



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

FALL ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

*Newton's land trust working to preserve
open space since 1961*

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NEWTON CONSERVATORS

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60th Anniversary of Newton Conservators

Newton Conservators has turned 60! Since its establishment in 1961, the organization has worked to fulfill its mission of “the protection and preservation of natural areas... for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton for scientific study, education, and recreation.”

Over time, that mission has broadened to encompass new issues and to be concerned with conservation beyond the borders of our city.

In the past year, the board created a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) committee and has been working to re-examine the structure of the board and its activities. More information about that process will be forthcoming. The board also has endorsed statewide issues such as the Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA) to strengthen protection of open space in Massachusetts, and it also supported Massachusetts Green Budget amendments.

As we plan for the future of Newton Conservators, let's also visit the past and celebrate the many accomplishments of our organization over the past 60 years.

The Beginning

After World War II, returning veterans and their families had trouble finding affordable homes in Newton. The city reacted creatively to this shortage by taking a large tract of land in Oak Hill by eminent domain and building affordable homes there. As the decade progressed, shopping centers and industrial and office buildings, as well as more homes and apartment buildings, were built across the city. Boston College, which had been a six-building complex, expanded rapidly. The Metropolitan District Commission (now



In the 1950s, the Metropolitan District Commission had begun selling some of the woodlands, near Hammond Pond for development of parking for the new Chestnut Hill Shopping Center.

DCR) sold off some of its woodlands near Hammond Pond for development, as did the privately-owned Norumbega Park. The Mass Pike Boston Extension took over homes in West Newton and a number of Newton's villages. By 1960, Newton citizens began to discuss the importance of preserving open space as the city continued to develop.

A small group of people from across the city met to discuss what could be done, and together the following people and others formed the Newton Conservators, which was incorporated in 1961.

- Allard M. Valentine, president of the Auburndale Cooperative Bank, and Murray I. Rothman, rabbi of Temple Shalom, were concerned about plans first for a racetrack and then for high rise buildings proposed for Norumbega Park.

- Jack M. Roberts and Helen A. Heyn, both members of the Oak Hill District

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Improvement Association, had seen most of the farm and woodland of their village disappear.

- Dr. Richard Lennihan, Jr. found Edmands Park in Newtonville badly neglected and fast becoming a convenient local dump.
- Deborah Howard, involved in ornithology research for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, worried that wildlife habitats would soon be decimated in Newton.

In the early 1960s, the new organization became involved in discussions of the reuse of the privately owned Norumbega Amusement Park on the Charles River.

By the middle of the decade, it became clear that Newton needed a Conservation Commission, which was created with the support of Newton Conservators in 1966. Since then, Newton Conservators has worked closely with this city commission to preserve Newton's remaining open spaces. To this end, the city has accepted bequests of land, taken land by eminent domain, and purchased land outright for parks and conservation areas. In 1968, the Conservators assisted the city in creating the Webster Conservation Area, Newton's largest conservation area.

To make environmental education available to Newton's junior high and high school students, Newton Conservators helped to establish the summer Environmental Science Program in 1967 as a joint project with the Newton Public Schools and the Conservation Commission. The program celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017 (with David Backer as its leader) and continues to thrive and grow. Newton Conservators contributes scholarship funds to the program annually.



Students attending one of the sessions for the Environmental Science Programs.

“The Newton Conservators has played a major role in keeping the Environmental Science Program running for over 50 years! The Conservators’ financial support for scholarships has enabled families to give their students the chance to get outdoors, learn about science, and make friends year after year.

Many students and leaders have gone on to careers with an environmental focus and have written about the strong influence that the program had on their lives.

Today, students and leaders are still hiking, bicycling, and canoeing all over Newton, and back-packing up Mt. Washington. These experiences are developing the next generation of environmentalists.”

– David Backer

The 1970s

In the early 1970s, Newton Conservators was fortunate to receive a gift of land and funds from Priscilla Ordway. This established Ordway Park in Newton Center.



Ordway Park was bequeathed to Newton Conservators by Priscilla Ordway in 1971.

two studies strengthened the arguments for a program of land acquisition by the city in subsequent years.

In 1975–6, after years of petitions, challenges, and public hearings, Newton Conservators, working together with Auburndale neighborhood organizations, persuaded the city to purchase more than half of the former Norumbega Amusement Park as Norumbega Park. The rest of the land was developed as a hotel by the Marriott Corporation. The Conservators lobbied successfully to protect the shoreline and to set limits on the hotel's size, both then and

In 1973, the Board of Aldermen requested that the Conservation Commission study the remaining open land in the city and establish priorities for possible acquisition. The Conservators' Open Space Committee made an independent survey, and the close agreement between the findings of the



Graphic showing the early history of Norumbega park. 1971.



