

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 5, No. 5

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

September 2004

Forum Comments on Alewife Construction

By Sue Bass

With a prospective tenant at hand and a substantial amount of its 400,000 square feet of space vacant, the developer of Cambridge Discovery Park at Alewife asked the state to let it start construction on a new building for that tenant without first completing a series of environmental impact reports. Specifically, the developer, the Bulfinch Companies, sought permission in July to proceed this fall with Phase I of its planned development, by tearing down one building and part of another and erecting a new 100-foot building and 600-car parking garage. The eventual development would involve replacing all the existing buildings on the former Arthur D. Little campus with more than 800,000 square feet of new office and laboratory space, about twice as much as is there now.

The Belmont Citizens Forum opposes the application on the basis that the proposal did not meet all the legal standards for a partial waiver of the requirement to file environmental impact reports under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act. The Citizens Forum also recommended several conditions that should be imposed if the waiver is granted, including wetlands restoration and conservation restrictions on open space abutting the Alewife Reservation.

Bulfinch said its prospective tenant, the Smithsonian Institution Astrophysical Observatory, has leases expiring in late 2005, and the construction of the new space should need to start now in order to permit the construction to be completed by that date.

In its letter to the State Secretary of Environmental Affairs commenting on the waiver

application, the Citizens Forum expressed “sympathy for Bulfinch’s need for a good tenant and the Smithsonian Observatory’s need for a new home” and said that the application probably does meet the first standard, hardship. The second standard for granting a waiver is that “strict compliance would . . . not serve to avoid or minimize damage to the environment.” The Citizens Forum has indicated that this second standard has not been satisfied.

“This area cries out for serious study of the traffic, flooding, wildlife habitat, and other environmental impacts of development,” the Citizens Forum’s comment letter said. “We understand that the new FEMA flood study recommending a flood elevation of 10.6 feet puts virtually the entire property, including

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Environmental Events Calendar

By Michael Stratford

Saturday, September 18, 9 am-12:30 pm (rain date September 26 12-3 pm): **Fall Coastsweep Cleanup.** Help the Mystic River Watershed Association make a difference as they clean the half mile of shoreline along the Lower Mystic River. This annual event is part of the Massachusetts Coastsweep initiative, which last year removed over 35,000 pounds of trash and marine debris from 130 miles of coastline. Refreshments and cleanup materials will be provided. Sponsored by: MyRWA, The Boston Harbor Association, Boys and Girls Club of Middlesex County, and the City of Somerville. For more information or directions contact Janet at (781) 316-3438 or janet@mysticriver.org.

Saturday, September 18, 1 pm: **The A B Cs of Trees and Other Woody Plants.** Discover the rich variety of trees at the Robert Treat Paine Estate on a walk with the Waltham Land Trust. We will meet in the

parking area. Wear walking shoes. Please come to the Robert Treat Paine Estate (Stonehurst), 100 Robert Treat Paine Drive (off Beaver Street), Waltham. There is no charge for this event. Sponsored by the Waltham Land Trust. For more information call Inge Uhlir at (781) 899-2844.

Late September/ Early October: **Lexington Conservation Fall Walks.** Nell Walker will lead a walk featuring the American elm and Winslow Green will lead an afternoon ramble in Hayden Woods, Lexington. Sponsored by Citizens for Lexington Conservation. More details available in mid-September by contacting Maryanne King at (781) 860-0229, Mkingmking@aol.com, or visiting the website, <http://www.lexingtonma.org/clc/HomePage.htm>.

Sunday, September 26, 9:30 am-11:30 am: **Celebration of Autumn With Phyl Solomon and Boot Boutwell.** Join us in a celebration to welcome autumn, which officially begins on 9/22 at 12:30 pm EDT when the sun crosses over Earth's equator on its way south. We will have a puppet show and create a "sun window." We will also walk through the trails of Habitat and discover how plants and animals change at this time of year. This event takes place at Habitat Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont, and costs \$8-\$11. To pre-register call (617-) 489-5050.

Thursday, October 21, 6:30 pm: **Mystic River Watershed Association's Annual Meeting.** Join Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Kathy Abbott for a presentation about the Massachusetts DCR, with a vision for the Mystic River. Location to be determined. This meeting is free and open to the public. For information call (781) 316-3438, email janet@mysticriver.org, or check the website at www.mysticriver.org.

Saturday, October 23, 8 am -11 am: **Arlington/Lexington Bird Walk.** Chris Floyd will lead a bird walk starting at the Arlington Reservoir (parking at the park off Drake Road in Arlington) and continuing through Arlington's Great Meadow in Lexington. This walk is co-sponsored by CLC and Friends of Arlington's Great Meadow and by the Menotomy Bird Club. For more information contact Maryanne King at (781) 860-0229, Mkingmking@aol.com.

Michael Stratford is the Belmont Citizens Forum newsletter intern and a student at Belmont High School.

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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

Town Introduces Pavement Management

By John Dieckmann

You have doubtlessly noticed that the 80+ miles of streets and roads in Belmont do not seem to be in the best of condition. This is the result of many years of underfunding of basic road work, due to tight Proposition 2 1/2 era town budgets and limited state funds for road work. For many years only state Chapter 90 funds were used for significant road projects, and the availability of these funds has shrunk noticeably, from close to \$1 million per year in the early '90s to less than \$200,000 currently.

