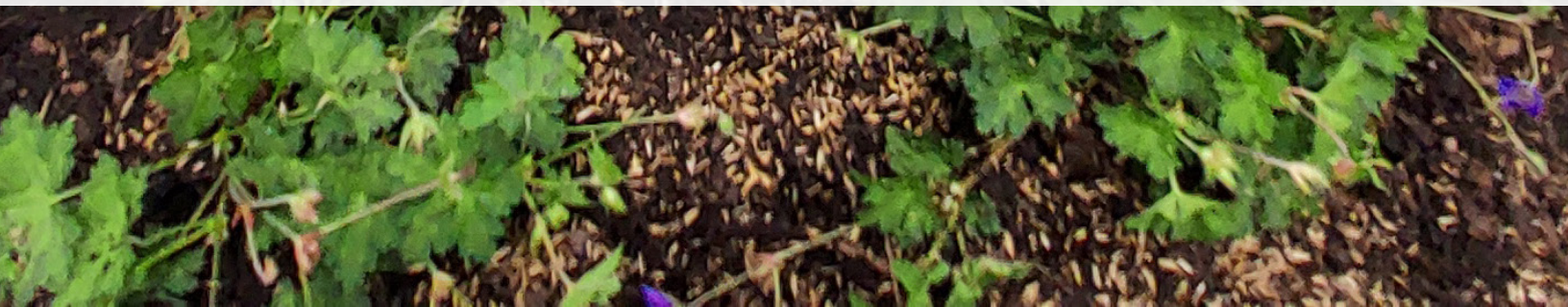




# **West Trenton Garden Club**

## **Birmingham Park Enhancement Grant**

Final Report | March 14, 2024





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# WTGC Birmingham Park Enhancement Grant

Final Report | March 14, 2024

## Introduction

First of all, thanks to the National Garden Club (NGC), David Robson and Mary Warshauer, for accepting our proposal to enhance our local park, and the associated grant of \$1,000 that spawned our project. Additional thanks go to the leadership of the West Trenton Garden Club (WTGC), Holly Nelson of Rutgers University, Ewing Township officials, the Mercer County Technical Schools Sypek Center, and all of the WTGC project team members and volunteers.

The experience of working with the NGC and our local team and partners has been a very rewarding experience for us all.

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## The Proposal

Our proposal was submitted October 15, 2022 in accordance with the “Plant America – Community Project Grants” guidelines. Primarily, the proposal included enhancements of the park in the areas of: Blue Star Memorial bed plantings, replacement of park benches and flags, water supply improvements and habitat additions for birds, bats and bees. The financial resources identified (in addition to the grant) were: Funds from WTGC budget and sponsor donations. (The full proposal is included as Annex 1.)

The proposal was approved December 19, 2022, and the grant funds were received early in February 2023.

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## The Approach

Realizing that this project was diverse and had several distinct facets, the approach developed was to have a set of coordinated Teams, each with relative autonomy and authority to pursue their specific responsibilities, based on an overall framework developed by the Grant Project Lead. The project was divided into the following segments:

- Planning, scheduling, budget and oversight
- Blue Star Memorial bed (perennials)
- Acquisitions
- Volunteer coordination
- Community outreach
- Sponsor development

Project planning and coordination was achieved using email messaging and scheduled Zoom team meetings. Three rounds of the overall project planning document were circulated and revised prior to the first team Zoom meeting February 7, 2023. The virtual team meetings continued monthly until July, and then bi-weekly through September. During the virtual meetings,

teams shared their findings and coordinated across the teams as needed to achieve the project goals. This approach was both efficient and effective. Additional wrap-up virtual meetings were also held for coordination.

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## The Team

All of the Grant Project Team are members in good standing of the WTGC, with personal drive, self-motivation and leadership skills. Each of the project segments had a “Team Lead” and several teams had additional team members.

