Past, Present and Future with New York City Parks and Hill International

By Joseph Pooler | Posted on May 19, 2021

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Pictured left: Rockaway Beach East & West Park in New York City. Photo courtesy of Hill International.

Since 2007, Hill International, Inc. has managed hundreds of construction contracts for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to help build, enhance, restore and protect the Big Apple's parks and public spaces. In that time, Hill has worked in some of the most picturesque and beloved areas of the city, including Union Square, Flushing Meadows, Van Cortlandt Park and Rockaway



Beach. Today, Hill and DPR's partnership continues to provide benefits to all involved, with active projects ongoing throughout the five boroughs.

This work is facilitated by Hill's familiarity with the city in general, having worked in New York since the company's founding in the 1970s, and with DPR, having supported the department for more than a decade. Hill has since garnered experience working with many of New York's public stakeholders on projects for diverse communities throughout the city. Much of Hill's value for the department, however, comes from the longevity and depth of their singular relationship.

"What we really bring to parks is a dedicated team with an understanding of how the department operates and

what its long-term goals are," says Project Director Gene McGarry, who oversees all of Hill's work with DPR. "Because our team has many years of experience with this client and shares the same values and long-term goals, we can appreciate and understand their needs. That means we can manage their projects more efficiently and with a unique perspective. We have been a part of many of their ongoing programs since inception, so we have a better sense of how to get individual projects done. No matter what challenges any project entails, our team is prepared to provide their services at the highest level because we've been doing so with parks for years. We are proud of our work with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and truly value the partnership. We look forward to working together on the completion of many projects in the future."

Building Open and Inviting Parks

One of Hill's most recently completed parks projects exemplifies the strength of the Hill-DPR relationship. The \$18 million Riverside Park South Phase V project upgraded a 6-acre section of Riverside Park, widely regarded as Manhattan's most spectacular waterfront park and is an officially designated scenic landmark in the city.

This project involved:

- Creating easy access for all from Riverside Boulevard to the Hudson River by building a grand staircase through the center of the site plus switchback, ADA-compliant ramps.
- Adding active and passive amenities such as customized granite retaining walls, stainless steel railings, paved plazas with abundant seating, playgrounds, spray showers, lawn areas, sand volleyball courts, lighting, landscape installations, custom precast concrete planters, a dog run, and a bike lane connecting Riverside Boulevard and the Hudson River Greenway.



The MacNeil Park Esplanade, another riverfront project. Photo courtesy of Hill International.

As the construction manager, Hill's contributions included:

- Oversight, quality control and consistency of work. Hill's familiarity with the department's processes and procedures were key in meeting project goals.
- Mitigating schedule and budget impacts when contaminated soil was discovered at the site by developing a detailed plan for safe storage, removal from site and disposal at approved facilities.
- Maintaining open lines of communication and sharing information in a timely manner so a multitude of stakeholders could make decisions to keep work moving.

Says Hill Project Manager Matthew Barboni, PE, RLA, LEED AP, CA, of the project: “It was extremely challenging, and ultimately rewarding, for me to take part in the construction of this premier park along Manhattan’s waterfront. Being involved in Riverside Park from the start, I was proud to see it through to completion. The day of the park’s opening, the whole team was flooded with congratulatory praise from nearby residents who had closely monitored our progress.”

Because of the team’s dedicated efforts to address unforeseen conditions and keep all stakeholders informed and up to date, the Riverside Park project concluded in 2020, despite the significant impacts of COVID-19.

Trees, Trees and More Trees

In addition to stand-alone, high-profile projects like Riverside Park, Hill has also helped DPR manage decades-long programs that impact the lives of all New Yorkers — for example, Hill’s work in assisting the city’s installation and maintenance of the urban forest. According to Million Trees NYC, the city has 5.2 million trees of nearly 160 species. That’s nearly 45,000 acres of tree canopy, or 24 percent of the city’s land covered in trees. Stewardship of such an expansive, diverse and thriving urban canopy is a full-time responsibility.

