



Hamden Land Conservation Trust
 Box 6185
 Hamden, CT 06517

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Step Up for Brooksvale!

Donate to our Step Up for Brooksvale Campaign to help out with the expenses of adding 42 acres to the park. **Thanks to a matching challenge grant, your contribution will be matched dollar for dollar up to a total of \$25,000.**

Three easy ways to donate: Visit our GoFundMe page at www.charity.gofundme.com/step-up-for-brooksvale; or make your gift via the Donate page on our website at www.hlct.org and send us an email via the Contact page telling us to designate your gift to Step Up for Brooksvale; or make out your check to HLCT with Step Up for Brooksvale in the memo line and send to HLCT, P.O. Box 6185, Hamden, CT 06517.

More than ever, Hamden needs open space for outdoor recreation and family time. You can **preserve 42 acres for families today and generations to come.** Visit our website at www.hlct.org to learn more.



President's Message

Brooksvale Park: Success and a Challenge

I don't know if I can adequately express the excitement I felt watching the Hamden Legislative Council vote to add 42 acres to Brooksvale Park. President Mick McGarry read every email aloud, which took more than an hour. Email after email expressed support.

He then read the names on our petition before the vote itself. One after another, Council members voted in favor, many citing your emailed testimony and petition signatures as the reason.

Thanks to you, one of the most significant open space acquisitions in Hamden is now on track to take place. Thanks to you, the Town

will take advantage of the grant it received from the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) program to purchase the land.

Last year, when the Town asked your land trust to help with the purchase of the 42-acre Brooksvale property, we answered the call by informing the public, obtaining a grant and working with potential donors. We have an outstanding treasure in Brooksvale Park and the HLCT stands by its commitment to assist the town financially in this land transfer.

As part of the OSWA agreement, the Town will provide its portion of the funding and has set aside an additional \$60,000 toward remediation of the land. Will that figure be enough? We can't predict that. What we can do, however, is make sure that this land transfer goes through by **matching the Town's \$60,000** for demolition/remediation. **We simply cannot come this close and have the deal fall through.**

I hope you **will join our Step Up for Brooksvale Campaign to ensure that this 42-acre parcel is permanently added to Brooksvale Park**—not just for Hamden residents today

but for generations to come. We've already been awarded a generous matching challenge grant from the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven of \$15,000, and a leadership donor has pledged to add \$10,000 to that. This means that **any contribution you make will be matched dollar for dollar up to a total of \$25,000.**

Contributions become part of a restricted fund that can only be used to facilitate the transfer and maintain the property.

Donate one of three easy ways: Join our GoFundMe campaign at <https://charity.gofundme.com/step-up-for-brooksvale>; donate on our website at www.hlct.org and send us a message on our Contact page that your gift is for Step Up for Brooksvale; or send your check made out to the Hamden Land Conservation Trust with "Step Up



HLCT President Gail Cameron.

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for Brooksville” in the memo to HLCT, P.O. Box 6185, Hamden, CT 06517.

Throughout the pandemic, your land trust has been working hard to be creative and help members stay connected. This was our first year participating in the Rock-to-Rock cycling event and your stalwart team of cyclists successfully raised funds and enjoyed riding to land trust properties. Rocky Top stewards Tim and Roberta Mack created an online postcard of a walk on that HLCT property to celebrate Connecticut Trails Day.

We also held socially distanced work parties at our Servoss and Ma-ther property to remove invasives, and at Bear Path School to weed and mulch the native plant garden we installed eight years ago. We launched our Pollinator Pathways project with a webinar about pollinators, their importance and what we can do to help them.

This fall, we plan to host a virtual beach cleanup with Save the Sound, hold another socially-distanced work party at our Winterberry

Wetlands property on the Farmington Canal, and conduct our annual meeting online in September. Keep an eye out for details!

I hope you will consider what open space means to you at this challenging time. More than ever, Hamden needs natural spaces for hiking, reflection, bird-watching, photography and family time.

Thank you for supporting Step Up for Brooksville and for your faith in our efforts.

How Sheet Mulching Can Help Your Home Garden

- By Eliza Caldwell

Are you thinking about putting in a garden bed, either for pollinator plants or vegetables? There are a few ways to begin, but one preserves the soil structure and produces a rich bed for your future plants—sheet mulching.

The goal is to smother the existing vegetation and build soil on top of it, which prevents the destruction of worm tunnels caused by other methods. Although this method takes about six months to complete, your garden will be thanking you for taking the time.

