

NAHANTON: THE CITY'S NEW DOG PARK?

Newton's open spaces serve many purposes. One is to give dogs and their owners a place to get out of doors. Another is to provide quiet, natural areas where wildlife can do what wildlife does, undisturbed. The two do not always harmonize. Newton has relatively little open space, in comparison to other nearby communities. Proposals to put Newton's few open spaces to uses that may conflict with more traditional open space uses like walking and birding understandably meet with resistance. The proposal for a dog park at Nahanton has sparked a discussion that has implications for other neighborhoods where dog parks may be located.

This issue of the Newton Conservators' Newsletter contains letters and articles from several members of the community. In addition, Jane Sender, President of the Conservators, has devoted her President's Message to the question. As she notes, the Conservators have advised the City that the Conservators oppose the proposal for a dog park at Nahanton.

*- Eric Reenstierna
Editor*

NAHANTON PARK: WHAT IS IT FOR?

The Parks and Recreation Commission at its regular meeting on September 21st at 7:00 PM will be reviewing a recommendation from the "Dog Off Leash Advisory Committee" to expand its experimental approval of Old Cold Spring Playground as a designated non-leashed dog area, to include the Nahanton Park Meadow and the back section of Braceland Park. This article presents the author's personal view of issues presented at Nahanton Park due to his specific knowledge of the park's history.

Nahanton Park is comprised of two parcels. In the early 1900s, the first 25 acres were purchased from the Burney Estate. At the urging of the Newton Conservators and other civic groups, the City in 1980 purchased an additional 32 acres, with partial reimbursement from the Commonwealth's Urban Self-Help Program.

Recent improvements at Nahanton Park were due to the efforts of the Parks and Recreation Department, The Newton Conservators, The Jewish Community Center, and interested neighbors. These groups formed the Friends of Nahanton Park to maintain the park as a nature center and hired Pressley Associates to develop a preliminary plan. The city received a \$450,000 matching grant to upgrade the park as a nature center. The Friends of Nahanton Park, in order to accept the grant, raised the necessary \$50,000 from about 125 to 150 individuals, companies and foundations. The grant paid for an extensive park upgrade, with the thrust of the plan to maintain the park's natural features, while providing for the improvement of the pre-existing soccer field.



The original master plan was broken into stages. The first stage was to build a nature center, build a dock, improve trails, and improve access and parking while reclaiming areas that were being used as a dump. Since the original grant, the soccer league has spent on the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars improving the soccer fields, and the Friends have made contributions, funding Florrie's Path (a handicapped-accessible path along the River) and upgrading the Winchester Street entrance. The second stage of development was to include upgrading the Community Garden.



The park now provides space for multiple uses:

- (1) A summer nature camp program
- (2) Community gardening
- (3) A full soccer program
- (4) A senior program.

In addition, the park is used heavily for bird watching, fishing and walking. The above listed programs all have a formal relationship with the city and often either pay rent or, in the case of the soccer program, make major contributions to maintenance.

The Nahanton Park meadow was part of the original Pressley Associates plan, which set aside the meadow as attractive open space and wildlife habitat. Several members of the Friends have weeded the meadow, seeded wild flowers, and placed birdhouses in the meadow. The open meadow also serves as an emergency snowfield during the winter and is part of the city's emergency plan to act as a staging area to remove fallen branches and trees.

It is the relatively low density uses at Nahanton Park that make it an attractive area to the Dog Off Leash Advisory Committee due to its size and parking capacity. But a dog area would conflict with the goal to maintain this unique city park as a natural park with an active nature

educational and camping center. The city has an obvious desire to create non-leashed dog areas, and the successful integration of this use presents unique challenges to maintain the natural quality of the park, provide a quiet area for birding, for nature students, and for walkers and to provide the opportunity to expand the community gardening program, with potential use by the nearby community farm. Use of public land to provide space for non-leashed dogs has an obvious public benefit. Where to locate the areas and under which rules and regulations they should operate are valid public concerns. Several local communities have recently developed non-leashed dog areas, and they have experienced conflicts similar to those in Newton.

- Peter Kastner

The writer is a member of the Newton Conservators' Board of Directors, a Member of the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission, and a founding member of the Friends of Nahanton Park.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: WHERE DO WE PUT THE DOGS?

As a dog lover as well as a lover of wildlife, I personally find the issue of where to site dog parks in Newton a thorny one. The Conservators have been reluctant to wade into these stormy waters, but the issue of the use of Nahanton Park as a dog park brings into focus the problems faced in a suburban environment and forces us to enter the fray.

