

# Charles River Conservancy **ANNUAL REPORT 2022**







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# WELCOME

We present to you returning, favorite activities in the river, and new, captivating park experiences!

The past year was packed with initiatives that the CRC has been continuously working towards, as well as new programs that support the parks and community.

In the spring, record numbers of volunteers helped the parks emerge from winter with the CRC as part of the annual Charles River Earth Day Clean Up. Sixth graders culminated a year of science studies by experimenting with a mini version of our Floating Wetland. Summer came with a splash, as swimmers returned to the Charles River for our community swim. In the fall, the skate and art communities came together as the CRC kicked off the engagement process for a public art project at the Lynch Family Skatepark. And before year’s end, the state announced a design that aligns with our community members’ goals and supports accessibility and transit in the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project—priorities we have been advocating for from the very beginning.

We were so grateful to see even more of you in person this year! The Charles River and its parks are special and unique spaces, but they come alive with you in them.

- If you jumped in the Charles with us, you supported making water quality a priority.
- If you removed litter (as a CRC volunteer or as a good citizen), you helped create a healthier ecosystem.
- If your child experimented with a floating wetland kit, you may have a future park steward.
- If you gave us feedback at the skatepark, you helped to shape the future of the space.
- If you donated to our organization, you made all these programs possible!

We are excited to share this work with you—in the enclosed pages and in real life.

**Laura Jasinski**  
Executive Director

**Lonsdale Koester**  
Board Chair





# ABOUT US

## MISSION

We strive to make the Charles River and its parks a well-maintained network of natural urban places that invite and engage all in their use and stewardship.

## VISION

The Charles River Conservancy lies at the center of the Charles River, its parks, and the park's users. We similarly envision a future in which the Charles River and its parks are celebrated, well-utilized, and connected centers of public life.

## GOALS



Cultivate active engagement with the Charles River



Define the parks as a platform for community and cultural life



Advocate using research and placemaking



Ensure long-term organizational sustainability

## STRATEGIES

- Work through partnerships
- Harness the community
- Leverage impactful pilot projects





# RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The CRC is proud to have accomplished A LOT along the Charles in 2022, from supporting native plant life by addressing invasive species, to keeping trash out of the river and parks, to creating welcoming spaces by maintaining park infrastructure. And we couldn't do it without the extraordinary commitment of volunteers! Our volunteer program works with people of all ages and invites them outside to experience the Charles River parks. Thank you to our volunteers for finding joy in caring for the parks.

*"I felt like I was able to see a tangible change in the park from the beginning to the end of the work I did."*

**- CRC Volunteer**



## CRC Volunteers

After keeping our events steady but small in 2020 and 2021, the CRC was able to quickly scale up as safety requirements eased and the demand for volunteer opportunities skyrocketed. We hosted open community volunteer days, as well as group events for organizations, and invited individuals to join together to care for the parks. Our program works with people of all ages, and we are grateful for the many children and teens who gave time to support the river.



### 23rd Annual Earth Day Cleanup

With 775 registered volunteers, 2022 was our biggest annual event ever. Families, college students, skateboarders, corporate groups, and community members removed hundreds of bags of litter from the parks, enough to fill a 30 yard dumpster!

## C.R.E.W.

In 2022, the CRC began a new volunteer program: Charles River Environmental Watch (C.R.E.W.) This program trains a handful of dedicated volunteers to care for a section of the park independently, picking up litter, monitoring invasive species growth, and noting infrastructure issues. Between May and November of 2022, C.R.E.W. members spent a combined 27.5 hours monitoring the parks and removing 15 bags of trash, providing crucial support that complemented our larger volunteer events.



## CRVMP

Recognizing that the Charles River parks are an important resource for the community, the Charles River Vegetation Management Plan (CRVMP) was developed by DCR to reestablish a native riverbank that is resilient to today's climate. DCR partnered with CRC and additional environmental organizations to develop a multi-year plan to help manage harmful invasive species impacting the Charles River and the parks.



