

Mayoral Candidate Responses to Newton Conservators Letter about the Preservation of Webster Woods

On July 26th, 2017, the Newton Conservators wrote to each candidate for Mayor of Newton asking the candidate to take a position on our proposal to preserve Webster Woods. Six of the seven candidates responded to our letter.

In this document our letter to the candidates appears first, followed by each response, in alphabetical order.

As a tax-exempt non-profit organization, the Newton Conservators is permitted to take a position on issues of public concern, such as the importance of preserving Webster Woods. However, we are not allowed to endorse a candidate for public office or to comment on a candidate's position on any issue. Therefore, we are presenting without comments the candidates' responses to our letter.

We hope that you will take the time to read the responses and take them into account when you vote in the preliminary election on September 12th and in the general election on November 7th.



July 26, 2017

Dear Newton Mayoral Candidates,

The mission of the Newton Conservators is to promote “the protection and preservation of natural areas . . . for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton for scientific study, education, and recreation.”

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Richard Primack
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Patricia Robinson
Jane Sender
William Shaevel
Verne Vance
Willis Wang
Brian Yates

The middle section of the Webster Woods, currently owned by Boston College, serves all of these purposes. University professors like Richard Primack have done research in the woods; our walk leaders such as Eric Olson have taken students and other residents of Newton into Webster Woods to learn about the plants and animals of the woods; and many of Newton’s citizens love to walk the paths through the woods. There are few other areas of the city where one can feel as much in a forest as here.

For almost two years, the Newton Conservators has worked with the Friends of Webster Woods to preserve this land. The Board of the Newton Conservators fully supports the letter sent to you by the Friends of Webster Woods on July 4. We hope that you will commit to the actions it proposes.

In addition, we would like to clarify our thoughts about what preserving “at least the wooded area” should include.

We believe that the city should take the following steps:

- Acquire outright, or through conservation restriction, the following areas of the Boston College property:

- (1) The wooded area west of the rear parking lot (i.e. the large wooded parcel that contains the Bare Pond vernal pool),
- (2) The rear MASCO parking lot that adjoins Bare Pond, and
- (3) The wooded area between that rear parking lot and the pavement adjacent to the western side of the temple building.

- Restore the rear (west-most) parking lot and its driveway to a natural condition. We believe that the extremely close proximity of this parking lot to Bare Pond threatens the vernal pool itself.

- Grant to the Newton Conservators or another organization a permanent conservation restriction on all city-owned land comprising Webster Woods.

- If the above land is not acquired by the city but is protected by a conservation easement granted by Boston College, arrange that Newton Conservators or another organization hold that conservation restriction.

We believe that including these areas in the acquisition and protection will best preserve Webster Woods, rectify an environmental error made when that parking lot was built, protect the vernal pool, and enhance the overall open space, without detracting from the development potential of the area around the building.

Furthermore, we hope that you will give consideration to removing and restoring the small parking lot immediately adjacent to Hammond Pond Parkway, and to replacing

the hazardous driveway access to the site with safer access via the signalized intersection and driveway that now serves the Towers of Chestnut Hill and the Shops at Chestnut Hill. While this would involve coordination with DCR, it is likely that all parties could agree to make this important safety improvement.

We request that you respond to this further clarification of the specific area of the property we think should be preserved.

We will publish the responses from all mayoral candidates on our website as we receive them. On August 21, we will send a message containing the responses (up to 1000 words per candidate) to all of our members.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions—either at the PO box on this letter or at President@NewtonConservators.org.

All the best,

Beth Wilkinson, President

On behalf of the Newton Conservators Board

Dear Ms. Wilkerson and the members of the Newton Conservators,

I would like to thank you for giving me a reason to look at the issue of Webster Woods. I have seen the signs and thought; of course we want to keep as much wooded area as we can in our city. As mayor of the city of Newton I would be committed to doing everything in my power as the chief executive of the city to ensure that the land is not developed, that the land that has been developed is reclaimed and that the land stays undeveloped in perpetuity.

To accomplish this I will rely on the Newton Conservators and hope that you will be willing to not only assist me and the city in preserving the Wester Woods, but helping me to stay aware of other situations that arise in Newton that are of or should be a concern to all of us.

Sincerely,

Al Cecchinelli

Candidate for Mayor of Newton.

The Fuller Committee
Steve Grossman, Co-Chair
Dana Hanson, Co-Chair
Tony Logalbo, Treasurer



ruthanne@ruthannefuller.com
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617-738-5311

Dear Newton Conservators,

Open space is one of the aspects of Newton that makes it a great place to live. We are fortunate that past generations of activists had the foresight to propose the preservation of key parcels of land, and that past generations of elected officials had the foresight and good sense to agree with those proposals. I am grateful to you for continuing that tradition of activism with your advocacy for Webster Woods, the largest contiguous parcel of open space in Newton. As Mayor, I intend to continue that same tradition of foresight and good sense by preserving this parcel.

