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Public/Private Partnerships

By Robert DeRubeis, Commissioner of Newton Department of Parks and Recreation



The Newton Department of Parks & Recreation has long recognized the importance and benefits of public/private partnerships.

Back in the 90's when the economic environment dictated that municipalities tighten their fiscal belts, we had to look at reducing the workforce without minimizing the work product. One of the first initiatives that intrigued us was the development of an Adopt-A-Space program. The program recruits volunteers willing and able to make a commitment to provide site improvements and landscape maintenance for the City's smaller public spaces.

Parks & Recreation is charged with maintaining the majority of green spaces in the city. Inclusive in those spaces are all traffic islands and other small parcels of land that previously created a logistical challenge for the department: the travel and preparation time to a number of these spaces was often longer than the actual maintenance time. Therefore, we reached out to residents and businesses, inquiring whether they would be interested in maintaining property in which they had a special interest. The Adopt-A-Space program

was born and continues to be a successful partnership today.

Back in 2000 to celebrate the millennium, a group of Newton residents came up with the idea of a community-based volunteer program and called it "NEWTONServes." This year more than 65 projects were undertaken by residents throughout the city. The Mayor has recently launched NEWTONServes as a year-round, village-based program.

We continue to work closely with Newton Youth Soccer and Newton Girls Soccer in a partnership venture that has resulted in the aforementioned leagues offering in-kind services as well as assisting with the purchase of materials and equipment. These leagues have purchased two John Deere tractors for the department that are used extensively on the maintenance of athletic fields. They have also purchased seed and fertilizer for use on the fields. The in-kind services have included hiring an outside source to assist with the lining of over 70 athletic fields that have to be completed on a weekly basis. The soccer goals that are seen throughout the city were purchased by NYS and NGS. Over the years of this partnership, the monetary value of their contributions is well over \$200,000.

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Public/Private Partnerships continued from page 1

Each of the four little leagues in the city maintains its own major-league field; Parks & Recreation continues to maintain all minor-league fields. Along with this maintenance, the leagues also have funded renovations such as lights, dugouts, scoreboards and major field reclamations. I have found with all the little leagues as well as girls softball that even when their own children have graduated from the leagues, parents continue to volunteer for years after. It is this commitment that allows us to have some of the best fields around.

In the Forestry Division, we have reached out to private individuals in the development of the Citizen Pruning program. This successful program allows us to use these trained individuals in the pruning of select public trees throughout the city.

The City of Newton has a number of unique areas that allow for both passive and active recreation. Two of those gems are

Crystal Lake and Nahanton Park. In order to maintain these sites and to allow for their continued enjoyment, the City has turned to two private groups for assistance. The Crystal Lake Conservancy has been a strong proponent of advancing the water quality of the lake as well as working to develop a new community-based bathhouse for the residents of the city. The Friends of Nahanton Park have worked diligently to maintain and advocate for the continued protection of the natural habitat. Concerned citizens throughout the city have developed "Friends groups" for a number of different properties to help maintain their integrity.

Since the late 80's, Parks & Recreation has experienced a significant decline in manpower. The advent of these public/private partnerships has allowed us to increase programs during this period as well as to continue to maintain 51 parks, 45 playground locations, 21 schools, 15 recreation buildings, 4 library buildings, and 4 community centers. ■

Newton Properties' Friends Groups

The following section contains descriptions of the all Friends groups associated with Newton open-space areas that we were able to reach. These entries were written and provided by the members of each organization.

Each listing contains contact information if you wish to become involved to help that public-private partnership to succeed.

The Playground Project (Albemarle Park & Cheesecake Brook)



The Playground Project grew out of a group of concerned neighbors of Albemarle Park and its surrounding neighborhood. Albemarle is one of the largest and most active parks in the city with a playground, playing fields, Gath Pool, Cheesecake Brook and Avery Wood. The park and surrounding areas serve the needs of many sport leagues, two schools, the city's only outdoor pool (and last August, the only summer swim area), several summer day camps, as well as passive recreation along the Cheesecake Brook corridor to the Blue Heron Bridge and the Charles River Pathway.

The Playground Project, a 501(c)3 organization, acts as an umbrella-organization for the various groups

with park-related concerns: cleaning up Cheesecake Brook, improving access and care for Avery Woods, replacing the wooden play structure at the playground and shade sails at the pool, to name just a few. The Playground Project acts in an advisory capacity for the many interest groups and neighbors involved, helping to balance priorities, providing tax exempt recognition where appropriate, and facilitating communication and collaboration with various City departments.

Contact: Margaret Doris (medoris@aol.com)

Crystal Lake Conservancy



The Crystal Lake Conservancy, founded as a 501(c)3 organization in 2009, is devoted to the preservation and protection of Crystal Lake for the benefit of the public. Our principal goals are to ensure the continued health of the Lake, to promote

the Lake's unique beauty, and to support the recreational enjoyment of its water.

The Conservancy's principal activities cover four major areas:

Environment: Our environmental work, now in its fourth year, includes documenting and mapping the watershed area and the related storm-drainage system into the lake; mapping of the lake configuration; water testing for clarity and temperature; and water sampling for bacteria, nutrients and chemicals. Volunteers document the readings and collect the samples, which are tested by a professional lab.

Education: We strive to increase community awareness of basic facts and issues that affect the lake. We educate the community through our website (www.CrystalLakeConservancy.org), a semi-annual newsletter, periodic lectures, an Annual Meeting, booths at local fairs and guest articles for other supporting organizations.