### Hell's Half Acre

We continue to manage exotic invasive plant populations, establish native vegetation, increase wildlife habitat, and educate the public at Hell's Half Acre. In 2022, 58 volunteers helped to cut back and remove seven different invasive plant species in Hell's Half Acre.





Clyde Carmant

# CITY SPLASH

This year marked the inaugural Charles River Swimming Day, which included both the CRC's City Splash community swim and the Charles River Swimming Club's one-mile race! After a multi-year hiatus, it was fantastic to see hundreds of people enjoy a swim in the Charles River! City Splash celebrates the environmental achievements to date and seeks to inspire continuing progress for a cleaner Charles. Although swimming is not generally allowed in the Charles, we obtain a Special Use Permit from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and ensure water quality standards are met for this unique and limited event. This year, we also collaborated with community groups, local businesses, and volunteers to provide a full day of celebration on and off the water!



Enrique Pepen

5

prior "splashes"

5

years of anticipation

1

day of combined river swimming events

300

swimmers in the Charles



Clyde Carmant



Clyde Carmant

Clyde Carmant



*"I wish we could swim in the Charles everyday. But until that's possible, I love that the CRC makes it happen for a day with City Splash!"*

**Jaiye Bynoe**, City Splash Participant



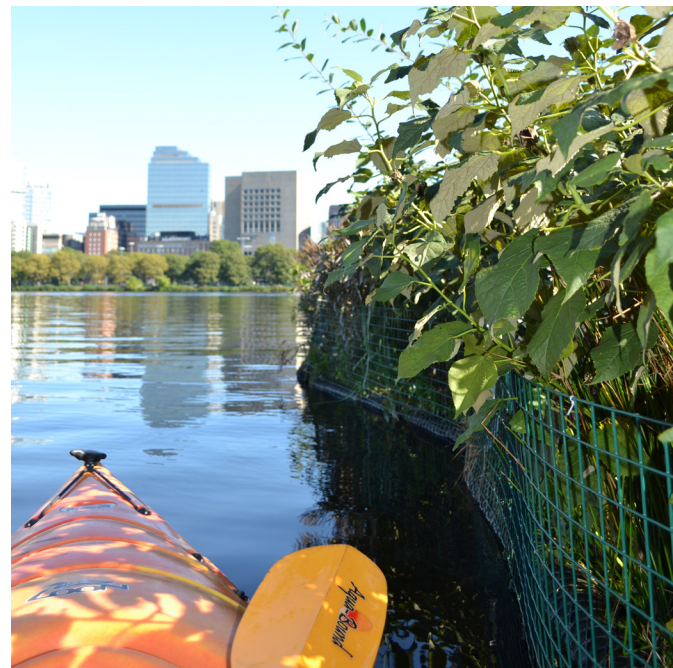
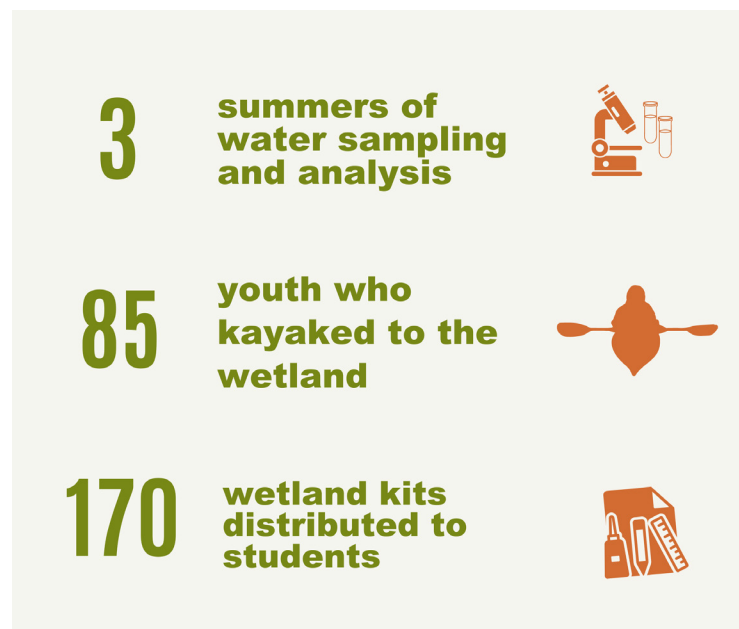


