

Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

Fall Issue, October 1997

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Message From the President

Elections in which the issues are clearly enunciated and discussed generally benefit the electorate regardless of the outcome. In this issue of our *Newsletter*, the Newton Conservators have posed eight questions to the two mayoral candidates concerning the acquisition and maintenance of our open spaces together with some environmental concerns.

We are grateful to both candidates for their prompt and clear responses, which indicate a concern for open space and a willingness to plan for it as an integral part of city government. Readers will discern for themselves the differences between the candidates positions, but the thought evident in their composition suggests that both candidates are willing to respond and act, when the community defines and presents their concerns about issues that so deeply affect the quality of life in Newton.

Michael J. Clarke President, Newton Conservators, Inc.

(Editor's note. Our Questions for the mayoral candidates and their answers appear on pages 3 through 5. The Newton Municipal Election will be held on Tuesday, November 4. Polls are open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. The Mayor is elected for a 4-year term. Also on the ballot are races for Alderman-at-Large and Ward Alderman. The School Committee seats are uncontested.)

An Invitation

The Friends of Hemlock Gorge invite Newton Conservators to visit their web site at <http://www.channel1.com/users/hemlock>. The site contains pictures, maps, and stories about the rich history and natural beauty of Hemlock Gorge Reservation, a 23-acre MDC park located along the Charles River in Newton Upper Falls, Needham, and Wellesley. Echo Bridge links the Upper Falls and Needham sides of this reservation described by Charles Elliot in 1893 as one of the most beautiful sites in metropolitan Boston. To learn how to enjoy it and help keep it beautiful, visit the reservation itself or the web site or call Friends of Hemlock Gorge President Alderman Brian Yates at 244-2601. The Friends meet on the first Tuesday of most months in the Emerson community Center.

Wildflowers in the Meadow

by Paula Chasan

The central meadow at Nahanton Park is being reclaimed for an expanded Wildflower Meadow Project. Following the site's use by the Dept. of Public Works to cope with the vast amount of trees and limbs downed in the April 1 storm, the City's Parks and Recreation Dept. and the DPW have kept a pledge to park advocates to not only restore the meadow, but to leave it better than it was before.

For several years, a band of wildflower enthusiasts, now a committee of Friends of Nahanton Park, have labored to plant and encourage the growth and diversity of wildflowers on the meadow slope. These efforts have lately been boosted by the energetic participation of Kenn Eisenbraun, a landscape designer and Senior Planner in the City's Dept. of Planning and Development. Kenn has brought his expertise and great interest in wildflowers to the project and has developed plans and got approval for funding the restoration. At the end of September, Kenn supervised the seeding of the large central meadow area with a wildflower and grass mixture that included such species as red corn poppy, blue lupine, dames rocket and little bluestem grass. So, watch Nahanton Park's meadow for color and beauty as next spring arrives! (And watch also for invitations to join weeding parties!). In May and June, the young wildflower plants will need help to survive competition from more aggressive and invasive plants.

Addendum: It is frustrating to report that after dark on October 12, a joy-rider drove into the newly planting area with a 4-wheel drive vehicle, tore up the field with repeated circling and plowed through several community gardeners' plots. Many of the new seedlings were just barely emergent, but were barely emergent, but were barely emergent. Protection from vehicular vandalism by limiting access to the gardens must be made a priority . An extension of existing fencing had been erected as part of the City's improvements, but neither chain nor gate were yet in place to prevent the vandalism of October 12.

Kessler Woods

by John Decker

One of the largest, most environmentally significant, and beautiful pieces of open land in Newton is at risk. The land is a 40-acre parcel owned by Boston Edison Co. known as Kessler Woods. It includes wetlands, multiple streams, hundreds of species of plants and animals (including many rare and unusual ones), dense woodlands and large rock outcroppings. It is adjacent to existing city conservation land, and is a clear link between the Emerald Necklace and public land along the Charles River in Newton.

The Kessler Woods is adjacent to Harwich Road, Vine Street and Wayne Road, near the Memorial Spaulding School. It has been offered for sale by Boston Edison, under pressure from Attorney General Scott Harshbarger's Office to help pay for Boston Edison's liabilities to ratepayers. The sale, announced in June and originally scheduled for September 1997, has been delayed for three to six months under an agreement between Mayor Thomas Concannon and Thomas May, President of Boston Edison, in order for the City to develop a plan to acquire the land.

