

REPORT FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

It is the mission of the Natural Resources Commission to provide stewardship of, education about, and advocacy for the Town of Wellesley's park, conservation, recreation and open space system so that the full value of the Town's natural assets can be passed onto future generations.

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) consists of five elected members, with staggered terms of three years. Current commissioners are Heidi Kost-Gross, Chair; Stephen Murphy, Vice Chair; Joan Gaughan; Raina McManus; and Lise Olney. The Director of the NRC is Brandon Schmitt.

The NRC is charged with the statutory responsibilities of *Park Commissions, Conservation Commissions, Tree Wardens, Shade Tree and Pest Control Officers, and Town Forest Committees* under Massachusetts General Laws Chapters 40, 45, 87, 131 and 132. The NRC appoints and oversees the Wetlands Protection Committee and the Trails Committee. In FY14, the NRC held 22 public meetings, 3 Public Shade Tree Removal Hearings, and issued 23 Permits for the use of Park or Conservation Land.

The NRC is committed to providing the highest level of service to the residents of Wellesley. The department receives numerous inquiries per week, including many walk-in office visits. Please visit the NRC office or see the NRC page on the Town web site for resources related to the work of the NRC, agendas for upcoming NRC meetings, and minutes of past NRC meetings. Through the web page, you can also sign up for the NRC email newsletter and the NRC Facebook page.

Accomplishments

Open Space and Recreation Plan

On July 8, 2015, the NRC received approval for the updated Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) from the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Approval of the plan allows the Town to be eligible for state and federal grants for municipal acquisition and protection of open space through 2021. The OSRP includes an inventory of existing resources, evaluates the interests of the community, and attempts to prioritize open space and recreational needs to assist Town officials in making land use and acquisition decisions. The NRC worked with several Town boards and departments in compiling the report, and more than 600 residents provided input by completing an on-line survey on parks and open space.

Strategic Planning

In consultation with other Town boards, committees, and departments, the NRC completed a two-phase strategic planning process. The following goals were approved:

1. Manage the work of the Board by establishing priorities and clarity about board and staff expectations, responsibilities, and capacity.
2. Through education and advocacy, create a culture within the Town that will encourage good stewardship of the Town's natural resources to achieve and amplify the board's efforts to ensure adherence to its mission and policies.

3. Expand the NRC's capacity to meet its stewardship responsibilities through collaboration (e.g., Fuller Brook Park and Morses Pond projects).
4. Utilize the collaborative management of the Fuller Brook Park and Morses Pond projects as a model in managing other projects, including work with Department of Public Works.

NRC Capital Improvement Projects

The 2015 Annual Town Meeting approved Community Preservation Committee funding for two capital projects:

- **Morses Pond Erosion Study:** An appropriation of \$20,000 was approved to fund an erosion study of the Morses Pond shore line. Disturbance due to heavy foot traffic, informal boat launches and heavy storm water runoff threaten the stability of the bank and water quality in several areas. The eroding shoreline threatens trees, wildlife habitat, and recreational areas. The study will assess deterioration due to erosion and determine areas of shore line requiring preservation.
- **Comprehensive Pond Management Plan:** An appropriation of \$100,000 was approved to conduct a comprehensive pond management planning study to assess and prioritize the preservation of the Town's ponds (excluding Morses Pond which currently has an active restoration plan): Abbotts Pond, Duck Pond, Longfellow Pond, Reeds Pond, Rockridge Pond, Farm Station Pond, Bezanson Pond, and Skating Pond. Pond ecosystems are fragile and must be monitored and protected from invasive species colonization, sedimentation buildup, and eutrophication. These smaller ponds offer countless recreational and environmental benefits, and would be lost without proper preservation.

Fuller Brook Park Preservation Project

Funds were appropriated at 2014 Annual Town Meeting for the fourth phase of the Fuller Brook Park Preservation Project, the construction phase. After many years of thoughtful planning by numerous stakeholders, this important project is well underway. Fuller Brook Park is vital to the Town's storm water infrastructure and is beloved as a recreational space.