# FLOATING WETLAND

Installing a floating wetland, researching its impact, and engaging the public have brought together a wide audience fascinated by ecological intervention that supports biodiversity in the Charles. We are excited to continue our work by collaborating with local groups and sharing the progress of the project's positive impacts on the Charles River and its community!

## Research

Our multi-year research partner, Northeastern University, gathered its final year of data to examine how the wetland impacts the local ecology in order to understand its potential to improve water quality and increase the river's resilience. Throughout this research project, the CRC and Northeastern have collaborated closely with water quality professionals and environmental advocates to share knowledge and discuss new findings. This has included presenting in public webinars, at conferences, and through stakeholder meetings. We look forward to sharing the final analysis and conclusions from this research in 2023 and how future phases of the floating wetland project might be implemented on a local and basinwide scale that can meet regulatory water quality standards.



## Education & Engagement

The floating wetland was an opportunity for the CRC to create education and engagement activities for the community, especially youth. Our objective is to create tangible relationships to this community research project with hands-on experience. This has included:

- Developing and distributing build-your-own wetlands kits (developed with partner MIT Sea Grant) to Cambridge Public School classrooms
- Partnering with student interns from Cambridge Youth Programs to expose them to design careers and help inform community feedback that will shape an expanded installation
- Kayaking with local youth groups to the wetland for an up-close introduction to the project
- Presenting in local classrooms
- Tabling at community events



*“They reflected on all they had learned, shared the results of their survey, and made a few recommendations about next steps. They met their goal of surveying 50 people too!! I am proud of the group’s efforts and grateful to have been a part of this amazing partnership.”*

**- Benjamin Stephen Godfrey**, Preteen Program Director  
Cambridge Youth Programs

*Reflecting on the achievements of the students who collaborated with the CRC.*

## Envisioning the Future

Installing the first artificial wetland in the Charles River was a major accomplishment and an important step in realizing innovative approaches to a healthier, more resilient Charles River. In order to have a meaningful impact on the river's ecology, however, the project needs to be expanded in scale. With this understanding, the CRC continues to work with public and private stakeholders to explore opportunities, criteria and a vision for a greener, more biodiverse and healthier river. In collaboration with Perkins&Will, we developed renderings to imagine what it could look like, which will be shared in 2023.

