

President's Message

This will certainly be a holiday season like none other with all the disruption of family gatherings due to Covid. In addition to the usual winter coats, hats, gloves, and scarfs, face masks are now *de rigueur* winter fashion, but at least they help keep your face warm! All the better to get outside to experience the frosty wonder of a New England winter, perhaps interspersed with a few unseasonable bouts of summer-like warm days. The arrival and distribution of an effective Covid vaccine will be a source of great thanksgiving for all of us.

With our fall walk series canceled this year in the interest of safety, walks coordinator Beth Wilkinson contacted some of our knowledgeable walk leaders to see if a pivot to the virtual world instead of the physical was possible. Thus was born our first ever fall webinar series, where we learned about butterflies, invasives, freshwater pond life, fall birds at Cold Spring Park, ferns, and turkeys. Beth hosted and handled Q&A duties, and Barbara Bates handled the technical details and coordinated Zoom details. Attendance far exceeded expectations and attendee feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with some noting the ease of seeing the presentation details better than at an in-person lecture. And for those who could not attend in real time, we are posting the webinars on our YouTube channel (tinyurl.com/video-conservators) for viewing at leisure.

Our 59th annual meeting also took place virtually October 21st, having been postponed from last May. Thanks so much to our wonderful meeting sponsors: *Paddle Boston, Lucy Stair, Village Bank, Larry Burdick, Willis Wang, and the Crystal Lake Conservancy*. We are grateful again to our dedicated board members (this time ratified via Zoom based poll) and esteemed advisors for their continued service.

It was surprising how much we accomplished as an organization despite the Covid situation. After Webster Woods, we turned our attention to working on new trails along the Charles River with the Riverside Greenway Working Group. The Pony Truss Trail has recently been completed, and there is additional financial support for other Greenway sections from the Riverside project. Houghton Garden has a new accessible path section and is being hydro-raked to prevent flooding and eutrophication as it had become badly overgrown. Volunteer invasive teams continued working through the pandemic even in the face of our public sessions being shut down. Our Dexter Woods hillside park received a lot of attention with invasive removal and restoration native plantings. We continue monitoring conservation restrictions (CRs) at numerous properties, and others are in the process of being completed with the city for Webster and Kessler Woods.

We continue to provide open space outreach through our website (featuring a new section on invasives), this newsletter, our frequent e-Bulletin, and expanded social media via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and now even Tik-Tok! Our long-standing grants program is accepting applications for open space related projects in Newton. And we have recently formed a "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" team dedicated to the continuing goal of making our open spaces and organization welcoming to all.

At the annual meeting, we also were able to announce this year's awards: Directors' Awards (Bob DeRubeis, Alice Ingerson, Ouida Young), Charles Maynard Award (Alan Noguee), and Environmentalists of the Year (the large Webster Woods team). We regret very much not being able to do this in person and hope to be able to do so at our meeting next spring. Thanks especially to the Webster Woods team for this major open space accomplishment that will keep this land as open space in the city forever. And Sam Jaffe delighted the audience with his wonderful caterpillar tales of nature connectedness. Elsewhere in this issue, you can also see Sam's inspiring article, an account of awards, some early history of our newly monikered Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department, a Charles River birding guide, and an appreciation of AnnaMaria Abernathy's long term of service as a Newton Conservator.

Watch for our renewal letter in the mail with a more complete update on our activities this past year. A gift membership, trail guide, or our almanac, all make great gifts during this holiday season. We always welcome new volunteers to help with our mission of preserving and protecting our open spaces. Wishing you a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthful 2021 — it can only get better! Please go out and enjoy the wonderful open spaces of Newton.

All the best,

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President, Newton Conservators