



# Warner's Pond Task Force: Meeting 6

*May 21, 2024*



CBI

CATALYZING COLLABORATION

# Goals for Today



- Identify key issues for research and consultation from the 2023 Alternatives Analysis report.
- Get aligned on next steps for future meetings.

# Agenda

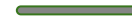
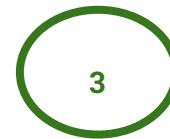
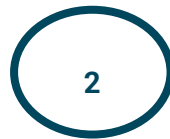


- 5:00 Welcome and Updates
- 5:10 Approve May 9, 2024 Meeting Minutes
- 5:15 Discussion on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report
- 6:20 Update and Discussion on Issue Identification, Work Groups,  
Expert Support, Site Visit, Public Information Session  
and  
Future WPTF meetings
- 6:55 Next Steps
- 7:00 Public Comment (limited to 2 mins per person)
- 7:10 End

# Group Process Arc



**We are here!**



- Clarify mandate, norms & roles
- Share different goals/interests
- Begin to identify shared decision-making criteria

- Develop shared understanding of the facts/issues
- Clarify options
- Identify unanswered questions

- Research unanswered questions
- Bring in experts as needed

- Evaluate options against criteria
- Build consensus
- Decide

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What are your high-level takeaways from the report?*

- **Methodology**
  - Limited number of alternatives considered, centrality of cost constraints
  - Collaboration among town divisions to develop goals
  - Distrust (early conclusion; misleading, inaccurate, contradictory statements)
- **Dam removal**
  - More clarity needed on approach, phases (costs & feasibility)
  - Benefits are well thought out and presented (ecological restoration, fish migration/aquatic organism passage, downstream sediment flow, aquatic invasives, paddling trail, economic burden/safety of dam, funding, Wood Turtle, permanence)
  - Appealing vision but hard to envision the transition
- **Dredging**
  - Project design: limited dredge area, sediment relocation
  - Lack of analysis of larger volumes, disposal options; questions on cost assumptions
  - Negligible reduction of sediment-associated nutrients, recreational benefits due to small dredge area
  - Undervalues importance of pond to West Concord

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What are your high-level takeaways from the report?*

- **Criteria**
  - Comparing project objectives vs. Envision Concord criteria
  - Subjectivity of costs vs. benefits across multiple issues
- **Public input**
  - Insufficient outreach
  - Survey: 54% support dam removal compared with 42% support of dredging
- **Pond condition**
  - Needs to be cleaned (e.g., MassWildlife fish survey, listed as “impaired” by MA DEP)
- **Dam condition**
  - Significant Hazard Potential classification (Class II)

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What (if any) conclusions does this report make that you think are especially relevant to the Task Force's analysis moving forward (whether or not you agree)?*

- Overall analysis of alternatives
  - All options costly, time consuming; not convinced by any of them
  - Goals (Table 1-1) align well with our criteria (70% overlap)
  - Relevance of Table 4-10, comparing goals achieved by each alternative
  - Inevitable transition to vegetated wetland if dam stays in place
  - Alternative designs not studied or evaluated
- Dredging
  - Limited approach = inadequate “band-aid”
- Dam removal
  - Very good from ecological and recreational perspective, but will change character

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What (if any) conclusions does this report make that you think are especially relevant to the Task Force's analysis moving forward (whether or not you agree)?*

- Concerns
  - Contradictions and assumptions: e.g., 1857 date vs. Thoreau writings, dredging costs, reduction in navigable water = “increased recreation”
- Limited community feedback
  - Lack of public input, involvement, clarity on what stakeholder feedback should be considered and how
  - Recreational analysis not informed by Scout's use of Scout Island
  - Abutters not included in preliminary dam removal planning and data analysis

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*Are there questions raised by the report that the Task Force should address in order to fill in knowledge or data gaps? If so, what questions?*

- Pond characteristics
  - What are the trends/rate of change in water quality over time?
  - What do we know/not know about sediment characteristics?
- Holistic thinking
  - What improvements to and connectivity within the overall Gerow Park-Warner's waterbody-Assabet River system are desirable from an ecological and recreational perspective?
- Dredging
  - Will any amount of dredging have a significant positive impact on recreation, given the disconnect with Gerow Park?
  - Will sediment removal improve water quality more broadly? What about in-pond sediment disposal?
  - What is feasible in terms of a more extensive dredge? What are the actual costs/funding sources? Is land next to Rt. 2 really available for all dredged material?
  - What is "polymer flocculant" and how safe is it?
  - Would seeding be needed in the new wetland area in the southwestern cove, how much would it cost, and how would it be accomplished? How would invasives be dealt with?