If you sheet mulch now, you'll be planting in the fall—which is actually a good thing! A little-known secret is that September – late October is the perfect time to plant perennials, and planting a vegetable garden in the fall can be very rewarding as well. Garlic is planted in mid-November, and Red Russian Kale, Beedy's Camden Kale, Champion Collards, and Delaway Kale can also be overwintered in our area with no protection. Further north, they may need a layer of row cover over them. If you're looking for additional vegetables to

plant, Fedco Seeds has an excellent list of winter-hardy vegetables.

Here are some easy steps to follow for the perfect sheet mulch:

1. Cut the grass or weeds low.

2. Lay down wet cardboard with the least amount of dye possible. Try your best to get as close to plain cardboard as possible!

3a. If you're creating a bed for native perennials, you're done! Just lay down about 2-3 inches of mulch—bark, wood chips, or heavy wet straw—to hold the cardboard in place and keep it moist. After a few months, you can plant right through the mulch and cardboard.



You can sheet mulch to suppress weeds or to grow plants and/or vegetables.

3b. If you're planting vegetables, you'll want to add more organic material. For an ideal recipe add 2-4-inch layers of **manure or compost**, with a sprinkle of fertilizer, and **yard scraps**, as long as they don't have seeds. Then, add a thin layer of **kitchen scraps** and a thick layer of **shredded dry leaves**. Lastly add **straw**, which can be bought in bulk from farmers.

You can always adapt this according to what you have on hand. The most important parts are cardboard underneath and leaves, straw, or woodchips on top.

Happy soil building!

Your Fabulous Freedom Lawn

- By Willow Ann Sirch

Every summer, millions of Americans blithely plant, treat, weed, water, spray, and mow an estimated 40 million acres of lawn. If you are one of those folks who find a manicured lawn esthetically pleasing, you might want to stop reading right now. Because you're not going to like what I have to say next. When I look at a chemically-based lawn, all I see is a dead zone.

Today's turf culture promotes the use of dangerous chemical pesticides that kill—not only the insects that birds eat—but the birds themselves. It encourages overuse of fertilizers that wreak havoc in waterways by causing a build-up of algae—robbing the water of oxygen and killing fish and other wildlife.

What's the alternative? In the 1990s, Yale professors F. Herbert Bormann, Diana Balmori, and Gordon Geballe came up with the idea of the “Freedom Lawn.” You can read more

about it in their book *Redesigning the American Lawn*. In the meantime, here are some things you can do right away to start your own natural lawn, saving you time and money.

Set your mower high. 3 to 4” is good. Often, people set their mower low, resulting in sunburnt patches. By keeping your grass high, you'll also need to water less. Your grass will grow stronger root systems that withstand drier conditions and consequently need less mowing.

Don't bag your grass clippings. Mulching your clippings as you mow provides a natural fertilizer for your lawn. That means you can skip the chemical fertilizers.

Love diversity. A lawn that includes flowering plants like creeping thyme, clover or violets, along with typical Kentucky bluegrass and fescues, promotes soil diversity, while providing ecosystem services for bees and butterflies.

Leave the leaves. According to the Xerces Society, lawns actually benefit from a thin layer of leaves, and the rest can be piled up around ornamental trees, shrubs, and perennials without harming them. Butterflies, bumble bees and other insects rely on leaf litter for protection.

Say no to pesticides. Applying chemical pesticides to kill Japanese beetle larvae sets up a vicious cycle. You apply pesticide, which kills the natural biome of the soil along with the grubs—then you need to apply more fertilizer to get a green lawn.

Less is More. Where feasible, replace lawn with native shrubs, trees and herbaceous plants. Your pollinators and songbirds will thank you.

A natural lawn is not only good for the local ecology. It can save you time and money. Give it a try. You may never go back to a chemical-based lawn again.



Credit: Willow Ann Sirch

Bees, like this bumblebee pictured on phlox, are important pollinators and can benefit from a natural lawn.

Turning Lemons into Lemonade at Rock to Rock

- By Craig Repasz

You know the saying: 'When life hands you lemons.' A lot of folks have been making lemonade since the pandemic struck. Despite the challenges, you can be proud of how your land trust spent its first year participating in our region's premier cycling/fundraising event Rock to Rock.

Last year, this exciting New Haven-based event attracted 1,300 riders and raised \$227,000 for charities with more than 50 sponsors and partners. The event traditionally features a Day of Service for all riders to give back to their community through a volunteer effort of their choice. On the day of the actual cycling event, all of the riders meet at East Rock Park in New Haven for a celebration of live music, presentations, and food.

