

Spring 1995 Newsletter

Newton Conservators, Inc.

The *Newton Conservators Newsletter* appears three or four times a year.

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Sunday April 30

Earth Day/Arbor Day - March for Parks; Building a sustainable Newton

by Barbara Herson

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the first Earth Day Celebration. Newton is planning a big, city-wide festival to commemorate this event on Sunday, April 30. The day will begin with gatherings in several parks and villages throughout the city. These groups will be encouraged to walk to Newton North High School where they will find Eco-Expo environmental exhibits, workshops, a speakers' soap box, music, food, fun, friends, and children's activities.

The educational focus for the day will be building a sustainable Newton; many groups and speakers will be addressing this issue.

Kids can enter the EARTHDAY/ARBORDAY CONTEST by creating an advertisement about recycling, composting, or trees. Entries must be submitted by April 10 to: Earthday/Arborday, Newton City Hall DPW, 1000 Commonwealth Ave., Newton Centre, MA 02159. The winner will be announced on Earth Day.

For more information, call 552-7180 or 964-7463. You are cordially invited to attend the Newton Conservators Annual Meeting Wednesday, June 14 Noyes Hall Andover Newton Theological School Herrick Road, Newton Centre

- 6:30 pm Social Hour
- 7:00 pm Dinner
- 8:00 pm Business Meeting:
- Election of Officers and Directors
- Presentation of Environmentalist-of-the-Year Award to Sen. Lois Pines
- Speaker: Greg McGregor, Vice President of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, will talk about the changing trends in attitudes toward landowners' private rights, i.e. the "takings" issue.

WATCH FOR YOUR INVITATION IN THE MAIL

Ware's Cove Update

by Marty Sender

On March 7, the State Legislature's joint committee on Natural Resources considered S.1148, a bill filed by Sens. Pines, Tolman and Hicks to allocate \$477,000 for a three-year program to begin controlling the outbreak of aquatic vegetation in the Lakes District of the Charles River.

More than a dozen lawmakers and concerned citizens, including Conservators' President Peter Kastner and Board Member Marty Sender testified before the committee.

A September, 1994 MDC survey of the Lakes District found nearly 50% of the surface waters of the Lakes District between Pleasant Street in Waltham and the Newton Marriott to be covered by aquatic weeds--principally water chestnut and fanwort. Failure to control this "major threat to both habitat quality and recreational utility," the study said "may necessitate far more extensive and costly management actions later."

Despite the support of co-chair Rep. Barbara Gray (Framingham), the committee did not approve the legislation and efforts are under way to seek the funds either through an addition to the Open Space Bond bill or as a supplemental appropriation in this year's budget.

Given the prolific nature of the plants, failure to begin control measures this year will likely result in even more severe reductions in recreational activities, habitat quality and access to the Lakes District. Members are urged to contact their state legislators to urge support for S. 1148.

City of Newton Hires Environmental Planner

Since the beginning of January, Martha Horn of Hingham has been working for the City of Newton three days a week as Environmental Planner for the Conservation Commission and Department of Planning and Development. She comes to Newton with a strong background, having worked as a consultant for a variety of clients whose projects range in complexity from simple docks and single-family dwellings to Massport harbor and airport facilities to the Central Artery/Tunnel project. She is experienced in regulatory analysis and permitting, mitigation planning, zoning, wetlands, waterways, historical and aviation issues with emphasis on design and permitting for public spaces and waterfront uses.

Ms. Horne has served on the Hingham Zoning Board of Appeals, Land Conservation Trust, and Conservation Commission. At the March meeting of the Board of Directors of the Newton Conservators she talked about her plans for Conservation Lands in the city and discussed issues of mutual interest. She plans to attend our Annual Meeting where members will be able to talk with her informally.

Conservators Make Two New Environmental Grants

by Burton Elliott, Chairman, Grants Committee

Continuing with our program of supporting projects which enhance Newton's open spaces and provide educational programs to our schools, The Newton Conservators has committed grants to the Cabot School and to the Newton Burial Ground Project.