The Mayor has asked Boston Edison that the 40-acre parcel be donated to the City, and if this is not possible, is seeking funding to purchase the land. The Board of this organization strongly supports their efforts. Please help support this initiative by writing to the following with the message that you are strongly in favor of transferring the land to the City.

Mayor Thomas Concannon
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02159

Thomas May, President
Boston Edison Company
Prudential Center
800 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02199

Attorney General Scott Harshbarger
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
1 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Questions for the Mayoral Candidates

Thomas B. Concannon, Jr. has served as Newton's mayor since the death of Theodore D. Mann in April of 1994. He is being challenged by David B. Cohen who has served as State Representative since 1980.

1. A state survey recently found nature walks to be the most popular recreational activity with the implication that the availability and management of open spaces is an important quality-of-life issue. Yet many feel that support for parks and passive recreation has placed a poor second to that for organized recreational activities. How will your administration coordinate the management of the city's open spaces, which is now divided among the Parks and Recreation Department, the Conservation Commission and other departments, to foster the appropriate use of Newton's open spaces for passive recreation?

1. **Concannon** Groups' reputation as the "Garden City" is one we must preserve and enhance. The desire for well-maintained open space is rightly shared by numerous individuals, nonprofits, and City departments. I have worked hard to coordinate their efforts. In December 1995, I appointed a Landscape Maintenance Task Force as a public/private partnership to study how to creatively fund, manage and meet growing demands for maintenance of our City's open spaces. The Task Force meets regularly to make recommendations and oversee implementation of initiatives. I have appointed a part-time Public Open Space Coordinator and made the position of environmental Planner full-time.

1. **Cohen** Newton's 1981 open space plan has not been well implemented in recent years. As mayor, I would create a panel to review and update our master plan with representatives from all of the overlapping departments and commissions, headed by the new Planning Director. This group would be responsible for recommendations as to our priorities and an action plan for the better coordination and implementation of our objectives. Clearly, a policy that balances the needs for both passive and active recreation is a key component. A review of John Richardson's surveys for the Conservation Commission would be a good starting point.

2. Once the Rumford Avenue landfill property is capped, how should it be appropriately integrated into adjacent conservation, MDC and Parks and Recreation land?

2. **Concannon** I am pleased that the incinerator is being demolished and the landfill capped because of my leadership. The majority of the landfill will be added to the Flowed Meadow Conservation Area and will be managed by the Environmental Planner. I funded land management studies of the Flowed Meadow and Norumbega Conservation Areas and these should be used as the basis for integration of this space. I will work with the board of Aldermen, Conservation commission, Parks & Recreation Department, Nightcap Corner Neighborhood Association and other interested individuals to make this into a neighborhood asset.

2. **Cohen** I would direct the affected city agencies to come up with an overview and joint plan after consultation with the Newton Conservation and Recreation Commissions, neighborhood organizations, and the Newton Conservators as well as other interested citizens. We may need to look into the possibility of additional land purchases and acquisitions where feasible in order to achieve our ultimate goals. As an alderman, I initiated and led the effort which resulted in securing Webster Vale. On the state level, I was responsible for \$200 million in bonds for open space acquisition.

3. By both plan and accident, Newton is blessed with several linear green spaces including the MWRA aqueducts. How will you assure the preservation of these open spaces? Will you support the development of the aqueduct greenways as linear parks with possible walk and/or bikeways?

3. **Concannon** I support development of aqueducts and other linear pathways throughout Newton that enhance the quality of life in the villages through which they pass. The Quinobequin Road river front land needs further attention from the MDC to reduce dumping and other detrimental uses and to enhance its value for recreational purposes. The MWRA should seek ISTEA transportation enhancement funds to complete restoration of the intersection of the Charles River pathway and Sudbury Aqueduct. I've asked Congressman Frank to maintain federal ISTEA funds and have written to the MWRA to express the city's interest in any plans it has for its land.

