

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 5, No. 3

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

May 2004

Residents Request Purecoat North Meeting

By Meg Muckenhoupt

Belmont residents are scrutinizing the Purecoat North facility (formerly Cambridge Plating). Located at 39 Hittinger Street, this electroplating plant abuts Belmont High School's softball fields, a residential neighborhood, Brighton Street, and the railroad tracks. Selectman Will Brownsberger said "It is an intrinsically dangerous facility... it is inconsistent with the surrounding use of property with schools and homes." At the request of local residents, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Health will hold a joint public meeting in June on Purecoat North; as of this writing, the exact date was uncertain. Health Department Director Donna Moultrup and Assistant Fire Chief David Frizzell are also planning to attend. "The meeting will review the status of Purecoat North... and what, if any, actions need to be taken for the future," said Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney.

Over the past two decades, Cambridge Plating has been charged with violating hazardous waste and pollution laws numerous times. Violations have been corrected after they discovered, but their frequency is disturbing. In a statement, Purecoat said it is "committed to performing company operations in an environmentally sound manner." The Purecoat statement listed improvements undertaken in the last three years, mostly under federal or state orders.

A Long History of Industry

What follows is a brief history of the site, with descriptions of some of the more unsettling incidents. The Hittinger Street area has a long industrial tradi-

tion. A combination sausage plant/ginger ale factory ran on the site of the current electric light substation across from Trowbridge Street from 1886-1923. A piano key factory with three bleach houses for whitening the ivory keys operated on Hittinger Street from 1897-1922, when it was sold to the Fuelite Natural Gas Company; the town bought the site in 1930, following a fire.

Purecoat North's building stands on the site of the former Campbell & Wisswell paint factory, which manufactured paint and varnish until 1935. The American Vault Company bought the factory and

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Environmental Events Calendar

Saturday, May 15, 2 pm: **Silver Maples to the Redwood Forest-Springtime Celebration.** Celebrate spring at the Alewife Reservation with drums and dance. Jimi Two Feathers, local Earth Drum Council, and Andy Barnett of Ancient Forest International will prepare a "Circle of Life" for the Uplands. Local drummers, dancers and musicians are encouraged to join other performers and friends of the forest to ring in Spring. Meet at Acorn Park Drive. Admission is free. Cosponsored by the Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR), Earthdrum Council Troupe, and others. For more information call Alice at (617) 547-4480 or (617) 547-1944.

Sunday, May 16, 1 pm – 3 pm: **The Case for Native Garden Plants.** Landscape designers are increasingly recommending the use of native species for gardens. We will talk about the benefits of going native, answer questions, and visit some of the native plants

Belmont Citizens Forum Officers and Directors

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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
or to editor@belmontcitizensforum.org

that have been planted on the Reservation. To be held rain or shine at the Walter J. Sullivan Water Purification Facility, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge. Free. Sponsored by Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation. To register please e-mail friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com or call Ranger Jean Rogers at (617) 349-4793.

Saturday, May 22, 7:30 am-11 am: **Western Greenway Walk.** Be a suburban explorer and discover the many acres of interconnected open space around Habitat. This is a 3.5 mile walk starting at Habitat and ending at the historic colonial Bow Street in Waltham. The terrain is gently rolling. Along the way you will learn why these properties are undeveloped and what proposals exist to develop them now. We will also discuss the flora and fauna of the area. Wear long pants, to protect from poison ivy, and bring water, and a snack. Return transportation provided. Meet at the Habitat Visitor Center, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. Fee \$20 Mass Audubon members, \$25 non-members. Sponsored by Habitat. To register, or for more information contact the sanctuary at (617) 489-5050, or e-mail: habitat@massaudubon.org

Saturday, May 22, 8 am: **Waltham Land Trust Monthly Walk: Rock Meadow.** George Darcy, WLT Founding Director, will lead a bird walk starting from the parking lot at Rock Meadow off Mill Street in Belmont. Look for the WLT sign. Free. Sponsored by the Waltham Land Trust. For more information call (781) 899-2844 or (781) 893-1572, or email memberlink@walthamlandtrust.org.

Wednesday, May 26, 6 pm – 8 pm: **Foraging Walk for Edible Wild Plants of the Alewife Reservation.** Join expert forager Russ Cohen on a two-hour ramble through the Alewife Reservation to learn about at least eighteen species of edible wild plants. Meet by the bicycle racks next to the "Passenger Pick-up/Drop-off" point on the ground floor of the Alewife T station parking garage. The walk goes rain or shine; pre-registration is not necessary. Free. Sponsored by the Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR). For more information call (617) 547-1944 or (781) 316-3438.

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Sewer Questions and Answers

By Sue Bass

Q. Why is the Citizens Forum challenging Northland Residential Corp.'s request for a state sewer connection permit?

A. To mitigate the environmental impact of the McLean development. Northland, the designated developer of 121 town houses at McLean, is the first developer ready to begin construction and therefore the first to apply for a sewer permit. The legal issues have included repairing Belmont's broken sanitary sewers, traffic mitigation, and historic preservation.

Q. What are the latest legal developments?

A. The Administrative Law Judge recently upheld the Citizens Forum's positions on several important motions related to sewer conditions and to legal standing – that is, the right to bring a challenge – but limited our ability to pursue the traffic and historic preservation issues in this proceeding. Those issues may have to be pursued through other forums. Without such an effort, the Northland development would be entirely exempted from participation in any efforts to control traffic. Hearings on the sewer issues are expected in the next month or two.

Q. Is the real purpose of this appeal to delay the project?

A. No. We appealed the sewer connection permit because of serious issues related to that permit. The Citizens Forum has not challenged many other aspects of the development. In fact, one of Northland's legal papers lists other legal challenges that the Citizens Forum could have filed but did not.

Q. Isn't Northland going to install new sewer pipes in the streets under its development?

A. Yes. The problem is not Northland's new pipes but the town system those pipes will empty into. Putting more sewage into that broken system is like pouring water into a pitcher with a hole in its side.

Q. Isn't that an exaggeration? Are Belmont's sewers really so bad?

A. They are that bad. The Belmont sewer system is about 100 years old, long past its expected life. The town's sewer consultant, Fay, Spofford & Thorndike,

reported, "The numerous large holes observed in the sanitary sewers facilitate an easy route for sewage to migrate into the soil and then infiltrate down to the storm drains below." From the storm drains, this raw sewage flows into brooks and ponds, violating federal and state water pollution laws. The system also spews sewage-contaminated floodwater into residents' basements during rainstorms, a serious health hazard.

Q. Is Northland responsible for the poor condition of Belmont's sewers?

A. No. But developers who plan to add sewage to a badly broken system are generally required to improve the system first. Halting development to require this has precedents. For example, about 15 years ago U.S. District Court Judge David Mazzone imposed a moratorium on new sewer connections during a case he was handling over raw sewage polluting Boston Harbor.

Q. How could traffic mitigation have come into a sewer case?

A. When it grants a sewer permit to a project covered by the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, as McLean is, the state Department of Environmental Protection certifies that it is imposing all feasible measures to avoid damage to the environment. In this case, it imposed no traffic conditions. The Citizens Forum argued that the permit should have required a comprehensive traffic management plan that would include shuttle buses, bike paths, sidewalks, and improved traffic signals and road design. However, the Administrative Law Judge has ruled that he has no authority to review that issue.

Q. Is that the end of efforts to get traffic mitigation of the McLean development?

A. By no means. Several appeals or other actions are possible after the sewer case is concluded. The traffic issues will only intensify as other developments arise at Belmont's borders.

