

Charles River Dam Advisory Committee | Meeting #9

January 25, 2021 (Virtual)

Meeting Summary

This meeting summary was prepared by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), a nonprofit entity contracted by the Town of Natick to facilitate the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee process. This summary is not intended to be a meeting transcript. Rather, it focuses on the main points covered during the meeting.

MEETING IN BRIEF

The Charles River Dam Advisory Committee (AC) convened virtually for its ninth meeting on Tuesday, January 25, 2022, to review and discuss recreation opportunities and features that would be desirable at this site under either scenario; continue discussions of key questions, including alternative repair methodologies; and share an updated committee workplan. Ninety-seven people attended this meeting: 19 AC members (plus one new member), 3 invited presenters, 2 CBI project staff, and 72 interested members of the public. **The agenda, presentation slides and the recording of this meeting are available on the project's webpage: <http://natickma.gov/crdam>.**

NEXT STEPS

- The AC is taking a brief meeting hiatus as the Town advances work with technical consultants, reconvening later in spring 2022 to review the outputs from the work with Stantec and Halvorson Studio - Tighe & Bond.
- The Planning Team will post the AC Meeting #9 recording and slides on the project webpage, as well as a revised version of the AC's workplan for 2022.
- Town staff will present an update on the AC's progress to the Select Board in February 2022.
- AC members will be invited to participate in one-on-one calls with the facilitation team to discuss how the process is going and capture any outstanding questions that members have.

WELCOME & COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Ona Ferguson, CBI Facilitation Team, welcomed participants. AC members approved the meeting summary from their eighth meeting on December 14. Ms. Ferguson presented a revised workplan for the AC in 2022, which includes a brief break in AC meetings to allow technical consultants working with the Town to complete their deliverables and report back to the AC with findings at the next meeting of the AC, anticipated to be in May/June 2022. The AC will have a membership change: Mary-Kate Schneeweis is stepping down as the Conservation Commission's representative and will be replaced by Chris Stillman, in attendance as well.

COMMUNITY USE & RECREATION

Maggie Osthues, CBI Facilitation Team, presented a brief overview of results from the public community use and recreation survey. Members of the public had the opportunity to share their thoughts, questions, and guidance on what community use and recreation features they would like to see in this area of Natick through an online survey that was open from December 17, 2021 through January 16, 2022. In total, 980 individuals engaged at least partially with the survey, including 139 Kennedy Middle School students.

In addition to closed-ended questions asking members to prioritize different features in and along the Charles River and adjacent parks, members shared thoughts in open-response questions. Key themes from the open responses of the survey included requests to consider the costs of each option; design with accessibility, connectivity in mind; design for improved canoeing and kayaking experiences; focus on nature, peacefulness in park design; honor the Indigenous history and vision for this area; include

sitting and picnicking areas; maintain the beauty and aesthetics of this iconic area; prioritize wildlife, ecology, and native plantings; and preserve the existing mature tree growth. *A high-level report of the survey results is available [here](#).*

Mark Jacobson, General Manager of Paddle Boston, presented considerations for the paddling experience at this site under either scenario. He highlighted that this stretch of river is a great, popular river trip for paddlers, with a safety challenge and hazard at the end of making sure that trip guides know where the takeout is to avoid going over the dam. There is decent accessibility, but there could be improvements to make the takeout more accessible and to the route overland. Mr. Jacobson noted that people in boats avoid the area just downstream of the dam because of the danger of the hydraulics, with guides advising people to put in further downstream. He shared some initial thoughts for how to improve paddling in this area under a spillway removal scenario with the addition of a better launching spot.

Discussion

Following presentations, AC members explored the question: “What absolutely should go on our wish list no matter what choice we make, and in one case or the other? Why?” Key themes from AC member discussion included:

- *Many priorities* - Survey respondents indicated that many of the design and recreation options are priorities, making it difficult to narrow down.
- *Accessibility* - It is important to design this area to be accessible for the disabled community and provide safe access to the water. It is easiest to design for accessibility early in the design process.
- *Boat launches* - In either scenario, a boat launch could be added to the site. Having a boat launch where boaters will want to pull over and spend some time in Natick is desirable. A good boat launch can be aesthetically pleasing (not just a concrete ramp), designed with accessibility measures, and be used for people on foot to access the water as well as launch canoes/kayaks.
- *River changes and safety* - There are still unanswered questions about what the river is going to look like at this site if the spillway were removed (e.g., the width, depth, flow rate of the river). This information could have implications for paddlers. The dam, as is, creates unsafe conditions for paddlers and people near the water. Currently, boats can get stuck, and the water’s edge is not very accessible to launch.
- *Multi-purpose courts* - The nearby multipurpose courts are an underutilized Natick asset that many would like the Town to improve, but that area falls outside of the scope of the AC. That area is included in the master plan for Natick’s parks. Committee members are interested in more connection between park areas. This committee could share recommendations for the multipurpose court area for the Town’s consideration.
- *The beauty of the area* - Many in the survey commented on their desire to preserve the natural beauty of the area, advising the Town to keep things beautiful and to not over-design the space. Many also seemed invested in preserving the existing mature trees on the earthen dam, which could help inform the committee’s decision-making.
- *Public access to the Charles River* - This area of Natick is one of the few places where people can access the river directly if they are not an abutter. People are drawn to the tranquility and peace of flowing, natural water. Many survey respondents called on the Town to cherish and protect the river and make it more accessible for the whole community.

PROJECT UPDATES

Following discussion of community use and recreation, the AC received a variety of project updates from Town staff and technical consultants on: Review of alternative repair methodologies, engagement with

landscape architects, scope of work for preliminary design of spillway removal, and water quality monitoring. *Slides are available [here](#).*

Review of alternative repair methodologies: William McDowell, Town Engineer, introduced the presentation on review of alternative repair methodologies, or the potential “third options,” noting that the AC explored 2 alternative repair methodologies in response to public input: backfilling the area downstream of the dam and installing sheet piling on the upstream side of the dam. He shared that the MA Office of Dam Safety (ODS) determined that trees would not be allowed to remain on the dam under any repair scenario. Derek Schipper, P.E., and Jim Guarente, P.E, from GZA presented further on the alternative repair methodologies idea, walking through the traditional dam repair approach, the backfilling downstream approach, and the sheet pile wall on upstream approach. In addition to the ODS determination that none of the approaches would allow Natick to keep the existing trees on the dam, GZA presented considerations around impacts to wetlands, the need for river storage replication, ability to permit, and design and construction costs for all approaches, concluding that alternative methodologies have permit challenges and higher design and construction costs than the traditional repair design.

Following GZA’s presentation, AC members commented that river storage replication and impacts to wetlands are important considerations for permitting as well as for consistent use and enjoyment of the park area (e.g., under the backfill alternative, the park on the library side would need to be used for river storage). Members noted that it was good for the Town to explore these alternatives with technical consultants, but that, given the permitting and cost difficulties, the AC should be using the traditional dam repair approach for its deliberations and decision-making. GZA responded to an AC member question that either natural or engineered product could be used for riprap/armoring, but natural stone, like granite, would be more pleasing and more expensive.

Engagement with landscape architects: Mr. McDowell presented on the Town’s efforts to engage a landscape architect, Halvorson Studio - Tighe & Bond, to develop better visuals to more fully illustrate the possibilities of the future design of this area under both dam repair and spillway removal scenarios. The landscape architecture team was in attendance at the meeting, received information from the community survey as well as other information from the AC’s work to date, and the Town will be providing the team with drone footage to support their work.

Scope of work for preliminary design of spillway removal: Mr. McDowell then introduced Michael Chelminski, P.E. and Principal at Stantec, to present on the grant that Natick received from the MA Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) to develop a preliminary design of spillway removal. Mr. McDowell noted that the Town was awarded this technical assistance grant in December 2021 to help answer key questions from the AC about river navigability, topography, and design and construction costs in a spillway removal scenario. Mr. Chelminski reviewed Stantec’s scope of services, highlighting the different data collection and hydrologic and hydraulic modeling that Stantec will be conducting to inform a preliminary design plan for spillway removal, as well as a technical memo and opinion on probable costs. An AC member asked about how far upstream Stantec would expect to see changes in the river from spillway removal; Mr. Chelminski said the river will likely look similar upstream to how it does even further upstream and similar downstream to how it does even further downstream, but that the Stantec team will be paddling the stretch of the river to collect data to develop a detailed hydraulic model to answer this question for the AC.