Such programs include:

- *Street Tree Program:* In this program, a highly specialized team of Hill’s resident engineers and arborists managed many different contractors at thousands of work sites throughout the city. Hill supervised the planting of hundreds of thousands of trees that will provide environmental, social and financial benefit to the residents.
- *Trees & Sidewalks:* Hill provided construction management services for a program to repair sidewalk damage caused by trees adjacent to homes throughout the city. There are two goals for the program: making the sidewalks safe for pedestrians and, equally important, improving the health and long-term survivability of the priceless large trees that have caused the sidewalk damage.
- *Greenstreets:* Hill has helped DPR transform barren traffic islands and roadsides into parkland that beautifies roadways and adds safe areas for pedestrians by careful management and coordination with government agencies such as the Department of Transportation.
- *Green Infrastructure:* Hill provided construction management services for the Green Infrastructure Program, a successor to the Greenstreets Program, which creates cost-effective stormwater infrastructure and helps the city achieve its water quality goals.
- *Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Citywide Treatment Project:* DPR’s treatment project aimed to protect NYC’s ash trees against the EAB, an invasive species of beetle that can devastate ash tree populations. Work included treating thousands of trees with insecticide and pruning thousands of damaged trees as directed by DPR. All of this work was consistent with the big-picture goal of maintaining a thriving urban landscape.



Hill has helped manage tree projects in the busiest locations in New York City. Photo courtesy of Hill International.

Planting and maintaining trees in a congested urban environment present logistical challenges such as construction access on heavily congested roadways and sidewalks and seasonal restrictions. Hill's construction management services are integral in controlling the projects' budgets, schedules and quality, and keeping sites safe for pedestrians and motorists. Specific services include continuous site supervision, maintaining accurate records, preparing detailed construction reports, ensuring adherence to contract documents, establishing lines of communication, reviewing contractor payments, preparing change orders and addressing community outreach needs. But the challenges are worth it. When considered in totality, this work is possibly the largest "green project" in the world and its positive impact will last generations.

"These individual projects are certainly some of the most important," says McGarry. "From supporting the city's work against the invasive EAB, to the street plantings and pruning, this work helps keep New York

City livable and green. Hill's familiarity with DPR's goals for these projects help us execute the work as planned and meet schedule and budget goals."

The Great Green Future

One of the most exciting aspects of Hill and DPR's collaboration is the pipeline of new projects on the way, some of which will be opened to the public in the not-too-distant future. For example, the Alley Pond Environmental Center is currently under construction in Queens' Alley Pond Park. This \$21 million project involves:

- The construction of a new environmental center facility to house small animals and classrooms for community programming.
- The demolition of the original structure and relocation of the active center to a temporary space within the same park.
- Achieving a LEED Silver rating or higher for the new facility.
- Installing a geothermal system to help offset the building's energy consumption.
- Protecting adjacent environmental features such as freshwater and tidal wetlands beside the building and trees that surround the site.

Hill's services for this task order contract include schedule analysis, construction administration and site inspection, shop drawing and RFI tracking, and change order analysis. Extensive prior experience supporting DPR and other NYC agencies in this line of work gives Hill an advantage over other CM firms and facilitates the process of performing agency-specific tasks.



Elsewhere in Queens, Hill helped manage construction at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Photo courtesy of Hill International.

"The Alley Pond Environmental Center is an exciting project," says McGarry. "Its features will make it a great asset for DPR and will allow the center to provide even better science programming for families.

Working on parks and green spaces, whether large landmarks or a single baseball diamond at a school, you get to see what a huge impact they have on their local and even regional communities. Like all of our parks projects, the Alley Pond project will add tremendous value to its community, educating the city's youth about green initiatives, wildlife and sustainability. It is something we are excited to be a part of."

If you're in NYC, make sure to visit Riverside Park this spring and check out the upgrades. If you don't make it to Manhattan, but find yourself walking along a busy summer street in Staten Island or Brooklyn, enjoying the shade of a sycamore or taking a deep breath beneath a beech, thank the great work that DPR and Hill have done over the past 14 years to keep New York's urban forest thriving. But no matter where you are, be sure to get to a park near you soon to enjoy some greenery and sunshine.

For more information about NYC's Department of Parks and Recreation and ongoing park projects, please visit <https://www.nycgovparks.org/>. For more information about Hill International, Inc. please visit <https://www.hillintl.com/>. To speak with Gene McGarry or Matthew Barboni about your own park project needs, reach out to GeneMcGarry@hillintl.com, MatthewBarboni@hillintl.com, or call Hill's New York office at (212) 244-3700.

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