3. **Cohen** I consider Newton's linear greenways a major asset in our open space inventory, which need care and thoughtful planning. I support their development as linear parks. As publicly owned open space, they fall within Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, which makes a change in use require the vote of 2/3 of the legislature. In other communities, owners of private lands have offered limited public access to link key public greenways, and I would like to see that explored in Newton. The proposed Charles River Bike Path has generated concern among neighbors about access and therefore, we will need to proceed sensitively.

4. The West Kessler and Marcy properties have been scheduled for acquisition since the 1981 Open-Space Plan. Now that Boston Edison is on the verge of divesting the Kessler Woods, how will your administration preserve this 40 acre tract as open space? If necessary, how will you fund its acquisition?

4. **Concannon** This space is precious. This summer, I made public my desire for Boston Edison to deed all or part of the parcel to the City, or at least delay the bid process to such a time as when the City would be prepared to participate. Responding to my request, the president of Edison agreed to delay the deadline until sometime in 1998. I continue to analyze financing options with my administration. I have contacted Senator Pines, requesting legislation that would allow the state to give the property to Newton or provide financing as was done for Weymouth.

4. **Cohen** My first choice is for Newton to acquire the entire tract from Edison as either a tax deductible gift or a donation of a conservation restriction on the land to the city or through pending electricity deregulation legislation in the House which will give additional incentives for Edison to give us the land. If supplemental funds are needed, I intend to seek Open Space Funding I probably voted for as State Representative. We must, however, be prepared with backup plans which explore limited development consistent with neighborhood concerns, sewage issues, and the impact on Sawmill Brook and associated wetlands.

5. Since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2, Newton has gradually backed away from its commitment to maintain its public grounds, parks and conservation lands, and street trees. Money for improving public spaces has been contributed by federal and state governments and by private organizations, but these investments are at risk because of inadequate City maintenance. How will you preserve and maintain this green infrastructure that helps define the character of the Garden City?

5. **Concannon** I am committed to providing as much funding from the City operating and capital budgets as we can afford, but this must continue to be a community endeavor. I have made the Environmental Planner's position full-time and have funded numerous detailed conservation area studies. I will continue to work hard to forge successful public/private partnerships and offer financial and administrative support form City departments. The renovation of the grounds at the old Weeks Junior High, planting of trees in Newtonville Square, and the success of the Adopt-a-Space Program are all visible results of community investment and commitment.

5. **Cohen** The challenge for Newton is that the more open space we acquire the more responsibility we have in caring for it. We need to increase awareness and use of our conservation lands and park advocacy groups. The just-completed restoration of the Nahanton Park meadow is a shining example of how this process can work. The City added compost to the damaged meadow, seeded it with wildflowers and native grasses and expanded the fencing. The Department of Parks and Recreation worked actively with Friends of Nahanton Park to ensure that more than the minimally required tilling and decompacting of the soil was done.

6. Other Massachusetts communities have utilized a Land Bank Trust for the acquisition and maintenance of open space and the preservation of historic sites. For example, this might accrue through a 1-2% real estate transfer tax with the first \$200,000 of each transaction exempt. Do you support this approach for Newton?

6. **Concannon** The concept of a Land Bank is an attractive one, but since the Acting Governor has vowed to veto all home rule petitions establishing land banks, it does not seem a practical means of meeting our urgent needs for preservation of open space, particularly Kessler woods. I would prefer to focus in the next year on working with the state to explore funding sources.

6. **Cohen** A land bank and transfer tax make the most sense in communities where there is much available land to acquire. I am open to this as one possible consideration for Newton, but would encourage various other alternatives. We need to consider the inequity of the burden on buyers as opposed to current residents while understanding that real estate values are dependent on the quality of existing land.

7. The City of Newton is remarkable for its citizen participation in numerous boards and commissions. While appointees generally serve the city quite well, over the years renewal appointments have often been pro forma with the result that some commissions seem static in both membership and activity. What criteria will you set for commission appointments and how would you review them? Will you implement term limits for serving on these boards and commissions?

7. **Concannon** Last year I appointed a Committee to Review Committees, Boards, and Commissions. One of its recommendations was term limits. I have acted on this recommendation in a case-by-case basis. I want committee membership to be representative of our City's population and diverse interests, so I have actively sought out new citizen participation by soliciting referrals from organizations and individuals. I have appointed an open space advocate to the Parks & Recreation Committee and plan to appoint an open space advocate to the Conservation Commission.

