

Newton Conservators NEWSLETTER

Summer Issue
July-August 1997

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From the Past President

Dear Members and Friends:

I am writing this as the new Past President. Our new President, Mike Clarke, is finishing up his year's appointment to the National Science Foundation in Washington, D. C. and his year's leave as professor of chemistry at Boston College. Mike is a dedicated environmentalist, a hard worker, and a dynamic leader for the Conservators and the city in the past. He has asked me to hold the fort for him until he returns at the end of the summer.

Our annual meeting and dinner was a success, with a larger crowd than last year. The food was good, the speeches were brief, the awards were well chosen, the elections went smoothly and the group was congenial.

Our Environmentalist-of-the-Year Award went to Dianne Dumanski for her superb reporting and her book on the environmental impact of pesticides. Our speaker was Jennifer Huntington, the newly elected President of the Appalachian Club. Both are Newton residents.

On page 9 of this Newsletter is a list of the Officers and Board Members with their telephone numbers so you can call and discuss issues with them. We do hope to hear from you often so we can include your thinking in the process of creating our agenda. In the fall we will publish the names of committee chair persons. We also hope we will attend our board meetings (see later article).

I believe we have had a very successful year. We accomplished many of the items we addressed with City Hall and with the Board of Aldermen. (See the President's report to Annual Meeting following this article.) After thirty seven years, the organization is still vital and effective, and I have no doubt that it will continue to be so. We have several new members on our Board, and that always brings new ideas and new energy.

I have enjoyed my period as President very much. It was a challenge, but I had an opportunity to be involved to a much greater extent than before. I learned a great deal. It was a privilege all the way. My wish for Mike is that he will have as great a feeling of satisfaction when his term ends as I do.

The Newton Conservators is a wonderful and important organization, and deserves your continued loyal support.

Sincerely,

Bud Elliott

President's Report Newton Conservators, Inc. Annual Meeting, May 29, 1997 by Burton Elliott

It is my duty to report on our activities over the past year. It won't be easy to do so in the six minutes or so I am allotted, but I will cover the highlights.

We have expanded the number of Newsletters this year, and we are including many more articles from outside participants to provide more information. Bonnie Carter once again has done a marvelous job in publishing the Newsletters.

Our membership is strong, and our financial position is good. We are supported only by our members and interest from our endowment.

We had fifteen spring and fall park walks this year and feedback from our walk leaders has been positive.

We have our own web site on the Internet where people can see some of our park maps and learn of our news and issues.

In our Grants Program this past year we partially funded an independent view of the Lost Pond and Kennard Conservation areas. We gave funds to the Library to purchase more environmental books and periodicals; we continued to give scholarships to the Conservation Commission Summer Environmental program, and also to environmental projects proposed by Newton School teachers.

Our November Symposium on Parks and Open Spaces with six City and State Officials was attended to overflowing at the Library auditorium, and helped with our agenda and activities since.

We worked hard and successfully to have the city fund the reconstruction of the Kennard Conservation Area bog bridge which is essential to its trail system, and we worked hard and also successfully to stop the city from allowing the construction of a 150' communications tower in West Newton Square. Area have been involved in the Allison Park renovation, and the Charles River Pathway Project. We worked on issues concerning Richardson, Lyons, Edmunds, Auburdmde, Nahanton, Cold Spring and other parks. We constantly encourage the City to keep the parks well-maintained and to keep them from inappropriate use and defacement, sometimes successfully, and sometimes not.

We successfully advocated for expanding the position of Newton Environmental Planner from a half time to a full time position. We expect that the increase will have a major positive impact on the future maintenance of our Conservation areas. We are pressing very hard for the City to choose a new Planning Department Director who will be equally as sympathetic to the City's environmental and open space needs as its development.

Our Board Meetings are well attended and hard working. You have a dedicated Board of Directors, and advisors regularly attend and participate. Aldermen have joined us, and the Public Works Commissioner made a presentation on capping of the Rumford St. dump. Our Board members attend Parks and Recreation and Conservation Commission meetings, as well as many Aldermanic committee meetings, and we speak on behalf of open space. Two of our board members are on the Parks and Recreation Commission, and we expect that one member will be appointed to the Conservation Commission this spring.

