

Warner's Pond Task Force
Task Force Group Protocols
February 8, 2024

Purpose

The Town of Concord needs to decide what should happen to Warner's Pond to improve the ecological health and recreational capacity of the Warner's Pond system. Many residents and stakeholders care deeply about what happens to Warner's Pond. A decision about what is next has historic, cultural, environmental, recreational, and fiscal implications.

The Warner's Pond Task Force, appointed by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), will review, discuss, and evaluate the options of what to do with the pond system and will present its recommendations to the Natural Resources Commission. The group will learn together about and jointly consider the many implications associated with the choices for what should happen to the pond system. Members will deliberate and seek to reach agreement to the extent possible.

Authority

Members' authority is to develop a shared recommendation for the Natural Resources Commission on a course of action or actions to improve the ecological health and recreational capacity of the Warner's Pond system. The Natural Resources Commission will take recommendations under serious advisement, and act accordingly. Major actions will be brought forward by the NRC to Town Meeting for approval. Task Force members do not have the authority to directly decide what happens to the pond system.

Composition

This Task Force is appointed by the Natural Resources Commission, in consultation with the Town Manager. Its members include community members representing various perspectives, both those who serve on particular boards or committees as well as those who represent other community views. Staff from key Town departments, as well as representatives speaking on behalf of other fundamental interests, serve as ex officio, non-voting members.

Time Commitment

Task Force members will be expected to actively participate over the duration of the project (anticipated to occur from February to December 2024). This will include attending approximately 10 virtual and in-person Task Force meetings, each approximately 2-3 hours for virtual meetings and slightly longer for in-person meetings. Members will be expected to track project related communication between meetings, review materials and draft documents, come prepared to meetings, and follow the expectations described below.

Decision-making

Given the importance of the pond to the Town, Task Force members commit to listening carefully, learning from one another, and seeking to understand each other's perspectives.

The Task Force will seek overwhelming agreement on its final recommendation, defined as at least 75% of voting members. Each Task Force member will have one vote. Agreement may be on a set of options or choices with their advantages and disadvantages clearly articulated.

During final decision-making, members may vote that they 1) endorse and support the final recommendation, 2) that they can live with the recommendation, or 3) that they cannot live with the final

recommendation. Members may also choose to “abstain.” Those who abstain will not be counted in the final tally. The Task Force’s final report will capture the weight of the group’s perspective on the final recommendation as needed, including capturing the key reasons why any who do not support the recommendation are not able/willing to sign on.

Should overwhelming agreement not be obtained on a recommendation, the Task Force will report out areas of agreement and disagreement. The Task Force will note if agreement was not reached due to incomplete information, and what information would be needed to reach a decision. The Task Force will issue only one report.

Meeting planning

With input from the Task Force, the facilitators will work with Town staff to design meeting agendas, work on logistics, prepare draft materials and provide appropriate technical presentations.

Expectations / Ground rules

To foster and open and collaborative discussion, we ask the following of each other:

- Take space/make space
 - Be as present as you can be
 - Contribute: your perspectives are valued
 - Share time, ask questions of each other
- Foster a safe environment for discussions
 - Be honest and respectful
 - Build on each other’s comments and integrate across ideas
 - Presume good intent and attend to the impacts of your actions
- Be an effective participant
 - Attend regularly for continuity
 - Come to meetings prepared
 - Actively participate and contribute, both at and between meetings
 - Keep collective purpose at the center, focus on solutions to bridge differences
 - Stay on track with the agenda
- Communicate thoughtfully
 - Communicate with others — both within and outside meetings — respectfully
 - “No surprises” policy — bring ideas for research to the Task Force for group discussion; be transparent about perspectives on options raised
 - Will not characterize the opinions of other Task Force members or the Task Force as a whole to others

Meeting facilitation

Impartial facilitation support will be provided by staff from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), who will plan and run meetings, coordinate with members between sessions, and help the group work through topics in a logical way.

Note-taking and documentation

The CBI staff will document the group’s progress and be responsible for helping to write up its final recommendation.