

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

The Commission acknowledges the reality of the ecological issues and adverse environmental impacts that exist now in the Oyster River watershed. These include pollution and contamination that will not be resolved by removal of the dam. We believe that these need to be addressed. We do believe that the historical and cultural importance of the Mill Pond Dam makes it essential that we preserve our history while attending to the environmental issues.

We also acknowledge the critical importance of honoring Indigenous history and culture. We are working to broaden our historical narratives in a variety of ways. We do not believe that the presence of the dam is detrimental to honoring Indigenous peoples' culture and heritage.

Why it should be saved:

Significant locally and nationally

The Mill Pond Dam's 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 dam¹, 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.

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.

What 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 long before English settlement was over 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 century² and more, even after wooden dams and mills were built to utilize water power.

Dams are not simply a Colonial device

Professor Robert Goodby's research in New Hampshire has explored stone dams and weirs built by Native Americans and used for seasonal fish harvests³. 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** does not dishonor the very essential and important history of Indigenous peoples' presence in the watershed.

Conclusion

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

Durham Heritage Commission 2/10/2022

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

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

³ Goodby, Robert. Tremblay, Sarah. Bouras, Edward. "The Swanzey Fish Dam." *Northeast Anthropology*. No. 81-82. 2014.