Karen DeRusha, K-1 teacher, and Betsy Nurczynski, PTA Co-President of the Cabot School, supported by Marilyn Quarcoo, Principal, have submitted a proposal for a grant to start a plant and bird study and work project for grades K through 2. This project will encourage and allow the children to learn about plants and birds by hands-on participation in plant growing and study, and by bird study and feeding programs. The initial program will be a twelve-month project, so the children can see the whole cycle.

The second grant will be to participate with other grantors in a project to restore Newton's first publicly-held open space, the Newton Burial Ground on Center Street, which dates from 1660. The project will include clean-up, repair and resetting of damaged stones, a survey of the stones, burial ground walks, and the publication of educational brochures. The Conservators are pleased to join the Newton Arts Lottery Council, The Mass Cultural Council, and The Newton Cultural Council in this worthy project. If any of our members wish to participate in this project directly, they may contact Dennis C. Rieske, President, Newton Historic Preservation Association, 14 Kenwood Ave., Newton Centre, MA 02159.

Once again, we thank our members for their dues and contributions which make these grants possible.

Recipients Report on Conservators Grants Projects

by Burton Elliott, Chair, Grants Committee

We asked the recipients of grants which we have made to send us reports periodically so we can evaluate the effectiveness of our Grants Program. The following excerpts are from reports our Grants Committee has received on the progress of some of the projects which we have funded in the last year or two.

From Stephanie Ripley of the Memorial Spaulding School. "All is well with our composters. The entire student population has had the opportunity to put their knowledge to work together to help reduce the amount of garbage the school and their families generate. We should this spring be able to use the material from the first composters in the front garden of the school. The first grade has been saving their tonic bottles to purchase another composter, so they truly believe there is gold in their garbage cans."

From William Jones and Richard Staley of the Day Middle School. "The Blue Team Award (for the Blue Team Adopt-a-Brook Program and the Day Middle School Environmental Club)...was entirely used to purchase canoe rentals, and bus service in support of the project entitled An Interdisciplinary Approach to Watershed, Wildlife and People...The Blue Team intends to continue the program in the future..." The Environmental Club was run as an enrichment

program...during after-school hours during the 1993-1994 school year. The money was used to re-supply chemicals for the water testing equipment owned by the school."

And a very extensive report (which was published and sent to all parents of the students) and accompanying pictures from Esther Muhfelder, Nature Walk Chair of the Bowen Elementary School. "We have accomplished the following:

- -cleared the path: removed poison ivy, glass, rocks and vegetation
- -cleaned up the surrounding woods: installed and painted the bench at the entrance to the walk
- -installed and painted the bench at the top meadow
- -dug test pits
- -purchased and installed signs marking the different sites and...tree specimens
- -produced bound "Nature Walk" materials (for teachers in each grade level. Since its opening day (June 12, 1994), the Bowen Nature Walk has seen much use by all of our students with the supervision of the teachers and by the Bowen After Care Program." (A copy of a wonderful study booklet was enclosed.)

We thank the members of the Newton Conservators for their funding of these programs.

Weeks Field and Park

by Michael J. Clarke

While Newton has closed several schools over the past decade, the school playgrounds have often remained as open space. But what sort of open space? Organized sports groups prefer it to be playing fields, while many residents prefer parks. This debate was undertaken at the January meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission with advocates for both sides well-represented following last year's combined efforts by the Conservators and the Newton League of Women Voters to restructure this Commission to include open-space advocates.

The Newton Youth Soccer League (NYSL) aired its plan to regrade most of the nine-acre Weeks Field to provide a large, flat, irrigated surface to maintain two large and two half-size soccer fields. A large area is needed to allow for rotation of the fields, which prevents worn areas from being churned into pools of mud. Two irrigation wells have already been sunk to avoid paying MWRA water rates.