Your stalwart team of eight riders comprised of board members, family, and friends, was ready for it all. They were on track to hit their fundraising goals. The Devil's Gear Bike Shop in New Haven had generously pledged to match donations and HLCT had planned a Day of Service at its Servoss & Mather property to clean up trash and remove invasives. The cyclists were in training and ready to take on one of the challenging group rides.

Then the pandemic hit and Rock to Rock and HLCT were forced to make some major changes. The Day of Service, all bike rides, and the festivities in the park were canceled. Group rides were replaced by participants taking part in individual bike rides, hikes, or other activities that would allow them to follow strict safety protocols. Riders were asked to post their ride or



HLCT Board Secretary and entomologist Tracy Zarrillo participated on this year's Rock to Rock cycling team.

hike to social media and tag Rock to Rock. And that's just what we did—nothing could stop us from achieving our goals.

Although it was not a formal Day of Service, on April 4, a group of HLCT members showed up at HLCT's Servoss and Mather property for some invasive garlic mustard removal, while wearing masks and gloves, and social distancing. On April 25, most of our team participants hiked at or rode to an HLCT property and

posted their photos on social media. Altogether, your land trust Rock to Rock team raised \$746—an excellent start for what promises to be an annual event. If there's a lesson for us in all of this, it's the importance of persevering and keeping close to our hearts the things that matter most—like love of nature and service to the community.

Thank you, HLCT Rock to Rock team! Your contribution makes a difference!

The Brethren: Hamden's Hidden Gem

- By Tim Mack

You've driven by it a thousand times, yet you, like most people, barely notice it. And if you do, it is to marvel at the gigantic rock formation that seems poised to roll down the very road you're on.

This 200 million-year-old "mountain of basalt" sitting on New Haven Arkose has its own address—1381 Shepard Avenue—and a name. "The Brethren," a glacial erratic, was deposited on this quarter-acre wooded shrubby knoll as the glacier retreated from North America about 10,000 years ago.

The Brethren stands about 25 feet high, split in two and accompanied by a similarly large rocky outcropping. This massive grouping of volcanic traprock seems so out of place, smack dab, in the middle of a suburban neighborhood at the corner of Shepard and Gateway. The Brethren commands an imposing presence.

Now framed by a sidewalk and paved streets, this rocky outcrop was rumored to be a special meeting place of the Quinnipiac tribe.

This sacred meeting place was hidden in the dense undergrowth and tangle of trees, accessible to only those who knew the trail.

Years later the "Leatherman," a recluse clad in hand sewn pieces of leather, was also said to visit The Brethren. This daunting rock was on his 365-mile circuit through southwestern Connecticut and New York state. Perhaps The Brethren's towering ragged walls offered him refuge throughout his journey.

Hamden folklore speculated he preferred caves to barns or the houses of the generous townspeople who would feed him along his journey. Maybe there was some mystical quality that drew him to this numinous place. Either way, The Brethren was considered sacred enough to be preserved when the neighborhood was first being developed.

This magical quarter-acre has been the property of HLCT since 1973 when it was donated by Alda Homes. Over the years, it's become overgrown and wild with brush

and saplings, seeking to hide itself away from the bustling traffic on Shepard Avenue. It's done such a good job that someone once called HLCT to ask if The Brethren was removed. But thanks to a generous neighbor, the rock stands in its former glory once again.

This past year, Eagle Scout candidate Spencer Currello, began a project to clear the overgrown brush and saplings that shrouded The Brethren from sight. Spencer and his group of volunteers revealed, once again, this million-year-old "mountain of basalt."

And what a difference it has made! Recently, when my wife Roberta and I were visiting The Brethren, we got lost exploring. Our voices would not carry and for a time we felt we were enchanted by this magical place. A spring ephemeral, Solomon's seal, was beginning to bloom and the clatter of chirping birds could be heard above. The footpaths, lined with fallen logs, weaved in and around this massive mountain of volcanic traprock.

The Brethren is, once again, there for all to explore. You can almost feel its intriguing history resonating as you place your hands on the rocky wall as you pass through its narrow corridors.

Come visit this Hamden jewel, a trio of rocky brothers, called The Brethren. It's never been easier to find—unlike earlier visitors who relied on a trail through the woods to reach this destination, you have an address—1381 Shepard Avenue—that you can google.



The Brethren stands about 25 feet high and is a HLCT property.