

# DONOR NEWSLETTER

January & February 2023



*James A. Brown poses at the Frick Environmental Center*

## Welcome James Brown, Director of Education & the Frick Environmental Center

Last month, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy welcomed James Brown as the new director of education and Frick Environmental Center. James most recently served as the Senior Program Director of Creative Youth Development at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA, he brings nearly two decades of youth development, mentorship, and art expertise to the organization.

“We’re honored to have James join us at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy,” said Catherine Qureshi, President and CEO. “He brings an impressive and unique skillset to the organization, and we’re thrilled to see him flourish in this role as he leads the next generation of park stewards.”

As director of education and the Frick Environmental Center, James will lead the Conservancy’s education team and the implementation of environmental education and STEM-focused programs for people of all ages at the Center itself and parks throughout the city.

“I believe the parks are one of Pittsburgh’s greatest assets, where youth of all ages and backgrounds can come to play, learn, grow, and gather,” said James. “I’m excited to join a talented team of outdoor educators and work together to create exciting and equitable park experiences at the intersection of nature, sustainability, culture, and wellness.”

While only a few weeks in, James has already hit the ground running. “When it comes to our education programs, we offer something for every age group – pre-K through high school,” said James. “Much like the paths that lead through the park, there’s an educational pathway from early learners to teens. Part of my vision is to strengthen these pathways so that schools and caregivers can provide young people with sustained engagement with nature. I think the hands-on learning experiences in the park are critical in helping young people develop an appreciation for nature and make sense of the complex environmental challenges we face.”

