

# Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 3, No. 1

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

January 2002

## *Better Crosswalk Design Makes Streets Safer*

*By Sharon Vanderslice*

Residents of Belmont's busiest streets have long complained about cars and trucks that whiz by their front doors at breakneck speeds, seemingly oblivious of the fact that they are traveling through residential neighborhoods. Crossing the street in these areas, even at a designated crosswalk, can be hazardous. Just a year ago, a woman was struck by a car in a crosswalk in Belmont Center.

Lowering the state-mandated speed limits or increasing police enforcement might help, but traffic engineers say the most effective way to slow traffic in residential areas is through various roadway improvements known as "traffic-calming measures." Such measures, which may be as simple as painting a crosswalk with wider stripes or installing curbing on a street that has none, have the psychological effect of making motorists more cautious.

The City of Cambridge has begun to install international-style crosswalks at key intersections and Arlington's Town Meeting recently passed a warrant article encouraging their use, especially near schools and senior citizens' facilities. These crosswalks have closely spaced two-foot stripes applied with a white plastic that does not fade over time. According to Paolo Marinelli, a former Belmont firefighter/EMT who now works in Cambridge, this thermoplastic, which is superheated and then melted onto the roadway, costs "ten times more than regular latex paint but lasts ten times longer." It also has some "reflectiveness," which makes it more visible at night. Crosswalks made of just two white lines are "antiquated," said Marinelli.

"All you're doing is channeling where people are going to get killed."

Generally wider than standard crosswalks (from eight to thirty feet, depending on the location) and sometimes combined with yellow cones labeled "Stop for Pedestrians," international-style crossings are easier for drivers to spot from a distance. They also discourage jaywalking, because they are easier for pedestrians to see. Crosswalks like these were recently placed on Concord Avenue in Cambridge between Belmont and the Fresh Pond Rotary.

Motorists tend to proceed even more cautiously at a crosswalk that is raised slightly and constructed of a material different from the rest of the roadway (cobblestone, for instance). This design is best used near schools or in historic downtown areas, where pedestrian safety is a top priority. A particularly effective crossing of this kind can be seen on Rindge Avenue in Cambridge near the Fitzgerald School.

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## Environmental Events Calendar

**Fuel-Efficient Vehicles.** Citizens concerned about greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles are encouraged to attend a strategy and event-planning meeting held by Massachusetts Climate Action Network on **Thursday, January 24 at 7 p.m.** at MASSPIRG, 29 Temple Place, Boston, in the fifth floor conference room. This committee is mapping out specific goals for the Campaign for Fuel-Efficient Vehicles in Massachusetts. If you plan to attend, contact Marc Breslow at [mbreslow@neaction.org](mailto:mbreslow@neaction.org) to get minutes of a previous meeting.

**Tools for Watershed Protection: A Workshop for Local Government.** This free, two-day workshop, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will explore ways for a community to encourage high-quality development while protecting vital water resources. It meets **Thursday, January 24** and **Friday, January 25** at the Colonnade Hotel, 120 Huntington Avenue, Boston.

### Belmont Citizens Forum Officers and Trustees

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Belmont Citizens Forum, Inc.  
is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums on key subjects. Our newsletter is published six times a year (January, March, May, July, September, and November). Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Letters to the editor may be sent to  
P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478.

For registration and information, contact Ellen Barros at (508) 833-6600 ext. 101 or at [ebarros@horsleywitten.com](mailto:ebarros@horsleywitten.com)

**Bird Walks with Children.** Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary in Belmont is offering two programs for children accompanied by an adult. "Night Owls," for ages 3-10 on **Friday, January 25 from 6 to 7:30 p.m.**, will explore how owls live, hunt, and raise their young. In "For the Birds," for ages 3-6 on **Wednesday, February 13 from 1-2:30 p.m.**, participants will make a "valentine" to take home for the birds in their own backyard. Call (617) 489-5050 for registration information.

**"Flood Alert!" Regional Water Forum.** Officials from Arlington, Belmont, Cambridge, and state agencies will explore the causes of flooding and poor water quality in the Alewife area and discuss corrective action. Concerned residents are urged to attend on **Thursday, January 31, 7 - 9 p.m.**, at Beth El Temple Auditorium, 2 Concord Avenue, Belmont. For more information, see page 7.