We successfully advocated for the City purchase of private property adjacent to the Flowed Meadow area in Auburdmde, and are encouraging the city to purchase another contiguous property which abuts the Charles River. We believe the entire contiguous area of approximately 170 acres can become one of the City's finest active and passive recreation areas if it is well planned.

We are requesting the City and its departments to do long range planning for our parks and conservation areas. So far we have not been organized at this, but we will not stop until we are.

We have worked in cooperation with the League of Women Voters, Newton Pride, the Newton Landscape Task Force and other non-profit organizations. We assisted the Green Decade Coalition in obtaining a grant for an anti-toxic pesticide program, and the Friends of Hammond Pond to get a grant to study the Hammond Pond deterioration. In July at the Chestnut Hill Mall we will join with the Brookline Green Space Alliance for a joint exhibit on our open spaces.

There is much more.

The first part of the first sentence of Article II of the original bylaws reads: "The purpose of the Corporation shall be to foster for the public interest in the City of Newton the protection, preservation and conservation of natural objects and areas. . . It later mentions fostering acquisition of land, dissemination of information, and incidentally, not to participate or intervene on behalf of any political candidate, to promote good citizenship, and even to combat juvenile delinquency!" I don't want to know what was going on then for that to be included!

Question: except possibly in regard to that last item, are we still living up to the original purpose? Question: is Newton a better place because the Newton Conservators exists? I certainly believe so and hope you do as well. With your continued support we will continue to do so.

The Upper Charles River Reservation Restoration Program By Dan Driscoll, MDC Senior Planner

The Upper Charles River Reservation has come full circle over the past one-hundred years. An initial period of resource protection, park development, and heavy public use was followed by decades of neglect, abuse and lost public interest. Today the public's historic love for the Upper Reservation has reawakened, stimulating renewed desires to protect and restore the River and its banks.

In 1891, a remarkable young landscape architect named Charles Eliot helped galvanize many people who were concerned that the growth of Boston would destroy the beauty of its landscape. The challenge was too great for a single community, so in 1893 a new regional agency was created: the Metropolitan Park Commission (MPC), the forerunner of the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). In its first five years, the MPC acquired eight-thousand acres of park land, about half the present 16,000 acre park system.

The banks of the Upper Charles River Reservation were a primary focus of the original park land acquisitions. The Reservation travels from the Watertown Dam to the South Natick Dam. Between 1897 and 1898, the MPC acquired approximately 300 acres of open space along the Charles between Watertown Dam and Hemlock Gorge in Newton. The founders hoped these key land acquisitions would help buffer pollution from industrial development of the river banks and provide opportunities for public recreation. Historic parks such as Hemlock Gorge, Riverside, and Norumbega were created in the early 1900s.

The Upper Charles River Reservation, in particular Riverside Park (with its olympic pool and more than 4,000 moored canoes) and Norumbega Park (with its zoo, rides, and the Totem Pole Dance Hall), became the most popular recreation site in metropolitan Boston. The Reservation also included popular bathing beaches, with facilities in West Roxbury, Watertown, and Waltham. River swimming was made possible at the turn of the century with the construction of two new trunk sewers, which significantly improved water quality.

A sad sequence of events transpired along the Upper Charles River Reservation between 1930 and 1970. Sewage and industrial wastes, already a problem in the 1890s, intensified as development and periodic pruning of trees to preserve their form, to eliminate weak wood and to minimize the risk of injury and disease. For several years, the Parks and Recreation department has proposed a program of preventive maintenance for city-owned trees, modeled after the one we take for granted for maintaining and periodically rebuilding city streets and sidewalks. Each year, modest sums of \$200,000 or less have been proposed and rejected in the budget process.

