

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Jonathan Freedman, Chair, Select Board

**FROM:** Jamie Errickson, Deputy Town Administrator, Operations

**CC:** Robert Rooney, Interim Town Administrator  
Jeremy Marsette, Public Works Director  
Bill McDowell, Town Engineer  
Jillian Wilson Martin, Sustainability Coordinator  
Marianne Iarossi, Conservation Agent  
Karen Partanen, Recreation & Parks Director

**DATE:** February 23, 2021

**RE:** **Charles River Dam - Deliberation Process Overview**

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**Introduction**

This memorandum is provided to outline the proposed community engagement process Town Administration recommends to follow in the coming year with regards to the aging Charles River Dam (“Dam”) in South Natick. Owned and maintained by the Town, the Dam is permitted through the Commonwealth’s Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) with required inspections once every two years. DCR has classified the Dam as a high hazard dam. Further, the most recent inspection completed by the Town identified some deficiencies in the Dam that will need addressing in the coming years, requiring significant investment to either replace or remove the Dam.

While the decision on how to proceed will ultimately rest with the Natick Select Board, with funding voted on by Town Meeting, Town Administration is intent on ensuring there is broad consultation and deep deliberation within the community to help inform the decision(s) the Town must make to addressing the deficiencies with the Dam. In order to make a thoughtful decision that incorporates the wisdom of the community, as well as the expertise of various Town departments, Town Administration created an internal planning team of employees (copied on this memorandum noted above). This team has sought advice from other colleagues within the Town government, including local elected officials, and has engaged with Ona Ferguson, Senior Mediator at the Consensus Building Institute, to help inform a robust community engagement strategy for this initiative.

Based on the work of this team, Town Administration proposes the creation of an “Advisory Committee,” which will be responsible for evaluating the options on what to do with the Dam and presenting its recommendation to the Select Board. The evaluation process will include not only hearing from consultants on the various options for the Dam, but also completing a comprehensive community-wide engagement effort, as described below.

## Proposed Approach/Framework to Community Engagement

Timing	Activity	Notes/Purpose
Feb	Share approach with the Select Board	Present to and seek approval or advice for changes needed
Feb/March	Present the approach to elected committees and commissions so they know what is happening, ask who from their group should be on the Advisory Committee	Give 10 min presentation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation &amp; Parks</li> <li>• Planning Board</li> <li>• Historical Commission</li> <li>• Conservation Commission</li> <li>• Open Space</li> </ul>
March	Form the Advisory Committee, meet once ( <i>see notes below this table about the committee</i> )	Agenda: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Share project approach</li> <li>• Test run presentations for feedback</li> <li>• Develop outreach approach</li> </ul>
April – May	Conduct outreach about the process and ways the public can participate	Ask Advisory Committee members to help with outreach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include information in Town e-newsletters</li> <li>• Post on Town website</li> <li>• Post on social media</li> <li>• Hang flyers at Dam</li> <li>• Mail notice to property owners located near the Dam</li> </ul>
May	Conduct webinar for the public	Inform the public of the choices, sharing how the options compare across key factors including cultural history, cost over time, ecological impact and other considerations. Presentation will be factual, clear and focused, with data and visuals. Session will be recorded for viewing by people who cannot attend.
June	<p>Conduct a virtual public meeting</p> <p>Pending the COVID protocols, host an in person meeting of some kind on site</p> <p>Provide an opportunity for people who cannot attend the virtual public meeting to provide feedback and answer questions online.</p>	<p>Give the public an opportunity to share their thoughts on the choices. Take careful notes on input.</p> <p>Post renderings of the options at the site with guidance on opportunities for the public to share feedback.</p>

		Share the same information/facts/visuals and questions online so everyone has the opportunity to participate.
July	Compile all the public input in a summary	Organize and synthesize all input from the public at the virtual meeting, in the online survey and at the in person session.
July-Oct	Advisory Committee begins to meet more frequently (e.g. meetings every few weeks)	Review the choices in detail, consider the input of the public and the various Town departments. Learn from each other and seek a consensus recommendation. Write up of the Committee's outcome to include dissenting opinions.
Oct-Nov	Advisory Committee submits recommended outcome to the Select Board for consideration and decision on how to proceed.	

\*Note, all materials presented in public meetings will be made available on a Town web page focused solely on exploring next steps for the Dam. Advisory Committee agendas and notes will also be posted.

**Proposed Role and Structure of Charles River Dam Advisory Committee**

*Purpose*

The Advisory Committee will work together in a series of meetings to review the options for the Charles River Dam in South Natick and develop a recommendation to the Select Board on what the Town should do with the Dam. While the group will aim for a consensus recommendation, if such a consensus recommendation cannot be reached, the Committee will capture the major elements of the discussion and identify where there is greater and/or lesser agreement and why.

*Proposed Composition*

General participation on an Advisory Committee that would work to develop a recommendation seeks to include broad representation from both Town government as well as key stakeholders. All members are proposed as full participants, seeking to reach broad consensus on a recommendation. The Committee is proposed to be appointed by the Town Administrator and include a group of up to 15 participants with diverse areas of expertise and focus. The Committee is expected to invite content experts as needed for particular discussions. Town Administration seeks to keep leadership in the neighboring municipalities of Dover, Wellesley and Sherborn apprised of this process.

*Elected and Appointed Volunteers*

- Recreation and Parks Commission
- Planning Board
- Historical Commission
- Conservation Commission
- Open Space Advisory Committee
- Finance Committee

*Key Stakeholders*

- Neighbors – one each from
  - Upstream
  - Downstream
- Natick Nipmuc
  - One representative

*Town staff*

- Jeremy Marsette, Director, Department of Public Works
- Bill McDowell, Town Engineer
- Marianne Iarossi, Open Space Planner and Conservation Agent
- Karen Partanen, Recreation & Parks
- Jillian Wilson Martin, Sustainability Coordinator
- James Errickson, Deputy Town Administrator, Operations

**Conclusion**

As outlined, the goal of this outline created by the internal planning team was to outline a process by which community engagement work can happen in order to provide an opportunity for the broader community to inform a comprehensive and thoughtful recommendation regarding what to do with the Charles River Dam in the coming years. The above outlined process is open for discussion and adjustment - any input is welcome.