- **Planning, scheduling, budget and oversight:** Team Lead – Rick Lazarick, members all other Team Leads
- **Blue Star Memorial bed (perennials):** Team Lead - Jeff Tryon
- **Acquisitions:** Team Lead – Sue Fair, members Barbara Bernhard, Ingrid Fair
- **Volunteer coordination:** Team Lead – Devah Brinker
- **Community outreach:** Team Lead – Anne Chmielewski
- **Sponsor development:** Team Lead – Camille Rainiero, member June Rosso

The responsibilities for each team were initially developed in January and evolved as the project proceeded. Annex 2 contains the initial responsibilities defined at the outset of the project.



Club members distributing seedlings on Arbor Day. Details next page.



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## The Execution

### Community Outreach – Arbor Day

Anne Chmielewski continued her annual celebration of Arbor Day by hosting an event at the Park, on April 28, 2023 in addition to a similar event at the Ewing Library. There were a total of 150 trees available for distribution to members of the community.

We distributed 150 Tube-Seedling trees on that day (60 Redbud, 30 Papaw, 30 Persimmon, 30 Red Oak). Distribution at the Ewing Library took place from 9:00am -12. Distribution at Birmingham Park was from 12- 3. About 75 trees were distributed at each location. Publicity occurred at the library with posting of flyers and through local social media on Facebook. Jeff Tryon provided the information to a local newspaper, "Town Topics". Devah Brinker recruited the several volunteers for distribution and welcoming at the event.

### Early Installations – Flags and Benches

The earliest tangible activities were the replacement of the tired and unsightly flags and park benches. The Acquisition Team searched for products that met the desires of the project team, and proposed new American Flags and two park benches made from recycled materials (as proposed). These product choices were reviewed by the entire team and then acquired.



The Acquisition Team handled the flags installation. The Bench installation was a bit more elaborate, as the kits were very large and heavy. Ewing Public Works came to the rescue and agreed to assemble and install both benches. This was achieved on July 21, 2023.

### Sponsor Development

The proposed idea for fundraising was to solicit local businesses to make donations, sponsoring specific park enhancements, and receiving an advertising plaque or label on the sponsored item. The Sponsor Development Team Lead, Camille Rainiero, searched out other approaches and recommended that we fundraise through the sale of commemorative bricks, with customized text created by the donating sponsor. Camille recommended the supplier, BrickMarker, and provided the details to the team. It was unanimously approved, and what a fine decision that was!



We chose to offer two brick sizes, small (4 x 8 inch) and large (8 x 8 inch) with 3 or 6 lines of writing on the brick. The prices were set to raise funds, so small bricks sold for \$50 and large for \$100. The Sponsor Development Team, spearheaded by June Rosso, personally and individually offered this sponsorship to over 20 local businesses. We also promoted this opportunity to our WTGC members, other local organizations and other garden clubs.

In total, 62 small and 14 large bricks were acquired and the net funds raised was over \$1,400.

## Blue Star Memorial

The single most significant effort of this project was the refurbishment of the planting bed surrounding the Blue Star Memorial. Jeff Tryon led this effort, and through his connections, we enlisted the services of Holly Nelson, a professor at Rutgers University.

Holly is an Associate Professor of Practice in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Rutgers, Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability. Originally the design layout and plant selection was intended to be a class project for Holly's students, but as it evolved, Holly took on the project personally. Our first interaction with Holly was a virtual meeting on February 25, 2023, where we expressed our interests with regard to focusing on perennials, choosing Red, White and Blue colored flowers appropriate to the Blue Star Memorial honoring the US Military, having multi-seasonal blooming, and the conditions at the park being open to plenty of sunshine and dry soil. Holly visited the park on March 13, 2023 to see for herself the layout and conditions of the memorial bed. At that time, only a few feet surrounding the memorial stone was planted in the red/white/blue scheme, with the majority of the bed being mature Liriope.