In 1996, the Selectmen announced that the town was implementing a long term pavement management program to remedy this situation. This program involves both careful evaluation of our major roads' need for repair or reconstruction and increased funding for road work. It also includes a plan to reconstruct major streets and maintenance to maximize their useful pavement life. Primary responsibility for this program rests with the Engineering Department in the Office of Community Development.

The Engineering Department works with outside consultants to evaluate Belmont's roads. Each street is given a careful visual assessment, noting the surface roughness and the numbers and condition of potholes, patches and cracks. On this basis, the road is given a pavement condition index (PCI) number, a rating between 100 (newly reconstructed) and 0 (badly deteriorated, practically a gravel and dirt road). A rating below 62 means that complete reconstruction is necessary. A rating of 70 indicates that the surfaces has deteriorated, but the road bed is sound enough that resurfacing can restore the street to nearly top condition. A rating of 75 indicates that an otherwise sound street needs maintenance such as crack sealing. Glenn Clancy, acting director of the Office of Community Development, provided a few examples of Belmont streets and their current PCI: Temple Street, 90; Bay State Road, 80; lower Common Street, 70; east-bound Concord Avenue, railroad bridge to Louise Road., 60; Beech Street, Waverley to Trapelo, 51; Benton Road, 40; Emerson Street, 32.

This system is a tool for managing, prioritizing, and optimizing the finite resources for the maintaining streets. For prioritizing reconstruction, the town considers both the PCI and the importance of the

major streets. Anticipated major utility work may be a reason for delaying action on an otherwise high priority street. For example, School Street awaits either construction of the MWRA pipeline (which will run the length of School Street from Goden to Trapelo) or definite abandonment of the project.



There are three basic options for repairing or upgrading a street. The most drastic is called full-depth reconstruction or reclamation. The existing pavement is removed, the roadbed or base underneath is filled, graded, and compacted, and new pavement is laid down. The second option, milling and overlaying, involves grinding off two or more inches of the pavement surface, leaving the familiar grooved surface, then repaving to the original or slightly increased surface height. This procedure is an effective way to remedy surface roughness and cracks and is considerably less expensive than full depth

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Pavement Management *continued from page 3*

reconstruction, but requires that the pavement and roadbed be sound. The third, less drastic, option is a combination of careful patching and crack sealing maintenance. The reality is that most of our major streets that have not been reconstructed since 1996 have deteriorated to the point where full depth reconstruction is necessary.

The town has decided that, when reconstructing a major street, granite curbing should be installed and the sidewalks should be rebuilt. While this is the most costly alternative, granite curbing improves pedestrian safety and the longevity of the street by containing and directing storm water to storm drains, preventing washout of the roadbed.

Three types of roads make up the 77.76 miles of public roads and 8.1 miles of private ways in town. First there are major arterials – state routes and major regional thoroughfares, such as Pleasant Street (Route 60), Trapelo Road, Common Street, Grove Street, and Concord Avenue, which total approximately 15 miles. Second are collectors, the major streets and roads that connect neighborhood streets to the major arterials, including School Street, Marsh Street, Goden Street, Oakley Road, and Washington Street, which total about 16 miles. The remaining roads are mostly lightly-traveled neighborhood streets. Maintaining and replacing the more heavily-traveled cross-town routes is a higher in priority than fixing the neighborhood streets. An obvious rationale for prioritizing major streets is that the resources benefit a much larger number of drivers than the same resources spent on neighborhood streets would. In addition, keeping the major streets in good working order tends to attract traffic off the neighborhood streets onto these routes.

In addition to town and Chapter 90 funds, combined state and federal funds are available for certain major projects, generally for reconstruction of the arterials. The reconstruction of Pleasant Street, currently pending, is an example of this; longer term, it is anticipated that the complete reconstruction of the Trapelo Road corridor will be funded in this way.

An obvious rationale for prioritizing major streets is that the resources benefit a much larger number of drivers than the same resources spent on neighborhood streets would. In addition, keeping the major streets in good working order tends to attract traffic to those routes and off of neighborhood streets.

Since 1996, funding for the program has averaged

approximately \$1 million per year. It has been estimated that the town needs to spend \$1.5 million per year to gradually upgrade the entire system of major streets. Four factors contribute to this cost:

- There are 30 miles of major roads, some of which can be treated as major state-federal projects.
- A fully reconstructed street should last 15 to 20 years.
- A full-depth reconstruction, including granite curbing and new sidewalks, typically costs \$1 million per mile.
- A portion (~25%) of pavement management funds needs to be allocated to timely maintenance.

There has been visible progress. Seven-and-a-half miles of major streets have been reconstructed or significantly upgraded since the pavement management program started 1996. Another dozen neighborhood streets totaling about three miles have been reconstructed as well. This leaves about six miles of major arterials and eight to nine miles of important (in the author's judgement) collectors that should be reconstructed. Pleasant Street and the Trapelo corridor are being handled outside the pavement management program.

Looking to the future, approximately \$1 million of town funds has been appropriated at each of the last three town meetings for road work, and the intent is to continue to do so indefinitely. This funding is still less than the \$1.5 million per year figure discussed above. At \$1 million per year and \$1 million per /mile it will take about 15 years to reconstruct the 15 miles of major arterials.