Water quality monitoring: Jillian Wilson Martin, Town Sustainability Director, and Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator, presented updates on different proposals the Town received for water quality monitoring, following the October 14 AC meeting on ecological impacts at which some AC members

indicated an interest in monitoring. Tighe & Bond proposed two options for water quality monitoring: three months for \$19,500 with a comparison of dissolved oxygen and temperature or \$25,750 for that work as well as water level monitoring and a benchmark elevation survey. Natick does not have an existing funding source to cover this work; Mr. Marshall advised that the Town not pursue this at this time. Two AC Members commented that this information is not needed to inform their decision-making, as there is enough data from other areas with dams and dam removals. One suggested that it would be nice to have monitoring data in the long-term for the Town, so maybe staff could explore an ongoing monitoring project with the Natick High School science department.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Below are verbal public comments shared live in the meeting. Additional public comments submitted in writing are captured in Appendix B.

- Jeff Federico: I am the creator of natickriveraccess.org. I think there will be a missed opportunity if the committee only tackles the decision of whether to remove the dam and does not recommend expanded public access. If it takes some more time upfront to consider granting public access, I think that it will be time well spent. The problem is, in the case of the South Natick Dam area, the current location has extremely limited parking, non-accessible launch location that is not widely known, and as a location, that is just not particularly inclusive for many members of the community. Particularly as we expand to have more condos and therefore residents who cannot store their own kayaks or canoes. However, the committee noted its own public meetings, a goal to recommend expanded public access. The proposal of natickriveraccess.org would be to transform 23 Pleasant Street, currently a very underutilized, overgrown basketball court, into a wonderful destination for public Charles River access. Ideally, the committee could recommend repurposing this facility into a parking lot, open space along the river bank, and kayak/canoe paddle board facility, complete with rental options and accessible launch facilities. The committee has a wonderful opportunity with a proposal to create expanded and improved public access. I strongly urge the committee to fully consider the proposal at natickriveraccess.org, including a video tour of 23 Pleasant Street and its awesome potential. The proposal has the written support of many Natick citizens, as represented in public comments sent to the Committee. I'm happy to take any questions the committee might have here or outside this meeting.
- Tom Palmer: I've been a Natick resident for almost three years, but I've been in the Boston area for 45 years and have a long familiarity with the South Natick area and the dam and have driven by it a lot and spent a little time there. I appreciated Terri Evans' comments in particular tonight. But there are a couple issues, I just want to very briefly mention. One is that there was a comment early on, about the legal issues and how those would sort of be taken up. It was suggested offline or out of the public, and I think the public needs to understand those issues, namely the property owners that are right next to the dam and have riparian rights there. I know this is a complicated legal issue, and I'm not a lawyer, but I think the public needs to understand what's going on there. I did some research and counted 11 different owners of that property that use that water or at least had the opportunity to use that water power in the past and, of course, water, as we know, is a very clean source of energy. It may never be used again there, but there's a real history of innovation and proud industrial history there that I think should be considered. The other thing I wanted to mention was that I think that everybody agrees that GZA is very experienced and knowledgeable about this, and what we're trying to do here is get objective information to make a decision that there may be some disagreement on. I appreciate everything everybody contributes, but the Division of Ecological Restoration, their goal is to remove dams, I mean that's what their purpose is, according to what I read on the website, or at least that

certainly suggested there. I just want to make sure that the information we get from all sources is really objective, and it doesn't push us in one direction or another on this because it's really important, and as Terri mentioned, there's a lot of appreciation for the existing condition.

- Brad Peterson, 7 Dover Road: A lot was presented this evening, a big meaty session and I'm sure we all have a lot to contemplate. I had three quick things I wanted to touch on; the first was the options. I'm grateful that the Town was willing to look at options other than the two that were first proposed; I know many others are as well. I have to say that I'm really quite disappointed with the result. I'm also just a little mystified. I wish the gentleman from GZA explained why the Office of Dam Safety wouldn't permit either of those. It was simply, "well they wouldn't permit it and you know here's what we suggested." In each case, it appears as though they were moving all the trees anyway, so what could the objection possibly be I don't know. It would be nice if, in some follow up, there is some explanation as to specifically why either option wouldn't be permitted. On the first one, you know replication of the wetlands, I can understand you need to replicate it somewhere. But why would you do that immediately across the river and destroy that old stone wall? It just seems like a terrible idea to me and I could see how that would just be unpalatable to a number of people. It would seem to me that, yes, you can replicate it at the same elevation somewhere else, perhaps just immediately downstream with the river. But those are just my thoughts there, it'd be nice to know specifically why they would object to either of those two plans. The second point was just on the renderings. I'm really happy that there's a third party brought in to provide renderings. I know many people felt that the rendering of repair was inferior to the rendering of removal so it'd be nice if there was equal time spent on either rendering, because there are a number of us that are sort of pro repair and would you know, would like to see a nice rendering of that. My last comment is on the survey. My one takeaway was that there was no takeaway. I mean that everybody voted for everything, which is wonderful, because we all want this stuff. But I can't see how you could possibly look at those results and say, well, this one was just slightly higher than this one so we're going to rank order them.
- Jeff Alderson: Precinct 9 town meeting, if that still counts until election, I'm also a resident who visits the area pretty often during the summertime months. I have a couple of comments about the survey given my background in data analysis. I think more effort should have been put into parsing the appendices of the open-ended comments for citizens. Some sort of affinitization towards the different options that have been proposed to see which comments are in support or not for certain options, maybe with some text analytics to show some sentiment analysis in terms of strength of support or lack of support for certain options. There's a lot of really great feedback from the community that was not presented tonight because we're focused on, I think, as a previous speaker said we're focused on options that are all about on par and equal with each other when you look at the numerically. I think a lot of the commentary tonight has been more on the subjective types of things, and so, if we could do some analytics on the subjective comments as well, I think the community needs to see those results. Also in another aspect of my nonprofit work, I am a former chair of the board of an organization that does outdoor adventure activities for people with disabilities. I know that it's a constraint on any project that there's ADA compliance here, but also the previous speaker said something about access. In terms of recreational access, I would be remiss if we didn't also make sure we're underlining support for ADA 3 in this, but not just the minimums. I think that a lot of times, these proposals come back in terms of cost analysis and look at the minimum requirements as opposed to what else we could be doing to open access even further. I'm not seeing that coming through the proposals yet. I'm not seeing the intentionality of the proposals towards opening access for people with disabilities.
- Robert Kearns: I'm the climate resilience specialist with the Charles River Watershed Association. Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide public comments. CRWA was founded in 1965, and our mission is to restore and protect the Charles River and its watershed. I've been attending and listening to your meetings and commend you for the thorough

data-based approach you all are taking to this important issue. And we have submitted a new letter to you all yesterday laying out our reasons for you, urging you to support the removal of the South Natick Dam, particularly related to the health of our cold water fisheries. According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, a cold water fishery resource is a waterbody used by reproducing cold water fish to meet one or more of life history requirements. These are particularly sensitive habitats, and there are very few cold water fisheries in our region, but several could see a huge benefit from the removal of the town's dam. For example, there's Noanet Brook and Trout Brook in Dover downstream, which are cold water fishery streams with native wild brook trout living in them, and with the removal of the South Natick Dam, they would, for the first time in over 100 years, be able to access a number of tributary streams in the largest free-flowing section of the Charles River upstream of the present day South Natick Dam. Additionally, I want to alert you that if the Sanford Mill Dam in Medway, which is the next dam upstream, were to also be removed, these wild populations of Eastern Brook Trout would be reconnected between Dover streams and another cold water brook called Shephard's Brook in Franklin for the first time in centuries. Increasing this connectivity between tributaries is essential for fish health because it allows them to migrate farther for food, spawning habitat, and for mates, and this is even more important as climate change brings new stressors to fish habitat, such as warmer water and more frequent drought.