**Art Exhibit.** Ann Coit Sifneos, who does the drawings for this newsletter, will be having an exhibit of her oil paintings **February 2 through 23** in the First Floor Gallery (Right) at the Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central Street (Route 135), Natick. The building, worth seeing in itself, is a handsome combination of old brick construction and contemporary architectural styling. For hours and directions, call (508) 647-6520.

**The Middlesex Canal and the Mystic River Watershed.** A talk by David Dettinger, a member of the Middlesex Canal Association, on the canal and its role in the history of the watershed is set for **Wednesday, February 6 at 7:30 p.m.** in the Community Room of the Winchester Public Library, 80 Washington Street, Winchester Center. For more information, contact the Mystic River Watershed Association at (781) 316-3438 or [jskovnr@gis.net](mailto:jskovnr@gis.net)

**Woody Plants in Winter.** Learn to identify trees and shrubs by their bark, buds, and branching patterns on **Saturday, March 2 from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.** at Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary in Belmont. For registration, call (617) 489-5050.

# 18 Acres Near Belmont Border To Be Protected

By Ellen Mass

In September 2001, the Cambridge City Council agreed to change the zoning of a 26-acre parcel of land occupied by Arthur D. Little, Inc., between Route 2 and the Metropolitan District Commission's (MDC's) Alewife Reservation. The zoning agreement allows the property owner, Bulfinch Cos., of Needham, to construct office buildings up to 90 feet tall with two above-ground parking garages on land currently leased to A. D. Little, while preserving other significant acreage as open space.

According to Richard McKinnon, who manages the property for Bulfinch, approximately 18 acres of floodplain within 200 feet or more of Little River will be either protected or restored.

The plan, negotiated with the Cambridge Ordinance Committee, requires Bulfinch to restore 4.2 acres of land that it currently rents from the MDC for use as a parking lot, demolish two large buildings and several smaller buildings on 3.8 acres abutting the north side of Little River, and protect an additional 10.8 acres of private property.

Neighborhood and environmental groups, although disappointed with the size of the new buildings, hope that large sections of the open space will be planted with native wetland vegetation. Restoration with appropriate plants would have the two-fold benefit of ameliorating the often severe flooding in the area and expanding habitat for wildlife in the adjacent Alewife Reservation.

A canoe launching area is also a possibility; this would make it easier to use canoes for cleanups and recreational outings in the reservation.

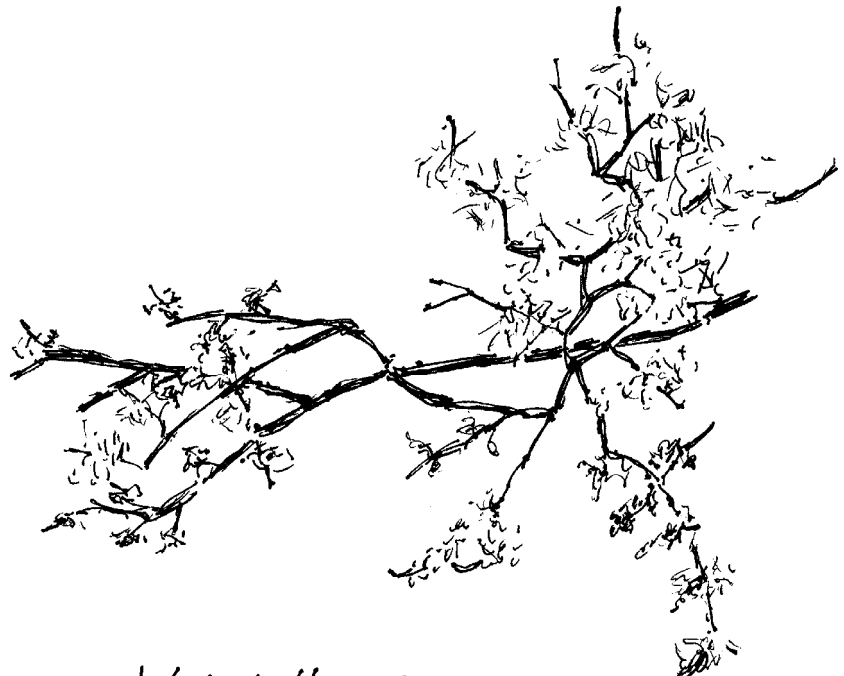
Accessible primarily by walking trails, the reservation is home to over 100 species of birds, including sandpipers, plovers, hawks, wild turkeys, and great blue herons. Fox, mink, rabbits, muskrats, and painted turtles have also been sighted.

