

Group aims to give New Rochelle greenhouse new life

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New Rochelle resident Millie Radonjic-Ilich talks about the plans to restore the Children's Greenhouse at Hudson Park and open it to the public. Seth Harrison/lohud



(Photo: KTM Architect)

overgrown shrubbery.

The decrepit buildings, known as the Wildcliff Greenhouse, were built in 1915 by the city Parks Department, but closed in 2009 due to building damage and operating costs.

Now, a group of city residents is looking to revitalize the 102-year-old greenhouse to make it a place for educational programs, mentorship and sustainability.

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NEW ROCHELLE - Atop the hill at Hudson Park overlooking Long Island Sound is a row of abandoned, weather-beaten buildings. The curved roofs of the structures resemble shells of a greenhouse one might find at the New York Botanical Garden, but these only bare shattered glass and

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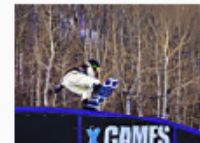
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"Everybody wants to see this park brought back to life with activities," said resident Millie Radonjic-Ilich, who spearheaded the idea to restore the greenhouse. "It's such a beautiful spot, even now."

However, she said, the greenhouse is in near disrepair and is an eye sore as it stands next to the popular Hudson Park Bandshell. So in 2015, Radonjic-Ilich formed the Hudson Park Children's Greenhouse, Inc., a nonprofit group dedicated to restoring the buildings, which could cost around \$500,000.



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New Rochelle resident Millie Radonjic-Ilich is leading a movement to restore the rundown Hudson Park Children's Greenhouse. *(Photo: Seth Harrison/The Journal News)*

The group, which has 40 volunteer members, presented its plan to City Council last month seeking a licensing agreement that would allow them to build and operate within the footprint of the public property.



"The renovated greenhouse will help activate Hudson Park, bring more people to New Rochelle's waterfront, and advance the principles of sustainable living," Mayor Noam Bramson said. "We are very fortunate that a committee of dedicated volunteers has donated so much time, energy and talent to this venture."

The greenhouses were built by Lord & Burnham Co., the former Irvington-based manufacturer which constructed historic glass structures across the country, including the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C. and Phipps Conservatory & Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh. Radonjic-Ilich said the New Rochelle group is working with former Lord & Burnham employees to use their expertise for the project.

Hudson Park's greenhouse is split into three sections: West and east greenhouses and a center "link" building. Radonjic-Ilich said the west building, which was renovated in the 1970s, is in better shape and still has its steel superstructure intact, while the east house is made of cypress wood that is decaying.



A preliminary rendering of the Hudson Park Children's Greenhouse. (Photo: KTM Architect)

Kim Tutera Martelli, a city resident and principal at KTM Architect in Port Chester, has been doing the architectural planning free of charge. She said that to maintain a reasonable budget, there would have to be compromises for what gets rebuilt and what gets restored. The plan is to create a combination of past, present and future.

“One will really have new, modern technologies to it and we’ll see what greenhouses are today,” she explained. “The other one will say, ‘Why were greenhouses so amazing? What was so valuable about these curved glasses and why were they so effective and what’s so charming and lovely about them and what shows the history of this area?’”

Radonjic-Ilich, who runs Amy’s Greenhouse at Barnard Early Childhood Center, said that the group would operate the greenhouse as an educational center open to the public. She said New Rochelle public schools, Monroe College and senior living centers have been open to the idea.



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New Rochelle resident Millie Radonjic-Ilich, left, is leading a movement to restore the run down Hudson Park Children’s Greenhouse. (Photo: Seth Harrison/The Journal News)







The group has raised about \$31,000 in the past year, Radonjic-Ilich said. In December, it received a \$250,000 state grant. If the group raises another \$9,000 by Sept. 1, it will get an additional \$20,000 through a matching grant from the Gwendolen Appleyard Trust Fund, she said.

Radonjic-Illich estimated that the cost of an individual greenhouse section would be about \$120,000, but Tuteria Martelli said the project will likely end up in the range of \$500,000. She added that the project may be broken into phases depending on funding.

Once more funding is secured and a legal agreement is reached with the city, the goal is to begin construction by the fall, Radonjic-Illich said.

Learn more about the Hudson Park Children's Greenhouse [project](#) or [donate here](#).

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