Long-Range Planning: The Conservancy has established a strong working relationship with the City through the Newton Parks & Recreation Department. We advocate for resident and City

involvement to decrease pollutants and to improve the quality of storm water that flows into Crystal Lake. We are advocating for the replacement of the Bath House with a state-of-the-art, energy-saving modern facility. Several Board members served on the City's Crystal Lake Task Force, which developed a proposed plan for the Bath House.

Fundraising: The Conservancy's environmental and educational efforts are funded principally by membership dues. We will assist the City in acquiring the funds to replace the bath house and to improve the public access areas around the lake.

Membership: The Conservancy is as strong as our membership. We strongly encourage all those who love Crystal Lake to join us as members. To do so, please visit our website at www.crystallakeconservancy.org. You can also contact us through the website or contact Co-Presidents: J_bourque@comcast.net (cell 617-967-0797) or schuyler.larrabee@verizon.net (cell 617-864-3870).

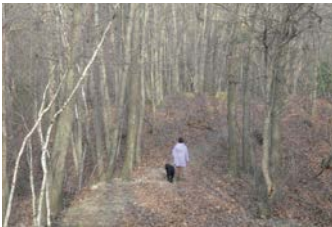
Newton Properties' Friends Groups

Friends of Dolan Pond



24 Henshaw Terrace
West Newton, MA 02465
DolanPond@aol.com
617-969-6222

Friends of Edmands Park



Often referred to as 'a hidden gem' in the center of a bustling community, Edmands Park occupies 33 acres and abuts Boston College's West Campus on one side and an environmentally impacted neighborhood downstream on the other. Celebrating one hundred years since the grant to the city of Newton, Edmands is known for its waters' edge trails and peacefulness.

A victim of neglect, Edmands' magical allure was dampened by decades of overgrowth of invasive species such as the Asian bittersweet—veils of tree-top strangulation standing in desperate testimony to the need for intervention. Civic-minded individuals have worked very hard to control these invasive plants and in many other ways work to protect the park.

Contact: Harry Sanders, volunteer advocate and caretaker (sheeznotmydog@comcast.net)
www.edmandspark.org

Hammond Pond and Houghton Gardens



Through their Environment Committee, the Chestnut Hill Association has been the major source of community support for Hammond Pond and Houghton Gardens.

They welcome new members to the Environment Committee and have a Facebook Page (Chestnut Hill Association) and Website (chanewton.org) which could connect people to us. We are currently in our Membership Drive, and people can get involved through the website and find our membership information there (voluntary contribution of \$40.00 or more).

Friends of Hemlock Gorge Reservation



1094 Chestnut Street
Newton Upper Falls, MA 02464
www.HemlockGorge.org

Friends of Houghton Gardens



M.hanss@comcast.net

The Friends of Kennard Park



The Friends of Kennard Park's mission is to support the city of Newton in restoring the land's integrity as an open space available to the public and also in figuring out a way to restore and to sustain the Kennard estate. Recently the Friends of Kennard Park participated in the NewtonServes community-service event that was held at the Kennard grounds and estate. The group of volunteers worked vigilantly for six hours, removing the invasives along more than 1/3 of the rock wall of Dudley Road. We accomplished so much in such a short period of time.

Once we are established as a non-profit group, tax-deductible contributions can be made through the Newton Conservators. Checks should be made out to the Newton Conservators, Inc., with a notation "Friends of Kennard Park." Checks can be sent to the Conservators at P.O. Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459. Monies donated will be fully tax deductible, and the funds will be maintained by the Conservators in a separate account and will be disbursed to Friends of Kennard Park as needed.

Contact: Carolyn Kraft, Friends of Kennard Park at 617-699-0741 if interested in supporting our goals.

Friends of Nahanton Park



Nahanton Park began as a 25-acre parcel on Winchester St., purchased by the City of Newton in 1890 for use as the Newton Poor Farm. It later became

the location for the Newton Almshouse, which was moved from Waban. The property was transferred to Newton Parks & Recreation in 1968.

The Xaverian Brothers owned a large parcel of land contiguous to the Almshouse that was used as the Working Boys Home and then as a novitiate. They sold the majority of land to the Jewish Community Center but wanted to develop the remaining 30 acres as an office park.

The City was adamant that this 30 acres of valuable property with its woods, open fields, wildflowers and proximity to the Charles River should be combined with the 25 acres from the Poor Farm to make a 55-acre park. After several years of failing to come to an agreement with the Xaverian Brothers, the property was finally taken by eminent domain, and improvements were funded with a \$450,000 Urban Self Help Grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1981 as well as \$50,000 of private donations.

Our original mission was to collaborate with the City and Marion Pressley of Pressley Associates, who was hired as the landscape architect to create a plan that would secure and protect this valuable open space. This included a dock for fishing/boating, a nature center for classes and a summer camp for children, community gardens and walking trails.

New uses continually are being proposed for this extremely attractive, large parcel of land, which requires our group to be vigilant in monitoring and responding to these proposals. Last year, we worked with the City and the Newton Conservators to fund a study by Mass Audubon to assess the current assets and uses of the park. We look for guidance in maintaining and improving what we have in order to continue our stewardship in the most beneficial way possible.

To become a member, please go to our website: www.nahantonpark.org/membership.html or email us at friends@nahantonpark.org

Duane Hillis, President
Suzette Barbier, Vice President

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Park Photos by Daniel Brody

Newton Properties' Friends Groups

Friends of Upper Falls Greenway



Across the city there are "Friends" groups that volunteer their time to protect, maintain and improve many of our park lands. The Friends of Upper Falls Greenway (FUG) is a different animal, however, because its park doesn't yet exist.