Q. What's the historic preservation issue?

A. Four historic cottages are among the buildings to be torn down for the construction of 121 town houses, largely because the zoning allows so many units.

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Sewer Q&A *continued from page 3*

Some, and perhaps all, four cottages could be saved if fewer units were built. The law requires developers to adopt all prudent and feasible means to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate damage to property listed on the state Register of Historic Places, as the McLean campus is.

Q. *Is that issue now dead?*

A. Not necessarily. There were two related issues: Whether McLean misled the Massachusetts Historical Commission during its review, and whether McLean had lived up to its agreement to try to find people to save the cottages by moving them off the site. The Administrative Law Judge ruled that the issues were out of his jurisdiction.

Q. *Hasn't this litigation cost Belmont hundreds of thousands of dollars in property tax revenue?*

A. No. It has not cost the town a penny in tax revenue. None of the developers was ready to build until now. But even if Northland had started construction last fall, the town would not have gained any tax revenue. Under the town's agreement with McLean, the hospital is paying about \$500,000 a year in lieu of taxes. As revenue from the developers starts coming in, the amount of McLean's payment will decline. Belmont will get no net increase in revenue until the developers pay more than \$500,000. That's several years away.

Q. *Will tax revenues from McLean reduce our taxes or at least provide more money for our schools?*

A. Not materially, if at all. McLean will eventually bring increased revenue, but it will also bring increased costs. The town hopes the revenue will exceed the costs, but there's no guarantee. If the net increase in revenue is \$1 million a year, as was recently estimated at Town Meeting, that's only a small slice of Belmont's \$77 million annual budget.

Q. *What about the delay in the town's getting the cemetery land, the open space, and land for expansion of the Waverley Oaks Apartments?*

A. McLean was legally obliged to turn that land over in February 2002. It should have happened. McLean has held up any transfer while the American Retirement Corp.'s litigation over the affordable hous-

ing rules at the ARC's planned senior complex is pending.

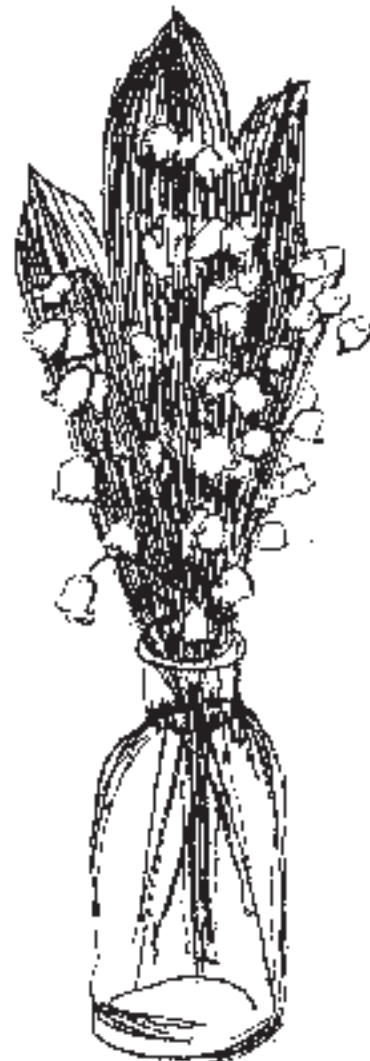
Q. *Don't you hope to stop the development?*

A. Stopping the development is no longer an option. The only issues still open involve the development's environmental effects.

Q. *What about negotiations?*

A. The Citizens Forum is interested in negotiating a resolution to this dispute and would welcome a negotiated solution to all the remaining issues over the McLean development.

Sue Bass, a member of the board of trustees of the Belmont Citizens Forum, is one of the 16 appellants in the appeal of Northland's sewer permits.





Belmont's Borders: Open Space or Suburban Sprawl?

The Fernald School land in Waltham and the Metropolitan State Hospital land in Lexington - both on Belmont's borders - are being developed. Lexington Town Meeting is scheduled to vote on rezoning the Met State land to allow 387 housing units, while the Waltham property is being considered for hundreds of units.

These projects will generate large volumes of traffic on our doorstep. Will civic groups be successful in reducing building density and preserving open space? Find out about how these developments will affect our town, now and in the future.

**MONDAY, MAY 17 at 7:30 pm
Bramhall Room, Parish Hall,
All Saints Episcopal Church,
Common & Clark Streets**

Diana Young, Treasurer, Waltham Land Trust:
Update on Fernald School Land
Kevin Johnson, President, South Lexington Civic Association:
Update on Metropolitan State Hospital Land

Refreshments will be served

Sponsored By The Friends Of The Belmont Citizens Forum
For more information, please contact us at
617 484 1844 or visit www.belmontcitizensforum.org

Town Hall Complex to Reopen in the Fall

By Sharon Vanderslice

The renovation of the three buildings in Belmont's historic Town Hall Complex is due to be completed this fall, according to Joel Mooney, who chairs the Town Hall Complex Building Committee.

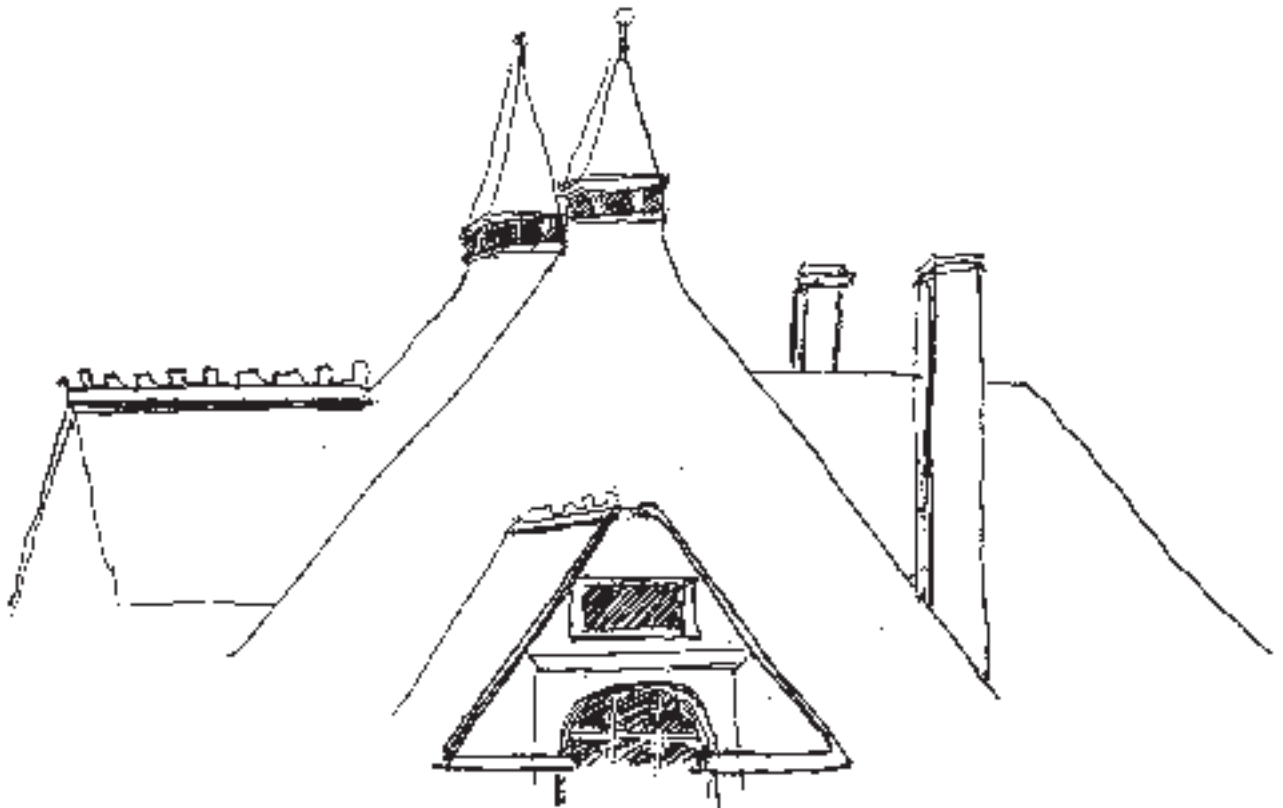
The Town Hall Annex on Moore Street, which was built in 1898 to house Belmont's high school, has been used as a municipal office building since 1937 but, said Mooney, this is the first major overhaul the structure has ever had. The Annex, built in the late Queen Anne style, was originally designed by Eleazar B. Homer, a member of the Wellington family who grew up in Belmont and was the first president of the Rhode Island School of Design.

