The Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

Fall 1998

Fall Issue September 1998

Developments on Andover-Newton Property

By Mike Clarke

After considerable negotiations between Hebrew College (HC), various aspects of Newton city government, and the Bowen-Thompsonville Association, a final draft of the Board Order for a special permit to allow the construction of the HC campus was circulated late in August, with some last minute changes prior to a vote of approval (21-1) by the Board of Aldermen on September 8. The purpose of the special permit is to allow HC and Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS) to cluster their campi with the saved open space at the perimeter being submitted to the Conservation Commission for consideration as a Conservation Restriction.

The proposed reductions in setbacks between the buildings are consistent with a recent change in the Newton Zoning Ordinance, which the Conservators helped to negotiate and which is limited to non-profit religious or educational institutions with similar missions. In effect, the setbacks are transferred from between the two institutions to their buffer along Langley Rd. and Ripley Street. This enables the preservation of natural features including the topography on the side of Institution Hill, including the trees and wooded area forming a portion of a wildlife corridor from Webster Vale to Crystal Lake. The setbacks will be 90 feet, measured from the present ANTS boundary along the present line of houses, up to 237 Langley Road. The first 40 feet will remain essentially the same, with the area being restored after construction. In the next 30 feet, landscaping and removal of shrubs will be allowed, but not the removal of healthy trees. In the final 20 feet,

landscaping, active recreation areas, seasonal structures, and up to 1,000 square feet of patio space are allowed, but not other paving. Utilities will be placed underground throughout the area. The areas shall remain open with no fences or paved walkways or roads. Exterior lighting will be downlit and not visible from off the premises.

The present fire road from Langley Road through the ANTS property will be used temporarily to reduce the impact of the construction on Newton Centre. There are many details of the construction management plan that will be overseen by a neighborhood Liaison Committee with Hebrew College. HC will also establish a Traffic Mitigation Fund to help mitigate the impact of the projected 820 daily trips to and from the college.

With regard to the rest of the ANTS property for sale, ANTS provided an opportunity for purchase of the property for conservation purposes that expired August 31; however, no source of funds could be found to meet the six-million dollar price tag. ANTS continues to pursue the development proposals by Terraces LLC and Management Sciences for Health for the 12.5 acres at the south end of the campus bordered by Langley Road, Langley Path and Cypress Street. Terraces LLC plans to develop 10 acres with approximately 60 units of cluster housing of which 25% would be affordable-income housing. This would require a comprehensive permit that could be granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Approximately 2.5 acres of land, which would have some sort of conservation easement along Langley Road would be sold to Management Sciences for Health, which would construct a 40,000 square foot educational building to train health professionals to work in third-world countries.

Board of Directors Meeting

Members are welcome to attend the open meetings of the Board of Directors of the Newton Conservators, Inc. Meetings are usually on the fourth Wednesday of the month. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, October 28 at 7:30 pm in Rm. 202, Newton City Hall.

Notes from the Conservation Commission

By Mike Clarke

- The bog bridge in the Kennard Conservation Area is finally under construction! A long delay in its reconstruction occurred when it was realized that the original bridge support pilings were not sunk sufficiently deep into the ground for new planking simply to be laid on top. The new bridge should be finished at the end of September, which will add immensely to the enjoyment of those walking through the Kennard/Lost Pond area.
- The City has acquired the Wightman property adjacent to the Rumford Depot on Wabasso Sreet. The house on the site, which might become a target for vandalism, is likely to be demolished soon. Eventually acquisition of the second Wightman property, which lies further in on Wabasso St., would provide the City with a complete parcel of land on the Charles River at Purgatory Cove not far from Auburndale/Lyons Park and bordered by Flowed Meadow, the MDC Grove Park, and the Rumford Depot. The Conservators have long advocated that the City develop a comprehensive plan for this area to provide for its ecological development, but also possibly as park land. The City should move toward acquisition of the final parcel and have the entire area reviewed and surveyed so that a plan can be made which takes into account the wetlands, special vegetation, wildlife, and other features. Comprehensive planning is needed not only for the conservation and park land issues, but also because the Charles River Pathway now informally proceeds through the MDC Grove Park and Auburndale/Lyons Park (see the Tour de Newton in this issue).
- The Houghton Garden's master plan consultant, Pressley Associates, is almost under contract and should begin work on this project fairly soon. Phase I will be all planning on paper. Phase II will be a combination of the construction drawings and then construction. Phase III should be continuing construction. Phase IV will complete construction and begin some educational outreach. Funding is available for Phase I and the City's Environmental Planner, Martha Horn, has requested funding for Phase II from the Mayor. This is the sort of project that should have a good chance for matching state funds, at least for Phase II. The Chestnut Hill Garden Club has been an important partner with the Conservation Commission both in providing funding and in doing the actual work in the Garden, which has been so generously done by Garden Club members. This is an exciting project involving both restoration of the Garden and outreach to the public to enjoy it, learn from it and help in its redevelopment. Gretchen Schuler is working on placing Houghton Garden on the National Register and on including it in the Historic District.
- Issues to be considered at the September 24 meeting of the Conservation Commission include Chabad House at 229 Dedham St. and the ATS tower on Chesnut Street.