When the April storm hit, it produced much greater damage than would otherwise have been the case. Well-pruned trees sustained little or no damage compared to their neglected neighbors. The consequence of this neglect was seen initially in the enormous clean-up effort mounted by the city. Now we face the daunting challenge of phase two, pruning the jagged stalks of broken branches that, in violation and in part because of the neglect, we pay the price associated with either their replacement or their permanent loss. We also have aesthetic, economic, environmental and health interests in the maintenance of our open spaces. We can only imagine the effect on property values, were the canopies over our streets to disappear. And we experience sharp increases in noise and air pollution. In short, our quality of life would be significantly diminished.

The other reason we have come to this point is that our elected officials don't know how people feel about this issue. It's not that they themselves don't care ó as recently as 18 months ago, the Board of Aldermen voted unanimously in support of a resolution to provide i. . . constant, effective, thorough landscape maintenance for sidewalks, parks and other public landscapes in Newton, emphasizing removal of litter and weeds and keeping turf, flowers, shrubs and trees healthy. And the Mayor, for his part, has been very active in supporting the work of the Landscape Maintenance Task Force and the Urban Tree Commission. But when it comes to money, both the Mayor and the Board need to hear that this is a priority. Otherwise, countervailing voices competing for limited resources will win the day, with their causes funded instead of this one.

If you believe your favorite should appropriate an additional 25% (about \$450,000) for landscape maintenance, plus a sum sufficient to care for trees damaged by April's storm (cost still being calculated), let the Mayor and your city officials know. Do it soon and do it often. Our elected leaders (and candidates for office) need to hear this message loud and clear. Not only will we reap a benefit in it, but we'll maintain for the enjoyment and well-being of generations to come the legacy that was so dutifully passed to us.

A model letter is included below. Please feel free to clip it and send it to the Mayor and as many Aldermen as you are able. Or write you own to city officials and candidates running for office. If you would like more information, please feel free to call me at 969-8661 or drop me a note at 17 Oxford Road, Newton Centre 02159, fax me at 965-8157, or e-mail me at gdickson@aol.com.

A Case For Increased City Funding For Parks And Trees

By Doug Dickson, Chair, Newton Urban Tree Commission and Landscape Maintenance Task Force

Take a moment and ask yourself this question: What gives Newton its special character and identity? If you're like most Newton residents, you can name five such factors in no time.

The most frequent response to this question is its public schools. And Newton's reputation has clearly benefited by its solid performance in this area. We invest the lion's share of our tax dollars in the schools each year and that, combined with the quality of students we attract, makes our reputation for good schools an understandable one. But, Newton is not unique because of its schools alone.

Other answers might include references to Newton's fortunate geography ó we're close to Boston, public transportation and major highways. Or you might cite Newton's village structure, its diversity and its attractive housing stock, the value of which has reliably appreciated year after year. Some might think of Newton's political stability, its reputation for progressive government and its triple A bond rating. And there are its institutions, services, business base, retail centers and all the other factors that contribute to quality of life.

But how many would include Newton's tree-lined streets and its network of parks and open spaces on their top-five list of factors that contribute to our city's special character and identity? Probably not a majority, even though we live constantly with the reminder that Newton is The Garden City.

It's easy to take these trees, grass, shrubs and the open space they inhabit for granted ó and, collectively, we have for many years. About 1% of Newton's annual operating budget goes to maintain parks, conservation areas, street trees, grounds of public buildings and all the other spaces owned and managed by the city. These spaces constitute nearly 9% of Newton's total acreage. And more than 65,000 city-owned trees line our streets.

If you do the math, the results are frightening: the city spends just \$150 per acre per year to maintain its grounds, parks and other open spaces, and it spends less than \$4 per street tree each year. Landscape maintenance includes mowing, pruning, planting, fertilization, weed control, leaf removal and all other maintenance functions. It excludes all improvements, which come out of the city's capital budget or from non-city sources, like contributions from sports leagues and state programs.

