

Town of Bethlehem

Albany County, NY

Application for Albany County Park Improvement Initiative Funds

August 30, 2024

A Pocket Park Facelift in the Historic Heart of Olde Delmar

Executive Summary

The Town of Bethlehem has a secret, not unlike other communities, but still quite special. It's a pocket park in one of the densest parts of our town, serving many diverse residents and visitors of our town, on the corner of Adams Place and Adams Street in Olde Delmar, marked by two white pillars that serve to greet people entering the neighborhood. It's small but it serves an incredible number of people every day.

On any given night, you may see a pack of teenagers gathered in the park, conveniently hidden behind the row hedges, doing what so many of us long to see teenagers doing - not looking at their phones or in their basements playing video games, but socializing in small groups. On a recent afternoon, there was a lone woman sitting in the shade, eating a meal she had carefully packed - perhaps a visitor to the Stram Center across the street. Just about any time of day, you can see dog walkers passing by - many in this neighborhood - using the garbage bins, taking a rest at a bench, or just letting their dogs enjoy the scents of this green space. During the Covid pandemic, this park became an extension of our homes - a safe, outdoor space for many people in the neighborhood to retreat to, walk through, and even socialize or play music in. After the pandemic, several memorial benches - in memory of residents who frequented the park and are now gone - popped up, installed by the Town of Bethlehem. The benches appearing over time emphasize what many of us already knew, which is just how special this place is.

It's small, only 0.28 acres, with an intermittent stream, part of the Normans Kill and Hudson watersheds, at the lowest point. Given its location in a highly walked and walkable neighborhood, ***this pocket park is a critical artery in the heart of Olde Delmar that deserves both improvements and intention*** as part of any future planning and upgrades. This proposal aims to bring *both* to Olde Delmar and the Town of Bethlehem - the ***improvements*** needed to create a thoughtful, planned, and permanent infrastructure that better supports the many users and visitors to the park and the ***intention*** critical to ensure that the Town of Bethlehem is maximizing this incredible, centrally located space for the benefit of *all* residents and visitors to the neighborhood. The Town of Bethlehem respectfully requests \$19,000 to support community engagement and outreach, design and planning, materials, and construction for this Olde Delmar treasure and historic pocket park.

Project Expenses

This proposal covers Phase I of this project from design to construction. The project design will require that we consult with a landscape designer/architect who can design and plan a park that meets the needs of the neighborhood, maximizing its existing attributes that residents and visitors seem to value such as shade, quiet, and respite from the surrounding area, while adding new and

much-needed enhancements and attention that will ensure greater use and usability by more residents and visitors. We also hope to include a portion of funding to support community engagement and outreach, since community involvement in a park directly [correlates to an increase](#) in their social capital, i.e. how invested residents feel towards their park. Additional funds will be used for construction and the purchase of sustainable materials, including stonework, signage, and vegetative landscaping. Phase I of this project, with proposed funding from Albany County, will create basic and permanent improvements and intention to the existing infrastructure. The following represent the costs associated with Phase I of this project as part of this proposal:

Expense	Amount
Facilitated community engagement	\$500
Landscape design and technical support	\$9,000
Materials and signage	\$9,500
Total	\$19,000

Additional labor and maintenance will be provided as an in-kind contribution by the Town of Bethlehem.

Future project phases beyond this proposed workplan may include creating a green infrastructure education site by taking advantage of the intermittent stream and its floodplain, the construction of permanent structures such as a pavilion if part of a long-term design, and further improvements, or replacement if deemed necessary, of the historic white pillars that serve to welcome visitors to the neighborhood.

Project Benefits and Impact

This pocket park is perhaps one of the most accessible parks in all of Bethlehem, and therefore accessible to many types of residents and visitors, and those who travel by foot, by bike, by bus, and by car to this part of Olde Delmar.

The following summarizes the incredible access that many have to this park, which is directly related to the number of people who will benefit:

- This is the densest part of our town of 35,000 people and will be available to all.
- The adjacent streets, and several of the neighboring ones, have ADA-compliant sidewalks. Several of them have been newly installed or repaired. Without question, this is one of the most walked and walkable parts of our entire town.
- The neighborhood is pedestrian and bike friendly, and is part of Bethlehem’s [Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Network](#).
- The [CDTA bus stop](#) is within one block of the pocket park, making it accessible to residents traveling to and from Bethlehem by bus.
- This is a central area for Bethlehem Central School District buses, with the corner of Adams and Adams serving as a popular High School bus stop, and at times, a Hamagrael Elementary or Middle School stop too.
- The pocket park is two blocks from Delmar’s ‘downtown’ area known as the Four Corners, with its many shops, bars, book store, and restaurants.