Choosing the right places for dog parks is not just about parking and ill behaved dogs. It is also about the constituency which cannot speak for itself other than by disappearing: wildlife. We are working to identify open spaces in Newton which do not currently serve as sensitive habitats for wildlife. We call on our members to help us identify these areas.

Densely populated as Newton is, its residents exist in a natural environment in which birds, mammals, plants and insects live and reproduce. Humans and canines share space with, for example, migrating birds, which need many different types of habitat if they are going to successfully live and breed here. Backyards are fine habitats for some birds – American Robins, Gray Catbirds, and Northern Cardinals, to name a few. They tolerate us

well. Other birds do not tolerate us as well and need habitats which are harder and harder to find, such as the large grassy field, left unmowed, at Nahanton Park. Many species of birds which depend on that type of habitat for feeding and breeding – Eastern Bluebirds, Scarlet Tanagers, indigo bunting, barn and tree swallows, brown thrashers, and many other passing migrants - are in decline. Nahanton Park is an example of a sensitive habitat which would be degraded by mowing and breaking up the field into sections. Breaking it up would contribute to the loss of species we love to see here. There are numerous examples of mammals that also fit into different categories. Raccoons, for example, clearly find our presence tolerable. River otters, once plentiful and now rare here, do not.

The Board of the Newton Conservators voted on September 9 to ask the Parks and Recreation Commission to not site a dog park in Nahanton Park. We will continue to give them our input. Please contact us if you have any thoughts about areas for potential parks for dogs, keeping in mind the other creatures which inhabit the space.

- Jane Sender
President, The Newton Conservators

OFF-LEASH: THE OTHER SIDE

National statistics show that about a third of households in the US have dogs, with perhaps a quarter of those households having multiple dogs. Newton has 71 tennis courts, 22 basketball courts, myriad acres of baseball and soccer fields, and even 71 acres for those who enjoy whacking a tiny ball towards a hole in the ground. Dog walkers form one of the largest user groups of open spaces in the city. Yet until recently there was NO legal space in the city for off-leash activity.

Most dogs require exercise that leash restrictions do not permit. Dogs are social animals whose mental health is improved by interaction with others. Happy, healthy dogs are calmer and better behaved. Walking dogs off-leash is indeed one popular form of passive recreation. Providing space for residents to walk their dogs off-leash is about meeting the needs of the residents, not just their dogs.

Communities are created by dog owners getting together each day to spend time with other residents as their dogs play. Many parks are virtually unused in the colder

months and early in the morning, except by residents that own dogs. A dog park builds bonds within the human community. Dog park patrons tend to be people who appreciate parks, take a “stewardship interest” in them, and, as a result, help keep the areas safe. At my local park, it is the dog owners who organized a playground project, installed a garden, organized cleanups, and removed trash left by other park users.

Many cities and towns throughout the nation and locally have identified the recreational and social needs of this group and have met these needs with dog parks. These are designated areas where dogs may run “off-leash” under the supervision of their owners. Most off leash areas around the country have some common threads – dogs must be licensed and up to date on rabies shots; dogs must be under control; owners must have leash in hand and must “pick up;” and usually no more than three dogs are allowed per person.

Many communities comparable to Newton (Weston, Wellesley) have implemented very successful off-leash policies. Denser Brookline has had a very successful “Green Dog” program in 14 parks where off-leash is permitted at certain times of day and year. In Newton, it has taken a very long time to get to the point of having an “off leash” ordinance and even a single experimental dog park within the city, at Cold Spring Park. Realizing that having only a single off-leash area in Newton was focusing too much activity at Cold Spring, Parks and Recreation requested that additional areas be put forward. To date, groups in two additional areas, Bobby Braceland Park and Nahanton Park, have formulated proposals.

At 57 acres, Nahanton Park is one of Newton's larger open spaces. Nahanton Park was suggested to the dog community as a potential location for which to submit an off-leash proposal by Parks and Recreation and at the suggestion of one of the aldermen.

The current proposal at Nahanton is to mow a portion of the meadow between the upper and lower community garden areas, utilizing the existing fence between the meadow and the parking lot and perhaps using the unmowed grass as a natural barrier. It is not surprising that this would ruffle the feathers, so to speak, of local birders who argue this is important nesting area for birds and other wildlife. The meadow is indeed an important habitat for sparrows and other species in season, and its importance to the birding community was probably not fully realized. This might be balanced against past recommendations for more mowing (due to deer tick and Lyme disease concerns).

