

Belmont Citizens Forum

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A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

July 2005

New Laws Can Help Belmont Build Paths

By John Howe

Is there a community path in Belmont's future? Several neighboring communities have converted abandoned railway corridors into public pathways for pedestrians, cyclists, and other recreational and commuter users. Belmont could soon have an off-road, paved trail network connecting the eastern end of the town to Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville, Watertown, and points beyond. The goal of connecting the town westward to the proposed Wayside Trail—running through Waltham and on to Berlin—remains elusive, although there are some signs of progress.

Community Paths, Long and Short

The first modern plan to establish a local community path was the Wayside Trail project, proposed in 1991. The trail was to be along the abandoned corridor of the old Central Massachusetts Railway (CMR), which branches off the Fitchburg Line near Beaver Street in Waltham and runs westward to Berlin. After making significant progress in every other town along the route, the Wayside Trail project hit a roadblock when Weston residents voted against the project in 1997. Despite Weston's rejection, in 1998 the Belmont Selectmen launched an effort to study possible routes for a path through Belmont, connecting the CMR to the Alewife MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) station in Cambridge. Other communities along the Wayside Trail route have continued local development efforts, but this regional trail project has been stalled since 2002, largely because of complications in negotiating

leasing arrangements with the MBTA, which owns the right-of-way.

Even in the absence of a long, continuous corridor, short trail segments of one to three miles can offer significant benefits. The easternmost segment of the Wayside Trail, known as the Fitchburg Spur (running from the Alewife MBTA Station along the southern edge of the Alewife Reservation to Brighton Street), is convenient for town residents. Last spring, members of the Friends of Belmont Community Paths spent a day widening and clearing the path of brush and debris, and adding stone dust to make it easily passable. This route now provides ready access to the T station and points beyond for residents of the Winn Brook neighborhood and, via Hittinger Street and Concord Avenue, to other neighborhoods in the town.

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Environmental Events Calendar

By Michael Stratford

Fresh Pond Ecology Walk: Investigating and Tracking the Connections. Saturday, July 16, 1 p.m.–3:30 p.m. Join the Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation in exploring a variety of ecosystems, plant and animal interactions, and seasonal changes. This free event will be held in the upper parking lot of Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge. Children accompanied by adults are welcome. Register with Elizabeth Wylde at (617) 349-6391 or friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com.

Building the Movement to Stop Global Warming Summer Workshop. Friday, July 22 to Sunday, July 24. This fourth annual conference sponsored by Mass Climate Action Network, Green House Network, and Clean Air-Cool Planet will provide information and feedback about effectively speaking and lobbying on specific climate change-related issues. In addition,

you can learn how to take action in your community by running an effective community campaign. This event will be held at the Outward Bound Conference Center on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. Cost for the weekend, including food, lodging, and materials is \$230 for dormitory accommodations and \$190 for those bringing tents. For more information, go to the website <http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org>. To register, send your application to Jennifer Schroeder at jschroeder@cleanair-coolplanet.org.

Boardwalk Construction at Arlington's Great Meadows in Lexington. Saturday, July 23, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Come and help make this natural area more accessible to all. For more information, e-mail David White, dwhite@gilbertwhite.com, or see www.FoAGM.org.

Alien Invasions: A look at New England's Invasive Species. Tuesday, July 26, 7 p.m. Found in every habitat type in the region, invasive exotic species pose one of the greatest threats to the native flora of New England. With few or no natural predators they thrive, in many cases spreading to cover vast areas and drastically changing the make-up of our natural communities. The effects of these invaders go beyond the plant world to mammals, insects, birds and amphibians. Join us for a discussion on the identification, natural history and control methods for some of our most common invasive species. This free program will be held in the Community Room, Medford Public Library, 111 High Street, Medford. Sponsored by the Mystic Partnership for Invasive Plant Control (Mystic PICM): Mystic River Watershed Association, Friends of the Mystic River, and Green Streets. For more information, call (781) 316-3438, or see www.mysticriver.org.

Sustainable Belmont Meeting. Wednesday, August 3 and September 7, 7 p.m.–9 p.m. Located in the Flett Room of the Belmont Public Library, the meeting will consist of planning for a fall public education forum about one environmental issue and will include discussion of a clean energy program for Belmont. Contact Jan Kruse for more information at jan_kruse1@yahoo.com.

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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

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Concord-Alewife Zoning Invites Density, Traffic

By Steve Kaiser

The City of Cambridge has completed a two-year study of the Concord-Alewife quadrangle, the area bordered by Concord Avenue, Blanchard Road, the Alewife Reservation, and Alewife Brook Parkway. The study area excludes the Cambridge Highlands, but includes the Fresh Pond shopping center.

The study recommends “upzoning,” or rezoning the area for denser development. The primary upzoning will come from “transfer of development rights.” This means that a property owner could sell the right to build an X-square-foot building to another Alewife property owner. The second property owner could then add those X square feet to the size of her planned building. Then the first property owner would receive a bonus for the land, so he can still develop 50% more than the current average building density at Alewife. It sounds like double counting of development to benefit developers. There is no density limit. Development would be restricted only by height.

For example, the Fresh Pond shopping center has about 700,000 square feet of land and a maximum height of 105 feet. Everything built above 85 feet can only be half as dense as development below 85 feet. What the 85-foot and 105-foot limits do is to allow for up to a 7 million-square-foot development envelope on the shopping center site. This is 50 percent more than all of the development in the Alewife area today. It is two and a half times the new development that the Cambridge planners have anticipated for the area for the next 20 years.

The building envelope is simply gargantuan, and the planners should be asked whether this is what they really intended. The failure to provide a reasonable zoning limit for the shopping center is the single largest failure of the new zoning package.