7. **Cohen** As mayor I will review our boards and commissions looking at their objectives, effectiveness, and coordination with city departments. While I oppose term limits because we would lose valuable individuals with much to offer, not the least of which is historical perspective, I would not encourage people whose interest and participation has waned over the years to remain. My criteria for appointments would be that our boards have broad-based representation, reflecting the diversity and expertise available in our city and that members be expected to participate actively.

8. A preliminary report on "The Preservation of Open Space in the Western Suburbs of Boston: Open Space Planning in the Cities" suggests that Waltham protects a higher proportion of its land because its citizens are more involved in the planning process. How will your administration more effectively involve residents in the development and implementation of Newton's Open Space Plan?

8. **Concannon:** I recently began meeting with members of my administration and other interested parties to discuss revising the 1995 version of our open space plan. We have a new Planning Director and I want him to have an opportunity to become well acquainted not only with Newton's physical characteristics and environment, but also with our community goals. Through a coordinated effort, I will solicit neighborhood input from all our villages and appoint a committee to work as a public/private partnership.

8. **Cohen:** I have not seen the report that is cited, but I do challenge the idea that Newton residents are not actively involved in the planning process. We have much expertise and passion on the part of our citizens. As mayor, I will provide the needed focus and coordination necessary to take full advantage of this most valuable resource, and I will do a better job at reaching out to citizens who care.

Proposal for Future Snow and Brush Removal

by Judy Hepburn

The City has been working with the Newton Conservators, Friends of the Landscape Maintenance Task Force to plan for future snow and brush removal. The April 1 storm that dumped more than two feet of wet snow within 24 hours, downing countless trees and limbs along our City's streets, served as a needed wake-up call. It showed that we must be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with catastrophic weather events and the temporary storage problems they create. With that goal in mind, an ad hoc disaster planning committee has been meeting this summer to establish locations and procedures for dealing with future storm debris. The problem is particularly acute this year because of the of the on-going capping of the Rumford Avenue landfill. This means that neither the Rumford site or the Elliot Street DPW yard will be available for emergency use during the '97-98 winter season, if need arises. Moreover, almost all of Newton's cleared, publicly owned space is already appropriated for sports fields and active recreational purposes.

Nahanton Park and Rumford Avenue exclusively bore the storage and wood-chipping operations arising from the April 1 storm. The committee felt strongly that a greater number of smaller sites, better distributed throughout the City, should be staging areas in future emergencies. This will reduce debris haulage costs, restoration costs to damaged land, and potential fire hazard from brush and wood chippings. Wherever possible we favored sites that were already hard-surfaced. Public safety issues, site accessibility, and impact to abutters and runoff were also taken into account.

The committee recognizes that, as a matter of principal, any park site used in an emergency must be restored and preferably improved by the City, acting in accordance with neighbors and park advocacy groups. The just-completed restoration of the Nahanton Park meadow is a shining example of how this process can work. The City added compost to the damaged meadow, seeded it with wildflowers and native grasses and expanded the fencing. The Department of Parks and Recreation worked actively with Friends of Nahanton Park to ensure that more than the minimally required tilling and decompacting of the soil was done.

The disaster committee has proposed that Nahanton Park's future emergency use be confined to the gravel parking lot off Nahanton St., which is less central and less disruptive to park operations. Three new sites are also being proposed: Newton Upper Falls Playground (lower level), Edmands Park (off Blake Street), and the Commonwealth Avenue carriage lane at Lyons Park. Additionally following the '97-98 winter season, the DPW Elliot Street yard and any DPW property retained at Rumford can once again be utilized. Some of the Lyons sites are restricted as to the type of debris they can handle, day-time operations or by season. The actual site or sites used will depend on severity of storm damage and where it is concentrated. Details of the plan are available from the Departments of Parks and Recreation or Public Works, and all comments are welcome.

FOCUS ON ORDWAY PARK

by Doug Dickson

Mention Ordway Park and the most likely reaction is a blank stare. Few seem to know what it is or where it is. I drove by it nearly every day for ten years before I realized it was anything other than an unintended vacant lot. I often wondered why its owners didn't give it better care. Then I discovered the painful truth: the vacant lot is a PARK! And the park is owned by the Newton Conservators.

