

🌿 Remembering John Bliss 🌿



John Bliss, former president of the Newton Conservators, died of complications from Parkinson's disease on February 1, 2023. A man who lived his values each day, he leaves behind a light carbon footprint and legacy of deep community impact in Newton, where he lived for 55 years.

John's daily routine reflected his environmental commitment. He recycled, rode his bicycle to work, shopped with canvas grocery bags, and installed LED lightbulbs a generation before these practices were common.

John was passionate about protecting green space in Newton and creating safe roads for cyclists and pedestrians. Soon after moving to Newton in 1968, he became a member of the Newton Conservators.

In the early 1970s, John joined the Open Space Committee, which researched and wrote the Open Space Plan that identified all existing open space in Newton and prioritized which properties were most important to save.

As part of the research John and his wife Tamara and other committee members walked the property then known as The Novitiate Land, a large property that abutted the Charles River, Nahanton Street, Winchester Street, and the Winchester Street Recreation Area, where residents could rent space to grow vegetables and flowers. The Archdiocese of Boston owned the land, which had one large building that had once been a home for novices and later became an orphanage. The land was the largest undeveloped parcel of land in Newton that abutted the Charles River. John was struck by the beauty of the property that included a forest of trees, two large meadows, a small pond, and access to the Charles River. The final report identified the Novitiate land as the most important property to keep open and ideally become a city-owned park.

Around 1980, the Archdiocese decided to try to sell the Novitiate land to a developer to build 250 condos. As president of the Conservators, John led the campaign to pressure the city to buy the property and turn it into a park.

While the city was interested in acquiring the land along the river, it did not want to buy the entire property because the old building with the iconic tower was in the middle of the property. The city had no use for the building, and it would be expensive to tear down.

Fortunately, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) wanted to buy part of the property to create a Jewish Community Center. John worked with Norman Leventhal from the CJP and others to draw the boundary between the land which would become the Jewish Community Center and the land the city would acquire, which became Nahanton Park. The city was able to combine the newly acquired property with the Winchester Recreation Area. They also were able to put a soccer field on the property. As president of the Newton Conservators, he spearheaded the city's acquisition of the last large parcel of open space on the Charles River in Newton to create the 57-acre Nahanton Park.

Because of John's involvement, his family identified the Newton Conservators as a recipient of memorial gifts. We all – birders, boaters, bee-keepers, gardeners, soccer players, and naturalists — can be grateful for John's foresight and skill in having the City of Newton acquire Nahanton Park.

🌿 Tamara Bliss and Bonnie Carter

Get Involved with the Conservators - Volunteers Needed

The Newton Conservators needs member volunteers to help with various events such as staffing tables at Newton's Village Days, the Harvest Fest, and others. These are fun events that give participants an opportunity to work with board members to learn more about Conservators' activities and to meet and distribute information about them to your neighbors. If you are willing to volunteer for a couple of hours at such events, it would be most appreciated. Please send an email to: president@newtonconservators.org and someone will contact you. Additional volunteer opportunities are listed on our website.

Thank you.