- Josh Ostroff: I have held various official positions in town, but I'm only speaking on my own behalf, although I should note I'm also a town meeting member. I just want to thank the members of the committee and our consulting staff for the thoroughness of this investigation and the work that you're doing. I'm trying to look at this from the perspective of what people will think about whatever decision we make in the years to come, considering the structure has been here for so long and how iconic it is and how people, notwithstanding the data-based approach that you're taking or that's being delivered to you, I don't think most people when they experience nature or a landmark think of those factors. I feel that the test of this committee will be whether people feel as if they were heard and whether we ultimately made a decision or the town made a decision that reflected broad public input, and I feel as if the committee is doing that collectively and individually. I want to thank you for that, having seen many projects where maybe we didn't do as good a job as we could have. I'm just grateful for your dedication, particularly, knowing that many of you are here in a volunteer capacity, which is not to say the professionals are also working hard and I mean they're paid. I look forward to May, when we see these renderings, and future meetings when there's more discussion.
- William Churchill: I'm an upstream abutter. I had one comment, you mentioned, there was a grant to do the study that Stantec is doing. When you were talking about trying to get an even-handed comparison of the choices and the costs at the same sort of level. You have some costs for repairing and restoring the dam and you're going to have some costs for the spillway removal. Is the availability of grants to remove the spillway as obtainable as the grant to study the removal of the spillway? If there are clear likelihoods or potential for grants to take the cost off of the taxpayers in Natick, can we have that included in the presentation where we're trying to weigh the two options?
- Kyle Ondricek: I live on 20 Pleasant Street right across from the multipurpose courts. I've also been involved with managing a small dam, so I'm familiar with dealing with the Office of Dam Safety. It's wonderful tonight that we finally got to the place where it's very clear that if you have a dam, you can't have trees. That is wonderful that we've gotten to that very clear point, so now it's either trees or a pond. So you either have a dam with trees, or you have you breach the dam and you have something else. Putting that then into context with the public comments that were made and the questionnaire, I think that later on, we need to really be clear that those are the two options, because, up till now it's been a lot fuzzier, and when people answered those questions about what do you want to see in the dam, as a previous speaker said, everybody wants

everything and it's really hard. I think you might want to rethink about going back, making it crystal clear that it's either trees or a pond, one or the other.

- Candy Hulton: Based on the information, a lot of things have come forward. However, we still have no third options. I don't think that is the right way to conclude a project of this dimension. But the comments that I already sent on to Maggie and others, not to be repetitive, but I think we have not done a service of letting the general public in Natick know what our options are and what we're all about because they're going to get taxed the same amount as we local people who are most interested in what's going on with this whole project. And I believe anything that people are talking to the media about should have all options available or we hold off on making any comments until we're ready to do that. Preferably, find a third option.
- Leslie Pano: I'm a downstream abutter, close to the river. This is more of a request for some information. In the 9/22 GZA presentation, there was a slide about flooding the hundred-year flood. In the slide, it shows post-dam removal overlaid with pre-dam removal, and I would like to see a picture of the pre-dam removal without the post-dam overlaying it to find out just how much further this hundred-year flood line is going to encroach on my property and my neighbor's property. Is there any way to get that from GZA?

CONCLUSION

Following public comments, Ona Ferguson, CBI Facilitation Team, reviewed a list of next steps and invited Advisory Committee members to share closing thoughts and reflections. Members shared gratitude for the time and insights of their fellow committee members, appreciation and excitement about the great engagement by members of the public, and interest and appreciation for the breadth and depth of information presented in the meeting and the due diligence of the Town to secure technical contractors to answer key questions.

APPENDIX A: ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members

Mike Balcom, Community Member
David Blease, Community Member
Dirk Coburn, Finance Committee Representative
Terri Evans, Planning Board Representative
Jeannine Furrer, Historic District Commission Representative
Martin Kessel, Community Member
Seth Levine, Recreation and Parks Commission Representative
David Lodding, Open Space Advisory Committee Representative
Jeremy Marsette, Director, Public Works
Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator
William McDowell, Town Engineer
Karen Partanen, Director, Recreation and Parks
Claire Rundelli, Conservation Agent
MK Schneeweis, Conservation Commission Representative
Aaron Spelker, Commission on Disability Representative
Rebekah Stendahl, Community Member
Chris Stillman, Conservation Commission Representative
Jillian Wilson Martin, Sustainability Coordinator
Kristen Wyman, Indigenous Representative: Natick Nipmuc Indian Council
David Yancey, Indigenous Representative: Natick Nipmuc

Project Staff

Ona Ferguson, CBI Facilitator
Maggie Osthues, CBI Facilitator

Invited Presenters

Michael Chelminski, Stantec
James Guarente, GZA
Mark Jacobson, Paddle Boston
Derek Schipper, GZA

72 interested members of the public also attended the meeting.

APPENDIX B: WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

Town of Natick: Charles River Dam Advisory Committee
January 25, 2021, 4:00 - 6:30 PM ET Meeting
Advance Written Public Comments

Candy Hulton
January 13, 2022

Thank you Jeannine for sending my concerns. To further that conversation, I have been involved in several Natick projects in the past and found it very frustrating to get message out to all Natick residents. Most residents do not pay for the local paper. The Natick Dam news should reach many who aren't as lucky as me to live nearby the dam/spillway. It is the reason I bought my house. I think the third option offers the best option to keep the spillway that we once called the dam, and the earthen dam that those with river/dam views cherish and those that use the recreation of the shaded area under the pine a place of calm and beauty. The third option preserves both the spillway and earthen dam as well as increases the recreational area. What is not to like if presented in all future publications and comments in that manner. The taxpayers should be informed that all of our taxes will be altered based on their votes. That is the transparency I would like to see. Thank you for your time. Candy Hulton

David Parish
January 20, 2022

To: The Charles River Dam Advisory Committee

The arguments why the Charles River should run without hindrance are persuasive. But, the current dam and spillway have a grace and simplicity that many find compelling—and there are far too few structures that have those qualities. The underlying issues evoke strong emotions—with no easy resolution.

Whatever the final decision, two issues must be addressed:

The final design for the area must be of the highest quality. It must balance safety and access and thoughtfully integrate the surrounding properties;

The project must include a full and honest acknowledgment of a central fact in the area's history: the loss by the Indigenous People of the land they cherished.

David Parish

Robert Reeve
January 20, 2022

Hello. I have already written in favor of removing the dam in the name of 'free flowing rivers.' However, I would also like to repeat my desire for the creation of an expanded park on the Dover side of the river...one that is keenly sensitive to the history and beauty of the location. Stabilizing that land in whatever engineering is needed.

Thank you, Robert Reeve. 8 Dover Road, Natick.

Jeff Federico

January 20 and 25, 2022

Hello,

This email is for the South Natick Dam Committee meeting focused on recreation access on January 25. Please forward to all members prior to the meeting so that they may read through the attached Word file and videos.

We (myself and additional supporting Natick citizens) are really energized by the opportunity that the South Natick Dam committee represents for potential expanded public access to a truly magnificent stretch of the Charles River and thank committee members for what seems a thorough process.

The attached Word file contains:

- Public access Problem statement with more detail, including videos at the sites
- Public access Proposal that I would urge the committee to fully consider. I am glad the committee has shown its openness to consider various perspectives and believe this will be given such consideration as well.
- Quotes of support for the Proposal from Natick citizens. I just barely had time to solicit such quotes and so they came as a result of a social media posting as of now.

I look forward to seeing the committee's consideration as part of the overall effort and welcome questions or discussion if requested.

Thank you,

~ Jeff Federico, with other Natick citizens' supporting quotes

<http://www.NatickRiverAccess.org>

Comments: In addition to the Natick Citizens' Quotes previously indicated in support of The Proposal at <https://www.NatickRiverAccess.org/the-proposal/> in the prior email I sent, more Natick citizens, from just the initial social media posting, indicated support. Here are those additional quotes:

Nitya Rudraraju: There is a huge demand for facilities like this and now with so much work from home, having outdoor activities in our neighborhoods are proving a requirement.

Allison Jones: Beautiful views, great access to recreational activity.

Vikaasa Ramdas Thandu Venkat Kumar: It would increase public access to a beautiful underutilized part of Charles River. I am in support of this proposal and would definitely visit often if it is done.

Walter Kolosky: I agree with this sensical proposal.

Leo Ng: I would love to have more access to the beautiful Charles River. If there were also kayak/canoe rental facilities, I would definitely make regular use of them in the summer. Currently I do not spend much time in South Natick because of limited access.

Annette Arabasz Grigely: [agreed without providing a quote]

David June: Great ideas! Provides more access to a beautiful area and the proposed activities could further benefit the small businesses in South Natick.

Eve Costarelli: More access to open green space is so important and we should not waste this valuable resource

Allison Clark: We love spending time outdoors with our 6 year old and feel so lucky to have spaces like Broadmoor and NCOF in our backyard. To have access to The Charles River would be such an exciting and valuable expansion of outdoor recreational space that we would love to share with our daughter and that is why we fully support this proposal!

Barbara Campbell: I'm a Natick resident and own 2 kayaks, a canoe and a paddle board. I'd love to be able to use those on the River!!!

