



Town of Natick Sustainability Committee

Dear Secretary Tepper and Commissioner Arrigo,

Thank you for the opportunity to write to you about DCR's Watertown Dam. We are writing to you in our roles as volunteer members of the Natick Sustainability Committee.

We encourage you to support the removal of the Watertown Dam and restoration of the Charles River.

Natick has recently gone through a process of evaluating repair vs removal of the Charles River Dam in South Natick. Included below is a statement that the Natick Sustainability Committee provided to the Natick Select Board and Finance Committee explaining our rationale for recommending removal.

In our community of Natick we are already seeing the impacts of increasingly severe storms and increased rainfall from climate change. Aging dams like Natick's Charles River Dam and DCR's Watertown Dam were not designed to withstand the effects of this severe weather and will be increasingly at risk of failure with associated downstream flooding. Dam removal eliminates this risk at less long-term cost than dam maintenance.

Removal of the Natick's Charles River Dam and DCR's Watertown Dam and restoration of the natural flow of the Charles River will also contribute to the ongoing cleanup of the Charles River as well as significantly improve the habitat for many species of fish.

As the Commonwealth and our country seek to acknowledge and respond to historic wrongs committed against indigenous peoples, we should also respect the views of local tribes favoring removal of the Natick and Watertown dams and restoration of the river. We have learned that the original construction of the Charles River dams and others was opposed by local indigenous peoples. It is time to acknowledge the legitimacy of these historic claims and do what is best for indigenous rights, the natural world, and the safety of Massachusetts residents.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,  
Leo Ryan, Chair Natick Sustainability Committee

CC: Massachusetts Fish & Game Commissioner Tom O'Shea  
Division of Marine Fisheries Commissioner Daniel McKiernan



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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Leo Ryan** <lryannaticksustain@gmail.com>

Date: Wed, Sep 7, 2022 at 11:56 AM

Subject: Statement from the Natick Sustainability Committee regarding Charles River Dam

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,



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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.



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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