

June 23, 2025

DCR Main Office
10 Park Plaza
Suite 6620
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
William Hickey,
Community Outreach Planning, Design & Resource Protection
mass.parks@mass.gov

Dear Mr. Hickey,

Thank you for speaking with me on Monday, June 23rd, regarding the Back River Watershed Association's concerns about the negative impacts of the construction of a new senior center proposed by the Town of Hingham within the ACEC boundary of Bare Cove Park

As President of the Back River Watershed Association, our mission is to preserve, protect, and promote the Back River and its watershed in Weymouth, Hingham and parts of Abington, Rockland and Braintree. In 1982, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts designated the Weymouth Back River and much of the area abutting it as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. In addition, the Commonwealth recognizes the historic Weymouth Back River a Local Scenic River, a Wildlife Sanctuary, and one of Massachusetts' "Special Places".

As background, Mary F. Toomey, founder of the Back River Watershed Association, worked diligently to protect the Back River and was the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Gulf of Maine Visionary Award. She worked for decades with Dr. Mary Sears, USNC and Oceanographer at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution to save the Weymouth Back River and create nine open-space public parks in the communities of Weymouth and Hingham. Their work resulted in the restoration of the entire Back River area, true champions for our environment. It is the responsibility of both the towns of Weymouth and Hingham to honor the ACEC agreement they share and work to preserve this remarkable natural resource for future generations

The Weymouth Back River serves as the boundary between the towns of Weymouth and Hingham. The two largest parks bordering the river are Great Esker Park on the Weymouth side and Bare Cove Park on the Hingham side. These beautiful forested parks provide critical habitat for many forms of wildlife and aquatic life. There are over 150 species of birds including many rare species listed with the Audubon Society. The Weymouth Back River supports a valuable estuary providing a nursery for over 30 species of native finfish, shell fish, smelt, eel, and the historic Weymouth Herring Run.

We strongly believe we must protect the Weymouth Back River and the surrounding ACEC from the negative impacts of the new senior center planned by the Town of Hingham. Building the proposed 28,000 square foot senior center, parking for 200 vehicles, and other planned amenities will require the removal of nearly five acres of forested land inside the ACEC boundary. This represents a significant loss of critical wildlife habitat within

The Back River Watershed Association is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization organized to preserve, protect, and promote the Back River and its watershed in Weymouth, Hingham, and parts of Abington, Rockland, Holbrook & Braintree.

the ACEC. This loss of habitat would be in addition to the loss resulting from 16 pickleball courts recently approved by the Town of Hingham located within another part of Bare Cove Park. Clearly, building this senior center on land designated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern compromises the spirit of environmentalism and the purpose of an ACEC.

While our organization is well known, we have limited influence on what is happening in the Town of Hingham. We urge you to look into this matter and are hoping that your organization can step in to prevent the development in the proposed location. ACEC's are rare and we all must work together to protect them.

Attached are several links to sites that provide additional information, a graphic that provides some clarity as to the location of the proposed senior center and its proximity to the defined ACEC, and other relevant information.

We sincerely thank you for allowing us to reach out to you. Please contact me if our organization can be of further assistance.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Linda J. DiAngelo



President, Back River Watershed Association
40 Neck Street
Weymouth, MA 02191
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Attachments

