

New Canaan Nature Center



Strategic Plan 2022-2027

“Two hundred and fifty-four years have spanned the distance between the day in 1705 when this land passed from the common ownership of the Proprietors of Norwalk into the ownership of William Haynes to the red-letter day of September 30, 1959, when this land returned to common ownership, this time to the people of New Canaan. It is doubtful if there was ever before so much happiness and thanksgiving in evidence in any Town Meeting as there was on that September evening when the magnificent gift of Miss Susan Bliss was accepted with a joyous shout. May we prove worthy of her generosity.”

~ Genevieve C. Salmon

Mission Statement

The New Canaan Nature Center inspires people of all ages to respect, protect and enjoy the world of nature.



Vision Statement

The New Canaan Nature Center will be a leader in environmental education while expanding programming, preserving natural resources, and implementing environmentally responsible land stewardship.



The New Canaan Nature Center is dedicated to inspiring people of all ages to respect, protect and enjoy the world of nature.

The New Canaan Nature Center (NCNC) has been a sanctuary for nature lovers since 1960. In 1959, Susan Bliss deeded her 40-acre estate of buildings, gardens, greenhouses, and specimen plantings to the Town of New Canaan. The deed specified that the property be held and used for the purposes of an arboretum, bird sanctuary, and nature center to encourage the appreciation and study of nature through science, education, and passive recreation. In 1960, the Town appointed the newly formed NCNC to manage the property as a community nature center.

The property features diverse habitats, including wet and dry meadows and woodlands, two ponds, dense thickets, an apple orchard, and a cattail marsh that are home to a wide variety of species. Two miles of trails crisscross the site that is one of the six largest parcels of open space in New Canaan. The NCNC is currently working with Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, a nationally recognized landscape architecture firm specializing in the use of native plants and the eradication of invasive species in the landscape. Larry and his team developed a Land Management Plan for the NCNC that details a method for eliminating invasive species and replacing them with native flora and fauna. This is a multi-year project and the NCNC has committed to implementing the plan without the use of chemicals. In addition to the beautiful landscape, an array of animal exhibits delight visitors exploring the campus and participants in the environmental education programs. The Nature Center's campus is open dawn to dusk and is free to the public.

The buildings on the campus have been renovated over the years to meet the diverse programming needs of the NCNC. In addition to adapting and maintaining the buildings, the NCNC cares for the habitats, trails, and gardens on the property, offers a broad array of programs for people of all ages in New Canaan and beyond, and runs a preschool for children ages 2-5. The Town of New Canaan provides in-kind maintenance of land and buildings.

Monies are raised in support of the NCNC's work through program revenues, special events, individual and corporate donations, grants, and membership dues. Programming revenues contribute 60% to the annual budget.

The NCNC is governed by a Board of Trustees and employs more than 30 full-time, part-time and seasonal staff. Volunteers are an important asset in helping the NCNC achieve its mission.

The NCNC plays a unique role in the community because it connects people of all ages with the natural world and helps promote a sense of wellbeing by inspiring connections with the outdoors. From toddlers in Little Explorers to young children in the preschool to elementary school children in the After School Program and camps to teens in specialty programs and volunteer projects to adults joining activities and classes to seniors who visit with Staying Put and other similar organizations, the NCNC has something for everyone. The NCNC is committed to its mission and will continue to work to expand the opportunities for all of these groups to enjoy the beautiful campus and learn about the natural world.

Strategic Objectives

Highlight and preserve our cornerstone programs and events including:

- ❖ Preschool and Summer Camp.
- ❖ After School Program.
- ❖ Family programs such as Fall Fair, Winter Wonderland, the Maple Syrup Program, Easter Egg Hunt, and Night Hikes.
- ❖ Birthday Parties.
- ❖ Harvest Fest and Holiday Market.
- ❖ Off-site programs, such as Environmental Education Programs at the New York Public Library, the Haley Project, and School Visits
- ❖ Adult programs, such as the hiking group, walks with naturalists, gardening classes, and workshops.
- ❖ New York Botanical Garden Classes satellite location.

Conserve the Nature Center's gardens, habitats, buildings, and collections.

- ❖ Continue to implement the Land Management Plan, returning the property to native plants without the use of chemicals.
- ❖ Develop a building plan that details how to best use the structures on property to meet the needs of the programs being offered.
- ❖ Improve the visitor experience.

Expand programming and diverse outdoor experiences and increase the visibility of all offerings.

- ❖ Continue to expand adult horticulture, environmental programs, and outdoor activities.
- ❖ Explore new community partnerships.
- ❖ Evaluate and strengthen off-site school programs.
- ❖ Create and implement a comprehensive marketing and communications plan.
- ❖ Ensure coordination between the NCNC Strategic Plan and the NCNC Preschool Strategic Plan.

Ensure the Nature Center's stability and growth.

- ❖ Preserve existing revenue sources.
- ❖ Broaden outreach for funding opportunities and secure new income sources to support existing programs as well as new initiatives.
- ❖ Improve database systems used in collecting revenue.
- ❖ Maintain a positive customer experience in purchasing and donating by creating more user-friendly system interfaces.
- ❖ Strengthen the organizational structure.