

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

**The Wellesley Natural Resources Commission and Director held its annual retreat on September 23, 2021. The goals and work from the past year were recounted, and goals and work for the upcoming year were determined.**

## **Opening Comments**

- 1) Retreat Goal – vision of 2021-2022 priorities reviewed to allow NRC to focus on priorities

The Commission reviewed and affirmed ten-year goals. Commissioners reviewed notes shared prior to the retreat with summary 2021 accomplishments and gaps, 2022 goals and desired accomplishments. (See Summary Table below)

## **Director's Overview**

### **2. Five-Year Capital Projects and Budgets for the NRC and Morses Pond ((FY2022 budget due in October)**

The Director confirmed that the NRC has completed the first 16 projects and inquired about future projects:

-The board reviewed the following projects

1. Duck Pond Bridge -Complete
2. Warren Park Inclusive Play (CPC) Funded, scheduled for FY21: Complete
3. Perrin Park Basketball courts (CPC): Almost complete
4. Complete except paint MOPO Water Quality Management – Ongoing
5. Church Park Restoration (CPC) – Funded
6. Fuller Brook Park Invasive Management – Ongoing
7. Aqueduct Bathroom – Awaiting Drawings, installation
8. Field Lighting Retrofit: Promoted to request for FY22
9. HS Track and Field Restrooms, Team Rooms, Snack Shack, other additions/changes: In design. To be covered by Schools without NRC contribution.
10. Morses Pond Erosion (CPC/NRC Capital) Funded, partially complete; (includes \$147,000/year as a standing request); Review Morses Pond Capital Request for FY 2022-Fy2027
11. Open Space and Recreation Plan – In progress
12. Native/Pollinator Corridors (encompassed in our landscaping line item of operational budget, depending on cost and scope)

13. Large Harvester Replacement: Out to bid 9/2021; completed
14. Dredging of Small Ponds (see Ken's comprehensive report on dredging small ponds); \$100,000 will cover the permitting, but not the whole project)
15. North 40 - no specific request;
16. Squirrel Road - abutted by NRC property; whose responsibility is maintenance of this scenic road? NRC and DPW to consider how to treat maintenance of this road
17. Meadow Project - a potential CPC project
18. Active Open Space Use study: Proposed FY21
19. Playground upgrades in budget for FY 2025; which may overlap with DPW upgrades;
20. Possible MVP proposal
21. Town Forest Nursery - support 55,000 for tree planting;

### **3. Overview of Operating Budgets for the NRC and Morses Pond**

-The board discussed the budgets and strategies to fund "orphan" projects and the need for sustainable and clear funding sources for maintenance of facilities and amenities on NRC property (e.g. basketball court lighting). Repair and maintenance of some items is in the DPW budget (e.g. portable toilets temporarily at Perrin Park). The collaboration with DPW has made it possible to address issues as they arise but that may not always be possible. It is important to clarify whose responsibility (and budget) should cover items that may be in a grey area. In particular, it is important to ensure that maintenance items are in the DPW budget or they should be incorporated into the NRC budget.

Concession stand and bathrooms will be built today for less than the cost of the bathrooms, not for the FY 2022 budget. The aqueduct bathroom will be built by end of year; for budgeting purposes the bathrooms will require maintenance in budget. The budget maintenance needs to be confirmed with DPW; any offset or differential will be confirmed.

Discussion of how to manage contributions from Algonquin to capital fund.

Discussion of who should budget for and lead active open space use study. Clarification that this involves NRC, Schools, PFTF, and Recreation. Questions of how to have continuity with master planning process. NRC would collaborate with all the stakeholders. NRC budget will include a line item in the budget and can be reviewed and voted on by the Board.

### **4. New Initiatives**

- 1) **Municipal Vulnerability Program** - NRC to consider initiatives for the MVP for bigger projects
- 2) **NRC and DPW Engineering Storm Water** - The Town is responsible for MSW permitting and they are considering a storm water utility bill for residential home owners. There are still implementation questions. The general idea is to

introduce a utility fee based on average or median impervious surfaces and then make a determination of fees based individual house coverage. This is an initiative that the NRC can promote.

3) By-law change so that NRC can ticket individuals for tree removal. This will simplify the process of fee collection

#### 4) **Meadow project**

### **5. Current Staffing Models and Issues for the NRC**

-The board discussed efforts to ensure proper classification of the current positions, and possible expansion of the Environmental Education position. This position is responsible for communicating about the issues that the town is facing that relate to NRC goals. There may be a benefit to figuring out the balance of time dedicated to communication to different audiences and on different topics. This could involve reviewing other municipality models, defining how the expanded position clearly promotes the mission, and looking for potential funding from the school committee for NRC efforts that are focused on schools.

There is an option to reconfigure existing roles as another NRC staff will be leaving.

Support to ensure that Director and Wetlands Administrator are properly classified in the Town banding.

### **6. Open Space and Recreation Plan – Initial Findings**

-Initial survey results were discussed as well as ideas to expand the survey and collect additional responses. Note that education and outreach were not ranked highly.

-The 3 most identified goals and objectives for those goals from the survey were discussed.

#### **Goal 1: Restore, preserve, and enhance open space for water, air and habitat protection, biodiversity, climate mitigation, enhancement of community character, and enjoyment of the public.**

Provide and maintain sufficient natural areas so that important plant and wildlife species can be sustained.

Continue to protect, enhance, and seek to increase open space in Wellesley. Maintain and improve the quality and health of the natural infrastructure of Wellesley

#### **Goal 10: Provide opportunities for safe and enjoyable walking and bicycle access throughout the Town.**

Expand and enhance the Town-wide trails network that interconnects and traverses open space.