The Newton: **Conservators Newsletter** appears three or four times a year. President: Michael Clarke. Production: Bonnie Carter, 969-0686. Editing: Father David Murphy. We wish to thank the contributors to this edition of the **Newsletter**: Norman Carter, Mike Clarke, Doug Dickson, Burton Elliott, William Hagar, Judy Hepburn, and Janet MacLeod. We also wish to thank Newton Communications Access Center, Inc., NewTV, for the use of its word-processing equipment.

Newton Conservators' Grants Program: Proposals due by October 31

By Bill Hagar and Burton Elliott

Co-Chairs, Grants Committee

The next period for grant submissions will be October 31, 1998. The Newton Conservators accepts grant proposals for monetary assistance for projects that complement the goals of the organization. This includes applications from schools, groups, or individuals for worthwhile projects in the environmental area. Requests may involve funds for such things as materials, equipment, books, speakers, transportation, publication and other necessities. The grants awarded are generally between $250 and $500, although smaller and larger grants will be given full consideration.

Grant proposals can be for a single event, a longer-term project, or for multiple year funding. Semi-annual deadlines for proposals are October 31 and April 30. Proposals must be postmarked by those dates to be considered with that group. Detailed criteria and other information on submission and evaluation of grant proposals are available upon request from Burton Elliott, 319 Highland Ave., West Newton, 02465; telephone: 617-244-8920, e-mail: BurtonEll@aol.com, or from Bill Hagar, 248 Winchester St.; Newton Highlands, 02461, telephone: 617-287-6669, e-mail Hagar@umbsky.cc.umb.edu).

The Newton Conservators provide monetary assistance for projects that complement the goals of the organization. This funding program was established in 1992 to provide support for worthy environmental projects. In the past six years of its existence, we have awarded over eleven thousand dollars to conservation programs, community groups, environmental education programs in Newton Schools, and preservation and documentation programs by individuals.

Among the projects we have funded were for environmental-based activities for the Countryside Elementary School and the Bigelow Middle School.

The Countryside Outdoor Classroom Project involves the development of an outdoor garden

linked to education and the environment. The project consists of a series of dynamic gardens designed to have their highest botanical interest during the months school is in session. The garden plot was designed by a local parent/architect and is intended to be a resource for Countryside school. Participants have begun to develop this project and have cleared an area behind the school for the garden. Several different types of plants are part of the vegetation with more to come. We look forward to viewing this garden and reading about the interest of the students with this project. This type of program where there is an integration of environmental issues, science teaching, and classroom activities is worthy of support from active environmental and science education sources. We wish the three coordinators of this program, Lisa Carron Shmerling, Karen Spier, and Susan Sangiolo continued success for the children, parents, and neighbors of the Countryside School.

The Bigelow Middle School water quality study "A Comparison of the Chemical Composition of the Charles River in Newton Massachusetts with Freshwater Systems Nation and Worldwide" involves water quality testing that is being done in many freshwater systems across the world. Kari Gathen and her coworkers are planning to share their findings with others monitoring freshwater systems as part of a Global Water Study Project on the Internet. This is precisely the type of environmental monitoring and science education program that makes students and residents aware of possible environmental problems, and provides an understanding of the scientific process as well as their environment. The Bigelow science group will also work with other environmental groups monitoring the Charles River and its watershed; particularly, the Charles River watershed Association (CRWA) located in Newton. They are involved in water quality testing all along the Charles River and will serve as additional support for their study. We look forward to reading about the results of this limnology study in the near future.