The question then becomes whether there is some compromise arrangement that might suit all parties. For instance, could a smaller portion of the meadow (kiosk end) be used and fenced, leaving intact a sufficient portion for bird nesting and still maintaining a vista with the use of non-visually intrusive fencing (e.g. black fencing becomes almost invisible and plastic coated wire mesh fence is fairly inexpensive)? Are there other areas in Nahanton that might also be considered, such as the mowed meadow closest to Nahanton Street which may be less used than the Winchester side? Could there be restrictions that would protect bird activities in certain seasons, as at Brookline's Larz Anderson Park, where off-leash activity has seasonal constraints?

Change is always difficult. There will always be reasons not to have a dog park. But doing nothing fails to address the real needs of a sizeable portion of Newton citizens. The challenge for dog park proponents and opponents is to have a rational dialog and find a way to meet everyone's needs.

- Ted Kuklinski

GARDEN THUGS

Your perennial garden may be full of thuggish overachievers that are pushing out less aggressive, more delicate plants. Removing and thinning out these invading plants will give you space to redesign your perennial garden. You may have purchased a home with overstuffed, unattractive flower beds, or you may have created the situation yourself with too much enthusiastic planting of the wrong plants over the years. If you are like me, you hardly ever see a perennial that you don't want to try.

There are particular plants in my garden that need regular attention to keep them from getting out of control. Lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*) is a constant source of irritation, popping up all over. Yes, it has sweetly scented tiny white bell flowers, but it overwhelms my garden. I've dug out large patches of lily-of-the-valley in the past and it is back-breaking work. The roots are matted and dense, and the soil needs to be shaken from each clump. Now I tear the leaves off lily-of-the-valley plants as they emerge among my other plants and I hope it will halt their spread. It seems to help.

Cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) has always grown in my garden. It has wonderfully airy chartreuse blossoms in May and June. I shouldn't let any Cypress spurge grow

because it is listed on the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England (IPANE www.nbiiln.ciesin.columbia.edu/ipane). I've removed it from all of my flowerbeds but it continues to spread throughout the winter as a creeper on the dry slope in my front yard.

Orange daylily (*Hemerocallis fulva*) has forever soured my desire for daylilies. I've found it nearly impossible to eradicate. When it blooms in July it adds that bit of bright orange accent and I think "Oh, it's not so bad," but it takes up far too much prime gardening space. I've exhausted myself trying to get its roots out and beat it back into submission. I found one location for orange daylily where it can grow to its heart's content: between the rock outcropping at the front of my property and the sidewalk. This natural physical barrier keeps it in check.

False dragon head (*Physostegia virginiana*) is a very mobile spreader. It marches across my flowerbeds and grows as high as five feet. False dragon head is worth having because it blooms late in the summer and looks lovely with its pink-blue blossoms. But about half of the plants need to be pulled out each year to keep it contained.

Yellow foxglove (*Digitalis grandiflora ambigua*) seeds and spreads with wild abandon. In early June this pale yellow native foxglove is a welcome vision of springtime. But in July its two-to-three-foot-tall stems fall every which way, suffocating other plants and laying across the edges of the lawn. As I cut the flower stems to their bases, I'm relieved to be rid of them.

Gooseneck loosestrife (*Lysimachia clethroides*) is one of those plants that your friends will palm off on you, and you'll think it's great until you have to pull out more than half of it each year. Eventually you'll realize it may not be worth having at all. This year gooseneck loosestrife merged with my iris 'Watercolor' and many of the iris rhizomes were damaged as I yanked out enough loosestrife to fill a trash barrel.

The biannual rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*) spreads by seed and pops up all over my garden. I consider it more worthwhile than many garden thugs. I allow rose campion to continue to grow in select areas of my garden to provide sweeping bursts of magenta flowers from June to July. I deadhead them to keep them blooming profusely and let a few plants go to seed to provide new plants for the following year. Rose campion grows to be two feet tall and often tips over, blocking garden paths. When the tall stems are removed you can enjoy the downy lower leaves as a groundcover.