In 2001, the Board of Selectmen voted to renovate the Annex in order to use the interior space more efficiently and make it accessible to the disabled, as mandated by federal law. Once this renovation is completed, there will be town offices on four floors as well as multi-purpose meeting, seminar, and gallery space. The new Belmont Gallery of Art, which is being administered by the Belmont Cultural Council, will be

permanently located in an attic auditorium unused since the 1930s. Its inaugural exhibit will be held in February 2005.

Architectural Conservator Lisa Harrington, a Belmont resident, is overseeing the restoration of the building's exterior, which should be finished by June. So far, she said, a new slate roof has been installed, along with new copper gutters and aluminum windows. Wood trim has been repaired and repainted to match the original paint colors, and the brick and limestone walls have been scrubbed with a non-acidic cleaner, power washed, and repointed.

The interior will have two newly constructed staircases, an elevator, and new plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems, including a radiant heating system in the floor. Construction has proceeded fairly smoothly, reported Kathleen Coles of Donham & Sweeney Architects, but there have been several unanticipated obstacles. For instance, 100 years' worth of pigeon droppings had to be shoveled out of the attic, where birds apparently had been nesting in the cupolas. Also, the original pine sub-flooring, which was



exceptionally springy, had to be reinforced with plywood before new gypsum cement floors could be laid. Ultimately, the office floors will be finished with carpeting and the corridors with granite. Stud walls are already in place, Coles said.

The Annex will house departments frequently visited by Belmont residents: the Town Accountant, the Town Treasurer, the Assessors Office, the Recreation Department, the Health Department, the Youth Services Coordinator and the Outreach Program, the Office of Community Development, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Building Services, and the Information Technology Office.

School Department personnel who were temporarily located in a trailer behind the high school will be moving back into the School Administration Building (the former Underwood Library). Kathleen Coles described the work on this circa 1900 Classical Revival building as “more of a restoration than a renovation.” The original wood wainscoting and doors, which were removed during demolition, will be reinstalled, and any new trim will be milled to match the old. School employees who previously were wedged into library reading rooms will get newly configured office spaces as well as an elevator. A handsome new roof of Vermont slate and scalloped standing-seam copper will protect the renovated building from the weather.

Improvements also have been made to the Belmont Town Hall on Concord Avenue. The auditorium there, which is used for public hearings and theatre performances, is now air-conditioned and has new material on the ceiling to enhance the acoustics. The Pleasant Street side of the building will be waterproofed at the basement level, where moisture has been seeping into two conference rooms on the ground floor.

Finally, the grounds around all three buildings will be re-landscaped, following a design by Mike Dowhan, Chief Landscape Architect of Edwards and Kelcey that incorporates planting and lighting suggestions from the Town Hall Complex Building Committee, the Shade Tree Committee, and the Historic District Commission.

Michael Smith, a Belmont architect who serves on both the Town Hall Complex Building Committee and the Historic District Commission, thinks that the revitalized complex will be “one of New England’s most treasured historic assets.”

“Belmont is setting an outstanding example for

Artists Sought

Artists who live and/or work are invited to submit entries for the Belmont Gallery of Art’s inaugural show, scheduled for February 2005.

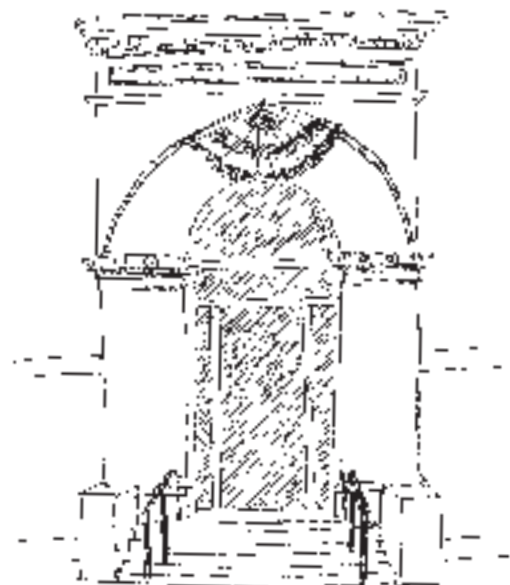
The submission deadline is **Tuesday, June 1.**

Applications are available on-line at <http://www.belmontgallery.org/>, or at the town clerk's office. For more information, contact Nan Rogers, gallery administrator, or e-mail belmont@mass-culture.org.

other municipalities,” he said.

The Annex, which was listed as one of the ten most endangered historic resources in the Commonwealth in 2001 by Preservation MASS (formerly Historic Massachusetts, Inc.), is the building in the complex that appears most improved by the careful attention it has received. “Watching the Annex restoration,” said Smith, “it’s hard to imagine that there was ever a move to tear it down. It is a magnificent piece of architecture.”

Sharon Vanderslice is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 2 and a member of the Historic District Commission.



signals in order to accommodate turns. Between the signals, though, “the traffic merges down to two lanes anyway,” he said.

The other options might all work in one spot or another, McClurg said. For example, widening the sidewalks between Grove Street and School Street could enhance the community by making it a more pleasant place to linger – perhaps even at sidewalk cafés. The quiet stretch of road near the Oakley Country Club could be narrowed to two lanes with a planted median, allowing for a wide sidewalk with trees on both sides of the street.

A three-lane road would allow cars to access all driveways from the center of the road west of Cushing Square and east of Bartlett Street.

McClurg also suggested that the Cambridge border area could be a “gateway to Belmont,” – with an actual gateway spanning the road, a planted median, signs, and trees – to show drivers that they are entering Belmont, a town of homes.

He called Waverley Square “the only truly dysfunctional intersection in the corridor.” With large numbers of pedestrians, cars driving at high speeds, and dangerous street crossings, Waverley Square needs an overhaul. “There’s vast space between the lanes. It’s public space we could do something with,”

said McClurg. He proposed a traffic island that would allow cars to move efficiently, be a safe zone for pedestrians, and provide benches and a pleasant space to sit.