Every spring, alewife herring swim up from the Atlantic Ocean, through Little River to Little Pond in Belmont, to spawn. In the fall, the fingerlings return downstream to their saltwater source. (Once an important industry in the area, herring seining gave northwest Cambridge its Alewife name.) While herring sightings have declined in recent years, expanding the wetlands along Little River could have a positive effect on the fish population, partly because runoff from the old MDC parking lot would be eliminated.

The zoning adopted for the property requires that Bulfinch apply for a special permit. The owner must submit landscape and restoration plans for approval by the Cambridge Planning Board, the MDC, and the Cambridge Conservation Commission and bear the cost of implementing the plan. Bulfinch may not proceed with construction of new buildings without first posting a bond equal to the cost of restoration.

A group of volunteers to monitor the process, work with the company, and present ideas for restoration to the contracted parties could be most useful.

*Ellen Mass is president of the Friends of Alewife Reservation and a member of the Mystic River Watershed Association. She is a frequent visitor to the reservation.*



*Witch Hazel*

# Street Architecture Affects Driver Psychology,

*Continued from page 1*

Shortening the length or span of a crosswalk also makes it dramatically safer. This is done either by creating “bump-outs” (i.e., extending the curbing out into the street on either side of the crosswalk, so that the crossing distance is effectively shortened) or by constructing islands or medians in the middle of the street so as to narrow the travel lanes on either side.

Residents living near Trapelo Road have suggested that a raised median be installed to narrow this unnecessarily wide roadway, which was originally designed to accommodate streetcars. Psychologically, wide swaths of asphalt encourage drivers to step on the gas. Median strips, on the other hand, narrow lane widths and help prevent accidents by reducing so-called points of conflict, or places where turns are allowed.

## **Narrowing Roadway Reduces Vehicle Speeds**

Physically narrowing the roadway reduces vehicle speeds by 9 to 14 miles per hour. The quickest way to do this is with colored paint—by converting

some of the excess asphalt into a painted shoulder or bicycle lane.

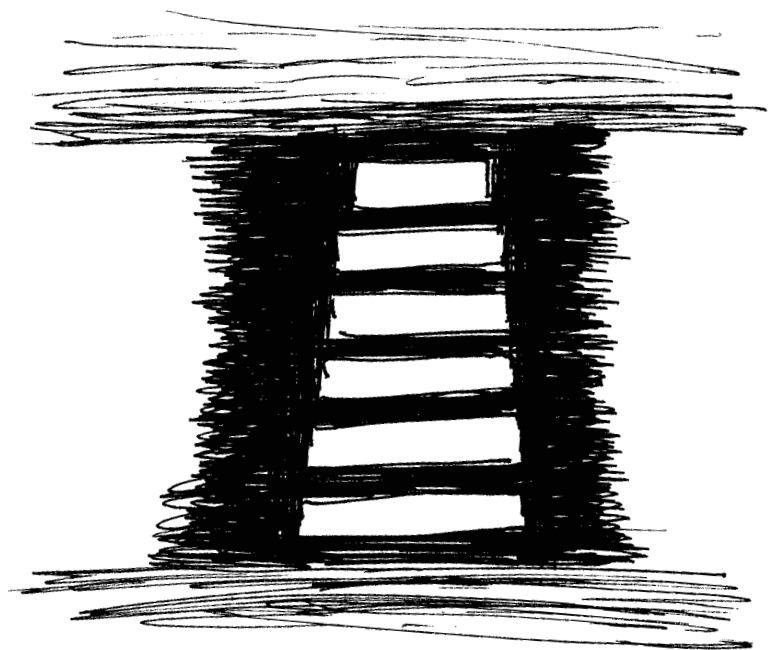
Traffic engineers say that any street with vehicle speeds in excess of 20 mph can benefit from the addition of a bicycle lane, because such lanes make both car and bicycle movements more predictable.

Obviously, encouraging bicycle use can reduce the number of daily car trips on any given stretch of road. “More people will ride bikes if they feel safer,” said EMT Marinelli. “In Europe, this is a respected mode of transportation. But here,” he lamented, “we’ve reduced the bicycle to a toy.”

A bicycle lane, demarcated with white lines, was added to Concord Avenue in Belmont a year and a half ago, but some motorists drive right down the middle of it or use it to pass other cars on the right. A bike lane made of colored asphalt or just filled in with colored paint would visually narrow the roadway so that drivers see only one travel lane, even though the curb-to-curb width remains the same.