My least favorite garden plant is the native Virginia spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*). I've been fighting this plant ever since I moved to this property. One time I dug up an entire garden bed and tried to get every bit of root out of the soil. It didn't work – they still came back up. My latest tactic has been working much better. I let them bloom for a little while and then I tear them off at the base and throw them away. This seems to keep them coming back in clumps rather than spreading willy-nilly in all directions. Perhaps it's because they don't get a chance to spread their seeds. I've seen other gardeners carrying Virginia spiderwort up to the garden center cashier and I've felt awful not warning them about this thuggish brute.

Wild goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) pop up in my garden beds each year. I've found goldenrod worth keeping. I let it grow if it maintains itself in an attractive clump. If it doesn't integrate itself well within the flower bed I pull it out.

When the prolific growers become a nuisance, cut them off near the ground, fill your vases with bouquets and bring them into the house. I call this "bouquet thinning." This is a solution for many garden thugs. This summer I found the native black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) to be an excellent candidate. Each time I mow the lawn I cut the black-eyed Susan that are sprawling over the edges of the garden beds. They mix well with garden thugs in bouquets. "Bouquet thinning" works best with perennials that spread by seed but will not help stop garden thugs that spread primarily by roots such as lily-of-the-valley and false dragon head.

I'm sure that you have your own unique garden thugs to battle with. Remember, we must fight the battle and fight to win. Our gardens are depending on us.

- Beth Schroeder

LETTERS

This letter was sent to Duane Hillis, President of the Friends of Nahanton Park, on September 6. Mr. Hillis' reply, an open letter to the Friends and the Conservators, follows Ms. Barbier's letter.

Dear Mr. Duane Hillis,

I would like to express my opposition to the creation of a fenced or open dog park on the hill between Nahanton Park's community gardens.

As a frequent visitor to the park, I would like to point out that Nahanton Park is a very special wildlife area. In a relatively small space, there are several different habitats — the river, a pond, woods, meadow and gardens. These all contribute to the unusual and diverse wildlife one is able to experience on a daily basis at the park.

Over the years, this parcel has grown in its appeal to a variety of birds, year-round and migratory. Thanks to some previous nature lovers and the Newton Parks and Recreation, wildflower seeds have been sown on the hill between the gardens, creating a rich source of seed and nesting sites for a variety of birds from killdeer, goldfinches, and warblers to sparrows, some of whom need to nest on the ground in just this type of environment. It would be a real shame to destroy this area for the purpose of a dog park when more suitable areas may be available. If there are to be official dog parks, then I believe they belong in a more usual situation such as a fenced in area in a regular city park.

Nahanton Park is one of Newton's special jewels. It is a suburban treasure to be preserved like a wildlife sanctuary, not divided up and destroyed.

Sincerely,
Suzette Barbier

To All the Friends of Nahanton Park,

I wanted all of you to know what happened today at Nahanton Park: I was there with my twin granddaughters (age 5) and my wife. The twins were walking along the edge of the soccer field, since there is considerable poison ivy along the trail, and there was a woman with a large, pit-bull type dog unleashed. I went to pick up our car at the Nature Center parking lot and my wife said the dog ran over to one of the twins, grabbed a stick that she was holding, "as if to play". Mary let go of the stick immediately and the dog aggressively tore up the stick, breaking a 1.5" hard wood stick! THE DOG WOULD NOT RETURN TO THE OWNER WHEN SHE CALLED REPEATEDLY TO COME!

The point is that the dog was *on the soccer field*, was unleashed and not responding to any commands, and was extremely frisky and aggressive around a small child. This is what is going to happen if we do not have fenced areas. People will come to walk in the park, watch birds, garden etc. and some of the dogs will intimidate them so it is not fun to be there. Today was a "12" on a 10 scale and we *were* having fun, until this happened. My wife insisted that I not talk to this woman. The big picture is we need rules

and fences, and the dog owners should pay for quality fencing, installation and maintenance AND all the dogs should be licensed with proof of vaccinations. These "exercise" areas should be only open to private, Newton residents, who have paid their usage fees with a dog-owner ratio of One to One. Professional "dog walkers" should not be allowed. Marianne Pressley should be involved as a consultant to make sure this "exercise" area is properly designed to fit in with the overall plan of the park. (Pressley Associates were the landscape architects who originally designed Nahanton Park with several phases yet to be finished, as funding permits.)

I hope you all have September 21st, 7 pm at the War Memorial Auditorium on your calendars to attend the Parks & Recreation Commission meeting. I have asked that Judy Hepburn, Yvonne Oppenheim and Chris Criscitiello speak representing the Friends of Nahanton Park as well as anyone else who wants to express their thoughts to the Commission. Considering what has happened at Cold Spring Park, this will be a very important decision for the future of Nahanton Park.

