

## Charles River Dam Advisory Committee | Meeting #14

September 7, 2021 (Virtual)

### Meeting Summary

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*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 (Committee) convened virtually for its fourteenth meeting on Wednesday, September 7, 2022, to finalize and vote to approve the final Committee report to the Town of Natick Select Board. More than 45 people attended this meeting: 17 Committee members, 2 CBI project staff, and roughly 30 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 Planning Team will post the approved final Committee report to the project webpage and work with Town staff to submit it to the Natick Select Board.
- Committee members Bekah, Dirk, Kristen, and Mike volunteered to help prepare materials and present the Committee's final report to the Select Board and other Town bodies as needed. Town staff members and Terri volunteered to help prepare presentation materials.
- The Planning Team will post the AC Meeting #14 recording and slides on the project webpage.
- The Planning Team will post the two July and today's meeting summaries on the project website.

#### WELCOME & COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Ona Ferguson, CBI Facilitation Team, welcomed participants, reviewed the meeting agenda, and timeline of the Committee's work to date. Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator, shared gratitude for the efforts of Committee members throughout this process. Committee members approved meeting summaries from their meetings on July 19 and July 26, 2022.

#### FINALIZING THE COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee members were invited to address any outstanding comments and feedback on the [updated draft](#) of their final report to the Natick Select Board (dated September 1, 2022). This draft was created by a drafting team of volunteer Committee members, building on the discussions in the July 19 and July 26 meetings. It also incorporated feedback sent individually by Committee members to the facilitation team. No changes to the final draft were raised, beyond noting a few typos to be corrected by the Planning Team. Multiple Committee members acknowledged the nuance in this report and a variety of strengths of support for the recommendation within the Committee, with a section on minority opinion rationale presented in the report.

Committee members participated in a roll-call vote to approve the September 1, 2022, version of the Committee's final report to the Town of Natick Select Board. Results:

Mike Balcom - yea  
David Blease - yea  
Dirk Coburn - yea  
Terri Evans - yea  
Jeannine Furrer - yea

Martin Kessel - yea  
Seth Levine - yea  
David Lodding - yea  
Jeremy Marsette - yea  
Jon Marshall - yea  
Bill McDowell - yea  
Claire Rundelli - yea  
Aaron Spelker - yea  
Bekah Stendahl - yea  
Chris Stillman - yea  
Jillian Wilson Martin - yea  
Kristen Wyman - yea  
David Yancey - yea

The vote to approve the final Committee report was 18-0.

Ms. Ferguson reviewed the top-line recommendation from the report: “The Charles River Dam Advisory Committee recommends that the Town of Natick remove the spillway and restore the river, and invest in creating a beautiful and welcoming waterfront park that integrates the river’s adjacent public lands and provides a space for the community to meet, contemplate, and enjoy.”

## LOOKING AHEAD: NEXT STEPS FOR THE REPORT AND COMMITTEE

Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator, shared that there will be a Select Board meeting on September 21. The Select Board will need some time to review the report and likely points of contact from Committee members to address any questions. Once the Select Board has had an opportunity to review the report, they will make a decision on the path forward for the Town, and then coordinate with Town administration on how to advance down that path (e.g., securing funding, planning the project, etc.).

Mr. Marshall also spoke to Article 29 for the Town Warrant. This citizen petition will be reviewed by the Select Board in their September 7 meeting. He noted that the Select Board will be interested in reviewing the report from this Committee to inform their thinking on the future of the Charles River Dam in South Natick. Whatever action Town Meeting chooses to take on an article, it will come back to the appropriate boards or area of Town administration to take the next steps. A Committee member noted that petitioners or official sponsors of articles are due a full and open-minded hearing on the article, and this Committee’s report will contain relevant information to be considered in that hearing.

All Committee members were encouraged to attend the September 21, 2022, Select Board meeting and future Town forums on this issue. Committee members Bekah, Dirk, Kristen, and Mike volunteered to help prepare materials and present the Committee’s final report to the Select Board and other Town bodies as needed. Town staff members and Terri volunteered to help prepare presentation materials. Committee members identified some key elements to include in presentations about this committee’s work including: the importance of investment in the parks, the historic importance of this decision given petitions from the Indigenous community several hundreds of years ago, collecting all necessary data and information to accompany the presentation. They also noted the importance of in-person dialogue in future park design at the site.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

No verbal public comments were shared live in the meeting. Public comments submitted in writing in advance of the meeting are captured in Appendix B.