The Upper Falls Greenway is conceived as a plan to create a new-mile long parkland along the unused railroad line behind Needham St. The FUG was created to turn this plan into a reality. Rather than park maintenance, FUG has been working for the last year and a half on building neighborhood support and working with city government to help shepherd the project to completion. The planning is now well underway; the lease for the property will be signed with the MBTA in the coming months; and construction is scheduled for this coming October.

As the project moves closer to reality, the FUG is now slowly turning its sights to slowly morphing into a more traditional "Friends" group. Our focus is beginning to shift to the longer-term issues of improving, maintaining and supporting a new park land. The construction in October of a mile-long multi-use trail is just the first step towards building a new park that we can all be proud of. In the coming years, we look forward to a working on a host of improvements—everything from plantings and new vegetation to additional connections with other parklands, Needham St and Newton Highlands and to fostering greater community usage. The FUG, the Upper Falls neighborhood, local businesses, and the city government are all excited by the possibilities of creating a wonderful

new amenity for the city that will continue to improve and evolve in the years to come.

Citizens for Wellington Park



Citizens for Wellington Park is an informal citizens' organization dedicated to the betterment of Wellington Park, a small neighborhood playground park (1.9 acres) in West Newton within a block bounded by Kilburn Rd, Southgate Park, Princess Road, Lindbergh Ave, and Henshaw Place. The land for the park was originally donated to the city in 1932 so that children would have a safe place to play.

Since 1999, the group has advocated for the park, and many improvements have been made, including a community-built play structure, accessible pathways and a water fountain, a bulletin board, shade trees, a community-maintained garden, and new tennis and basketball courts. A park festival (Wellington Parkfest) has been held most years to foster a spirit of community and cooperation in the neighborhood and beyond. Each spring, NewtonSERVES volunteers spend an afternoon to help beautify the park. Wellington Park draws users from all over the city for its unique charms, whether to sit and relax or play.

Please visit www.wellingtonpark.org or contact Ted Kuklinski (617-332-7753, tkuklinski@aol.com) or Ann Dorfman (617-244-9321) for further information. ■

Editor's Note

We welcome new (and returning) Conservators' president Beth Schroeder, whose introductory message in this issue expresses our organization's interest in increasing membership—in order to spread our message and to increase the funds available to accomplish our mission of protecting and preserving open space in Newton. If you know someone who might like what we do, please share this newsletter with them.

As city budgets become more stressed, it is clear that there probably never will be enough funding from the city to meet all the needs of our city parks and conservation areas. In this environment, the role of private/public partnerships is crucial. Bob DeRubeis, Director of Newton's Department of Parks and Recreation, explains the importance of those collaborative relationships in our city. His article is followed by descriptions of all the Newton support organizations that we were able to reach. When we contacted Vivien Li, noted Executive Director of the Boston Harbor Association, to talk about the value of public-private partnerships, she was delighted to share her experience with us. We can use the many partnerships in which she and her organization have been involved as models for our work on behalf of open space in Newton.

The December 2012 issue of the newsletter included a description of the work that volunteers from one of the local support organizations, the Friends of Nahanton Park, and the Newton Conservators did to maintain the specialized open habitat of Woodcock Meadow. Studies have shown the importance of maintaining not only such open meadows but also bare ground, which few people think of as an important natural resource, to help support the declining populations of native bees. It's important for us to advocate not only for natural spaces in general but also for the preservation of diverse habitats. ■

Happy Reading!

✍ Beth Wilkinson



Andree & Richard Wilson (left), Beth Schroeder & Brian Washburn (right) at the 2013 Annual Meeting

The array of public-private partnerships described in the following article by Vivien Li is inspirational. These ideas that are working in Boston and some of its neighbors can be a great source of ideas and connections for open-space advocates in Newton.

Open Space Public-Private Partnerships

✍ By Vivien Li, President of The Boston Harbor Association

Last month, more than 800 people, including prominent park advocates Eugenie Beal, Valerie Burns, and Norman Leventhal, Boston Parks Commissioner Toni Pollak, Brookline Parks Director Erin Gallentine, and Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Ed Lambert joined Boston Mayor Thomas Menino at the 10th Annual Justine Mee Liff Fund Luncheon. The event, organized by the Party in the Park

Committee of the [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#), raised \$1.3 million, the most successful luncheon ever planned by women leaders in Boston. Funds raised by the non-profit Conservancy will be used to replace damaged trees and to plant new ones in more than 1,100 acres of public parklands within the Emerald Necklace park system.



PHOTO: BOSTONCONDOLOFT.COM

Such public-private partnerships can be found throughout the Commonwealth. In Boston alone, according to Commissioner Pollak, there are 176 park partners from the non-profit, private, and public sectors. Along Boston's waterfront and environs are some of the most effective public-private partnerships involving not-for-profit organizations working in tandem with state and city agencies.

Boston Natural Areas Network

Founded in 1977, [Boston Natural Areas Network](#) (BNAN) works to preserve and expand urban open spaces through community organizing, acquisition, programming, and advocacy for open spaces along the East Boston Greenway

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President's Message

Greetings to our members and newsletter readers. As the new and former president (four years ago) of the Newton Conservators, I am looking forward to working with you again. I hope more Newton residents will join us as members this year. Membership dues help us carry out our goals. The Newton Conservators are dedicated to protect and to preserve the natural areas of our city. As our board member Bill Hagar likes to say, we started on this mission in 1961. The Massachusetts Turnpike extension to Boston had just opened, and many were concerned that our Garden City would become overwhelmed by new developments.