BC Soccer Fields Under Construction

On Newton Campus

By Doug Dickson

As of this writing, Boston College has begun construction of a regulation soccer field on a three-acre site it owns adjacent to Edmands Park. This parcel is part of the Newton Campus of Boston College and has not been used by the college until now. Its wooded character and location on the Edmands Park side of Colby Street (a paper street that consists of a rarely used dirt road) led many in the community to assume it was indeed part of Edmands Park. This public park, also known as Cabot Woods, is a 33-acre parcel donated to the City of Newton by the Edmands family in 1913. With its many trees, small clearings, glacial eskers and wetland fed by Edmands Brook, the area is valued by many for its walking trails, bird watching,

and natural beauty.

When Boston College proposed earlier this summer to develop its three acres as a soccer field, there was immediate concern about the impact of this development on Edmands Park, already suffering from years of neglect. A number of community groups mobilized their efforts to influence the outcome of this project.

Under state law, religious and educational institutions have broad latitude to develop their land free of most local controls. Because of the nature of this proposal and its proximity to Edmands Brook, Boston College was required only to obtain approval from the Conservation Commission to build within the area close to the brook.

Enter controversy #1: Early in the seventies, the state enacted a wetlands protection law that defined the area of jurisdiction for such decisions as 100'. More recently, the Rivers Protection Act was passed, defining the area of jurisdiction as 200' for any waterway that flows year-round. Was Edmands Brook an intermittent stream, flowing only part of the year and therefore subject to 100' jurisdiction, or was it perennial and therefore subject to the Rivers Protection Act? This was an important first question for the Conservation Commission to answer not only because it determined its degree of jurisdiction but also because the state defines additional requirements under the Rivers Act, such as an alternative sites analysis.

Predictably, BC contended that the smaller jurisdiction applied and provided expert testimony to support its position. The City, on the other hand, had mapped this for years as a perennial stream and submitted a report from its own expert. While the two experts took contrary positions, both acknowledged that it was a close call.

Now enter controversy #2: The Rivers Protection Act allowed projects underway before its passage to be grandfathered under earlier rules. Boston College contended that even if the 200' jurisdiction applied, it should be grandfathered since a campus development plan showing this area as a softball field had been submitted for a different purpose prior to passage of the new law. Did this earlier plan meet the grandfather requirement? Does it matter under the terms of the law that the softball field was changed to a soccer field? The City Solicitor's office concluded that the plan did not meet the technical requirements of the grandfather provision.

Meanwhile, other voices entered the debate. Two local groups, the Newton Campus Neighborhood Association and the Westchester/Cabot Neighborhood Association, long accustomed to dealing with BC on campus development, traffic and related issues each raised concerns specific to their interests as neighborsfencing, noise, traffic, etc. A third group, Friends of Cabot Woods, was formed with the objective of blocking the project altogether. This group waged a very public campaign in favor of leaving the three acres undeveloped.

The Newton Conservators took the position that, while it would ideal for this plot to remain available to the public as undeveloped land, BC did have a right to develop it and, compared to dormitories and parking lots, a soccer field was a much friendlier use and would have a much lower impact on Edmands Park. The Conservators proposed a number of conditions to minimize impact, including water run-off rates, control over use of pesticides and fertilizers, saving as many trees as possible, placement of fences to control litter and erosion, and aesthetic considerations. In addition, we proposed that Boston College participate in a plan to restore and maintain Edmands Park and that an outcropping of Cambridge slate near the construction site be preserved through a conservation easement, as called for in the city's Open Space Plan.

Through the joint efforts of the Newton Conservators and Conservation Commission member Ira Wallach, discussion among the parties resulted in agreement by Boston College to a number of the conditions. While helpful in opening lines of communication, this agreement was unfortunately shunted to the sideline by decisions related to the core controversies.