Roadways also can be narrowed by installing, or expanding the width of, sidewalks on either side of the street; by adding landscaped areas; or by using some of the roadway for on-street parallel parking.

*A crosswalk that conforms to international design specifications is at least eight feet wide and has closely spaced, two-foot stripes applied with reflective thermoplastic. It is easily seen from a distance by both motorists and pedestrians.*



# Can Calm Traffic and Make Town More Livable

Two years ago, Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee suggested that such improvements be made to Belmont Center. Leonard Street has, unfortunately, become a favorite cut-through route for commuters trying to avoid congestion on Route 2. At the same time, this area probably has more pedestrians than any other place in town. Shoppers, students, visitors to the Town Hall complex and to various banks, restaurants, and medical offices, and those walking to the bus stop and commuter rail station, come and go all day long. But the high traffic volume and the width of the streets make crossing hazardous.

Like other business districts in town, Leonard Street formerly accommodated angle parking. This was discontinued when traffic volume increased and it became unsafe for drivers to back out of these parking spots. However, the roadway remains as wide as it was originally.

The Traffic Committee's proposal was designed to make the entire district less accident-prone and more appealing to shoppers by widening the sidewalks, adding more outdoor seating and landscaping, and shortening crosswalks through the creation of "neck-downs." A neck-down is created by bumping out the curbing at the mouth of a street so that the travel lane is narrowed to 14 feet or less. This creates a tighter turning radius for motorists entering or exiting the street, forcing them to slow down. Wide-mouth intersections like those at Leonard and Channing or Channing and Cross could be made considerably safer through the use of neck-downs.

Landscaping treatments, when used in conjunction with other traffic-calming measures, make the street part of a place rather than just a through route. Low-growing shrubs, flowers, and properly trimmed trees tighten the roadway visually, help keep the street cool in hot weather, reduce water run-off, improve property values, and increase pride in the neighborhood.

## Traffic Circles Prevent Accidents

Roundabouts, jokingly referred to as "circles of death" by some nervous Massachusetts drivers, actually have been found to reduce motor vehicle crashes

by up to 90 percent. These raised circular islands, constructed at the center of busy intersections in place of stop signs or traffic signals, have the dual effect of slowing drivers approaching the intersection and reducing backups on the streets that feed them. Instead of making left turns, drivers proceed counterclockwise around the circle until they reach their desired street. At least one traffic engineer has suggested a mini-circle of this type at the intersection of Concord and Common Streets next to the railroad bridge. This bottleneck has been the site of hundreds of accidents over the years, gives the right-of-way to no one in particular, and is completely impassable for pedestrians. Cyclists attempting to make a left turn at this intersection are putting their lives in jeopardy. Indeed, the Concord Avenue bike lane ends abruptly here.

Other major intersections in town that could benefit from redesign are those at Grove and Washington Streets near the Cambridge border and at Mill Street and Concord Avenue on the way to Lexington. Like

*continued on next page*

## Discuss Crosswalk Design in Belmont

**Wednesday, January 23  
7:30 p.m.**

If you are interested in improving pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as traffic flow in town, please come to the next meeting of the Belmont Citizens Forum Traffic and Transportation Committee. We will be discussing the advantages of the international crosswalk design and planning other transportation initiatives.

**For directions, call (617) 484-1844.**

## Traffic Calming, *continued from page 5*

junctions in many New England towns, these two predate the invention of the automobile. The Traffic Advisory Committee's attempts to modify them into standard T-shaped intersections have met with resistance from some local residents. To date, they remain confusing to motorists and dangerous for those who would like to be able to walk or bike through them.

## Good Street Architecture Builds Community

Ultimately, the way we design our roads affects the psychology of the residents as well as the psychology of the drivers. If we want to maintain the integrity of Belmont as a residential community rather than a commuter crossroads, as a town of neighborhoods rather than of throughways, we have to proclaim it in the architecture of our streets. It is in the nature of the commuter to find the path of least resistance. Why should we allow Belmont to become that path?

The exhortation to "take back our town," which

has been used in other contexts in the town's political history, could just as easily become a rallying cry for the hundreds of Belmont citizens who feel physically threatened by automobile traffic: schoolchildren, senior citizens, users of public transportation, cyclists, shoppers, joggers, dog walkers, parents with strollers, and anyone simply trying to cross the road with a cup of coffee.

Pedestrian-friendly streets would make Belmont more livable for everyone by reducing pollution, congestion, and noise and by increasing the opportunities for face-to-face meetings between those who live and work here.

