

## Durham Historic Association Statement Concerning the Mill Pond Dam 2/21/2022

The Durham Historic Association (DHA) finds that the presentation of information to residents regarding the dam – including the answers contained in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document – contains errors, omissions, and biases that advocate for dam removal, instead of carefully balancing community values with a complete scientific evaluation of alternatives. The DHA offers the following points to the community for a fuller understanding of the dam issue before the March 8th vote:

1. The VHB study omits any mention of the much larger, permanent UNH dam one mile upriver, leading many citizens to believe a naturally flowing river will be restored if the Mill Pond Dam is removed. The fact is that the Oyster River will never run wild and free because the 20-foot-high UNH dam, which retains the essential water supply for UNH and Durham, will never be removed.

2. The FAQ document ignores the fact that NH Fish and Game rates the Mill Pond impoundment as the **Highest Ranked Wildlife Habitat in NH**. Removing the dam means the destruction of this 24-acre wildlife preserve, a 375-year-old ecosystem that is home to over 119 species of animals and plants, including endangered and threatened species.

3. Removing the Mill Pond dam without addressing the sources of the Oyster River's pollution will result in a continuous flow of contaminants directly downriver into the Great Bay estuary. The FAQ document identifies the Oyster River as "an impaired waterway," but neglects to explain why. An immediate identification and reduction of point source pollution from fertilizers, pesticides, and impervious surface runoff is needed to improve the Oyster River both above and below the Mill Pond. We are also concerned that removing the dam will unleash an additional flow of contaminants locked in Mill Pond sediments into the fragile environment of the Great Bay. We support an aggressive reduction in pollutants of all kinds to clean up this invaluable natural resource, the Great Bay estuary.

4. With dam removal the Mill Pond will become a **600-ft-long artificial, narrow channel lined with riprap** making the exposed, drained pond ripe for invasives. Draining the Mill Pond and destruction of the current ecosystem removes a significant landscape in the middle of Durham's

Historic District. The vision of this shallow, dug channel is not a return to the pre-colonial, natural landscape of the indigenous people.

5. The NHDES position on dams states that “when a dam is historically significant, dam removal may not be appropriate and other alternatives may need to be considered.” The FAQ fails to mention that the NH Division of Historic Resources is a state agency that strongly supports keeping the Mill Pond Dam for its **historic significance in ten categories**: (1) location; (2) design; (3) materials; (4) workmanship; (5) feeling; (6) association; (7) event; (8) person; (9) archaeology; and (10) architecture/engineering.

6. The VHB Study and FAQ document describe one way to repair the dam through concrete encasement that would damage the integrity of the dam’s design and jeopardize preservation funding. An alternative, offered by Dr. David Gress, a former UNH Civil Engineer and concrete expert who has worked on our dam, is to replace any weakened, load-bearing plates and to repair any damaged concrete. This can be accomplished without damaging the original dam design.

Durham’s Mill Pond Dam represents the long history at the head of tide of the Oyster River used for lumbering, milling, and shipbuilding activities that supported the growth of our town for 300 years. Today the dam retains a valued recreational and cultural resource for the people of Durham. We in the DHA value our historic past and will continue to argue for the preservation of the Mill Pond Dam as a reflection of what has made us who we are.

We encourage voters to think twice...

YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’VE GOT ——’TIL ITS GONE.

Respectfully,

The DHA Executive Board:

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