Norumbega park today.

in subsequent years when the Marriott proposed further development.

Throughout the 1970s, Newton Conservators was instrumental in creating other key conservation areas in the city including Kennard Conservation Area, Houghton Garden, Dolan Pond Conservation Area, and Sawmill Brook Conservation Area.

Some of the leaders who made this early conservation work happen were AnnaMaria Abernathy, Sarah Barnett, John Bliss, Thelma Fleishman, Bart Hague, Helen

Heyn, Jean Husher, Peter Kastner and, a little later on the scene, Lisle Baker.

The 1980s and 1990s



A sample page from the current walking trails booklet.

In 1981, the Conservators published *Visit Your Parks*, a guide to Newton's public open spaces containing detailed maps of individual parks and conservation areas and their walking trails. This publication was very popular with visitors to Newton's open spaces, and it has been revised several times over the years.

In 2003, Judy Hepburn, Pat Robinson, and Lucy Caldwell-Stair produced the current book form, *Walking Trails*, and updated it again in 2013. A new edition is now in the works.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Newton Conservators assisted in creating the Flowed Meadow Conservation Area and helped to develop Nahanton Park. In addition, Newton Conservators was a key player in the redevelopment of the park and playing fields at the former Weeks School.

Continuing with our environmental education efforts and to foster open-space conservation and study, the Conservators established a grants program in 1992 to provide funding for conservation-related projects to Newton teachers, community groups, and other organizations.

The Early 2000s

Newton Conservators played a leading role in several major open space acquisitions by the city in the early years of the 21st century. Many of our recent successes have come through funding from the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which Newton voters adopted in 2000. Our advocacy and public education programs (led by Jim Broderick) were integral to winning voter approval of the CPA in Newton.

In 2003, we assisted the city in using CPA funds to buy a tract of land adjacent to Dolan Pond Conservation Area and to partner with Habitat for Humanity to build several units of affordable housing on and next to the already-developed portion of the land. Current president Ted Kuklinski helped to guide that project.

“Newton Conservators has been an important in the preservation and improvement of Newton’s open spaces since I first joined the City Council in 1980. In Ward Seven alone the Conservators have supported acquiring the 71-acre Newton Commonwealth Golf Course on Kenrick Street, small additions to the Webster Conservation area on Elgin Street as well as the Houghton Garden on Suffolk Road, a conservation restriction on the landscape next to the historic Durant Kenrick Homestead on Waverley Avenue, the Waban Hill Reservoir on Ward Street, and most recently, the almost 18 acres of the Webster Woods near Hammond Pond Parkway. Newton’s open spaces are much better because of their efforts.”

– Lisle Baker

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Newton Community farm from the air.

Advocacy by the Conservators from 2003 through 2006 was critical in persuading the city to partner with a developer to save a large portion of Kessler Woods.

Newton's last farm was saved from development in 2004 when the Newton Board of Aldermen approved the proposal by the Conservators to use CPA funds to buy the former Angino Farm and to reopen it as Newton Community Farm. Newton Conservators—under the leadership of Doug Dickson, Duane Hillis, Eric Reenstierna, Jon Regosin and others—played a critical role in saving the farm, including negotiating the purchase from the Angino estate.

“One of the most popular CPA acquisitions was Angino Farm — where the Conservators boldly took the lead with a CPA proposal and educating the city and public about the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. Passage of this project was a nail biter with a truly last-minute phone negotiation by the Conservators with the seller during the final board vote discussion. It yielded a price concession just enough to win over one of the aldermen on the fence and provide the needed majority vote for passage. Today we look back at the immense success of the Newton Community Farm and enjoy its bountiful crop of fresh produce!”

– Ted Kuklinski

The Past 10 Years

The past decade started with Newton Conservators' 50th anniversary in 2011. In 2012, we were delighted to celebrate that milestone by having noted naturalist Doug Tallamy address our annual meeting.