Natick River Access – The Problem and The Proposal

All information below, including video tours showing the Problem and the Proposal may also be accessed on the web at <https://www.NatickRiverAccess.org/>

The Problem

KEY POINTS

- Extremely limited current public access for the tremendous public resource that is the relatively natural section of the Charles River
- Only very limited local knowledge of existence of what little public access there is
- Area referred to as “kayak/canoe launch” has only a few parking “spaces” on a narrow busy public street that are not highlighted with signage.
- “Kayak/canoe launch” requires ownership and storage of such a craft, and the ability to carry it through a wooded area to a very tiny and poorly located launch site right next to the South Natick Dam. It is therefore not friendly to all ages, abilities and housing situations

The Problem is that a great public natural resource without great public access is no longer a great public natural resource. In the case of the South Natick dam area, Natick’s only remaining viable Charles River public access area, that is currently the problem.

Natick has an awesome opportunity to ensure that we do have such great public access, but that cannot be achieved using only the existing footprint.

Below are photos showcasing some of the truly natural upstream territory that we ALL could enjoy if Natick expanded public Charles River access:





Existing public access is plagued by lack of parking and signage, and a tiny hidden inaccessible “launch” site.

While the asphalt and concrete side of the dam is a great location from which to view the rushing of the dam and enjoy the splendors of the river, it is in no way a location from which to launch a recreational kayak/canoe/paddleboard.

The opposite bank is theoretically the existing public launch site. There, recreational enthusiasts would have to own and store their own kayak/canoe/paddleboard for such access as the first barrier to entry. However, even if they did, access to that launch location is via a busy narrow street which is in no way ideal for removing a recreational kayak/canoe from a vehicle. The extremely limited parking is also not indicated with signage, and there is no sign acknowledging the location as a public launch point.

Assuming members of the public did choose to launch from this area, they would have to first carry their ~60 pound crafts through a wooded area. They could then hack their way through a small resulting launch site, but at least one such site would be dangerously close to the existing dam. So this current launch site is inaccessible for those of varied ages, abilities, and housing situations.



Please view video demonstrating current launch site issues:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0GOikGNuvY>

While this is the “problem,” there is also an opportunity. Improved access to the Charles River would expose more members of the public to a truly awesome natural resource that just cannot be appreciated by access locations closer to Boston. Indeed, many

citizens of Natick and surrounding communities could have renewed sense of peace and appreciation of the need to conserve our shared natural resources by just taking a simple kayak/canoe journey.

It is unfortunate that such a message needs to be authored. If we were to talk with people who lived a hundred years ago and tell them that in a century, Natick would have a conversation about how to protect the LAST viable public land from which to access navigating the Charles River, they may well find it implausible.

This message is authored not for those historical representatives, though. This problem is to highlight that we are truly at a crossroads. We can either tell people a hundred years in OUR future that we did nothing to truly ensure our last remaining public access to a truly majestic public resource. Or, we can say that we chose to invest and expand public access and countless community members benefitted.

The good news is it is not too late (yet). All it requires is your input to influence the conversation. Which path would you like to choose?

The Proposal

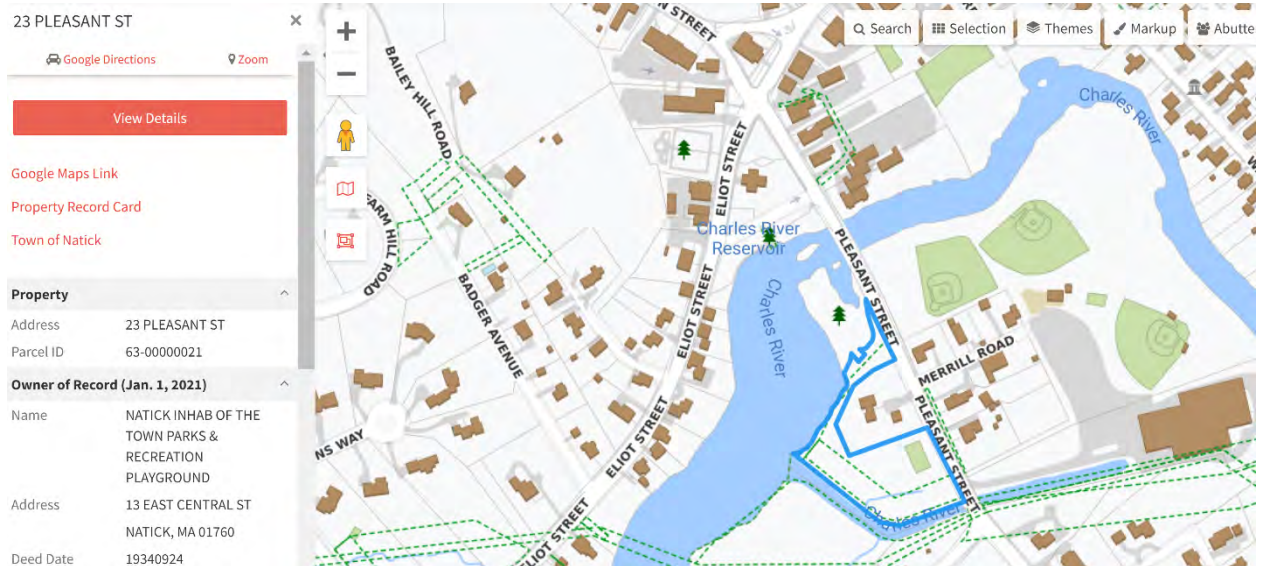
KEY POINTS

- Re-purpose the current 23 Pleasant Street underutilized basketball court and other public asphalt lot as the premier public access location along the Charles River
- Add parking lot, accessible kayak/canoe/stand-up paddleboard launch points, and a rental facility for such recreational pursuits
- With such a space, miles of beautiful Charles River could be accessed by the public for the first time
- Such a facility could become a destination for residents and could host events such as pop-up markets, floatilla gatherings, etc.

The Proposal would be to transform [23 Pleasant Street, Natick \(Google Maps link\)](#) into the pre-eminent destination for public Charles River access in Massachusetts.

The property is currently a public park that has a basketball court and another asphalt area. However, the current facility has no parking. Judging by the location and Google Maps photo from 2019, it seems unfortunately underutilized.

Screengrabs below show 23 Pleasant Street map highlighting its truly special Charles River access, and its current use.



This committee is weighing an important decision in terms of whether to remove or replace the dam. However, part of the committee's charge is also to ensure public access to the river.

Turning the 23 Pleasant Street underutilized park instead into a parking lot, kayak/canoe/stand-up paddle board launch point, and a rental facility, would definitely

meet the criteria of the committee's goals. The proposal should therefore be seriously considered for the enhancement of our community.



Please view video tour of 23 Pleasant Street, highlighting its current use and future potential, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvnRhu18ML0>

Natick residents have a huge opportunity since this public forum is now considering the future of this general area. Do we want access only for a few abutters along the river to enjoy, or do we want to be more inclusive in terms of expanded public access? Do we want to be OK with a languishing public park, or do we want to build a magnet that will undoubtedly draw recreation enthusiasts and nature lovers from around the area, and expose many people to the wonders of the natural parts of the Charles River for the first time?

If you want to ensure we together create a community river access resource that we all can be proud of and leave as a legacy for the future of Natick, now is THE opportunity to do so.

Natick Citizens' Quotes

Emily Taber: "This seems like a great new recreation opportunity, as long as it has minimal impact on the natural environment it would be increasing access to."

Adam Knee: “It is incredibly important that public access to waterways for recreation are prioritized. Using this as an opportunity for the community to have an increased connection to the Charles River is the best use for this site. A basketball court can be put anywhere, but opportunities to provide public access to the Charles is fleeting.”

Chris Bunn: “Better for the community to have outdoor areas that can be leveraged for activity.”

Caroline Proulx-Lafrance: “As a paddle board enthusiast, I would love to have access to this portion, I would hope it is done with respect for the environment and conscious of the potential increase in traffic, as a cyclist/triathlete, I bike in that area often and safety is important to me”

Amit Jain: “This would definitely be a great addition.”

Roger Jarrett: “This is a great opportunity to provide canoeing/kayaking on the Charles that many Natick residents could use.”

Jen Goree: “The potential removal of the dam offers the unique opportunity to make South Natick a destination for river boating.”

Tracy McDermott: “Sounds like a great idea!”

Abhishek Manjunath: “I support this proposal as providing access could be wonderful to Natick residents like myself who would love to enjoy kayaking/canoeing/paddle boarding by the dam.”

Jason Goldrick: “Great natural resource with access far too limited.”

Sandy Tobin: “Great idea.”

Andrew Meyer: “I have been a fan of converting that basketball court area into more usable public space and river access since I first heard the idea 10 years ago. It’s time to make it happen.”

Ronni Baron: “Agree!”

Sarah Calcutt: “My husband and I canoe and kayak frequently, and this would be such a wonderful option!”

