

The Newton Conservators NEWSLETTER

Winter Issue February 2000

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Evolution of the Newton Conservators Role
- 36 Acres of DPW Land Declared Open Space
- Christmas Bird Count
- Policy for Signs on Little League Fields
- Community Preservation Act Advances
- Report on New School Construction and Open Space
- Clutter in Winchester Gardens
- Conservators & NLWV Open Space Forum, March 19

Message from the President

Our Evolving Role

By Doug Dickson

Advocacy organizations like the Newton Conservators remain vital by adapting their voices and actions to current circumstances, while remaining true to their vision for the future. During the first decade of our history, the Conservators helped lay the foundation for protection of Newton's physical environment by advocating creation of the Conservation Commission and passage of floodplain, watershed protection and gravel removal ordinances, among others.

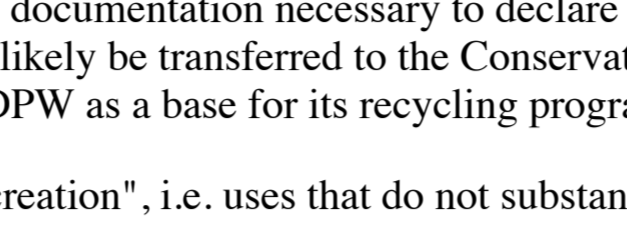
Then came a period of intense open space acquisition. The City's first Open Space Plan derived much from a prior survey of Newton's open space by the Conservators that targeted key parcels for acquisition. During a ten-year period beginning in 1973, the city added more than 300 acres of open space, most of it for conservation and passive recreation. The Conservators pushed for each new preservation opportunity as it presented itself. This focus on acquisition and preservation turns out to have been farsighted and fortunate. Proposition 2-1/2, accelerating land values and other factors have limited opportunities to add significantly to the city's open space since the early 80s.

Then, our focus shifted again. Instead of acquisition, our attention was increasingly given to responsible development of parcels that in an earlier day would surely have been candidates for conservation. In many ways, this continues. We declare victory today, if we can save mature trees, negotiate conservation restrictions, preserve the integrity of nearby wetlands, reduce building size or ease the impact of development on adjacent neighborhoods. Elsewhere in this issue, you can read the latest in our two-year effort to help minimize the brunt of three simultaneous developments at Andover Newton Theological School, one of several such projects we are actively working on or monitoring. And you can read the final chapter regarding the successful passage of a landmark tree preservation ordinance in December.

Now, the Conservators are working with a coalition of environmental, housing and preservation groups to secure final passage in the State Legislature of the Community Preservation Act. Passed by both houses and now in conference committee, this legislation would create a mechanism for local communities to set aside funds to acquire and maintain open space, build affordable housing and preserve historic structures and landscapes. Learn more about the progress and content of this important bill in another article in Jim Broderick's article in this newsletter.

A strong, coordinated effort on the part of local advocacy organizations will be needed for this bill to become law and for the law to be successfully implemented here in Newton. But you can count on the Conservators being in the vanguard of this effort. If we are successful, our role will again shift to respond to new conditions and new opportunities. But our underlying mission remains constant and our vision clear: we exist as an organization to preserve the character and quality of our community through active conservation of open space, responsible land-use policies and vigilant protection of our environment.

Members of the Flowed Meadow Planning Group at Press Conf.



Mayor Declares Flowed Meadow as Open Space

by Michael J. Clarke

During his last week in office, DPW Commissioner, James Hickey, completed the documentation necessary to declare most of the Flowed Meadow parcel surplus to the DPW mission. On January 11, 2000, Mayor Cohen declared 36 acres of the area as open space, which will most likely be transferred to the Conservation Commission following the recommendation of the Mayor's Flowed Meadow Planning Group (FMGP). Twelve of the 48 acres of this land will be retained by DPW as a base for its recycling programs.

The FMGP is unanimous in designating future use of the 36 acres for "passive recreation", i.e. uses that do not substantially alter the land. Among its expected recommendations are: improvements to trails, benches overlooking the wetlands,

Among his many contributions to Newton during his long term as head of DPW, Commissioner Hickey will be remembered by open-space advocates for making available for one of the large Flowed Meadow parcel, but also 33 acres of what is now Charles River Park. Led by the Conservators and Wells Ave. Hickey was also responsible for funding 3 lots totaling about one acre in the Frank Barney Conservation Area.