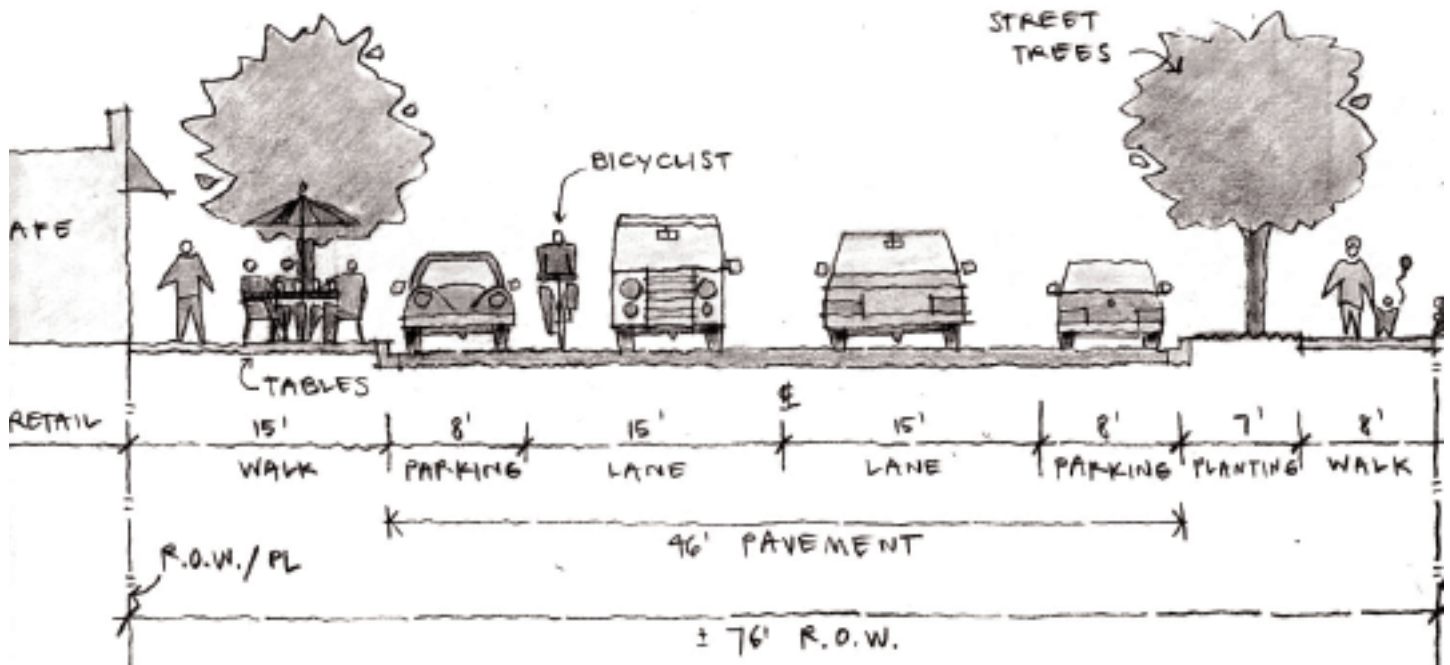
More detailed recommendations will be developed after further study by consultants working with Belmont’s Traffic Advisory Committee, said Mary Jo Frisoli, the committee’s chair. “Now we can design a road that is our town’s heart and soul,” Frisoli said. “We don’t want gridlock or a commuter highway.”

Drive, Walk, Bike, or Take the Train

Bicycle activist Hamann urged the Traffic Advisory Committee to provide bicycle lanes on Trapelo Road. Cambridge divides 15-foot travel lanes into a 4-foot lane for bicycles and an 11-foot lane for cars, Hamann said. “It regulates spaces, slows the cars, and keeps them from wandering from one side to another,” he argued.

John Allen, a board member of the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, said an 8-foot median would make the road too narrow to have parking, car, and bike lanes, and would “encourage motorists to make right turns from the left lane.” In Denver, Allen said, “lane

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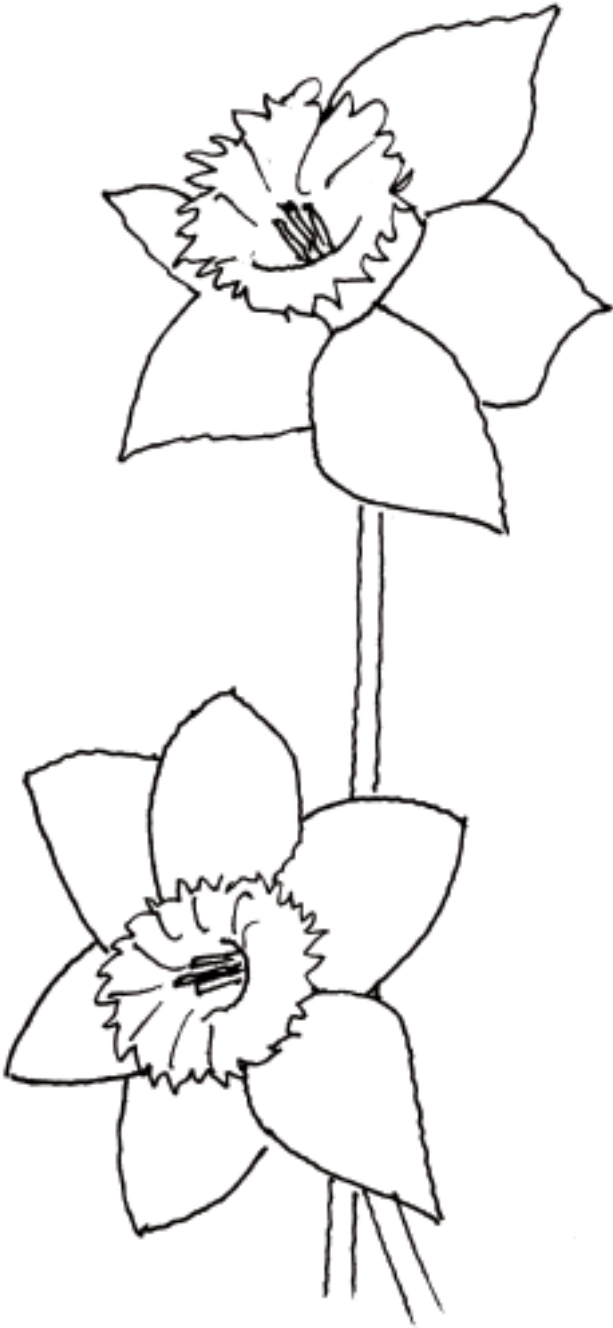


Artist’s rendition of a potential design for portions of Trapelo Road, with two fifteen-foot driving lanes, two eight-foot parking lanes, and fifteen-foot sidewalks. Illustration by Carol Darbyshire.

Trapelo Road *continued from page 9*

sharing” with dashed lines for bike lanes works well, but not on downhill slopes with fast speeds. “There are lots of devils in the details,” said Allen.

Peter Cavanagh of Betts Road argued that pedestrians need more than a safe street. “We want places where people can walk not only in safety, but in



pleasure,” Cavanagh said. In the winter Cavanagh pointed out, large sections of Belmont are unwalkable due to the snow that plows throw onto sidewalks.

Janet Breen of Concord Avenue complained about the neckdown already built on Trapelo Road at

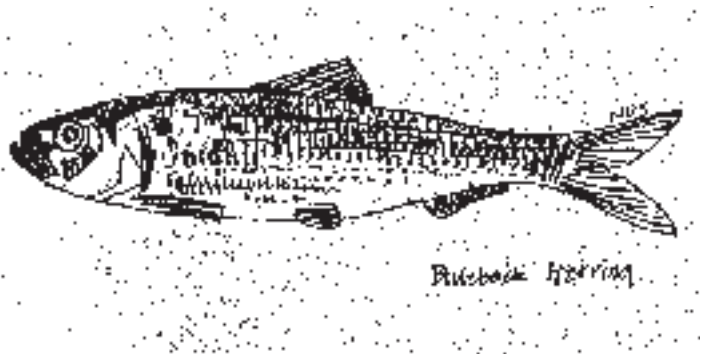
Hawthorne Street to improve safety for students of the nearby Butler School. The neckdown is not marked by any signs, she said. “Cars are still passing each other in the neckdown, and the bus stop has not moved – it stops in the bumpout and cars go around it,” said Breen. Frisoli said that the Office of Community Development is responsible for signs.