Sincerely,
Duane Hillis

EVENTS

Newton Community Farm's Harvest Festival

Sunday, Oct 18, 2009, 1PM - 4PM

On the farm at 303 Nahanton St., Newton

Free event; food available for purchase

Join the Newton Farmers for an afternoon of live music and family fun! At the annual Harvest Festival, visitors can decorate pumpkins, sample jams and jellies, tour the farm, watch a cooking or gardening demo, and more. All are invited to help celebrate this fourth successful growing season.

For more information, view the event webpage:
<http://www.newtoncommunityfarm.org/events/>.

Green Decade Lecture

"Deep Energy Retrofits in the Real World"

Thursday, Sept. 24 7:00 pm

Newton Free Library, Druker Auditorium

Speaker: Paul Eldrenkamp

Free to the public

- Learn how to calculate a quick but useful energy rating "score" for your home, and know how you compare with your neighbors.
- Find out what those "scores" will need to be for us to be able to reach the Obama administration's 2050 greenhouse gas emissions goal
- Get in on the ground level of a range of initiatives in Newton to increase not only our awareness of where we need to go with our houses but our collective ability to get there.

Green Decade 9th Annual Solar/Green Homes Tour

Sunday, October 4, 10:00 am-2:00 pm (9:30 am registration)

\$15 per person in advance, \$18 at the door

Meet at Newton Community Service Center

492 Waltham Street, West Newton

Mayoral Candidates' Forum on Environmental Issues

Monday, October 5, 7:00 pm

Newton Free Library, Druker Auditorium

Free to the public

The finalists present their positions on the environmental issues facing the Newton community. Brooke Lipsitt, former President of the Board of Aldermen, will moderate.

WATER CHESTNUT UPDATE

This summer's volunteer effort to hand harvest water chestnuts in the Lakes District of the Charles River was very successful in terms of volunteer participation and the amount of weeds pulled by hand. Groups of 10-20 people worked with canoeists filling baskets with water chestnuts and with volunteers on shore to off-load and empty the full baskets. One group of 20 volunteers filled a dumpster and a half in about two hours. The Charles River Watershed Association - in particular Brendan Brooks and Becca Wickham - is to be commended on their efforts to recruit over 540 volunteers.

Unfortunately, the task is so large that progress was limited. The amount of coverage is comparable to that of

2007 before mechanical harvesting commenced. The lack of funding for mechanical harvesting essentially nullified the significant effort of the past two summers, when DCR spent \$250,000 for mechanical harvesting.

At present there is substantial infestation along approximately a mile and a quarter of the river from Kingsbury Cove to Purgatory Cove. Except for Wares Cove, most of the coves are infested. Kingsbury, Roberts, and the smaller coves around E-Island are close to 100% covered with water chestnuts.

The three quarter mile section of the river around E-Island is about 60% covered with water chestnut and the open area just upstream of Forest Grove is approximately 15% covered. In 2007 coverage around E-Island was estimated at 28 acres. This year a warm spell in early spring resulted in a long growing season with coverage estimated to be 40 acres. In addition, significant patches exist on both sides of the Purgatory Cove culvert and near the old Waltham Water Works. There are scattered plants on the Waltham Watch Factory side of the river between the boat ramp and Prospect Street.

Goals for the future include seeking greater funding from grants, the State, and donations from businesses and individuals. Workers can then be hired for hand pulling and to lead a larger volunteer effort. Pulling would commence in early June as the plants emerge. Additional composting sites will be sought. The resumption of mechanical harvesting would greatly facilitate the cleanup.

- Lawrence M. Smith

WARREN STREET OUTCOME

A recurrent theme in the relationship of the Conservators to Newton's open spaces, parks, and conservation areas is the need to remain aware of any proposed changes or modification to the areas, or to the access for such areas.

In recent months we have encountered a potential modification to access for the Webster Conservation Area and the Webster Playground. One of the primary access points to the Webster Conservation Area is at the end of Warren Street in Newton Centre. Warren Street at its eastern end is one of many in Newton labeled a "paper street," a street that is laid out but that remains largely un-built. Public access is guaranteed, but the city does not take responsibility for maintaining the street.