The nearly complete report of the Flowed Meadow Planning Group will be presented at a public meeting Tuesday, March 16 at 6:30 pm in the Burr School. Public comments will be used in preparing the final recommendations, which will be presented to the Mayor.

Volunteers Needed!

Charles River Park

Nahanton Pk to Oak Hill

April 9, 2000

by Mike Clarke

MDC Ranger Kevin Hollenbeck will lead as many as 200 volunteers as part of the Newton 2000 effort to make the Charles River more scenic. The Newton 2000 Committee is working for 2000 on Sunday April 9 for various projects to improve the Garden City. Some years ago the Conservators and other volunteers cleared the southernmost section of the Charles River Pathway in Newton, which runs along the river parallel to the river between Nahanton St. and the Oak Hill Woods behind the Solomon Schecter School at the end of Wells Ave.

Briars to be Cleared from the Southern CR Pathway

This path is particularly beautiful in the spring, when numbers of many different types of wildflowers bloom along the wetland border. Hollenbeck plans to widen the path in places where briars have grown in, straighten it in others and improve the entrance accesses. Eventually, a bridge will be built to cross Country Club Brook to make the path continuous. A side path will be constructed out to a delightful drumlin overlooking the river.

Please call Newton 2000 or e-mail Mike Clarke (clarke@bk.edu) to volunteer! Better yet, organize your own work group of about 10 and volunteer en masse. This will be a significant addition to the CR Pathway that will eventually provide a wonderful walkway all along the river through Newton.

Newton, A Leader on Trees & IPM

by Doug Dickson

Thanks to many who called and wrote letters to members of the Board of Aldermen, the final challenge to enactment of Newton's landmark Tree Preservation Ordinance was laid aside on December 20, 1999. The aldermen voted 14-9 to deny a motion to reconsider its Board's 6-0 vote to pass the ordinance. With the Mayor's signature in early January, the new law officially took effect on December 26, 1999.

Newton thus becomes the first community in New England to enact an ordinance providing comprehensive protection to trees on private property. The new law has engendered a great deal of interest from surrounding communities in Massachusetts and nearby states. Cities and towns that have been working on tree ordinances of their own are encouraged by our success. Others are now beginning to consider enacting similar legislation. Some report they are looking to strengthen their subdivision bylaws in an effort to retain existing trees and encourage planting of new ones.

On another front, Newton was cited as one of only four cities in the country with an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) board in a recent issue of IPM Practitioner. Our IPM Advisory Committee was created three years ago when it adopted a comprehensive IPM policy to focus on prevention activities and alternative controls to reduce the need for use of pesticides in city-owned buildings and on city-owned grounds. Implementation of IPM practices continues for parks, playgrounds, schoolyards and other public landscapes as well as in all 22 school buildings. Implementation in all remaining city buildings is expected to begin later this year.

Because of the good work done by GreenCap, the Green Decade Coalition's Committee for Alternatives to Pesticides, Newton has minimized its use of pesticide products in recent years. That, along with support from the Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, the school department and city department heads, has made acceptance and implementation of IPM easier than in many communities. Nevertheless, old habits must be unlearned and new techniques embraced, which take time and requires focused effort.

The IPM Advisory Committee reports to the Mayor and consists of representatives of four city departments (Public Health, Parks and Recreation, Public Schools and Public Buildings) and five members of the public. The committee actively guides the implementation process, reviews and recommends action to control pests, including use of chemical pesticides when necessary, and monitors compliance with the city's IPM policy.

Newton's new Tree Preservation Ordinance applies to trees larger than eight inches in diameter at breast height (4 feet above grade). These trees must be saved if possible and protected during construction. If construction requires removal of trees larger than eight inches, they must be replaced on an inch-per-inch basis. Alternatively, an amount equivalent to replacement cost must be contributed to a fund of which trees are planted or maintained on public property. Exempt from this ordinance is all private property with dwellings of four or fewer units that are occupied by or rented from Newton homeowners. Also exempted are dead, diseased or dangerous trees.