The transfer of development rights has other hazards. Developers could swap development rights several times, selling off first their rights to build housing and then their rights to build office and R&D space. Land owners will have higher property values,

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A map of the Concord-Alewife Study Area. This map is a simplified version of a plan prepared by the City of Cambridge's Office of Community Development for the Concord-Alewife Study.

Con-Ale Zoning *continued from page 3*

which means higher taxes. The economic incentive will be to sell development rights, make a cash windfall, and get a reduction in taxes. With this arrangement, pressure for development would become very intense.

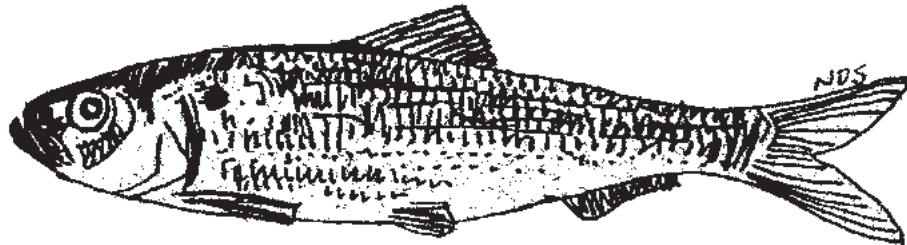
The key problems for Belmont are traffic and flooding. The preliminary flood estimates from new Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) studies indicate that the 100-year flood level could rise by up to 30 inches (see "What is a Floodplain Map? And Why Does it Need to be Updated?", Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, March 2005, www.belmontcitizensforum.org/read_newsletter.htm). Flood waters of this depth would cover almost all of the Concord-Alewife area and affect Cambridge, Belmont, and Arlington. Water could flow over Concord Avenue into Fresh Pond, threatening Cambridge's water supply.

Traffic is the big unanswered question at Alewife.

The Concord-Alewife study does not contain any proposals for improving Alewife intersections. Cambridge planners have claimed that all traffic problems are regional, and thus no local mitigation would be useful. Toward the end of the two-year study period, Cambridge staff produced a rudimentary traffic study, which claimed to show that future traffic would be reduced by the new zoning. The apparent rationale was that the new zoning encourages housing, which generates less intense peak-hour traffic than offices would. Unfortunately, the full traffic analysis has not been made public, and there is no evidence that Cambridge planners took future transfer of development rights into account.

The Cambridge City Council will take final action on the zoning recommendations this fall. For more information, see www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/cp/zng/concalew.

- Steve Kaiser is a civil engineer, and a member of the Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods.



Blueback Herring

Events *continued from page 2*

Summer Evening Mushroom Walks. Wednesday, August 17, 6 p.m.-7:30 p.m. Learn about and discuss the identification, habitats, sights, textures, and odors of mushrooms. Each walk will focus on a different area of the Habitat Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. The cost is \$10 for members (\$12 for non-members). For more information and to register, contact Habitat at (617) 489-5050.

Management and Control of Invasive Plant Species. Tuesday, August 30, 7 p.m. Understanding the ecology and identification of

these species is an important first step, but what is the next step? This program will review the techniques used to control various groups of invasive plant species, and will provide land management professionals and local officials the knowledge and skills necessary to implement or evaluate successful invasive plant control projects. This freetalk will be held in the Community Room, Robbins Library, 700 Mass. Ave, Arlington. Sponsored by the Mystic Partnership for Invasive Plant Control (Mystic PICM): Mystic River Watershed Association, Friends of the Mystic River, and Green Streets. For more information, call (781) 316-3438, or see www.mysticriver.org.

BCF Board Turns Down Junction Brook Appeal

By Grant Monahan

The Belmont Citizens Forum has decided against appealing an administrative ruling that Junction Brook is not a perennial stream. Although a poll of supporters of the Citizens Forum found substantial moral and financial support for an appeal, after further consultations with legal counsel the board reluctantly concluded that the chances of success were too low to warrant further litigation.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection recently confirmed the conclusions reached by Administrative Magistrate James Rooney, who has been hearing the Junction Brook case for three-and-a-half years. Rooney found that Junction Brook was not a perennial stream protected under Massachusetts law. As a result, the construction of the American Retirement Corp.'s 600,000-square-foot senior complex and Belmont Value Realty's 150,000-square-foot research and development project will proceed without regard to the location of Junction Brook. The brook emerges from beneath a road abutting the R&D project and flows through open space only 100 feet away from the senior complex. The Citizens Forum board will ask the McLean Land Management Committee as guardian of the open space to require both developers to use construction techniques that will protect Junction Brook.

advocate for protection of our community and natural resources and will, when necessary, pursue judicial review of appropriate issues in the future.

- Grant Monahan is President of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



The Citizens Forum will continue to

TAC Sets Public Hearing Dates, Hires Consultant

By Meg Muckenhoupt

Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) will hold three more public hearings on the future of Trapelo Road during July and August. The July 7 session focussed on bicyclists and pedestrians with disabilities: the remaining three sessions will focus on specific concerns of various groups with an interest in the Belmont Street/Trapelo Road redesign, while the final session will be open to all topics.

Upcoming TAC Belmont Street/ Trapelo Road Hearing Schedule

All hearings will take place at 7 p.m. in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall.

Date	Focus
July 19	Business interests and the Business and Economic Development Planning Group (BEDPG)
August 2	Residents Vision Committee, Belmont Housing Authority
August 16	Open topic

TAC Chair MaryJo Frisoli said that she regrets that the meetings are being held during the summer, when so many people are on vacation, "but otherwise we'll be set back a year." The reason to rush is that October is this year's deadline to submit projects for state Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding. TIP applications require a conceptual design, not a final blueprint for rebuilding the road—but to make it through the competitive selection process and onto the final list of TIP projects, the plan needs support from the community, selectmen, and state legislators. The conceptual design will include specifications for the number of lanes the road will have at various points along the roadway and for

finishing touches, such as plantings and street furniture.