Two important considerations are being included in future plans: traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures and coordination of utility work so that it precedes (rather than follows) major reconstruction. The Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) recommends and advocates traffic calming. The 2003 reconstruction of White Street is the best example to date of the process, which involved extensive TAC and public input to the traffic-calming aspects of the design. The resulting street incorporates several well-thought-out traffic calming measures. Utility coordination involves having the town utilities (water, sewer, storm sewer, electric) and private utilities (Verizon, Comcast, and Keyspan) plan and implement major projects prior to street construction. Much of the burden of this coordination falls on the town engineer.

Beyond the projects still in process (Brighton,

GARDENING FOR THE BIRDS



BLUEBERRIES

Fall is a great time to get started!

Birds and gardens go together like, well, blue jays and blueberries. Gerry Kaye and Nell Walker are longtime champions of both. And fall is a great time to plant shrubs that will provide food in future years.

Gerry and Nell, both gardening professionals based in Arlington, will talk about their many years of trial and error in planning gardens to attract and feed birds year round. They will emphasize native plants that provide berries, shelter, and nesting places for garden birds common in this area.

Nell Walker is a landscape designer and invasive plant expert.

Gerry Kaye is a retired botany librarian, an environmental advocate, and a chronic beginning birder.

Thursday, September 23, 2004

7:30 - 9:00 pm

**All Saints Episcopal Church, Bramhall Room,
Corner of Common and Clarke Streets**

Light refreshments will be served.

For more information, contact the Belmont Citizens Forum at (617) 484-1844.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Prospect, Clifton), three specific projects are planned for the near future. Bright Road will be reconstructed with granite curbing and new sidewalks in 2005, and lower Common Street (Slade Street to the railroad bridge) will be milled and overlaid this fall. The intersection of Washington/Bright/Grove/Blanchard is being redesigned under the direction of the Traffic Advisory Committee, with funding provided by Cambridge, and will be reconstructed using Belmont

funds. In addition, 15 streets requiring crack-sealing maintenance will be addressed this fall. Beyond the estimated cost of these currently planned projects, another \$1.3 million has been appropriated for pavement management, so we can expect a number of additional projects to be announced and begun during 2005.

John Dieckmann is Vice President of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Waltham Land Trust Protects Local Open Space

By David Kehs

The Waltham Land Trust (WLT) is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving our community's natural resources through open space advocacy, education, acquisition, and protection.

If someone mentions "Waltham," chances are that the first thing to come to mind is not "a city with lots of open space." You might think of the office buildings on Route 128, or the restaurants on Moody Street, or perhaps the old Waltham Watch Factory along the Charles River. But open space? Don't you have to go out to Lincoln and Weston to find that?

Well, it turns out that about 1600 acres of the 8700 acres that comprise Waltham are undeveloped, including about 250 acres for cemeteries and playgrounds. The Waltham Land Trust would like to keep it that way.

The City of Waltham has a long history of encouraging development, starting with manufacturing operations along the Charles River and continuing with office buildings along the Route 128 corridor. There have been certain benefits to this development, such as employment opportunities and an expanded tax base. But our woodlands and farmlands have been falling victim to the bulldozer at an alarming rate in recent years.

Fortunately, the city has also been home to

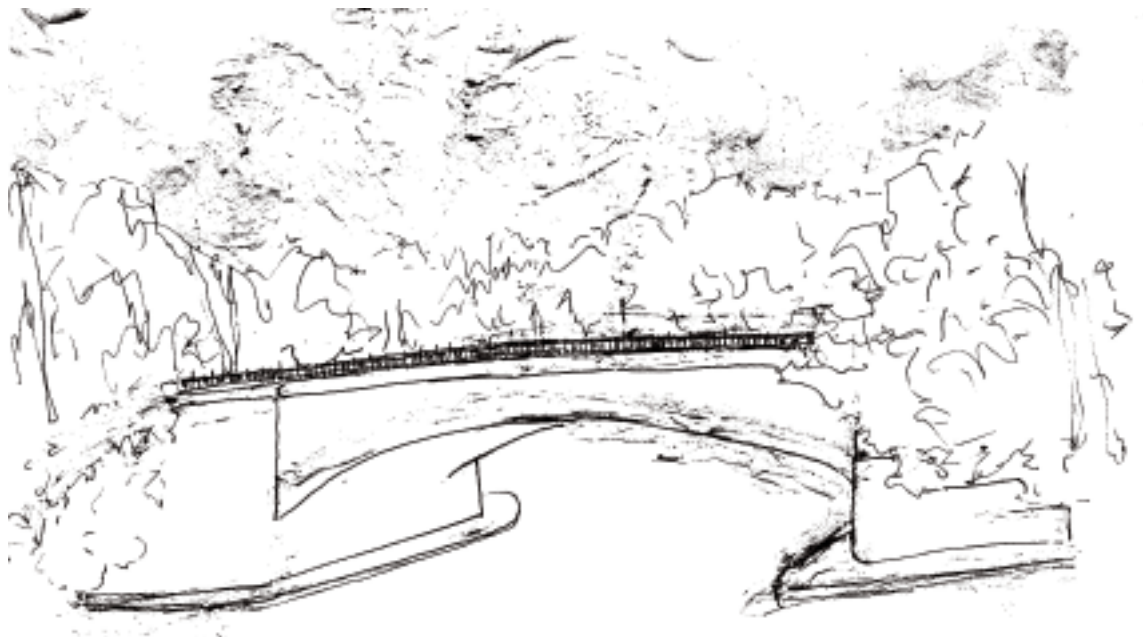
individuals who have recognized the value of preserving our natural landscape. Over 100 years ago, the citizens of Waltham supported the preservation of the twin summits of Prospect Hill. Thanks to their efforts we can now enjoy the 250-acre Prospect Hill Park, with its spectacular views of the entire Boston basin.

