

Ware River Watershed Public Access Plan finalized

By Eric Goodhart
Correspondent

BARRE – The people have not only spoken; they have been heard.

Efforts by the Chair of the Ware River Watershed Advisory Council, Jeffrey Schaaf along with the Council members, to continue to allow public access to the watershed paid off at the Sept. 13 meeting, held at Quabbin Regional Middle High School.

The Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Conservation and Recreation presented their final plan that night by the Director of Natural Resources, Dan Clark.

It had been almost three years since the commonwealth began the process in 2019, but the pandemic and lockdowns delayed the proceedings to review the DEP policies every 10 years. But by the time the DEP met via Zoom on Feb. 23, thousands of concerned citizens had heard that some restrictive changes to the Ware River Watershed Public use policies were planned and they were alarmed.

Many were apprehensive at the Rutland Library that night. Many citizens came to hear firsthand about the proposals reducing or eliminating some recreational uses of the Ware River Watershed to ensure that the quality of the water was never contaminated and safe to drink into the future, which appeared not to have been scientifically based on sound research over time.

The question and answer part became heated.

Particularly insightful questions and statements made from two members of the Advisory Council, Dennis Guberski, a Rutland resident and Cynthia Schlener, from Hubbardston, pointed them out.

Anne Gobi, now the newly appointed Director of Rural Affairs, but state Senator at the time, was one of several who said the monitoring and protection



The slide show presented at the Quabbin Regional High School in September lists procedural elements. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

program for both the Quabbin, and the Ware River Watershed has been exemplary year after year.

In fact, they continued to be awarded by the DEP the Public Water System award by performing above and beyond the standards required.

In a very impressive show of concern by citizens when they are informed with the facts and come together to make their views known has clearly shown what can be accomplished from the ground up. At the end of that meeting in February there were over 8,000 citizen signatures presented to the Director Natural Resources, Dan Clark to share with the MA DEP and the EPA in Boston. There were many more comments made on line for a few weeks after the February meeting on the DEP website set up for public feedback.

All of that and spearheaded by Schaaf and the WRWAC Council's efforts have clearly been influential in the overall favorable outcome in the final recommendations made by the DEP announced on Sept. 13.

They are now posted for the public

to see on the www.mass.gov website by searching "2023 Ware River Public Access Plan Final". The pdf illustrates the existing policy, the DEP first draft and the final policy.

Feedback from some of the attendees on Sept. 13, was positive rather than negative in any substantive way.

Perhaps there is still some caution and final review of the plan will be when the WRWAC meets on Thursday, Oct. 5. At that time there will be an official statement made.

Part of the reason for the delay was the newly elected Governor Maura Healey had much on her plate and did not fill the position of Massachusetts Commissioner of the DEP until March. That person is Bonnie Heiple an attorney with an impressive resume with a focus on environmental and water pro-

tection issues.

Healey has said this about her. "As commissioner, Bonnie Heiple will be focused on protecting our residents and our most precious resources from harmful contaminants and the threats of a changing climate."

It seems much state and national and global policy has its origin based on climate change.

In addition, Healey also appointed a new Commissioner of the DCR, Brian Arrigo, former Mayor of Revere. He has already said he wants to be the "longest serving" person in that office. The Commissioner has been replaced six times over the last eight years.

At the end of the Sept. 13 meeting, Clark said that the final plan included a statement that the "Division of Water Supply Protection DWSP will reserve the right to become more restrictive if access issues arise and cannot be resolved." Therefore, the members of the WRWAC urge all citizens using the beautiful natural resources of the Commonwealth, public and private to continue to be careful stewards of the land.

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Brookfield, MA, to operate a West Brookfield Historical Museum. The parcel to be leased is described in the deed recorded with Worcester South District Registry of Deeds at Book 8464, Page 0218.

Proposals are due no later than November 6, 2023, at 10 AM to the Town Administrator's Office, located at 2 East Main Street in West Brookfield, MA. The Proposal Packet is available on line at www.wbrookfield.com or in person in the Town Administrator's Office, Monday through Thursday, 8 AM to 4 PM.

You may contact the Town Administrator with any questions. 10/13, 10/20/2023



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Jim Daley – (508) 867-1417

or via email jdaley@wbrookfield.com

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