TAC has hired the BSC Group as consultants to help plan Trapelo Road. TAC initially considered seven consultants. "A lot of firms are doing massive highways. We wanted a firm to embrace the public process, and be sensitive to the town—someone familiar with the type of town we are, and that there are a lot of groups to take into account," said Frisoli. "We want a fair and democratic process from beginning to end." In addition to consulting on the road's design, the BSC Group will perform other services to help the town improve the road, such as helping business owners find grants to upgrade their storefronts.

The Belmont Street/Trapelo Road redesign will have to satisfy many stakeholders, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, the Housing Authority, McLean, local business owners, and residents who live along the street. "We have a lot of people to please," said Frisoli. "We want this road to be a flagship for the town."

Trapelo Road Neckdowns

The new neckdowns on Trapelo Road at Willow and Poplar Streets and the one installed earlier at Sycamore Street are not part of the Trapelo Road redesign. They were planned by TAC three years ago.

In 2002, the Board of Selectmen appropriated \$150,000 from the pavement management budget to the TAC to make the town's roads safer. TAC decided to concentrate on pedestrian safety.

The committee started by specifying the locations for five international-style crosswalks at key pedestrian intersections in town, which were funded by \$2,500 donated by the Belmont Citizens Forum, after a study found that international-style crosswalks were safer than other styles. (See "New Crosswalks Improve Pedestrian Safety," Belmont Citizens Forum newsletter, September 2004, or "Better Crosswalk Design Makes Streets Safer," Belmont Citizens Forum newsletter, January, 2002, available at www.belmontcitizensforum.org/read_newsletter.htm) All of Belmont's crosswalks will be converted to international style as the intersections are maintained.

TAC used some of the town's \$150,000 to install

for Trapelo Road Redesign, Installs Neckdowns

traffic drum barricades to alert drivers to yield to pedestrians in Belmont Center, in Cushing Square, and on Cross Street at the Winn Brook school. TAC also relocated the Sycamore Street/Trapelo crosswalk to Hawthorne and Trapelo and installed a neckdown so that children could cross Trapelo Road to get to the Butler School.

TAC also decided in 2002 to install neckdowns on Trapelo Road at Willow Street and Poplar Street. They were to have been built shortly after the Hawthorne neckdown was completed, but they were delayed when a resident challenged them. The Willow and Poplar Street locations were chosen by TAC and Tom Gatzunis, then town engineer. They were selected because they would “. . . announce to motorists that they are entering a commercial area and that they should slow down because of the high likelihood that pedestrians will be trying to cross the road,” according to Glenn Clancy, Belmont's Director of Community Development. The neckdowns were placed on the sites of existing crosswalks.

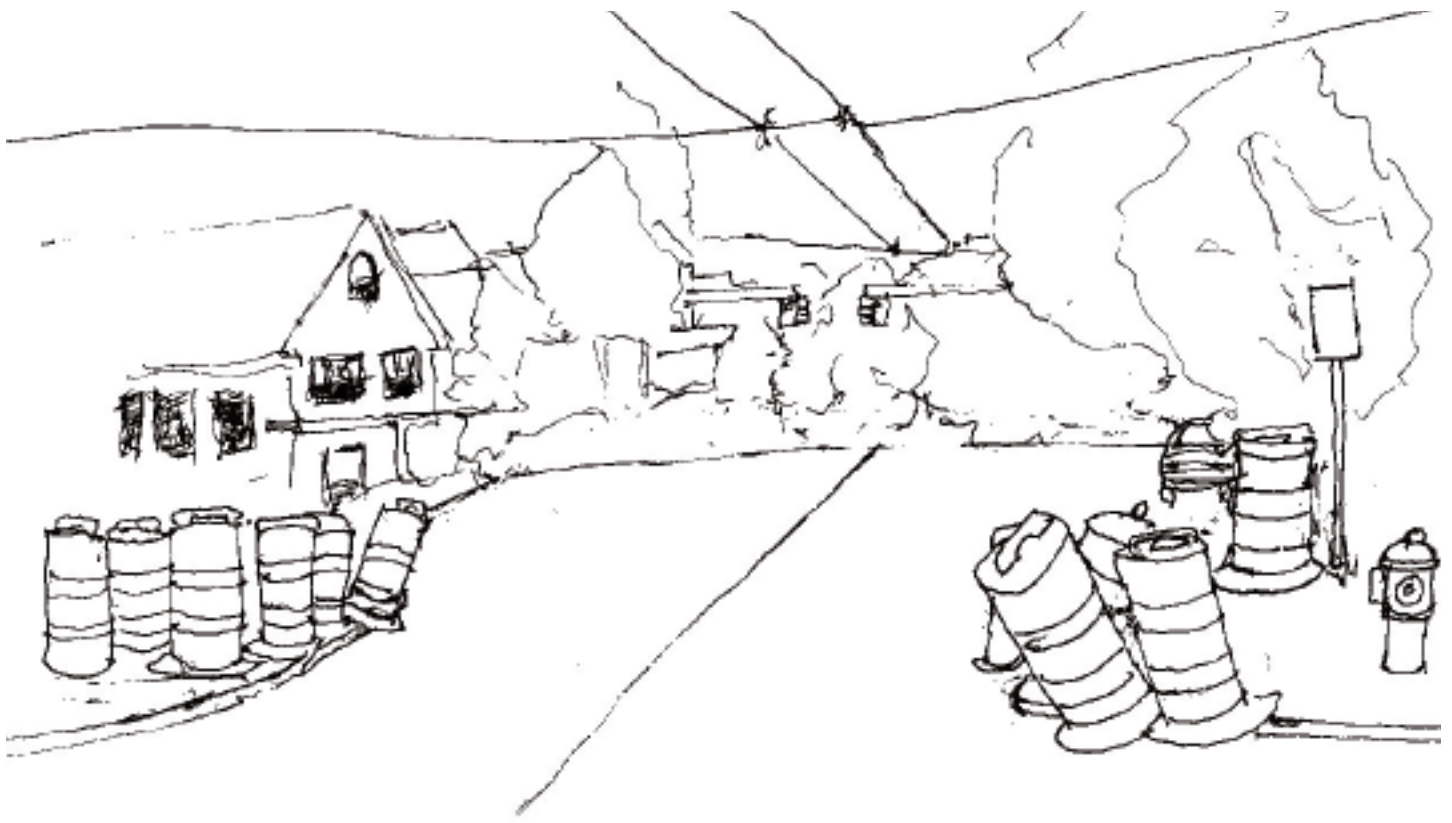
Clancy blamed part of the construction delay on scheduling. He said work on sidewalks and curbs, including neckdowns, is put off until the end of the roadwork season. Last fall and in fall 2003, the crews

