

MMOC Meeting Minutes
December 11, 2024, ZOOM Meeting, 6:00-7:25pm
As approved January 9, 2025
Minutes prepared by Matt Eddy

Member Attendees:

- Tom Brady, Alex Cassie, Elisabeth Cianciola, Parker James, Lisa Kumpf, Arleyn Levee, Sean Lynn-Jones, Karen Mauney-Brodek, Jack Schleifer (ENC), Freddie Veikley; Matt Eddy (MMOC Administrator).

Other Attendees:

- Caroline Reeves, Carroll Williamson, Carl Zimba.

Welcome:

- This is Tom Brady's last meeting representing the Town of Brookline for the MMOC and for the Restoration Project as a whole; he is moving to become the Director of Public Works in Watertown beginning in January 2025. Gathered members thanked Tom for his many years of dedication to the Project and wished him well in his new role.
- We welcomed Alex Cassie, Conservation and Natural Resources Manager for the Town, as Brookline's new representative to the MMOC. Alex introduced himself and summarized his years of experience working in Brookline's parks. When Alex is unable to attend a MMOC meeting, Alexandra Vecchio will serve as the town's rep.

Muddy River Oil Spill:

- Approximately 100 gallons of home heating oil were released into the Muddy River sometime on Sunday, December 8, 2024. The suspected source is the Village Brook Outfall at Leverett Pond. MassDEP (and its contractor, Clean Harbors) is leading the "Immediate Response Action" (IRA), the investigation, and any possible enforcement actions, with support from Brookline, Boston, and other state agencies. DEP's Max Scott is the lead investigator.
- Absorbent booms and pads have been deployed across the river at 11 or 12 different sites stretching from Leverett Pond to the Longwood T station. While MassDEP/Clean Harbors crews continue to clean up oil, it's likely these booms will remain deployed for several weeks.
 - Some oil has escaped the most down-stream booms, and surface sheen has been observed in Justine Mee Liff Park. Additionally, the smell of oil has been detected as far downstream as the Museum of Fine Arts.

- New England Wildlife Center, in cooperation with MassWildlife, has been capturing oil-coated waterfowl and transporting them to veterinary centers for treatment; approximately 50 birds have been captured so far.
 - Members of the public are discouraged from trying to capture birds themselves. Such action risks harm to birds and exposure of citizens to chemical contaminants.
- Observations of additional oil or animals in distress should be reported to the MassDEP release hotline at 1-888-304-1133. More information about contacting MassDEP is available here: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/report-a-spill-or-environmental-emergency>. Lisa Kumpf said that you could ask to speak to Max Stott directly and he would likely take your call.
 - Karen Mauney-Brodek suggested that signage be increased in the Leverett Pond area, including a number to call if additional oil is detected.
- The discharge appears to have occurred in a single pulse rather than a sustained leak.
- The oil contains a red dye that is a common additive to oils for tracing purposes, suggesting the oil is relatively new, not a decades-old discharge. This was also true for the Brook House oil leak in 2023.
- The absence of oil residue in lateral connections to the Village Brook drain suggest the oil entered the stormwater system very near the outfall, but the source/cause remains unknown at this point. Tom emphasized that there is currently *no evidence that Brook House was the source* despite a similar release from that property two years ago.
 - Sean noted that Brook House converted its heating system to natural gas a year ago, with all associated oil tanks and associated pipes having been removed at that time.
- Wednesday's rainstorm may have served to dilute/break up oil patches and/or wash oil further downstream.
- MassDEP will be the primary source of updated information as the investigation continues; Brookline's Maria Rose is in regular communication with MassDEP and can serve as a point of contact.
- The MMOC has produced a blog post summarizing what is known about the spill so far and linking to press releases from our public partners and member organizations. MMOC members are asked to share information about the spill in a responsible way – please do not speculate or propagate unconfirmed claims.

Phase 1 and 2 Updates:

- Through communication with Matt Eddy, Tom Timmons reported that Phase 2 landscape maintenance contracts are currently out for bid; the city will award those contracts before January 1, 2025. Boston Parks is also renewing A&M Home Services' contract for Phase 1 maintenance for an additional year.