I hope our members and newsletter readers will also join us for our informative walks, kayak/canoe excursions and bicycle rides throughout the year. We have a *Newton Conservators Almanac* available with information about native plants and birds found in Newton's open spaces on a month-by-month basis and a *Walking Trails* book that lists interesting open spaces to visit in Newton's parks and conservation lands.

Our annual meeting was held on May 1st, and it was a delightful beginning to the month of May. There were many

familiar faces and new people to meet, a great time to catch up with friends. We had a dandy lecture on the evolution of trees by Dr. William (Ned) Friedman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum and Arnold Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. The meal from Maria's catering was the best we ever had. The table decorations were lovely, and I was happy to bring home a centerpiece for my porch. I hope everyone had a good time.

We would like to thank David S. Backer and Chris Hepburn for joining the board as well as returning board member Duane Hillis. I welcome them to the board and look forward to working with them over the next year. Many others continue to volunteer and to help us with their expertise as advisors to our board. One example is Don Lubin, our local fern expert who leads fun and educational fern walks in the spring and fall.

If you would like to be more involved in the Newton Conservators, please let us know. We always appreciate your interest and participation. ■

✍ Beth Schroeder, President, bsw1@comcast.net



Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway

PHOTO: THE BOSTON HERALD

and the Neponset River Greenway. BNAN also serves as a citywide trust for community gardens, operating 59 community gardens and providing services to all of the city's 175 community gardens. In all of its work, BNAN is guided by local citizens advocating for their open spaces.



BNAN focuses its advocacy on opportunities to connect Urban Wilds with existing public parks and abandoned industrial land to create new linear open space systems. When completed, the Neponset River Greenway, which includes 17 Urban Wilds, will be a ten-mile pedestrian/bike trail from the Neponset River to the 5,800-acre Blue Hills Reservation, providing access to the largest open space within 35 miles of Boston. More than 7.5 miles of the Neponset River Greenway and over 80 acres of new parks have been completed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and BNAN sponsors extensive free public programs on the Greenway throughout the year.

The East Boston Greenway is a linear park along an abandoned railroad right-of-way, connecting neglected portions of the historic waterfront from Piers Park to Bremen Street Park, Memorial Stadium, Constitution Beach, and Urban Wilds at Wood Island Bay Marsh and Belle Isle Marsh. When completed, it will add 20 acres of new parkland and a 3.3 mile pedestrian/bike trail through East Boston. Its first half mile was built by Boston's Parks and Recreation Department, with the MA Turnpike Authority building the 15-acre Bremen Street Park and a 7-acre expansion of Memorial Stadium as part of its "Big Dig" environmental obligations.

Monthly meetings of the Friends of the East Boston Greenway and of the Neponset Greenway Council, convened by BNAN, provide the community vision for the on-going advocacy and maintenance of the two nearly completed Greenways, together with the programming.

This summer, dozens of teens in BNAN's Youth Conservation Corps will work along the Neponset River Greenway in Dorchester and Mattapan and along the East Boston Greenway. These youths will be involved in environmental restoration and landscaping activities, as well as creating murals along the Neponset and East Boston Greenways. BNAN partners with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation and with Boston's Parks and Recreation Department to accomplish Youth Conservation Corps projects.

Boston Harbor Island Alliance

The [Boston Harbor Island Alliance](#) (BHIA) is the non-profit partner of the [Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area](#), which includes 34 harbor islands and peninsulas in Boston Harbor. The organization partners with the National Park Service, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, the City of Boston, and others working to promote greater access to the Harbor Islands. Visitation to the islands has increased dramatically since BHIA's founding.

In recent years, BHIA has invested over \$16 million in infrastructure and spearheaded the building and renovation of historic visitors centers on George's and Peddock's Islands, key destinations in Boston Harbor. A very

successful capital campaign by the Boston Harbor Island Alliance resulted in the construction of the award-winning BHIA Pavilion on the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, where tens of thousands of people each year get educational and visitor information about the islands.

The organization also contracts with Boston's Best Cruises to provide water transportation for the general public to and from the harbor islands and with Jasper White's Summer Shack to provide food services and special events catering on the islands.

BHIA runs more than 150 free programs on the islands annually for the public and for families, from antique baseball and concerts to school science field trips. Its staff works closely with the National Park Service and Department of Conservation and Recreation staffs and rangers to ensure unique and fun activities on the islands.

Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy

The [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway](#) is a 15-acre, 1.5-mile roof garden park that sits on top of the eight-lane highway tunnel created by the "Big Dig" project. While the MA Department of Transportation (DOT) owns the land and operates the highway under the Greenway, the non-profit Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy has the responsibility to maintain, program and improve the Greenway under a lease agreement with DOT.

From the start, the Conservancy set a standard by using organic and sustainable landscape-management practices to maintain its parklands. The Greenway is Boston's only organically maintained public park and one of the few organically maintained urban parks in the country.