ran out of time and had to finish their projects the following spring. Signs went up shortly after the neckdowns were finished, but re-striping the road was delayed by bad weather. “This spring saw so much rain it set their [the contractors’] schedule back,” Clancy wrote in an e-mail.

Clancy said pedestrians “really like” the Sycamore Street neckdown, which helps Butler School children cross Trapelo Road. But building that neckdown taught the town a few things. Bus stops located at a neckdown made traffic back up. When striping the Sycamore Street neckdown was delayed so that it could be done at the same time as similar work on Brighton Street, drivers were confused. “In retrospect, it was more important to get the bumpout [neckdown] striped than it was to try to take advantage of an economy of scale by having all striping done at once,” Clancy said.

“I get no complaints from drivers,” Clancy recently noted. “In fact, I can’t recall ever getting complaints from drivers. Perhaps they are complaining to other people.”

— *Meg Muckenhoupt is the Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.*



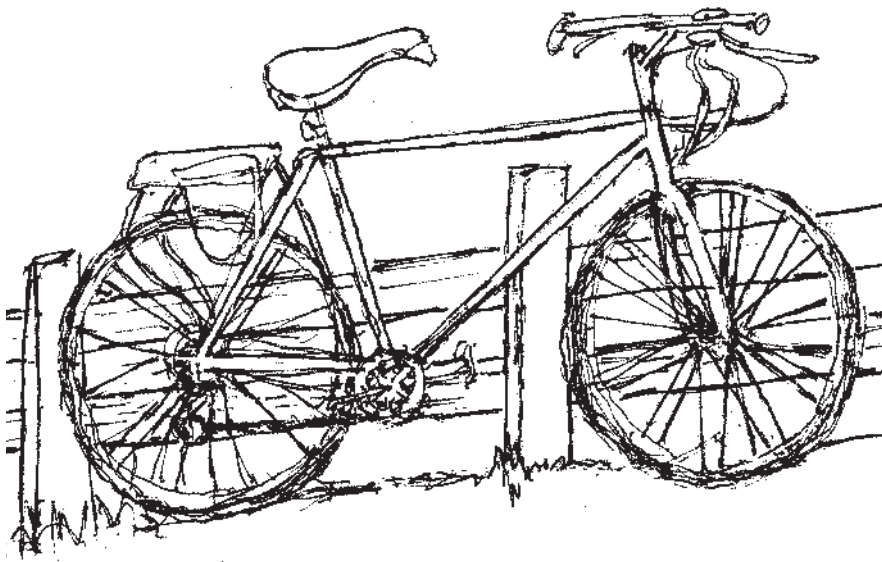
Community Paths *continued from page 1*

Because of its connection to the MBTA system and other existing trails, the Fitchburg Spur segment has been recognized by the state as a key intermodal link. According to state Representative Anne Paulsen, this segment is slated for all-weather paving and other improvements through the state Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), with funding approved for federal fiscal year 2006. However, she emphasized that driving this project forward will require active support from the Selectmen and town planning office. Selectman Will Brownsberger recently emphasized his commitment to early completion of this upgrade project, describing it as “low-hanging fruit” that will offer great benefit to the town and its residents at minimal cost.

Belmont’s Tricky Routes

Beyond Brighton Street to the west, routing issues for a pedestrian/cycle path through Belmont become more complex, and it is unclear whether the ideal goal of a single, continuous, off-road pathway can be realized. While open space exists alongside the live tracks of the Fitchburg Line between Brighton Street and Belmont Center, Representative Paulsen said that the MBTA opposes the concept of a fenced “rail-with-trail” design throughout Belmont because of public safety. Several rail-with-trails exist in other parts of the country, but not in areas with frequent or high-speed service.

Access from Brighton Street to Belmont Center via Channing Road is blocked by private lots, and the school department has insisted that a public bicycle



Further Information

For excellent in-depth information on existing and proposed bikeways in Massachusetts, visit www.massbike.org/bikeways/

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation has a map showing existing and proposed recreational trails at www.eot.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=bikes/bikes&sid=bikes

For descriptions of existing trails across Massachusetts and other states, visit TrailLink, a service provided by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, at www.trailink.com.

route must not encroach on the high school campus. At present, cyclists may travel from the Fitchburg Spur at Brighton Street to Belmont Center along Hittinger Street and south of Claypit Pond to Concord Avenue, which was striped with a bicycle lane in its reconstruction in the late 1990s. No obvious solution has yet been identified for traversing the busy five-way intersection at the railway underpass in Belmont Center.