While generally supportive of the NYSL plan, dozens of neighbors indicated that Weeks field is really used as a park with spontaneous activities such as kite-flying kids running around, skiing, sledding and generally just enjoying a fine day seated on a bench. In the past, the field had fruit trees and a large, stately maple, which were vestiges of the orchards of Henry and Luther Paul. In the 1920's the site was taken for the middle school and in the 30's the field was developed by the CCC, which placed benches in the area. Unfortunately, the trees were not replaced as they were felled; the CCC's cement benches were not maintained; and even the much-used baseball backstop on the Cedric Road side of the field fell into such disrepair that it was recently removed.

The monetary infusion offered by the NYSL for grading and irrigation was to be matched by funds from the Parks & Rec capital improvements budget and a special fund from the Mayor derived from Newton Commonwealth Golf Course fees. Neighbors argued eloquently that provision should also be made for passive uses by generating a master plan for the Weeks Field and Park. This view was supported by Ald. George Mansfield and the recently-appointed alternate Commission members, Peter Kastner and Michael Clarke. The January meeting ended with the Parks & Rec Commission allowing one month for an ad hoc committee of Commission members and neighbors to devise an overall plan.

The neighborhood committee, headed by Bruce Kimball and Doug Dickson, quickly moved to generate guidelines providing for four playing fields, a 40-foot buffer zone between the fields and abutters, regulations for the use of the playing fields, and recommendations regarding traffic and parking. With these guidelines bolstered by suggestions from architect Curt Lamb and encouragement from Parks & Rec Commissioner Russ Halloran, the City Landscape Engineer, Kenn Eisenbraun, drew up preliminary plans for the playing fields, but with a central contoured park area planted with trees. After first doubting the feasibility of the plan, NYSL was persuaded that it would actually be a more enjoyable space for soccer players, their parents, and siblings to enjoy a sporting day. At the February meeting, the Parks and Rec Commission was receptive to a modified plan that featured two large areas sufficient to allow for rotation of the fields, but separated by a narrower park strip. Commissioner Halloran moved the project forward by committing \$7,000-\$8,000 for tree plantings; however, questions remain as to the size of the central park area, how much fill will be available for its contouring, and the cost of the overall project.

While still in the planning stages, this represents a decided movement toward accommodating both the needs of organized sports and passive recreation, which sets a desirable precedent for resolving open issues as NYSL, the Newton Little Leagues and other sports organizations target additional sites for improvement. As no public funds are available for amenities such as benches, stone walls or extensive contouring, it is evident that open space organizations, like organized sports, should endeavor to provide resources that can be matched by government to catalyze such improvements in park land. Overall, this is a major step forward for open space in Newton.

Irwin Road Update

By Peter Kastner

We reported in the December issue of this Newsletter that the Conservation Commission had approved an Order of Conditions which allowed the Laura Estates subdivision to build Irwin Road in order to gain access to land for development. The action of the Conservation has been appealed to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Affairs and the Massachusetts Superior Court. We continue to support these appeals of the Conservation Commission's approval which would allow the developer to build a raised road through the 100 year floodplain. We believe that this would undercut the integrity of Newton's Flood Plain/Watershed Ordinance which does not permit filling, dumping, excavation, removal or transfer of gravel, sand, loam or other materials which will restrict floodwater flow or reduce floodwater capacity, nor does it permit road construction.

The ten taxpayer appeal, which is before the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, would resolve outstanding issues concerning the Wetlands Protection Act. A joint motion for an Advanced Ruling on the Applicants Motion to dismiss, due to a late filing of the appeal, was denied by the

Administrative Judge and the pre-hearing conference was continued indefinitely. This appeal would review how the Conservation Commission reviewed state law, and determine whether the Commission had the authority to approve going through a wetland after private land owners legally refused the builder permission to use a private road.

