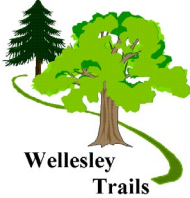




WELLESLEY TRAILS COMMITTEE

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To: Select Board
Community Preservation Committee
Planning Board
Recreation Commission
Natural Resources Commission
School Committee
Zoning Board of Appeal

From: Trails Committee
Date: December 15, 2023
Subject: Trails Committee Statement on Protecting the North 40

The North 40 is 46 acres of open space land purchased from Wellesley College in December of 2014. It is a triangular shaped piece of land bounded by Central Street, Weston Road, and Turner Road.

And while that defines the land, the North 40 means so much more to the town. The natural beauty of our town is one of the reasons so many people have chosen to make Wellesley their home. This space is an irreplaceable natural asset appreciated by a wide range of Wellesleyans throughout the year, and the Wellesley Trails Committee urges that it be preserved as passive open space for future generations to enjoy.

The North 40 Provides Passive Recreation

The many trails that wind through the North 40 are maintained by this Committee and are a fabulous resource that encourages physical and emotional well-being for our citizens.

There is a one-mile loop trail through the North 40 that highlights the beauty and diversity of this open space area. The trail is marked with purple arrow medallions. It goes through a pine forest and wooded areas on a flat and scenic path that is easily walked, accessible via stroller, and used regularly by residents for nature walks, running, walking dogs, family outings, and more. This Committee has been leading guided walks in North 40 since 2014.

The Crosstown Trail is a 6.3-mile trail that traverses the Town from Natick to Newton and goes through the North 40. At the Natick town line, the trail continues along the aqueduct to Pickerel Pond that is maintained by the Natick Trails Committee. Recently, Natick obtained funding to construct a bridge at Pickerel Pond, which will provide a connection to the Cochituate Rail Trail (CRT) and would complete our goal to connect the Wellesley trail system to the expanding MetroWest trails network.

The North 40 also abuts the Morses Pond trails and pond. This fabulous resource provides contiguous trails with the North 40 trails and encourages people to walk or bike rather than take a car to the pond.

The Wellesley High School cross-country running team regularly uses the trails in the North 40, for both training and racing.

The North 40 Houses Historic Community Gardens

The North 40 includes the Weston Road Community Gardens. During World War II, the Botany Department of Wellesley College established Victory Gardens in the North 40 when food was being rationed to support the war effort. Seventy years later, these gardens still provide food and are tended by Wellesley residents who grow everything from sunflowers and cooking herbs to heirloom vegetables and berry bushes. Plots in the community gardens are popular – there's a waiting list – providing a healthy activity for residents of all ages.

In addition to those growing their own produce, the local food pantry receives 20 to 100 pounds of food from the community gardens each week during the harvest season (roughly half their total collection).

The North 40 Supports Local Wildlife

The North 40 includes a vernal pool that creates a protected environment for species that can only survive within its unique habitat. Such species include fairy shrimp, green frogs, American toads, and salamanders. Protecting this pool helps create a healthy ecosystem for our Town's flora and fauna.

The North 40 also is part of a 2.5-mile wildlife corridor that extends from Pickerel Pond in Natick to downtown Wellesley along the historical Cochituate Aqueduct. The corridor facilitates the movement of wildlife by connecting fragmented habitats, which improves population stability and biodiversity.

The North 40 Contains Trees as old as 215 years!

The North 40 houses a multitude of trees and shrubs and many tree-canopied trails. These trees provide walkers with shade from the summer sun and protection from heavy rain and snow. Trees play a critical role in improving air quality by removing air pollutants and greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. The climate crisis makes it mandatory that we protect as many of our trees as we possibly can.

Near the trailhead along Turner Road is a massive white pine tree with multiple limbs close to the ground. This is a seed tree that grew unconstrained in a meadow and is estimated to be 215 years old (DBH 43"). Protecting the North 40 means protecting these ancient trees.

Wellesley has limited protected open space, considerably less than nearby towns

Wellesley boasts numerous enchanting natural assets, yet in comparison to our neighboring towns, our preserved acreage falls notably short. Currently, we safeguard only 900 acres of open space, a stark contrast to Needham's extensive 1,800 acres. Moreover, Lexington, Weston, and Concord have prioritized conservation with 2,112 acres, 1,800 acres, and 1,500 acres, respectively.

Our Recommendation

For all the above reasons, We, the Wellesley Trails Committee, believe the entire 46 acres of the current North 40 should remain in its natural state for passive recreation to be appreciated and enjoyed by our residents for years to come.