To the west of Belmont Center, there could be a dedicated off-road trail crossing the McLean Hospital property along Pleasant Street. Such a project was envisioned in the Memorandum of Agreement negotiated in the late 1990s between McLean and the town regarding expected uses of the property. Due to the presence of a ledge [a kind of stone], however, trail construction along the hillside could be expensive. Representative Paulsen noted that the current reconstruction of Pleasant Street already includes striping of a bicycle lane at the edge of the roadway. To the west and south of McLean Hospital and Trapelo Road, a variety of options and obstacles exists for traversing the Waverley Oaks region of Waltham, connecting to the Wayside Trail route south of Beaver Street.

Rail-with-trail conversions are progressing in neighboring communities. A proposed trail from Fresh Pond in

Cambridge through Watertown has been under study by members of the community and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, and could proceed toward initial construction shortly. Meanwhile, the city of Waltham has sought to negotiate a long-term lease with the MBTA for rights to the Central Massachusetts Railway right-of-way.

New Help for Community Paths

One of the principal obstacles that has prevented communities from assuming responsibility for MBTA corridors has been liability of two types: personal injury and environmental remediation. Progress is being made on both fronts.

Last year, a new state statute was enacted that limits communities' liability for accidents that occur on converted rail-trails to \$5,000. Liability for environmental contamination discovered on rights-of-way is a separate and even more complex matter that has impeded trail development. Most recently, construction on the already-approved Bruce Freeman trail from Lowell to Framingham has been delayed for redesign to deal with any hazardous materials on the site. Representative Paulsen said that the Legislature is working on a new statute to allow communities to use "Section 21E" funds, available under the state's Brownfields Redevelopment program, for insurance. Under the proposed legislation, \$1 million of the Brownfields Redevelopment fund would be set aside for cities and towns to purchase environmental



insurance for potential cleanup costs that may be associated with rail-to-trail development. In the very unlikely instance that the cleanup costs exceed the limits of the policy, the communities can apply directly for 21E funds. Representative Paulsen said that enactment of this proposal would "remove an obstacle that has made communities reluctant to pursue" rail-with-trail conversions.

Community paths and rail-with-trail conversions are highly complex projects that frequently take 15 to 20 years to complete. The highly successful Minuteman Bikeway was conceived in the mid-1970s, yet opened in 1992. Many studies have shown that such pedestrian- and cycle-friendly trails contribute to healthier, more livable communities, enhanced property values for abutters, small business opportunities, and an improved climate for economic development. With energy costs projected to remain high, a path that offers residents convenient, safe, non-motorized access around town and to the MBTA without depending on a private automobile could be even more valuable in the future. For all of these reasons, and despite the numerous obstacles and complexities, trail advocates and supporters persist in efforts to develop Belmont's own path and contribute to an important, growing network that links our surrounding communities.

— *John Howe is a Belmont resident who works in the energy utilities industry. He has also served as chair of the advisory board to the New England office of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.*

Next Steps

A meeting to discuss strategy for **completing the Wayside Rail/Trail through Belmont** is being planned for this summer.

Those who are interested in participating should call

John Dieckmann at
(617) 489-1423 or e-mail him at
dieckmannj@comcast.net

Belmont Was Once a Town of Thriving Farms,

by Eric H. Anderson

Before it was a town of homes, Belmont was a vital farming community. For its first 100 years, agriculture was the town's chief source of revenue. There were orchards, market gardens, small dairy producers, and stock farms that bred cattle and racehorses. According to local historian Jane Sherwin, Belmont was known for its fruits and vegetables just as Paris was known for its women's fashions.

Belmont's farming history was the subject of Sherwin's June 7 presentation, "The Farm Where You Live." She covered the period from Belmont's 1859 incorporation to about 1950, when almost all of the town's farmland had been sold for real-estate development. The presentation was made possible by a grant from the Belmont Cultural Council.