The Greenway has many offerings for visitors, including five water features to cool off in, a series of food trucks and carts offering a variety of unique and affordable food selections, distinctive public art, including long-term installations and temporary public art, as well as one of the largest free public Wi-Fi networks in the state. Free public programs and events on the Greenway serve to attract residents, workers and visitors to interact and to enjoy the parks. The Conservancy partners with cultural institutions and other non-profit organizations to create events geared toward multi-generational and multi-cultural audiences. Over 350 free events were organized by the Conservancy last year, including the FIGMENT participatory art festival, Boston Local Food Fest, Boston-NY Food Truck Throwdown, and Berklee College of Music concert series.

Thanks to the Conservancy's successful fundraising, a new Greenway carousel designed to attract more families and visitors is currently under construction and will open on Labor Day. Instead of the usual horses, riders will sit atop replicas of such iconic local favorites as a lobster, a harbor seal, a whale, a cod, and a grasshopper. An additional \$1.5 million grant to the Conservancy will help pay for lush landscaping around the Boston-themed carousel.

The Conservancy also partners with other volunteer groups. Last November, the [Friends of the North End Parks](#) worked with the Conservancy and volunteers to plant 13,000 daffodil bulbs on the North End parcels of the Greenway. In April, the Friends and the Conservancy celebrated the first Annual Daffodil Day.

Other Partnerships



The [Boston Harbor Association](#) (TBHA), a non-profit, public-interest organization founded in 1973 by the League of Women Voters and the Boston Shipping Association to promote a clean, alive, and accessible Boston Harbor, was the first organization to call for the clean-up of Boston Harbor. In 1983-84, TBHA served on the City of Boston's Harborpark Advisory Committee, which recommended to city and state officials the establishment of a HarborWalk public access system. When completed, the HarborWalk system will cover 47 miles through the six waterfront neighborhoods of Boston. Currently, the public can enjoy about 40 miles, or approximately 84%, of the HarborWalk along Boston Harbor.

Using existing state and city regulatory processes, TBHA is the leading advocacy organization working on completion of the HarborWalk system. In addition, TBHA is the primary organization working with public and private property owners to ensure that HarborWalk segments and interior facilities of public accommodation along the HarborWalk are maintained in clean, safe conditions consistent with state and city permits and have appropriate, visible signage welcoming the public. Information on the HarborWalk system is available on TBHA's HarborWalk web site.

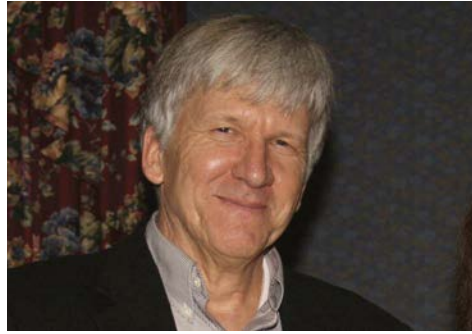
Other effective waterfront public-private partnerships include the [Friends of Christopher Columbus Park](#), an all-volunteer non-profit organization made up of North End and waterfront neighbors who further the restoration, protection, care, and enhancement of the City of Boston's Christopher Columbus Park, and the [Charles River Conservancy](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to the renewal and stewardship of the Charles River Parklands from Boston Harbor to the Watertown Dam. The Charles River Conservancy partners with the Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation and has successfully leveraged funds to begin construction of a world-class skate park under the Leonard P. Zakim Bridge. It also annually engages thousands of volunteers in maintenance and planting activities along the Charles River.

While public funding and support of parks and open spaces remain crucial in ensuring quality work and residential environments, public-private open space partnerships in Greater Boston have helped to further enhance our public parklands. ■

Conservators Award Three at Annual Meeting



Jane Sender



Eric Olson



Norman Richardson

“Volunteers are not paid,” so the old adage runs, “not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.” Over the years the Conservators have recognized politicians, public employees and private organizations for their work, but through it all we’ve never lost sight of the fact that it’s the efforts of volunteers, operating individually and collectively, who create the kind of change that money simply can’t buy. This year, the Conservators gave all three of our awards to individuals for their unpaid efforts on behalf of conservation, the environment and open spaces.

Environmentalist of the Year Award

Jane E. Sender

For four years as Conservators’ President and her work on the Conservation Commission

Back in the winter of 2004, teamwork was very much on the mind of Conservators President Eric Reenstierna. Teamwork, he noted in the winter newsletter, had suddenly become trendy. Every organization, he observed, from the Patriots to the Red Sox to “traditional, management-driven corporations attempts to instill the team concept.” But that was nothing new to the Conservators, he went on to explain: “all along, the Conservators have played as a team. Every member of the Conservators’ Board of Directors serves an important function. In one aspect or another, every director takes the lead....No one calls all the shots. We make all our decisions as a group. Every couple of years, someone else from the team takes the wheel. And it works. The proof is in our string of accomplishments.”

In that same issue, newsletter readers were introduced to Jane Sender, as the Conservators took note of the October dedication of the Marty Sender Riverwalk. Marty, a long-time director of the Newton Conservators died of injuries suffered in an accident in 2000. Three years later his widow, Jane, gathered with state and local officials, neighbors and friends to cut the ribbon and open the portion of the Charles River pathway named in Marty’s memory.

Nearly a decade later, the Conservators are proud to honor Jane with the Environmentalist of the Year Award, recognizing her many accomplishments as she carried on the Sender tradition as President of the Conservators and as a member of the Conservation Commission. Jane’s tenure encompassed the last years of the Conservators’ first half-century and the first years of our next. As such, Jane was

responsible for making sure we stayed true to our original mission while re-envisioning it for the 21st century.