Black Cherry Tree in Blossom-CR Pathway

To qualify for these exemptions, a homeowner must complete a Certificate of Exemption, obtained from the Inspection Services Department, at the time that a building permit is applied for. No building or renovation is involved, exempt property owners may remove trees without filing any paperwork. Developers, on the other hand, must apply for a Tree Removal Permit, showing which trees will be removed, which will stay and where replacement trees will be planted, before any trees can be removed. Normally, this will happen in conjunction with the building permit process. The city's forestry department (part of Parks and Recreation) is responsible for reviewing applications and issuing Tree Removal Permits. Questions about the process should be addressed to Parks and Recreation (552-7120).

Christmas Bird Count

By Ted Kuklinski

The 1999 annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday, December 19. Begun in 1900 and done all over the country by teams of birders, local counts are made within a specified fifteen mile circular area. Newton is part of the Greater Boston count circle. Changes in numbers over the years help to spot environmental trends. Beginning around 6:30 AM, volunteer teams fan out all over Newton and to get as complete a count as possible of the birds in Newton. A few hardy birders go out even earlier at 4 A.M. to call and count owls. Teams concentrate particularly on open space areas, such as our parks and conservation areas. Later in the day, neighborhoods are checked, especially locations with bird feeders. Teams count both species and numbers of each species--yes, even count crows, sparrows, and starlings! The birders rendezvous later in the afternoon and tally up their results. Later, representatives from the entire Boston area meet and put together the summary census for the Boston count circle. These results are archived from year to year and interested readers may find them for past years in the journal Bird Observer at the Newton Public Library.

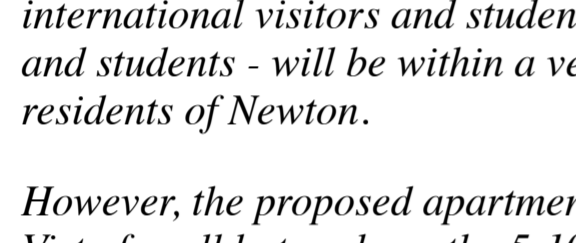
This year, a total of 45 species were counted, which, while not a record high, was very good. Among the birds counted in Newton were sharp-shinned hawk and

robins (many stay the winter), some winter wrens, redpolls, wood ducks (the only ones reported around Boston), and even a Newt skinned hawk at the feeder of the house where the Newton birders met. A black-throated blue warbler seen in the rear parking lot of the Meredith Building (California and Bridge Streets) represented a first in the 27 year history of the Greater Boston CBC. Normally this colorful bird would have been sunning itself somewhere in the Caribbean. According to Michael Partridge, the Newton count coordinator, "the diversity and numbers of many Newton birds appeared to be higher than in surrounding towns. It's tough to compare, because other count areas may have had fewer people and less observation time. But Newton birders should take heart that's its at least as good as any other inland location this time of year." If you are interested in participating in future bird counts (no experience necessary), please contact Michael Partridge at partridge@vpharm.com and #0#mailto:tdolanpond@aol.com.