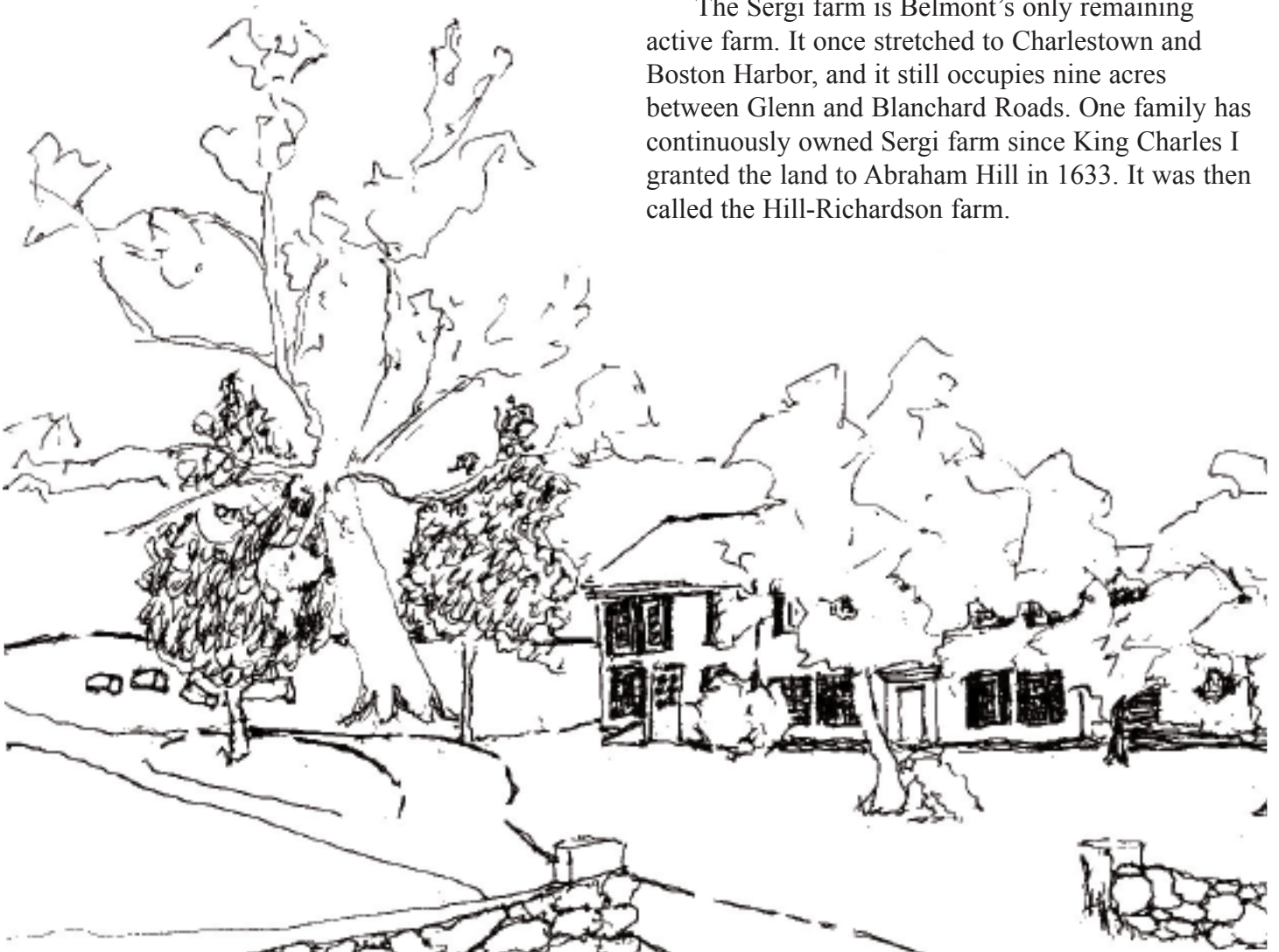
Sherwin feels that Belmont's origins contribute to what the town is today, and that if people don't under-

stand Belmont's past, they will not feel connected to the community. Sherwin studies and publicizes Belmont's farming history so that residents will know and preserve elements of our active agricultural past.

Belmont's land has been farmed since earliest colonial times. In 1859, when Belmont was incorporated, the town was still mostly farmland. There were two types of farms in town at the time: older farms settled as early as the 1630s, whose number had decreased over the years due to land sales, and newer farms of 10 to 25 acres each.

What made Belmont special was its innovative and enterprising farmers, who won awards for their produce and served in state and local farm associations. Some of these leaders introduced European livestock breeds to the New World. Winthrop Chenery brought Frisian Holstein cattle to New England. Others developed new plant varieties like the Colonel Cheney strawberry.

The Sergi farm is Belmont's only remaining active farm. It once stretched to Charlestown and Boston Harbor, and it still occupies nine acres between Glenn and Blanchard Roads. One family has continuously owned Sergi farm since King Charles I granted the land to Abraham Hill in 1633. It was then called the Hill-Richardson farm.



Market Gardens, Orchards, and Dairies

In 1845, Warren Heustis married Lucy Ann Hill and began a farm on the 13 acres between Little River and the Arlington town line that had been given to him by Lucy Ann's father, Amos Hill. Heustis and his son grew award-winning fruits and vegetables, and they had the largest fancy-pig farm in the region (1200 registered stock). The elder Heustis was the first farmer to import short-nosed Yorkshire pigs to America. This stock became the foundation of his piggery.

Herbert Shaw purchased 12 acres on the corner of Washington and Grove Streets in 1875 and began the Shaw Farm. His son Edward ran the farm after graduating from the Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst in 1907. By 1915, the farm had seven greenhouses, 75,000 square feet of produce under glass, and orchards with nine varieties of pears and six varieties of apples.

In 1921, Walter E. Lenk established Belmont Gardens between Sherman and Hoitt Roads. It had ten greenhouses with 100,000 square feet of glass. He also developed the Belmont Gardenia and received one of the first U.S. plant patents issued. His company shipped up to 8,000 gardenias per day.

In Sherwin's words, "by the late 19th century, Belmont was full of greenhouses, farms, and market gardens designed and operated to produce fruits and vegetables and flowers to sell at Quincy Market. The demand for this produce was so great ... that farmers could afford to build elegant homes and to send their children to college."

As small farms became less profitable in the first half of the 20th century, Belmont's farms began to disappear, but evidence of their existence remains today. Vegetable gardens still border the soccer field in Pequossette Park, community gardens still thrive in Rock Meadow, and scattered fruit trees and stone walls still bear witness to former orchards and fields. All over town, farm buildings still stand—such as the Long Farmhouse across the street from the Chenery

Middle School.

To revitalize Belmont's ties to farming, Sherwin suggested having community farming at Rock Meadow or creating a virtual orchard by designating fruit trees throughout Belmont for cultivation and harvest. Residents could revive Belmont's Strawberry Festival, first held in 1859, which drew thousands each year. Volunteers could interview farmers who lived and worked in Belmont.

After the presentation, former town resident Ralph Stevens, now of Northborough, talked about working on the Shaw Farm as a boy. Stevens recalled harvesting beans and beets when he was eight or nine years old for \$0.19 an hour and accompanying the farm truck to market.