A lot that abuts a dirt section of Warren Street was recently sold. The new owner was concerned about traffic from people coming to the Webster areas for bird-watching, nature study, or walking on the trails. The new owner (whose development plan, by the way, included extensive removal of invasive vegetation and planting of native species) proposed to landscape the end of the street in a way that would add trees and shrubs in the middle of the street, which would have had the effect of making the street less suitable for parking. These changes would not only have restricted normal access to the Conservation Area but would have made it difficult for visitors with difficulty walking or using a wheelchair on sloped surfaces to visit the area.

Over the past several months, these issues were actively discussed by the Parks and Recreation Commission. The Recreation Commission Chairman, Fran Rice, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Fran Towle, Ward Seven Alderman Lisle Baker, and representatives from the Conservators (particularly Mike Clark and Peter Kastner) participated in reviewing the proposed changes and in developing a plan for the street that would facilitate both access and parking for visitors.

A second proposal by the abutter was a request for the right to construct a sound barrier on public land, to minimize MBTA Green Line noise. The Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously not to allow this construction, with the major concern being that no change or construction of any type of building on park land could be allowed primarily for the benefit of a single or few abutters, rather than the Park itself.

What have we learned from this experience?

1. The Conservators should actively review any proposed changes to all the open space areas in Newton and any proposed changes to the access for these open spaces – particularly when such changes would diminish easy access by handicapped individuals.
2. The Conservators must monitor the agenda and actively participate in any hearing before the Newton Parks and Recreation and the Conservation Commission.
3. The members of the Conservators' Board must work together with the members of the Board of the Aldermen to seek their advice and support in reviewing and commenting on any proposed changes. In the case of the Warren Street proposal, the support and activities of Alderman Baker were of enormous importance. It is likely that the positive outcome might not have occurred without his leadership and his conversations both with the Parks

and Recreation Commission and staff and with the property owner.

4. In situations like this, it is important that the Conservators appreciate the different points of view of the abutters to a conservation area and try to find resolutions that recognize their concerns while protecting the public interest at the same time.

- Octo Barnett

CANOEING UPSTREAM

Canoeing on the Charles brings me back to a more ancient time when most transportation was done by water. We are fortunate to have access to such a majestic river as the Charles. The Conservators have been sponsoring water tours with lectures for the past few decades and recently have focused on sections of the Charles River near the convergence of Commonwealth Avenue and Route 128. This summer's canoe trip started at Charles River Canoe, near the Marriott Hotel, on June 7, 2009. This is a good place to rent canoes or kayaks and also meet other travelers who have their own craft.

There are two choices: to go downstream to Waltham and the old watch factory or to head upstream on a more tree lined route. This year we went upstream. This route initially takes you under massive concrete structures of roadways, and you can feel the vibrations and hear the noise from cars. But after a short while all of this noise is left behind.

Paddling gently through the quiet waters of the Charles, you hear the sounds of animals along the banks, in the water or in the air. This is the same pathway that generations of settlers and indigenous people used. The name Quinobequin means "the river that wanders," and the Charles does wander from side to side like the impression a snake leaves on sandy terrain. Sometimes you become spellbound by the beauty of the vegetation on the edges of the river as well as the deeper woods themselves. This upstream portion of the Charles is heavily wooded. From water level, the trees look enormous, with their upper branches pushing back the sky. Some of the shallower edges have vegetation suited to red wing blackbird nests. These birds' cries filled the air as we passed. A family of swans was a particularly impressive picture of wilderness. I really enjoyed watching the baby swans swimming in a straight line behind their mother and father. Is it because they are doing what they are told, or is it just easier to follow in the wake of others?

It was a wonderful way to spend a couple of hours that left impressions in all of our minds.

- Bill Hagar

CONSERVATORS CO-SPONSOR NEW CPA PROPOSAL

Tom McBride is a resident of the Pine Street neighborhood of Auburndale. He lives near a wooded area that is partially City-owned. He will bring a proposal to the Community Preservation Committee in October to better naturalize and provide access to this land, as a new park. The Newton Conservators will co-sponsor his proposal. This article by Mr. McBride provides background.

Looking out across the cul-de-sac from our front window, I see a stand of trees breaking the string of houses along the street. It's not a large section of foliage, yet this view enhances the neighborhood, presenting a dense green curtain hinting at more "nature" beyond.



This area of trees is on an unoccupied, privately owned parcel of land. While it is technically "undevelopable" (it lacks the required street frontage), there are occasional rumors about somehow building on it. It would indeed be disappointing to see this green view diminished.