The 22-acre parcel of undeveloped land now owned by Boston College is directly in the middle of the public open space under the care of the City of Newton to the north and the Department of Conservation and Recreation to the south. Whatever happens to that parcel is critical to all residents of Newton for environmental, recreational, and educational reasons. Therefore, we need permanently to preserve and to protect the remaining open space within the parcel, including public use of the undeveloped wooded portion, as well as assure use compatible with this open space for the portion that is now occupied by structures and paved surfaces.

I am committed to:

1. Striking while the iron is hot. The opportunity to preserve open space does not come along every day, and once a parcel is developed, it's almost always gone forever. That is why preservation of appropriate open space in general, and the permanent protection of Webster Woods in particular, has always been a top priority of mine. ☐
2. Forming a citizen advisory group as soon as possible after taking office and meeting personally with the group at a minimum of once a quarter. ☐
3. Negotiating with Boston College for permanent protection of and public access to the undeveloped wooded area at a minimum, and preferably including the rear and front satellite parking areas and their abutting wooded areas as well. Restoring these parking lots to a natural condition would significantly expand and improve the safety of Webster Woods.

Furthermore, I will negotiate with BC for assurances of compatible future use of the remaining portion of the parcel. These negotiations will be concluded within two years of taking office, but preferably sooner. ☐

4. Submitting necessary approvals to the Community Preservation Act Committee and the City Council to finalize and implement the agreement with Boston College within two and a half years from taking office, but preferably sooner. I will also include the funding for acquiring the wooded portions of Webster Woods in the Capital Investment Plan the first year I am in office, and will follow that up with the necessary complementary funding (both CPA and, if necessary, city) to assure we achieve these objectives. ☐
5. Supporting a taking by eminent domain (or potentially an equally enforceable legal alternative) that ensures no development of the wooded area(s) of the parcel and continued public use of it, if, despite my best efforts, I am unable to forge a satisfactory agreement with Boston College. ☐
6. Imposing an enforceable perpetual conservation restriction on the open space. ☐
7. Exploring with DCR and the Conservation Commission the replacement of the current driveway access to ☐the site, which is hazardous, to the signalized intersection and driveway currently serving the Shops at Chestnut Hill and the Towers of Chestnut Hill. ☐

Please feel free to reach out to me to discuss Webster Woods. I can be reached at 617-738-5311 or ruthanne@ruthannefuller.com.

Sincerely,

Ruthanne Fuller

July 28, 2017

Eli Katzoff

Without a question Webster woods must be preserved. So to be clear, I am 100% in favor of preserving these woods and would fight hard to do so. After all, we are talking about the largest open space in Newton. On top of this, any development that would go into this area I have no doubt would not be for socially conscious use like affordable housing etc given it's spectacular location. Therefor we owe it to our citizens to keep this fantastic piece of natural land intact and undeveloped.

With that said, in order to persevere it for the future it's also important that we encourage people utilize this piece of green land for recreation. There is no better insurance for keeping it undeveloped in the future then having it used regularly. So, as a city we have to continue to encourage residents to venture off into these woods and thus keep up the tremendous support that already exists for it's conservation. As mayor, this will happen.

Cheers,
Eli

Please consider this letter a formal commitment that as Mayor, **permanently protecting Webster Woods will be a top priority for my administration.**

During my tour with the Friends of Webster Woods last year, I learned a great deal about this unique open space in our city. I was astonished at the beauty we have in our own backyard. I was also stunned to learn about the lost opportunities in the 1950's and more recently, to preserve all of Webster Woods. I will not let protecting this beautiful open space, through some form of acquisition or restriction; pass us by a third time.

I believe that with my leadership experience and the collaborative approach I have shown as President of the City Council, I will be able to conduct productive and respectful conversations with Boston College and all other stakeholders. As I said in my letter to the Friends of Webster Woods, if despite my best efforts, I am unable to forge an agreement with Boston College, I would fully support a taking by eminent domain that ensures no development of this area and continued public use of it. I am confident, however, that by working collaboratively with Boston College and other stakeholders, Newton will not have to get to this point.

As I also committed to the Friends of Webster Woods, I will form an advisory group that will include members from that group and the Newton Conservators. I will establish this advisory group within my first six months of taking office, if not sooner. I will personally meet with this group quarterly and if needed, more often, depending on how discussions with Boston College are proceeding.

I will work in partnership with the Newton Conservators and the Friends of Webster Woods to develop a master plan for this entire area. The Newton Conservators' presentation "The Future of Webster Woods" contains excellent points that can be incorporated into this planning effort.