Violations of the Newton's Floodplain/Watershed Ordinance and administrative procedures are being appealed to the Massachusetts Superior court, and the case is in the discovery stage--though it is believed that the discovery stage will be limited due to a desire to have the case decided by a summary statement, and therefore, the case would be limited to information that was presented to the Conservation Commission. - that the Conservation Commission did not have legal authority to grant approval to build a road through a wetland, and that sufficient information was presented before the Conservation Commission to decide the case. For Newton Conservators, maintenance of the integrity of the Flood Plain Ordinance is a vital issue, and it is sad to note that the preliminary plans for the potential development of Old Cold Spring as a middle school site also calls for a road to be built through a wetland.

Individuals that are interested in supporting this legal action should send contributions to the " Newton Conservators--Legal Fund," c/o Burton Elliott, Treasurer, 319 Highland Avenue, West Newton, MA 02165, phone 244-8920. Several neighbors have made generous contributions to the legal fund since publication of our last Newsletter.

VISIT YOUR PARKS, especially NAHANTON

! by Paula Chasan

Spring is almost here and Nahanton Park once again beckons, welcoming us to spend time in one of Newton's special places. Nahanton Park is a rare 55-acre open space in our city: there are grassy fields, paths through woods and along the river bank, freshwater marshes, and a pond to explore. The city's gardeners have their vegetable garden "Kingdom" here. People who garden in this tranquil place describe feeling restored by the peacefulness of nature, as much as by their gardening activity.

Birds are part of the experience at Nahanton Park at every season. In winter, Red-tailed Hawks soar and circle overhead, flocks of Tree Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Goldfinches and Dark-eyed Juncos scour the weedy grasses for seeds. Wildlife surprises can be found at every season at this park. But in spring and fall, many birds come in the great migrations, and the park is a Mecca for birders throughout the Boston area. Many species of birds nest here in spring, attracted by the varied habitat rich with water and plants. Gardeners become familiar with the melodious singing and beautiful flashing gold and black of nesting "Baltimore" or Northern Orioles. Yellow Warblers nest here, as do House Wrens, Northern Flickers, Brown Thrashers, Ring-Necked Pheasants, and American Woodcock, to name just a few.

Wildflowers have become a priority at Nahanton Park. The meadow on the hillside that leads to the upper gardens has been dedicated to wildflowers and grasses; they grow here assisted by nature, and by the efforts of a group of wildflower enthusiasts, who obtain seeds and plants for this hillside, and for a meadow area near the lower gardens. In the past year, one could find a variety of wildflowers on these meadows: Purple Coneflower, New England Aster, Black-eyed Susan, Lupine, Little White Aster, and Goldenrod were among them. (By the way, Goldenrod does not cause hayfever. The culprit is Ragweed; unfortunately, that plant grows well at the park, as it does in all of our own yards.)

Current plans of the Wildflower Committee call for use of one of the garden plots to raise wildflowers for transplanting to the meadows and other areas of the park. The Wildflower Committee welcomes interested people to join them in growing and planting wildflowers and other plants attractive to wildlife at the park. For information, call Paula Chasan at 965-2752.

An exciting project soon to get underway is construction of an improved nature path along the banks of the Charles River. The Friends of Nahanton Park received support from local businesses and the City itself, to improve this path, making it accessible to people in wheelchairs. Work will begin this spring to improve and extend the path. It will lead to an outlook over a portion of the wetlands near the river. The Friends of Nahanton Park hope that eventually the path will be extended onward to reach a lovely vista, overlooking the freshwater marsh.

Nahanton Park supports many interests, all of which are enriched by the beauty of nature. The playing field, used for softball and baseball in spring and summer, and for soccer in the fall, is one of the most beautiful fields anywhere. It is framed by trees and woodland vistas all around its perimeter. Last year the soccer league had an irrigation system installed using water from a well they'd had dug adjacent to the field. The soccer league hopes that irrigation will keep the field's grass plants healthy and strong in the dry summer season, improving the field for the game. Perhaps birds that feed on worms and insects in that field each spring will enjoy the extra wetness, too.