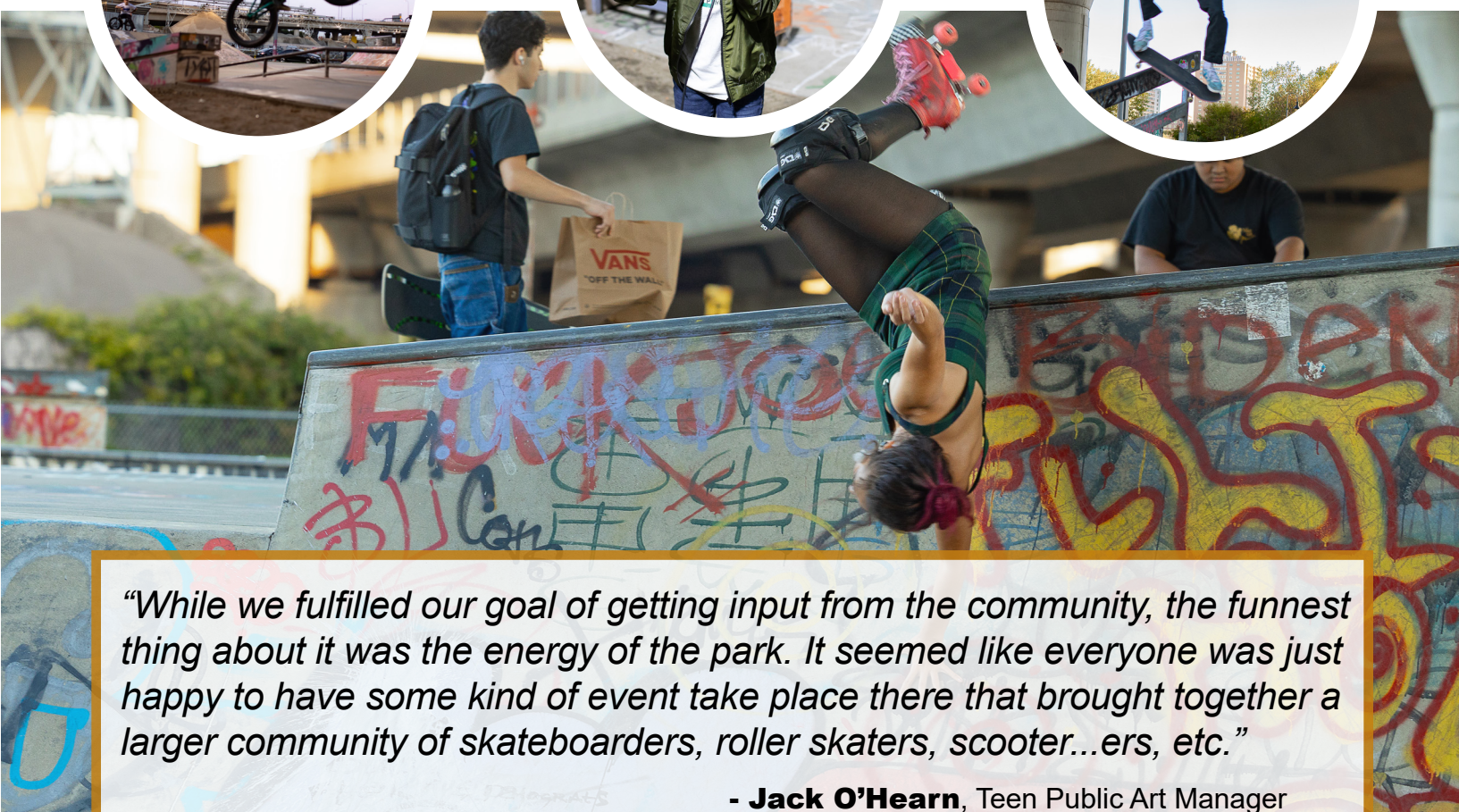




# LYNCH FAMILY SKATEPARK

## Public Art Project

The CRC is excited to support and strengthen the park’s physical and social infrastructure by pursuing a public art project at the site. Our goal for this project is to open up conversations for an inclusive park experience that will result in a public art installation that celebrates park users and invites new audiences to the riverfront. In 2022, we focused on building partners within the skate, skatepark and art communities, which allowed us to develop a plan for engagement. This engagement kicked off this past fall with a Social Justice Skate Jam that asked skatepark users their feedback on how the Lynch Family Skatepark can be improved socially and physically to better support the skate experience. The CRC partnered with the Cambridge Hip-Hop Collective, Community Art Center, LonelyBones Skate Co., and the Chill Foundation to develop questions to understand park users’ experience at the Lynch Family Skatepark; **we received over 100 comments**. These partnerships and the feedback collected from skatepark users will support a series of forums in 2023 to further understand how public art can support the needs of the space.



*“While we fulfilled our goal of getting input from the community, the funnest thing about it was the energy of the park. It seemed like everyone was just happy to have some kind of event take place there that brought together a larger community of skateboarders, roller skaters, scooter...ers, etc.”*

**- Jack O’Hearn**, Teen Public Art Manager  
Community Art Center

Reflecting on the 2022 Social Justice Skate Jam.





# ADVOCACY

The CRC advocates to safeguard the urban parks along the Charles River, to increase community access to these special places, and to ensure the best possible outcomes for the river and surrounding communities.