As mentioned, I am prepared to negotiate an agreement with Boston College that includes permanent protection of 'at least the wooded area' but to address the specific points in "The Future of Webster Woods" presentation:

- a) I feel very strongly that preserving *Bare Pond and the vernal pool* be a priority in any negotiation, acquisition or restriction;
- b) The *MASCO parking lot* obviously would bring another stakeholder into the conversation. However, it would be my responsibility to explain to MASCO why the parking lot it uses is an important part of the Woods' integrity. It makes perfect sense to acquire and/or restrict the area now used by the parking due to its proximity to the pond and vernal pool. As Mayor, I will work to restore this area to a natural condition, unless during the formation of the master plan, the Conservators and the Friends point out a better use;

Scott Lennon

- c) I am amenable to granting the Conservators a role in administering the conservation restrictions on Webster Woods, assuming that doing so is in the best interest of the city and its taxpayers.

- d) I will work closely with all stakeholders, the city's Director of Transportation and the DCR on incorporating a full review into our master plan of the small parking lot and the access issues identified for improvement in your letter.

Lastly, I look forward to meeting with generous members of the public who have offered to contribute to this preservation effort. As Mayor, I would leverage city money to ensure that we do not let this opportunity pass by again.

I pledge a strong partnership with the Newton Conservators, the Friends of Webster Woods, and the many other supporters I have heard from on this issue to ensure that this "open space gem" (as the Friends of Webster Woods has called it) remains just that!



August 2017

RE: Mayoral Candidate, Amy Mah Sangiolo's Pledge to Support Acquisition of Webster Woods

Dear Members of the Newton Conservators and Friends of Webster Woods,

As a 20 year member of the Newton City Council, a life-long environmental activist and a Mayoral candidate, I am writing to pledge my commitment and support for the the swift acquisition of the Webster Woods parcel. We have already lost so much of our urban forest to development. Here, we have an opportunity to preserve Webster Woods, in particular, the middle section currently owned by Boston College. Further development of this land will have detrimental impacts on the entire ecosystem of the woods and the only way to ensure its protection is to acquire the property in its entirety in perpetuity.

As a City Councilor, I have already pledged my support for acquisition of Webster Woods. I wholeheartedly supported a Resolution to the current Administration in 2015. As Mayor, I pledge that protection and acquisition of the area is permanently protected will be a top priority. The area to be protected and acquired either through outright purchase or by conservation restriction (to be granted to the Newton Conservators or other organization to serve as holder of the restriction) shall include:

- 1) The wooded area west of the rear parking lot that contains the Bare Pond vernal pool,
- 2) The MASCO parking lot that adjoins the Bare Pond, and
- 3) The Wooded area between the rear parking lot and the pavement adjacent to the western side of the temple building.

As part of this acquisition, I will seek funding to ensure that the rear parking lot and driveway is restored to its natural condition. As stated earlier, I will ensure that either the Newton Conservators or another organization serve as holder of the restriction not only on the acquired land or acquired conservation restriction but also on the city-owned portions of the Webster Woods land. I will coordinate with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to improve access to the site with potential signalization and driveway improvements and remove and restore the small parking lot immediately adjacent to Hammond Pond Parkway.

The City has an historical commitment to this area and has precedent for using eminent domain to obtain conservation land. We did it back in 1968 to save Houghton Garden from development and we can do it again to save Webster Woods should we be unable to reach an agreement with Boston College.

As Mayor, I will draw upon my legal skills and experience and my commitment and passion to preserve and protect Newton's precious natural resources. Webster Woods will be a top priority.

Sincerely,

Amy Mah Sangiolo
Ward 4, Councilor-at-Large, City of Newton
Candidate for Mayor, City of Newton

Geoffrey Woodward

Since the Newton City Alderman lost their lawsuit to prevent the MDC sale of 23 acres in 1954, I do agree to following ALL the Newton Conservators steps listed below.

I would add that I would actively seek the city repurchasing the piece of land from Boston College for a bartering agreement regarding their other properties in Newton. I think if the City of Newton could outright repurchase and reclaim the land we could use it for preservation and have it managed by the Newton Parks and Recreation Department. I know Marc Welch and feel that Newton Parks and Recreation could make Webster Woods into a Newton City preservation area.

I could give a longer response at one of your upcoming forums. But I do feel that I trust the decisions of the Newton Conservancy and feel that purchasing the land from Boston College would be the best way to go about implementing these solutions to preserving Webster Woods. If that could not be accomplished, then we definitely need to negotiate with Boston College about Newton City rules and requirements regarding conservation restrictions.

Many thanks,

Geoffrey