



# *Town of Colchester, Connecticut*

127 Norwich Avenue, Colchester, Connecticut 06415

Norton Park Committee

## Letter of Memorandum

Date: September 18, 2023

Attn: Town of Colchester Board of Selectmen

From: Norton Park Committee

Re: Proposed revisions to the Norton Park Plan of Development

Dear Board of Selectmen;

We would like to thank you for your continued support of the development of the Norton Park on the Jeremy River on Westchester Road (Rte 149) and Paper Mill Road. Your award of monies from the ARPA Funds for the development of the park will go a long way towards realizing the reclamation of this formerly industrial space as a Town asset instead of a liability.

As you are aware, the proposed park sits on the site of a former paper mill containing considerable industrial waste that needs to be remediated prior to continuing with development. This process was interrupted by the events surrounding the COVID situation of 2020, which created considerable cost and time implications that are outside the scope and authority of the Norton Park Committee to address. Although the Town has been proactive in these last years in attempting to secure funds to complete the remediation, thus far we have been unsuccessful in acquiring the necessary funds through grants.

This has had the unfortunate effect of indefinitely delaying the development of the park. The committee has recently been hearing from townspeople who have donated to the park development asking for a schedule which we have not been able to provide. This has resulted in a good deal of frustration on their part, even to the request of the return of their donations.

With this in mind, and a desire to make meaningful progress in the near term, we, the Norton Park Committee would like to ask the Board to consider a revision to the Norton Park Plan of Development. This revised plan would allow the Town to proceed with a partial development for a usable park that would neither require, nor impose on, the remediation of the mill site.

By way of background, the proposed park site is divided by Paper Mill Road. The southern portion is the old mill site requiring remediation. The northern portion is clean and currently being used to stockpile clean fill for the remediation process. Once the remediation fill was complete, our intent for the first Phase of development was to use Town stockpiles off site to

infill the mill foundation creating an open field area south of Paper Mill Road, and to the north, provide parking and a naturalized walking area.

Our new proposal is as follows, with diagrams attached:

Rather than wait for remediation of the southern mill site, we would like to develop the parcel north of Paper Mill Road into a usable park space. We would define a gravel parking area, and using the clean fill currently on site, we propose to level an open playing field at an elevation 6 feet above the parking area, with a new stone retaining wall and stairs between them two. In addition, certain features previously intended to be provided in the southern mill area would be relocated to the northern parcel, including picnic tables, a brick patio with engraved bricks purchased by donors, a memorial tree dedicated to a prominent Colchester resident, walking paths and river access for fishing, as well as other minor amenities.

This new plan would allow the Town to proceed with park development that the public could use immediately, while we continue to address funding the remediation of the mill site. The public will be able to see their donations in use, we would have a clear timetable to use time dependent grant monies towards the park development, and may even be able to use the progress on the park as a positive incentive towards obtaining the remediation grants needed to allow the Park to be fully developed. This amended proposal would not impact the plan for the mill parcel in the future, and may even increase Town interest in donations towards its final development.

We realize there are many implications of this plan, for example: the use of fill on site currently intended for remediation, impacts on staging and timing of remediation plans when they become viable, as well as an increased need for professional engineering to accomplish the proposed plan. However, we feel this is a proactive approach to what has been a long and challenging wait with no clear timetable of resolution, and would reinvigorate the people's interest in the park's development.

We are requesting the Board of Selectmen authorize the Committee to proceed with this revised plan for the parcel north of Paper Mill Road, allowing us to advance the project productively.

Thank you for your consideration

Norton Park Committee

Robert Misbach	Chair
Nan Wasniewski	Vice-Chair
Kevin Byrne	Member
Patrick Reading	Member
Julianna Cameron	Member
Andrew Norton	Alternate
Linda Pasternak	Alternate