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Joint Statement from City Departments on Summer Recreation in Leeds

The City of Northampton hereby issues this statement about the city's approach to summer recreation in Leeds concerning activities in and around the Orange Dam. The city is keenly aware of the noise, trash, parking, and other associated problems caused by people understandably using this area for recreation.

The city deeply sympathizes with the residents of Leeds affected by this situation. The Mayor's Office, working with representatives from the Police Department, Fire Rescue, Planning & Sustainability, Emergency Dispatch, Department of Public Works, the Office of Parking Enforcement, and the City Solicitor, has developed this response policy in an effort to clearly communicate where there is a role for the city, and where there is no role for the city.

Below is the city's approach to each of these issues for the summer of 2021:

Changes to Parking Ordinance:

Last year, we explored short-term parking bans designed to ensure public safety access to the neighborhood and the safe flow of pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle traffic on streets not designed to handle the level of traffic and parking present during peak recreational usage. Based on this experience, we have submitted a list of permanent recommended parking changes to the City Council for passage on Front Street, Grove Avenue, Florence Street, and Main Street. We expect these changes will ensure road safety and the ability for emergency vehicles and equipment to navigate the area. Enforcement in the form of ticketing and towing will begin shortly after the City Council approves all of the proposed changes.

Managing Trash:

Leeds residents, the Leeds Civic Association and their partners, the Office of Planning and Sustainability (for city land only), and Chartpak, will regularly check for and remove waste from the area. Consistent with citywide efforts, recreational users are being encouraged to 'Carry in - Carry out' all materials and trash they bring to any river site.

Planning & Sustainability is in the process of hiring a part-time 'river steward' to caretake the Mill River and the Connecticut River Greenway, which is city-owned conservation land. The steward will assist

with education and clean-up. The steward will work to educate users to improve compliance with Conservation Commission regulations on such things as fires and behaviors that damage the property.

Chartpak had committed to thrice-weekly trash pickups on their property, and the city will join the Leeds Civic Association in asking that this continue in 2021.

Last week, upon a request from the Mayor, the Conservation Commission, and Planning & Sustainability, the City Council approved an order to acquire the 1.5 acre 'unknown owner' property north of Chartpak's land and south of the existing Mill River Greenway. As of today, this is now city land. City ownership of this parcel will clarify responsibility in every type of response on this land.

Quality of Life Issues:

Residents have made it clear to the city and the community that the levels of noise, around the dam especially, are significantly impacting the quiet enjoyment of their homes. The Leeds Civic Association reports that Chartpak has committed to hiring a "roving" security guard this summer who will check the dam hourly and ask trespassers to leave. If there is a serious problem, their security guard will call the police. The city is grateful that Chartpak is engaged in conversation with residents and has taken meaningful steps towards addressing challenges at the dam, and we are confident that the combined effect of everyone's efforts will result in a positive impact on the dam's neighbors.

The Northampton Police Department will continue to respond when called by residents for crimes being committed when they have available personnel. Northampton Police will *not* respond to noise complaints or trespassing complaints in this area, as city ordinances generally do not support such enforcement. The city has no wish to issue criminal trespassing charges against families swimming in the river, and there is no civil option for the city to invoke on private property. Likewise, the river steward, Planning & Sustainability, and the Conservation Commission are not undertaking enforcement actions but will alert Police and Fire when necessary.

The Northampton Fire Rescue Department will continue to respond to reports of large and dangerous fires in the area when called, but will not respond to calls about cooking fires. Northampton Fire Rescue does not have the resources or the inclination to monitor that level of activity and needs to be ready to respond to other emergency situations. Residents are urged to only call in case of a true emergency.

Longer-term

The city continues to explore the possibility of securing federal or state funding to create municipally-owned and managed swimming and picnic areas to meet some of the clear community demand. The city is examining various locations on the Mill River and the Connecticut River. Planning & Sustainability has moderated public forums to explore this idea and to work to make it a reality.

Again, the city is grateful for the engagement and assistance of Leeds residents as we all work through this complex issue and try to chart a balanced and appropriate response. We will continue to update everyone in the city as we monitor the effectiveness of our and Chartpak's approach to the Orange dam.

Thank you,

Mayor David Narkewicz

Police Chief Jody Kasper
Fire Rescue Chief Jon Davine
Director of Emergency Dispatch Kelly Schuetze
Director of Public Works Donna LaScaleia
Director of Planning & Sustainability Wayne Feiden
City Solicitor Alan Seewald
Parking Enforcement Administrator Nanci Forrestall