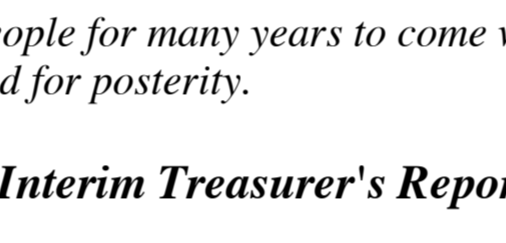
Andover-Newton (Institution) Hill

by Sarah Barnett

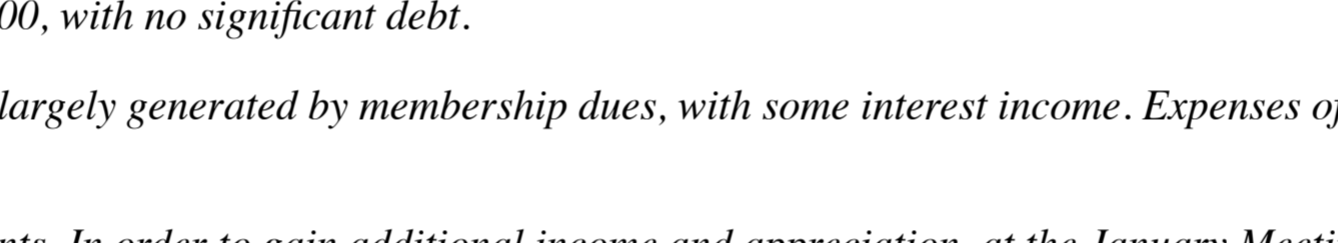
The panoramic Vista from the southern end of the top of Andover-Newton Hill stretches from Oak and Bald Pate Hills on the western side, across the watersheds of the Charles and Neponset Rivers, to the 7,000 acre MDC Blue Hills Reservation with Mt. Chickatabut Hill on the eastern side. This magnificent Vista, with wide valleys of trees and rooftops leading to distant hills, will come into clear view when the developers start cutting down the trees on the southern slope of A-N Hill. For 20 years Newton's Open Space Plan has called for preservation, without obstruction, of this view south to the Blue Hills.



Unobstructed View from Institution Hill



Obstructed View from Institution Hill



Elevations from Institution Hill

Three educational institutions (one with residence halls), and a condominium complex are proposed for Institution Hill. The three educational institutions (Andover Newton Theological School, Hebrew College, and Management Sciences for Health - which provides training for health care workers in third world countries) will not only have people from many parts of the U.S., but also many international visitors and students. The condominium complex will probably require that at least one person living in each unit be over age 55. Hundreds of people a day - employees, visitors, residents, and students - will be within a very short walk of the southern end of the A-N hilltop. The panoramic Vista, like a city park, should be preserved for all these people, and for the present and future residents of Newton.

However, the proposed apartment house, stretching from one side of the southern slope of the hill to the other side, with a height of 290 ft. above sea level, would permanently block the Vista for all but perhaps the 5-10 people in the 5 condominium units on the top floor. These 5-10 people would have exclusive rights to the Vista. Everyone else, would see a few bumps (the tops of the very tallest hills in the distance) along the 500 ft. roof line over the 500 ft. long apartment house.

Hopefully, the developer will lower the height of the apartment building so that all people for many years to come will have access to and can enjoy the Vista from Andover Newton Hill south to the Blue Hills. This unique and irreplaceable "masterpiece" of nature should be preserved for posterity.

Interim Treasurer's Report

by Michael A. Collora

The Conservators' current assets total approximately \$100,000, with no significant debt.

Gross income in 1999 was slightly over \$20,000, which was largely generated by membership dues, with some interest income. Expenses of about \$8,000 stem from Newsletter and other member materials and educational grants to local schools.

Most assets are invested in treasury bills or similar instruments. In order to gain additional income and appreciation, at the January Meeting the Board resolved to invest a up to 40% of liquid assets in index funds and similar investment vehicles with no load or low fees. Membership remains strong, with approximately 125 renewals in December 1999 alone. Total paid memberships for 1999 was 374.

Skaters Ware's Cove Auburndale Park

Massachusetts Biodiversity Days

June 9-11, 2000

by Ted Kuklinski

Bob Durand, Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs, along with a number of environmentally-oriented nonprofit and educational organizations, is sponsoring the nation's first citizen Biodiversity Day, June 9-11, 2000. Biodiversity Days will involve schools and citizen naturalists, who will find, record, and learn about the component species of flora and fauna in their hometowns. During an event period, naturalists would take a group of citizens into the field and/or join informal nature walks.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs will provide several tools to naturalist group leaders in both paper and electronic formats: (1) a guidebook on how to conduct an inventory of species and habitats, called "A Citizen's Guide to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystems, and (2) a checklist of visible flora and fauna of Massachusetts."

Each individual participant will be challenged to see (or hear) at least 100 species. Each town is challenged to find at least 200 species; a number of towns may find 500 species or more. The town's master list would be recorded in our environmental planning office in a "Local Species and Habitat Registry", which will be open to receive additional species and habitat data on an ongoing basis. It will also be archived and recorded at the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. This inaugural event is the dream of Peter Alden, Biodiversity Days Organizer, and well known birder/naturalist (National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England).

