

**MMOC Meeting Minutes**  
**June 12, 2024, ZOOM Meeting, 6:00-7:30pm**  
**As Approved July 12, 2024**  
Minutes prepared by Matt Eddy, MMOC Administrator

**Member Attendees:**

- Kelly Brilliant, Elisabeth Cianciola, Elton Elperin, Parker James, Lisa Kumpf, Arleyn Levee, Sean Lynn-Jones, Kay Mathew, Jack Schleifer (ENC), Tom Timmons, Freddie Veikley; Matt Eddy (MMOC Administrator).

**USACE Attendees:**

- James Newman (Chief of Civil Works), Jennifer Flanagan (MRRP Project Manager), Kristina Ekholm (Chief, Hydrology/Hydraulics/Coastal Section), Tom Mihlbachler (Civil Engineer), Michael Narcisi (Wetland/Soil Scientist), David Bean (Chief, Natural Resource Restoration).

**Other Attendees:**

- Ethan Busch (CRWA), Caroline Reeves, JoAnn Robinson, Carroll Williamson.

**Welcome:**

- MMOC interim chair Kay Mathew welcomed all attendees and brought the meeting to order.

**Discussion with USACE regarding Low Water Levels**

- Kelly Brilliant welcomed James Newman, Chief of Civil Works for the New England District of the US Army Corps of Engineers. She also welcomed others from USACE including David Bean, Kristina Ekholm, Jennifer Flanagan, Tom Mihlbachler, and Michael Narcisi. Kelly framed this discussion as the first of several, with the hope and expectation that we could discuss shared concerns and possible action steps in response to low water levels – particularly in Riverway Park, but also observed elsewhere such as the Upper Fens section of Phase 1.
- Lisa Kumpf spoke on behalf of the MMOC in characterizing the issue and identifying critical challenges.
  - The MMOC takes a holistic view of the Muddy River and the Emerald Necklace, recognizing that continued ecosystem evolution is inevitable and that the hydrological realities of the river intersect with the human cultural experience of the park.

- The MMOC acknowledges the observed successes of the Restoration Project, particularly in relation to flood risk mitigation, bank stabilization, invasive species removal, and new plantings.
- Water levels along the Riverway have dropped in comparison to the period before cofferdam removal (April 2023), exposing significant mudflats and reducing the depth of the river. Lower water levels are persistent and in the context of higher-than-average precipitation.
- Possible consequences identified by the MMOC include:
  - loss of visual distinction between land and river channel;
  - exposure of toxic sediments to the surface, per USACE’s own test data;
  - stagnant water as a breeding ground for mosquitos;
  - increased water temperature and lower dissolved oxygen content;
  - impaired fish passage;
  - newly established habitat for nuisance species invasion;
  - altered height of the water table, potentially harming riparian zone trees; and
  - degradation of the Olmsted aesthetic in a recognized as a critical historic landscape.
- The MMOC appreciates ongoing monitoring of water level by the non-federal sponsors, but also asks that the USACE recognize that the final result of the restoration project is not in keeping with the public’s expectation for a restored river.
- Following a brief overview by James Newman, Kristina Ekholm was the primary respondent for USACE. She presented slides summarizing her hydrological investigations of the river.
  - Flood risk mitigation – the primary goal of the Restoration Project – has been achieved.
  - USACE anticipated a 0.7ft (8.4”) drop in water level upon removal of the Flow Restriction Control Structure (FRCS, or the “cofferdam”); this modeling was presented to the non-federal sponsors prior to cofferdam removal, and that change was deemed acceptable by the non-federal sponsors at the time.
  - Historically, water levels of the Muddy River appear to be regulated largely by the levels of the Charles River Lower Basin, which are regulated by the DCR dam at First Street.
  - Water levels vary seasonally, with higher water in summer and lower water in winter. Further, in late 2023, the dam was operated in such a way that Basin water levels were a few inches below their 16-year running average for that season. USACE is not clear on why DCR made this management choice. [NOTE: Kelly Brilliant reported that, at the Cabinet meeting held on June 13,

Patrice Kish stated that DCR's operation of the dam had not changed and remains consistent with established management procedures.]

- Per USACE calculations, if the Charles were maintained (by DCR) at 108.0ft, Muddy River water levels would be similar to or above pre-construction levels.
  - The cut-down FRCS and the sewer pipe at Work Area 4 now function as “speed-bumps” when the level of the Charles Basin is particularly low. It is anticipated that the absolute low water level upstream of the FRCS is now controlled by the FRCS itself, not the Basin.
  - USACE maintains that the observed mudflats are transient “organic barges.”
  - Water level may also be affected by blockages such as downed trees. USACE recommends that the non-federal sponsors remove downed trees in the river as part of regular maintenance. Possible supplementary dredging may also be a requirement of long-term maintenance by the non-federal sponsors.
  - USACE continues to monitor water levels along the river; this is independent of the work done by CDM-Smith on behalf of the non-federal sponsors.
- Discussion:
    - Sean Lynn-Jones asked, if we consider the mudflats as a problem, how could one address those while maintaining flood risk reduction. James Newman replied that sediment continues to move around; it will settle wherever there is an obstacle to flow, whether that is a dam or a downed tree. Ongoing maintenance will be required.
    - Lisa Kumpf asked: Why didn't the design drawings show a planting plan that would account for lowered water levels and newly exposed ground? Jennifer Flanagan replied that USACE didn't anticipate that the DCR dam operation procedures would change. There is more exposed material than originally anticipated. It is possible that the change in dam operation is a temporary circumstance.
    - Freddie Veikley asked why DCR is operating the dam differently. Answer: no one knows for sure. Maybe it was a response to a particularly rainy winter. It's also possible that removal of “speed bumps” in the river has increased flow rate. Other natural speed bumps may develop over time.
    - Arleyn Levee noted that it's not entirely fair to pin the blame on DCR and the operation of the dam. We need a resolution, particularly due to the degraded aesthetics of the area. Are there new BMPs that the Army could recommend? James Newman replied that USACE is trying to help while recognizing the limits of their authorization for the project. BMPs are outlined in the new Phase 2 Operations and Maintenance Manual.
    - Caroline Reeves noted that there is a lot less mudflat exposure downstream of the FRCS. But her primary concern is impairment of the herring run. Shallow waters could be fatal to the entire run. Caroline also noted that there have been observed changes to how trash moves up and down the river.