## CLOSING

Next steps in the Charles River Dam Advisory Committee process include:

- The Planning Team will post the approved final Committee report to the project webpage and work with Town staff to submit it to the Natick Select Board.
- Committee members Bekah, Dirk, Kristen, and Mike will help prepare materials and present the Committee's final report to the Select Board and other Town bodies as needed. Town staff members and Terri will help prepare presentation materials.
- The Planning Team will post the AC Meeting #14 recording and slides on the project webpage.
- The Planning Team will post the two July meeting summaries on the project website.

Committee members were invited to share their closing thoughts; themes included:

- Appreciation for an open, mutual, collaborative, respectful decision-making approach
- Acknowledgement of a necessary but long and resource-intensive process
- Appreciation that the collaborative drafting process worked well to ensure the report represented and respected everyone's opinions well
- Gratitude for everyone who has participated throughout this process, including Committee members and members of the public
- Satisfaction that the Committee asked good questions together to gather necessary information to inform this report
- Happiness for a lessened anthropogenic impact to the river with the removal of the spillway, and sensitivity to those in the Natick community who feel loss associated with spillway removal
- Confidence in the final recommendation and report
- Deep hope that this work results in a wonderful future for this area, knowing that there is still work ahead for the Town and Natick community

## 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 of Public Works  
Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator  
William McDowell, Town Engineer  
Claire Rundelli, Conservation Agent  
Aaron Spelker, Commission on Disability Representative  
Bekah 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

~30 interested members of the public also attended the meeting.

## APPENDIX B: ADVANCE WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

Town of Natick: Charles River Dam Advisory Committee  
September 7, 2022, 5:00 - 7:00 PM ET Meeting  
**Advance Written Public Comments**

**Thomas Connors**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Thomas Connors. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations.

Removal of the dam is environmentally necessary, allowing for a naturally flowing river and all the benefits that would follow. The choice to remove the spillway is clear- not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely,  
Thomas Connors  
30 Kodaya Road  
Newton MA 02468

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**Matt Arnold**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Matthew Arnold. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. There is no reason to keep the dam, we have learned from history that they are bad for the environment and the fish in the river. The choice to remove the spillway is clear- not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

All the best,  
-Matt Arnold

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**McNamara Buck**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is McNamara Buck. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely,  
McNamara Buck  
18 Gold Star Road  
Cambridge MA

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**Lauren Carmi**  
July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Lauren Carmi. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely,  
Lauren  
Massachusetts Resident

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**Jeffrey Axelrod**  
July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Jeffrey Axelrod. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Additionally, removal of the dam would improve canoeing on a beautiful stretch of the Charles, thereby adding economic activity and enhancing the experience of folks like myself who enjoy outdoor activities in nature.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely,  
Jeff Axelrod

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**Rob Vandenabeele**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Rob Vandenabeele. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

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**Nicholas P. Quinlan**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Nicholas P. Quinlan. As a South Natick resident, I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely, Nicholas Quinlan

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**Laurel Facey**

July 18, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is Laurel Facey, and I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely,  
Laurel Facey

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**Tom Menapace**  
July 19, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

My name is \_. I strongly urge Natick to remove the Charles River Dam and restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations. The choice to remove the spillway is clear– not only is it the most fiscally responsible, ethical, and environmental option, but the dam is an affront to the Natick Nipmuc people. We must honor the wishes of past & present Nipmuc leaders who have long called for dam removal, and eliminate the hazard of catastrophic dam failure.

Thank you for your hard work and research on this important decision.