In Newton, we are hoping to schedule a series of walks as part of the Newton Conservators Spring Walk series in our natural areas such as Dolan Pond and Flowed Meadow. So if you know bugs, birds, plants, trees, fish, frogs, or animals, please come out and help with this exciting event. If you're not a naturalist, but would like to open your senses to the living wonders all around us, please join us on one of the upcoming walks. Look for details in our next newsletter. Please contact Ted Kuklinski, DolanPond@aol.com or (617) 969-6222, if you are interested in helping out or participating in the Newton Biodiversity Days.

Consistent Policy for Little League Signs

by Michael J. Clarke

An inconsistent policy has evolved regarding advertising signs on Little League fields. Each Little League has a "major league" field, which is fenced in accord with Little League regulations. Of Newton's five Little Leagues, Newton North and Newton East have been allowed to erect a fairly large number of advertising signs along their major league outfield fences. Last year, the Parks and Recreation Commission also voted to allow the Newton West Little League (NWLL) to erect 44 4x8 ft. advertising signs on the fence the ball field at Lyons Park, which it uses for its major league games.

As a result of an effort at compromise suggested by Peter Kastner and implemented by Alderman Philip Bryson, representatives of the Auburndale neighborhood and NWLL agreed on single 4-ft. sign to list donors toward field improvements to be mounted on the backstops of both fields at Lyons Park.

This past fall, NWLL requested a similar sign for the Hamilton Field, which represented the first such request for advertising signs on a local "minor league" field. While the Parks and Rec Commission has not ruled on this request, the Lower Falls Improvement Association voted overwhelmingly against the idea. Since the Newton South and Newton Central Little League's have not requested permission to mount any advertising signs, the various major league fields exist with none, one, or very many signs.

Should some neighborhoods be subjected to substantial advertising signage and others to none as a result of political maneuvering? The compromise reached with NWLL provides it with significant annual income, but does not accomplish this by blighting the park. A city-wide policy of a single 4x6 ft sign listing up to 12 donors should be adopted. The existing NELL and NWLL signs could be phased out over 2-3 years. If they should choose, NSLL and NCLL would be allowed to utilize similar signage. This approach would allow all little leagues to derive similar revenue streams, but would greatly decrease the total number of signs in our public parks. Nevertheless, it leaves unresolved the question of how to proceed should soccer, softball, basketball or other sports leagues demand equitable treatment in deriving similar income sources to improve their playing facilities.

Community Preservation Act

By Jim Broderick

After years of effort by a wide range of organizations, Community Preservation bills are now a Conference Committee of the State Legislature. According to the office of Representative Ruth Balsler, the Conference Committee's first meeting on February 2 meeting was contention-free but a subsequent meeting was not scheduled.

If a Community Preservation Act becomes law, every city and town in Massachusetts will have a chance to raise funds to purchase land for open space, to preserve and maintain historic structures and landscapes, and to provide affordable housing - without over-riding the present 2 1/2 restriction on taxes. A local Community Preservation Fund would be used to support specific preservation projects approved by the Board of Aldermen and to build escrow accounts for open space, historic sites and community housing. When immediate or large outlays might be required, bonds could be issued against these accounts, as for instance when a golf course or college site came on the market. In addition, any specific project could be partially supported by grants from a state fund that would be established by the Act.

Crystal Lake in Winter

This enabling legislation will restrict the ways in which communities can raise and distribute funds. Both the House and Senate versions allow that 10% of the money raised locally each year must be devoted to each of the three areas: open space, historic sites and community housing. The Senate version gives communities the option of raising money by a deeds excise tax of not more than 1%, or by a tax on real property of not more than 3% of the real estate tax bill. The House version allows only the additional real estate tax. But both versions permit exemptions for low income or low-income senior housing and for certain commercial and industrial properties. Within general guidelines, each community can determine the size of the new levy and its exemptions.