Holly used the site visit information, our inputs, and her expertise to design a layout plan and plant list that involved the entire bed surrounding the memorial, about 20 feet wide. The layout thoughtfully placed plants to mingle the blossom colors, appropriately positioned by height, and having seasonal color distribution. In all, about 100 perennials were identified in the design. The entire project team review the plans, asked several questions, and the plan was approved. Holly also recommended a nearby plant wholesaler, Pleasant Run Nursery, who provided the majority of the plants. Our Acquisition Team worked hard to find the remaining species at alternative nurseries nearby. Only a few plant substitutions were required based on availability.

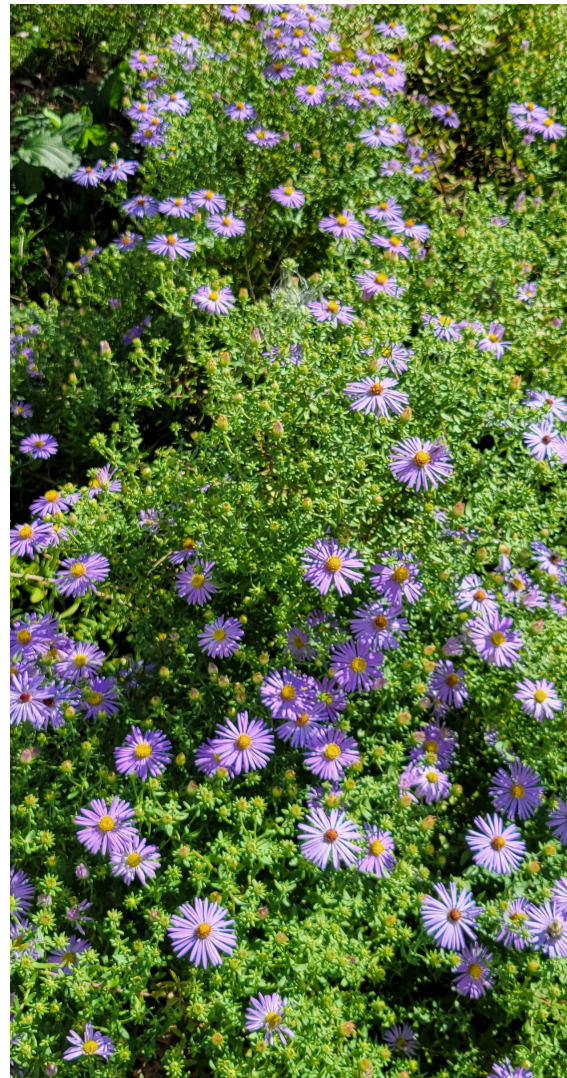


Using an anchor date in late September as the ideal planting date for perennials, we developed a plan to prepare and execute the perennial bed replacement. The first step, on September 7, 2023 was to remove the Liriope turf and assorted bulbs from the bed. We chose to repurpose the Liriope by potting the plants (roughly 80) and providing them to our members, free of charge, to be used in their personal gardens. Additionally, several pots were offered to a local merchant (adjacent to the park) who offered them to their customers. In all, we successfully found caring homes for all of the transplants. All of the bulbs were transplanted in the center bed within



the park. We also transplanted several New England Asters, originally growing just behind the memorial stone, and relocated them to an adjacent bed primarily planted in daffodils. This effort was achieved with the help of a large number of member volunteers (see photos).

The second major step was to fill the bed with rich soil. We purchased 6 yards of leaf compost from Rosedale Mills. We received support (Sept 15, 2023) from the Ewing Township – Public Works Department, to move much of the soil into the bed, and to repair some damaged areas in the park (the result of a major dig to replace a sewer line). A second day (Sept 17, 2023) to complete the soil moving was achieved by 3 member volunteers.



The third step in the process was to remove and transplant perennial Salvia growing adjacent to the stone, and to layout a planting grid in preparation for planting day.

The focal initiative was on Sept 22, 2023 when we purchased and planted all of the perennials, according to the layout design. A very large crew of volunteers served as pick-up/transporters, diggers, planters, and of course a fine collection of supervisors. Our plans to do this across two days was thwarted by an impending massive rainstorm, so we pushed ahead and completed it on Friday Sept 22, 2023 and the bed of new plants got a thorough soaking thanks to Mother



Nature the very next day. A photo gallery (see Annex 3) provides a remembrance of that day's efforts, and recognition of the volunteer team.