- Mudflats at the Carlton St. Footbridge are very large, probably due to the drawing down of water from the lower basin of the Charles. This drawdown is presumably a combination of anticipation of a predicted storm and seasonal adjustments that occur every winter. Matt Eddy made the conjecture that mudflats would remain quite visible until spring – other than during rain events.
 - Sean Lynn-Jones noted that this was the lowest level he'd ever observed in Riverway Park. Lisa added that the drought is also a likely contributing factor (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/drought-status>)
 - Arleyn Levee noted that leaf material being blown into the water at that site was probably having a negative effect. Alex Cassie agreed to ask relevant managers at DPW to find out whether any more leaf clean-up in that area is planned.
- The intersection of Brookline Ave @ Park Drive is quickly returning to a state of compacted mud despite Boston Parks' efforts at restoration there last summer. Jack Schleifer reported that the project proposed by the MMOC's Landscape Maintenance Subcommittee (for soil decompaction and tree protection at that site) would likely occur in early spring – delayed by the drought. ENC will oversee the bid process, and the work will be paid for by Phase 1-specific mitigation funds received from Samuels in an earlier year.
- One of the two curved stone walls at Charlesgate has now been disassembled by DCR's contractor. The area now has lovely sightlines and an open feel. Matt noted that the filter socks and turbidity curtains meant to protect the river there are in poor condition. Jack and Parker James agreed to send photos of those deficiencies to their contacts at DCR.

Willow Pond/Leverett Restoration:

- Alex Cassie and Tom Brady reported that the Town of Brookline is still waiting for final USACE approval of permits for dredging and restoration of Willow Pond and Leverett Pond. There may be some delay in the start of the project in response to the oil spill. While the work will be performed by Brookline, a large proportion of the pond actually lies within Boston, so coordination and communication are ongoing. Sam Downes is the lead project engineer for the Town.

Subcommittee Reports:

- Lisa Kumpf spoke on behalf of the Water Quality Subcommittee:
 - CDM Smith has provided the latest round of post-construction water quality data from their sampling work on October 3, 2024. The winter quarter sampling is scheduled for Friday, December 13. The Water Quality Subcommittee continues to analyze this data; preliminary results suggest that Dissolved Oxygen and E coli are the primary concerns, but dry-weather discharges of ammonia and phosphorus are also concerns.

- Lisa noted that the two-year period of water level monitoring is scheduled to end in April 2025. She expressed hope that the MMOC and the non-federal sponsors would identify next steps shortly after that point in time.
- The WQSC is exploring historical records of the Back Bay Fens provided by Carl Zimba which suggest the water level in the Fens was significantly higher in the early 20th century than it is now. This information may inform ongoing conversations about the future of water level in Riverway Park.
- Discussion to improve the effectiveness of Restoration Project Annual Updates are ongoing.

Member Organization Updates:

- Charlesgate Alliance is speaking in front of the Boston Conservation Commission this evening to present their Request for Determination of Applicability for their plan to plant 11 trees in the Charlesgate area. The MMOC produced a letter of support for the Alliance.
- Jack reported that ENC is undertaking a full inventory of approximately 2,000 trees in the Back Bay Fens, with an expectation that roughly half of those will undergo structural pruning this winter. While there are some mature trees that will unfortunately require removal for safety reasons, ENC has funding for planting additional trees in that area.
- Freddie Veikley stated that she and Marie Fukuda (Fenway Civic Association) are serving on the City’s Shadow Study advisory board. The work of the Study are at an early stage.
- Sean Lynn-Jones announced that the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is hosting a conversation about the future of the beech grove at Longwood Ave Mall. As aging beeches die, they may be replaced by a wider variety of species, but this proposal is controversial.

Updates on Nearby and Adjacent Projects:

- Interested MMOC members will meet with Ben Wan of GODE Architects to discuss the design for the buildings at 142-146 St. Mary’s St. and their potential visual impact on Riverway Park. The Zoom meeting will take place on Monday, December 16. Please reach out to Matt Eddy or Sean Lynn-Jones if you’d like to be included in this meeting.

Public Comment:

- Caroline Reeves announced that DCR will be presenting at the Massachusetts State House on Thursday, December 12 from 10am-12pm. She encouraged all to attend and to support DCR representatives as they lobby for additional funding.

MMOC Business:

- A tentative date for the MMOC retreat has been proposed: Wednesday, February 12. We would host an abbreviated monthly MMOC meeting early that evening and extend the retreat afterwards for 90 minutes or so. More details are forthcoming.
- Matt reported that planning for the office move-out are proceeding according to schedule. Parker has volunteered to assist in an inventory, and others are welcome to help! All MMOC materials will be relocated to a storage locker.
 - Arleyn is in communication with archivists at Massachusetts Historical Society; it is possible that MHS will be the long-term home for MMOC records.
- Approval of the November minutes was postponed until January 2025.
- Our next MMOC meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, January 8, and Wednesday, February 12.

Adjourned 7:25PM.