The Act is an enabling law. Only communities that complete a required three-step process of approval will be able to take advantage of its provisions. A city would first draft a plan that states its goals, specifies the nature and size of its levies and exemptions, and formulates how its Community Preservation Committee would be chosen. Second, the Board of Aldermen would have to approve the plan and submit it to the voters. And finally, the voters would have to approve the referendum. The House and Senate have only minor differences on the approval process. Clearly Newton advocates of the Community Preservation Act will have to prepare for a lengthy, open, carefully developed and patient considerations of all features of the Act.

The Newton Conservators have supported this legislation and written to the Conference Committee and to State Senator Birmingham and House Leader Finerman urging prompt agreement on a new promise bill. We have also argued for a recommendation made by the Community Preservation Coalition that future growth in revenue from existing deeds taxes be dedicated to the state matching fund. This proposal would avoid any new tax, would clearly earmark revenue from real estate transactions for specific real estate purposes, and provide annual sums sufficiently large to offer strong incentives to communities hesitant to commit to preservation under the Act.

We can not predict the Conference Committee's schedule or the shape of the final bill. But past experience suggests that continuing pressure on the legislature and its leadership will be needed to ensure an Act that is broadly designed and adequately funded. Copies of the House and Senate versions of the Community Preservation Act are available from the offices of our local representatives: Senator Cynthia Cream, Reps. Kay Kahn, Ruth Balsler, Rachel Kaprielian, and Peter Kontoujian. The Community Preservations Coalition (617-725-0597) has materials analyzing both versions of the bill and recommending compromises and improvements.

Panel on Environmental Legislation

Monday, February 28

by Barbara Herson

The Newton Free Library, The Newton LMV and the Green Decade Coalition will be co-sponsoring our third annual Environmental Legislation Update. Mayor David B. Cohen will welcome invited speakers; Congressman Barney Frank, State Senator, Cynthia Cream, and State Representatives Ruth B. Balsler and Kay Khan will lend their expertise and experience. Also on the panel that night will be Barbara Berney director of the Mass Environmental Collaborative, and the Environmental League of MA; John McNabb, John Solid Waste Policy Director for Clean Water Action and James St. George of the Tax equity Alliance of Mass. The evening has been organized to update citizens about current environmental bills and initiatives. Some of the topics include The Community Preservation Act, environmental justice, sustainable development and land use and open space. The forum will take place on Monday evening Feb.28, 2000 at the Drucker Auditorium at the Newton Free Library from 7-9 PM.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter appears three or four times a year. Editor: Michael Clarke. Production: Bonnie Carter, 969-0686. We wish to thank the contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: Mike Clarke, Doug Dickson, Jim Broderick, Sarah Barnett, Philip Shabecoff, Barbara Herson and Ted Kuklinski. We also thank Boston College, for the use of its word-processing equipment.

Reflections in Bullough's Pond

Economy and Ecosystem in New England

By Diana Muir, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH 320 pp., \$26.00

Book Review by Philip Shabecoff

Bullough's Pond is a small, sparkling body of water in the heart of Newton, diagonally across two busy thoroughfares from City Hall. I have driven past it dozens of times in the past couple of years and thought only how nice it is to have this piece of nature in our urban community and that it would be pleasant to live in a house on its banks.

Diana Muir does live on its banks. But when she looks at Bullough's Pond she observes considerably more: reflected in its waters she sees nothing less than the ecological and economic history of it all of New England. Beginning with the PaleoIndian hunter-gatherers who occupied the land after the glaciers retreated, she traces the impact of humans on through the age of Neolithic farmers, the arrival of the first Europeans, the industrial revolution and up to the present day.

The Northeast of the United States, like much of the rest of the world today, is largely a created artifact. Its original physical contours and composition have been changed beyond recognition by human activity - hunting, gathering, farming, industry, trade; pulling fish from the oceans and estuaries, cutting trees from the forests, washing soil from the fields, smudging the air and fouling the water with our pollution. The changes here will not be quite as drastic, the land not as degraded as they are, elsewhere. The great microbiologist and ecologist Rene Dubos once observed that New England, like the English countryside and the Ile de France is still lovely because the land has been humanized by a "wooning" of its inhabitants over the centuries rather than by rip and conquest.