### **Replacement Tree**

Based on a surplus of funds, in October the project team agreed to invest in a new, 10 foot tall, mature Japanese Stewartia Pseudocamellia. The tree was installed on November 6 by Kales Nursery of Princeton. This tree replaces a former Magnolia which was damaged during the sewer line replacement disaster.

### **Commemorative Bricks**

The final installation was the Commemorative Bricks. The fundraising effort (previously described) provided 74 bricks containing inspirational phrases created by each sponsor. The project team collaborated in the development of a suitable location for these bricks to be installed in the pathway within our park, and the configuration layout for these bricks.

The decision was reached to have two sections of these bricks, placed symmetrically around the center of the park, as indicated by location 3 and 4 in the diagram. The arrangement of each block of the printed bricks plus the accent border bricks is shown in the figure.

The WTGC rekindled a relationship with the Mercer County Technical Schools – Sypek Center, through Camille Rainiero and their teacher, Ed Birdsall of the Horticulture and Turf Care Management department. Ed collaborated with our team in the brick layout design process, and accepted the responsibility for installing the bricks in the park. Ed executed the installation with assistance from his two classes of high school students (all special needs students), and he used our project as a hand-on learning opportunity for these students. What a WIN-WIN arrangement this turned out to be. The installation was completed the week of November 6, 2023 based on the students' and transportation availability. Photos of the final project and the installation team are shown.





## The Financials

### Progressive Tracking

It was imperative that this project was fiscally responsible, so all financial details were tracked throughout the project. Our grant application outlined a balanced budget of \$3,260, which included the \$1,000 grant from the Plant America Community Project Grants. (See full details in Annex 1). Many iterations were required as we selected purchases, received unexpected donations, and pursued our sponsor fundraising. Several surprises were in store.



### Donations

In total, the cash donations received was \$1,762, all unexpected at the outset. Several tangible donations were received, including bird houses (from Buxton's), hardscape materials (from Sypek) and a water pump.



## **Sponsors – Brick Fundraising**

The anticipated sponsor fundraising revenue was \$600, but with the change to selling commemorative bricks, we experienced a net revenue of \$1,493 (less \$284 for brick installation costs).

## **Budget Balancing**

Because of the unexpected level of donations plus the fundraising revenue surplus, we were faced with a substantial budget imbalance – too much money! In October we chose to invest these surplus funds by purchasing a mature Stewartia tree, installed on November 6, 2023 by Kales Nursery of Princeton. This tree replaces a former Magnolia which was damaged by the sewer line disruption. We also did not need to utilize the funds earmarked within the WTGC budget.

## **Expenditures**

The major expense items were:

- 2 Park benches - \$1,512
- Plants - \$765
- Soil - \$370
- Tree – Stewartia - \$1,103

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## **The Outcome**

### **What was Done, or Not Done as Planned**

As described, we succeeded with the installation of 2 new flags, 2 new park benches, a large bed of perennials, a new mature Stewartia (tree) and 2 sections of commemorative bricks. We changed the approach to solving the water flow issue, not by elevating the tank but rather obtaining a battery-operated water transfer pump to provide abundant pressure to facilitate the necessary watering tasks, past and future.

### **What is Planned in the Future**

We postponed the installation of the bird, bat and bee habitats until the Spring of 2024. We also postponed the replacement of the water tank surround which became non-critical when the water flow solution changed.

We are planning a celebration on Thursday May 23, 2024, just before Memorial Day, inviting members, community leaders, project participants and sponsors, local and state Garden Club leaders, Blue Star Memorial leaders, and the National Garden Club who spawned this project. The timing of this event is related to the first blooming of the Red/White/Blue perennials. We intend to honor several of the key individuals who made the project a success with Proclamations from the Township of Ewing.