More detailed information on traffic-calming measures and how to plan for them is available from the Center for Livable Communities, producers of a handbook called *Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars: A Citizens Guide to Traffic Calming*, at [www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org) or from Transportation Alternatives, a walking and biking advocacy group, at [www.transalt.org](http://www.transalt.org)

*Sharon Vanderslice is a resident of Pleasant Street and a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 2.*



*Clay Pit Pond*

# Regional Water Forum Focuses on Alewife Area

By *Evanthia Malliris*

In past years, Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge have experienced severe localized flooding in the Alewife region, which was formerly covered by what was known as the Great Swamp. The discharge of untreated sewage into Alewife Brook makes this flooding even more intolerable. The area will probably continue to experience problems unless all three communities take action.

On January 31, a Flood Alert forum will bring together key municipal officials from the three communities with the public for the first time so that they can define the problems associated with flooding and poor water quality, explore the causes, and discuss corrective actions. The event, sponsored jointly by the Belmont Citizens Forum and the Mystic River Watershed Association, will be held from 7-9 p.m. in the auditorium of the Beth El Temple, 2 Concord Avenue at Blanchard Road, in Belmont. Maria Van Dusen, former head of the Massachusetts Riverways Program, will be the forum moderator. Municipal representatives from Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge and regional experts will participate.

Grace I. Perez, executive director of the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), will outline the challenges facing the Alewife area and explain the relation between flooding, sewage back-up, and stream pollution, and their effect on the Mystic River watershed. "Flooding and other water-related problems ignore town boundaries. The Alewife area deserves to be looked at as a whole, rather than as fragments of three separate communities," stated Ms. Perez.

Richard Bento, Arlington director of Public Works, Tom Gatzunis, Belmont town engineer, and Owen O'Riordan, Cambridge City engineer, will discuss their communities' water-quality and -quantity

issues as well as current action plans. There will be ample time for questions from the audience. To make the Q & A period more informative, the Belmont Citizens Forum and the MyWRA are also inviting a number of experts, including the Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions of each of the communities, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, and various state regulators.

All three communities have contributed to flooding problems in the area.

For example, Belmont sends over 50 percent of its stormwater into Little River and Alewife Brook, where it intensifies flooding in Arlington and Cambridge when heavy precipitation occurs. A number of combined sewer overflows along Alewife Brook, managed by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority and the City of Cambridge, routinely discharge large quantities of untreated sewage during storms. A massive sewer-

separation project in Cambridge is underway to reduce these discharges, and controversial plans have been put forth for a large stormwater detention basin in the Metropolitan District Commission's Alewife Reservation. Each of these plays a role in Alewife's "water budget."

Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge are now under U. S. Environmental Protection Agency orders to identify and remove all illicit sewer connections that empty sewage into streams and rivers instead of directing it to the sewage treatment facility at Deer Island. In Arlington and Belmont, where sanitary sewers and storm drains are officially separate, it is believed that plumbing from a number of homes is still connected to storm drains. Additionally, the infiltration of stormwater into the sanitary sewer pipes is so severe that some homeowners get sewage backup in their basements.

Concerned residents are urged to bring their questions and comments to this important forum.

## **"Flood Alert!"**

**A public water forum**

**Thursday, January 31  
7-9 p.m.**

**Beth El Temple Auditorium  
2 Concord Avenue  
at Blanchard Road  
Belmont**

# Public Comment Sought on Proposed Noise Bylaw

Three years ago, a committee was convened by the Board of Selectmen to review and suggest revisions to Belmont's existing Noise Bylaw, Article 23 of the General ByLaws. The recommendations of that committee will be presented and discussed at a public hearing on Tuesday, January 29 at 7:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School.

Gladys Unger, Chair of the Noise ByLaw Review Committee, told the selectmen last month that the committee's goal was to make the bylaw both more realistic and easier to enforce. The committee tried to strike a balance, she said, between people's need for quiet and their need for activity.

There are two sets of regulations: one for schools, churches, hospitals, and residences and one for commercial properties. Construction noise would

be limited to an average of 70 dBA measured at least 50 feet away over a ten-minute interval. Impact noise (noise created by jackhammers and pile drivers) would be allowed to reach 90dBA.