Jane oversaw the upgrading of our operations, the establishment of an on-line membership database, and design and content improvements to our newsletter, website and other on-line and printed materials. With Jane at the helm, we finalized the Wilson conservation restriction protecting a 2-acre Newton Center parcel from further development, participated in Newton’s new Open Space plan, and advocated for issues ranging from storm-water problems plaguing our river, lakes and ponds to maintaining open space in new commercial developments. At Jane’s behest we worked closely with the Parks and Recreation Department on issues ranging from a temporary fire station and other non-park-related building use to snow and brush dumping to creating management plans. After all that, it would not be surprising if Jane wanted to rest on her non-invasive laurels. But we’re delighted to report that, while she may be changing positions, Jane will still be a part of our team!

Charles Johnson Maynard Award

Eric Olson

For his commitment to the removal of invasive plants to preserve Newton’s biodiversity

When Eric Olson says he’s working on a knotty problem, he means it literally. As the founder of the Newton Invasive Task Force, Eric is spearheading an effort to eradicate the invasive Japanese knotweed from the banks of the Charles River in the City’s northside. And knotweed isn’t the only problem—in a 2010 survey of a Newton wetland, Eric found three times as many invasive species as native species. Invasive plant species threaten the entire eco-system, out-competing native plants, reducing biodiversity and negatively impact bird and insect life.

Dr. Ned Friedman Addressed the Annual Meeting on What it Means to be a Tree

Dr. Ned Friedman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum and Arnold Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University, was the featured speaker at our Annual Meeting and dinner on May 1.

Early in his talk about “The Evolution of Big,” Dr. Friedman asked the audience what it means to be a tree. He showed a slide of palms and asked the audience whether they are trees. The easy answer? No. Why? Palms do not have a cambium, the layer of undifferentiated cells that many see as the defining feature of a tree. The cambium is the site of cell division and growth that allows a tree to increase in girth; it produces the xylem, the tubes that move water and nutrients from the roots to the rest of the tree, and phloem, the tubes that move sap from the leaves down to the rest of the tree.

Dr. Friedman told his listeners that approximately 350 million years ago there were no trees and then in a span of 15 million years (as he said, just the blink of a geological eye) six different groups of plants separately evolved the ability to increase their girth and to qualify as trees. He described the features of those early trees and then revealed that only one of those groups—the “progymnosperms,” which reproduced by spores—survived to become the trees we see today.

That is when Dr. Friedman’s discussion became more complicated. He explained that those progymnosperms gave



Dr. Ned Friedman

rise to seed-producing plants, evolved into flowering plants; then one group broke away and redeveloped into herbaceous plants and re-evolved “small.” He gave evidence that most of our flowering plants still have remnants of a cambium. He even revealed that some herbaceous plants have once again re-evolved woodiness. He left us with the idea that it can be hard to define just what the essence of being a tree really is.

Dr. Friedman’s talk was warmly received, and afterwards, he was surrounded by members wanting to ask questions or to talk with him about their ideas. He invited everyone to visit the Arnold Arboretum on the Arborway in Boston, or online at www.arboretum.harvard.edu.

Note: Visit the Arboretum’s website to sign up to receive notices of their Tree Mobs. What is a Tree Mob? Their web site describes them as “interactions with scientists or other specialists at the Arnold Arboretum [that] provide another pathway to enjoy and learn in the landscape. Experts share little-known facts about our living plant collection, its relevance today, and its importance to future generations. A Tree Mob may attract a small group or a large gathering—we won’t know until it takes place.... Plan to spend approximately 30 minutes learning about an interesting component of our collection.” ■

✎ Beth Wilkinson

Conservators Awards continued from page 8

Eric, a professor at Brandeis University’s Heller School, is also a Board member of Green Decade and a member of the Waltham Land Trust Advisory Board. In his efforts to eradicate invasives, he’s become, as he puts it, “an expert on the risks and pleasures of depending entirely upon volunteer labor.” Whatever the risks and pleasures, Eric makes it look easy as he assembles a posse that includes everyone from high school students to senior citizens, all intent on ridding Newton of foreign invaders!

Directors’ Award

Norman A. Richardson

For his decades of exemplary service on the Newton Conservation Commission

When the *Newton Tab* profiled Norman Richardson in 2005, they said the key to the ultra-marathoner’s success was that he doesn’t “dwell on the blisters, the dry heaves and vomiting, the hallucinations and the pain.” Instead, Richardson gives up “on thoughts of defeat as quickly as they enter his mind.”

That’s probably also the key to Norm’s success at another marathon endeavor: his years of service on Newton’s Conservation Commission. Norm has laced up for many of the Commission’s landmark accomplishments. He helped negotiate the 30-year Conservation Restriction with Lasell College. He represented the Commission on the Newton Open Space Advisory when, in 2003, it prioritized the acquisition of West Kessler Woods and Angino Farm. He agreed to represent the Commission on the Off-Leash Dog Task Force. And Norm was not afraid to be the voice of the loyal opposition, as he dissented from the Commission’s conditional approval of the installation of artificial turf at Newton South.

The citizens of Newton are grateful that Norm is still in it for the long haul. As he told the Tab, “From 60 miles on, you can be as fit as you want: if your head isn’t there, you’re not going to make it.” When it comes to conservation and advocating on behalf of all Newton residents, Norm’s head is clearly here! ■

✎ Margaret Doris

Avian Spring Arrivals

This has been a slow spring for bird migration in New England because we had an extended period of cold weather during April and at the beginning of May. A change occurred on the weekend of May 11th and 12th, when the warm weather brought lots of birds that had been bottled up south of here, just waiting for the warmer weather. Most of these birds depend on insects for their diet; now they have arrived and are devouring small caterpillars and other insect meals at a great rate.