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## **The Bottom Line**

With the help of the Plant America Community Project Grant, we vastly improved the appearance of the Birmingham Park, involved the local community in park activities, built camaraderie within the volunteer crews, and we all had a great time making this project such a success.



April 2022



## **PLANT AMERICA** **Community Project Grants** **Guidelines and Application**



The **PLANT AMERICA** Community Project Grants Program is sponsored by National Garden Clubs, Inc. for new or existing club projects in their respective communities. Projects may be a joint venture with another organization/s. The scope of these projects may include but are not limited to:

- Beautification and/or restoration
- Community gardens
- Youth gardening
- Habitat for Humanity landscaping
- Landscaping projects
- Implementation of environmental practices
- A horticulture or environmental educational event for the public

**Grant Amount:** Up to \$1,000.00 is available to be used for direct expenses of 2023 projects.

### **Who May Apply:**

- Individual or near-garden clubs that are members of National Garden Clubs, Inc.
- **NOTE:** Recipients of previous **PLANT AMERICA** Community Project Grants are **NOT** eligible to apply.

### **How to Apply using this PDF form:**

- Application is limited to a **TOTAL** of **two (2) pages**. (This page does not count.)
  - **ONE (1) PAGE** - Application Form (Page 1)
  - **ONE (1) PAGE** - Budget (Page 2)
- *Applications of more than two pages will **NOT** be considered. NO PHOTOS/DIAGRAMS.*

- Save this form to your desktop and open it in Adobe Acrobat; it is not fillable with most internet browsers. Fill in, save the changes and email the completed **application form** and **budget** to:  
PlantAmericaGrants@gardenclub.org.

### **Application Deadline: October 15, 2022**

- Recipients of grants will be notified, and all money will be awarded by **January 31, 2023**.
- Projects must be completed by **February 28, 2024**; final report forms due by **April 1, 2024**.

### **Judging Criteria:**

In evaluating grant applications, judging is based on the following Scale of Points:

Benefits and visibility in community	40	Collaboration with other community groups	15
Impact and scope of project	25	Application form complete	5
Involvement & participation by club members	15	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Funding Guidelines:**

Grants will not be provided for:

- Projects in which club does not participate in some aspect
- Purchase of Blue or Gold Star Markers
- Competitive Flower Shows
- Scout projects
- Salaries or benefits of personnel
- Political action programs
- Capital drives and/or fund building
- Scholarships and/or endowments
- Private gardens
- Lawsuits and/or litigation
- Overhead costs
- Projects completed before 2023.

### **Final Report:**

1. **Deadline:** within two months after the completion of the project or by April 1, 2024.
2. Email the following:
  - A short two-to-three pages report describing the project including photos
  - A copy of the final financial report including all income and expenses
  - A copy of any publicity

**NOTE:** Please indicate if permission has been given for use of photos by NGC in print, website and social media. A release form for adults and minors can be found on the NGC website. <https://gardenclub.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/ngc-publication-release-fillable-01.pdf>



**PAGE 1 - APPLICATION**  
**DEADLINE: OCTOBER 15, 2022**

**Date of Application:** 10/15/2022

**Name of State Garden Club:** Garden Club of New Jersey

**Applicant** (Club/s): West Trenton Garden Club (WTGC)

**Contact:** (Name of individual representing club/s) Rick Lazarick

**Address:** 8 Blackwood Drive, West Trenton, NJ 08628

**Email:** ricklazarick@gmail.com

**Phone:** 609-433-1793

**New Project:** Yes ☒ No ☐ **Beginning date:** 03/01/2023 **Completion date:** 10/01/2023

**Number of Club Members:** 62 **Anticipated Number Members Involved in Project:** 20

**Amount Requested** (up to \$1,000): \$ 1,000.00 **Total Project Budget:** \$ 3,260.00

**Description of Intended Project: (Please use font size "10" or larger)**

This grant submission pertains to Birmingham Park, located in West Trenton, NJ. It is the site of a Blue Star Memorial and is an historic Revolutionary Crossroad. The park is owned by Ewing Township and maintained by the West Trenton Garden Club (WTGC). The Blue Star Memorial was installed in 2019, and is the cornerstone of this historic "pocket park". This project will refresh and enhance the Memorial and surrounding park areas, add new native and pollinator plants, create new habitat areas, and refurbish park features. The WTGC will host a community wide environmental education event on Arbor Day 2023.