Mowing alone costs the city about \$900 per acre per year for the 200 plus acres that are mowed regularly under a competitively-bid contract. So you quickly conclude that little or no attention is paid to most of the land the city owns ó and it shows. While some properties are more intensively used than others and therefore require more care, all open spaces, including conservation areas, need basic care to preserve their value and to make them safe for public use.

Newton Pride and the Landscape Maintenance Task Force have been successful in promoting the adoption of small parks and traffic islands by community groups and individuals, and this effort has helped in beautiful spaces that are not economical for the city to maintain. But economies of scale argue for larger spaces to continue as the city's responsibility. The added cost to the city of making good on this responsibility is modest ó about 25% of total, or a fraction of 1% of the city budget, would do the trick. And this small investment has the potential to pay back handsomely. When you take care of green things, they grow stronger, look better and last longer, ultimately requiring a lower expenditure over the long run.

For street trees, the expenditure of \$4 per tree covers preservation pruning, disease control, removal when necessary and replacement when funds allow. Because of disease, age and injury, more than 300 city-owned trees must be removed each year. Over recent years, we have had funds (only some of which come from the city) to plant 150 new trees per year, producing an annual deficit of 150 trees. Were we to instead replacing trees at this staggering rate, we would lose all of them in just 80 years. We can all be thankful that our forbears were more thoughtful in their allocation of city budget dollars and in their stewardship of this life-sustaining resource than we have been in the recent past.

The extensive damage to our street trees from the April Fool's storm is a good example of how today's penny-wise and pound-foolish decision-making has a way of backfiring. Arborists recommend preventive maintenance for city-owned trees, modeled after the one we take for granted for maintaining and periodically rebuilding city streets and sidewalks. Each year, modest sums of \$200,000 or less have been proposed and rejected in the budget process.

When the April storm hit, it produced much greater damage than would otherwise have been the case. Well-pruned trees sustained little or no damage compared to their neglected neighbors. The consequence of this neglect was seen initially in the enormous clean-up effort mounted by the city. Now we face the daunting challenge of phase two, pruning the jagged stalks of broken branches that, in violation and in part because of the neglect, we pay the price associated with either their replacement or their permanent loss. We also have aesthetic, economic, environmental and health interests in the maintenance of our open spaces. We can only imagine the effect on property values, were the canopies over our streets to disappear. And we experience sharp increases in noise and air pollution. In short, our quality of life would be significantly diminished.

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Sample Letter:

The Honorable Thomas B. Concannon, Jr.

Mayor, City of Newton

1000 Commonwealth Avenue

Newton, MA 02159

Dear Mr. Mayor,

I am writing to express my strong support for increasing the funding for care of city parks, trees and other city-owned property. The benefits for current residents and for those to whom we leave our legacy as The Garden City make this investment well worthwhile.

I recommend that we increase annual operating funds for park and landscape maintenance by \$250,000, that we earmark \$200,000 each year for preventive maintenance of street trees, and that we set aside funds to prune storm-damaged trees to prevent further deterioration and to extend their useful lives.

I believe this is a top priority and should be treated as such in this year's capital and operating budget process.

(To find the name, address and telephone number of your alderman/alderwoman or other city officials, call the City Clerk's office at 552-70299 refer to page 6 of the Newton Conservators April 1997 Newsletter.)

Newton Geology Books Available

A wonderful booklet entitled "The Geology of Newton" is again available. It was written at the request of the Newton Conservators in 1973 by James W. Skehan, S.J. and Catherine W. Barton, both of Boston College. It is full of information about natural geologic sites throughout all of Newton, with maps, pictures, and a most interesting glossary for those of us in the early learning stages.

It is a useful guide while walking in our conservation areas and includes a Geology Field Trip. While these last, we are making them available at no cost to anyone wishing one. Write to the Newton Conservators, Inc., P.O. Box 11, Newton Centre, MA 02159 att: Peter Kastner, and you will receive one. During July and August, you can also pick one up at our exhibit in the Chestnut Hill Mall exhibition area on the ground level.