Susan Baron, president of the Waltham League of Women Voters, observed that upcoming developments at the McLean site and at Waltham’s Fernald and Met State sites would produce even more traffic on Trapelo Road, and asked for “more of a regional tie-in.” “If we had a parking structure at the train station, we could make that the destination, instead of having traffic going through town,” she said. Andrea Masciari, a member of the Traffic Advisory Committee, stated that the town is planning a study on parking options, which will be partly funded by the MBTA.

Belmont also needs to get in line for the money to build Trapelo Road and Belmont Street. To qualify for state and federal funds, the project needs to get on the state's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) list, which lists all transit and highway projects that will be constructed with state or federal aid over a three-year period, with an additional two-year waiting list. These funds are available only for construction, not design or engineering. To pay for design and engineering, the town can use state Chapter 90 money, known as pavement management funds, though that will reduce the money available for other road repairs.

To sign up for notices of Traffic Advisory Committee meetings, e-mail jwheeler@town.belmont.ma.us.

Meg Muckenhoupt is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter



Cambridge Plating *continued from page 1*

made concrete vaults and other products until 1968, when Cambridge Plating acquired the property. Purecoat North purchased Cambridge Plating in January, 2003.

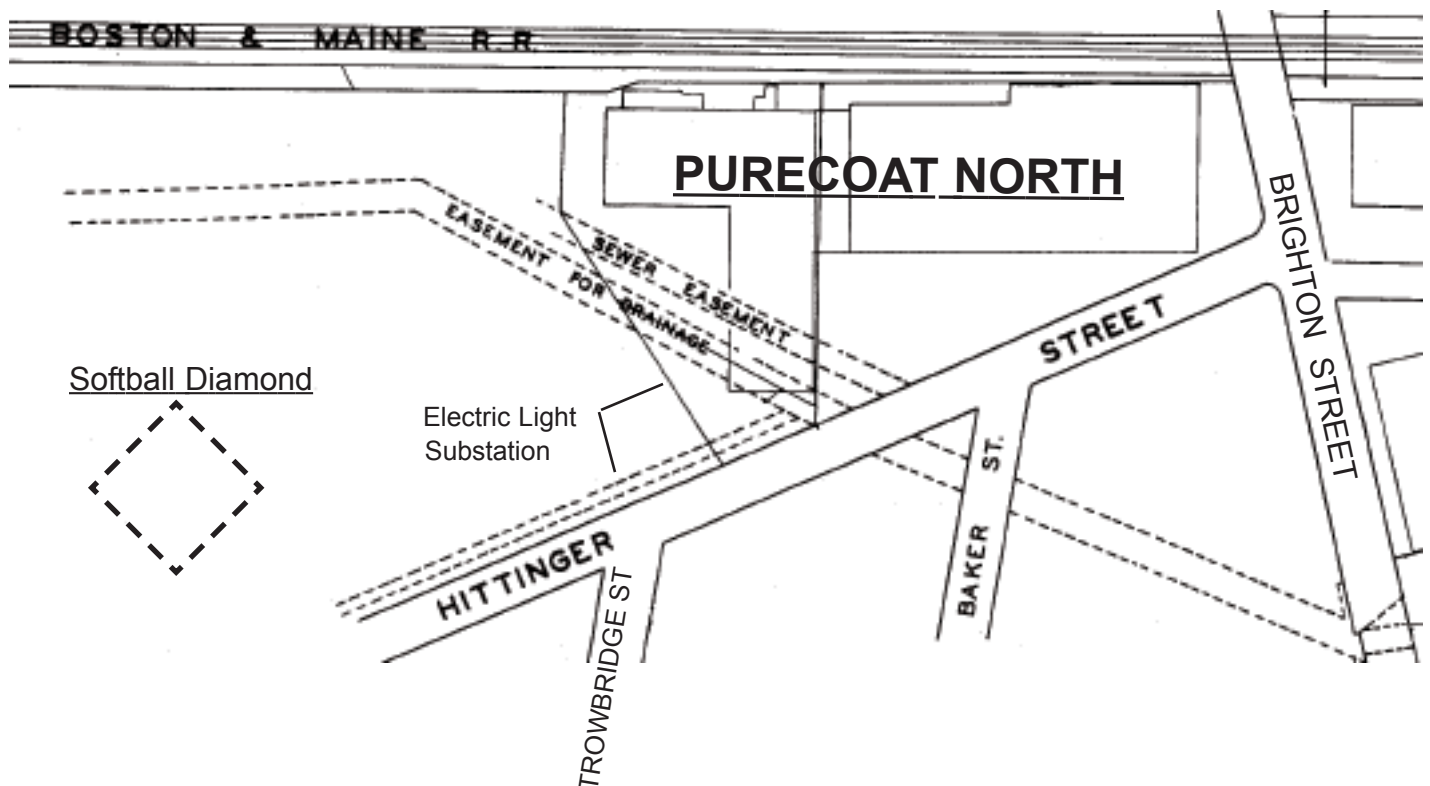
The Purecoat North complex sits at 39 Hittinger Street. According to a 1996 report by Paragon Environmental Services, the plant stands 600 feet east of Clay Pit Pond, and 500 feet west of Blair Pond. The report stated that at the time 4,169 people lived within a half-mile of the plant.

Cambridge Plating's run-ins with town, state, and federal agencies began over 25 years ago. Between 1976 and 1980, the Belmont Fire Department was called to Cambridge Plating 12 times, according to a memo by Fire Alarm operator Frederick Dattoli. In 1980, the Board of Health "... received a number of complaints regarding odors emanating from the Cambridge Plating Company," according to Belmont's 1980 Annual Report. That year, Board of Health records state that an accident involving the nitric acid dip tank produced brown fumes for thirty minutes, which Cambridge Plating dispersed into the

outside air via exhaust fans. A report dated April 24, 1980 from Herbert H. Foss, Cambridge Plating's Operations Manager at the time, refers to the smoke as "nitric oxide" and "nitrious oxide." However, nitrous oxide is an odorless, colorless gas, which is not generally toxic. It is used as the propellant in canned whipped cream. The brown gas may have been nitrogen dioxide, a toxic gas that forms nitric acid when it comes in contact with the lining of the lungs. The firm released another set of fumes from a nitric acid tank on November 22, 1985, according to a memo from Thomas F. Deeley, Lieutenant, Fire Prevention. On October 19, 1980, a 55-gallon drum of muriatic acid (also known as hydrochloric acid) fell off a forklift, tipped over, and was flushed straight into the storm drain.

Belmont Board of Health Director John J. Malone wrote in a memo dated June 7, 1982: "What we observed was a yard filled with full barrels of corrosive acids, rusted empty ones, ones half rusted and filled with water plus various other debris, such as pallets, ducts, and tanks. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason paid to the orderly storage of this

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A map of the Purecoat North complex, showing surrounding streets and the approximate location of the Belmont High School softball diamond. The softball diamond is not drawn to scale.

Cambridge Plating *continued from page 11*

material except for the new secured area just to the left of where you enter the yard.” Cambridge Plating subsequently changed their storage methods.

