

GREENFIELD

Many hands make light work at Highland Park

Neighbors pitch in to remove abandoned campsites in woods near hiking trails

By **ANITA FRITZ**
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — At-Large City Councilor Philip Elmer enjoys walking through the woods in Highland Park, like many other community

members. So, when he came across a couple of abandoned campsites, he decided to clean up what was left behind.

“I was walking along one day and ran into a man who was living in one of the campsites,” Elmer said. “It was messy, and after a heavy rain, I noticed the man had left, but no one had picked up.”

Elmer spoke with city officials, in-

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The Highland Park cleanup crew, from left: Anna Morrison, Mitch Anthony, Debbie Kates, Marie-Francoise Hatte, Philip Elmer, Barbara Nichols Zaccheo, Corky Miller, Otis Wheeler, Sam Samuels and (behind the camera) Al Norman.

Cleanup is easy with people pitching in

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cluding those at the Department of Public Works, which provided garbage bags and gloves. The councilor then found people to help him clean the site.

"I called some friends in my neighborhood and they were more than willing to help," Elmer said. "We all wore kerchiefs over our faces and practiced social distancing."

Al Norman, who lives with his wife, Anna Morrison, on Grinnell Street, joined the effort Sunday morning.

"My wife, Anna, and I use the Temple Woods trails in all seasons," Norman said. "It's a great resource for all the residents of Greenfield, especially in COVID time, when people need some outdoor escape. We cleaned out two encampments and got everything cleaned down to the forest floor."

Elmer said he threw clean-

ing supplies into his backpack, met nine neighbors in Highland Park's parking lot, and they all hiked to the spot off the path in the woods.

"It only took us about an hour," he said. "We filled bags with lots of trash, and because whoever was living there left three large tarps, we used them to pick up, wrap up and drag a bed frame, pillows, a mattress and other larger items. We even found a needle there."

Elmer said the group hauled the tarps close to Mountain Road where the Eversource wires hang, so that the DPW could get its truck in to pick them up.

"I didn't count how many bags we filled, but there were plenty," he said. "We had bags with recyclables and garbage."

Elmer said he and his neighbors were happy to pitch in by cleaning the site.

"The people who were living

there have nothing," he said. "The people who live nearby and are living well felt the least they could do was help. That's social justice."

The crew consisted of Elmer, Norman, Morrison, Mitch Anthony, Debbie Kates, Marie-Francoise Hatte, Barbara Nichols Zaccheo, Corky Miller, City Council Vice President Otis Wheeler and Sam Samuels.

Elmer said the effort was part of the annual Source to Sea Cleanup organized by the Connecticut River Conservancy, which provided the kerchiefs.

Although the Source to Sea Cleanup is typically held over just two days, due to the pandemic and congregating being discouraged, organizers planned the event to last throughout September this year. An orchestrated clean-up effort will, as usual, be held at the Green River Swimming

and Recreation Area on Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"We just started a little early," Elmer said.

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