Newton's Environmental Planner Position

Now Full Time

by Burton Elliott

For years we have been urging the Mayor and the Board to increase the position of the Environmental Planner from a half time position to a full time one. The Mayor included it in his fiscal budget 1997, and the Aldermen passed it. It has finally come to us as of July 1, 1997.

Why is this important and what difference will it make? The Conservation Commission operates under the Planning Department budget, and Conservation Land issues have dropped way down on the priority list. The Planner is the only person scheduled under that budget, and that one person must handle all the staff work which includes legal matters, permits, budget, maintenance, inspection, violation and other issues which are the responsibility of the Conservation Commission. When a permit request regarding wetlands (or our rivers and streams) comes up, it goes to the planner. When a violation falls down in a conservation area, it is up to the Planner to take care of. When the trails in a conservation area get blocked by trees, it goes to the Planner to correct. When someone illegally builds an addition to their building which impinges on wetlands, the Planner must address it and cure it. All matters regarding the new Rivers Act goes to the Environmental Planner. Well, you get the picture.

It has been an impossibility to take care of all the demands in a less than one half time job, and it may be very difficult to do it in one full time job. However, we are very lucky to have Martha Horn at the Conservation Commission, and she has proven to be indefatigable in her attention to the Conservation Lands and their needs. Until some time ago, the wonderful Helen Heyn did much of their work on a volunteer basis. Helen has had to ease off over the past few years, and much of her work has been left undone. Martha was hired on a part time basis to fill in. It wasn't enough, and our Conservation Areas have suffered. Now we look forward to their receiving the attention they need and deserve.

We thank Helen for all she has done since the beginning of the Conservation Commission, and we wish Martha well in her task of continuing the work.

Do You Have Suggestions for our Nature Walks Program?

In our fall Newsletter issue due in September we will publish our Newton Walks scheduled for the fall. In the past, these delightful walks have covered such areas as Nahanton Park (bird watch), the Aqueduct, Hammond Woods, Hemlock Gorge and many of the natural areas in Newton. During the walk, the leader points out the trails, natural geologic phenomena, flora and fauna as well as telling about interesting historical data of the area.

As we prepare our future schedules, we will be looking for new places to visit. If you have a favorite place or an idea for a walk, please let us know. Also, if you would like to be a leader, let us know that as well. We are always looking for people with a special knowledge or love of a special location to join our roster.

Just write to our Walks Committee at our address (PO box 11, Newton Centre 02159) and tell us about it. If you prefer, you can call Bud Elliott at 244-8920 or Peter Kastner at 244-6094 to give us your suggestions, ask questions, or join up.

Newton Conservators Board Meetings are Open to All Members.

Our Board of Directors meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:30 PM, with occasional changes. At present, the location is Room 202 at City Hall. The meetings are stimulating, and issues which concern everyone in Newton are taken up. That is where we choose our agenda and where we address matters brought to our attention by various citizens and other organizations.

We invite you to attend. You will certainly learn what goes on and you may find that you wish to participate or join one of our committees. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday September 24th. Try it and you may like it!

The Newsletter, Doug Dickson, Dan Driscoll, Burton Elliott, Janet MacLeod, and Clarke Veevers. We also wish to thank Newton Communications Access Centre, Inc., NewTV, for the use of its word-processing equipment.

Joint Newton-Brookline Green Space Exhibit

at the Chestnut Hill Mall

The Chestnut Hill Mall is hosting an exhibit by the Newton Conservators and the Brookline Green Space Coalition from July 8 through the end of August. We are joined by the Friends of Hammond Pond and other environmental groups.

Please stop by the center section of the lower level of the mall to enjoy the photographs by Newton and Brookline photographers, GIP and orthophoto maps, a wetlands exhibit and much more.

Newton Conservators in Open space exhibit at the Chestnut Hill Mall

by Jay Veevers

In July and August, in a first-time-ever collaboration, conservation activists The Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, The Newton Conservators, and Friends of Hammond Pond are joining forces in a visibility-raising campaign sponsored by the Mall at Chestnut Hill.