While contemplating the Newton Assessor's map recently, I noticed that this property is not the only unoccupied parcel in the area. There are larger, though unconnected, City-owned properties just beyond it, off Pine Street. And with just a few changes in property ownership and/or property line re-drawing via land swaps, a significantly sized parcel of land could be consolidated, owned by the City, and preserved. Because open space is being preserved, this project might be made feasible through the use of funds collected under the Community Preservation Act.

A preliminary discussion with the city indicated that this dream might have possibilities and that co-sponsor(s) would be needed. Enter the Newton Conservators. In late August, Jane Sender, President, AnnaMaria Abernathy, Secretary, and Alison Leary and Ted Kuklinski, Board members, and I walked these properties. There is significant foliage in the form of many plant species, including a fair number of good sized trees, some fairly dense vines, as well as a few invasive species of plants.

The land under consideration is located between Albert Road, River Street, and Pine Street in the villages of Auburndale and West Newton. It is between and adjacent to parcels of land shown on the Newton "Open Space" map as vacant city land. The swap and purchase of these parcels by the City would tie together land that would then total approximately 11 acres. The area could potentially have access from the three streets indicated above.

In addition to green space, possible uses might include walking paths on the land, providing an educational component in which students of the Burr School could learn about habitat restoration and general nature study, or other compatible uses yet to be determined.

Portions of this land appear to have been wetlands at one time (a 1929 map shows water connected to the Charles River). These subsequently became the Pine Street Landfill. Development of the privately-owned parcels with buildings is perhaps more difficult and costly than typical land development would be. This is another reason why the land is best used as open space. And its previous use as a landfill need not prevent its being used recreationally, as other landfill areas have been converted to this type of use.

While the designation of "undevelopable," along with the presence of landfill materials underground, would seem to make the prospect of development unlikely and protection therefore unnecessary, zoning variances can be granted, and soils can be cleaned up. That is why it would be

worthwhile to purchase and protect this land now, while real estate prices have moderated somewhat.

The Conservators have recently voted to sign on to co-sponsor this project. A proposal to purchase one parcel of land, and make a swap involving another, will be made to the Community Preservation Committee this fall.

If the proposed plan comes to fruition, an area of the city that is unused and underappreciated could permanently become an everyday asset to the neighborhoods of West Newton and Auburndale, and to the city as a whole.

- Tom McBride

The Newton Conservators Officers and Directors 2009

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Alison Leary, *Vice President*
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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 48 years ago in June 1961.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter© is published four times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc., in June, September, December, and April. Deadlines for these issues are the first Friday of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

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 ericgreen@tiac.net. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: Suzette Barbier, Octo Barnett, Bill Hagar, Duane Hillis, Peter Kastner, Ted Kuklinski, Tom McBride, Pat Robinson, Beth Schroeder, Jane Sender, Larry Smith, and, as always, Douglas Leith for his excellent proofreading.

If you have not already done so this year, use this form to renew your membership in the Conservators. Also, please consider a gift to support our work.



*Celebrating 48 years
of open space advocacy
in Newton*

Newton Conservators Membership Form

PO Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459 • www.newtonconservators.org

- ☐ YES, I'd like to start/renew my one-year membership with the Newton Conservators to help preserve open space in Newton. I'll receive informative newsletters and emails and be invited to participate in guided tours of local conservation areas, lectures, and other programs and activities.
- ☐ I'd like to make an additional tax-deductible contribution to support the work of the Newton Conservators: \$_____
- ☐ Please do not share my name and address with other groups.