## Memorial Drive & Riverbend Park

The CRC is a proud member of the Memorial Drive Alliance (MDA), a coalition of community members who care deeply about the natural beauty and health of the Charles River and the ability of people to walk, run, and bike along Memorial Drive safely. We have been committed to supporting and expanding Riverbend Park, which includes open streets that prioritize people walking, running, and rolling by closing vehicular access. In addition, we continuously work to ensure longer term improvements and protections during DCR’s Memorial Drive Phase III planning process, such as a road diet that increases people’s access to the river and protects the iconic landscape and ecology.



Clyde Carmant

# Resources for DCR and our State Parks

The CRC’s Executive Director served on the DCR Special Commission, representing and working closely with Friends Groups throughout the state and ensuring their voices were heard throughout the process. In early 2022 lead consultant UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) submitted their final report to the State House that underscored the value of our state parks system – not only to the ecosystem, but also to the economy – and the need to increase the budget and capacity of a chronically-underfunded DCR. It included recommendations for the agency to develop a strategic plan, reduce deferred maintenance, improve internal processes and external communications, and to better

leverage Friends Groups and partners, like the CRC. These priorities were informed through a CRC-drafted comment letter signed by over 58 organizations from across the state.

The CRC continued to work closely with DCR leadership as the agency developed a Strategic Readiness roadmap in accordance with the Commission’s recommendations. Our efforts to support DCR’s effectiveness included a briefing of the joint House and Senate Park Caucus. CRC will continue this momentum into the new legislative session, coordinating with partners and lawmakers to secure funding for our critically important state parks.



Aaron John Bourque

## I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

The CRC continued its involvement in the Allston Multimodal Project as a member of the project’s Task Force that has been building consensus for a road design that prioritizes connectivity to the river and parks, seamless walking and biking pathways, and improved transit. After years of advocacy work, the CRC and project Task Force achieved a huge win when **MassDOT announced the Modified At-Grade option as the preferred alternative** which public stakeholders, including the CRC, have tirelessly advocated for.

“While the review process requires us to continue advancing several design alternatives, MassDOT’s view is that [the Modified At-Grade] option has the broadest support among key stakeholder groups, and represents the best choice to expand access to transit, facilitate new or improved connections for cyclists and pedestrians, and allows for new economic development opportunities within the area.”

**- Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver**

*From “MassDOT Declares Preferred Alternative...” Press Release*

1

win for public stakeholders on the I-90 project

58

Friends groups joined together to improve DCR

13

letters signed onto or publicly commented

70

attendees briefed at the Congressional Parks Caucus



# THE RIVER BANK ANNUAL FUND



The River Bank, our annual fund, supports our mission to make the Charles River and its parks active, attractive, and accessible to all.

None of the accomplishments you read about in our annual report would be possible without our supporters. The River Bank not only ensures the CRC’s financial stability and growth that is needed to continue impactful work along the river, it also connects supporters to our work in a way that is meaningful to all.

We engage with and thank donors at all levels, providing walking and kayak tours, volunteer days, and recognition through our social media, e-newsletter spotlights, and Annual Report publications.

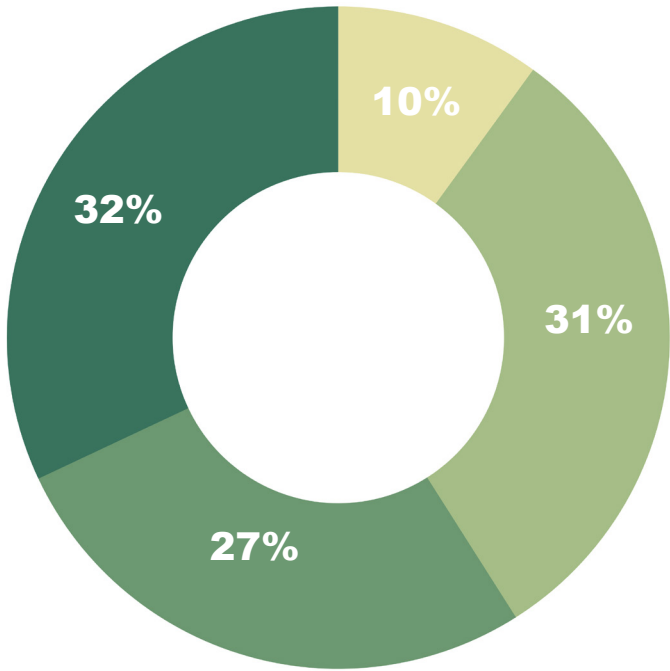
Thank you to each and every one of our supporters for your continued involvement and investment that help secure our future.