Components include a Mall photographic exhibition of parks, lakes, ponds, fields and sanctuaries created by leading local photographers including Brookline's Michael Berger, Steven Sternbach, and Jean Stringham, as well as Newton's Steve Black, Burton Elliott, Eric Myravnages, and Michele Waldman. Information on the activities of both organizations, membership applications and maps of some of the hard-to-find sanctuaries will be freely available. Specialty created computer created maps of Newton and special areas will be shown for the first time. There will be MDC material and a free Newton geology book at the exhibit.

A duck pond complete with Native Wood ducks and a wetland inside the shopping center are unusual features of this exhibition. Even more unusual is the work of Paris-based environmental artist, jecqa, whose fascination with the 160-year-old beech trees in Brookline's Longwood Mall started when she was a student here. Fifty of the beech tree nuts, which are gathered annually by jecqa (who flies in from France for the harvesting), have been propagated by the Mall's horticulturist in preparation for the spiral sculpture she will design utilizing them in the shopping center's Center Court. Jecqa was with the New Art Center before she went to Paris.

Twenty-five of these historic baby beech trees - each in its own clay pot - will be given by the visiting artist to the first 25 people interested in this art project on Saturday, July 12, at 1:00 pm. The remaining 25 will be given away at the same time the following day. Photographs of the tree recipients will be incorporated into the artist's installation and featured in the Mall until the end of the promotion. Since jecqa began this art project, she has distributed beech tree seedlings to 120 people in 30 different countries around the world. The exhibition will be a Mall until the end of August on the lower floor. It will be worth a visit.

Parks Map To Be Reprinted

Our very popular IParks Map will be reprinted; our last printing was in 1992, and the map's popularity has dwindled our stock to almost zero. Unfortunately, our reserve supply was damaged in the spring flood, and we are getting those away free until they are gone.

This map locates and gives details and trail information on 21 areas in Newton. It is the only such map available.

New members each receive one map free with their membership. Since the water damage, some have not been sent out. Those members should watch for our announcement in our fall newsletter and write to us. We'll send you one.

Kennard Bog Bridge Update

The Kennard Conservation Area, off Dudley St. is a marvelous place. It connects with the Brookline Lost Pond Area, and an additional MDC area all quite delightful.

The main footbridge over the bog was in very bad and even dangerous condition as we told you in earlier issues. The budget was provided to replace it with a new one less susceptible to rot. The bids are now out, and we should look forward to seeing it in place later on in the summer.

Grants Program to Continue in Fall

This is just a preliminary reminder that our Grants Program will be accepting applications and proposals in the fall. We give grants to schools, individuals and organizations for environmental projects. They are primarily given for participatory, educational and research projects. If you know anyone who might fit into our categories and needs a grant, tell them to call Bill Hagar, Grants Chair, at 964-2644. He will give suggestions and see that our criteria sheet and an application is sent out. They can write to the Grants Chair at our address as well.

New Officers and Board Members

Officers: President: Michael Clarke 965-5074

Vice President: Douglas Dickson 869-8661

Secretary: Sally Flynn 965-6297

Treasurer: Nicholas Yannoni 332-8683 or 444-0166

Past President: Burton Elliott 244-8920

Directors: Margaret Albright 244-6145

Stephanie Bacon 734-2904

James Broderick

Bonnie Carter 969-0686

Michael Collora 964-3294

Carol Lee Corbett 332-4015

Roger Feinstein 969-0942

William Hagar 964-2644

Bart Hague 969-3640

Judith Hepburn

Frank Howard 244-7269

Peter Kastner 244-6094

Colleen Minaker 965-5691

Norman Richardson 964-8591

Martin Sander 244-5681, 244-5815

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please renew your membership for 1997.

____ New Member ____ Renewal

Name

Address:

Village:

New member (first year) \$10

Individual member \$20

Family membership \$25

Sustaining member \$35

Donor \$50

Patron \$100

Additional Contribution \$_____

Total \$_____

Phone:

Dues and contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

Please make check payable to: Newton Conservators, Inc.