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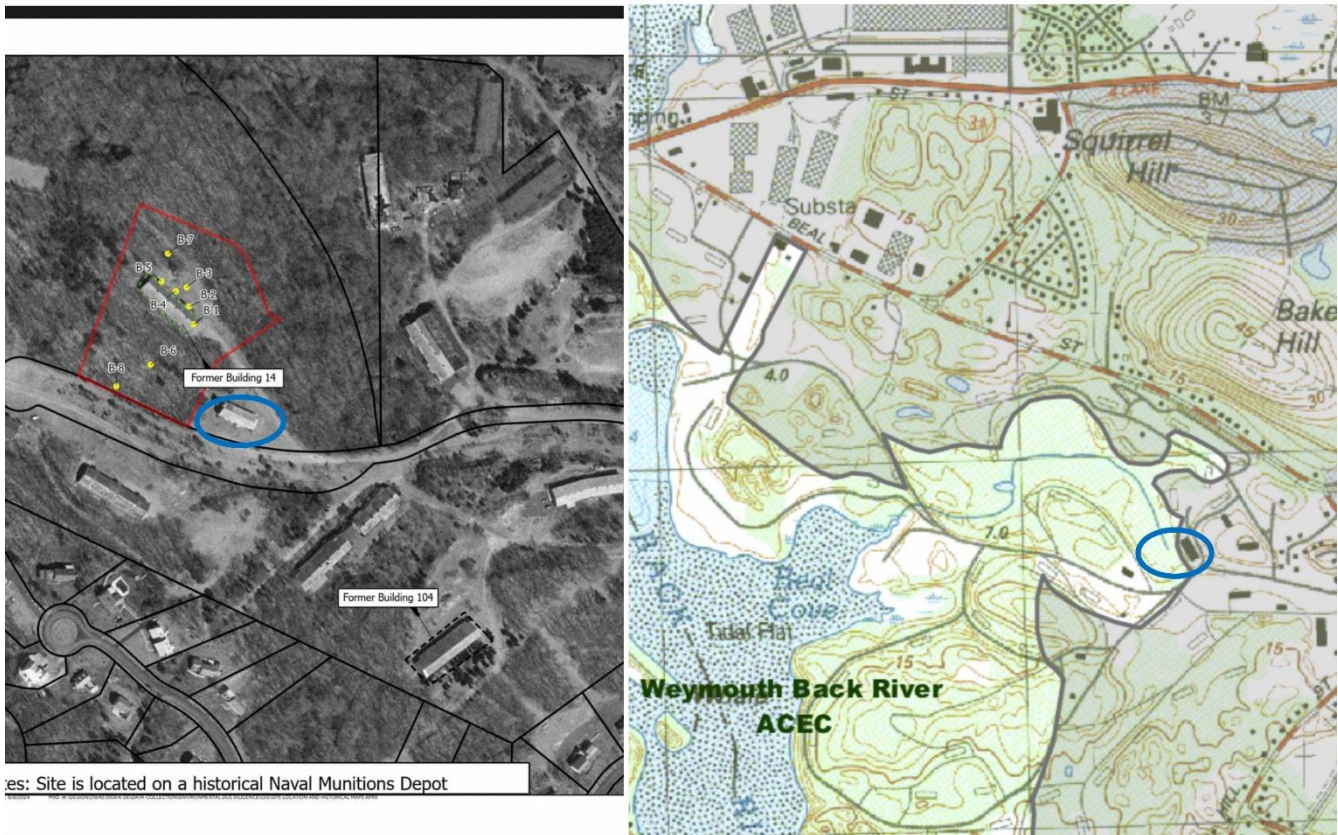
Ecology & ACEC Program - Mass.gov - <https://www.mass.gov/ecology-acec-program>

Weymouth Back River ACEC - Mass.gov - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/weymouth-back-river-acec>

The Ecology of the Weymouth Back River, A Monograph -
https://www.weymouth.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf8386/f/uploads/final_ecology_back_river_3-18-2019.pdf

Center for Active Living Building Committee recommends Bare Cove Park site for new \$33 million senior center - <https://www.hinghamanchor.com/center-for-active-living-building-committee-recommends-bare-cove-park-site-for-new-33-million-senior-cente/>

Site of Proposed Senior Center



Proposed Site Hingham Senior Center (red)

Blue Circle – Location Reference

Excerpt of Back River ACEC Map

Attachments

THE BACK RIVER AREA- A PRICELESS ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

The archeological potential of the Weymouth Back River is probably one of the greatest remaining in the Boston Basin. So much of the coastal areas have been destroyed that little can be learned concerning the various pre-historic cultures which occupied the area for thousands of years.