*“The strength of the CRC lies in our incredible donors, whose support connects them to our achievements for and along the river.”*

**Laura Jasinski,**  
Executive Director, CRC

# FINANCIALS

The CRC’s fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30. In FY2022, which ended on September 30, 2022, the CRC had **\$794,079** in Revenue and **\$693,254** in Expenses.



## Revenue

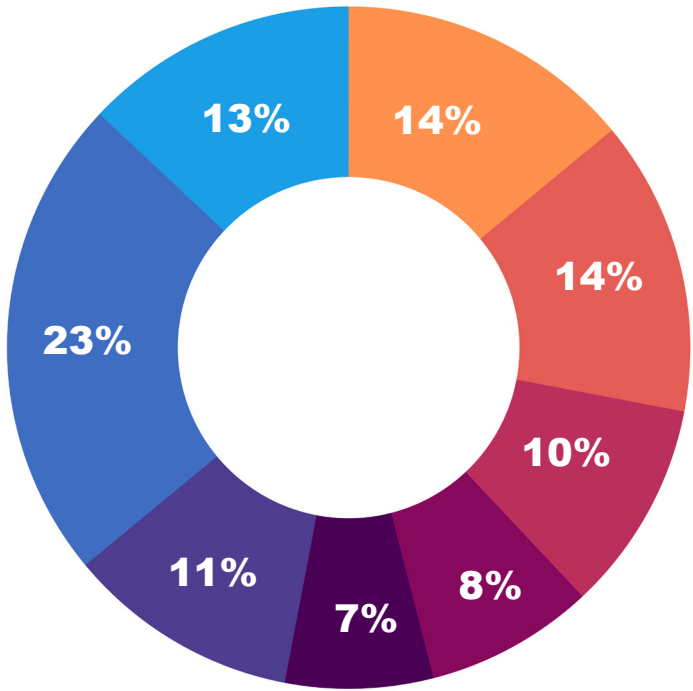
### Sources

- Foundations
- Corporations
- Government
- Individuals



### Type of Support

- Unrestricted 76%
- Restricted 24%



## Expenses

- Floating Wetlands
- Volunteer Programs
- Education and Other Projects
- Swimming
- Advocacy
- Communications & Outreach
- Administration
- Development

For a copy of our complete Fiscal Year 2022 financials, visit [thecharles.org/about/public-documents](https://thecharles.org/about/public-documents)





Aaron John Bourque

# DONORS

*Fiscal Year 2022 (October 1, 2021–September 30, 2022)*

**\$50,000 or more**

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**\$25,000 to \$49,999**

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**\$10,000 to \$24,999**

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The Wyss Foundation

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**\$1,000 to \$2,499**

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## Charles River Conservancy

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# GET INVOLVED

## 1. Connect

Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, check out our website, and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Learn more at [thecharles.org](https://thecharles.org)

## 2. Volunteer

Join us for one of our Saturday volunteer events, which are free and open to all, or schedule an event for your company or group during our 2023 season! Learn more at [thecharles.org/volunteer](https://thecharles.org/volunteer)

## 3. Donate

Your financial support will enable innovative ecological projects, maintenance to keep these public spaces welcoming for all, and advocacy to ensure that the public's interest in the parks is protected. Learn more at [thecharles.org/support](https://thecharles.org/support)



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