In a hearing that began June 24 and continued July 29, the Conservation Commission determined that part of Edmands Brook is intermittent and part is perennial. Because the part closest to the proposed soccer field was judged to be perennial, the 200' jurisdiction would apply. The Commission further ruled that the grandfather argument did not pertain to this development and it denied BC's application to build within the 100' wetlands resource area as not responsive to the requirements of the Rivers Protection Act.

Boston College came away from this hearing with three options. One was to appeal the decision of the Conservation Commission to the state Department of Environmental Protection, which BC did on August 19. Another was to prepare a new application to the Conservation Commission under the terms of the Rivers Protection Act. As of this writing, that step has not been taken. A third option was for BC to revise its planned soccer field so that it fell entirely outside the 200' resource area, thereby sidestepping any need for Conservation Commission involvement. Such a plan has been drawn up and construction has been underway for several weeks. Trees have been cut and grading of the land has begun.

If the current plan holds, Boston College will construct a somewhat smaller soccer field than it originally proposed. The regulation field will be used by both the men's and women's varsity teams. Across Colby Street and behind Alumni House, the plan includes reconstruction of a practice field and relocation of tennis courts. This part of the plan is not affected by the Conservation Commission's decision or subject to any other city permits or requirements.

There are too many variables to know or speculate how this will all end. If BC wins its appeal, the City may decide to launch its own appeal. If BC loses, it may decide to appeal further, re-apply under the 200' requirements, or go forward with construction of the smaller field. For our part, the Newton Conservators will continue to monitor developments with the hope that we can play a constructive role in achieving our original objectives, and preserving Edmands Park as a high-quality recreational resource for generations to come.

Project "Save our Wildflowers"

By Judy Hepburn

When the first settlers came to Newton 350 years ago they found a landscape lush with gentians, cardinal flower, trillium, asters, mayapple, and other native wildflowers, many of which were lost in subsequent years to agriculture and urban development. How can we reclaim these lost treasures?

Project *Save Our Wildflowers*, Newton Pride's Newton 2000 project, has been initiated to meet this challenge. Newton Pride has created a partnership with many organizations and individuals, including the New England Wild Flower Society, the MDC, Charles River Watershed Assoc., Newton Conservators, Newton Planning Dept., HC Starck Co., Newton Public School Science Dept. and noted garden designers to make Project S.O.W. a success. Over the summer these partners have met, brainstormed and begun planning how to bring back many species of desirable wildflowers to our parks and conservation lands, walking trails, and bikeways. The City's seeding of wildflowers in the Nahanton meadow last fall and the MDC's restoration of native plants along the banks of the Charles Riverwalk have been an inspiration for this new mission.

While the focus of the project is on the enhancement of municipal open spaces, the initial thrust that will begin this fall has been expanded to include Newton's homeowners. During Newton Pride's bulb pick up days Sept. 23, 24, 25, 26 at the Crystal Lake Bathhouse, a supply of Native American plants suitable for fall planting will be made available for purchase. Additional projects for the spring include a major purchase of plugs and young seedlings, which generally do better than field-sown seeds. Plugs will be cultivated over the summer in test plots and planted on municipal open space in the fall. Additional wildflowers will be obtained from division, plant rescues at construction sites, etc. Your participation and involvement in this work is welcome. If you have an interest in horticulture and wildflowers, please call the offices of Newton Pride to volunteer.

Bicycle Tour of Newton

This 20 mile bicycle "Tour de Newton" connects the north and south ends of the Charles River Pathway in Newton along with Crystal Lake and many of Newton's fine parks. It is of moderate difficulty and involves a few steep hills and a couple of gravel paths. While it can be started at any point on the circuit, directions are given from Nahanton Park along the River in south Newton, as this is a popular starting spot for local bicycle rides and has adequate, free parking.

Directions:

Turn left from the Nahanton Park parking lot.

Left at Winchester St. (caution)

[At rush hour it may be safer to cut through the Jewish Community Center to Winchester St.]

Right at Rachel Rd.

Right at Dedham St.

Left at Parker.

Cross Rte. 9 and take 3rd left onto Athelstane Rd.

After 1 short block turn right onto Cedric and left onto Rowena at Weeks Field Park.

Turn right onto Allerton Rd. and pass Weeks House, cross Centre St. and left onto Rogers St.