Maintain the trails network and existing trails through park and woodlands.

Promote the development of bicycle routes through the Town, as part of the regional transportation system.

**Goal 2: Protect, enhance, and restore Wellesley's sensitive land, water, and wetlands resources, especially those resources that have been degraded or impaired.**

Protect Morses Pond, Lake Waban, and Longfellow Pond as primary water supply areas and as passive recreational resources.

Minimize the impact of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemical lawn and landscape treatments on the Town's groundwater and surface water bodies.

Enforce laws, bylaws, and regulations to protect groundwater, wetlands, and surface water bodies.

**5) Review of Open Space Goals**

**Tree Canopy** – There was a shared concern about changes to the tree canopy and a confirmation that this is an area that benefit from additional study. The 2014-2015 tree audit demonstrated the gap between clearing and canopy renewal. NRC and Planning are interested in studying this issue further. Enforcement remains an issue. There appeared to be agreement that this issue would merit further research.

**Access, Management and Protection of Open Space -**

**A. The Commission Elected Officers and Appointed Liaisons**

**-Liaisons/Committee members**

Jay McHale: Wetlands Protection Committee; Bea Bezmalinovic: Playing Fields Task Force; Raina McManus: Community Preservation Committee; Laura Robert: Trails Committee.

**After a motion was made and seconded, the board voted unanimously on the following slate of officers:**

Chair: Raina McManus

Vice Chair: Laura Robert

Secretary: Bea Bezmalinovic

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect existing shade trees and increase the Town's tree canopy</li> </ul>	<p>Being able to do tree plantings last fall and slightly upping the tree budget in a difficult budget year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to quantify the tree canopy with aerial surveying (although I think that's not complete)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree/Canopy Protection – issue of daily discussion</li> <li>• Continued coordination with Planning Board; observation that builders/developers may have adjusted their approach</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue making progress on encouraging more sustainable approaches to the natural environment, which encompasses support for pesticide free care, encouraging natives, tackling invasive species, expanding the public shade tree program (or ensuring that we are maintaining tree canopy, not losing it).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect Trees</li> <li>• Continue efforts to quantify tree canopy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Management/Stewardship of Town Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning updating Open space plan.</li> <li>• the trails sub-committee's work at Centennial</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Trails/Wetlands/NRC communication and coordination, and enhance coordination of Trails events and initiatives</li> <li>• Explore and encourage safe connections between and travel to open spaces through the Mobility and Trails committees. Consider creating a policy for private use of public land during emergencies (ex. COVID-</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to protect drinking water</li> </ul>				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the biodiversity of the town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollinator project,</li> <li>• iNaturalist project to document where pollinator plants were located.</li> </ul>		Continue pol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue Grow Green Wellesley Initiatives to protect our water, environment and health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pollinator habitat, organic pest management, healthy yards, planting of native species</li> <li>○ Outreach to institutions like the new Wellesley Office Park, and the Wellesley Community Center</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the protection of open space (Active and Passive)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• progress on the aqueduct bathrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining an understanding of playing fields needs for all sports and understanding of how to provide more equitable access to playing fields across men's and women's sports.</li> <li>• Field improvements with respect to lighting (just stalled)</li> <li>• helpful for the NRC to coordinate with other Town boards (Schools, Recreation) to develop a master plan that optimizes the use of our current recreational space over the next 5-10 years to respond to demand while protecting existing open space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master plan (with Schools and PFTF) of all active fields in town in order to have 5-year plan for usage improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and make recommendations on proposed facilities and upgrades on parklands</li> <li>• Seek to create balance in open spaces for Active and Passive Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Explore options to meet field demand</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<p>Improve the functioning of the NRC within Town Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>our contribution on COVID related matters from smooth NRC operations and engaged and retained staff, to collaboration with other departments, and the public - - providing appropriate and safe solutions to problems and challenges, alternative educational programming and experiences, and thoughtful attention to and investment in lands and water bodies under our jurisdiction.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begun implementation of/supporting NRC pieces of the new sustainable mobility plan and CAP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the creation of the Town’s Climate Action Plan</li> <li>Continue MVP town-wide planning</li> <li>Continue participating in the CRWA Climate Compact</li> <li>Leverage relationships with other boards, committees, departments and environmental groups to further the NRC Mission, including: (Police, Planning, Select Board, Recreation, Schools, Health, DPW, Wellesley Land Trust, Native Plant Trust, Gas Leaks Allies )</li> <li>NRC Director will evaluate the current office staffing model and make any recommendations.</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease the impact of exterior lighting on the natural environment in the town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRC has made progress on improving the lighting the Hunnewell field and tennis courts for both residents and the natural environment around the fields.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding Secured for Replacement of Existing Lights at Warren Field and Tennis Courts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend and review exterior lighting on new buildings on parkland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work with lighting consultant to determine how to improve existing lighting at playing fields and courts, and provide/recommend stadium lighting options</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect air quality</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce noise pollution</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint (with schools) sound policy for open fields in town</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce litter and plastic waste</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice Climate Resilience and Preparedness</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage Community Engagement</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comprehensive plan for outreach and communication that goes beyond our traditional partners to support education and outreach on sustainable landscapes to the business community, the schools and sports communities with guidance on supporting more sustainable landscapes. Our messages</li> </ul>	

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			need to incorporate more emphasis on sustainability on a budget or ways in which sustainability can be good for the budget.	