- The [Stram Center for Integrative Medicine](#) is located across the street.
- There are two churches - the [Delmar Reformed Church](#) and [St. Thomas The Apostle Catholic Church](#) - and the [Bethlehem Chabad](#), all within one block from the pocket park.
- The St Thomas School is also within one block. While not in the immediate neighborhood, the Bethlehem Central Middle School and Hamagrael Elementary serve this neighborhood and are within walking distance.

The benefits this small park provides in an otherwise residential neighborhood with few public spaces cannot be overstated. Parks, of course, provide many [health benefits](#) such as improving individuals' physical and mental health, brain development in children, and social health for communities. Trees and green spaces provide additional benefits such as [mitigating the effects of higher temperatures](#), [filtering pollutants from the air](#) (including the pollution we have experienced recently from wildfires), [reducing stormwater runoff, and improving water quality by filtering pollutants](#). Many of these environmental threats will only worsen with climate change, so safeguarding our natural resources, not only in our major parks but also in our smaller pocket parks and green spaces situated in our densest neighborhoods, will be critically important.

Need for Assistance and Deficits

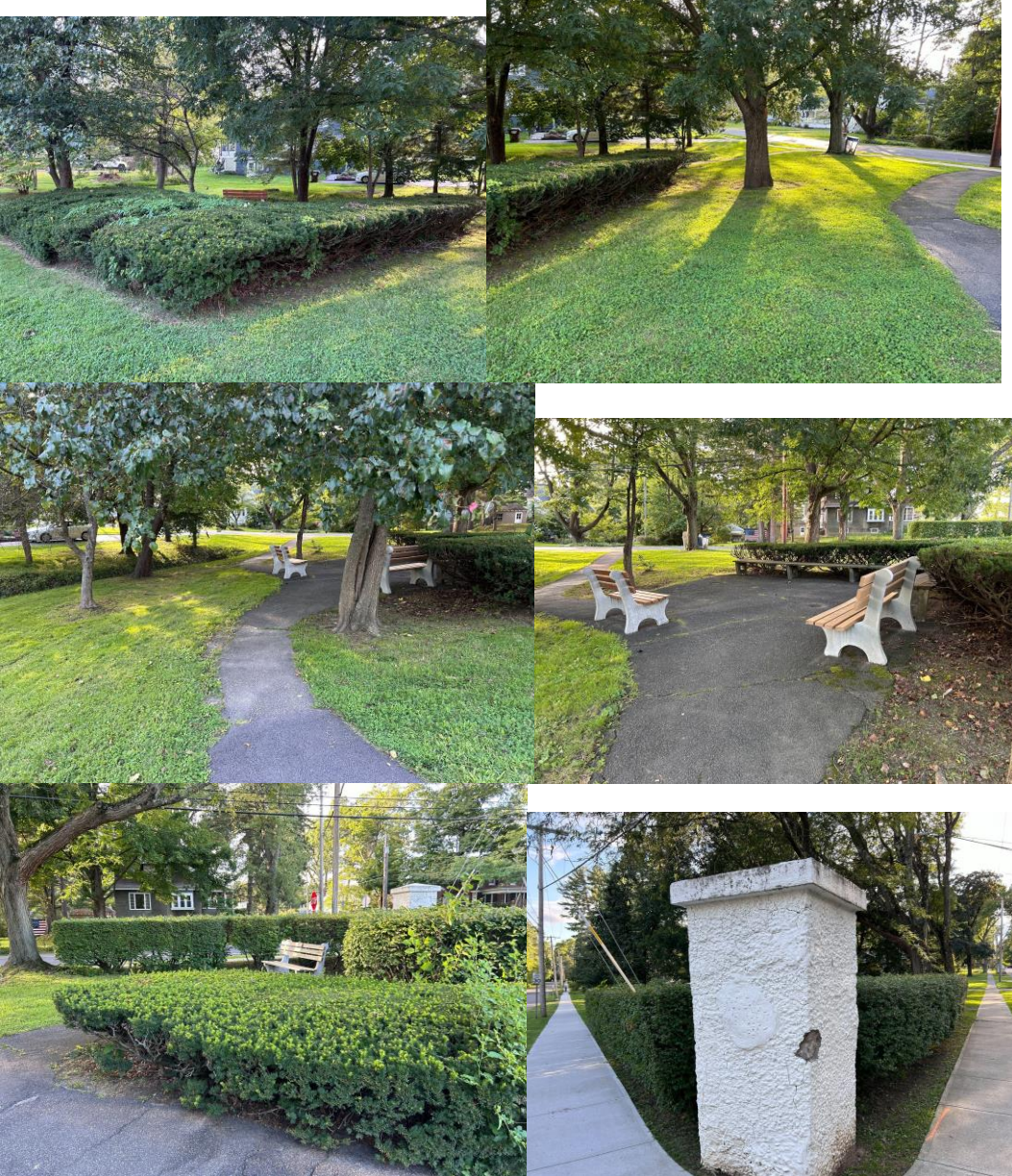
Like many pocket parks and small suburban/urban green spaces, this pocket park has been largely overlooked. Though our pocket parks are mentioned in our 2022 Bethlehem Forward Comprehensive Plan Update, they need the attention they deserve in line with other well-used parks. The Town of Bethlehem requires and requests additional assistance to take advantage of this green space and natural resource in the heart of Olde Delmar. Namely, we seek the assistance of a landscape architect who can help create a more thoughtful vision for the space and the purchase of materials and technical support to put the plan into action. We hope to supplement the project with Town laborers, if and when needed, and of course for the maintenance of the site.

