



For: Immediate Release
Monday, October 3, 2016
What: Rye Town Park Accepted For Capstone Project
When: Notice Received September 29, 2016

Rye Town Park (RTP) was notified on September 29 that its application to the highly competitive NYU/Wagner Capstone Program has been selected. Notice of selection was sent by Elizabeth F. Larsen, Director of Academic Development for the NYU Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

The Capstone program, which is part of the school's core curriculum, provides students with both a critical learning experience and an opportunity to perform a meaningful public service. Over the course of an academic year, the Capstone team will work as consultants for RTP to address key strategic and operational issues. "This is the first step in a process which will include the Commission, staff and all stakeholders in determining the future of our park," observed Commission President and Rye Town Supervisor Gary Zuckerman. Commissioner Benedict Salanitro added, "Involving the public will be a key component of this project."

The decision to apply for the Capstone Program evolved out of RTP's Annual Community Conversation event held last May. "In reviewing past park activities and soliciting suggestions for the future, it became clear that a community-wide visioning exercise would be enormously helpful," observed Debbie Reisner, Secretary to the Commission and Chief-of-Staff to the Town of Rye and herself, a graduate of NYU/Wagner. "The Park's Commission will be able to use the Capstone Team's findings and final report as a framework for making long-range management decisions for the park."

The application was co-authored by Reisner and Helen Gates, a community volunteer who has secured three prior Capstone teams for local organizations. Co-founder of The Rye Town Park Alliance Jamie Jensen also made key contributions to the final proposal. "Helen's and Jamie's leadership on this initiative were pivotal," said Ms. Reisner.

The proposal included four parts: 1) Conduct qualitative and quantitative research such as surveys and town hall forums among the park's stakeholders; 2) Identify best practices of parks and how they are used in similar circumstances (i.e., located in residential, suburban environments); 3) Develop performance metrics and outline a framework for future success. (In other words, How do you measure a successful park?); 4) Identify strategies for serving a social good, while also sustaining the environmental wellbeing of the park.

The Capstone team that selected Rye Town Park's proposal includes four students: Colin Storey Murphy, Barbara Ioannidis, Jenny O'Connell, and Chelsea Brandon. Their faculty adviser on the project is Michael Keane. Mr. Keane, AICP, is an urban planner with professional planning experience in the public and private sectors, both in the United States and internationally.

Mr. Murphy told Ms. Reisner that "my teammates and I were all very intrigued by your proposal for Rye Town Park, and we are excited to be working with you on this project. As a native of Westchester myself, I am looking forward to getting some planning experience back in my home territory."

Capstone partners last year included: Bloomberg Associates, The MTA, and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development.