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Restoration of World War I memorial in Green Hill Park on tap



By Nick Kotsopoulos
Telegram & Gazette Staff Follow @NCKotsopoulos

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WORCESTER - City parks officials and the Green Hill Park Coalition are collaborating to restore a virtually forgotten piece of local history - the World War I Memorial Grove in Green Hill Park.

The Parks and Recreation Commission authorized the undertaking Thursday night, with the goal of restoring the memorial site so it becomes another focal point in the city's flagship park and more fittingly honors city residents who died while serving this country during World War I.

Memorial Grove was dedicated in 1928 and established by American Legion Post 5, which is no longer in existence.

The grove is off the Green Hill Parkway entrance to Green Hill Park, near the Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial and south of the outdoor Forum Theatre.

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Service from worcester who died during world war I - that were neatly planted in 22 rows. It is one of the few World War I memorials in the city.

Beneath each tree, a bronze plaque was placed, identifying the deceased service member and the branch of the armed services the person served in.

But time and vandalism have taken a toll on Memorial Grove.

Robert C. Antonelli, assistant commissioner of public works and parks, said many of the trees have died from age or disease, while other parts of Memorial Grove have become overgrown or were vandalized.

Today, about 212 of the original trees remain standing, while all of the individual memorial plaques are long gone and no one seems to know what became of them.

The walkway leading to Memorial Grove has also fallen into disrepair, the ornamental shrubbery that once provided color to the grove no longer exists, and even the flagpole that once stood at the top of the hill is gone.

"Probably less than 5 percent of the people who live in this city know that Memorial Grove exists or what it is all about," said Brian P. McCarthy, president of the Green Hill Park Coalition. "We'd like to bring it back as much as we can, and even add to it, so people are more aware of what this memorial is all about."

Mr. Antonelli said Mr. McCarthy approached him about the Green Hill Park Coalition wanting to work with the city on restoring Memorial Grove.

With the city renovating the Civil War and World War II monuments on Worcester Common, Mr. Antonelli said, it was only fitting that it also help restore the World War I memorial.

Mr. McCarthy said the renovation would include clearing out the overgrowth and replanting all 380 trees, as well as replacing the walkway to Memorial Grove, repairing the archway and putting in new arbor vitae.

He said they would also like to add an honor roll to the site, where the names of the service members who died during World War I could be memorialized.

Mr. McCarthy said he has set up a bank account for soliciting private donations to have the work done. The city and the coalition are also looking to enlist the help of the Community Services Division of the Worcester County Sheriff's Office for clearing out the brush and overgrowth.

"It's really something when you consider that nearly 400 people from Worcester died while serving their country during that war," Mr. McCarthy said. "And of all those young men who died, more than half of them were first generation of immigrants who had moved to the United States."

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