Project work involves brook and stream restoration, storm drain improvements, pond and brook dredging, invasive plant management, and landscape improvements.

The Project Management Team, consisting of members of the Department of Public Works, Selectmen's Office, and the NRC, entered into a contract with R. Bates & Sons for \$4,432,647 to construct the project. The estimated completion date is November 2016. Project Manager Peter Jackson meets regularly with the five-member Fuller Brook Park Coordinating Committee, comprised of representatives from the NRC, Board of Public Works, Wellesley Historical Commission, the Friends of Fuller Brook Park, and a fifth member appointed by the Town Moderator.

To date, through February 2015, the contractor has completed \$869,389.50 of work or 20.1 percent of the contract amount. The project is on budget with small cost

increases offset by currently projected project savings. Our consultant, BETA Group, Inc., has spent \$114,099.93 or 35.26 percent of their budget to provide construction support services.

The FBPC has announced that the project has been awarded a grant of \$337,000 by the EPA. The project manager is working to reduce the Town's costs by maximizing the work chargeable to the grant. However, the funding has been delayed while the work proceeds, and the total amount realized may be less than the original grant amount.

An extensive project web page with weekly updates and photographs is maintained on the Town's website, and the project manager also sends weekly updates to email subscribers. (To subscribe, click "Subscribe to News" on the home page of the Town web site.)

Morses Pond Restoration

The NRC continued to work with pond consultant Dr. Ken Wagner, the Department of Public Works, and the Recreation Commission in restoring and maintaining the health of the pond. Now in its eighth year of implementation, the restoration has resulted in clearer water, and a decrease in nuisance aquatic plants. Implementation of an automated phosphorus inactivation system will reduce the cost of treatments and allow greater control.

Perrin Park Playground Improvements

New playground equipment was installed at Perrin Park with funding from the Community Preservation Committee and generous donations by neighbors. The NRC was proud to partner with the CPC, the Department of Public Works, and the neighborhood in making these much-needed park improvements.

Tree Planting Program and 32nd Annual Tree City USA Award

The NRC continues annual funding and oversight of the town-wide tree planting program in cooperation with the Department of Public Works. In June 2015, Wellesley was awarded the Arbor Day Foundation "Tree City USA" designation for the thirty-second consecutive year.

Reduction in Pesticide Use: Fighting the Winter Moth with Biological Methods

In FY15, the NRC approved the continuation of a successful effort to use biological methods to control the invasive European winter moth by releasing parasitic flies (species *Cyzenis albicans*) in Centennial Reservation. The parasitic flies disrupt the life cycle of winter moths, acting as a natural control, and allowing the Town to significantly reduce pesticide use. This project is conducted in conjunction with UMass Amherst Extension specialists and scientists from MA Department of Conservation and Recreation.

With the success of the parasitic fly release program, Wellesley residents are requested to limit spraying to trees that will not survive any moth infestation.

Stewardship, Education and Advocacy

Advocacy for North 40 Acquisition

The NRC was pleased to be among the many Town boards that advocated for the purchase of 46 acres (known as the “North 40”) from Wellesley College. This acquisition, which was approved by Special Town Meeting on January 20, 2015, will provide an extraordinary opportunity to increase the Town’s inventory of land available for open space and recreation. A new North 40 Committee will be appointed in 2015 to determine the best use of the land. The NRC looks forward to continuing to advocate for the preservation of open space on the North 40 as an important natural resource for the Town.

As part of the evaluation process for the North 40 acquisition, the NRC worked to quantify all the open space in Wellesley and to better understand its status (protected and unprotected). NRC members worked with the Geographic Information Systems department to create a map highlighting acreage, ownership, and levels of protection for different parcels of open land. (The “Open Space Map” is available on the NRC web page on the Town web site.)