In the middle of the last century, the descendants of Robert Treat Paine, Jr., saw the value of preserving the historic Stonehurst estate and donated the home along with 109 acres of land to the city. That land, known as the Storer Conservation Land, is now protected and is open to the public for passive recreation.

More recently, Waltham citizens have become involved in a number of organizations and committees aimed at preserving some aspect of our environment. To cite just a few examples:

The Hardy Pond Association is noted for its tenacious (and successful) efforts to secure funding for dredging and restoring the pond. The HPA is still working to preserve the adjacent lands and to improve public access.

Concerned Waltham residents and elected officials joined with their counterparts from Belmont and Lexington to develop the re-use plan for the Metropolitan State Hospital property. Their efforts



Through Education, Advocacy, and Inventories

have resulted in the preservation of over 300 acres of that property, which might otherwise have been sold off for development.

The Chester Brook Neighborhood Association formed for the specific purpose of preventing the development of a fragile 25.5-acre parcel of land that abuts Waltham's Storer Conservation Land.

In 2000, people who had been involved in these localized preservation efforts noticed that other cities and towns had formed Land Trusts and suddenly asked, "Why don't we have one of these in Waltham?" Thus was born the Waltham Land Trust, which serves as a focal point for preservation activities throughout the city. The Waltham Land Trust pursues its goals through a number of activities:

Inventory. One of the first projects of the WLT was to conduct an inventory of undeveloped parcels within the city. We have identified approximately 60 different parcels of 4 or more acres in size and have attempted to determine the value of each parcel. While we are interested in preserving ALL undeveloped parcels, it is useful to have an objective way of identifying the most important parcels so that we know how to prioritize our preservation efforts.

Walks and Talks. WLT conducts approximately one event per month (see "Environmental Events Calendar" on p. 2). The event may be a guided walk in one of Waltham's open spaces, or a lecture related to natural resource preservation. These events are not only fun, but also encourage residents to get involved. Residents of any community are always welcome to attend WLT events.

Advocacy. Open space preservation in Waltham requires substantial assistance from public officials and agencies. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the owner of significant properties in Waltham, so one WLT activity is to encourage state officials to "do the right thing" with that land. Other properties can only be preserved by purchasing them, and only the City of Waltham has the financial means to do so. The WLT has rallied support to encourage the city to protect important parcels of land. These efforts have paid off, as evidenced by the recent agreement between the city and the Archdiocese of Boston for the purchase of about 30 acres of land behind Our Lady's Church on Trapelo Road.



School Programs. The WLT has assisted in presenting two environmental programs for Waltham's school children. Through efforts like this, we can encourage students to start thinking about environmental issues from an early age.

Greenway Project. The WLT has invested significant effort in promoting the Western Greenway, a swath of green space that spans Belmont, Lexington, and Waltham. Some portions of the Greenway are protected from development while others are still threatened. With funding from a state grant, the WLT Greenway Committee produced a color brochure along with a PowerPoint presentation that has been delivered to several local groups.

Newsletter. WLT publishes a periodic newsletter to keep members informed about open space preservation activities in the city.

Website. WLT maintains a website (www.walthamlandtrust.org) containing information about our activities, land in Waltham, and preservation topics in general.

Fundraising. WLT applies for grants and solicits donations from corporations and individuals. In March 2004, WLT organized a major fundraising event, the first annual Green Space Blues Jam, which was held at the Stonehurst Estate.

Anyone interested in land preservation in Waltham is welcome to attend WLT events and to join the organization. For more information, visit the WLT website, www.walthamlandtrust.org, write to WLT, PO Box 541120, 02454-1120, or call (781) 899-5344.

David Kehs is clerk of the Waltham Land Trust.

New Crosswalks Improve Pedestrian Safety

By Mark D'Andrea

Walk, cycle or drive through Belmont and you will notice new international design pedestrian crosswalks. This international design originated in Europe in the late 1940's. Locally, it was used in Cambridge, Arlington and Medford before being introduced in Belmont in 2002. The Belmont Citizens Forum, the Belmont Traffic Advisory Committee and the Selectmen all worked to bring these crosswalks to Belmont. The Citizens Forum funded the first two crosswalks in 2002 in an effort to promote the safety benefits of this new design.

The international design adopted by Belmont in

2002 makes a huge difference in promoting pedestrian safety. Poorly designed crosswalks can cost lives. Some crosswalks in other communities are made of bricks or are painted so that they are not readily seen by approaching motorists. To be visible to drivers, crosswalks need white stripes at least ten feet long. The longer the stripes the better, as the stripes form a backdrop to see pedestrians' movement across the crosswalk. This is especially important at dusk.

International design crosswalks are easily seen by approaching motorists. The two-foot wide white stripes are aligned with the direction of travel, creating a vivid white-black-white-black pattern that alerts drivers to watch for pedestrians.

