



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

WINTER ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

Newton's land trust working to preserve open space since 1961

WWW.NEWTONCONSERVATORS.ORG • WINTER 2016

2016 Officers and Directors

Beth Wilkinson, *President*

George Mansfield,
Vice President

AnnaMaria Abernathy,
Secretary

Katherine Howard,
Treasurer

Board of Directors

Margaret Albright

David Backer

Dan Brody

Lalor Burdick

Mat Calabro

Bonnie Carter

Michael Clarke

Ann Dorfman

Margaret Doris

Henry Finch

Robert Fizek

Maurice Gilmore

Daniel Green

William Hagar

Chris Hepburn

Ted Kuklinski

Larry Smith

Willis Wang

Advisors

Lisle Baker

Rodney Barker

John Bliss

Octo Barnett

Lee Breckenridge

Lucy Caldwell-Stair

Michael Collora

Douglas Dickson

Bart Hague

Judith Hepburn

Duane Hillis

Peter Kastner

Alison Leary

William Leitch

Don Lubin

Eric Olson

Anne Pearson

Richard Primack

Eric Reenstierna

Jon Regosin

Patricia Robinson

Jane Sender

William Shaevel

Verne Vance

Brian Yates

An Adventurous Walk Along the Charles: Auburndale to Lower Falls

By Representative Kay Khan

On Saturday, October 17th, Dan Brody from the Newton Conservators and I met at the parking lot on Recreation Road (Exit 23 Northbound only off Route I-95/128) to lead a walk along the Charles River from the backside of Riverside to Lower Falls. We hoped our walk would spark interest in the condition of existing trails in this area of Newton.

One couple in our group was from Singapore. While visiting family in Newton, they found the announcement of the walk in a copy of the Conservators' Newsletter in the library and decided to join Dan, Jerry Reilly, Chris Steele, me, and several others interested in exploring the area on this picture-perfect fall afternoon.

Our walk included two Newton bridges that were beautifully restored a few years ago—thanks to former Governor Deval Patrick's Accelerated Bridge program and my work with DCR, DOT and many advocates. The first was the old railroad bridge over the Charles in Lower Falls, officially opened in 2012, which connects Newton to Wellesley and its walking trails, and the second was an old pedestrian footbridge behind Riverside,

easily accessible from Recreation Road. (A third bridge close to the Lasell College Boat House on Charles Street in Auburndale will hopefully be done soon, which will be a welcome addition for bikers.)

During the walk, we got a close-up look at both of these restored bridges and followed a proposed route of a walking trail (possibly also a bike trail) that might be completed some day in the future. The walk followed the riverbank into two areas that are not yet widely used and are very rough in spots, so hiking shoes are recommended if you decide to give it a try. Thanks to DCR, young people

from Americorps helped with some of the cleanup in the area behind Riverside two summers ago including the painting of the tunnel under the commuter rail connecting to Charles Street. Soon thereafter, the graffiti artists returned it to its previous state.

Now, a little history...

In 1970, when my husband and I bought our house on St. Mary's Street in Newton Lower Falls, we discovered a train track running close to our back yard. One day shortly after moving in with two very young children,



Newton Conservators Charles River Walk

PHOTO: KAY KHAN



PHOTO: KAY KHAN

Restored Stringer Bridge

we were excited to greet a train, waving to the engineer as it came down the track from the Riverside Station area in Auburndale. This train would be traveling through Newton Lower Falls to Wellesley Lower Falls, delivering lumber to the Grossman's Lumber Yard, located in Wellesley Lower Falls at the time.

home, the train stopped delivering lumber. There had been a station in Wellesley Lower Falls, built in 1887, but it was razed in 1944. That station was located on the west side of the tracks, about two hundred feet north of Washington Street, long before Grossman's put up their cash-and-carry store.

The Newton Lower Falls branch of the Boston and Albany Railroad ran from Newton to Lower Falls in Wellesley. The line branched off at Riverside Station (not the present Green Line station but a main-line rail station, whose remnants still exist), and ran for a distance of approximately one mile to Lower Falls, serving the mill area at Wellesley Lower Falls and later Grossman's Lumber Yard.