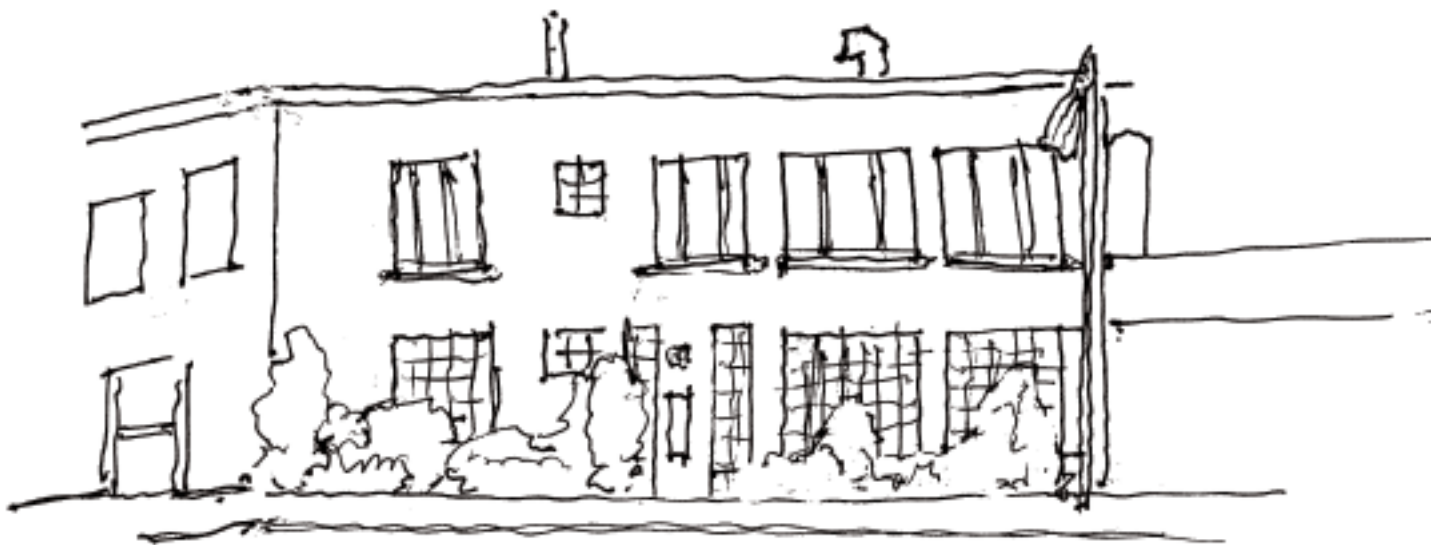
In 1988, Cambridge Plating was assessed a \$682,250 fine by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) for “significant violations of MWRA sewer use rules and regulations” stemming from a faulty wastewater system; Cambridge Plating subsequently won a lawsuit against the maker of the faulty system and challenged the MWRA fine, which was reduced to \$128,500. The state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (now the Department of Environmental Protection) sent a notice of noncompliance to Cambridge Plating regarding hazardous waste storage on January 5, 1988, based on a site visit on November 18, 1987.

From 1994-1995 the (MWRA) issued Cambridge Plating several notices of noncompliance with wastewater laws. The MWRA issued an administrative settlement with the firm on September 4, 1996, but then issued ten Notices of Violation in the four years after the settlement. On November 7, 2000, the MWRA’s Toxic Reduction and Control Department issued an administrative order for violations, including discharging wastewater with excessive levels of hexavalent chromium, petroleum hydrocarbons, trichloroeth-

ylene, copper, cyanide, nickel, and zinc into the MWRA sanitary sewer system, and operating a bypass of its pretreatment system.

The company has also run afoul of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on several occasions and has been charged almost \$475,000 in penalties in the last five years. In September 2002, the EPA ordered Cambridge Plating to pay a civil penalty of \$65,000 and to spend a total of \$357,000 on environmental projects. The case arose from EPA inspections in 2001 and 2002, which revealed violations of hazardous waste handling requirements under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and violations of monitoring and reporting requirements under the Clean Air Act, according to an EPA press release. In addition to the fine, in a consent agreement with the EPA, Cambridge Plating agreed to close its chrome plating operations, eliminating air emissions of toxic hexavalent chromium and to reduce air emissions of trichloroethylene (TCE), another toxic pollutant, by at least 40 percent. Cambridge Plating also agreed to reduce noise and odor pollution from the site.

On November 29, 2001, the EPA also ordered Cambridge Plating to establish an environmental management system and to undergo annual environmental audits performed by an independent environmental firm. An Environmental Management System is a



framework of specific protocols that establish what environmental hazards are at issue and create clear lines of responsibility, check-in points, and monitoring and review procedure. EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming said that the EPA is “very satisfied” with the progress Purecoat North has made and said, “Based on their actions over the last two years, they made progress.” Fleming also confirmed that Purecoat North has eliminated its chrome plating operations, and no longer uses TCE at its facility.

The state Department of Public Health (DPH) is currently investigating the neighborhood surrounding the plant as a potential “disease cluster” at the request of Belmont’s Board of Health, local residents, and a legislative order directing the DPH to investigate the area. According to Meg Blanchet, an environmental analyst for the DPH’s Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment, the DPH is examining the occurrence of six cancer types in the area: cancers of the kidney, liver, lung and bronchus, and pancreas, leukemia, and non-Hodgkins lymphoma. The Bureau is completing an internal draft, which will be sent out for peer review before being released to the public later this year.

The May 2002 Fire

In addition to various releases of fumes, the firm has had five fires in the last 20 years, in 1986, 1988, 1998, 1999, and 2002. Cambridge Plating’s last blaze started at 5:45 am on May 25, 2002. Baker Street Resident Audrey DiGiovanni, a leader of Belmont Citizens for Environmental Safety, a group critical of Purecoat North, said, “People were asleep with their windows open, people were out jogging - but the neighborhood was not alerted. There was no police car around making announcements.”

Over the next few days, government agencies allege that Cambridge Plating resumed work, even though the company was unable to process its wastewater. On May 28, 2002, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) received a call from the Belmont Fire Department reporting the fire. The MWRA sent an inspector to the site, and ordered Cambridge Plating to cease and desist all work that would produce wastewater in a letter dated May 31, 2002. That letter reads in part:

“The MWRA industrial coordinator also noted that the basement was flooded with about 9” of yellow-colored liquid, and that holding tanks in the base-

ment that Cambridge Plating used to store wastewater before pretreatment were full and overflowing to the basement floor.... Cambridge Plating has exceeded its holding capacity for untreated process wastewater and in effect has been using the basement floor of its facility as a holding area for untreated waste.”

A letter dated May 31, 2002 from Kenneth B. Rota, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Chief of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Compliance Unit states, “Notwithstanding its inability to use the wastewater treatment system, we understand that Cambridge Plating resumed manufacturing operations on May 28 and May 29, resulting in the generation of wastewater.”

On April 5, 2004, the EPA fined Cambridge Plating \$50,000 for alleged violations following the May 25, 2002 fire. The EPA charges that Cambridge Plating started work again within a week after the fire, even though the plant’s wastewater treatment system was not repaired for over a month. According to the EPA, the company produced “significant” volumes of

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untreated wastewater that contained toxic metals, stored liquid hazardous waste in a single-walled tank in the parking lot, and omitted “significant” information when reporting to the EPA’s after to the fire.

The Future of 39 Hittinger Street

The Board of Selectmen and the Board of Public Health will be holding a public meeting on the Purecoat North site in June. “It will give us an opportunity to address the larger issue of what to do... we need to put together a group whose mission it is to

change the use of that property to a safe use,” said selectman Will Brownsberger. “The facility has had a host of regulatory violations of town, state, and federal regulations. I can’t see how that facility fits with all the school children [at Belmont High School].”