The Belmont Highway Division is responsible for maintaining crosswalks on existing streets and roads. The Belmont Office of Community Development is responsible for installing international design crosswalks on new road construction such as White Street and the yet-to-be-reconstructed Pleasant Street. Peter Castanino, Director of Public Works, hopes to redo all of our existing crosswalks by the end of the current fiscal year in June 2005.

A drive through town indicates that more than half of our existing crosswalks have been up dated to the international design. Owing to population density and new road construction on streets such as Prospect and Clifton, most existing crosswalks are located on the south side of Pleasant Street.

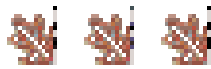
In the summer of 2003, an elderly woman was struck and killed crossing Trapelo Road at Sycamore Street. Prior to this crash, the Belmont Traffic Advisory Committee was already studying the area in response to a petition from the Butler Elementary School PTO and concerned parents. As a result of the study, a neck-down – where the street is narrowed so that pedestrians have a shorter distance to cross – was installed at the intersection with an international design crosswalk and fluorescent signage. Unfortunately, these improvements occurred after the fatal crash. Outside of installing pedestrian controlled signal lights, this intersection is an excellent example of what a crosswalk should look like.

Mark D'Andrea is Precinct 3 Town Meeting Member and Chairman of the Belmont Citizens Forum Traffic and Transportation Committee.





Belmont Community Environmental Fair



What environmental issues does Belmont face?

What can you do to make a difference?

Come and see!



Saturday, October 23, 2004

Belmont High School Field House

10 am to 4 pm

Exhibits! Demonstrations! Family Activities!

We are looking for help! Would you like to volunteer?

Call Jenny Fallon (617) 489-3860

Co-sponsored by:

Vision 21 Committee • Belmont Public Schools • Conservation Commission •
Belmont Municipal Light Department • Habitat

Alewife Comments *continued from page 1*

the site of the proposed first-phase structure, Building 100, inside the 100-year flood line. . .

“The impacts of Phase I are significant, especially during the demolition of buildings with asbestos and the construction of a 100-foot observatory building and a 600-car garage in the flood plain. A good alternatives analysis might well find that a lower building and/or a different garage configuration would be preferable. And it is clear to anyone who drives through Alewife at rush hour that ‘ample and unconstrained infrastructure facilities’ do not exist to support a return to the number of vehicles this proper-

River

- restoration of a parking lot on state property to the wetlands envisioned in the Alewife Reservation master plan;

- a significant financial contribution toward the implementation of the rest of the master plan; and conservation restrictions guaranteeing permanent preservation of some wetland and riverfront on the developer’s land.

The letter also recommended that construction equipment be banned from entering or exiting the site during the morning and evening rush hours.

For more information on the Phase 1 waiver, see

Why does the Belmont Citizens Forum File Comment Letters?

Filing comment letters is one of the Belmont Citizens Forum’s more important jobs. Government agencies read comment letters and take them seriously, especially when they reflect a careful consideration of the environmental issues and legal standards. Comment letters are invited under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) for new development and redevelopment at several stages of the project, usually after the developer files an Environmental Notification Form, again after he files a Draft Environmental Impact Report, and finally after he files a Final Environmental Impact Report. After each comment period, the state agency that administers MEPA, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, must rule on the adequacy of the filing and such special requests as Bulfinch’s request for a waiver.

The state and federal governments also solicit comments under other circumstances, as you can see from the range of issues on which the Citizens Forum filed comments just last month. We filed comments on several other important issues in June, including the proposed revisions to the state regulations implementing the Wetlands Protection Act, as reported in the July newsletter. Nearly 200 organizations and individuals filed comments on that proposal, which the state Department of Environmental Protection is still considering. Most of the comments – including all of those from environmental organizations – raised serious concerns with many specifics of the proposed changes.

Many of the comment letters filed by the Citizens Forum are researched and written by members of the board of directors, but the board often asks volunteers to examine the many technical issues and offer advice. In recent months, the Citizens Forum has decided that it should formalize this situation by creating a Technical Advisory Committee to help analyze and prepare comments on proposed regulations, environmental impact reports, and similar documents. For more information or to volunteer, please call Sue Bass at (617) 489-4729.

ty formerly added to the area, much less the addition of a single car,” the comment letter said.

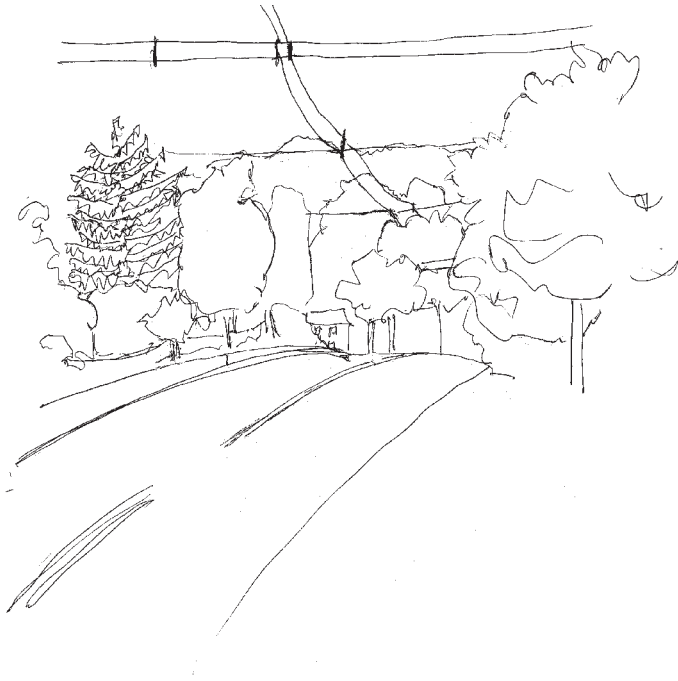
If the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, Ellen Roy Herzfelder, decides to grant a Phase I waiver, the Citizens Forum recommended several conditions to minimize the environmental damage and traffic, including