Diane Lavos: “I launch my canoe just south of the dam at the picnic area. Few people use the area. Poison Ivy is everywhere. I sneak through it, walk into the somewhat slimy section of river and push off, paddling upriver for a charming view. Many more people could enjoy the River if the site was cleared, improved, and more parking available at the “basketball court.”

Sam Brill: “The Charles River is a preeminent feature of South Natick and offering the public good access to and use of the river provides an invaluable service to the local community”

Sarah Cope: “We need more opportunities to enjoy the nature in the area and with Covid we need more safe activities for residents.”

Terri Charles: “This is an excellent way to improve Natick river front.”

Jaclyn Schechter: “I think it would be great for our town!”

Jennifer Green: “This would be an incredible addition to our community. I am a kayak owner, a nature enthusiast and a town resident. What a wonderful asset this would be. I used to live in Newton near Charles River Canoe and Kayak and it was always an adventure to go there. Would love to see this happen!”

Rebecca Kipling: “I wonder about this abandoned basketball court every time I’m in the area. Repurposing for public River access would be a fantastic investment.”

Cassandra Budge: “Would love a closer place to kayak on the Charles rather than going to Newton.”

Matthew Schechter: “Would add revenue to the town!”

Alayna McGarty: “Would love to have another outdoor area with activities to go.”

Heather Margulis: “It would be a marvelous addition to the community , create more recreational space for us and neighboring towns, increase connections with neighbors and nature.”

Wendy Comeau: “It would be a wonderful opportunity for Natick residence to have access to the Charles River and its beauty.”

Buz Bragdon: “A great idea! I think it should be presented to the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee. Maybe the that committee would morph into a committee that considers the greater area along the river, more than just the dam area. Later, that committee should put out an updated survey that considers the larger area, not just what to do about the dam.”

Randy Johnson: “Great idea - and it should be combined with water access / boat storage on Cochituate also.”

Also indicating support before being asked for quotes were **Alison Engelman** and **Lisabeth Jorgensen**.

Art Massucco
January 20, 2022

Just restore this favorite site as it is now. Not necessary to make a “park to serve all needs” extravaganza. It is a perfect small park as it is now, no need to serve every outdoor possibility for every person’s preference. The area is already overused to some extent with limited parking and with vehicles trying to beat the traffic light and speeding down the side street. More is not better in this case.

Natick is getting too busy, too fast. We should not destroy the dam park, just restore it as it is now.

Thanks for asking my opinion, Art Massucco

Kyle Ondricek
January 24, 2022

Hello

I ask that the studies contain a very clear, definite option/estimate of the probability that Office of Dam Safety will allow the existing trees to remain in any alternative.

In my experience working with ODS they are adamant and hard-lined about trees. I.e no trees and woody vegetation are allowed (see ODS) material below) GZA was asked about that in a previous meeting, but in my view they were not direct or firm with their opinion of ODS allowing the trees to remain.

This process started with a public backlash to the trees being removed. I’m concerned that these alternatives may set up a false expectation regarding the need for their ultimatum removal.

Thank you again for your work on this.
Kyle Ondricek

ODS says “at least 20 feet downstream from the entire downstream toe of earth embankment dams be maintained free of trees and woody growth.”

Ray Watts
January 24, 2022

Attached are comments for the meeting tomorrow. Please let me know if there is any problem.
Thanks

Ray Watts, 61 Eliot St, Natick

Comments for Dam Advisor Committee Meeting January 25th, 2022

Initial repair design: The town engineers, and GZA, seem to imply that state and federal regulators are difficult to satisfy, and only the most stringent design will meet approval. I have spoken to the head of the DCR Office Dam Safety and an engineer in her department responsible for dam certification. Although I did mention our dam, no specific design was discussed. What we did discuss are the principles that need to be obtained, specifically as related to trees on dams.

Here are his comments: “The Office of Dam Safety’s (ODS’s) Policy on Tree on Dams prohibits trees or woody plants on a dam, within 20’ of the downstream toe of a dam, or within 20’ of a concrete dam or within 20’ of appurtenant feature (training walls, outlet conduits, etc.) of any dam. For landscaping outside of those woody growth exclusion zones, ODS has no requirements or recommendations regarding planting species.”

This seems to indicate that with careful design, clear cutting all trees on Grove Park is not necessary; at least according to state regulators.

SLOW/FAST water safety: I have had a boat since I was ten. I have had power boats, canoes, kayaks, and sailboats. I have raced large sailboats in Boston Harbor, and small sailboats on Lake Winnepesaukee and the Caribbean. I have also frequently canoed the Charles in various places. Additionally, I am a certified SCUBA diver with an advance rating. I would **NEVER** say that there is no difference in safety between a fast moving river and a calm pond or lake. Fast moving rivers are always more dangerous. I am curious how the committee member came to a different conclusion.

The lost eco-system: I was shocked to hear what would be lost if the waterfall was removed and the pond/lake drained had already been covered, presumably in the October 14th, 2021 meeting. So I went back and listen to the entire 2 and ½ hours. I found no mention of any negative effect removing the Waterfalls and draining the lake would have. What I did find is 2 hours and 21 minutes into the meeting, with the “rap-up”, Karen Partanen, from Parks & Rec, asked the questions, “What do we lose?” She was not the only member to express this concern, but seemed the most troubled, as I am.

Community input: At the end of the last meeting an Eliot Street resident abutting the river expressed her concerns about the pollution report, given her experience with the river. She also seemed to have technical knowledge to add credibility to her concerns. However, her input was quickly dismissed by the town engineer. I think this was a mistake. I encourage the public works to follow up and report back to the committee.

Submitted by: Ray Watts, Owner 61 Eliot Street

Emily Norton Robert Kearns, on behalf of the Charles River Watershed Association
January 24, 2022



January 24, 2021

Dear Members of the Natick Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

We are writing on behalf of Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) to offer information that may be helpful to your discussions around the future of the Charles River Dam in South Natick. As you know, CRWA is in favor of removing the Charles River Dam in South Natick, and we have been closely following the work of your committee.

We understand that the Committee is concerned about whether the removal of the South Natick Dam would ultimately be beneficial to fish passage given the presence of other dams upstream and downstream along the Charles River. We have sent previous letters about the other benefits of dam removal including water quality and the potential preservation of a number of mature trees. We hope the information provided below will address some of these concerns.

Removal of dams on the Charles River is not unprecedented. Ten dams on the main stem of the Charles have been breached/removed since colonization, the most recent being the Old Mill Dam (a.k.a. the Caryville Dam) in Bellingham, which was removed in 2017. Across Massachusetts, 60 dams have been removed in the past 12 years, according to the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration. There are another 15 active dam removal projects in the state, and many others are being considered for removal.

The average age of the 19 dams remaining on the main stem of the Charles is approximately 126 years--these dams are old, built in a prior era to support industries that no longer exist along the river. Many of the dams have not been maintained over the last century, and in some cases, the owners of the dams have disappeared entirely, causing disputes over ownership and responsibility of maintenance.¹ The Town of Natick is not alone in having to grapple with what to do with these legacy dams; many other dam owners are facing similar decisions in the coming years. The majority of the remaining dams on the main stem of the Charles River, from the river's headwaters in Hopkinton all the way to Boston Harbor, are potential candidates for dam removal. As shown in the chart below, several dams are in poor or even unsafe condition, and many pose impediments to fish passage. Natick's decision on the South Natick Dam will set an important precedent and could be a catalyst for removing other dams, significantly improving the health of the Charles River.

The Committee has also raised questions about current fish passage along the main stem of the Charles. Seven out of the 10 dams downstream of the South Natick Dam have fish passage as indicated in the table in the appendix. For example, the New Charles Dam at the entrance to Boston Harbor, which regulates tides and water levels within the Lower Charles River Basin,

¹ See description of Sanford Mill Dam in Appendix B.


allows for fish to pass between Boston Harbor and the Charles River via operation of the dam's locks. Moving upstream fish passage mechanisms include the Watertown Dam fish ladder, the Bemis and Bleachery Dam notches (both dams are partially breached), the Moody Street Dam fish ladder, and fish ladders at Newton Lower Falls and Cordingly Dams. Overtime, removal of other downstream dams due to deteriorating conditions and concerns over extreme rain events will allow for even freer fish passage. Challenges remain in establishing fish passage at the Circular, Silk Mill and Cochrane Dams, the three dams downstream of South Natick which do not currently have any passage. Removal of the South Natick Dam would, however, provide additional motivation for improving fish passage at these sites by adding passage or investigating opportunities for additional dam breaches or removals. Addressing fish passage in the section of the river between Circular Dam and the South Natick Dam has the potential to drastically improve fish passage and habitat conditions on the river.