Newton's Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of programs to encourage enjoyment of this lovely park in all seasons. The Nature Center building is used for community programs year-round, especially for seniors and school-age children. In winter, there is a program of cross-country skiing at the park for seniors; in July, there is an Outdoor Adventure Camping program for children entering grades 2-5, which encourages environmental awareness. On Thursdays, through the school year, an afternoon Adventure Club is offered. A very popular freshwater fishing course is given in April and October. (This course is free; watch for dates.) A program of outreach to Nursing Home residents is expanding: each month a group comes to visit the park, enjoying lunch and the chance to be close to nature in this beautiful place.

For more information about the city's programs at Nahanton Park, Judy Dore, the Recreation Department's Supervisor of activities at the Park, is a helpful and enthusiastic resource. (552-7120)

The Friends of Nahanton Park welcomes the participation of our community in the enjoyment of this lovely park, whose gift to us is to provide a retreat in our busy lives, a place for reflective recreation, education and tranquility.

In this time of major governmental cutbacks, it is vital that we all take an active part in community improvement programs. If you are interested in ensuring the preservation of Nahanton Park for future generations, a contribution made payable to Friends of Nahanton Park is one action you can take. Contributions can be sent to: Nahanton Park, 455 Nahanton Street, Newton Centre, MA 02159. The Friends of Nahanton Park will send contributors (and anyone who requests it,) an informational flyer about the park, which includes a map of Nahanton Park's areas and trails.

This is your Park: Welcome! Enjoy!

SLAPP Suits

by Rep. David Cohen

The reward for raising your hand at a public hearing should not be to have a subpoena slapped into it. Citizens across the state, however, have faced the daunting prospect of defending themselves against harassing lawsuits brought because those citizens spoke out about important issues in their communities. In 1993, I filed a bill to curb these suits, and last year the Legislature responded by enacting one of the nation's strictest laws to protect the right of citizens to speak out on issues and to petition government.

Suits designed to harass and intimidate citizens who speak out on important issues are part of a disturbing trend across the country. Two [professors at the University of Denver School of Law have dubbed them SLAPP suits, for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. SLAPP suits take many guises. They typically allege defamation interference with contract, antitrust violations, civil rights violations, and abuse of process or malicious prosecution claims. The list of horrors contained in a SLAPP suit may make it seem that the suit's target has engaged in truly reprehensible behavior, but the allegations have little, if anything, to do with the activities that spawned the suits.

The activities of citizens that put them in the position of having to defend themselves against SLAPP suits can best be characterized as the honest efforts of people to comment on issues that affect them and their communities. People have been sued for signing petitions, speaking at public hearings, and writing letters to the editor of local papers. In other words, SLAPP victims are usually civic minded individuals acting as good citizens.

In Blackstone, a woman appeared before the town Board of Selectmen to complain that they had been too lax in overseeing a development next to her home, which caused flooding of her property. When her comments about the Board's inaction appeared in the local newspaper, the developer sued her.

In West Roxbury, a lawyer for a group of citizens opposed to the opening of a Home Depot along the V.F.W. Parkway wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper outlining the group's position and was sued for defamation and violation of the unfair business practices law. In Worcester, the city sued its own citizens after they complained to the state about expansion plans for the Worcester airport.

In all three, and in many other cases across the state, the SLAPP suits were dismissed, but not before causing damage to the targets, the community and to local governments. SLAPP targets incurred tens of thousands of dollars in legal costs. SLAPP suits dragged on for months and sometimes years. Families endured the stress of worrying that they might lose their homes or retirement savings.

Although some SLAPP victims have redoubled their resolve to speak out, others vow never to get involved again. The effect on the community is similar. A developer who has a reputation for being quick to sue can bully his way past local opinion. Local governments suffer from a lack of public input on important decisions. As news of the devastating effects of SLAPP suits spread, the Legislature responded by enacting an anti-SLAPP law. The Governor vetoed the Bill I filed in 1993. I refiled the bill in 1994, and, though the Governor chose to veto it again, the bill became law at the end of the 1994 session when the Legislature overrode the Governor's veto.