- construction of a pedestrian bridge at the east end of the Little River, as envisioned in the Alewife Reservation’s master plan, and a path from that bridge to the bicycle path on the south side of the Little

the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act web site, <http://www.mass.gov/envir/mepa/secondlevelpages/currentissue.htm>

In other comment letters filed in August, the Belmont Citizens Forum:

- Urged Purecoat North to study whether floods wash contaminated material onto neighboring property and into waterways and to test groundwater under the nearby town softball field and tennis courts for possible contamination from the plant. Because of a petition from a group of neighbors organized by Belmont Citizens for Environmental Safety, Purecoat



Hear MIT's Proposals for the Trapelo Road/ Belmont Street Corridor

October 14, 7:30 pm
Selectmen's Meeting Room
Belmont Town Hall

How should the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor look? How can we make it function better, and create a more pleasant place to live and work? How can we transform it from a commuter highway into a main street for residents and local businesses?

More than 20 graduate students in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Community Growth and Land-Use Planning course are studying Trapelo Road and Belmont Street this fall, trying to provide answers to those questions. **Those students will be in Belmont in October to present their preliminary ideas.**

Steer them straight. The students need to know where they're on target and where they're missing the boat. They want to hear what you think of their ideas. Come tell them!

Sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum. For more information, call (617) 484-1844

North was required to establish a Public Involvement Plan, but the draft plan showed results only from tests on Cambridge Plating property. The Citizens Forum commented on the draft plan by urging additional study beyond the company's borders and by raising technical questions suggested by a volunteer expert.

- Applauded the state Department of Environmental Protection's decision not to downgrade the Alewife Brook/Mystic River watershed from Class B (fishable and swimmable) to Class BCSO, which would have allowed combined sewer overflows into the watershed forever. Instead, DEP proposed to issue a third three-year waiver, allowing some overflows to continue as late as Sept 1, 2007, but keeping pressure on the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, Cambridge, and Somerville to continue working for the eventual elimination of overflows. That was the

position advocated last fall by the Citizens Forum and other environmental groups.

- Endorsed a proposed study by the state's Central Transportation Planning Staff of the traffic problems at the borders of Belmont, Lexington, and Waltham in view of the impending development at McLean Hospital, Fernald Center, and Metropolitan State Hospital. This \$200,000 study was first suggested at a meeting on May 17 sponsored by the Citizens Forum to discuss the proposals for Fernald and Met State. The Citizens Forum's endorsement letter expressed the "hope that the student is able to come up with creative mitigation methods that protect the historic country roads of Belmont, Lexington, and Waltham."

Sue Bass is a Precinct 3 Town Meeting Member and Belmont Citizens Forum Board member.

National Register and Preservation Easements

By Joseph Cornish

How much do you know about the National Register of Historic Places? Please ask yourself whether or not the following statements are true or false:

1) If my house is listed on the National Register, I can't make any changes to it, including changing its paint color.

2) If my house is listed on the National Register, it cannot be demolished by a future private homeowner.

3) If my house is listed on the National Register, it has to be open to the public a certain number of days per year.

All of these statements are false. The National Register cannot keep you from repainting your house – but listing your house on the National Register can gain recognition and some protection for your property, and may offer federal income tax deductions.

How the National Register Works

The National Register of Historic Places was authorized under the National Preservation Act of 1966 as part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect the nation's historic and archeological resources. The National Register is the official national list of these places, and includes buildings, (houses, barns, churches), structures (bridges, lighthouses, windmills), objects (boundary markers, fountains, monuments), sites (battlefields, campsites), and districts (mill complexes, college campuses, town centers).

In Massachusetts, the National Register Program is administered through the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) on behalf of the National Park Service. The criteria for a listing on the National Register are:

- association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- association with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- embodiment of distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity

whose components may lack individual distinction; or

- likelihood of yielding information significant in history or prehistory.

Properties must meet at least one of the above criteria to be eligible for listing in the National Register, or they may meet special criteria. For example, a reconstructed building could be eligible when no other building or structure with the same association has survived.

In Belmont, we have three individual properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

- The Belmont Lions Club at 1 Common Street, constructed in 1908 by the Boston and Maine Railroad as a station, is listed as a representative example of Craftsman style architecture and for its association with the development of Belmont Center and transportation.

- The Abraham Hill House at 388 Pleasant Street, constructed in 1693 and enlarged in 1796, is listed as a representative example of First Period architecture (period before 1720) and for its association with Abraham Hill, a prominent early Menotomy local official who held such positions as constable, surveyor of highways, and fence reviewer.