Follow Rogers straight as it turns into Lake Ave. and circles around Crystal Lake, crosses over Beacon St. and becomes Pleasant St. Follow past the Mason-Rice School and the acqueduct.

Stay on Pleasant St. across Homer St., and then veer right onto Ashton Ave.

Left onto Cedar St.

Cross Mill St. at Edmands Park onto Blake St.

[There is about 50 yards of unpaved gravel on Blake St..]

Continue on Blake as it crosses Cabot St. and becomes Parkview St.

Where Parkview turns left, take the partially paved path through Cabot Park to the East Side Parkway and continue north.

Right onto Newtonville Ave, left onto Lewis St., which crosses the Mass Pike.

At the Washington St. intersection, make your way over to the Jackson Homestead (quick right and left at lights, caution).

Continue down Jackson St. past the Jackson School and Lincoln-Elliott School buildings and playground.

Left on Morse St. to Watertown St. (Rte 16).

Make a right on Watertown Street and then a quick left onto Fifth St. in Watertown (caution).

This brings you out onto California St. about where the Charles River (CR) Pathway begins, just above Laundry Brook and the Watertown Dam.

Take the CR Pathway west (upstream) by the old swimming beach at Forte Park until it returns to California St. near Bridge St.

[The planned section of the CR Pathway between Bridge and North St. is not constructed.]

Stay on California St. for about 0.25 mi, make a right onto Nevada St.

Quick left at Albemarle Rd. Cross Cheesecake Brook on footbridge.

Right 1 block to Anthony Rd. Follow to right around Anthony Cr. and right out on Anthony Rd. again. Turn right 1 block, then left on Farwell St.

Right on North St. until the CR Pathway picks up on the left at the Farwell St. bridge.

This section of the CR Pathway has lots of observation decks, a nice view of a low mill dam (Bleachery Dam) and a wonderful foot bridge paralleling an old RR bridge with pleasant views of the river and adjacent wetlands.

Continue on the Pathway across Newton St. past the McKenna Playground and Cacciatore Ballfield to Elm St. in Waltham.

[CR Pathway between Elm and Moody St. on south side of river is not constructed].

Cross the Elm St. bridge and take left across RR tracks onto the roadway between old mill buildings and past the Charles River Museum of Industry.

Cross at crosswalk at the Moody St. bridge onto the CR Pathway.

Continue on Pathway to terminus at Prospect St.

Left on Prospect St. and cross bridge.

Right into the parking lot of the old Waltham Watch Factory.

Continue along river and exit parking lot by making right onto Crescent St.

Right on Woerd Av. (easy to miss, look for bus arrow).

Continue on Woerd Ave. across Purgatory Cove to Grove Rd.

At circle in the MDC Forest Grove Park, take the gravel path parallel with the river into Auburndale Park. This section needs a boardwalk and may be impassable following rains.

Follow the bluestone exercise trail along Ware's Cove into Lyons Park.

Veer right and exit onto the intersection of Islington Rd. and Commonwealth Ave.

Right on Commonwealth Ave. past the CR Watershed Assoc. and the CR Canoe & Kayak Center across the river and Rte. 128.

Left onto Park Rd. in Weston (caution), which continues as Concord St. through the Leo J. Martin MDC Golf Course and Lower Falls MDC Park. Pass St. Mary's Church (1813) and graveyard.

At light in Lower Falls make a left onto Rte. 16 (Washington St.). [Cordingly Dam is behind the parking lot of the Stone House after the turn.]

Right at the lights onto Quinobequin Rd. (Careful the right fork is the Rte. 128 on ramp!)

Follow Quinobequin Rd. along the river past the wetlands at Laura Rd. and under Rte. 9.

Go up the hill on Ellis St. past Hemlock Gorge and Echo Bridge.

Right onto Chestnut St., which goes through Upper Falls past Mills Falls and the Braceland Playground.

Just past the Biltmore Cafe make a right onto Oak St. and cross the RR tracks.

At the paper mill condominiums, make a right onto Needham St. [South Meadow Brook enters the Charles here.]

Immediately after crossing river, make left onto the CR Pathway (no crosswalk).

Follow paved path parallel to river. Be careful crossing the RR tracks.