Town Meeting Member Kit Dreier announced a proposed by-law that would help preserve Belmont's remaining farm buildings. The by-law would allow the Planning Board to issue a special permit for the "adaptive reuse" of a freestanding barn or carriage house that

is more than 100 years old, subject to the approval of the Historic District Commission and a public hearing. The special permit would allow an owner to convert the historic structure to a use other than agriculture, such as housing.

Sherwin said that Belmont's "farms and market gardens and greenhouses offer a continuity between the early settlements, Belmont's incorporation as a town, and the present... The more we know and understand this part of the town's history, the greater will be our sense of connection to the life of our community."

Sherwin said that if there is sufficient interest, she will repeat the June 7 talk, and she plans a follow-up talk next fall. For more information, contact her at j.sherwin@verizon.net.

— Eric H. Anderson is a Belmont resident, and will be attending the University of Michigan Law School in the fall.



Residents Envision Historic “Waverley Trail”

By Jim Levitt

Over the past year, a group of Belmont citizens has been meeting to discuss ways to highlight and celebrate the internationally significant role that a Waverley neighborhood landscape has played in the evolution of the conservation movement. That landscape, located just west of the Andros Diner and the spray park on Trapelo Road, was home to a collection of ancient trees, the Waverley Oaks, which helped to inspire the creation of both the world's first land trust (now The Trustees of Reservations) and the nation's oldest metropolitan park commission (now part of the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation).

An editorial in *Garden and Forest* dated February 19, 1890, explained the Oaks' significance. The huge trees were "well known to all Bostonians interested in nature, and strangers not infrequently made the pilgrimage to Belmont to look upon those venerable products of the Massachusetts soil, ...[some of which] had attained to some size before the Pilgrims landed on the shores of Massachusetts Bay." The trees were prominently mentioned in Charles Eliot's drive to rally "lovers of nature... to preserve for themselves and all the people scenes of natural beauty which, by great good fortune, still exist near their doors."

Today the offspring of those great oaks still thrive on the small hills adjacent to Beaver Brook. Curiously, the heritage of the trees and the landscape that surrounds them is virtually unknown to younger residents of Belmont.

On June 21, a group of interested Belmont residents met at the Chenery Middle School with Steve Cecil and Kristen Bendery of the Cecil Group to review the consulting firm's vision of a Waverley Trail. The trail would celebrate the remarkable history of the Oaks and the Waverley neighborhood. The planning work, paid for by a grant from the state, laid out a potential route for the trail. The Cecil Group also presented options for appropriate markers and signage. Participants were particularly impressed with simple, classic designs. With the benefit of the residents' feedback, the Cecil Group will prepare documents to help Belmont residents promote the Trail, and find funding for it from local businesses and other potential donors.

For further information on the Waverley Trail, please contact Jim Levitt (jnlevitt@aol.com).

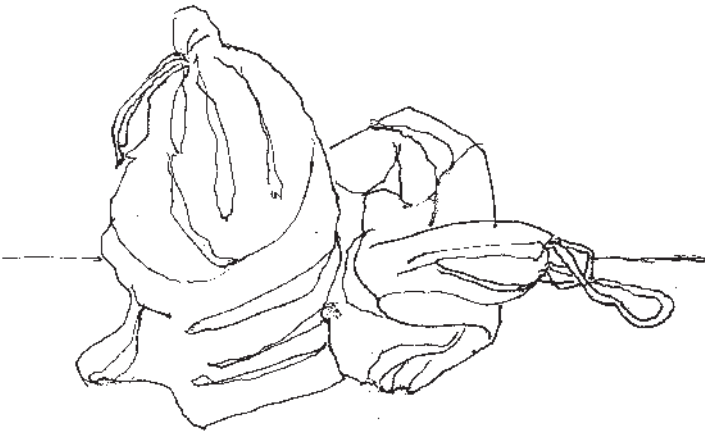
- Jim Levitt is a Belmont resident and has an office on Church Street in Waverley Square.



Town To Test Groundwater Near Purecoat Site

By Meg Muckenhoupt

The Purecoat Planning Committee has requested the testing of groundwater for contamination on both town property and private lots near the Purecoat North electroplating plant. On June 20, the Belmont Board of Selectmen authorized spending up to \$21,000 for testing and extended the committee's charge for another year. The testing dates have not been set, pending bids for the contract, but the work will probably take place this fall, according to Noah Sachs, chairman of the town's Purecoat North Planning Committee.



Although the Hittinger Street plant abuts Belmont High School and a residential neighborhood, there is no record of any groundwater testing outside the Purecoat site itself, Sachs said. Such testing has been repeatedly recommended by neighborhood residents and other observers, including the Belmont Citizens Forum. "I think it's time we put this issue to bed," said Selectman Will Brownsberger.

The decision to test outside the plant site follows the May 20 letter from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to Purecoat. The DEP letter drew attention to a groundwater mound below the building—a raised area in the water table that sits above the surrounding groundwater. "A groundwater mound sends water in all directions," said Sachs. "The danger is that these chemicals will well up in basements, volatilize, and send vapor up through homes."

The DEP's letter reported evidence that "a continuing source of contamination [by chlorinated solvents] is present," perhaps in the loading dock area or underneath the plant. The agency instructed Purecoat to conduct further on-site studies during the next six months: new tests for two carcinogens found previously, chromium and trichloroethylene (TCE); tests to identify the direction of groundwater flow; and tests of the soil under the building.