The new law, section 59H of chapter 231 of the General Laws, allows SLAPP targets to file a special motion to dismiss. The burden then shifts to the party that brought the suit to prove that the SLAPP target's activities lacked any reasonable basis in fact or law. The effect of this new law will be to protect anyone who is legitimately trying to influence public officials.

If the court dismisses the SLAPP suit, it must award the SLAPP target its costs and attorney's fees. Other provisions provide that the costly process of discovery (answering interrogatories and attending depositions) is suspended pending the court's decision on the special motion. The law also allows the Attorney General to Intervene to support the SLAPP target.

Massachusetts has now become one of ten states to adopt an anti-SLAPP law. Our law went into effect on January 28th. Its provisions should allow citizens to exercise their rights of free speech and petition under the Massachusetts and United States Constitutions without fear of harassing and intimidating lawsuits.

Choosing the site for a New School

by Peter Kastner

Over the past twenty years Newton public school enrollment has decreased from around 18,000 to 12,000 due the aging of residents that moved into the city in the 40's and 50's, as well as delayed births from two-income families that moved into the city in the 70's and 80's. Most of the surplus schools were sold off, and the majority of the buildings were converted into housing units. Two schools--Bigelow and Oak Hill--were saved for later use and the last school, Warren, was sold as late as 1991. Recently, this downward enrollment trend has reversed and the school system is seeing the addition of 200-300 students annually, causing an immediate need for more middle school capacity and an eventual need for increased elementary school capacity.

In developing a site for a new middle school, without the benefit of having set aside property near playgrounds (except for the Oak Hill School), the Newton School Committee and the Advisory Task Force on Space developed criteria which stress speed of acquisition and minimal cost. They identified the following parks and playgrounds as potential school sites for a middle school:

Old Cold Spring Park

- Warren Field
- Weeks Playground
- Newton Highlands Playground
- Newton Centre Playground
- Oak Hill School (Addition on an existing facility)

The sites identified by the Task Force are granted special protection under article 97 of the Articles of Amendment to the Constitution of Massachusetts as approved by the Massachusetts electorate November 7, 1972--which provides for a 2/3 approval of the Massachusetts Legislature to convert public park lands to a different use. In addition, several of the parcels originally identified in the site process have restrictions due to gifts, receipt or grants or wetland

regulations.

The Newton Parks and Recreation Commission formed a subcommittee, comprised of James Mahoney, Wally Bernheimer, Peter Kastner and Michael Clarke, to develop criteria for the consideration of requests for transfer of land for alternate use. The following draft was adopted at the Commission's March meeting, and will be finally voted on at its April Meeting.

The Parks and Recreation Commission supports the preservation of open space in the City of Newton for the benefit of future generations of Newton citizens. In general, open space should be diverted for other uses only as a last resort after all other reasonable options have been found deficient.

The following issues will be addressed by the Commission in considering any request for giving up land:

1. 1. What will be the impact of the loss of an open space parcel on the total publicly owned open space in the City?
2. 2. What will be the impact on the distribution of publicly-owned open space throughout the City?
3. 3. What will be the impact on the city regarding the existing specific uses of the Parcel? Can these uses be diverted to other available sites or will new sites need to be found? What will be the cost of these alternatives?
4. 4. What will be the impact of the loss of the open space on the adjacent abutters and surrounding neighborhood?
5. 5. What compensatory open space is being offered for the land? If other compensation (funds, facilities, substitute services) are to be provided, are they an adequate substitute?

At a Task Force public meeting, on March 23rd, the Newton Conservators supported the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission Guidelines and stated that, before using public park lands to build a middle school, the Newton School Committee and the Advisory Task Force on Space need to exhaust alternatives which will not require the loss of park land--such as the reuse of Oak Hill as a new middle school. Secondly, we noted that if park land must be used, care should be taken to use parcels that will not destroy the nature of the local park--such as Cold Spring or Newton Centre and that funds saved by previous closings, almost \$24,000,000 annually at \$4,000 per 6-8,000 students, should be used to acquire new sites or acquire additional park land and facilities to compensate neighborhoods if local public park land must be used. We noted that in developing a site for a new middle school, the Newton School Committee and the Advisory Task Force on Space have confused park and recreational land with vacant or surplus space, a perspective which often results in the loss of valuable open space.

