Rock Creek Conservancy is an award-winning 501(c)(3) nonprofit, an official philanthropic partner to Rock Creek Park (National Park Service), and the only organization dedicated to the entirety of Rock Creek and its parks.
The past year has presented immense challenges to all of us, our families, and our communities. Multiple, compounding crises have threatened our health, our environment, our economy, and our community, and at a time when many have yearned for connection and togetherness, we felt an overwhelming sense of isolation. Though the pandemic has forced a disconcerting shift in our way of life, it has also brought about a recalibration of priorities for individuals and organizations.

Though we know there is much work to be done, Rock Creek Conservancy is optimistic about the future. For the past several months, we’ve seen a resurgence of interest in shared outdoor public areas and green spaces. As a response to stay-at-home orders and remote work, many of us have (re)found a wild home in Rock Creek and its many benefits. The 2021-2023 Strategic Plan is a bold statement of our intent to become an even stronger organization with far greater impact in our watershed and in our communities.

We’re heartened by a renewed focus on racial justice and social equity more broadly. The Conservancy will work to prioritize equity and accessibility in our engagement, programming, and advocacy work. The need for action on climate is becoming more and more prominent at the local, national, and international scales, and the Conservancy is well-positioned to lead on-the-ground climate mitigation and adaptation efforts that enhance our region’s resilience.

As much as we found common ground in Rock Creek’s parklands, this year brought into focus the deep divisions that exist in our society – and even in Rock Creek. This plan offers us an opportunity to reimagine Rock Creek as a place that unites more than divides, just as the Conservancy works to bring together the people and organizations that can work to make Rock Creek a cleaner, healthier watershed.

This Strategic Plan represents the product of several months of research, engagement, and dialogue among the Conservancy’s staff, board, and stakeholders. The plan is designed less as a discrete pathway and more as a framework for action, as we know the next few months—and perhaps the next few years—will bring additional continued uncertainty and volatility. The Strategic Plan provides enough structure to serve as a practical guide while providing the type of flexibility the staff and board will need to adapt to new realities and new opportunities as they appear.

We invite you to join us as we implement this plan and realize the Rock Creek watershed our community deserves. Rock Creek is a reservoir of resilience and offers us hope for a path forward.

Adopted November 2020
By the Rock Creek Conservancy Board of Directors
Rock Creek Conservancy exists to restore Rock Creek and its parklands as a natural oasis for all people to appreciate and protect.

**OUR VALUES**

Rock Creek Conservancy’s values serve as a compass as we do our work. They help to guide our approach to solving problems, engaging our audiences, and advocating on behalf of the watershed. Though our values haven’t changed since our last strategic plan, we revisited and renewed our commitment to each one of them to reinforce our organizational philosophy as a staff and board.

**STEWARDSHIP.** We engage community members throughout the Rock Creek watershed and region to catalyze and cultivate the motivation to take tangible action to increase the health of the Rock Creek parklands and surrounding watershed and achieve a positive, measurable restoration impact.

**LEADERSHIP.** We leverage our unique position to proactively advocate for needed changes in the park and watershed by serving as a convener and connector among government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, institutions, community groups, and residents.

**INVOLVEMENT.** Our people-powered ethos is a constant reminder of our commitment to find and support opportunities for individuals to contribute to our mission in ways that are most meaningful and comfortable for them.

**INCLUSION.** We are committed to becoming an anti-racist organization. We foster more inclusive and welcoming parklands by offering programs that continue to expand the availability of and access to Rock Creek’s resources and benefits for all people.

**TRUST.** We will earn and maintain the trust of our constituents and stakeholders by providing transparent access to and accountability for organizational information, cultivating authentic relationships, and consistently demonstrating our relevance and impact.
OUR VISION

Though this strategic plan will guide the Conservancy’s work over the next three years, we remain committed to achieving lasting, long-term change. Our vision for the future is unabashedly ambitious and our work in the coming years will set us up for enduring positive impact.

The Conservancy envisions a new model of city, in which the natural benefits of the park extend to the communities around it. The creek will meet water quality standards while supporting a rich and diverse ecological community. Surrounding the creek will be healthy, climate-resilient forests – free of invasive plants, with an emerging assemblage of thriving species – that continue to offer protection to the surrounding watershed.

Rock Creek Park will be an inclusive, vibrant park that is able to protect and revitalize the recreational, cultural, educational, and natural resources that define it – from the forests that make it an urban wilderness to the historical structures and performance spaces that bring us together in celebration. Neighbors will recognize its national significance as well as its local benefits, and visitors will support the park through their behaviors and through direct contributions. Through engagement in the park, community members will support the restoration of the Rock Creek watershed.

The residents of the Rock Creek watershed will be engaged stewards of Rock Creek and its parklands, with a strong sense of place fostered in the park. Everyone will feel safe, welcome, and included in Rock Creek Park, especially communities historically underrepresented in conservation.

The Conservancy will operate as a high-performing organization that is able to be responsive and adapt to the social and cultural needs of our communities. As the Conservancy’s organizational and resource capacity grows, so does its positive impact throughout the watershed.
The following four goals emerged following extensive research and through focused discussion within the Conservancy and the community. Each goal represents a uniquely important area of focus for the Conservancy over the next three years, and, while they are distinct and different, they are highly interrelated and interdependent. If the Conservancy’s mission is Rock Creek, each of these goals is a primary tributary. The goals draw upon varied sources, yet each goal flows centrally toward the mission. Collectively, these four goals are aligned to generate mutually supportive impacts downstream.

Over the next three years, the Conservancy will use people-powered restoration to build an ever-more inclusive constituency for Rock Creek and will leverage the power of the park to continue to help our communities thrive.

**GOAL 1 | Develop, and galvanize community support for, an ambitious strategy to improve the health of the Rock Creek watershed.**

Priority strategies include:

- Establish a foundational understanding of the state of the Rock Creek watershed using available data and from a cross-jurisdictional, watershed-wide perspective.
- Identify and advocate for policy and program interventions to reduce effective impervious surface within the watershed and make the watershed more resilient as a greater source of regional adaptation to climate change.

**GOAL 2 | Protect and revitalize Rock Creek Park’s natural, cultural, educational, and recreational resources for the benefit of all people by serving as the park’s philanthropic and stewardship partner.**

Priority strategies include:

- Drive widespread understanding of the alignment between the Conservancy and Rock Creek Park and the resulting benefits for the watershed and the community.
- Leverage public and private funding, including potential land acquisitions, in order to restore Rock Creek Park’s infrastructure and the needs of the natural resources within the park.
GOAL 3 | Grow stewardship for Rock Creek by building and advancing a robust continuum of engagement opportunities that is responsive to evolving community needs and preferences.

Priority strategies include:

• Strengthen existing program impacts by connecting current and aspiring stewards with each other in a meaningful way to inspire greater commitment to Rock Creek Park, the Conservancy, and the watershed.

• Expand the breadth of engagement options, including both service and enjoyment, as well as diversify the focus of the engagement to go beyond natural resources and to reach communities traditionally less connected to the park than others.

GOAL 4 | Strengthen organizational capacity and develop resources to accomplish these strategic goals and position the Conservancy for significant growth.

Priority strategies include:

• Empower staff, board members, and supporters as advocates and ambassadors to ensure that the Conservancy maximizes its potential to attract investment at necessary levels from a diversity of sources.

• Take the necessary action and reflection to become anti-racist, including measures to ensure the board and staff better reflect the communities being served.