By Muir's account, however, the woeding has gone too far. "The entire New England landscape," she laments, "is but an imitation of nature." We never need to accept, she cautions, that humans are but a part of nature and that we are to adapt to it instead of changing it.

Reflections in Bullough's Pond is an altogether wonderful book, packed with information, brimming with wisdom and a delight to read. Although I have been following and writing about environmental issues for decades, I learned something new and interesting on virtually every page, whether about the ecology and economy of Newton, New England and the world or how each of those things affect the other. I learned, for example, about the rich variety and abundant numbers of marine organisms that spawned in the Charles River and the vast changes in the river system that explain why we no longer have smelt, salmon, sturgeon, shad and other species thriving in its waters. I learned how tanning, papermaking, the steam engine, even clockmaking and peddling, and of course, the automobile, helped produce major changes in the New England landscape and its ecosystems. I learned how laws were created to abet the despoliation of the land and how laws to protect it were ignored.

I do have a few quibbles about the book (no self-respecting reviewer would regard an assignment as completed without a quibble or two). For one thing, it could have used a firmer hand with the editing pencil. There is substantial amount of repetition that could have been excised. Having had a book with the same publisher a few years ago I do sympathize: the University Press of New England does seem to scunt on its copy editing. There are also a few generalizations in the book that seem a bit too broad. For example, Ms Muir contends that their culture prevented immigrants from Ireland from engaging in the same kind of adventurous entrepreneurship she finds so characteristic of the original Yankee settlers. My own view is that there is a wide range of capacities within any ethnic group.

Reflections ends with a call for a new "revolution" that will replace the destructive technologies of the industrial revolution with technologies that preserve and restore our habitat. It sees, quite correctly I think, an emerging consensus that "our first priority must now be to defend the integrity of natural systems."

Consensus alone, however, will not bring revolutionary change in a political system dominated by the money of special interests and by the rise of a global economy and the mega corporation. Such a change is also require a concerted effort to reform not just technology but our political and economic systems as well.

All of this is implicit in Ms Muir's fine book. I do not know whether she is in any way related to John Muir, the transcendentalist, naturalist and writer of a century ago, who is one of the patron saints of the modern environmental movement; but the old man would have liked Reflections in Bullough's Pond.

Philip Shabecoff's next book, Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21st Century, will be published by Island Press in March. Mr. Shabecoff was for many years environmental reporter for The New York Times. He and his wife Alice are residents of Newton Centre.

New Schools & Open Space

from Rep. Ruth Balsler's Office

The Governor's report on "Reconstructing the School Building Assistance Program" recommends that responsibility for school building be transferred from the Department of Education to a new School Facilities Commission within the Executive Office of Administration and Finance. The new commission would rewrite the existing program regulations to eliminate the present bias toward new construction. The report also recommends that any school seeking to take open space for a new school submit a comprehensive open space plan with the SBA application. A "no net loss" of open space policy is recommended such that any open space taken would be replaced with equal or greater environmental value.

Many of these recommendations resulted from a meeting convened in the summer by Rep. Balsler, which involved legislators, representatives of DOE and of the Environmental Affairs Department, environmental advocates and 2 representatives of the Administration & Finance Department. The earlier conference's recommendations put forth the possibility of recycling historic buildings in preference to new construction and to net loss of open space as a standard. The Governor incorporated these measures in his report and it is to be congratulated (letters of support might be great) for this pro-environment report. �

Annual Dinner - Save the Date!

Tuesday, May 23, 2000

Noyes Hall,

Andover Newton Theological Seminary

Speaker: Robert Durand

Mass. Secretary of Environmental Affairs

Nominations Sought for

Environmentalist of the Year

Mail Nominations to: Doug Dickson, 17 Oxford Rd

Newton Centre, MA 02459 ddickson@mediaone.net

Open Spaces to Disappear in Thompsontville

by Michael J. Clarke

The Thompsontville Neighborhood between Newton Centre, Newton Highlands and Oak Hill feels itself under siege by developers. In addition to the 20 acres of Andover-Newton Theological Seminary land to be converted to schools and condominiums, Bradford Development has filed for a zoning change and special building permits to allow construction of 59 units of condominium garden apartments and townhouses near the junction of Langely Rd. and Rte 9.