At the Memorial, new perennial flowering plants, in Red, White and Blue, will be purchased and installed, including low growing varieties in front and taller beside and to the rear of the Memorial. American flags adorning the park will be replaced with new, weather resistant flags. Additional colorful, pollinator-friendly native perennials will be added to areas adjacent to the Memorial. Habitat/houses for bees, birds and bats will be acquired (made from recycled materials) and installed throughout the Park. In order to provide adequate watering capability, the existing gravity fed water tank (filled courtesy of the West Trenton Fire Company) will be elevated to increase water flow rate. Two existing park benches will be replaced with new benches (recycled materials).

Birmingham Park is located in the center of the residential community where there is high visibility by motorists due to the proximity of Interstate 295. Additionally, pedestrian traffic, cycling and nearby shopping present the ideal setting for visits to this Park. At a Spring re-opening of the enhanced Park, an Arbor Day celebration will be held, providing an educational opportunity to interact with the local community, to emphasize the environmental benefits of planting trees. Native trees grown by the NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection, Forest Service Nursery will be distributed free to attendees at the park, along with informational materials about the value of native trees within our community and home landscapes. This project will be conducted in collaboration with other organizations to include: Ewing Green Team, Ewing Historic Society, Rutgers University – Professors Bruce Crawford and Holly Nelson (Landscape Architecture). This grant will enable the WTGC to strengthen and renew our community's connection to this historic location in a sustainable way. By building on the past, taking positive steps to educate and encourage our community, the seeds planted today will flourish, offering hope for our future.

**Brief description of how the funds will be used: (type of plants, hardscape items, construction, etc.)**

Purchases of flowering perennials (RWB) for the Memorial, pollinator-friendly native plants, flags, benches, houses for bees, birds and bats, materials for construction of the water tank elevation platform and a decorative surround. Planned perennials include: Lobelia, Echinacea, Perovskia, Ceratostigma, Veronicastrum, Dianthus, Vernonia, Gallardia, Salvia, Polemonium, Eryngium, Iris.

**Brief statement of any in-kind or volunteer services: (who, number of hours, function, etc.)**

Rutgers landscape design students will assist with plant layouts, habitat designs, etc. Hours estimated 100. West Trenton Fire Company will continue supplying and replenishing water as required. Hours estimated 30 annually, recurring. Labor to build and install equipment (by members). Hours estimated 100 hours.



**PAGE 2 - BUDGET**  
**DEADLINE: OCTOBER 15, 2022**

Garden Club Name: West Trenton Garden Club

State: New Jersey

**EXPENSES**

<b>Plants (# X \$.00) (listed below)</b>	\$ \$ 300.00
15 Perennials x \$20	
<b>Delivery of plants</b>	\$ \$ 0.00
<b>Soil amendments/mulch</b>	\$ \$ 0.00
<b>Labor</b>	\$ \$ 1,000.00
<b>Other Purchases (listed below)</b>	\$ \$ 1,960.00
Benches, animal houses, water tank elevation materials, tank bamboo surround, installation materials	
<b>*TOTAL</b>	\$ \$ 3,260.00

**INCOME**

<b>NGC Plant America Community Project Grant</b>	\$ \$ 1,000.00
<b>Approximate value of donated Labor/Services</b>	\$ \$ 1,000.00
<b>Approximate value of donated Supplies/products</b>	\$ \$ 0.00
<b>Club's Contribution</b>	\$ \$ 660.00
<b>Other Organizations' Donation/s</b>	\$ \$ 0.00
<b>Other (listed below)</b>	\$ \$ 600.00
Bench sponsors: Local bank, restaurants, will be acknowledged with bench name plates	
<b>*TOTAL</b>	\$ \$ 3,260.00