Meg Muckenhoupt is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.



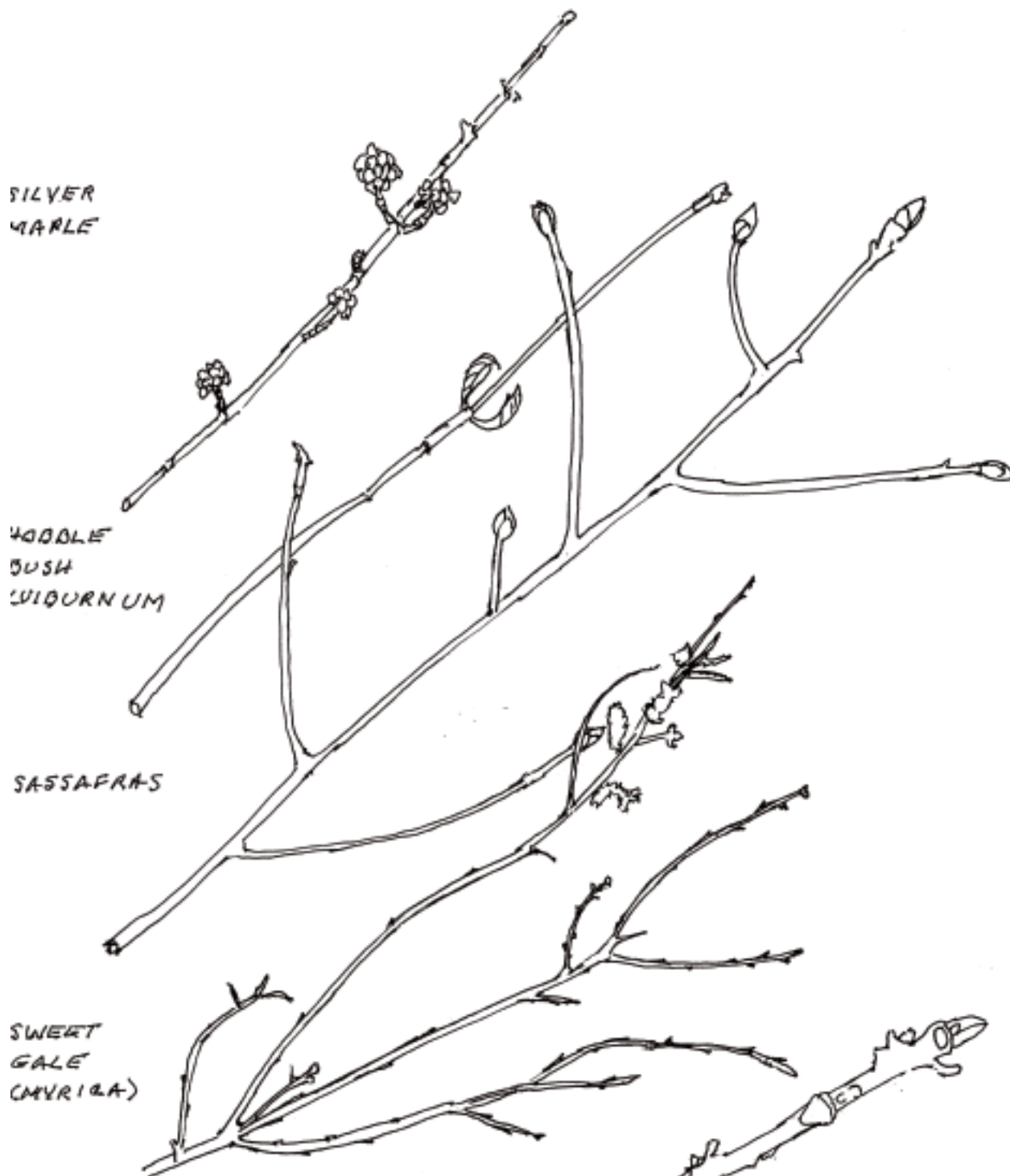
Pleasant Street Reconstruction to Begin

The Massachusetts Highway Department has opened bidding for reconstructing Pleasant Street and will accept bids until May 25. According to Glenn Clancy, Belmont's acting Director of Community Development, work on the street should start in late spring and last about two years.

Although the state is in charge of both the bidding and construction, Belmont's office of Community Development will administer the project. Clancy

writes "... I will be working to be part of the process in some capacity, as I feel it is important that the town have a means to communicate concerns and also be made aware of things as the project progresses."

For more information, see Belmont's Pleasant Street Reconstruction web page, http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_Commdev/pleasantst/index



No Resolution Yet for Belmont Uplands Site

By Darrell King

The story of the Belmont Uplands is still unfolding. As recently as March of this year, O'Neill Properties had asked for yet another continuation of the Planning Board hearing, presumably to avoid a negative vote at April's Annual Town Meeting. Every indication was that the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Conservation Commission would all oppose the current rezoning proposal for 250 units, which requires a two-thirds majority of Town Meeting for passage. At the same time, O'Neill indicated it would begin proceedings for a Chapter 40B development on the site, which would allow O'Neill to build densely if 25% of the units are affordable by state definitions. The 40B application has now been submitted to the Commonwealth, this time for 300 units.

In the meantime, a significant effort has been launched by an independent group of Belmont Town Meeting Members and citizens from North Cambridge and East Arlington to facilitate a land swap between O'Neill's Uplands parcel and the nearby MDC site, a former skating rink. O'Neill would be able to build residential units and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) would get to annex the Uplands to the Alewife Reservation. The swap would fit in nicely with the DCR's master plan for Alewife. It would preserve the Uplands in their entirety.

An architect has designed the 150-unit residence totaling 240,000 square feet at skating rink site, a development approximately the same size as the previously approved commercial proposal for 242,500 square feet. This plan would bring the town badly needed revenues as well as affordable housing and age-restricted housing. It would ensure the floodwater storage capabilities of the Uplands would remain intact, and additional floodwater storage would be built into the skating rink site along with the housing.

O'Neill principal Brian O'Neill and senior vice president Steve Corridan have been approached with the plan, as have the DCR, Mass Highway, and several members of the state government. In fact, Brian O'Neill contacted the Belmont Citizens Forum several months ago to ascertain what aspects of his residential proposal could be modified to ensure its accept-

ance and approval. At the moment, O'Neill does not look favorably upon the proposal but has stated that if the Town was in agreement and there was no opposition, the firm would explore the plan.

The land swap has been presented to the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Belmont Housing Trust. The Belmont Housing Trust gave a cautious endorsement at their April 8 meeting, with the condition that a number of 3-bedroom units be added to the 1- and 2-bedroom units currently proposed. The Planning Board listened to a comprehensive technical presentation of the proposal's merits at a special meeting on April 13; reaction was favorable.

Several environmental groups, numerous Town Meeting Members, and state representatives from the region have endorsed the land-swap plan. Governor Romney should applaud the proposal as well, since it is so closely aligned with SmartGrowth, a philosophy of development publicly favored and promoted by his administration. Romney's Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD), headed by Secretary Douglas Foy, endorses the following philosophy:

- Redevelop first, by encouraging reuse and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure rather than the construction of new infrastructure in undeveloped areas.

- Concentrate development, by supporting development that is compact, conserves land, integrates uses, and fosters a sense of place.

- Restore and enhance the environment, by protecting environmentally sensitive lands, natural resources, wildlife habitats; by increasing the quantity, quality, and accessibility of open space; by promoting developments that respect and enhance the Commonwealth's natural resources.