Wellesley is made up of approximately 10.5 square miles or 6,720 acres of land in total. Thirty-three percent of Wellesley’s lands are not developed (2,212 acres). These 2,212 acres consist of the following:

- 350 acres of town-owned municipal lands (including School lands, Recycling and Disposal Facility, Department of Public Works, Selectmen’s’ land)
- 546 acres of town-owned park and conservation lands protected under Article 97* and under the jurisdiction of the NRC;
- 90 acres of state/federal lands-protected under Article 97;
- 1,226 acres of other open space that is not protected. These lands include state and federally owned lands such as Mass Bay Community College and other educational institutions; the Sudbury Aqueduct; the National Guard; cemeteries; land trusts; golf courses; and lands that benefit from Chapter 61 tax relief such as conservation easements.

Only 9.5 percent of Wellesley’s total acreage is protected under Article 97* of the Massachusetts Constitution.

**Article 97 was enacted to protect the right of citizens in Massachusetts to clean air; water; freedom from excessive noise; and natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic qualities of the environment. Any land subject to Article 97 may not be used for other purposes, sold, or removed from protected status without the town undergoing a municipal and state legislative process, which includes approval by two-thirds of the Massachusetts legislature.*

Formation of the Wellesley 3R (reduce, Reuse, Recycle) Working Group

Members of the NRC joined the Department of Public Works and the Sustainable Energy Committee in creating the **Wellesley 3R Working Group** to consider improvements to waste management in Town, including food waste and plastics reduction. The working group is exploring the feasibility of a ban on single-use plastic bags in Wellesley, and is conducting merchant surveys to better understand

how waste is handled by businesses and institutions. So far, the working group has held three events:

- “Garbology 101: Talking Trash with the Wellesley RDF,” attended by more than 70 residents;
- Food Waste Summit with John Fischer (Branch Chief, Commercial Waste Reduction & Waste Planning at MA Department of Environmental Protection) attended by 40 stakeholders to discuss new food waste diversion regulations;
- Tour of the MWRA Solid Waste Facility at Deer Island.

Other Projects

- **Brookside Community Gardens and the Weston Road Garden Club:** The NRC staff coordinated with the boards of both gardens to draft uniform governing policies, including the stipulation that gardens are maintained organically (without the use of any pesticides).
- **Bird Walk and Vernal Pool Exploration of Morses Pond and the North 40 with Wellesley Resident and Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary Director Elissa Landre**
- **MassReleaf Ministry Project at Morton Park:** The NRC approved plans for MassReleaf Ministries to plant six native *Amelanchier* (serviceberry trees) in Morton Park. MassReLeaf works with local municipalities to encourage hands-on tree care.
- **Annual Earth Day Clean-Up on the Charles River**
- **Neighborhood Clean-Ups:** Reed’s Pond, Brookside Area, North 40, Morses Pond, North 40 Vernal Pool, Fuller Brook, and elsewhere.
- **St. Paul School in Fuller Brook Park:** NRC staff led two educational sessions for St. Paul School on the Fuller Brook Park Preservation Project.
- **Community Outreach:** The NRC participates in the Wellesley Green Collaborative; staffs tables at local events to educate residents about environmental issues such as the harmful effects of pesticides and plastics in our environment; maintains a web page on the Town’s website; hosts a Facebook page; and sends out regular news updates to email subscribers.

Report from the Wetlands Protection Committee

The NRC serves as the Conservation Commission for the Town of Wellesley. The NRC delegates to the Wetlands Protection Committee the power and authority to administer and enforce the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Chapter 131, Section 40) and the Town Wetlands Protection Bylaw (Article 44). The NRC appoints five volunteer members to the WPC, along with no more than two associate members. At the start of FY15, WPC members were Bob Collins, Chair; Carl Sciple, Vice Chair; J. Stanley Waugh; Jay Hammerness; and Richard Howell. Jay Hammerness retired from the WPC in September 2014, and the WPC is grateful to Mr. Hammerness for his years of service. In March, the NRC appointed Neal Glick as a member of the WPC, and Peter Jones as associate member. Pam Helinek, the Wetlands Administrator, held a part-time position in FY15 and will become full-time in FY16.