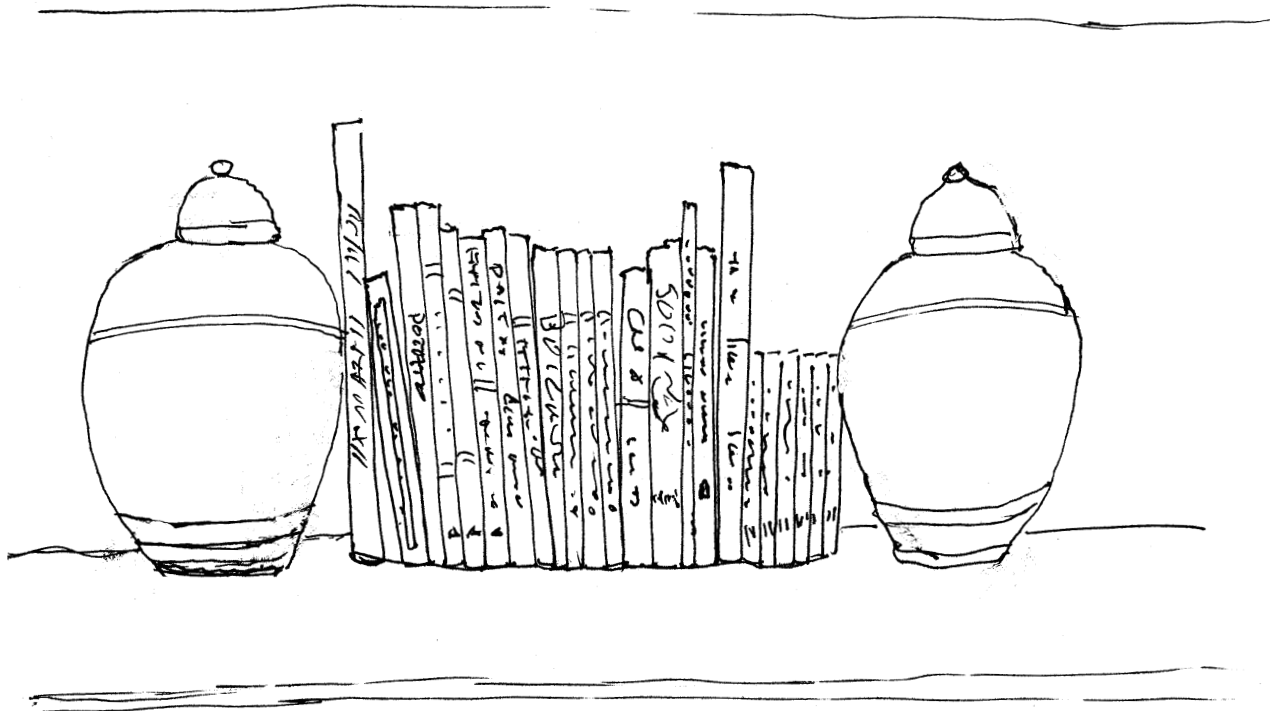
The penalty structure for violations would change, with fines escalating for each successive infraction. Construction could be halted by the Office of Community Development if the work was not in compliance.

Some noise would not be covered by the new bylaw: barking dogs and leaf blowers, for instance.

At this hearing, the committee will explain the rationale for the changes it is proposing and solicit questions and comments from the public.

Copies of the report of the Noise ByLaw Review Committee are available on the Town of Belmont website: [www.town.belmont.ma.us](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us). Click on Public Documents and then scroll down the list to "Report to the Selectmen on the Proposed Noise By-Law". Limited copies of the report are also available at the main library, near the front door.

Reading through the report prior to the meeting will facilitate the discussion.





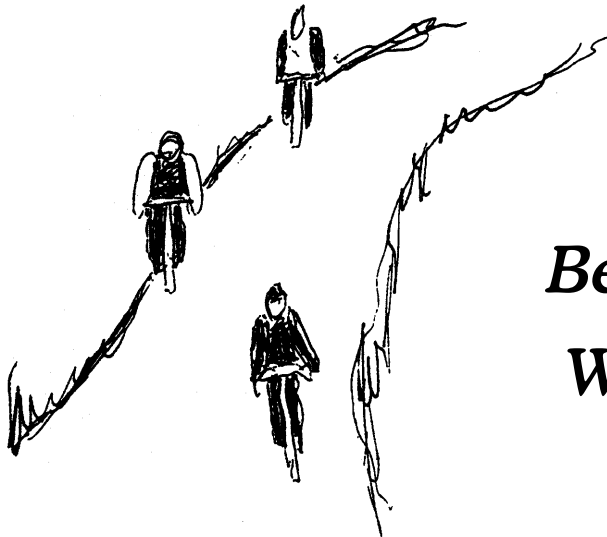
# Belmont Citizens Forum Elects New President

Last month, the Belmont Citizens Forum selected Jim Graves as the organization's new president. Graves has been vice president of the Forum since its inception two and a half years ago. He replaces Sue Bass, whose energy and devotion to civic affairs in Belmont are widely known.

