

The Newton Conservators Turn 50-Why We Really Matter

By Jane Sender, President

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Newton Conservators. Our reason for being is as compelling today as it was in 1961. What is our reason for being? Joni Mitchell still said it best in her emblematic 1970 hit song *Big Yellow Taxi*: “Don’t it always seem to go/That you don’t know what you’ve got/Til it’s gone/ They paved paradise/And put up a parking lot...” Fortunately, fifty years ago the Conservators knew what we had before it was gone, and we still know that today.

Going many years back, one early Conservators’ project was Norumbega Park, the thirteen acres of land along the Charles River next to the Newton Marriott. This conservation area would probably be a number of parking lots today but for the intervention of the Conservators and our partners. Today you can enjoy a walk there and listen to the migrant songbirds as they start their annual breeding, rather than the sound of car engines starting up. For that we can thank those Conservators and others who knew what would be lost, and permanently carved out a place for birds and other species to live and breed - and for humans to enjoy.

There are dozens of other similar accomplishments to celebrate from the past 50 years. Many Newton parks and conservation areas – Nahanton Park, Webster, Kennard, Saw Mill Brook, Cold Spring Park, Auburndale Park and Flowed Meadow, Ordway Park, Dolan Pond, Crystal Lake beach expansion and Awtrey Dell* to name a few- would also be parking lots or buildings if not for our work along with our partners. Our efforts, however, have not been aimed only at keeping special parcels from development. They also have gone to protect land already set aside as open space. Here’s one recent story that shows the constant pressure on open space to slowly evolve into something else – like a city dump.

Over this past winter, conditions at areas of Nahanton Park, one of our real Newton treasures, went from bad to worse. Snow had been trucked in and stored in huge mounds for months, leaving the well known Nahanton Park meadow, often the site of spring nesting bluebirds and swallows, deeply rutted and torn up. Piles of tree limbs and Christmas trees made the park truly begin to take on a dump- like appearance. Together with the Friends of Nahanton Park, we stood up for the integrity of the park, and convinced the City to no longer store tree limbs there, to reconsider next year’s snow storage policy to avoid using parks or conservation land, and to restore the meadow as soon as possible – we hope in time for the birds to decide it’s safe to nest again this year. We need your help to celebrate and foster this watchdog work, which we do day in and day out.

Our annual meeting, with the first-ever silent auction and awards presentation on May 25, will celebrate all of the wonderful accomplishments of the Conservators and their partners to preserve and protect open space in Newton. Details can be found at www.newtonconservators.org. Proceeds from the auction and from our generous sponsors will support our land acquisition program—our efforts to save additional appropriate Newton parcels, like those abutting conservation land or along the Charles River—from future development through various tools such as conservation restrictions or outright purchase. While we are often able to draw on our in- house expertise for these types of transactions, funds are needed to offset some of the upfront expenses of

protecting this kind of property—such as appraisals sufficient for IRS regulations and various fees—as well as for the future monitoring of the property. Our speaker at the meeting is Bob Wilber, Land Protection Director for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which now holds conservation restrictions on more than 5000 acres throughout the state. Bob, an inspiring speaker, will share thoughts about the importance of this work in a suburban environment.

Many of you support our work through memberships, volunteering and other donations. We hope you have received our invitations and look forward to seeing you on May 25. To those who don't know us as well, please check us out on our website and join us on May 25 to learn more and consider joining our efforts as we begin our next fifty years.

*If you do not know where to find a Newton park or conservation area, please take a look at the 2011 edition of our very popular Walking Trails Guide (available at www.newtonconservators.org).