Back in 1971, Miss Priscilla Ordway willed this one-half acre parcel to the Conservators for use as a public park. She had maintained it as a natural woodland garden. A walkway circled through the park, giving visitors a shady tour of the woods, dogwood, mountain ash, red oak, yellowwood, and a variety of other specimen trees and shrubs.

Ordway Park is located at the corner of Everett Street and Grant Avenue (between Beacon Street and Commonwealth Avenue) in Newton Centre. Turn up Everett from Grant and at the corner of Gibbs Street, a bronze plaque mounted on a Roxbury conglomerate boulder identifies the entrance to the park. Two small white signs were placed along Grant Avenue this spring to identify the park to passersby.

Today, the park isn't used much. A well-worn path across one corner shows its value to neighbors as a shortcut. The presence of bottles and other trash suggest it is sometimes used by young people as a party spot. Otherwise, it gets no use. And-- out of sight, out of mind--it gets little upkeep. Last fall, a group pulled out trash and planted daffodils, and some tree work has been done in the past, but no formal maintenance plan exists. And now this little jewel of a park is showing us the long-term cost of neglect.

Current Condition. An assessment of the current condition of Ordway Park reveals the following: Red oak large trees are dead or dying and in need of removal. Many others trees with dead branches are in need of pruning. Smaller trees are competing with larger beeches and red oaks. There is a plethora of saplings, some of which should be encouraged to develop as replacements for larger trees when they die. An overgrown rhododendron along Gibbs Street is in need of major pruning. There is an abundance of ornamental shrubs and ground covers to be reclaimed. The floor of park is compacted, with very little humus. The berms and banks facing the streets are weedy and overgrown. There are some signs of stress to the American beeches; we are awaiting disease reports from arborists. Utility wires are strung through middle of the park, attached to a large oak.

Action Plan. Recognizing the need to improve our maintenance of this community resource, the Newton Conservators Board of Directors decided at its September meeting to take the following steps to reclaim Ordway Park:

1. Do badly needed tree work this winter. Select arborist and authorize up to \$4000 worth of work (about 5 days) Obtain recommendation for additional work, if not completed, include remaining work in management plan (see item 3, below)

2. Determine uses for park going forward. Consider passive only, outdoor classroom and other possible uses. Create ad hoc committee to recommend plan to Board of Directors. Explore funding sources for implementation of plan.

3. Develop management plan to guide ongoing professional and volunteer work. Research past plans for input and ideas Catalog species and prepare map of plants to be retained Determine steps to implement planned uses. Identify tasks to be performed, frequency, skill requirements, etc. Convene volunteer group and/or solicit bids from professionals.

A committee led by Carol Lee Corbett has taken responsibility for implementing this action plan. If you would like to participate in and/or provide input to this process, please contact her at 332-4015. Our goal should be to maintain this property at least at the level we expect (and prod) the city to meet in its care of public parks and conservation lands. With a little effort and your support, we can make this jewel sparkle once again.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please renew your membership.

___ New Member

___ Renewal

Name

Address:

Phone:

New member (first year) \$10

Individual member \$20

Family membership \$25

Sustaining member \$35

Donor \$50

Patron \$100

Additional Contribution \$ ___

Total \$ ___

Please make check payable to:

Newton Conservators, Inc.

Mail to:

Newton Conservators

P.O. Box 11

Newton Center, MA 02159

Newton Conservators Fall Walks

Sunday, October 26 at 2 pm

Hammond Pond - Webster Woods

Visit a forest and wetland preserve containing a variety of native trees and shrubs, a red maple swamp, puddingstone ledge rock, and a bog which records climate and plant life for the last 12,000 years. Enter the mall off Hammond Pond Parkway (northbound) at Bloomingdale's and go left into the reservation parking lot, next to the pond. Leader: Lawrence Kaplan 527-3449

Sunday, November 2 at 2 pm

Aqueduct Walk: Newton's Linear Open space

Walk along the Sudbury and Cochituate Aqueducts, which run behind backyards and through rarely visited pine woods and meadows. This is one of our most popular walks. Meet in the parking lot of the Waban MBTA Station. Leader: Nick Yannoni 444-0166