

STEWART: Batterson Park revitalization project is set to begin ... finally

It's finally happening! After nearly a decade of back and forth, many meetings, countless conversations and plentiful pleas – construction is set to begin to revitalize Batterson Park this coming spring.

As many of you reading this column already know, Batterson Park has a rich history tied to our community and was at one time a top destination for recreational activity for the City of New Britain. To provide you with a little historical context on this beloved park, nearly 90 years ago the City of Hartford Water Department donated the reservoir and over 700 acres of land to Hartford's Parks Department. It quickly became a popular place for families from Hartford and the surrounding communities of New Britain and Farmington to enjoy nature and escape the summer heat. So many of us, who live in New Britain, myself included, have wonderful memories of spending time outdoors with friends and family at Batterson Park throughout their childhoods. Unfortunately the park closed down in 2015, and has been sitting as a shell of what it once was ever since.

For years our residents have regularly asked me what, if anything, was ever going to happen to Batterson Park. For a long time I unfortunately did not have a good answer for this question, but then back in 2021 I stood beside Speaker Matt Ritter to finally announce that \$10 million in funding from the State of Connecticut had been designated to restoring Batterson Park to the outdoor designation it once was. Together with Batterson Park neighborhood activists, we have been working with the Hartford's Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission since that announcement to bring all the key players together to form a realistic rehabilitation plan for this wonderful space, and this upcoming year we will see this project finally come to fruition. Thank you to the City of Hartford, specifically their Public Works Department, for their commitment to this worthwhile project.

Construction on the Batterson Park Improvement Project is set to begin by in March of 2025, and finish up toward the end of the summer of 2025. Once complete, the revitalized Batterson Park will include a new pavilion and bath house, a children's play area with a playground and splash pad, kayak & canoe storage and launch site, a recreational event lawn, an expanded picnic grove area, a designated wetlands garden with a bird watching platform and boardwalk, a concession space, a fishing platform, paved walking trails that will connect the majority of facilities on the Farmington side to the boat launch on the New Britain side of the park, as well as new parking lots and a new access road in Farmington to help with traffic flow. Designated bus zone parking/drop-off areas will also be included, to ensure that this park is easily accessible to those using public transportation as well. Unfortunately this project will not include improving the water quality, so swimming will still not be allowed.

The newly renovated Batterson Park will be open 365 days a year, from sunrise to sunset and will be free for anyone to use. There will be a significant presence of Park Rangers from May through October to help ensure the safety of all who visit the park, and all onsite regular park maintenance will be overseen by Riverfront Recapture, an incredibly successful nonprofit organization with decades of experience in managing, maintaining, and operating parks and trails that are adjacent to bodies of water.

The Batterson Park Improvement Project is the result of neighboring communities coming together in order to provide an incredible resource to the residents of New Britain, Hartford and Farmington, as well as those who visit this area, and I am incredibly proud to have been a part of it. Due to the \$10 million in funding from the State of Connecticut and ongoing operation costs funded through the Passport to Parks state program, this project comes at no additional cost to our taxpayers and once all renovations are complete our residents will have access to yet another incredible outdoor recreation facility right here in our own community. I look forward to seeing families coming from near and far to enjoy the revitalized Batterson Park for many, many years to come.

Erin Stewart is the mayor of New Britain