NAME _____

STREET _____ VILLAGE _____

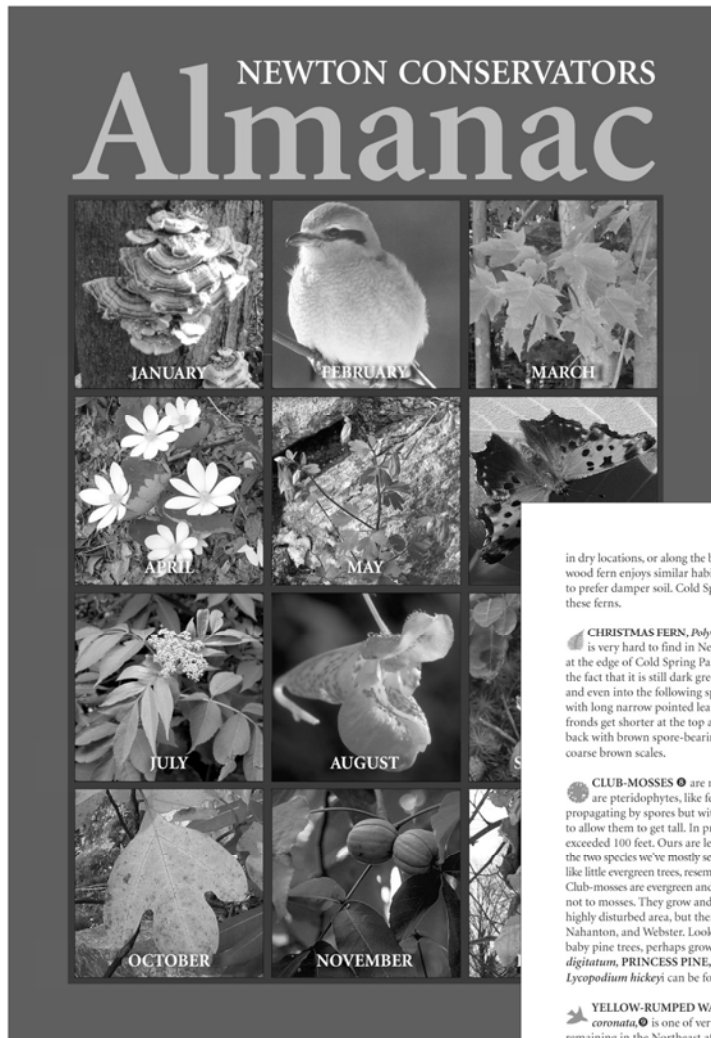
EMAIL ADDRESS _____ Make checks payable to _____

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

- | | |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual member | \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family member | \$35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining member | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Donor | \$75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$100 |

All amounts are tax deductible

What are you doing next year?



Spend 12 months getting to know Newton's parks with the Newton Conservators Almanac!

The Almanac is organized by month with "quick-to-locate" seasonal color bands.

Each entry displays the common name, scientific name and a group graphic with description and local field notes.

in dry locations, or along the base of a cliff. Evergreen wood fern enjoys similar habitat, but spinulose tends to prefer damper soil. Cold Spring Park is full of these ferns.

CHRISTMAS FERN, *Polystichum acrostichoides* is very hard to find in Newton, occurring only at the edge of Cold Spring Park. It gets its name from the fact that it is still dark green in late December, and even into the following spring. It is once-cut, with long narrow pointed leaflets, which in fertile fronds get shorter at the top and are covered on the back with brown spore-bearing sori. The stems have coarse brown scales.

CLUB-MOSSES are not true mosses. They are pteridophytes, like ferns and horsetails, propagating by spores but with vascular structure to allow them to get tall. In prehistoric times, some exceeded 100 feet. Ours are less than a foot tall, and the two species we've mostly seen in Newton look a lot like little evergreen trees, resembling a bonsai juniper. Club-mosses are evergreen and are related to ferns, not to mosses. They grow and spread slowly so they are rather uncommon in our highly disturbed area, but there are small patches at Flowed Meadow, Kennard, Nahanton, and Webster. Look for plants four to eight inches tall that look like baby pine trees, perhaps growing in a line. **GROUND CEDAR, *Diphasiastrum digitatum***, **PRINCESS PINE, *Lycopodium obscurum*** and **PRINCE'S PINE, *Lycopodium hickeyi*** can be found in Newton.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER, *Dentroica coronata* is one of very few species of warbler remaining in the Northeast after the onset of cold weather. It is quite common during spring migration and may nest in our area, spending the warm months here. Most warblers are entirely insectivorous and migrate south as days grow colder. The yellow-rumped warbler is an exception in that it can live on some types of berries so it may be seen in the winter. Check for it in low areas of our parks, searching for food among berry bushes.

Native representatives of conifers and deciduous trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns, butterflies and birds are some of the monthly entries you will find in this book.

Beautiful color photographs of some of the flora and fauna you are likely to find in Newton

Order your copy today!



The Newton Conservators
PO Box 590011
Newton Centre, MA 02459

☐ Yes, please reserve _____ copies of the Newton Conservators Almanac. Enclosed is my check for \$21.95 plus \$2.50 for postage for each copy. Please make checks payable to Newton Conservators.

Name _____

Address _____ Phone Number _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail to: Newton Conservators Almanac, PO Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459



NEWSLETTER

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

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NEWTON CONSERVATORS, INC.
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Newton Centre, MA 02459

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