**\*Totals for income and expenses must be equal.**

**Email APPLICATION and BUDGET (and Questions) TO:**  
[PlantAmericaGrants@gardenclub.org](mailto:PlantAmericaGrants@gardenclub.org)



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## **Annex 2 – Initial Project Team Responsibilities January 2023**

### **Description of Project Execution Teams**

#### **Project detailed planning**

- Lead: Rick Lazarick
- Members: (tbd)
- Expand the Project Plan details as the project evolves, including overall schedule
- Establish Leads and members for each of the Project Execution Teams
- Coordinate with all Team Leads, via email, Zoom meeting, phone conversation as required. Collaborate on project decisions.
- Coordinate with WTGC President/leadership, including volunteer needs & opportunities
- Coordinate with Ewing Township, advising them of the grant and the project plans
- Financial planning and tracking
- Provide periodic project information to the Club (meetings, newsletter, etc.)

#### **Garden design**

- Lead: Jeff Tryon, Rutgers
- Members: (tbd)
- Renew communications with Rutgers and confirm their partnership
- Site visit for Rutgers reps (could be multiple)
- Agree upon Landscape design objectives, philosophy (email, Zoom,...)
- Provide plant suggestions developed for the grant application
- Rutgers class members+ develop draft plans, review with WTGC team, revise plans
- Deliverable – layout plans and associated file to illustrate the landscape design details
- To be used in part to drive plant acquisition
- Collaborate as necessary during execution

#### **Acquisitions**

- Lead: (tbd)
- Members: (tbd)
- Develop a comprehensive list of all products required to purchase
- Obtain cost estimates and product alternatives
  - For locally sourced product, seek cost discounts/sharing
- Review product selections with full project team leads, obtain approval to purchase
- Order products, payment by the WTGC Treasurer, arrange delivery as needed, based on schedule



### **Sponsor development**

- Lead: (tbd)
- Members: (need several)
- Develop goals for funds from sponsors, sponsor motivation, candidate sponsor
  - Initial thoughts: cost of benches, signage on benches acknowledging sponsors
  - Investors/Citizens Bank (WTGC bank), Dunkin Donuts, 7-11, Café 52, all local businesses
- Develop prepared materials to introduce sponsors
- Approach sponsors with materials, signage examples and suggested donation levels
- Allow lead time for sponsor business decision process
- Expand goals if initially successful in fulfilling – add items to sponsor
- Accept funds from sponsors, issue thank you letters, publicize sponsorships

### **Volunteer coordination**

- Lead: (tbd)
- Members: (tbd)
- Develop installation schedule, several different dates
- Coordinate with Acquisition team lead
- Offer volunteer opportunities to WTGC members (well in advance)

### **Community outreach**

- Lead: (tbd) Anne?
- Members: (tbd)
- Coordinate Arbor Day event at the Park
- Coordinate with Ewing Township – solicit support with water tank elevation task, offer to provide materials if Public Works can design/build elevation platform
- Coordinate with West Trenton Fire Co. – water refill, elevated platform functionality
- Reach out to Ewing Observer – fill them in on project plans and progress reports, potential for one or more articles in the Monthly publication
- Other opportunities for publicity



Annex 3 – Photo Gallery | The Park



Before



After



Annex 3 – Photo Gallery | Benches



Before



After



Annex 3 – Photo Gallery | Blue Star Memorial





Annex 3 – Photo Gallery | Commemorative Bricks



Before



After



## Annex 3 – Photo Gallery | Volunteers



Devah Brinker, Anne Skalka, Anne Chmielewski, Jeff Tryon, Karen Lewendowski, Heidi Furman



Sypek students



Karen Lewendowski, Rick Lazarick



Rick Lazarick, Heidi Furman, Anne Chmielewski, Christine Kamping, Devah Brinker, a local visitor, June Miller, Victoria Rivera-Cruz



Ed Birdsall



Ed Birdsall and a team of students