Removal of the South Natick Dam would also improve upstream fish passage for resident fish living in the main stem of the Charles River and its tributaries. Based on the state's [Coldwater Fisheries Resources](#)² map for the Charles River watershed, removal of the South Natick Dam would reconnect Noanet Brook and Trout Brook in Dover to a number of other tributaries in the 19.6 miles of main stem river between the South Natick Dam and the Sandford Mill Dam in Medway. This section of the main stem of the Charles River is the largest free flowing section of river. Coldwater fisheries are rare in this part of the state, making this a unique opportunity to restore important habitat.

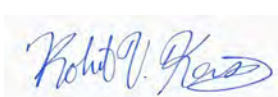
Additionally, if both the South Natick and the Sanford Mill Dam (which was rated in "poor condition" in the latest inspection report³ were to be removed, wild populations of Eastern Brook Trout would be connected between Noanet Brook and Trout Brook in Dover and Shephard's Brook in Franklin (all coldwater fisheries) for the first time in centuries. Increasing connectivity between tributaries is essential for fish health because it allows them to migrate farther for food, for spawning habitat, and for mates. This is even more important as climate change brings new stresses that degrade fish habitat such as warmer water and more frequent drought.

Thank you for considering these comments. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We look forward to continuing to be involved in this important conversation.

Sincerely,



Emily Norton
Executive Director



Robert Kearns
Climate Resilience Specialist

² According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, "A Coldwater Fish Resource (CFR) is a waterbody (stream, river, or tributary thereto) used by reproducing coldwater fish to meet one or more of their life history requirements. CFRs are particularly sensitive habitats."

³ See description of Sanford Mill Dam in Appendix B

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Dams in the Charles River

Number from Boston Harbor	Name of Dam	Owner	Municipalities Located	Age	Hazard Classification ^	Condition†	Fish Passage ‡
1	New Charles Dam	DCR	Boston	44 years	High Hazard	*	Y
2	Watertown Dam	DCR	Watertown	56 Years	Significant Hazard	Fair	Y
3	Bemis/ Nonantum Dam	DCR	Newton/ Waltham	~244 years	Non-Jurisdictional	Breached	Y
4	Bleachery Dam	DCR	Waltham	203 years	Low Hazard	Satisfactory	Y
5	Moody Street Dam	DCR	Waltham	175 years	High Hazard	Fair	Y
6	Lower Falls Dam	DCR	Newton/ Wellesley	69 years	Significant Hazard	Poor	Y
7	Cordingly Dam	DCR	Newton/ Wellesley	222 years	Significant Hazard	Fair	Y
8	Circular Dam/ Newton Upper Falls Dam	DCR	Newton/ Wellesley	116 years	Significant Hazard	Satisfactory	N
9	Silk Mill Dam	DCR	Newton/ Needham	66 years	Low Hazard	Fair	N
10	Cochrane Dam/ Willow Street Bypass Dam	DCR	Dover/ Needham	86 years	Low Hazard	Fair	N
11	Charles River Dam/ South Natick Dam	Town of Natick	Natick	88 years	High Hazard	Fair	N
12	Sandford Mill / Medway Dam	Private	Medway /Franklin	~93 years	Significant Hazard	Poor	N
13	West Medway Dam	Private	Medway/ Franklin	194 years	Low Hazard	Poor	N

14	North Bellingham Dam	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Bellingham	179 years	Significant Hazard	*	N
15	Box Pond Dam	Private	Bellingham	153 years	Low Hazard	Unsafe	N
16	Milford Pond/ Cedar Swamp Dam	Town of Milford	Milford	83 years	Significant Hazard	Fair	N
17	Dilla Street Dam	Private: Milford Water Company	Milford	112 years	Non-Jurisdictional	N/A	N
18	Wildcat Pond/ Waterworks Dam	Private: Milford Water Company	Milford	~72 years	Non-Jurisdictional	N/A	N
19	Echo Lake Dam	Private: Milford Water Company	Hopkinton	~141 years	High Hazard	*	N

*Seeking further information on the condition of these dams

Hazard Classification is “[t]he rating for a dam based on the potential consequences of failure. The rating is based on potential for loss of life and damage to property that failure of that dam could cause downstream. The hazard potential classification for a dam has no relationship to the current structural integrity, operational status, flood routing capability, or safety condition of the dam or its appurtenances.” 302 CMR 10.3.

^Hazard Potential Classification Table (DCR)

High Hazard Potential (Class I)	Dams located where failure will likely cause loss of life and serious damage to home(s), industrial or commercial facilities, important public utilities, main highway(s) or railroad(s).
Significant Hazard Potential (Class II)	Dams located where failure may cause loss of life and damage to home(s), industrial or commercial facilities, secondary highway(s) or railroad(s) or cause interruption of use or service of relatively important facilities.
Low Hazard Potential (Class III)	Dams located where failure may cause minimal property damage to others. Loss of life is not expected.

†Overall Physical Condition of Dam (DCR)

1. Unsafe	Major structural, operational, and maintenance deficiencies exist under normal operating conditions
2. Poor	Significant structural, operational and maintenance deficiencies are clearly recognized under normal loading conditions
3. Fair	Significant operational and maintenance deficiencies, no structural deficiencies. Potential deficiencies exist under unusual loading conditions that may realistically occur. Can be used when uncertainties exist as to critical parameters
4. Satisfactory	Minor operational and maintenance deficiencies. Infrequent hydrologic events would probably result in deficiencies
5. Good	No existing or potential deficiencies recognized. Safe performance is expected under all loading including Spillway Design Flood (SDF)

*Fish passage notes whether or not there is fish passage structure at or around the dam.

Appendix B: Notable Dams on the Main Stem of the Charles River based on Condition

Sanford Mill Dam

Sanford Mill Dam (a.k.a the Medway Dam) is a privately owned Significant Hazard Potential dam located between Franklin and Medway shortly upstream of the Lincoln Street/Sanford Street Bridge. According to the latest inspection report (June 2019) done by the Pare Corporation for DCR's Office of Dam Safety (MADCR), the Sanford Mill Dam is in "poor condition." The ownership of the dam is unclear. Operational and maintenance responsibilities for the dam remain undetermined. Operation and Maintenance responsibilities were not identified during the preparation of this report." According to the report, the dam also does not have a mandatory evacuation plan, which is required by law. The report concludes that "given the advanced deterioration of the structure and the limited size and recreational benefit of the impoundment, removal of the dam may be a feasible approach."

West Medway Dam

The West Medway Dam is a privately-owned Low Hazard Potential dam located between Franklin and Medway approximately behind the Medway Police Station on Village Street. The last inspection (from March 1998) found the dam to be in poor condition, specifically noting "the existence of the sinkhole immediately downstream of the left training wall, the displaced capstones on the spillway, the inoperable low-level outlet and the deteriorated condition of the sluice gate structure. If the sinkhole at the left training wall is not investigated and repaired, the training wall could collapse, creating an end-run around the spillway." To our knowledge, there

have not been any improvements to the condition of the dam since the date of the last inspection report

Box Pond Dam

Box Pond Dam is a privately-owned Low Hazard Potential dam located in Bellingham. The last inspection report (from November 2020) found the dam to be in an unsafe condition, the worst rating a dam can receive. The inspection report also notes that “breaching of the dam is a viable alternative for addressing safety and stability concerns at the dam.” Additionally, the 2020 Bellingham Hazard Mitigation Plan states that “[t]his dam has been identified as needing immediate repairs and restoration, including replacement of the sidewalls and removal of vegetation and debris from the spillway. A dam breach would result in significant to catastrophic downstream flooding to the eastward commercial, industrial and residential properties in Bellingham.”

APPENDIX C: WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED BETWEEN JANUARY 25 - JUNE 7, 2022

Town of Natick: Charles River Dam Advisory Committee
Written Public Comments
Received January 25 - June 07, 2022

Leslie Pano

January 26, 2022

The GZI slide presentation included a slide about the 100 year flood zones. It showed both pre-dam removal and post-dam removal zones. Because they are on one drawing, it is impossible to see what the differences are. The post-dam removal zone now extends deep into my property (8 Merrill Rd). I believe it is significantly different from the current zone. If this is the case, what protections will I have from future flooding? Will I now incur added expense of purchasing flood insurance. Given this hardship, do I have any recourse to stop dam removal?

Thank you,
Leslie Pano

Michael Dinning

January 27 and 28, 2022

Thank you for ensuring that the public has had opportunities to participate in the discussions concerning the South Natick Dam. My wife and I live a few blocks away on Phillips Street and have listened in on nearly all of the Zoom calls you have facilitated.