This process will be going on through late Spring, and interested individuals should contact members of the task force or join the Newton Conservators to fight to preserve our parks and develop a land use policy that will be able to accommodate swings in school enrollments and maintain a quality park and educational system.

Crystal Lake is the Best Lake in the World

by Sofi Inbar, President GEM, Crystal Lake is Newton's Gem, Inc.

Crystal is the best lake in the world; it has one attribute no other lake has: it is close to home! It is our physical and mental therapy. For many (seniors, mothers, the disabled), it is the only recreational facility. Recently numerous users of Crystal Lake expressed to GEM Board members their wishes and concerns regarding the length of the season, accessibility to the Lake, operations and facilities and regulations.

GEM - "Crystal Lake is Newton's Gem, Inc.," is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to enhance recreational activities, the Lake's accessibility, improve the beach, bath-house and parks appearance, and usage; address ecological issues (silt, chemicals, geese); develop educational programs and collect literature about the Lake's nature, history, and scenic/artistic aspects to be used by schools and residents.

GEM's achievements include: an earlier June opening of the swimming season (since 1989) which warms people's hearts after the freezing winter. Sailing, wind-surfing, canoeing for non-abutters-- colorful sails now decorate the Lake. GEM also promotes understanding and cooperation between different sides of various issues.

We addressed traffic, parking litter and noise issues. We will continue to pursue the goal of ice skating. Fulfilling other wishes, such as sailing lessons, and beautifying the beach and parks, can further the pleasure from this precious natural resource. We have been greatly supported by many of Newton's residents, including Alderman George Mansfield, Alderman McGrath, Newton Conservators President Peter Kastner, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Council members, and others.

Before the November '94 election, we met with Mayoral candidates--Mr. Tom Concannon, then Acting Mayor, and Alderman Lisle Baker. After discussing our goals with them, we are very optimistic about accomplishing our objectives. They both assured us of their commitment of cooperation between the City and GEM on a regular basis, including updating the 1929 regulations that are in effect. They stated they will keep an open door for us.

Mr. Concannon studied the material we submitted to him, and gave us valuable suggestions. He will ease our access to data needed for proposals, and pledged his support in whatever capacity he would serve the City. Mr. Baker, as a committed environmentalist, has supported our cause in the past, and will be available in the future. They both expressed appreciation to our organization and recognition of Crystal Lake's great importance to Newton's citizens.

Our goals for the upcoming season include extending the swimming and updating the regulations. We have some viable ideas to solve issues of funding for improvements and extension of the season, finding lifeguards for the extension, neighborhood concerns, and safety considerations.

Your contribution of time, ideas, expertise, materials and literature is important. There is a lot to be done, the time is short and the resources limited. Please contact A.S.A.P.: GEM, Inc. 702 Boylston St., Newton Highlands, MA 02161, Tel. 332-2114, Fax: 244-3331. Please include your Fax number.

Open Space Awareness

by Michael J. Clarke

Data garnered from the annual City Census Questionnaires are structured to make city departments look good. The City defines the satisfaction level of its

residents as the percentage of those responding knowledgeably to a query with a rating of good or fair, whereas many would consider good to be a merely satisfactory level. Notably, there is no designation for excellent. Consequently, the high satisfaction levels touted by city departments could well be taken as an indication of their degree of mediocrity. In the case of the Department of Parks & Recreation, the more telling response for planning purposes might be the awareness level, which can be defined as the percentage of residents who are sufficiently aware of a city service to feel they can respond (knowledgeable responses/total returning questionnaire). Census statistics clearly show that residents are most aware of our parks, open space, and public grounds. While this should be no surprise in the Garden City, it is an important consideration as various groups compete for "improvements" in Newton's open spaces.

