Like music and art, love of nature is a common language that can transcend political or social boundaries.  *Jimmy Carter*

As we embark on the New Year the Jersey City Parks Coalition (JCPC) reflects upon its accomplishments of 2017 and looks forward to an outstanding 2018. Our success would not be possible without the consistent effort and dedication of our many volunteers; the residents who participated in our City of Trees initiative and other planting efforts, the Parks and Neighborhood groups that are stewards for their local parks, and the Board of Directors that keeps the organization focused and on track. We are thankful for the strong partnership forged with the City of Jersey City and specifically the Department of Public Works, Division of Parks and Forestry & Architecture, the Mayor’s Office and the Division of Health and Human Services. We are very thankful this year for the assistance of Jersey City VISTA volunteers Jillian Baumann and Alma Hidalgo. Their social media and website skills have been a huge asset. Behind the scenes but no less important to all of these projects is the support of our donors & sponsors. So here are some highlights of our year.

- **CITY OF TREES – Summer Tree Care Workshops**  JCPC worked with Jersey City Division of Parks and Forestry, its Arborist, the VISTA volunteers and members of the JCPC Tree Lovers Crew to learn about and care for our young city trees. Three workshops were held in Bayside Park, Pershing Field and Berry Lane Park. Maintenance activities included weeding, securing stakes, pruning young street tree, identifying minor imperfections and watering. These events were made possible by Goldman Sachs, our Education & Engagement Sponsor.

- **OCTREEBER – Fall tree planting events that included:**
  
  o **Washington Park Association Tree Planting Project** - On National Make a Difference Day the TD Bank Tree Planting Day was held in Washington Park, in association with the New Jersey Tree Foundation, Jersey City Parks Coalition, Hudson County, Union City and Jersey City. 81 trees were planted for future generations to enjoy.

  o **Marion Gardens, Jersey City Public Housing Authority Complex** - Also on this day, Jillian and Alma helped Marion Garden residents plant 10 trees and 25 shrubs and plants to help beautify their neighborhood. This initiative came about through the generous support of The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The residents were very excited to get their hands dirty and intend to not only maintain those existing trees but plant more gardens around the neighborhood. They hope that through these types of initiatives more residents can feel empowered to be the agents of change they want to see in their communities and can continue to build capacity and accountability to sustain improved results over time.

- **GROWING OUR ORGANIZATION:** JCPC welcomed the Friends of Boyd McGuiness Park to the Coalition this year. The Friends of Boyd-McGuiness Park are delighted to be joining the JCPC. In the fall, they appointed an interim Board of Directors and approved new bylaws. They also had a very productive general meeting in September
which was attended by Mayor Fulop and several other community leaders. They are thankful for the many people who have helped them get their organization off the ground and look forward their programming for the spring and summer, including a community planting and other activities for the children, families and neighborhood residents. They are a wonderful asset to our organization!

- **ENGAGEMENT AND EXPANSION:** The VISTAs, Jillian and Alma, have also been a huge asset in the development of our social media and website page updates. They have been researching painstakingly on ways to get our amazing volunteers more excited about the projects while also trying to get more volunteers to join. They have been providing an open dialogue within the community about the importance of green infrastructure for storm water management, resiliency, health and overall beauty.

- **BUILDING A CULTURE OF HEALTH IN NEW JERSEY - Communities Moving to Action:** A four-year grant provided by New Jersey Health Initiatives (NJHI), a statewide grant making program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, was awarded to the City of Jersey City in 2015 with JCPC being the non-profit partner. The RWJ group created and presented their Blueprint for Action to create a healthier JC. The group identified the top 5 health concerns, based on County and City rankings, and identified action steps to address the issues over the next few years. They are now in the process of creating a HealthierJC website that allows partners to add contact and program information and list upcoming events. This platform will encourage organizations to improve their outreach and coordinate events and services across the city.

- **Audubon Park, Hamilton Park and Van Vorst Park** had a full calendar of events for the enjoyment of City residents. The highlights included:
  - Easter Egg Hunts, Spring and Fall Clean ups and Plantings, Jazz in the Park in conjunction with the Riverview Jazz Festival, Shakespeare in the Park, Hamilton Park Parkfest, Movies in the Park, Halloween Parades and Events, Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremonies and Farmers Markets. **Friends of Van Vorst Park** also hosted its Annual Disco Party, 5 weddings, 2 proposals, and 16 birthday parties. A busy and engaging year indeed!

- **Canco Park** volunteers put many hours into restoring their lawn, the park’s biggest feature that had started the season in a fairly worn condition. Kevin and Dawn Giambalvo planted a lovely butterfly garden on the south border. Lisa Rodriguez donated a beautiful, mature Japanese maple that was planted in the southeast corner, and Duck Properties donated ninebark shrubs that were planted in borders on both street sides. They presently have a bylaws committee meeting twice or more per month, working through the document an article at a time, and expect to have a completed document soon.