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report

*Are there questions raised by the report that the Task Force should address in order to fill in knowledge or data gaps? If so, what questions?*

- Dam removal
  - What is a ballpark estimate of state and federal financial support? What criteria are used to determine how competitive the project would be?
  - What is progress towards removal of the Talbot Mills Dam?
  - What are actual benefits to diadromous fish given presence of other dams?
  - Why are different fish and wildlife seen as superior to what has been established for 150+ years?
  - What is the budget/costs for reestablishing 35 acres of wetlands?
  - What does ecological restoration look like (process, timelines, visuals)? How will invasives be dealt with?
  - How can we mitigate impacts on Scout Island's accessibility?
- History/trust issues
  - Why was EA contracted to evaluate three alternatives when dredging was already identified by previous studies and approved at Town Meeting?
  - Why didn't EA use *Envision Concord* criteria for their analysis and did this alter the outcome?
  - Why are there inaccuracies in the report, e.g. discussion of boat and fishing access<sub>10</sub> on Commonwealth Ave., inability to lower water levels with the dam

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What other information about the alternatives does the Task Force need in order to evaluate them effectively?*

- No action
  - Past 5 years of pond upkeep expenses
  - Sediment deposits in north/west area of the pond, and whether it's filling in
  - Safety of the dam
- Dredging
  - Potential for adding fish passage/ladder, good pond habitat for spawning alewife
  - Accurate cost estimates for dredging
  - Different amount of dredging and disposal strategies
  - Impact of sediment removal on water quality/eutrophication
  - Map of areas projected to be free of aquatic vegetation (given slopes, other factors)
  - Possibility of state mandating dam removal if Talbot Mills Dam is removed
- Dam removal
  - Impact of dam removal on property values
  - Likelihood diadromous fish will come to the area
  - Nature of Scout Island if dam removed, and improvements needed to ensure access
  - Downstream impacts of dam removal
  - How changes in base flood elevations are calculated

# Survey Responses on 2023 Alternatives Analysis Report



*What other information about the alternatives does the Task Force need in order to evaluate them effectively?*

- **Recreation**
  - Clarification of desired improvements to the whole Gerow-Pond/Creek-River system, and evaluation of the alternatives' contribution to this system
- **Financial costs**
  - Impact on tax burden of actions beyond \$3M budget
- **Community engagement**
  - How to engage the entire community not just a subset of interested people

# Update and Discussion on Future Issues



- Issues Document
  - *Have we accurately identified the central issues and questions from our discussions to date? What's missing?*
  - *What do you think about these questions as a guide for work group research/consultations, starting at the next meeting?*

# Update and Discussion on Future Issues



- Work groups
  - Poll, then initial convening at next meeting
- Outside experts
  - Q&A upcoming meetings
  - Research support
- Site visit May 25, 9am-12pm
  - Additional date?
- Public information session
  - Mid-June
  - Raising awareness; sharing information and getting feedback on approach and progress
- Future Task Force meetings
  - Cadence, format, scheduling

# Next Steps



- Site visit on May 25, 9am-12pm
  - Additional site visit date based on polling
- Next meeting June 13, 5-7pm, Keyes Road
  - Discussion and Q&A with outside experts, plus initial convening of work groups
- Public meeting in mid-June
- Meeting feedback form
- Documents/materials suggested by Task Force members
  - OARS water quality data (Keith)
  - OARS water temperature logger summary (Delia)
  - EA Sediment Sampling Memo (Delia)
  - Plymouth dam removal study (Jeff)
  - YouTube video on sediments (Sven)
  - Ipswich article? (Paul)

# Public Comment



- Be respectful
- Avoid personal attacks
- Max 2 minutes/speaker



## About CBI

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Our staff are experts in facilitation, mediation, capacity building, citizen engagement, and organizational strategy and development. We are committed to using our skills to build collaboration on today's most significant social, environmental, and economic challenges. We work within and across organizations, sectors, and stakeholder groups.

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