

# Newton Conservators Position on Webster Woods

October 2019

Newton Conservators enthusiastically supports [Mayor Ruthanne Fuller's proposal to permanently preserve 17 acres of Webster Woods](#), either through negotiation with Boston College or by an eminent domain purchase.

Webster Woods is the heart of the largest contiguous forest in Newton. For more than 100 years, since Edwin Webster donated the conservation land to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the woods have been open to the public for walking and nature study. The land now owned by Boston College is entirely surrounded by city and state conservation areas.

In 1954, when the state announced plans to sell part of the woods to Congregation Mishkan Tefila, [the City of Newton went to court to try to block the sale](#). But throughout the 60 years since the 8 acres of the temple's land facing Hammond Pond Parkway was developed, the public has enjoyed unrestricted access to the remaining 17 acres of the woods, which are crossed by numerous hiking trails.

The City of Newton has a long history of commitment to preserving the woods, and it received many assurances that Boston College was willing to have the woods preserved:

- October 5, 2015     The Newton Board of Aldermen **unanimously** [approves a resolution](#) urging Mayor Setti Warren to “work to preserve the recreation and conservation character of 300 Hammond Pond Parkway.”
  
- October 7, 2015     [The Boston Globe reports](#) that Congregation Mishkan Tefila's advisor acknowledges the city's interest in saving the woods:  
                              “Ted Tye, managing partner at National Development, who has been working with Congregation Mishkan Tefila for the past two years on its plans to sell, said the city ‘was well aware’ members were seeking a buyer for the property. ‘The city has already reached out to Boston College,’ he said. ‘At the right time, the discussion of open space preservation will be an easy one.’”
  
- Fall 2015             According to [a later report in the Newton Tab](#), Mishkan Tefila President Paul Gershowitz sends an email saying the following:  
                              “Boston College is well aware of the interest in protecting the undeveloped areas of the property and we trust that they will be a good partner in working with the city on this matter at the appropriate time.”
  
- May 31, 2016         Boston College completes its purchase of the parcel.
  
- October 5, 2016     [The Newton Tab reports](#) assurances received by Mayor Warren:  
                              “Boston College has indicated it is open to working with the city to preserve the undeveloped portion of land the university purchased from Congregation Mishkan Tefila earlier this year, Mayor Setti Warren said Wednesday.”
  
- August 2017         Mayoral candidate Ruthanne Fuller [announces her commitment](#) to preserve Webster Woods:  
                              “**We need permanently to preserve and to protect the remaining open space within the parcel, including public use of the undeveloped wooded portion... .**”



Mayor Fuller's proposal would leave Boston College in control of the 8 acres of the site that were developed by the temple. Her action would affect only the 17 acres of Webster Woods now owned by Boston College. We applaud Mayor Fuller for taking action to fulfill the city's 2015 commitment to preserve the woods.

Boston College has announced its objection to the Mayor's proposal, but has not explained its plans for the woods. We are very concerned that Boston College plans to develop, and thereby destroy, the woods. Newton Conservators believes that now is the appropriate time for Boston College to follow through on the public commitments made in 2015 and 2016 that Webster Woods will be protected.

We urge Boston College to negotiate a sale of the wooded 17 acres to the City of Newton. If negotiation is not successful, we urge the City Council to authorize the Mayor to acquire this land by eminent domain.