Matching Funds

As of now, there are no matching funds.

Appendix

The following represent some existing photos of the Olde Delmar pocket park, which show an historic white pillar that is crumbling and in need of repair, memorial benches that are plopped down with no sense of coordinating with existing benches or the landscape, a garbage and recycling bin that do not match and though well-used are unsightly, hedges that have long since overgrown and taken over most of the park, and two paved paths that are usable but unsightly and cracking. That said, there is great potential with this space, with the shading from large trees, the vegetation and green space, some of the privacy offered by a line of hedges parallel to the street, and a small intermittent stream at the base of the park.



The following represent a similarly-sized pocket park in Wellfleet, MA called [Memorial Garden](#) which shows how more intention and thought can greatly change a small public space - the placement of matching memorial benches in a careful and systematic way, stone pavers that frame the space, a visually appealing centerpiece surrounded by a stone sitting ledge for additional and natural-looking seating, and simple vegetative landscaping. The space also provides privacy through landscaping since it cannot be seen from the sidewalk or street.

Pathways are made of natural stone and pavers. This is a place that can be used by individuals or as a public space for small events.



Letter of Support #1

August 29, 2024

Honorable Dan McCoy, Albany County Executive
Albany County Executive's Office
Albany County Parks & Recreation
Albany County Legislature

Via Email: Recreation@albanycountyny.gov

I am writing in strong support for the Town of Bethlehem's application to the *Albany County Municipal Park Improvement Initiative Grant Opportunity* for the proposed project entitled, *A Pocket Park Facelift in the Historic Heart of Olde Delmar*.

I am a resident of Olde Delmar in the Town of Bethlehem for nearly 20 years, and have raised my only son here with my wife, Erin MacArthur LaDue. We are avid walkers and bikers in Olde Delmar as well as frequent customers and visitors to the businesses in the Four Corners area. We have frequented the Olde Delmar pocket park as we move around the area, and our son and his friends have stopped there en route to other destinations in the area. It is a natural spot for people to pass through, rest, and enjoy a small bit of green space.

Like many residents of this densely populated part of town, we would love to see this pocket park receive the upgrades and thoughtful design that it deserves. It is a well-used park, and could be greatly improved with the use of the funds from this grant opportunity.

I sincerely hope you support the Town of Bethlehem's application to support our beloved pocket park.

Sincerely,

William LaDue
51 Fairway Ave
Delmar, NY 12054
917-576-4288

Letter of Support #2

August 29, 2024

Honorable Dan McCoy, Albany County Executive
Albany County Executive's Office
Albany County Parks & Recreation
Albany County Legislature

Via Email: Recreation@albanycountyny.gov

Dear County Executive McCoy and Albany County:

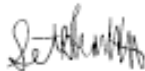
I am writing in support of the Town of Bethlehem's application to the *Albany County Municipal Park Improvement Initiative Grant Opportunity* for the proposed project entitled, *A Pocket Park Facelift in the Historic Heart of Olde Delmar*.

I am a resident at 13 Hawthorne Ave in Delmar, which is just down the street from the Olde Delmar pocket park. My wife and I moved here just a few years ago, and are raising our family here. My sister and her family live just a couple doors down at 19 Hawthorne Ave. My wife and I moved to this part of town largely because of the quality of life, which includes the many green spaces. The pocket park, though small, is one of those green spaces that brings character and a better quality of life to our community. We have two dogs, and we pass through the park on our walks. We hope our children, as they grow, will enjoy the park as we have seen many older kids and teenagers do as we pass by.

I am hopeful that the funds from Albany County will help the Town of Bethlehem be able to upgrade this small pocket park and preserve it as an important resource in this densely populated part of town.

I support the Town of Bethlehem's application.

Sincerely,



Seth Reinhardt
13 Hawthorne Ave
Delmar, NY 12054