Statistics from 1994 Census Questionnaires

Parks & Recreation Concerns No. % % Satisf. Awar. Resp. Good Fair Poor Level Level Park Facilities 10,444 68.5% 28.0% 3.5% 96.5% 76.8% Indoor Recreation Facilities 6,206 56.8% 33.5% 9.7% 90.3% 45.6% Senior Recreation Programs 4,667 77.5% 20.0% 2.5% 97.5% 34.3% Adult Recreation Programs 4,667 77.5% 20.0% 2.5% 97.5% 34.3% Youth Recreation Programs 6,060 70.1% 25.0% 4.8% 95.2% 44.6% Special Needs Programs 3,114 71.5% 23.2% 5.4% 94.6% 22.9% Public Grounds Maintenance 11,432 68.3% 27.7% 4.0% 96.0% 84.1% Outdoor Recreation Facilities 8,514 65.7% 29.9% 4.4% 95.6% 62.6% Recreation Facility Maintenance 8,190 60.3% 34.2% 5.5% 94.5% 60.2% Preservation of Open Space 9,458 62.1% 30.3% 7.5% 92.5% 69.5%

Spring Walks Schedule

Canoe Trip--Cutler Park

May 13th, at 2 pm

Explore the Charles River Meadows in Newton & Needham with an experienced guide. Meet at Nahanton Park canoe launch. Leader: Michael Clarke, 965-5074, Conservators Board Member and Trail Blazer of the Charles River Pathway

Mothers Day Bird Walk

--Nahanton Park (call ahead) May 14th, at 7:00 am

Early morning walk through our waterfront park with terrific birding opportunities. Meet at the Nature Centre off Nahanton Street. Leader: Paula Chasan, 965-2752, Friends of Nahanton Park Board Member and birdwatcher extraordinaire

Newton Cemetery

May 21st at 2 pm

View Newton Cemetery, molded after Mount Auburn, our response to the romantic cemetery movement and early Victorian ideal of the sublime. Meet at the cemetery entrance. Fiora Houghteling, 969-7764, Newton Conservators Advisor

Hammond Woods

June 4th, at 2:00 pm

Visit Newton's Wetland nature preserve--rich in plant and animal life. Meet at parking lot near Hammond Pond and Bloomingdale's. Lawrence Kaplan, 527-3449, Newton Conservators Board Member; Chairman, Botany Department, U. Mass. Boston

Lake District Walk--Charles River

, 3 hrs June 11th, at 2:00 pm

Ware's Cove--Waltham Watch Building--Mount Feake Cemetery--Brandeis--Duck Feeding Area--Charles River Canoe Service--Norumbega Park--Lyons Field. Meet at parking lot at Ware's Cove. Leader: Peter Kastner, 244-6094, Newton Conservators President, hiker, and biker.

Aqueduct Walk

June 18th, at 2:00 pm

Explore Newton's hidden linear park with a student of the history of MWRA water system. Meet at Waban T station. Leader: Nick Yannoni, 444-0166, Conservators Board Member, volunteer scientist for MWRA.

Prospect Park

, Waltham June 25th, at 2:00 pm

Climb Prospect Hill and see Charles Elliot's favorite vista. Meet at parking lot off Trapelo Road near ski area. Leader: Gloria Champion, 894-9320, Waltham Conservation Commission You are invited to join the Newton Conservators! Dues and Contributions are tax-deductible

Calendar of Events

- April 22 - Clean-up Day at Nahanton Park
- April 22 - Earth Day in Waltham
- April 29 - Rain date for Nahanton Clean-up
- April 30 - Earth Day in Newton
- May 13 - Canoeing on the Charles
- May 14 - Birding at Nahanton
- May 21 - Walk in Newton Cemetery
- June 4 - Hammond Woods Walk
- June 11 - Charles River Hike
- June 14 - Annual Meeting
- June 18 - Aqueduct Walk
- June 25 - Prospect Hill Hike