

# Volunteers surprised as Hartford abruptly ends relationship with Batterson Park Conservancy



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The city of Hartford is ending its relationship with the Batterson Park Conservancy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the 200-acre park, effective Sept. 12.

In a letter addressed to the conservancy care of board member Neil Connors on July 14, Hartford corporation counsel Howard Rifkin said the conservancy must cease efforts to raise money for the park and that it cannot represent itself as an agent or representative for the park, which is owned by Hartford but located within the borders of New Britain and Farmington.

In addition, the letter says neither the Batterson Park Conservancy nor the members of its board of directors “have access to the park.” The letter concludes with the threat of litigation.

“Please be advised that any efforts or actions taken under the name of BPC on behalf of Batterson Park or any interest therein shall give rise to the city taking any further legal action as it deems necessary,” the letter said.

In June 2021, officials from all three municipalities announced that [the long-neglected park would be receiving \\$10 million from the state](#) for a significant makeover. The funding was available to clean up the park’s 165-acre pond, remove invasive plants, truck in more sand for the beach and replace the decrepit and vandalized concession building and bath house.

The Batterson Park Conservancy, composed of neighbors of the park and volunteers, planned to preserve the park’s upkeep once the renovations were complete.

The letter did not specify why the city was terminating its relationship with the conservancy. However, Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin said in a statement that the city decided to go in a different direction.

“We’re moving ahead with the \$10 million restoration and renovation of Batterson Park, which will be a tremendous benefit both to the city and the region — and we’re committed to working in partnership with our neighbors in Farmington and New Britain as we do it,” Bronin said. “This particular organization, while it includes some very passionate people, just turned out not to be the right one to support the work and ultimately ensure the sustainability of the park for many years to come.”

The effort to create the Batterson Park Conservancy was spearheaded four years ago by Connors, an attorney, and his wife, Allison Cappuccio. Every park in Hartford has a group that serves as a caretaker and advocate of that park, Cappuccio said.

“That’s where we came on, is that nobody was advocating for Batterson,” Cappuccio said. “It represents 25% of Hartford’s parklands, and nobody was advocating for it.”

Cappuccio said they were surprised with the city’s decision, particularly since the Batterson Park Conservancy board of directors had met as recently as June.

“Things were going well and they were looking forward to our input in the future with what would be going on at the park and the design,” Cappuccio said. “That was a few weeks ago.”

Connors and Cappuccio, who live on the New Britain side of Batterson Park, modeled the conservancy after the Elizabeth Park Conservancy, which is based in West Hartford.

“I used to live in the west end of West Hartford and ran in Elizabeth Park all the time,” Connors said. “I moved to this neighborhood and noticed there was a park here that was in disrepair, I looked for the best template possible and that was Elizabeth Park Conservancy. We are a photocopy of that, except instead of a rose garden committee subbed for the beach.”

The role of the Batterson Park Conservancy, composed of members from Hartford, Farmington and New Britain, was for it to be a steward, fundraiser and advocate of the park, and possibly to operate a money-making facility like the Pond House at Elizabeth Park, Connors said.

“Elizabeth Park is able to do weddings with a little rose garden and a pond. We have a beach that is essentially the largest beach in the county, I think,” Connors said. “That was the plan.”

The Hartford City Council passed a resolution in 2019, allowing for the creation of the Batterson Park Conservancy. Though it could not raise funds in the city, the conservancy still had to maintain a majority of Hartford residents on the board.

The conservancy’s chairperson was Charmaine Craig, Hartford City Councilor Marilyn Rossetti’s chief of staff. Some internal friction began over whether Craig was representing the conservancy or the city of Hartford at meetings that impacted Batterson Park, Connors said.

Craig, when reached by phone Wednesday, said she resigned from the Batterson Park Conservancy board of directors in February. She declined further comment. In addition to Craig, Lisa Karam, Craig Mergins and Kathy Kraczkowsky also resigned from the Batterson Park Conservancy at the same time.

Still, one former board member on a Facebook post said Craig left the board “due to us not agreeing with certain things you wanted to do.”

“You were upset because we didn’t want to do things in your way without understanding it was disorganized and a complete mess,” Lee Tre Brown said in a post directed at Craig. “So you, along with other names who won’t be named, decided to have something to do with this simply because you don’t like how we respectfully disagreed with how you wanted to go about business. You would abruptly leave meetings when things didn’t go your way.”

Farmington Town Council Chairman C.J. Thomas said he was concerned with Hartford's abrupt termination of its relationship with the Batterson Park Conservancy.

"This is something that came out of the blue," Thomas said. "[The conservancy] was put forth as an example of communities working together. We're hoping we move forward in that same manner. ... I hope this project can move forward and the \$10 million will rehabilitate the property and a clear path to keep up the property through the years is taken."

Rossetti, for her part, disagreed that the Batterson Park Conservancy's issues stemmed from internal strife so much as what was being asked of the conservancy was beyond what was originally intended following the announcement of the \$10 million funding from the state.

"We are actively looking at a successor model and actively talking to New Britain and Farmington about the design process and community involvement," she said. "But it became clearer and clearer it was not going to work" as far as the conservancy was concerned.

"So many moving parts were taking place at the same time, on us, we absolutely should have reached out to Farmington and New Britain officials," she said. "It wasn't done to be secretive.

"But sometimes you've got to cut your losses. In the end, what matters most is that families and children will be able to take part in a fully restored Batterson Park. Everyone should celebrate that."

*Correction: This article was edited to reflect the correct spelling of Marilyn Rossetti's last name.*