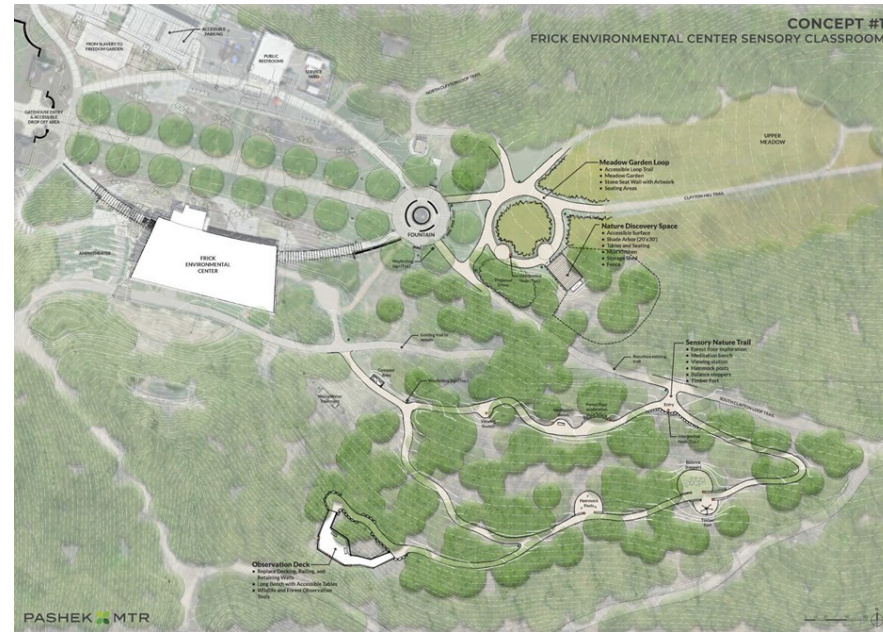


## Work advances on new sensory classroom and trail in Frick Park

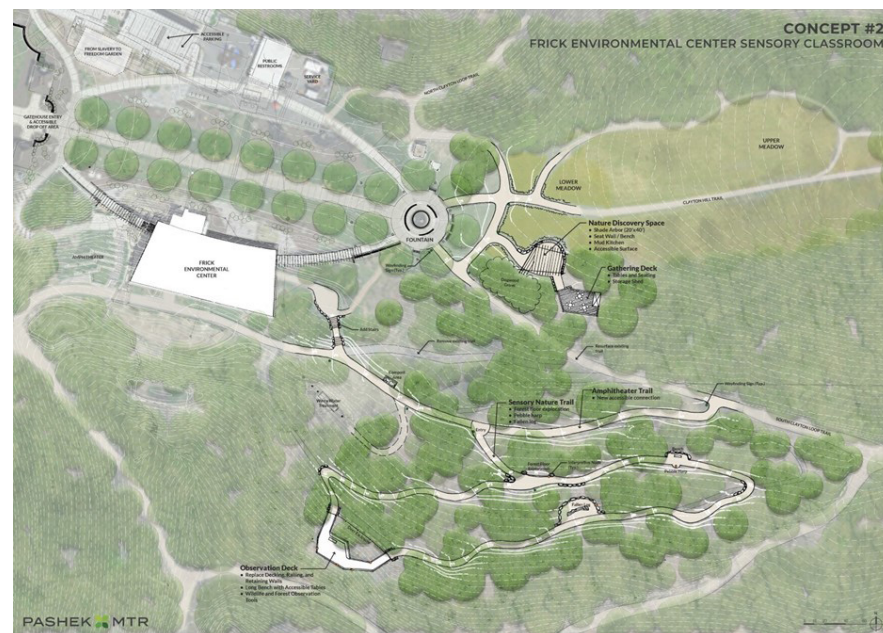
In 2022, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was awarded a grant from the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust to plan, design and conduct community engagement for a new outdoor sensory classroom at the Frick Environmental Center (FEC). The project will unlock both informal and formal nature-based learning opportunities for learners with intellectual and physical disabilities and their families.

Over the past several months, the Conservancy has engaged with focus groups of community members with disabilities, caregivers, teachers, students, and advocates to collect feedback on promoting an accessible and engaging space for all. An Advisory Committee with representatives from the City of Pittsburgh’s Departments of Public Works and City Planning, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and disability advocacy organizations is guiding the community engagement process and sharing critical input to ensure the project responds to the needs of educators and learners with exceptionalities.

The Conservancy is also working closely with experienced parks and sensory landscape-design consultants with the goal of repurposing and enhancing the existing spaces at the FEC with thoughtfully designed improvements to provide structured learning, play, discovery, observation and gathering. The site



**A design concept shows concept #1**



**A design concept shows concept #2**

will accommodate formal education programs hosted by the Conservancy and partner organizations as well as informal opportunities for park users to explore and engage.

Encompassing 3 acres within Frick Park, the project will feature an accessible quarter-mile trail with

stations along the way that encourage visitors to pause and participate in activities that promote learning and engage the senses. Interactive signage, which will be available in Braille and will contain QR codes that lead park users to webpages with more information, will dot the

landscape. Gathering spaces will host groups for picnics and discussions on the lessons learned. There will also be space for quiet contemplation and reflection.

Once built, the project will be the first dedicated sensory space within a public park in Pittsburgh and will welcome learners from across the region.

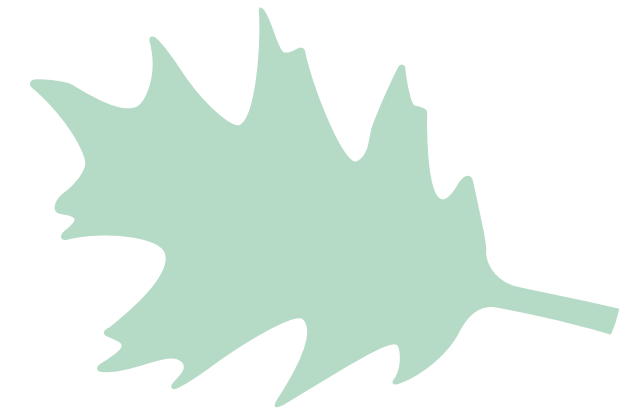
“The intent here is to protect nature as much as possible and tuck in these experiences where we can,” said Brandon Riley, Capital Projects Manager in a recent article in TribLive. “Nature is really the star. We’re trying to weave our way through it and preserve that nature, but also make it accessible to people.”