It's clear from the survey responses and public comments that the Natick community feels that boating access to the Charles River at or near this location should be a priority. The Natick River Access organization made a compelling case for this at the meeting on January 25. What I don't believe has been adequately discussed, however, is that the Town of Natick has already established this as an important town goal and has included recommendations for the South Natick area in their plans.

Significantly, the Natick Comprehensive Master Plan included "Expand Public Access to the Charles River" as a goal, with specific recommendations to "provide kayak launches along the Charles River." The plan presented proposals from the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields for how boating access could be provided as part of a multi-purpose recreation area and kayak launching area adjacent to the dam. (see attached from Natick Comprehensive Master Plan; Open Space, Recreation & Natural Resources, Goals & Recommendations, Section R2.2, p. 7.46).

The Committee should coordinate with the appropriate town organizations to ensure that their recommendations support access for boating, as specified in the Natick Comprehensive Master Plan.

While the Committee may feel that designing and implementing boating access facilities is beyond their scope, it is critical that they coordinate with the Parks and Recreation Department and others to ensure that their recommendations take the Town's goals and existing plans into account.

Thank you for your consideration,
Michael Dinning
14 Phillips Street

Here is the link to the Natick plan I referenced in my earlier email.
[Chapter-7-Goals-and-Recommendations \(natickma.gov\)](https://www.natickma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1000/Chapter-7-Goals-and-Recommendations)

Depending on the feasibility and timing for the proposed multi-use site it could also make sense to incorporate a launch area into the plans for the dam site. The key is to coordinate this with the Town planners and recreation people.

Mike Dinning

R2.2

EXPAND PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE CHARLES RIVER.

LEAD 

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

 **1-5 YEARS** 

The Town can help increase access to the Charles River by both identifying it more formally as a “Blueway” within the Town, and by increasing direct access to the river itself.

Designating the Charles River as a “Blueway” could be accomplished through two primary mechanisms. A more symbolic approach would be to use this designation as a way of branding and highlighting the Charles River as a recreational and environmental asset to the Town. The “Blueway” designation would be publicized on the Town website and on other tourism sites for visitors to the area. Signage and branding could be developed to help recognize the waterway as a recreational corridor similar to other land-based greenways in the area. This approach would help bring attention to the corridor as a valued Town asset, while limiting the amount of regulatory oversight needed for the process.

A regulatory approach to this designation would include additional protections for water quality, standards for regular public access along the Charles River, and ongoing efforts to make all bordering areas to the Charles River open and available to the general public. This approach would require updates to the Town bylaws and development of a review and oversight structure.

 **4-7 YEARS** 

Provide kayak launches along the Charles River. To help increase physical access to the Charles River, the Master Plan for Parks and Fields illustrates three potential locations for kayak launches along the Charles River. These locations provide access both above and below the South Natick Dam, and coupled with additional park improvements, would provide easy boating access on the River offered in close proximity to new parking lots.



Proposed Plan for Charles River Kayak Launch Locations from the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields

Susan Blease

January 31, 2022

Here is a photo of flooding from Pleasant Street, that illustrates the importance of this area for overflow and that if it were filled in (which wouldn't be approved) the water would have to go somewhere else.

Here is another view of flooding from Pleasant Street, that illustrates the importance of this area for overflow and that if it were filled in (which wouldn't be approved) the water would have to go somewhere else.

Sue





Alfredo J. Vargas
February 25, 2022

Dear Advisory Committee Members,

I'm writing regarding the debate whether to rehabilitate or remove the dam, and specifically, to request that you please listen and consider carefully the requests from the Native people.

To this end, I'd like to share some news from Newton regarding their City Seal. In the fall of 2020, Mayor Fuller convened a Working Group to take a look at the City Seal. She asked them to make recommendations about whether the image depicted is still relevant and meaningful today and whether there are graphics and/or words that would better portray the values, identity, and spirit of Newton.

The seal depicts the English missionary John Elliot proselytizing to a group of Native people under an oak tree, exhorting them to convert to Christianity and adopt English customs.

The Working Group solicited input through community meetings and email. While they heard from those who want to preserve the original 150-year-old design, the overwhelming majority favored moving forward with a new design. Numerous respondents found the seal's scene, depicting an English Puritan preaching to Native people the error of their ways, to no longer being in keeping with how Newtonians see themselves or want the world to see them today. In keeping with others, Maria Turner (Natick Nipmuc) wrote, "I feel that it is important [that the seal]...does not make a group of people feel less than when they look at it." The Working Group agreed.

In its summary of its recommendation, the Working Group wrote, "Pictured is a Colonial authority telling a people that their ways of living and worshipping are wrong. Certainly, most Newtonians would not want a symbol of cultural arrogance to represent their City made up of many faiths and cultures."

I share this story because this process seems analogous to the debate that Natick is having. The dam may have been necessary at one point, but that is no longer the case, and like the image that the Newton City Seal depicts, it begs the questions if it's still relevant and meaningful today and whether there is a better way to portray the values, identity and spirit of Natick that honors and dignifies the requests from the Native people?

With the above being said, I ask that you please listen and consider carefully the requests from the Native people in your final recommendation.

Thank you,

Alfredo J. Vargas
59 Felch Rd
Natick, MA 01760

Candy Hulton

March 9, 2022

Hi Karen—I had a conflict for your last meeting and wondered if you could recap your ideas about the dam. As you probably know I am passionate about keeping the dam (spillway) and this may end up removing the trees that will have little affect for most people. Natick pays a hefty fee for yearly reviews by the state for the spillway. As i mentioned to Jillian Wilson-Martin, our town has a lot of old historical buildings and schools etc that we pay for and the spillway should be considered to remain on their list. It is enjoyed by many both in Natick and out of town. I hope your committee will make the same decisions and adopt a vote to keep it. In addition Thursday 7pm the Open Space Committee will discuss the multi-purpose land which I believe is the old basketball court. Several years I was at your meeting about that court as something that could be resurfaced and relined with lines for both basketball and PICKLEBALL, a favorite of mine. That was also talked about at a “dam” meeting to be repurposed for a parking lot. It seems that change can either mean repair or rip out. I hope all of these decisions are looked at carefully as meaning and usage by the largest number of people with the least about of change. South Natick could look like a newly developed area instead of respecting the old. I hope my comments might be shared with your members. Thanks Candy

Rev. Dr. Ian Mevorach, MDiv, PhD (he/him)

March 25, 2022

Dear Ms. Osthues and the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

Good morning. Thank you for your leadership of the Dam Advisory Committee.

Please find a statement attached on behalf of ten local religious leaders, titled "Honoring the Quinobequin: A Statement in Support of Removal of the Dam in South Natick." It is an ethical and spiritual reflection, and a statement of our shared values; it is largely inspired by Kristen Wyman's insightful and passionate presentation on the subject, which we all viewed together at a recent meeting of our Natick Religious Leaders Association..

We respectfully request that the Advisory Committee members read, reflect, and discuss this statement as part of their process of decision-making.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Peace,

Ian

--

Rev. Dr. Ian Mevorach, MDiv, PhD (he/him)
Spiritual Leader and Community Builder
Common Street Spiritual Center

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3/24/2022

Natick Religious Leaders Association

Honoring the Quinobequin: A Statement in Support of Removal of the Dam in South Natick

Dear Ms. Osthues and the Dam Advisory Committee,

As part of our shared responsibility to inspire the Town of Natick to live according to our highest moral, ethical, and spiritual aspirations, we are writing to share these thoughts with the Town of Natick's Dam Advisory Committee.

We understand that there are a broad range of perspectives that the Advisory Committee is considering in a careful and inclusive process, and that there are voices speaking for many possible solutions to the problem of the degraded spillway and earthen dam in South Natick.

As most of us typically think of that body of water where the dam is located, in colonial terms, it is called the Charles River, but in the indigeneous traditions of this region, of the Nipmuc and Wamponoag peoples, it is called the Quinobequin. Many of us first heard this name for the river, Quinobequin, in an eloquent presentation made by Kristen Wyman, a member of the Natick Nipmuc Council and also a member of the Dam Advisory Committee.

As a matter of justice and equity, given that the Nipmuc were forcibly removed from Natick in an act of genocide, and their lands subsequently taken away from them, we believe that Nipmuc perspectives must carry extra weight in the Dam Advisory Committee's deliberations and ultimate recommendations. Many members of our Natick Religious Leaders Association are turning our concerted attention and efforts towards steps that we can take towards honoring indigenous peoples, including through education, public art and monuments, and possibly more tangible means such as intentional affordable housing.