The Back River is unique, as it is one of the only estuaries which still has a number of the aboriginal sites still preserved in its soils. It should be noted that archeological sites represent an unrenewable resource which can never be replaced.

Estuaries were very attractive to groups of pre-historic peoples. They were a means of transportation in dugouts, and natural food were in plentiful supply. Seasonal anadromous fish could be taken easily. Abundant mudflats were always a source of shellfish. The estuarine environment was generally attractive to many game animals and birds, as it is today.

Members of the Eastern Massachusetts Archeological Research group have been studying the aboriginal occupations of the Back River for thirteen years and are in the process of writing a book entitled The Archeology of the Weymouth Back River. The book will consist of a description of eight different stone age sites the earliest dating back to the late Paleo stage, some 9,000 years old.

A number of late Archaic Cremation and Secondary Burials were recovered with elaborate and exotic grave goods which seem to indicate that the eskers were sometimes used as natural burial mounds.

From the evidence found to date, the Bake River Eskers and Sand Plains were the home of at least eight Eskers and Sand Plains were the home of at least eight pre-historic cultures.

By William F. Bowman

Eastern Massachusetts Archeological
and Geological research, INC.

Attachment



THE ALEWIFE (HERRING)

Habitat

The alewife is a herring which lives in the salt waters of the North Atlantic from Nova Scotia to South Carolina but spawns in fresh water. For this reason, it is considered an anadromous fish.

Physical Characteristics

The alewife is characterized by a greyish-green back, pale silvery sides, large round eyes, a small mouth, and protruding lower jaw. At physical maturity, an alewife is about thirteen inches long, four inches deep, and weighs about a half pound.

Migration/Spawning

The alewives which migrate up the Back River to Whitman's Pond were born there at least three years previously. Their migration takes place when the temperature of the fresh water becomes warmer than the salt water. In Weymouth this usually occurs from April through May. Once the fish enter fresh water, they do not eat until after spawning.

When they have reached the pond, each female alewife deposits thousands of tiny pink eggs, which are immediately fertilized by the milt of the male and then sink to the bottom of the pond. Spawning completed, the alewives feed on algae and then begin their return trip, swimming backward to slow their descent.

The baby fish are born within a week of spawning, and during their first months of life travel in schools along the shallow edges of Whitman's Pond eating algae which could otherwise

clog the pond. Accordingly, the larger the number of alewives that get into Whitman's Pond, the healthier and cleaner it will be.

When the juvenile alewives are one inch long or more, they too make their descent down the ladders and out to sea.

As a Source of Food

Alewives are a valuable food resource to man and wild-life alike. They were a primary diet staple of early colonists and Indians. Today they are usually pickled, smoked or salted. They also provide sustenance for the other fish in Whitman's Pond, in Back River, and offshore. Commercial and sports fishermen often use herring for bait, particularly for lobster and bass.

Man's Role in their Preservation

Although alewives are such a valuable resource as a food and in controlling algae in our ponds, man is their greatest foe because he pollutes their streams and provides obstacles of all kinds for the tired herring.

It is important not to touch the alewives during their migration. They have delicate scales which once touched can hurt their chances for survival. Furthermore, people trying to lift them over the fish ladders can stun them and cause them to be easily swept back.

The Weymouth Herring Run provides a focal point for the community and a reminder of man's dependence on nature. People should take a pride and interest in this precious resource.



TOWN OF WEYMOUTH
HERRING RUN COMMITTEE

"THE HERRING ARE IN AT WEYMOUTH"



Herring Run
1947

"Somewhere in the depths of the ocean each Weymouth born herring remembers Whitman's Pond, and comes to it directionless from the sea. How do the creatures find their way? Whatever the reason, the herring are in at Weymouth, breasting the brook's overflow to their ancestral pond."

Henry Beston, "The Outermost House"