Although Newton Conservators works to protect land primarily through advocacy, we also function as a land trust and have assumed legal responsibility to help protect some of the open spaces owned by the City of Newton by holding a conservation restriction on them; this requires us to monitor those properties every year. Newton Conservators currently holds a legal conservation restriction on eight parcels for the City of Newton:

- Crystal Lake Conservation Restriction (area along shoreline path near 230 Lake Ave.)
- Elgin Street Conservation Area (adjacent to Webster Conservation area at end of Elgin St.)
- Newton Commonwealth Golf Course
- Newton Community Farm (Angino Farm)
- 20 Rogers Street at Crystal Lake (adjacent to the Crystal Lake Bath House)
- 30 Wabasso Street (adjacent to Purgatory Cove)
- Webster Park (adjacent to Dolan Pond)
- Waban Hill Reservoir-Heartbreak Hill Park

In 2012, Newton Conservators took on its first and, so far, only conservation restriction on a private property at 15 Bracebridge Road: a beautiful wooded 2-1/2-acre lot then owned by Andrée and Richard Wilson across from Mason-Rice School. The public-access path through the lot continues to be used by many, who also enjoy the native plant landscaping established by the Wilsons' son André.

In addition, Newton Conservators owns three small pocket parks: Ordway Park, Dexter Woods, and Awtrey Dell, all legally restricted to conservation purposes.

The Newton Conservators' website was created by Mike Clarke in 2001. Dan Brody managed the site for many years, carrying out major revisions in 2003 and 2019. Dan made the website an invaluable resource for Newton Conservators, the city, and others. It contains information on all Newton's open spaces and their histories, links from QR codes that are posted in all of Newton's conservation areas, and so much more.

The Newton Conservators' newsletter has been increasingly important for sharing the organization's work with members and the community at large. In recent years, it has been ably produced by editor Ken Mallory and designer Suzette Barbier.

“Congratulations to the Newton Conservators on our 60th anniversary! From my home in New Hampshire’s White Mountains, I follow you and was thrilled with the protection of Webster Woods — so critical as a wildlife corridor in a heavily developed area. I was President for the 50th anniversary, when we were working to protect the Newton Commonwealth Golf Course and the Wilson property. All the accomplishments over 60 years have helped to protect healthy habitats for plants and wildlife — so critical in mitigating the effects of climate change, protecting species, and providing places for humans to enjoy the natural world. Awesome works, and kudos to everyone involved all these years!”

– Jane Sender

Starting in 2015, Newton Conservators was instrumental in working with the City of Newton to preserve the portion of Webster Woods that was owned by Boston College and at risk of being developed. Newton Conservators’ involvement in the effort was led by Beth Wilkinson, who was the chair of the Mayor’s Webster Woods Advisory Panel, and Dan Brody, who was a member of the Community Preservation Committee. At the end of 2019, the city (guided by Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Councilor Lisle Baker, former City Solicitor Ouida Young, Chief Environmental Planner Jennifer Steel, and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo) took the land by eminent domain.



The land purchased by the city is outlined in blue. The land retained by Boston College is at the right. City and state conservation areas are at top and bottom.

Starting in 2015, Newton Conservators began a collaboration with the Riverside Trails Committee, the Solomon Foundation, the Mass Department of Conservation

and Recreation, Bike Newton, and the Conservation Commission to expand the network of trails along the Charles that is now known as the Riverside Greenway. Work on the historic Pony Truss Trail was completed in the fall of 2020, and the official ribbon cutting took place in June of 2021 (see article by Ted Chapman elsewhere in the newsletter). Work on further trail expansion continues.

Over the past ten years, our Invasives Team, led by Katherine Howard, has worked to foster a healthier and more biodiverse environment in Newton’s parks and conservation areas by consistent and diligent invasives removal efforts, and by educating the public on this issue. In 2019, Katherine wrote a guide for the Conservators’ website (<https://newtonconservators.org/invasive-plants/>) to help everyone to recognize invasive plants in our community.



Pollinator demonstration garden at Newton City Hall.

Knowing that it’s also important to replace invasive plants with pollinator-friendly native plants, Beth Wilkinson and Mark Feldhusen created a Pollinator Toolkit on the website (<https://newtonconservators.org/pollinator-toolkit/>) in the summer of 2021 and joined with the Newton Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department and the new Pollinator Working Group to plant a pollinator demonstration garden at City Hall.

Thank you!

The Board of Newton Conservators feels proud of all that our organization has accomplished since 1961 and thanks all our members who support its work, and everyone who has been involved with its many projects over the past 60 years.

We look forward to new projects with you as we continue to set and meet new goals. ♦

By Beth Wilkinson, AnnaMaria Abernathy, and Katherine Howard—with thanks to Conservators’ historian Dan Brody and the other contributors to the website over the years