After the train line branched off from the Boston and Albany main line on the Weston side of the Charles, it crossed back over the Charles before continuing on its current course. It crossed highway ramps and Route 128 before running parallel to the Leo J. Martin golf course. It transected a residential area before crossing Concord Street and the Charles River into Wellesley. Originally, the track even extended across Route 16 after crossing the Charles River.

The tracks were removed many years ago, but most of the rail grade in Newton is still intact, while in Wellesley it has been built over. Although the tracks have been removed, the

two bridges are still extant: a pair over Route 128 and the off-ramp from exit 23.

As more interest in off-road walking trails began to arise several decades ago and money slowly became available for walking and biking trails, I began to explore with DCR and the Newton Bike and Pedestrian Task Force what could be done in Lower Falls to utilize the old railroad track to improve walking in Newton and to connect Lower Falls to Wellesley trails and the Charles River Pathway system into Boston. There is a long way to go in this small section of Newton bordering on Weston and Wellesley, but there is movement.

Now that we have spent seven years focusing on getting one section of the mile-long trail converted to a walking path in Lower Falls with the Trestle Bridge restored, it would be great if neighbors would get on board so that eventually the entire network could be completed from Wellesley Lower Falls to Riverside. Many feel that would be an added amenity to the Newton Lower Falls community, which is disconnected from the rest of Newton by Rt. 128.



PHOTO: KAY KHAN

Teepee

Extending the Charles River Pathway from the Auburndale section of Newton near the Marriott Hotel to Charles Street in Auburndale, then following the Charles River close to the backside of Riverside Station into Lower Falls and crossing into Wellesley, would be an ideal transportation corridor for commuters who might walk to Riverside from Auburndale or Lower Falls or from Lower Falls to the Commuter rail in Auburndale. People could come from other areas by T with their cross-country skis and get right on the Weston Ski Track in the winter.

If the Riverside redevelopment project moves forward, there could be the possibility of opening the locked gate into the Riverside Station, giving Lower Falls residents direct off-road access into the station, at least from Deforest Road in Lower Falls, an idea which seems to have some support.

Sadly, the likelihood of the entire path becoming available in Lower Falls seems slim: instead, especially along the St. Mary's Street stretch, abutters are dumping trash, debris from fallen trees, piles of leaves, and chopped wood to prevent walkers from easily moving about. There are also several



PHOTO: KAY KHAN

Giant Puffball Mushroom

lawsuits pending regarding the ownership of parts of the trail, so the idea of a beautiful off-road walking experience on public land where one could enjoy nature and wonderful wildlife—all within the neighborhood and with easy access to Riverside—will not become a reality any time soon.

It was a wonderful afternoon: all who joined us seemed to enjoy the walk as we explored the area and, hopefully, inspired more people with the beauty Lower Falls has to offer. At least for now, Newton Lower Falls has the Leo J. Martin Golf Public Course, the Weston Ski Track, and the

ability to walk across the Charles to all of the amenities in Wellesley Lower Falls.

Credit for the stretch from Concord Street in Newton Lower Falls to Wellesley:

Newton Bike and Pedestrian Task Force • Bike Newton • League of Women Voters • Newton Conservators • Green Newton • Citizens of Lower Falls and Auburndale • City of Newton • Town of Wellesley • Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) • Mass Department of Transportation (DOT) ■

Riverside Pathway: Another Voice

By Jerry Reilly

Jerry Reilly is a frequent walker and a member of the Conservators

The Riverside Pathway is a fairly simple, low-cost plan that would be a wonderful amenity for the residents of Lower Falls as well as the rest of Newton's citizens. Many people have been working on the essential pieces that are needed to construct this trail. Now is the time to focus on the entire trail as an easily achievable goal.

Lower Falls is effectively an island. It's cut off from the rest of Newton by Route 128. The primary links to the mainland of Newton are by two busy roads (Route 16 and Grove Street). There is an unused railroad that connects Lower Falls directly to the Riverside property. For the price of a pair of bolt cutters, the gate to that bridge could be opened, and Lower Falls would have a new pedestrian footpath to Riverside Station on the 'mainland'. The path would start at Deforest Road in Lower Falls and cross Route 128 and the 128 exit ramp. Between the railroad bridges, there's a small strip of woods that's a pleasant little surprise along the teeming highway.

