

Discovering Chestnut Hill: The Wissahickon Watershed is in your backyard

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(http://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/REL_CHC.crop.jpg)

East Brook, an open watercourse and tributary to the Wissahickon, runs through multiple backyards in Northeast Chestnut Hill. The Chestnut Hill Conservancy currently has an easement protecting about 8 acres of East Brook.

by **Angelina R. Jones**

One of the basic principles of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's Conservation and Easements Program is that everyone in Chestnut Hill has a role to play in the conservation of the Wissahickon Valley.

Your backyard may not feel large compared to the 1,800-acre Wissahickon Valley Park, but what you do in your yard impacts the ecology and water quality of Chestnut Hill and the entire valley. Conserving open space on your own property, planting non-invasive plants, and limiting use of fertilizers all contribute to a healthier ecosystem and watershed. Your backyard is part of a network of privately owned land that is a critical natural resource in Chestnut Hill.

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy is proud to be the first accredited urban land trust. When we initiated our program in 1990, we were adopting a tool that had initially been developed for use in rural areas primarily to conserve farmland. Our Conservation and Easements Program, which is run in partnership with the Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW), continues to be a leader in urban land conservation. We currently hold 44 easements, all in the Wissahickon Watershed and have facilitated the permanent protection of over 130 acres of urban open space.

There are, however, 400 more acres in Chestnut Hill that were identified as priority parcels for the conservation of the Wissahickon in FOW's "Protect Our Watershed" study. Since these parcels are privately held, easements are a very useful tool to encourage open space conservation as it allows owners to keep the deed to their property and retain rights of use of the property as long as they do not diminish the conservation value of the land.

Chestnut Hill and Mount Airy have the most dense canopy cover in the city. This means not only that our conserved open spaces offer beautiful, green views, but that they are also part of an extensive urban forest that acts as a vegetative buffer in high drainage areas that lead to the Wissahickon Creek.

Trees and other vegetation on your property mitigate stormwater runoff before it reaches this precious water source. The Wissahickon Valley Park's watershed protects the drinking water of 350,000 Philadelphians, which means the buffer provided by privately owned land adjacent to the park has a very important role to play in maintaining water quality.

The Wissahickon Creek is suffering from increased degradation due to both stormwater runoff and waste water from development in the watershed. These are both sources of pollution that we address with our Conservation and Easements Program by limiting development and protecting vegetative buffers. Protecting the Wissahickon Watershed not only protects water quality; it also preserves recreational opportunities for 1.1 million annual visitors to the Wissahickon Valley Park that includes fishers, birdwatchers, equestrians, hikers, runners and cyclists.

What you do in your own backyard has huge implications for the environment and character of Chestnut Hill and the entire Wissahickon Valley. To learn more about the impact of easements in the protection of our precious cultural and natural resources, go to www.chconservancy.org/easements (<http://www.chconservancy.org/easements>) or contact me at angelina@chconservancy.org (<mailto:angelina@chconservancy.org>).

Angelina R. Jones is conservation and easements manager for the Chestnut Hill Conservancy

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