Wetlands Permits

In FY15, the WPC held 17 public meetings and issued 39 Orders of Conditions, 7 Amended Orders of Condition, 25 Certificates of Compliance, 4 Enforcement

Orders, 15 Determinations of Applicability and 3 Orders of Resource Area Delineation. One decision was appealed to the MA Department of Environmental Protection but the appeal was withdrawn. Wetland fees received in FY15 totaled \$20,310.50.

Wetlands Regulations and Guidelines

In FY15, the WPC retained the services of a consultant to re-write the Wellesley Wetland Bylaw Regulations. The new regulations will

- Define more clearly and thoroughly the implementation of the Wellesley Wetland Bylaw,
- Provide better protection for the Town's 25-foot "No Disturbance Zone"
- Establish clear storm water management standards,
- Require wetlands permit applications to be filed electronically as well as by paper copy.

A draft of the new regulations will be discussed at a publicly advertised meeting and the final version will be promulgated in FY16.

The WPC also published guidelines for environmentally responsible methods of draining swimming pools, hot tubs, and ice skating rinks. These guidelines will be mailed to all Wellesley residents with swimming pools at the end of the summer in FY16.

Report from the Trails Committee

During FY15, the Trails Committee maintained and improved Wellesley's trail network and continued community outreach programs. The Town has a total of 43 miles of trails, and 26 miles are marked with directional medallions.

Members of the Trails Committee are appointed by the NRC. The members of the committee are: Miguel Lessing, Chair; Denny Nackoney, Vice Chair; Joan Gaughan, NRC Representative; Bob Brown; Diane Hall; Jared Parker; John Schuler; and Ekaterina Zemlyakova.

Trail Maintenance and Expansion

The committee continues to maintain posts, directional medallions, map houses, and doggie bag stations. The Department of Public Works assists on larger projects and keeps paths mowed in the summer. Graffiti cleanup is a constant activity. The following projects were completed:

- a. Sudbury Path: Improved the segment along the aqueduct near Dover Rd. Widened and leveled trail access on the east side of Dover Rd. Cleared shoulder for safer passage along Benvenue St. Added two steps at Waban Arches to address erosion and improve drainage.
- b. Added additional steps at the Morses Pond Loop Trail.
- c. Rerouted trail at the Centennial Reservation in fields around wet spots and improved trail drainage.

Community Outreach

The committee led three walks in the fall and four in the spring with 211 participants. The addition of three walks on the North 40 property (while the Town was seeking to acquire the land from Wellesley College) generated another 147 participants. Kids'

Trail Day attracted 129 attendees. Including maintenance work volunteers (15), total participants for the year reached a new record of 502, an increase of 17 percent over the previous year.

A website and Facebook page are kept fresh and updated. The committee also participates in the Sustainable Energy Committee's Wellesley Green Collaborative, the Wellesley Day of Service, and supports the Earth Day cleanup along the Charles River. Presentations were given to a Friendly Aid senior group, a Wellesley Garden Study Group, and the ESL community.

The Trails Committee contributed to the discussions of the North 40 Steering Committee, advised the MWRA on connecting the Sudbury Aqueduct in Needham to the Metrowest trails network, finalized plans for rerouting the Brook Path at Hunnewell Fields, gave input to the Town Government Study Committee, and helped update the NRC's Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Appreciation from the Trails Committee

The Trails Committee appreciates the cooperation received from MassBay Community College, Babson College, Wellesley College, Olin College, the Town of Needham, the DCR, and the MWRA to allow the trails network to cross their properties. The committee is grateful for the help received from Town boards and staff, the Wellesley Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, Haynes Management Inc., Nelson Properties, National Development LLC, and the Beard Way Homeowners Association.

Thanks and Appreciation

The members of the NRC wish to thank the many other volunteers who help protect and maintain Wellesley's open space and natural resources, especially the members the **Wetlands Protection Committee** and the **Trails Committee**, who work tirelessly throughout the year. We also appreciate the dedicated efforts of the staff of the **Department of Public Works**, who are essential to the execution of our mission.