- "Red Top": The William Dean Howells House at 90 Somerset Street, was designed by the firm of McKim, Mead and Bigelow and constructed between 1877 and 1878. Red Top is listed for its association with Howells, a well-known 19th century literary critic and editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, who lived there with his family between 1878 and 1882. Red Top is a representative example of the Queen Anne style of architecture in New England. Red Top has also been designated a National Historic Landmark, a title reserved for properties that are nationally significant in American History and Culture. Red Top is the only National Historic Landmark in Belmont.

Belmont also has two National Register Historic Districts: the McLean Hospital National Register District, which included 308 acres significant for the period from 1859-1952, and the Pleasant Street Historic District, which includes 62 properties.

The Pleasant Street Historic District is also a Local Historic District, which is different from being a National Register District. A Local Historic District is created by a municipality and generally controls changes to exteriors of properties in these districts

Protect Homes and Maintain Privacy

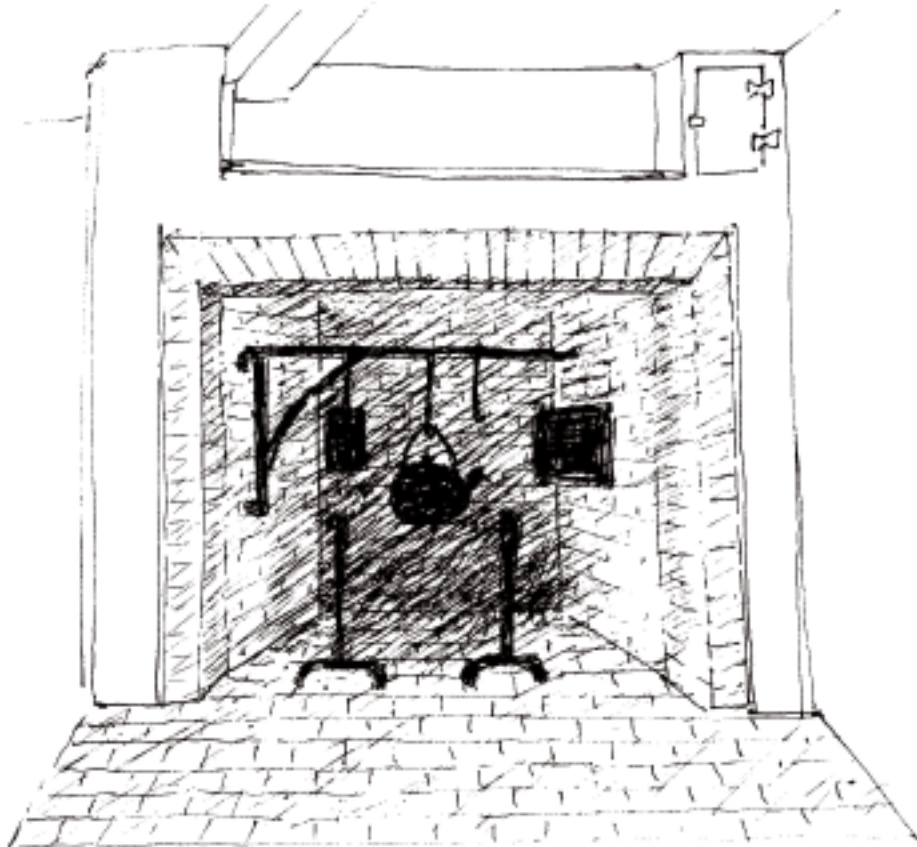
that are visible from a public way. In this case, both the Local Historic District and National Register District share the same boundaries.

Benefits to Listing

Why should I list my historic property on the National Register? There are three reasons.

How Do I List and Protect My Property?

The first step is to contact the State Historic Preservation Office of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) at www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc or (617) 727-8470. The MHC will confirm whether or not your property is currently listed individually or as part of a district. If your property is not already listed,



Recognition: The National Register recognizes the significance of a property to the community, state, and/or nation, and makes information about the property available to scholars and researchers.

Protection: National Register properties are afforded limited protection from adverse effects of state and/or federally funded and permitted projects.

Tax incentives, including tax credits for rehabilitation of income-producing properties, and funding opportunities, such as the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF), which offers matching grants to non-profit organizations and municipalities for preservation projects.

you will be asked to submit a letter to the MHC with a state survey inventory form which briefly describes the historic and architectural merits of the property. If the property is eligible, then a National Parks Service nomination form must be submitted, along with documentation of the property, including black and white photographs of the exterior and a GIS map that shows the location of the property. A State Review Board reviews the nomination, and sends nomination to the National Parks Service. Once the State Review Board and National Parks Service agree that the property fulfills the requirements, the property is formally added to the National Register. The process for listing

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Concord Intersection *continued from page 16*

lane on Common seems to be the only vestige of control and reason in the place, and it doesn't help much. "When I was in high school, they had kiosks [at the intersection] where the policemen stood to direct traffic," said Linda Nickens, TAC vice chair. "Those kiosks got hit so many times that the town removed them."

For such an awkward intersection, the place is well traveled. Sergeant Kenneth Hamilton, of the Belmont Police Department's Traffic Department, recalls that the Belmont Police tried to enforce safe driving at the intersection a few years ago. "We got a call from the Medford Police Department," said Hamilton. "It was backed up through Arlington and Medford... the Selectmen said 'Never again!'" Nickens observed that the intersection is key to Belmont transportation. "There are some places you can't go in town without turning left there. You'd have to go through Waltham," said Nickens.

enormous silver "UFO things" with a "highway look," said Nickens.