- Jack Schleifer agreed with Caroline that the problem is most acute upstream of the FRCS site. What is the future of the remaining portion of the FRCS? Jennifer Flanagan replied that there are no plans to remove the underground portion of the FRCS.
- Jack Schleifer noted that exposed mudflats represent an enlarged management area and therefore a financial burden on the non-federal sponsors. Jennifer replied that she had not heard from the non-federal sponsors about any such concern.
- Kelly wound down the discussion and thanked visiting USACE representatives for their time. She reiterated that she hoped we could have additional meetings in the future, with a focus on solutions rather than diagnosis.

### **Phase 1 and 2 Updates:**

- This is turtle egg-laying season; see recent MMOC social media post for some nice photos provided by a local naturalist.
- The MMOC has received the first round of water quality testing data from CDM-Smith. This report will be reviewed by the Water Quality Subcommittee; a first look at the data suggests persistently high E. coli levels and a few areas where phosphorus is a concern.
- The USACE has provided the MMOC with a draft Phase 2 Interim Operation, Maintenance, Repair, Rehabilitation and Replacement Manual (“O&M Manual, for short). This will be reviewed by both the Water Quality Subcommittee and the Landscape Maintenance Subcommittee. If others are interested, please email Matt to request a copy.
- Thanks to A&M Home Services for what appears to be a solid job cleaning the Phase 1 area and cutting back nuisance vegetation. The area looks well cared for. The LMSC may have some suggestions for maintaining Olmsted-style views of the river at designated locations.
- Turf continues to grow in the fenced-in areas along Brookline Ave. The MMOC encourages Boston Parks to keep the fences up as long as possible to maximize the chances the turf will root deeply.
- The LMSC will begin making recommendations for the future of the far up- and downstream ends of Phase 1, which have become overgrown due to lack of maintenance.
- DCR has planted new trees along Park Drive between Clemente Field and Peterborough St. Water bags are in place. Let’s hope they thrive!
- The previous contractor for Phase 2 – Great Horizons – has been dismissed. Leahy Landscaping has taken over responsibility for maintenance of these sites. They will not only work inside the fences but also in some of the non-project spaces between work areas and the Parkway. So far, the areas seem very well taken care of.
- Invasive knotweed management is becoming an increasing concern, especially along Riverway Park. It grows high enough to block the view of the river. The problem exists

on both the Brookline side and the Boston side. BPRD and ENC are strategizing about how to move forward; they have produced a map of problem areas. Recently, an ENC-led PowerCorps team removed a large section of knotweed between Netherlands Rd and Longwood Ave.

### **Brookline DPW Planned Dredging of Willow Pond:**

- On June 4, 2024, members of the Landscape Maintenance Subcommittee and the Water Quality Subcommittee met with Brookline DPW Project Engineer Sam Downes and Tom Brady to discuss the future of Willow Pond. Dredging operations there are anticipated to begin in early 2025. Approximately 1,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed. The goal is to remove legacy oil contaminants, improve habitat, and establish a mechanism for sustaining the level of the pond at a consistent height. The project will also include bank stabilization and revegetation of the Brookline side of Leverett Pond. More information, including a complete Environmental Impact Report, is available at the DPW website, <https://www.brooklinema.gov/3741/Willow-Pond-Dredging-and-Leverett-Pond-B>

### **Upcoming events of note:**

- Arleyn would like all to know of an upcoming event sponsored by the Friends of Fairsted — [a tour of Riverway Park](#) with 2023 Beveridge Fellow and Olmsted scholar Loic Massias.
- Parker announced the Fenway Transportation Safety Walk with Boston City Councilor Sharon Durkan and State Senator Will Brownsberger, scheduled for June 25 at 4:30pm. <https://partiful.com/e/myBqLMWXRQ8obqc1KzdG>
- The Studio Without Walls annual installation of art along Riverway Park is now open and will run until September 2. Brookline DPW is the primary sponsor.
- Mass Parks for All is hosting a meeting with DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo on Tuesday, June 18 at 7pm. The focus will be on bringing our state parks into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ENC is hosting open houses at the Shattuck Visitor Center highlighting their newly updated exhibits about the Emerald Necklace. The events are scheduled for Tuesday, June 18 at 4pm and Saturday, June 22 at 10am.

### **Public Comment:**

- Caroline Reeves reminded all that the Charlesgate Farmers Market opens Sunday, June 23 and will run every Sunday through October. Part of the goal is to bring attention to the river. All are encouraged to attend.
- Caroline also noted that the launch party for the Watergoat is scheduled for July 14.

**MMOC Member Business:**

- Following motion by Kelly Brilliant and second by Parker James, minutes for the MMOC meeting for May 10, 2024, were approved by unanimous vote (with abstentions from those who were not present for that meeting). Final copies of the minutes will be distributed to MMOC members and will be available on the MMOC website.

Adjourned 7:30PM.