Sincerely, Tom Menapace

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**Jen Goree**  
July 25, 2022

Thank you to the Natick dam committee for supporting removal of the dam. This is the best outcome for the future of the river and opens up new possibilities for South Natick.

thanks.  
Jen Goree  
Natick resident

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**David Parish**  
July 26, 2022

Attn: Maggie Osthues-Consensus Building Institute  
Charles River Dam Advisory Committee  
Town of Natick

### **A Mind Game**

I do not have an answer to the question of the preservation or removal of the spillway. However, a few days ago, I overheard a conversation among family members who had bought ice cream and had come to eat at the picnic table beside the Bacon Free Library.

Man: That was a nice break. Shall we drive on?

Woman: It's pretty here. Let's walk down to the water.

Young daughter: Oh, please, Daddy. I want to see the waterfall.

There are many reasons people value the dam and spillway on the river in South Natick: some because of the impact on real estate values, some for the historical significance, and many because they find the structure on the river beautiful (acknowledging that any definition of "beautiful" is elusive and subjective).

There are also strong arguments for removing the spillway: the cost of repair and preservation, town liability if the dam fails, the environmental damage caused by impoundment, and violation of the belief of some concerning the value of a free-running river. Perhaps the strongest argument *for* preserving the current structure is because it is beautiful—and therefore loved.

**First quiz:** If the beauty of the structure on the river is not a sufficient reason for its preservation, what human-made structures anywhere in the world are worth preserving, regardless of cost or controversy? Please list.

**Second quiz:** What would America be like; what would the world be like—what would Natick be like—if, upon arriving on this continent, Europeans had sought understanding rather than subjugation?

David Parish

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**Timmy and Stuart Supple**

July 27, 2022

We love the waterfall, it is beautiful, it is an audio and visual delight, please keep it!

Thank you.

Timmy and Stuart Supple  
108 Woodland St.

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**Imran Khan**

August 3, 2022

Hi: I would prefer if the dam was repaired. A better method for allowing fish to travel up stream could also be easily designed in.

Thanks.

Imran

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<https://thefisheriesblog.com/2021/03/23/do-fish-ladders-work/>

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**Diane Young**

August 10, 2022

My name is Diane Young. I have lived on Eliot Hill Road in South Natick for 38 years. I have lived in Natick my whole life. What a lot of people don't realize is the entire Natick Community loves the S. Natick dam/spillway not just those who live in the South part of town. Trouble is most of the Natick residents don't have a clue what is happening regarding the removal of the dam. I know that there has been a committee working hard for the last year and a half doing studies on removal or repair but it has all taken place during a pandemic and people Don't know about it. I believe that removing g the dam will be a very bad decision, for many reasons. Obviously the beauty of the spot will never ever look the same, but I am deeply concerned about the towns financial commitment to restoring and maintaining this park area for generations to come. Penny wise and pound foolish is unfortunately the result of many decisions in Natick. That discussion is for another time.

What we dont know is the long term effects removing the dam will have on fish, birds, all wildlife and plant life. Lowering the depth of the water can lead to huge issues especially with climate change.

More studies need to be done.

More people need to know what is happening

People are not participating in Zoom meetings especially I. The middle of the Summer

This is too big a decision to be made just yet. The town has known the dam needed repairs for years now and have not kept up with the repairs. Nothing dangerous is going g to happen to the dam if we pit the breaks on this and research further options and funding

As we all know You don't know what you got till it's gone. Let's not make a huge mistake we cannot reverse without turning over every possible stone to see what we are actually dealing with.

I really want to help in anyway I can

Thank you  
Diane Young

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**Lynn Klatt**

August 12, 2022

Please preserve the Natick Dam by repairing it. We love this beautiful spot and stop her to relax while out riding our bicycles. It would be a shame to remove this wonderful structure.

Regards,  
Lynn Klatt  
16 Walnut Street  
Needham, MA 02494

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**Demet Tatar**

August 13, 2022

Dear Charles River Dam Advisory Committee,

As a resident of South Natick, I would like to send you an email and ask to help us save our beautiful South Natick Dam.

I was born and raised in Istanbul, came to Boston for studying for my doctorate degree. This little dam is the most beautiful and memorable place for me in the entire planet. It has so many memories for me. It is home to so many animals and plants. There is an habitat around it and if we break the dam, all these animals and plants will be destroyed.