The cultural, spiritual, and historical significance of the Quinobequin in the Nipmuc perspective is profound and points to the ecological and ethical reasons that the spillway should be removed and the river restored to its natural state. For example, damming the river disrupts the ecosystem, especially the ability of fish to migrate upstream. Without a restored river, there is little hope of restoring native fish species and biodiversity to the river. For this reason, environmental scientists and conservationists have spoken to the Advisory Committee in favor of restoring the river to its natural flow. Furthermore, as Ms. Wyman mentioned, ancient cultural practices like building burnt out canoes using downed pine trees and navigating the waters in them could be restored along with the restoration of the river. Modern day forms of recreation on the river such as kayaking could also be introduced, allowing all citizens to foster a deeper connection to this waterway and the many forms of life it sustains along its meandering path.

Ms. Wyman's presentation reminds us all of the sacredness of water as an essential element of life. The health of our waters is directly related to our own health, as we have also been reminded as a Town by the recent troubling discovery of PFAS in our wells. A sustainable society is one that values the sacredness and purity of water. Therefore, we should also be aware that the river itself, the Quinobequin, is more important than the dam, which is a humanly-constructed object inserted into it for a period of time, which is now falling apart.

The indigenous people of this land have consistently opposed the practice of damming rivers because of the many reasons detailed above. It is time for the Town of Natick to recognize and adopt this perspective. As a Town we are a colonial institution that inherits a troubling history of genocide that took place right in our own front yard. Part of how we reconcile with this history and change course for the better is by learning to respect and honor indigenous perspectives and rights, including the right to use the Quinobequin river as a source of food and as a place for traditional practices like canoeing—rights which the dam impedes.

Therefore, we hope that the Dam Advisory Committee will consider all of this and recommend a pathway forward with all due respect for the Natick Nipmuc values that Ms. Wyman so eloquently and passionately represented and that we, as religious and spiritual leaders of this community, wholeheartedly support. Please recommend that the river be restored and that this restoration process must be one that is respectful to the history, values, and rights of indigenous people.

In a spirit of honoring the Quinobequin,

Rev. Dr. Ian Mevorach, Common Street Spiritual Center, Natick
Rev. Rebecca E. Binns Gettel, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Natick
Rabbi Cantor Ken Richmond, Temple Israel of Natick
Rabbi Robin S. Sparr, HaMakom is The Place, Natick
Rev. Dr. Adam Tierney-Eliot, The Eliot Church, Natick
Rev. Alecia Reeves-Freeman, Fisk Memorial United Methodist Church, Natick
Cantor Hollis Schachner, Temple Shir Tikva, Wayland, (Natick resident)
Rabbi David Klatzker, Temple Israel of Natick
Sarallyn Keller, First Congregational Church, UCC, Natick
Rabbi Danny Burkeman, Temple Shir Tikva Wayland, (Natick resident)

Catherine LeBlanc

April 19, 2022

Dear South Natick Dam Committee,

My name is Catherine LeBlanc, I am a resident of Cambridge and a member of MA Sierra Club. I walk on DCR property along the Charles River on both the Cambridge side and Boston Esplanade regularly. (I also pick up a lot of trash as I walk.)

The removal of the South Natick Dam spillway would allow more continuity of the Charles River, permitting fish to spawn normally/naturally. Fish ladders don't work for all species, fish can be injured or be easy prey at ladders.

Returning the river to its natural flow and allows for a greater buffer zone for river rise/flooding is critical with our current and anticipated climate mitigation needs. The area above the dam retains sediment, is warmer and increases growth of algae blooms and harmful bacteria.

As a member of the MA Sierra Club Forest Protection team, the mature trees on the earthen dam are doing critical work of carbon drawdown, sequestration, air purification, cooling and maintaining biodiversity. There is no substitute for the complex and necessary role these trees perform especially with our climate emergency.

When I walk along the Charles River in Cambridge I know the water species are contiguous and I want them to have a restored river, all the way up for their life cycles. I want as many mature trees to continue their amazing work allowing them to reach their full heritage legacy.

Please do everything in your power for the removal of the South Natick Dam spillway.

Thank you,
Catherine LeBlanc
14 Tufts St #3
Cambridge

Deb Pasternak, Sierra Club

April 27, 2022

To the South Natick Dam Committee,

Please find attached a letter in support of removing the Charles River Dam's spillway and preserving approximately 60 mature trees on the earthen portion of the current dam.

Thank you!



April 27, 2022

Dear Members of the South Natick Dam Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment about the future of the Charles River Dam in South Natick. On behalf of over 100,000 members and supporters across the Commonwealth, The Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter writes to you in support of removing the dam's spillway and preserving approximately 60 mature trees on the earthen portion of the current dam.

Restoring a free-flowing Charles River is strongly aligned with our mission to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

The 60 trees on the earthen part of the current dam provide significant shade, air quality and noise pollution mitigation, and sequester carbon. The trees provide services that benefit the Natick community and would be lost if they were removed.

The current dam and spillway negatively impact the water quality of the Charles River. The dam slows the water in the so-called mill pond upstream of the spillway leading to higher temperatures, lower dissolved oxygen levels that are bad for aquatic wildlife. In a dam repair scenario, this water would be even warmer with the 60 trees removed.

A free flowing Charles River with the spillway removed would allow for free movement of fish, wildlife and paddlers and establish colder water temperatures with more dissolved oxygen benefiting the fish and other wildlife.

Additionally, spillway removal would have the benefit of connecting two coldwater tributaries downstream in Dover to the largest free-flowing section of the river upstream of South Natick.

Thank you for considering our comments. Please feel free to reach out to us for more information.

Sincerely,

Deb Pasternak

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deb Pasternak". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned below the printed name.

State Director

Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter

Rui Coelho, Greater Boston Chapter of Trout Unlimited
April 28, 2022

Dear Members of the South Natick Dam Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your proceedings surrounding the South Natick Dam.

Our mission at the Greater Boston Chapter of Trout Unlimited is to bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. We engage with communities across America in the work of repairing and renewing the rivers, streams and other waters on which we all depend. Locally we represent almost 1,000 members of our chapter, with many of them in this watershed.

We encourage you to support the removal of the dam's spillway, restoration of the Charles River and the preservation of several trees on the present-day earthen portion of the dam.

The current mature trees on the earthen portion of the dam provide important shade, cooling of the water and surrounding air and habitat which would be lost if they were to be removed.

Additionally, this project has the opportunity for significant dam removal and river restoration with multiple benefits that we would like to express to you all and encourage you to consider in your decision-making process.

Removal of the dam will improve water quality in the Charles River. The current impounded area of the river upstream of the dam has higher temperatures, lower dissolved oxygen levels and traps sediments behind the dam. Freeing the Charles River at South Natick will lead to lower temperatures and higher dissolved oxygen levels as the water would flow more freely. Colder waterways with higher levels of dissolved oxygen are better for the wild trout that our organization supports. Free movement of sediments in a restored river would also improve the riverine bottom habitat for fish species. We have seen improvements in river ecology, flood prevention and community safety resulting from several dam removal restoration projects we have worked on regionally (Mill Pond Dam on Traphole Brook in Norwood) and [a great many projects nationally](#) under the auspices of Trout Unlimited National and leadership from scores of local TU chapters.

Removal of the South Natick Dam would reconnect two coldwater streams, the Noanet Brook and Trout Brook in Dover, to the largest free-flowing section of the Charles River: 19.6 miles of main stem river as well as additional tributary river miles. These streams have wild populations of eastern brook trout. This is important because these trout will be able to travel for food and mates, something ever more important with climate change. A total of 26.2 miles of the main stem of the Charles River would be free-flowing from Medway to Needham. Not only trout would benefit from the removal of the spillway, but other resident fish including bass, bullhead, catfish, perch and pickerel would also have increased habitat and access to food and mates.

Removing the South Natick Dam would advance the ultimate goal of connecting populations of wild brook trout in Dover to coldwater fisheries in Shepards Brook in Franklin for the first time in centuries. Removal of the dam will certainly benefit the upstream and downstream communities by raising the ecological health and recreation value of the Charles River watershed. One other dam, the Sanford Mill Dam, stands in the way upstream of Natick, and your decision will send a clear message to decision-makers and dam owners upstream and downstream.

Thank you for considering our comments. Please feel free to reach out to us for more information.

Sincerely,

Rui Coelho
President
Greater Boston Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Belmont, MA
617-285-1665

CC via email:
CRWA Charles@crwa.org

Mary Brown
May 9, 2022

I am Mary Brown, a resident of Natick near the dam at 18 Pleasant Street.
I am urgently in favor of removing the spillway and restoring the river to its free flow.
I am adamantly opposed to taking down the mature trees on top of the dam.
I have followed the impressive Zoom presentations from scientists. Keeping the dam is environmentally unsound.

Thank you
Mary Brown
917.862.8753