A resident of the Pleasant Street Historic District since 1994, Graves holds an M.B.A. from the University of Virginia and is currently the marketing director of a software company in Burlington, Mass. He was formerly active in the McLean Open

Space Alliance and was a founding member of the Belmont Land Trust.

"After two and a half years of strong leadership, Sue Bass asked to take a breather from her responsibilities as president," Graves said. "In my new role I look forward to assistance from the entire board, including Sue Bass and Mark D'Andrea, who have been elected vice presidents. The Forum will continue to be actively involved in environmental and quality-of-life issues that affect Belmont."



## *Belmont's Bikeway: Where Is It Going?*

**Monday, February 4 at 7:30 p.m.  
All Saints Church, Corner of Common & Clark Sts.**

You are invited to attend a talk by Don Becker, Co-chair of Belmont's Bikeway Planning Committee, in the comfortable living room of Bramhall Hall at All Saints Church.

Don will discuss the status of the Belmont section of the Wayside Rail Trail, display alternative routes under consideration, and outline the steps for bringing the trail to reality.

He will also discuss efforts to improve bicycle safety throughout the town.

**Sponsored by the Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum**

**Affordable Housing**, *continued from page 12*

developer is going to rent or sell the affordable units to anyone who might be an undesirable neighbor.

In fact, the affordable housing built under Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Laws, the kind mentioned in these threats, is designed for middle-income families, not low-income people. These middle-income families who need a little help to stay in Belmont are local schoolteachers, police officers, and other town employees. “They’re the ones who earn 80 percent of median income,” pointed out Belmont Town Meeting member Edith Netter, a land use attorney with a background in planning. Eighty percent of the median income for a household of four people in Middlesex County is about \$56,000.

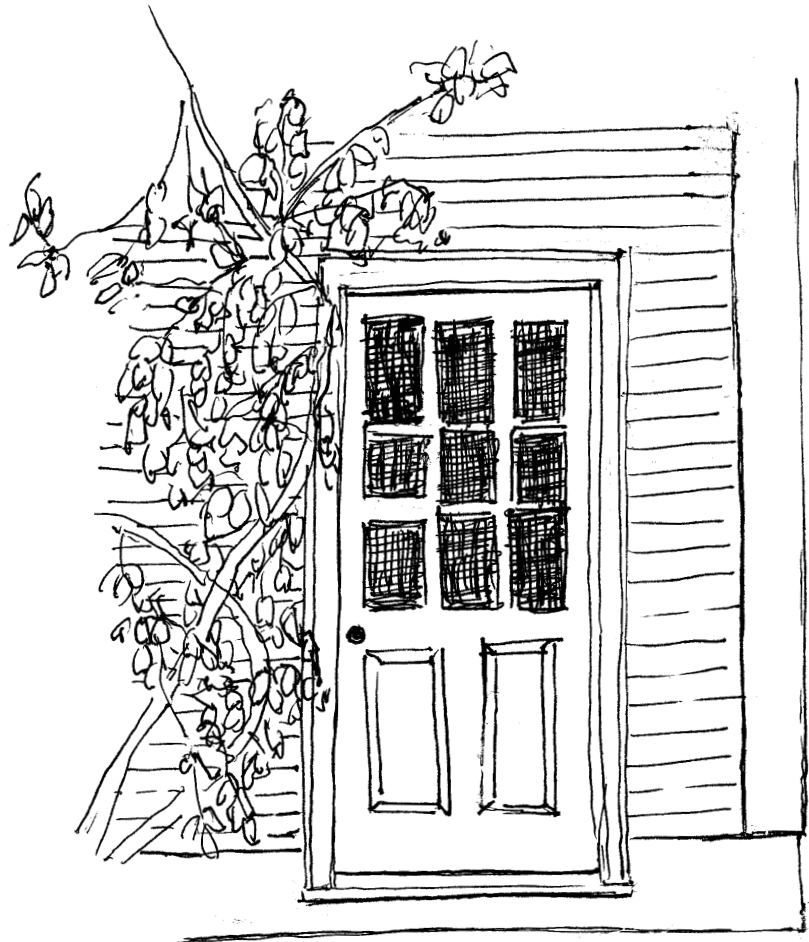
*Can developers do whatever they want?* Of course not. State law does give people who want to build affordable housing a route around the town’s zoning but not a license to build anything they’d like. The mandate of Chapter 40B is to promote

affordable housing without violating the planning goals of local government. A review published last spring of 16 affordable housing developments in Massachusetts – developments selected as typical – shows that every developer made major changes to satisfy local concerns.