I like very close to this dam and walk to it everyday with my children. It is the reason why we left Boston and I am begging you to help us preserve it.

Kindest Regards,  
Demet Tatar

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**J. Gold**

August 24, 2022

Please repair and do not destroy the South Natick Dam.

Thanks,  
J. Gold

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**Valerie Lin**

August 30, 2022

I am writing to provide some information about what happens when a dam is removed. I grew up in Wisconsin along a river that was in between two dams. After the removal of both dams our river went from being a beautiful 30' wide flowing water that we would canoe and fish in. It now is radically different - it is about 7-15 feet wide and surrounded by tall grass and trees to the point that many times of the year you can't see the water. There are NO FISH! It is believed that the water is so shallow and shady that the fish have left. Please do NOT remove the dam - there will be only a trickled of water left and I can assure you it will be a huge disappointment for all involved!  
Warmly,  
Valerie Lin.

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**Rose Coyman**  
September 1, 2022

Hello,

I am a realtor and resident of South Natick. I strongly believe that the dam is an important (maybe the most important) landmark of the town and an asset that contributes value. Removal of the dam would actually lessen the value of Natick overall as well as all of the surrounding real estate. People come from many surrounding towns to visit this area due to its beauty, and removing it would also result in decreased economic activity to and interest in the town overall. The relatively small cost to repair it is nothing compared with what would be lost. I also hope the committee recognizes that areas such as the dam are part of the reason Natick has increased in popularity in recent years and that people are willing to spend more money on real estate here, which contributes to higher taxes for the town. I am disheartened lately by the town's willingness to dispose of multiple such assets that contribute to the beauty, history, and character of the town, such as 5 Auburn St and now the dam. Please please strongly consider keeping the dam and making the small investment in our town.

And since i'm at it...keep 5 Auburn St. The town could turn it into needed 55+ housing using government grants that aren't available to private developers. I feel the decision to sell this property was also made with far too much haste and no foresight. Keep our town's treasured properties!!!

Thanks,  
Rose Coyman

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**Elizabeth Rosa**  
September 1, 2022

My questions and concerns come from the fear of flooding that may happen if the dam is taken away. What will prevent future flooding the the area around the Charles River, particularly in the Dover area. We are already in a flood zone, will removing the dam further flooding problems?

Elizabeth Rosa  
Cullen Road

Dover, MA

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**Zach Rubin**  
September 2, 2022

Hi,

I live in South Natick right near the dam. I originally thought we should demo it, but now have changed my mind as there are some times when areas that contribute to town/city beautification just need to be invested in.

I am a taxpayer here, and believe we should repair the dam and make the area even more beautiful.

Best,  
Zach Rubin  
7 Matthew Ct, Natick, MA 01760

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**Richard Subber**  
September 3, 2022

Thank you for all of your hard work to determine what's best for Natick regarding the South Natick dam.

I urge you to remove the spillway.

Richard Subber  
46 Union Street  
Natick, MA

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**Anne Geissler**  
September 1, 2022

We prefer to meet in person as an "open meeting" should be conducted

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**Nancy Quinlan**  
September 5, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

Below are my arguments for taking down the South Natick Dam.

As the discussion relating to the future of Natick dam continues, I have come across an article in the most recent issue of [Massachusetts Wildlife](#) a quarterly magazine published by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. It describes the wealth of fish both in number and species that existed in Massachusetts when the early European settlers arrived, and it explained how dams built across the rivers have decimated them. It offers hope that taking down

dams will greatly improve the chances of wildlife to rebound and the environment they and we live in.

Chronicle, a long running series on channel 5 reran a story on dams in Massachusetts from 2/2/2022. A few takeaways for me are:

More than 3,000 dams impede Massachusetts rivers, many ready to fail.

Gov. Baker approved the \$300,000,000 Federal American Rescue Plan that includes money for municipalities to remove dams.

President Biden approved 3 **Billion** dollars in federal funds which can be used for dam removal.

Lastly, and sadly, this past summer from my back yard I watched great blue herons spend entire days standing in the river all day and into dusk trying to get a single fish. The kingfishers stopped coming altogether by late July.

Nancy Quinlan  
Down stream abutter.

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