Other solutions, such as building pedestrian bridges and or widening the tunnel, would also wreak havoc on the historic landscape. A small rotary in the current space would be illegal, and Belmont's ladder trucks could not negotiate the tight curves. A large rotary would involve sacrificing the Wellington station, and perhaps the War Memorial as well. These beautiful monuments, which are part of Belmont's heritage, effectively block the town from installing a rotary to manage traffic. As Frisoli puts it, "Our [the TAC's] priority is not to move traffic. Our priority is to get pedestrians across roads safely and preserve the character of Belmont."

Belmont's TAC has tried to find a way to improve this intersection at least twice in recent memory – in 1989 and again in 2000. For the more recent consideration of the intersection, the Traffic Advisory Committee hired the BSC Group consultants to redesign Belmont Center. "The traffic engineers were

Motor Vehicle Crashes August 1999-August 2004

<u>Location</u>	<u>Crashes</u>	<u>Injuries</u>
Concord/Leonard/Channing	96	5
Concord/Common	33	10
Trapelo/Pleasant	88	15
Concord/Mill	61	8
Trapelo/Mill	50	4

Poor sight lines have kept the town from installing a pedestrian crosswalk closer to the intersection. Paradoxically, the lack of a view also makes it impossible to install a traffic light there, according to Nickens. Nickens said that there were concerns that a traffic signal would actually increase fatalities. "With a yellow light, someone could speed through, and you can't see [anything]," she explained.

Potential fatalities are not the only barrier to putting traffic signals in the intersection. The TAC has also discussed putting in synchronized traffic signals from all directions, but they are a very expensive proposition. They are also ugly. Once upon a time, traffic lights were simple affairs, with charming inoffensive single posts. Today's traffic signals are

stumped," said Frisoli. The TAC and the Board of Selectmen were also reluctant to experiment with changes that might make traffic worse in some other part of town.

"I get e-mails from newcomers about this intersection," said Frisoli. "I reply, 'No one can agree what to do with this intersection.'" Do not despair: Frisoli affirms that "the TAC is willing to entertain any and all ideas with respect to this intersection and certainly will put it up as an agenda item when requested by any resident." As Nickens put it, "We'll take any ideas anyone comes up with."

Meg Muckenhoupt is the editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

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National Register *continued from page 13*

a property currently takes almost two years.

While a listing on the National Register of Historic Places offers limited protection to historic properties, there are other tools that can guarantee preservation. Local Historic District Commissions regulate exterior changes to historic properties visible from a public way in designated local historic districts, such as Belmont's Pleasant Street Historic District. However, historic interiors are not protected from alteration, and there is no promise that future changes in legislation will not be made in the future that would limit the oversight of a Historic District Commission.

Through the legal mechanism known as preservation easements (or preservation covenants or preservation restrictions), significant interior and exterior features of historic buildings can be protected against alteration, neglect or demolition. Most people are familiar with easements that restrict property for public rights-of-way, or power and water lines. A preservation easement gives an organization the right to stipulate what improvements and repairs can or cannot be made by its a property's owner. The right is recorded with the deed and runs with the property in

perpetuity. In the event of a violation by the owners, the easement empowers the easement holder to take legal action to enforce compliance. Protected features range from structural timbers, doors, windows, plaster, masonry, woodwork and hardware, to outbuildings and site features such as barns and stone walls.

The federal government has recognized the importance of these easements by establishing income tax incentives to taxpaying donors. These incentives allow a qualified donor to take a charitable contribution deduction for the appraised value of all legally binding preservation restrictions placed in perpetuity on an historic property. In addition, the donation of a preservation restriction may give rise to favorable property, estate and other tax treatment.

One organization that holds preservation easements is Historic New England, formerly the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. For more information about Historic New England's preservation program (the Stewardship Program), please call (781) 891-4882, ext. 227, or visit its website, www.historicnewengland.org.

Joseph Cornish is Stewardship Manager at Historic New England

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People Are Asking

Why doesn't Belmont Fix the Concord/Common/Leonard Street Intersection?

By Meg Muckenhoupt

In some areas of the far West, driving is a simple thing. You turn on the car, point it in the direction you wish to go, and keep going until you wish to stop. Virtually every television ad for SUVs dramatizes this ideal – of not merely open roads, but open land. Where's the challenge in driving across streams, or over cliffs? You've traversed a thousand miles of trackless desert? Who cares? True valor – true adventure – rises from a challenge. In Belmont, the intersection of Concord, Common, and Leonard Streets is one of the greatest challenges of them all.

It's not that this intersection is a deadly place.

There are plenty of accidents, but they are “fender benders,” not highway deaths. The intersection of Trapelo Road and Pleasant Street produces injuries at a higher rate. “Everyone goes slowly, so no one gets seriously injured,” explained Mary Jo Frisoli, chair of Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC).

The reason the Concord/Common/Leonard intersection is challenging is that there seem to be no rules. Consider the scene. Drivers approaching from Common Street have a view of Wellington Station on the right, and the War Memorial and the Lions Club on the left. Cars coming down Leonard Street go through a tunnel under the railroad tracks. The tracks block sight lines so that Leonard Street drivers can't see anything approaching the intersection until they are already out into it. There are no stop signs, no traffic signals, no lights on the street. The left-turn

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