Continue on roadway to Kendrick St.

Cross river and return to Nahanton Park on Nahanton St.

The Charles River Pathway continues south as a footpath with entrances directly opposite both parking lots in Nahanton Park. On the Needham side of the river on Kendrick St., there is a parking lot with access to the trails around Cutler Pond. During dry periods, trail access is possible to Powell's Island and the Great Ditch in Dedham.

For a map of the Upper Charles River Reservation (Watertown Square to Rte. 128), contact MDC Planning Office, 20 Somerset St., Boston, MA 02108. (617) 727-9693 Ext. 268.

Newton Conservators Fall Walks '98

Saturday, October 3, 8:30 AM

Birding at Dolan Pond

Despite its modest size, the Dolan Pond Conservation Area has a reputation for attracting unusual or rare bird species during spring and fall migrations. Bring your binoculars and discover West Newton's "hidden gem" with Ted Kuklinski (332-7753) who has birded this wooded wetland and its three ponds for many years. Park and meet at the entrance by the Webster Park circle, off Webster Street.

Saturday, October 17, 10 AM

Biking the Tour de Newton

This 20 mile bicycle circuit "Tour de Newton" connects the north and south ends of the Charles River Pathway in Newton. It is of moderate difficulty and involves a few steep hills and a couple of gravel paths. Beginning at Nahanton Park it goes by Crystal Lake, Newton Center Playground, Cabot Park, the Jackson Homestead and follows the Charles River to the Waltham Watch Factory, Auburndale Park, Leo J. Martin Golf Course, Quinobequin Rd., Echo Bridge, and finally the southernmost section of the CR Pathway in Needham. Bring a helmet and a sturdy bike. Meet in the parking lot of Nahanton Park. Leader: Mike Clarke (552-3624, e-mail: clarke@bc.edu).

Sunday, October 18, 2 PM

Edmands Park

This is one of Newton's oldest parks, donated in 1913 by the wealthy Edmands family. Its trails and dammed skating pond were created by Depression-era "relief work," along with picnicking facilities that have largely reverted to nature. But the park has been the scene of recent controversy, as potential plans to develop soccer fields on abutting property threaten its aesthetics and water quality. Walk the trail system through the 33-acre of oak woods, wetlands, and glacial esker (about 1 hr.). Park and meet at the lower entrance on Blake Street (north entrance), between Cabot and Mill Street. Leader: Sally Flynn (965-6297).

Saturday, October 24, 10 AM -1 PM

Ordway Park Clean-up

Help us prepare the Conservators' own green space for winter. Ordway Park is at the corner of Grant and Everett Streets in Newton Center. Call Jim Broderick (332-3465), Chair of the Conservators' Ordway Park Committee for more information. If you can, bring gloves and small gardening tools.

Sunday, October 25, 2:00 PM

Houghton Gardens

Around the turn of the century Martha Houghton surrounded her Chestnut Hill Spanish Mission-style home with a naturalistic garden featuring a tranquil pond, waterfall rock formation, and an alpine rock garden. Now owned by the City of Newton, the garden's the original plan can still be discerned as you stroll its azalea and rhododendron-bordered paths. Trip leader Nancy Avery of the Chestnut Hill Garden Club is active in restoration plans for the garden. Meet at the entrance on Suffolk Road. (Info: 964-1137).

Sunday, November 1, 2:00 PM

Hemlock Gorge Reservation

An old stone building, 1800 textile mill, prominent waterfalls, and a handsome pedestrian bridge noted for its fine echo reveal Hemlock Gorge's prominent role in Newton's early industrialization. Stroll the hemlock-studded banks of the Charles and explore the Devil's Den with Vaunita Schnell (969-3620). Meet at the reservation's parking lot on Elliot St.

Sunday, November 15, 2:00 PM

Newton Historical Cemetery on Center Street

In the colonial cemetery of Newton's first meetinghouse you can still see the intricately-carved headstones of our city's earliest settlers the Parkers, Hydes, Jacksons, and others whose names now grace our streets and landmarks. Park on Cotton St. and meet at the cemetery entrance around the corner on Center St. Trip leader is Thelma Fleishman (244-5598).

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please renew your membership for 1998.

____ 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.**

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