

The Durham Historic District Commission/Heritage Commission (HDC/HC) reaffirms our support for preserving and protecting the Mill Pond Dam and Pond and supports voting YES on Question 2 on March 8, 2022.

## **Why it should be saved:**

### **Significant Locally and Nationally**

The Mill Pond dam's national significance is recognized by its place on the State Register of Historic Places, listing on the National Register as a resource in the Durham Historic District, and individual eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places – the Nation's premier listing of historical resources – in 10 categories. In 2010 Durham recognized the significance of the dam and pond as an iconic focal element in our community, by supporting its preservation.

### **The Mill Pond Dam as Technological Marvel**

The Mill Pond Dam is an Ambursen type reinforced concrete dam<sup>1</sup>, representing cutting edge technological advances in dam engineering of the early 1900s. Local designer Professor Charles E. Hewitt and builder Daniel Chesley were at the forefront of modern technology in 1913.

### **Correcting Misinformation The Dam is consistent with pre-dam geology and river flow**

**Proponents of dam demolition say** that removal of the dam will result in the restoration of the Oyster River's "natural flow." This is not as clear cut as it may seem.

~~On the contrary,~~ wWhat Valentine Hill built in 1649 for his water-powered mill was at a **natural falls** in the Oyster River. The **natural flow** of the river since before English settlement was a bedrock barrier which formed the head of tide and impounded a freshwater body upstream. The location was known to all as Durham Falls for the next century<sup>2</sup> and more, even after wooden dams and mills were built to utilize the water power.

Retention of the dam is consistent with its long time historical usage and approximates what existed prior to the first dam being built in 1649.

~~Removing the dam will not result in restoring the natural river flow of the Oyster River but rather will create a newly fabricated tidal extension of the estuary.~~

~~Dams are not simply a colonial device. Proponents of dam removal say that dam construction was used by early European settlers in the dispossession of Indigenous People and that dams were a colonial instrument and not utilized by Indigenous People.~~

~~On the contrary,~~ Professor Robert Goodby's ~~has shown that to be untrue.~~ Goodby's work has explored stone dams and weirs built by Native Americans and used for seasonal fish harvests<sup>3</sup>. Indigenous peoples, like people throughout history, managed and stewarded land and water resources in ways that were appropriate to the times. Preserving the dam and freshwater pond is a closer approximation of the pre-European period landscape than a proposed extension of the tidal estuary. ~~does not dishonor the very essential and important history of indigenous peoples presence in the watershed.~~

<sup>1</sup> Laprey, Kari, and Monroe, Lynne. Mill Pond Dam State Register Nomination NHDHR Inventory DUR0018. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, M. P. *Landmarks of Ancient Dover*, 1892. p. 68, 172-3.

<sup>3</sup> Goodby, Robert. Tremblay, Sarah. Bouras, Edward. "The Swanzey Fish Dam." *Northeast Anthropology*. No. 81-82. 2014, pp. 1-22.

## **Conclusion**

It will be a tragedy if we lose a historic, cultural, and recreation resource that is an icon of the unique beauty of our town, only to find that we have destroyed our history to fabricate an inauthentic landscape afflicted by the ongoing environmental problems that plague it now.

*The Durham Heritage Commission 2/6/2022*