If you take a walk in Nahanton Park, you will be treated to the sight of the Tree Swallows that are nesting in the bird boxes around the lower and upper gardens. They are graceful in flight and make pleasant liquid-sounding warbles as they fly past you, often overhead. They also can be seen sitting on the nest boxes or with their heads poking out of the hole.



Tree Swallow

The Tree Swallows are one of the earlier migrants to arrive here. This year they were in our area by April 1st. They are less dependent on insects as they feed extensively on berries when the insect supply gets short. By now they are swooping around Nahanton Park, catching insects on the wing. So be thankful that they will scoop up some biting insects. (If only we could train them to gobble up deer ticks.)

Tree Swallows from our area migrate in the winter to Florida, Cuba and Central America. In the fall you can see huge masses of these swallows staging in places like Plum Island along our Atlantic shoreline, getting ready to fly south.

On a Newton Conservators bird walk on May 4 in Cold Spring Park, we were treated to the sight of a close Wood Thrush, up in the trees in front of us. This bird arrived in the park on May 1st and has been singing every morning since, establishing his territory in the wet woods in the central area of the park. His song has an ethereal flutelike quality with one phrase often described as “eee-oh-lay.” These thrushes can sing two notes at the same time since they have double voice boxes. Wood Thrushes are growing less common as their woodland habitat keeps getting chopped up for human habitation.

The Wood Thrush migrates south in September and flies across the Gulf of Mexico from Florida or from the gulf coast to the Yucatan peninsula, from which it moves into Central America for the winter. They reverse this trip each spring.



Cedar Waxwing



Great Horned Owl

On that same May 4 bird walk, we observed a pair of Cedar Waxwings feeding berries to each other in a tree over our heads. (A nice relational touch.) Our Cedar Waxwings may move south in the United States for the winter, but there usually are some of these birds around here all winter long, possibly from Canadian populations. After the breeding season, they are quite nomadic, following the supply of ripe berries and crabapples. Their plumage has an understated beauty to it, with the soft browns, black mask and bright, waxy tips to their tails and wings.

A very different bird is the Great Horned Owl, a top predator of the night-time world. Our local owls already have nested and now are getting their fluffy youngsters into flight and hunting. One male spent most days this spring roosting in one particular white pine tree in Cold Spring Park, near the off-leash dog area. He was occasionally mobbed by flocks of angry crows, who undoubtedly view Great Horned Owls as serious night-time ogres.

I also saw a crow being chased by eight or ten songbirds yesterday, as it flew away with a baby songbird in its beak. The natural world does have its dangers.

In addition to the few birds highlighted here, there have been nearly 30 different species of brilliant wood warblers passing through Newton, en route to more northern nesting grounds. A winter plumage Cape May Warbler is



Cape May Warbler

shown below. Both Baltimore and Orchard orioles are here now, sporting vividly colored plumage. Get out with your friends for a walk in an open space nearby and soak up the beautiful sights and pleasant sounds. Absorb the good Karma in the warm sunlight. We all need it. ■

— Pete Gilmore

Foundation Plantings—Plant Math

A tape measure is one of the essential tools in a gardener's toolbox.

One of my pet peeves is when a beautiful home in Newton is completely buried in shrubbery and trees. Sometimes it's a homeowner who can no longer keep up with their garden, but in many cases the homeowner just doesn't realize that their home is being eaten by shrubbery. I've written about this subject before. I've nicknamed overly-large, pruned shrubs "meatballs". Meatballs or not, shrubs need to be tamed. Often times, the wrong plant was chosen; it was planted too close to the house; and it is too close to the next plant. The people who planted it had no idea how big that little shrub would get.

Some Newton houses are lovely examples of period architecture. I look at a home, and I wonder what beautiful details are obscured by the bevy of bushes. Even a "Marsha Brady" house can have wonderful 1950's lines. I'd like to see them. The best thing to do is bite the bullet and to take the shrubs out. Often times these shrubs have grown to be twenty feet wide. A tree-trimming service can cut them down and pull out or grind up the stumps and roots. The property will look much larger afterwards. If they are removed and replaced with shrubs that only grow to four feet wide, that leaves sixteen more feet of property to actually use, room to play catch, sit on the lawn, or play fetch with a dog.

Foundation plants aren't planted just to hide the foundation. They should add beauty to the home and help make a transition from the flat lawn to the taller house. Shrubs and trees that are planted too close to the house are cute when they are young. It is kind of like having a baby tiger as a pet. Lots of fun until it gets big enough to eat you. It isn't good for a house to be smothered with trees and shrubs because houses need sunlight and ventilation.

Once the shrubbery and foundation trees are removed, it's possible to start over. This time don't go to Home Depot and buy cute little green things to plunk into the newly opened space. There is nothing wrong with shopping at Home Depot, but you need to understand that these things are going to grow. Some of them grow like mad. You must read the tags to find out how big they will become.

For foundation plantings I recommend buying dwarf-sized shrubs. Even most rhododendrons and mountain laurels get too big for foundation plantings. A *Rhododendron catawbiense* can grow to be twenty feet wide and eight feet tall. A mountain laurel can grow to be ten feet tall, much too big to go under a window.