This land is currently owned by the Signore family and the Redstone Corporation, and is contiguous with privately-owned green spaces that link it to the large Kennard and Lost Pond (Brookline) conservation areas. The 6.3 acre site contains two streams and a wetland resource area. Besides loss of open space, there are significant concerns about how the development would handle drainage both to maintain the wetlands and to minimize basement flooding to existing housing.

Newton's Environmental Planner, Martha Horn, has raised concerns about Bradford's proposal to grade over a stream without regard for the wetlands resource. She also noted that the developer plans to place detention basins along the edge of the wetland areas that should be left in their natural state.

The Newton Tab quoted Bradford's Bob Fox, to say that two-thirds of parcel the company owns will be devoted to open space, and the 67-year-old gas station will be saved.

The gas station, which may have historic value, on the Signore parcel, is a "21E" environmental waste site that must be cleaned up before construction on this parcel. One of the many concerns is how to plan conservatively for the site, if the cleanup of the Signore parcel becomes too expensive for development, which is why the site has remained fallow. Regardless of other issues, it may be reasonable to heed that the developers offer a conservation restriction on the southern portion of the land as part of the special-permitting process in the Board of Aldermen. A hearing for the special permit will be held February 15 in the Aldermen's Chambers.

Other nearby developments on the ANTS land developments include: 1) Management Sciences for Health - A 40,000 sq. ft. office/school building, which is filing for an administrative building permit. 2) Ternaces LLC - A 42 unit condominium building plus 18 townhouses, which will file for a Comprehensive permit, and 3) Hebrew College, which has already received its special permit and begun clearing land. Hebrew College will be offering the Conservation Commission a conservation restriction (agreed to as part of the special permit) on a portion of its land to the Conservation Commission on February 17.

Community Gardens Eyesore

By Judy Heburn

Nahanton Park is unique among our city's parks in that it lacks abutting households. The lack of timely alerts from the neighborhood has sometimes facilitated vandalism, joy riding, and midnight dumping. The community gardeners have long been a welcome presence in the park, serving to keep the incidents down during the most vulnerable spring through fall months. Nevertheless, for the past few seasons the two community gardens have become increasingly unkempt. Friends of Nahanton Park have been exploring solutions to this problem and are making recommendations for future regulations that will lead to better stewardship of the gardens.

Plot at Winchester Gardens-Nahanton Pk.

The Friends of Nahanton Park have been comparing Newton's regulations to the more detailed rules used by Brookline and Wayland, and to the recommendations of the American Community Gardening Association. In the past Newton's rules for the gardens have been much too general, specifically forbidding only pets, chemical pesticides and unattended use of sprinklers. They require plots to be planted by June 1 or relinquished, and again to be "prepared for winter" by November 30. While termination of the lease for violations is threatened, this has never been done. In contrast Wayland forbids the planting of fruit trees, requires invasive perennials such as raspberries be kept in bounds, calls for removal of fencing after each growing season, and permits only rustic garden benches and seating.

What has been the result of our laxness and lack of guidelines? One Newton gardener improved his plot last summer by removing topsoil from a nearby pathway, leaving a gaping hole nearly a foot deep and several feet in diameter. Another brought in a gas grill and propane tank, which still stands there today in the winter snow. Two gardeners have built ramshackle permanent garden sheds on their leashesolds, in clear violation of Parks and Recreation's own explicit rules and review process for the building of structures on parkland. Yet to be fair to the gardeners, their is nothing in the rules and regulation they've been receiving with their spring renewal notices that tells them structures are in violation of Park and Recreation rules.

It has also been many years since the City's Engineering Dept. has surveyed and laid out uniform garden plots. The original plan is barely discernible today. Few of the boundary stakes remain, and many paths between adjoining plots have been removed, fenced in and planted over by ambitious gardeners. It is hard to tell which gardener leases which plot any more.

As a first step toward restoring the aesthetics of the community gardens, the Friends of Nahanton Park have recommended that the Parks and Recreation Department perform a much needed resurveying and engineering of the garden areas after this summer's growing season (Fall, 2000). This would provide gardeners with a full season's