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City of Newton Expenditures on City Owned Conservation Land

By Alderman Ruthanne Fuller

The City of Newton covers 18.33 square miles. Open space comprises 19.6% of the City's total land area, of which 55% is publicly owned.

Newton has approximately 590 acres of park, recreation and conservation land. Seventeen properties are "Conservation Commission Properties." They range in size from the Martin Conservation Area, which is a mere half acre on a wooded slope off Circuit Street to our largest, the 100 acre Webster Conservation Area next to Hammond Pond. (The next two largest ones are the Charles River Pathway at Wells Avenue (30 acres) and the Saw Mill Brook Conservation area (20 acres). Altogether, these Conservation Commission properties total approximately 440 acres. (This estimate of acreage may be high since the Department of Conservation and Recreation may control some portion of it.)

Looking specifically at these City owned Conservation Commission properties, how much are we investing annually in their maintenance? Not much.

In the last five years, there have been only three sources of funding for maintenance done by the City of Newton owned conservation land.

- First, the City of Newton invests in conservation properties. The Planning Department pays for a Senior Environmental Planner (currently Anne Phelps). Approximately 15% of her time is dedicated to Conservation Commission properties. The City occasionally pays for environmental consulting. The City also spent some money on the Deer Park. (Some of the Deer Park funds can now be reallocated to other conservation properties as there are no longer any deer in the

City of Newton Conservation Expenditures Fiscal Years 2007-2011

Expenditures	FY2011	FY2010	FY2009	FY2008	FY2007
15% of Salaries & Benefits of Senior Environmental Planner (SEP)	\$10,782	\$10,468	\$9,994	\$9,445	\$11,236
15% of Office Expenses for SEP	\$309	\$235	\$237	\$222	\$396
Environmental Consulting	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,926
Deer Park	\$2,106	\$1,712	\$2,057	\$2,416	\$2,017
Public Works & Parks and Rec	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500
Total City of Newton Expenditures from General Fund	\$13,697	\$12,915	\$12,788	\$12,583	\$25,075
Conservation Land Maintenance Funded by Newton Commonwealth Golf Foundation	\$11,822	\$26,831	\$23,452	\$23,050	\$35,104
Fireman Conservation Permanent Fund	\$0	\$2,556	\$0	\$157	\$0
TOTAL	\$25,519	\$42,302	\$36,240	\$35,790	\$60,179

park.) Finally, in times of dire need, the Department of Public Works has removed materials dumped in the conservation areas and the Department of Parks and Recreation has sent its tree contractor in to remove trees when it was absolutely necessary and no conservation funds were available.

- Second, the City also spends money on a landscape contractor for conservation land maintenance. The sole funding source for this is a \$25,000 annual contribution from the Newton Commonwealth Golf Foundation. (When the City bought the golf course from the Chestnut Hill Country Club in 1981, the Commonwealth Golf Course agreed to pay the City \$25,000 annually to maintain conservation land and another \$25,000 for support of recreation.) If the full \$25,000 is not spent in one fiscal year, the remainder carries forward to the next year.
- Third, the City also has access to the income from a \$25,000 gift from the Fireman Family. In this economic environment with low interest rates, the income may be as little as \$200 a year.

What does this add up to? Looking back over the past five fiscal years, the most we ever have invested in maintenance in one year has been a mere \$60,179 (in FY2007). On average in the last five years, we have spent \$40,006. In FY2011, the City of Newton only spent \$25,519 on city owned conservation land. ■

Data Supplied by David Wilkinson, Comptroller, City of Newton and Anne Phelps, Senior Environmental Planner, City of Newton

President's Message



As 2011, our 50th anniversary year, comes to a close, we wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and happy New Year. This year flew by but was busy and productive for us.

This newsletter covers a variety of issues relating to Newton's parks and conservation areas. Alderman Ruthanne Fuller sets the stage, writing about the dismally small amount of money the City spends to maintain its conservation land. Gloria Gavis writes about the proposal to spend significant money to build a floating boardwalk and other structures at Hammond Pond so that people can enjoy the beauty of the Pond while *putting on the back burner* the fact that the Pond is, in fact, significantly stressed by storm-water runoff, a condition which could be mitigated by an expenditure of some of that money. Mike Clarke writes about the Community Preservation Committee's first ten years, its important role in protecting land, and its upcoming neighborhood meetings. I have written about the Nahanton Park management study and our plans for working on issues at that beautiful park.

These articles shed light on the challenges we face in protecting and expanding the precious and beautiful spots that people enjoy throughout Newton and that provide important wildlife habitats. More time, effort, and funds are needed to ensure that what looks beautiful actually is as healthy and protected from environmental stresses as it can be. We will be working hard in the coming months to focus on these issues and to solve some of the problems we face.

We hope you have received our membership renewal letter and will support us as you have done in the past. We very much look forward to seeing and working with you in 2012! ■

Jane Sender, President

Nahanton Park—Study done, now it's time to Work

Last year the Conservators, along with the Friends of Nahanton Park and the City of Newton Parks & Recreation Department, formed a joint committee and hired Massachusetts Audubon's Ecological Extension Service (EES) to do a natural-resources inventory and management plan for Nahanton Park. We did this in part as a way to respond thoughtfully to Newton Community Farm's proposal to expand their farming into the park. The report, just published last month, gives us a rich blueprint for understanding the needs of this beautiful fifty-five-acre parcel and can be read on our website, www.newtonconservators.org. We are very appreciative of the efforts of the Parks & Recreation Department, particularly the support of Commissioner DeRubeis and the work of Carol Schein, who led the committee. Now the real challenge is to make sure the recommendations are implemented.

Lots of activities go on at Nahanton Park, from community gardening to soccer, birding to dog walking, canoeing to children's programs at the Nature Center. The goal of the study was to gain knowledge of how various activities affect the park. We wanted to know how to balance all the activities, as well as the proposed farming, and still to maintain a high-quality wildlife habitat and a pleasant overall park experience. Happily, the report tells us how, answering our questions and giving us expert guidance and recommendations about specifically what needs to be done.

These detailed and specific recommendations broadly involve (1) improving community gardening management and continuing to discuss farming at the Park along with wildlife habitat protection; (2) improving the Winchester Street entrance to improve the overall feel of the park; (3) maintaining and expanding wildlife habitat through removal of invasive species, pruning vegetation, investigating storm-