



Linda Wollschlager <lwollschlager.fincom@natickma.org>

Statement from the Natick Sustainability Committee regarding Charles River Dam

Leo Ryan <lryannaticksustain@gmail.com>

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To: selectboard@natickma.org, Linda Wollschlager <lwollschlager.fincom@natickma.org>

Cc: Jillian Wilson Martin <jwmartin@natickma.org>

SelectBoard and Ms Wollschlager (Finance Committee Chair):

On behalf of the Natick Sustainability Committee, I'm submitting the statement below for consideration by the SelectBoard and Natick Finance Committee. This statement was reviewed and endorsed by vote of the Sustainability Committee during our meeting on Tuesday, July 12.

We sincerely appreciate the work done by the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee in soliciting community input and engaging experts in multiple disciplines.

Thank you,

Leo Ryan

Chair, Natick Sustainability Committee

Natick Sustainability Committee Statement on the Future of the Charles River Dam

As the committee responsible for "evaluating Natick's environmental impacts, challenges and opportunities," we would like to offer our perspective for consideration by the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee in its final recommendation to the Select Board.

First, we appreciate the Advisory Committee's open and public process of discovery and deliberation. We've observed a commendable amount of public outreach and inclusion, including multiple surveys, 11 public meetings, and an FAQ drawing answers from across the Town's responsible employees, with evidence provided from studies and examination of other dam removals.

The potential removal of the dam is a complex issue, but we believe a compelling base of facts has emerged that should guide the Advisory Committee's final recommendation:

- In accordance with the Commonwealth’s unambiguous “no trees on dams” policy, any restoration or repair of the spillway will lead to the removal of 60+ mature trees
 - Any reduction of the tree canopy in Natick contributes to the temperature increases
 - Natick is actively pursuing an increase in our tree canopy to address surface-level temperature hotspots; removal of mature trees is a setback to this goal
 - Removal of trees reduces natural carbon sequestration and releases stored carbon
- Evidence to date shows only positive environmental impacts from spillway removal on the health of the river; in particular, we note the October 12, 2021 letter from the Charles River Watershed Association, and the October 14, 2021 meeting on ecological impacts, which highlight:
 - The multiple negative impacts of dams on water quality
 - The improvements that dam removals have in restoring a healthy river ecosystem, including allowing for natural sediment dispersal, reducing toxic algae blooms and improving seasonal migration of fish populations
- Evidence to date suggests that spillway removal—though it will change existing water depths and could lead to more noticeable, seasonal variations in water levels near the dam site—will, on balance, provide additional opportunities for public access to and engagement with the Charles River for recreational purposes, enabling residents greater benefit from our natural resources
- Repair of the spillway will require additional future investment in spillway maintenance

Additionally, many of us on the Committee felt very moved by the perspective and request of the Indigenous population, and by the clergy letter expressing support for that request. We favor considering their request as a factor in the evaluation, and note that the presentation on November 9, 2021 by Kristen Wyman and David Yancey showed that the Nipmuc perspective on the restoration of natural ecological processes, and on our human interdependence with our local environment, are very much aligned with the outcomes we expect were the spillway to be removed.

As the Committee charged with a focus on public environmental stewardship, these are the factors we suggest the Advisory Committee consider in final deliberation and recommendations to the Select Board.

Thank you,

Natick Sustainability Committee