- Conserve natural resources, by increasing our supply of renewable energy and reducing waste of water, energy, and materials, and by constructing and promoting buildings and infrastructure that use land, energy, water, and materials efficiently.

- Expand housing opportunities, by supporting the construction and rehabilitation of housing to meet the needs of people of all abilities, income levels, and

household types.

- Provide transportation choice, by locating new development where a variety of transportation modes can be made available.

- Plan regionally, by supporting the development and implementation of local and regional plans that have broad public support and are consistent with these principles, and by fostering development projects, land and water conservation, transportation, and housing that have a regional or multi-community benefit; consider the long-term costs and benefits to the larger Commonwealth.

Upon receiving notification of the 40B submittal from MassDevelopment, Massachusetts' economic development authority, the town has 30 days to

respond with comments. The Board of Selectmen has obtained an extension to solicit public comment. The Board of Selectmen appointed a committee to investigate implementation of the alternative proposal. The committee will report its findings to the Selectmen on May 24 and to the Planning Board on May 25. There is a final deadline of June 30 for a draft letter to MassDevelopment.

Given that over 120 Town Meeting Members and dozens of others have signed a petition, and considering the length of time involved in navigating a 40B proposal, shouldn't this alternative plan be supported as a way to move the Uplands project ahead, with the end result being a winning solution for everyone?

A website has been established, www.upland-alternative.info, which gives detailed information about the plan.

Darrell King is a Precinct 1 Town Meeting Member.



Public Meetings *continued from page 16*

citizens to hear the exchange and participate in the meeting.

At a recent Selectmen's meeting I attended, a slide presentation was given. The speaker went round and

Citizens do not have to physically attend public meetings to keep up with what's happening in town. Selectmen's meetings are broadcast on the town's Channel 8 cable station. In addition, each committee posts agendas and minutes of all public meetings and hearings are posted on the town's web site.

round in circles, simultaneously trying to address the selectmen, refer to his slides, and not be rude to the citizens, who were clearly interested in what he had to say. In another instance, the petitioner sat at the selectmen's table, with his back to the audience, and spoke in a conversational voice. Unless citizens were sitting in the front row, they would have trouble hearing what was discussed, and find it impossible to perceive the nuances of communication. In other instances, speakers use large signboards placed on easels that show maps or illustrations. Without hand-outs, the audience may not be able to see the boards and follow the discussion.

I attended an Historic District Commission meeting last winter, having received a notice about a renovation taking place near my home. This meeting was held in one of Town Hall's many smaller meeting rooms, unlike the grand setting of the Selectmen's meeting. Commission members sat around several tables grouped together to make one large table. A large pillar partially blocked the table from public seating, and the room was cluttered and uncomfortable. Even though I was the only citizen attendee for the first part of the meeting, my presence was never acknowledged.

As I waited for the meeting to begin, I noticed that the commission was poring over drawings unfurled on the table, and members were conferring. The meeting had not been called to order! It was awkward for me

to see the plans, and no cork board was available to post them for public review. I had to stand over commissioners' shoulders to learn what was being proposed for a home renovation. When I raised my hand to ask a question, I was rather abruptly admonished to give my name and address, and asked whether I was an abutter. Communicating with the commission was a challenge.

Because of the physical setting, these meetings seem like a private conversation among the committee members rather than a public meeting. Citizen participation in town government is crucial to making good decisions as a community. If meetings are conducted in a less-than-optimal manner, citizen participation is not being encouraged. What can be done to make Belmont's public business meetings a bit more welcoming?

A few common-sense remedies might do the trick. Simply re-orienting the physical set-up of the Selectmen's meetings so that presenters face both the Selectmen and the public would vastly improve meet-

A recent sampling of the committees' minutes revealed that two did not have any minutes on-line; one had up-to-date minutes; two had most recent minutes dated 2003, and one had most recent minutes dated 2002.

ing dynamics. A podium with a microphone could be set up for speakers. The slide screen could be placed for optimal public viewing, and Selectmen could simultaneously view the presentation on a laptop.

Improving meetings held in smaller rooms could be a challenge. Posting oversized architectural drawings on an easel or wall is the first step to making information accessible to observers. Or, if these drawings have been generated electronically, projecting them on a screen from a laptop would be ideal. Both the committee and the public could then stand around the drawings and have a discussion. As for seating, it only makes sense for committee members to face the public. A U-shaped seating arrangement might make a good solution.

As our town faces issues of increasing complexity

We need you.

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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- Planning & Zoning
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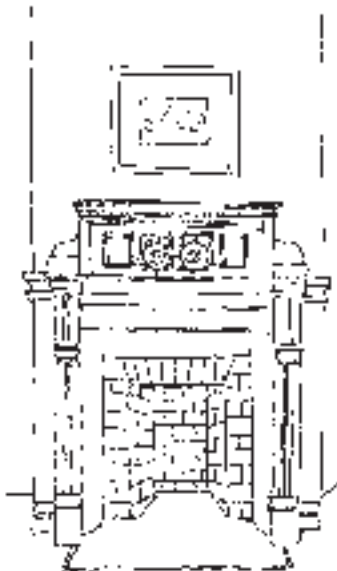
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Make checks payable to Belmont Citizens Forum and mail to Belmont Citizens Forum, P.O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478. Thank you!

– new developments both within and outside our borders; increased traffic; rebuilding neglected infrastructure; environmental stewardship; historic building preservation—public participation in town affairs will only increase. Let’s make attending public meetings a more pleasant and productive affair.

Evanthia Malliris is Secretary of the Belmont Citizens Forum and a Pct 2 Town Meeting Member.



Environmental Events *continued from page 2*

Saturday, June 12, 10 am: **Waltham Land Trust Monthly Walk: Fernald Center.** Meet at 200 Trapelo Road, Waltham. Free. Sponsored by the Waltham Land Trust. For more information call (781) 899-2844, or (781) 893-1572, or e-mail member-link@walthamland trust.org.

Monday, June 21, 6 pm – 8:30 pm: **Welcome Summer.** Celebrate summer’s first full day by exploring Habitat’s many and varied habitats. We’ll focus on plant natural history and identification on this evening stroll. Fee is \$12 Mass Audubon members, \$15 nonmembers. Meet at the Habitat Visitor Center, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. Sponsored by Habitat and the New England Wildflower Society. To register contact the sanctuary at (617) 489-5050 or e-mail habitat@massaudubon.org.

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People Are Asking

How Can We Make Public Meetings More Welcoming?

By Evanthia Malliris

Our town, like any busy municipality, holds public meetings almost every day of a given week. The selectmen meet on Mondays, the Traffic Advisory Committee meets on Thursdays, the Historic District Commission meets on Wednesdays, and so on. There are 39 standing committees in Belmont, such as the Board of Water Commissioners and the Cable Access Committee, and there are eleven temporary committees, such as the Belmont Center Parking Study Committee and the Sewer/Storm Water Committee. There are also special public hearings on issues such

as building new firehouses or removing trees on Pleasant Street. Notice of these meetings is listed in the weekly Belmont Citizen-Herald and posted on the town's web site. An interested citizen could make attending public meetings a full-time job.

So what's it like to attend, say, a Selectmen's meeting or an Historic District Commission meeting? Are citizens made to feel part of the process? Are these meetings welcoming?

Belmont's selectmen sit at an oversized, ornate, dark-wood table facing the public, who sit in straight-backed chairs. The room accommodates approximately 60 people, and citizens often stand at the back of the room and spill out into the foyer when all seats are taken. Presenters on the agenda approach the selectmen and either sit at the table or stand before them. The result is, awkwardly, that presenters have their backs to the public, making it difficult for

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