- **Embankment Preservation Coalition** reviewed the Cultural Resources Identification Report issued by the Surface Transportation Board this year, Coalition/City/Rails-to-Trails responses to the report, and the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Opinions related to it. The NJ State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) issued new formal Opinions on historic resources within an area that may be affected by decisions on the Harsimus Branch. **Why are these opinions important?** The Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal agency that will decide the future of the Harsimus Branch, is bound by the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Protection Act to avoid harm to historic and environmental resources in its decisions, if prudent and feasible to do so. In their view, the SHPO Opinions, coupled with the City of Jersey City’s pledge to purchase the rail line and protect it, should carry great weight with the STB.
• **Pershing Field Garden Friends (PFGF)** concentrated its efforts on the installation of the new Patrick Mangini Memorial Garden. This garden pays tribute to Pat, a selfless steward of Pershing Field, who devoted countless hours of his life to the beautification and care of the park’s gardens and green spaces. Tragically, he passed away in 2013. The site was designed by Tim Keating, principle of Earthbilt Landscapes. Other than the plants that Pat had rescued, and were left in place in his honor, the design used only plants native to eastern North America. The native plants will provide more food to native butterflies and bees, greater resilience in the face of the changing climate and be lower maintenance that the lawn that they are replacing. Tim was able to incorporate native stones salvaged from a local development site, to echo Jersey City’s original natural ecosystems. PFGF’s fifteenth Annual Community Planting was centered around this garden but our existing planting beds were also enhanced & maintained with the help of their young 4H volunteers. This student initiative is part of the Rutgers cooperative extension 4H gardening program and headed by Rutgers Master Gardener Jill Koproski, JC Heights resident and PFGF member. The other major project that got underway was their west wall Pershing Field Tree Replacement Project. After several community meetings and much research & professional consultation, 5 old growth trees will remain, the balance of the unhealthy trees will be removed and 27 new mature trees of appropriate size and type will be planted. This initiative is part of the Patrick Mangini Memorial Project and is being financed in part through the PFGF Memorial Fund created by his family and other fundraising efforts. The project will be executed this year and be completed in 2019.

• The **Riverview Neighborhood Association (RNA)** celebrated the official ribbon cutting of the Maria Tuzzo Memorial Volunteer Pavilion on September 23, 2017 during their annual flea market event. The pavilion replaces the 1915 brick structure that had been destroyed by hurricane Sandy in October 2012. The pavilion design is the result of the desires of community members to highlight the stunning view of the Manhattan skyline with an open modern concept that also incorporates historic elements and provides functionality for the community. They continued community involvement in the planning of the renovation of Riverview Fisk Park resulting from many community meetings since 2016 to gain input for specific features desired. RNA then provided that feedback to the city planners this year to arrive at a final concept. Construction should begin in 2018. About four years ago the RNA board was approached by residents regarding a problem with dog owners use of Janet Moore Park as a dog run. There were obvious health and safety issues involved that affected the children and parents using the park. RNA suggested a solution to the city to follow through on a plan to develop adjoining Tumulty Park as a dog park. After nearly three years of discussion, construction has begun for this open space as intended in the 2008 Park’s Master plan. They successfully partnered with The Statuary and Riverviewjazz.org in 2017 to originate art and music programming on historic Holland Street and continue to look for ways to improve and restore this unique landmarked street for use as open space, art and music performances.

• **At Sgt Anthony Park** last year the Sgt Anthony Neighborhood Association was glad to once again host the spring flea market, introduce Yoga in the park every Sunday morning over the summer, had a movie in the park. Preparations for repairing the dog-run started at the year’s end. They look forward to more members joining them in 2018 and are working diligently, prioritizing the replacement of the broken playground this year.

• **Washington Park Association (WPA)** Kicked off their summer gardening maintenance program in Washington Park with Capt Martinez and Lieutenant French from the North District Police Precinct lead a amazing group of JCPD Officers to reshape gardens, weed, plant and add new wood chips to the pathways in the Learning Garden of Washington Park. The group of law enforcement officers worked side by side with WPA trustees, community members and DJ Wise's family and friends. The WPA worked diligently with the County to bring to fruition the completion of the new picnic area. A wonderful addition to the park!
It has been a fruitful year for the Jersey City Parks Coalition. As we turn our attention to 2018 and plan what is to come, we hope to have opportunities that make you eager to participate, with a few hours or days of your time, a monetary donation, or through your encouragement and moral support; keeping our parks and open spaces beautiful and safe for everyone to enjoy.

President, Jersey City Parks Coalition