



*Spring is in the air* and the first docks of the season are in the water! Let the dreams of summer begin after a cold, icy winter!



**Northern Lights over Willett Pond – October 10, 2024**  
**Photo by Dan Dennehy**

**First let us mention two upcoming events!**

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, we will have our Annual Meeting at the Walpole Police Department at 50 South Street beginning at 7 PM. There's a lot of business to be discussed, questions answered, and boat stickers will be handed out – same general format as usual.

Secondly, we will this year be hosting a “**Willett Pond Appreciation Party**” on Sunday, July 20<sup>th</sup> at Jim and Ann McGrath's house from 2:30 to 5:30 PM, with a RAIN DATE of July 27<sup>th</sup> - so please SAVE THE DATE. We will feature a basic barbecue format with all food provided, including pasta, salad, cheese, plates, beer, and wine –

among other items. Susan Ragland and Rick Sonnenberg are assisting Jim and Ann in this effort. Depending on its success, we would like to institutionalize this to become an annual rotating social event, and we are now working on adding a speaker for 20 to 30 minutes on ecological or other matters of interest to all of us. Please join us for a really fun afternoon! We'll provide more information later on this as we get closer.

In addition to announcing those events, this report will touch on several subjects, including the recent completion of the Lower Level Drain System (LLDS), weed treatment, pond maintenance, budgetary matters, recent board members, changes in officers, and various policy updates, especially those concerning lease matters. We'll also touch on the spillway repair status, (seemingly some progress here it appears), landscaping, and docks, and public access. A fairly wide – ranging and largely positive agenda, so again: please join us for the details!

### **Lower Level Drain System (LLDS)**

As for the now-completed LLDS, where repairs were made to the water flow exit pipes and critical valves were replaced, after nearly 3 years, the Project is now complete and fully functional after nearly 3 years of work and planning. And despite the extended duration of this project, including divers working *under* the ice this winter, the

project cost wound up at \$314,000, plus pending engineering fees, saving about a third off of the originally budgeted \$500,000, with our share of that cost dropping from about \$105,000 to about \$65,000. Congratulations to John Mustonen, Landholding, and the contractors! While the important safety upgrade doesn't fix the much larger outstanding spillway issue, it provide an important safety improvement and certainly should relieve some pressure from the Office of Dam Safety.

## **Landholding Discussions**

You may recall that last year's weed treatment was late, but fortunately weeds were nowhere near as serious an issue as in the past. We have been told that Landholding has received their permits on time this year, we have asked to meet with Landholding's weed expert and we are told treatment dates and scope are now being planned. Stay tuned.

Murray Beach has met with Landholding regarding a budget review, and Landholding currently has plenty of cash for operations. But please do note that, as we discussed in great detail last year, large expenditures on the spillway tend to be made on short notice, So their cash balances can quickly change. But where we are now is a good place versus the alternatives!

Other Landholding discussions now underway concern various aspects of pond maintenance. These include cutting oversize birch trees on the dike, which is normally an annual event, but Landholding overlooked it last year. This is a critical long – term safety issue as any uprooted large birch stumps can destabilize the dike, and Landholding has promised to give us required notice this year before performing this work.

We have additionally asked that the beach gate situation be improved and strengthened. Last year we added a combination lock-box with the key to the gate, but there was still at least one lock sawed off – – PLEASE ASK if you need a code or a key, or if you see tampering with a lock. Several other lesser maintenance matters will be reviewed at the Annual Meeting.

We do want to report that last month several teenagers accessed "Eagle Island" over the ice and had an illegal bonfire and party. Jim Kane at Landholding took immediate action, so thanks to him. REMEMBER: "if you see something, say something!"

## **Adams Farm Access Point**

There is little new news to report on public access regarding the Adams Farm access point. They are developing trails and a small foot bridge over a stream, all per accepted plan. Hopefully this trail will yield only limited usage as it's a long hike and a dead-end location quite far from Adams Farm itself—and there are no plans to add a dock. Incidentally, our new Board member Susan Ragland, who is highly up to speed on public access given her home's proximity to the beach location, will be taking over the Public Access Task Team from Jim McGrath (and prior to that Katie Cissell) shortly.

## **Spillway Update**

Landholding informs us of “good progress” on getting spillway preliminary engineering plans started using the “piano weir” solution. They also claim to have had good initial reception on obtaining public funding - -which as you all know is directly tied to NEPRWA’s original grant of limited public access. After 15 years of discussions and false starts on the spillway repairs, we shall merely wait and see here- of course, seeing is believing. But please note that the very earliest actual spillway work could begin is 2027.

## **Docks and Landscaping**

Docks and landscaping projects are typically periodic and few, but it’s been a busy fall and spring on those ends. As we’ll detail at the meeting, we are continuing to work with Landholding to get common-sense relief from dock length limitations, when necessary for water access, and have facilitated a number of dock approvals this year on that basis. One of those docks required your Board to invest nearly 30 hours of our time – -but we got it done for our fellow abutters as we’ll detail at the Annual Meeting. Currently, we’re also nearly a dozen hours into helping a new Fisher Street abutter get a large landscaping project going. Helping get through red tape with Landholding and ConCom is our commitment to you. Prior wetlands violations on this particular Fisher Street property, by prior owners in 2016, with ConCom fines in the tens of thousands of dollars, only make our job tougher- -so please ask for permission before cutting vegetation. Asking for after-the-fact forgiveness is a bad mistake that always results in inferior outcomes!

## **The 2019 Lease Project**

Administratively, we are undertaking a new and important initiative this spring which we presently intend to complete this summer. The 2019 lease project was by far the largest Pond event in decades, creating long-term assured Pond use via Sublease versus simple biannual renewable Licenses. But there are still approximately 20 abutters who have not yet signed the Sublease, although most of them do pay annual fees. Not signing the Sublease raises liability and other legal issues and is unfair to those of us who have signed. We will therefore be reaching out to these non-signing neighbors individually.

## **Free Riders**

As you may also know, for over two years now we’ve cut the number of non-paying “free-riders” abutters and late payers dramatically, and look forward to eliminating all or nearly all of the remainders soon (well, some will need to wait until houses resell though the outstanding fees accrue at 10% annually). It’s just not right to ask your neighbor to pay your share of preserving your home values on our collective Pond, regardless of individual actual usage.

## **Board Member Changes**

Lastly, we want to report that Murray Beach has recently retired from his role as WPCPA President after 6 years, though he will remain as a Director. Murray has made simply enormous contributions for which we can’t thank him enough. With a steady, unwavering, and fair but firm hand, he has overseen and directed the largest upgrade in the Pond’s governance of over 100 years, and this is not an overstatement. For those who remember 2014 or prior

annual meetings, we now have a far more functional organization today versus our “rag-time ad hoc” beginnings. And we intend to continue to improve our processes and procedures going forward.

Jeremy Ritzenberg has big shoes to fill as our new President as he steps up from his current VP role, and Jim McGrath has agreed to become Vice President, We will additionally make several other changes to our task teams, such as placing Susan Ragland as head of public access, as we mentioned earlier. Jim will be split off from dock approval duty but remain in charge of landscaping given his interest, expertise, and Concom connections there, thus freeing him up a bit to best assist Jeremy. *We will detail more of the anticipated changes at the Annual Meeting. We hope to see you all then!*

Best Wishes,

Your Board of Directors



*Photo by Jim McGrath*