Recently, two conceptual designs were released to the public. Throughout January and February, public meetings, tours of the site, and an online survey allowed the public an opportunity to identify what they enjoyed about different elements included in each of the conceptual designs.

Next, the Conservancy will synthesize the input collected throughout the community

engagement process thus far and create a design that incorporates this feedback. As the design phase continues, the Conservancy will host additional public meetings and engagement opportunities for the public to continue to weigh-in on the Sensory Classroom.

Stay tuned to the EngagePGH webpage ([engage.pittsburghpa.gov/fec-sensory-classroom](https://engage.pittsburghpa.gov/fec-sensory-classroom)) and the Conservancy’s social media channels for more information on the project and future opportunities to lend your feedback.



## Revitalizing the Beloved Walled Garden at Mellon Park

In partnership with the City of Pittsburgh and Friends of Mellon Park, we are thrilled to announce that work on the first phase of a new restoration project in the Walled Garden at Mellon Park will begin this month. This first phase of work will repair and restore the sandstone paver pathways on the perimeter of the garden, address shifting and settling of the pavers, and ensure that the stones remain sturdily in place. The project will ensure that current and future generations can continue to enjoy this beloved park space. The garden will be closed during construction, anticipated to begin mid-February or early March as weather allows, and will be complete by the end of April 2023.



**A rendering shows proposed pathway improvements at the Walled Garden in Mellon Park.**





## PPC Continues Ecosystem Restoration Efforts in Emerald View Park

The most recent addition to Pittsburgh’s list of Regional Parks, Emerald View Park, spans 257 acres across the wooded slopes of the Mount Washington, Duquesne Heights, and Allentown neighborhoods. The park features winding trails, steep hillsides, stunning vista points of downtown Pittsburgh and surrounding communities, and recreational assets, including playgrounds, ballfields, and off-leash dog areas, and Depression-era sandstone steps and walls.

Since our efforts in this park began in 2016, in close collaboration with the City of Pittsburgh, the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation, and other key partners, we have made significant progress toward the remediation, reforestation, habitat restoration, and removal of illegal dumpsites within Emerald View Park. Our efforts have included planting of hundreds of trees, native plants, and perennial flowers, construction of deer “exclosures” to prevent deer from browsing on steep slopes, enhancement of trailhead and park signage, management of invasive species that threaten the health of the park’s ecosystem, and engaging volunteers and residents in these efforts.

### Stantec volunteers in action, planting trees.

Our work in Emerald View Park and parks citywide is driven by passionate champions like the dedicated volunteers from Stantec who have donated their time and energy to our greenspaces. Last year, 15 team members from Stantec planted 64 trees in Emerald View Park’s Greenleaf Trailhead, and this year, Stantec generously contributed funding to support our ongoing efforts to restore the ecosystem of Clayton Hill in Frick Park, another key site within the park system, and plans to return to plant more trees at the site.

“Throughout the year, Stantec employees volunteer in our communities around the globe. Locally in the area, we have continued to support the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy because Pittsburgh’s parks are exceptional and benefit residents year-round,” said Stantec’s Patrick McKenzie. “We enjoy volunteering to local organizations and planting trees provides long-term improvements to Pittsburgh’s parks, benefitting the urban environment, wildlife, and people.”

In 2023, we look forward to continuing efforts to promote a healthier ecosystem, build safer and more accessible trails, and engage volunteers and community members in this work. We encourage you to plan your visit to Emerald View Park and check out all this sprawling and beautiful park has to offer.



**A group of volunteers from Stantec poses for a picture after planting trees in Emerald View Park last year.**



### Help us Gear up for Spring

Your support ensures that the Parks Conservancy has the necessary garden tools to upkeep our parks.

- \$25
- \$50
- Other \$

See enclosed envelope or visit [pittsburghparks.org](http://pittsburghparks.org) for more information.

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy does not solicit contributions from persons or entities in states other than Pennsylvania, New York, or Florida.

**ENGAGE**

Contact Zak Koval at [zkoval@pittsburghparks.org](mailto:zkoval@pittsburghparks.org) or 412.682.7275 ext. 240