Just as is, the path is certainly walkable. The railroad tracks and ties are long gone, but the surface is railroad gravel – not the best walking surface. Dumping dirt on top of the gravel and rolling it would be a simple and cheap—and a big improvement

Once inside the Riverside property, some sort of walking path would need to be included in the new Riverside development project to get pedestrians from there across the property to Riverside T station. As part of the development project, this is a relatively simple piece.



The Riverside Pathway

Opening up that piece of the footpath by itself would be of great benefit to Lower Falls' residents on foot, but it could also be the start of a ¾-mile long river walk that would connect to Riverside Park and extend all the way to the Lasell boathouse.

The path would run along the hillside between the Riverside property and the Charles River to the existing unused pedestrian underpass under the commuter rail tracks. At the moment, there is a very rough, little-used trail along that hillside. With little effort and expense, that existing trail could

be turned into a real walking trail and be connected to Riverside.

Halfway along that hillside path there is a lovely wrought iron pedestrian bridge that has just been beautifully restored by the DCR. The bridge crosses the river to the Recreation Road Park, which is a sizable and pleasant chunk of riverfront public parkland in Weston. At the moment, that bridge is a bit of a mystery. It's a beautifully restored bridge to nowhere on the Newton side of the river since there seems to be no officially sanctioned public access.

Continued on page 4

Continuing along, the trail would pass through the pedestrian underpass below the commuter rail. That underpass looks a bit shabby at the moment, but some trash clearing and a coat of paint would work wonders. You'd probably want to put up a fence to keep the trail separated from the commuter rail tracks.

The trail would then continue down to the Lasell boat house to another pedestrian bridge across the Charles, which I believe is already scheduled to be refurbished soon. Alongside the boathouse is another under-utilized DCR park with picnic tables and a playing field.

From here, a pedestrian can walk down quiet Charles St to Auburn St and into Auburndale.

Over recent years, many people have been working on some of the details of this plan. In fact this plan was first laid out in detail way back in 1975 by the Newton Conservation Commission. What needs to happen next to make it a reality is to treat it as a single integrated project and to tie it in to the Riverside redevelopment project. We need the DCR, the MBTA, the City of Newton, the Riverside developer, the Conservation Commission and the neighbors to work together on this.

The entire route from Lower Falls to the Lasell Boat House is three quarters of a mile, most of it along the river front. This portion of the river has long been neglected because it's encircled by highways, ramps, and rail yards. Despite all the nearby traffic, once you get down to the riverfront, it's quite pleasant and scenic.



PHOTO: DAN BRODY
Pedestrian Underpass Below the Commuter Rail

Back in 1898, this stretch of river was described like this: "Within ten miles of Boston, there is a stretch of river scenery that cannot be surpassed in the United States". Now with 128 and the Pike in the immediate neighborhood, this section of the river will never live up to that 19th-century description, but there are still plenty of modest pleasures to be had there.

Over the last 25 years or so, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) wove together waterfront paths that stretch from

Watertown to Auburndale along the river. This path system has quietly grown into one of the most treasured natural assets of the citizens of Newton. It's time to continue that work further upstream. The Riverside project presents the perfect opportunity to create a new 3+/- mile of riverfront path. Best of all, the Riverside Pathway can be done quickly and cheaply, using existing public land and infrastructure that's now being wasted. ■

**If you haven't renewed your membership already, now is the time.
And consider a gift for a conservation-minded friend.**



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

NEWTON CONSERVATORS
PO Box 590011
NEWTON CENTRE
MA 02459

2016 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

YES! Please renew my tax-deductible membership at the level checked below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Patron | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Family Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Donor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Individual Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sustaining Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Student |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Contribution _____ |

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____

Please make checks payable to Newton Conservators, Inc.

Visit our website at www.newtonconservators.org if you wish to renew your membership online.



Fritillary

Photo by Suzette Barbier