And developers will now have less reason to threaten 40B housing, as McLean and O’Neill did, when they’re actually looking for commercial development. According to the regulations that went into effect last fall, a town can reject 40B housing if a developer was denied permission to build on that land within the preceding 12 months a project that did not include affordable housing.

*But won’t affordable housing bust the budget?* The creation of new housing, whether mixed-income or market priced, may mean more schoolchildren, unless the development is restricted to senior citizens – and Belmont badly needs more good housing for seniors. But it’s a mistake to imagine that even family housing is likely to be

*continued on next page*



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*If you can volunteer even a few hours a month, you can make a difference. You do not need to be an expert—just a person who cares about our town.*

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## **Affordable Housing, continued from page 10**

teeming with children. In single-family housing, the ratio of public school students per house is typically only two students for every three houses, and the rate is lower, not higher, in multi-family housing. It's also a mistake to assume that a modest addition to our school population would cause overcrowding. In 1999, the Belmont School Committee was told that the townhouse development at McLean would have a minimal impact on the town's schools.

The cost of educating these children is not simply added to the tax bills of all other property owners in town. Mixed-income housing developments pay property taxes, often substantial amounts. Whether a development's tax bill covers all the services it requires would have to be judged case by case. Typically, any kind of housing costs the town money only during the years the children are in public school; it pays a surplus the rest of the time. Multi-family housing, then, may end up being cheaper for the town than single-family housing.

For many of us, though, the ultimate question is about protecting our dwindling open space. That's where, it seems, developers always want to build, instead of redeveloping land that's been built on before. Is there any way for the town to protect

open space while meeting its legal requirement (and its moral obligation) to provide affordable housing?

Happily, the answer is yes, there are several ways, but they require good planning. Belmont has taken the first step by submitting an open-space plan to the state. Edith Netter, who has had many years of experience representing communities and developers in Chapter 40B matters, has suggested a second step to the Zoning Board of Appeals: that it promulgate regulations to govern the review of any 40B application.

More fundamentally, Netter suggests that the town should act first, instead of sitting back now and reacting later. To ensure that sufficient affordable housing is available in town, and in the right places, Belmont should find a landowner and a developer, and should look for a good architect. That way Belmont can choose to have affordable housing of exactly the kind it wants in a location near public transportation and local stores, while protecting open space. The more we design our future, the less vulnerable we'll be to the whims or threats of developers.

*Sue Bass is a Town Meeting Member representing Precinct 3.*

**Belmont Citizens Forum**  
**P. O. Box 609**  
**Belmont, MA 02478**

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**FLOOD ALERT!**  
**A Public Water Forum**  
**Thursday, January 31, 7 p.m.**  
**See Page 7.**

*People Are Asking*

## **Must Affordable Housing and Open Space Always Be in Conflict?**

*By Sue Bass*

The pattern has become routine. A developer asks for land to be rezoned so that he or she can make more money. The community objects, because it wants to protect open space or limit traffic. The developer replies with the familiar threat: Give me what I want or I'll build affordable housing! I'll build so many units that your classrooms will be jammed and your kids will suffer! Your town will go into debt building a new school! And usually someone points out, perhaps under his breath, an even greater danger: The residents attracted by this new development are likely to be "undesirables."

Like every other town under siege by developers, Belmont has seen this pattern. The threat was made in 1999 about McLean. It was made last year about the O'Neill property at Alewife, land usually called the Belmont Uplands, even though its high point is only about 20 feet above sea level. It will be made again, about the Uplands or other pieces of land whose development could be contemplated in the future – the Belmont Country Club, for example.

How real is this threat? Who are these undesirables? Can developers really do anything they want? And are the desires to preserve open space and limit traffic inevitably in conflict with the state's mandate to provide affordable housing?

The easiest question to answer is about the "undesirables." All affordable housing now being built is mixed-income housing, in which market-rate units (usually three-fourths of the total) subsidize a small number of units available to people with limited income. The developer's profit depends on his getting top dollar for the market-rate units. No

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