Measure from the ground to the sill of your first-floor windows, this is how big your plants should get. This eliminates most pruning, and your windows will not be blocked in the future. If you have 54" under your windows, try to find a plant that will only be up to 54" tall. A tiny bit bigger would be okay, but not a plant that will be fifteen feet tall when mature.

Most deciduous shrubs have lovely shapes even without any leaves, but it's a good idea to mix deciduous and evergreen shrubs in your foundation planting bed. That

gives the house a bit of greenery all year long. Some people recommend using one evergreen shrub for every three deciduous shrubs, but this is a rough guideline.

Some of my favorite shorter deciduous shrubs for foundation plantings are: calycanthus, cotoneaster, daphne, deutzia, dwarf fothergilla, hydrangea, snowberry, and spirea. Compact inkberry, rhododendron 'Olga Mezitt' and rhododendron PJM are broadleaf evergreens. They have leaves rather than needles.

Conifers also add a bit of year-round greenery. The conifer *Pinus mugo* 'Moppet' grows to be only two feet tall. Juniper horizontalis 'Bar Harbor,' 'Blue Chip' and 'Blue Rug' each get to be six to twelve inches high. They make nice edging plants for a foundation bed.

Remember that a mountain laurel grows to be twenty feet wide. It was probably originally planted three feet away from a rhododendron, which also can grow to be twenty feet wide. The width of the plants must be considered. If you want to plant 'Goldmound' spirea in front of your house, look at the tag: you will see that they grow to be four feet wide. That means you must plant them four feet apart. At first your plantings will look a bit sparse, but you can put in some nice brown colored mulch in the in-between areas. The spirea will be full-sized before you know it, probably in the first year.

Your housepainter will bless you if you leave a bit of space between the plants and the house. If the new shrub gets to be five feet wide, how about planting it four feet from the foundation? Then you will have an extra eighteen inches available for home maintenance. It may pull the plants out enough that they are beyond the roof overhang so that they can better benefit from rainfall.

Access to front paths and the driveway may also be blocked by overgrown shrubs and conifers. Here the same rule applies. If your new conifer is going to grow to be ten feet wide, you need to plant it at least five feet from the edge of the path or driveway. Otherwise your path or driveway will be blocked within a few years. You may want to leave even more than five feet to give a bit of space between your plants and your paths. I often see people put in a new row of arborvitae to give their front yard privacy. Many varieties grow to be up to ten feet wide, but they're often planted only eighteen inches from the sidewalk. Do you see a future problem?

Where you have a blank space between windows in the façade of your house, there is an opportunity to plant a taller shrub or a small ornamental tree. But again, plan ahead. If you have your eye on a Kousa dogwood, and it grows to be fifteen feet wide, don't plant it five feet from the house. Move the tree out into your yard so it has room to grow. A fifteen-foot-wide plant needs to be a minimum of seven and a half feet from the house. ■

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Newton North Green Wall presentation
at the Annual Meeting
Photo by Henry Finch

New Board Members

David Backer

David grew up in El Paso, Texas, and has lived in Newton for 29 years. He obtained his BS at Washington University and after adding an MS in Computer and Information Science, he helped develop three-dimensional computer-aided design (CAD) systems for several years. He was one of the first graduates from the MIT Media Lab doctoral program. In 1995 he became a joint owner of the new studio in Newton, a design and development company for interactive applications, where he is the Chief Technology Officer.

David became Executive Director of Newton's Environmental Science Program in 2004 and together with ESP received the Conservators' Charles Johnson Maynard Award in 2009.

Chris Hepburn

Chris Hepburn, a long-time Professor of Geology in the Dept. of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Boston College, will be joining the Board. Chris, who retires from BC this summer, is an expert in igneous and metamorphic petrology and geochemistry, particularly as applied to the geological development and plate tectonic history of the northern Appalachians. He is a member or Fellow of several scientific societies and has served them in various capacities.

Chris and his wife Judith, a past Board member and current Advisor of the Conservators, are active birdwatchers both locally and further afield. Chris currently serves as Treasurer of the Friends of Nahanton Park.

Duane Hillis

The board welcomes back Duane Hillis after three years as an advisor. While on the board before, he was key to the City's acquisition of the Angino Farm. Duane grew up in Colonie, New York, and trained as a veterinarian at Cornell. He moved to Newton 35 years ago and practiced emergency veterinary medicine before going into real-estate development.

Duane shared the Conservators' Charles Johnson Award with Suzette Barbier in 2011 for his work with the Friends of Nahanton Park, of which he is current president. Among his special interests are growing trees from seeds (oaks, giant sequoia, paper birch, red maple).



MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 52 years ago in June 1961.

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We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to bethwilkinson@mac.com. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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



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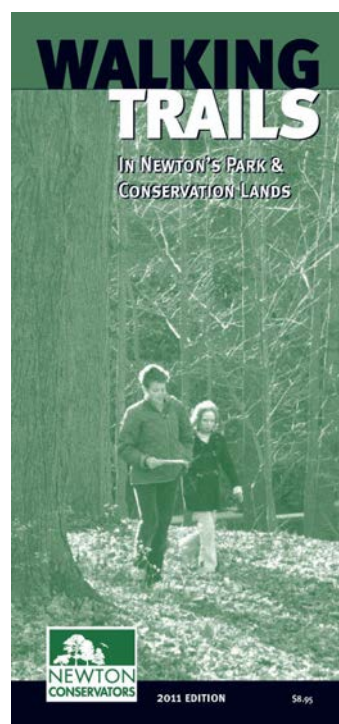
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Photo by Dan Brody

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