

**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NRC to Offer Amendments to Proposed Plan to Restructure Wellesley
Town Government*****Board Seeks to Retain Independent Role to Protect Public Open Space and the
Environment***

OCTOBER 23, 2015 (Wellesley, MA) – The members of the Wellesley Natural Resources Commission (NRC) will offer amendments to the Town Government Study Committee (TGSC) proposal that will be considered at the Special Town Meeting convening on November 2. The TGSC is proposing sweeping changes to Wellesley's form of government after a review of the current structure. The members of the NRC are concerned that the proposed changes will compromise the ability of the NRC to accomplish its mission to protect the environment, conserve open space, and promote recreation in Wellesley. In their amendments, the members of the NRC will ask Town Meeting to allow the NRC to remain as an independent elected board and department, similar in status to the School Committee and the Municipal Light Plant.

The five-member NRC board, elected by town residents, announced the plan after meeting with a representative of the Town Counsel on October 20th.

"We wholeheartedly support the concept of a town manager and would like to follow the example of other towns, such as Brookline, Winchester, and Weston, that have very effective town managers who work in collaboration with independent elected boards," said Vice Chair Lise Olney, after the recent decision by the NRC board. "In looking at comparable towns, it's clear there is no one-size-fits-all structure for town government – each town has worked out its own particular solution, and we would like to find a balanced solution for Wellesley. The structure proposed by the TGSC would place the NRC several layers down in the Town organizational chart, under the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager, and a Deputy Town Manager. We are deeply concerned that this structure will compromise the independence of the NRC and restrict our ability to execute our environmental mission. For nearly 40 years, the NRC has been an independent voice for environmental concerns in Wellesley, helping maintain the Town's natural beauty and quality of life. We had hoped the changes proposed by TGSC would allow the NRC to continue to function independently. Ultimately, we determined that the proposal of amendments was our only option."

The NRC was created in 1977 in response to public dissatisfaction over how open space was managed in Wellesley. Town Meeting members voted to consolidate the management of open space in an *elected* Natural Resources Commission with a broad mission of stewardship over conservation land, parks, and natural resources, including public education and advocacy. The NRC is charged with the statutory authority and responsibility of Park Commission, Conservation Commission, Tree Wardens, Town Forest Committees, and Forestry and Pest Control Officers. Among other accomplishments, notable NRC projects include:

- the successful campaign to purchase and preserve Centennial Reservation
- the Integrated Pesticide Management program, which limits the use of pesticides on public land, including parks and playing fields
- the restoration of historic Fuller Brook Park
- the ongoing restoration of Morses Pond
- the protection and enhancement of the Town's tree canopy through the Tree Planting program for which Wellesley has received the Tree City USA Award for 32 consecutive years.

“The pressures on Wellesley’s natural resources and open space are increasing with every passing year. As more and more private open space in town is lost to development, we must continue to preserve and protect our public open space. It’s our hope that Town Meeting members will recognize the need for an independent voice for the environment and vote to approve our amendments,” said Olney.

The Wellesley Free Library Board of Trustees has voted to propose a similar amendment, and the Wellesley Board of Health also has submitted an amendment to the TGSC articles.

To learn more about the NRC, go to http://www.wellesleyma.gov/Pages/WellesleyMA_NRC/index

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