

FORESTS THROUGH THE EYES OF REBECCA LONGVALL: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

When I sat down with Rebecca Longvall, a Clinton resident and Conservation Agent with the Town of Bolton, to discuss the ways in which forests and open spaces support the health and resilience of communities, she wanted to highlight two specific locations: Central Park in Clinton and Taggart Forest in Bolton.

Forest in the City

Central Park is a four-acre town park in the heart of Clinton, MA¹. Surrounded by a relatively dense urban environment, Central Park provides a splash of color and shade in what is otherwise a traditional New England cityscape. Central Park sits at the convergence of traffic flows and many essential Town amenities, including the Council on Aging, Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton Town Hall, and several local churches.



Rebecca described her personal connection to the Park. “I love to walk my dogs, Axel and Bella, there on the weekends” (Bella pictured to the left). “We do a giant loop.” She went on to describe how well-used and beloved the space is because of its centralized location. “Central Park is home for many events in the town. People walk their dogs, stroll with their kids, have a cup of coffee or a business meeting.” This tree dotted area in the center of town plays an important role in local health, wellbeing, and recreation. Rebecca described how the Park supports community resilience. “It has served as a green and aesthetically appealing haven in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It creates mental relief in the midst of our current high stress context.”

Rebecca went on to highlight the ways in which this urban green space additionally supports ecological resilience. Surrounded by hardscape or other “white elephants” as Henry James once illustrated, Central Park is home to “emerald giants”, trees with massive canopies. This helps to manage stormwater runoff and reduce impacts from extreme heat because permeable and green spaces soak up water and trees provide shading. “Before it even becomes runoff it hits the canopy of the tree and partially evaporates,” said Rebecca. This urban park provides a multitude of benefits to human health through shading, forest

¹ [Clinton Parks and Recreation - Central Park](#)

immersion, and natural systems connections, among others. Looked at in these ways, it becomes a symbol of our interdependence with nature.

A Forest of Possibilities

On the surface, the second property that Rebecca wanted to discuss sits in contrast to Central Park. The Taggart Forest land in Bolton² spans 43 acres. The Town of Bolton



acquired the property in 2020 through the passing of a local ballot question. 4.5 acres have been allocated for town use outside of conservation, but the remaining acres are conserved as woodlands and provide essential wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

Like Central Park in Clinton, however, Taggart Forest provides community health and resilience benefits. Rebecca described how abutters of the property use it regularly, from walking with their families to running a loop through the property. The property also connects to existing sports fields and provides trail connectivity between residential neighborhoods. This 74 acres of contiguous open space plus Taggart's 43 acres comes out to 114 acres total along the Still River and Forbush Mill Road Corridor.

Rebecca went on to describe how the Taggart property provides essential ecological benefits. She referenced the Apple Country Natural Climate Solutions Project when describing the Still River Tributary, which flows into an area of critical environmental concern in Lancaster. According to the project report, this river can support stormwater management, provide flood storage, and support carbon sequestration, all of which provide essential climate resilience benefits³.

Forests, whether urban or rural, support the health and resilience of communities. From the benefits of sitting beneath a tree in Central Park on a hot summer day, to the critical ecological functions and services of a property like Taggart Forest, woodlands bolster a community's ability to thrive in the context of climate change, now and into the future.

² [Town of Bolton MA - Taggart Land Acquisition Project](#)

³ [Apple Country Natural Climate Solutions Project](#)