In their report to the Selectmen, the Purecoat Committee did not recommend rezoning the site now because the cost of any required environmental cleanup is unknown, Sachs said. Further testing should help clarify exactly what is on the site and how much it will cost to remove it. The Selectmen had voted last January to support housing at the site, and the committee suggested that between 50 and 67 units might be appropriate. Residents who attended the May 11 public hearing on rezoning the Purecoat North site supported dense residential development if traffic issues could be addressed. "The consensus was that almost anything is better than what is there now," said Sachs.

In an interview, Sachs noted that Purecoat's site is contaminated by carcinogens, that Purecoat's basement contains open vats of electroplating chemicals that could spill over in a flood, and that Purecoat's building has had three fires in the past eight years. "Residents should know just how dangerous this place is," said Sachs.

Purecoat North's attorney, Shepard Johnson, did not return repeated calls and e-mails for this article.

Does Belmont Need New Toxics Regulations?

The Purecoat Committee recommended a town hazardous material by-law to allow registration, inspection, and regulation of toxic substances. "Over 75 separate releases of hazardous substances and/or oil in Belmont have been reported to the DEP since 1987, according to DEP records, and about 30 of these were within the past five years," the report noted. "The town should be involved more in commenting on and monitoring of these spills," Sachs said.

continued on page 14

Purecoat *continued from page 13*

State law gives the town power to regulate “public nuisances and noisome trades,” according to the Purecoat Committee report, but the town does not treat hazardous uses as “noisome trades.” Belmont also does not require “site assignments” for activities that involve hazardous materials. A site assignment is

rials regulations “have been on our to-do list for a long time.” However, “any regulations will not be geared just to Cambridge Plating [now Purecoat North.]” She said the company’s hazardous materials are “covered by state and federal laws.” David Alper, chairman of the Board of Health, agreed, saying, “The fire department and police already have a list of everything in them.”



an official determination that the planned use is suitable for the site. The state does require some facilities, such as large incinerators, to get site assignments from towns. But other businesses, such as Purecoat's electroplating facility, are not covered by state regulations.

Watertown, Cambridge, Weymouth, and Stoughton already have hazardous material by-laws. At the June 20 Selectmen's meeting, the Selectmen encouraged the Purecoat Committee to work with the Board of Health to develop new regulations rather than propose a new by-law independently.

Donna Moultrup, director of Belmont's Health Department, said in an interview that hazardous mate-

Alper said the Board of Health is working on two hazardous materials projects: emergency preparedness (required by the state and federal government) and regulations for business and residential handling of common toxic materials such as motor oil and chemicals used in nail salons, dry cleaners, and so on. “There's a lot of old professors and scientists in town,” said Alper. “They'll bring in old reagents [to Alper's office], in brown bottles with glass stoppers—no one knows what the heck they are.”

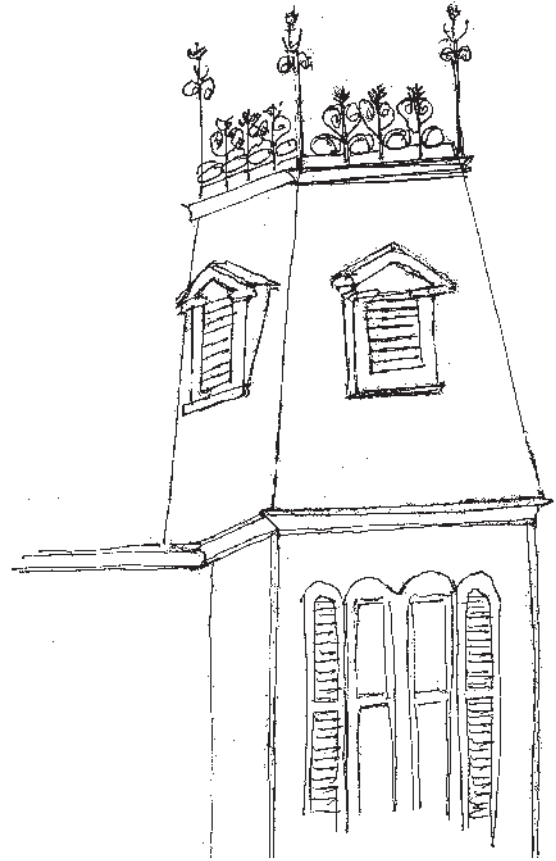
— Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

How big, how high, how dense?

The Belmont Citizens Forum's Planning/
Zoning Committee will meet on August 11
at 7:30 p.m. to brainstorm how to start a
town-wide conversation on **density in
Belmont**.

The committee might decide to
invite a speaker or a panel or put together a
slide show illustrating various levels of
density in other communities.

If you are interested in helping, please call
Sue Bass, (617) 489 4729.



The Belmont Citizens Forum Wants To Write About YOUR Group!

The January 2006 Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter will feature a
review of Belmont's environmental organizations.

If you would like your group included in that issue, please contact the
editor, Meg Muckenhoupt, at editor@belmontcitizensforum.org
by December 1, 2005.

Please include contact information and a brief summary of your group's
recent activities, and a logo, drawing, or photo of your group, if one is
available.

Diverse Wildlife Thrives at Alewife Reservation

By Eric H. Anderson

Despite local overdevelopment, bad drainage, and threats to a nearby forest, the Alewife Reservation is a rich urban wilds, with an astonishing variety of species living within walking distance of the T stop.

Mike Arnott, a naturalist with a master's degree in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts University, spoke on "Urban Wilds: Past, Present, and Future: The Alewife Reservation's Wildlife, Wetlands, Meadows, and Woodlands," on June 14. The talk was sponsored by the Belmont Land Trust, the Arlington Land Trust, the Belmont Citizens' Forum, the Friends of Alewife Reservation, and the Mystic River Watershed Association.

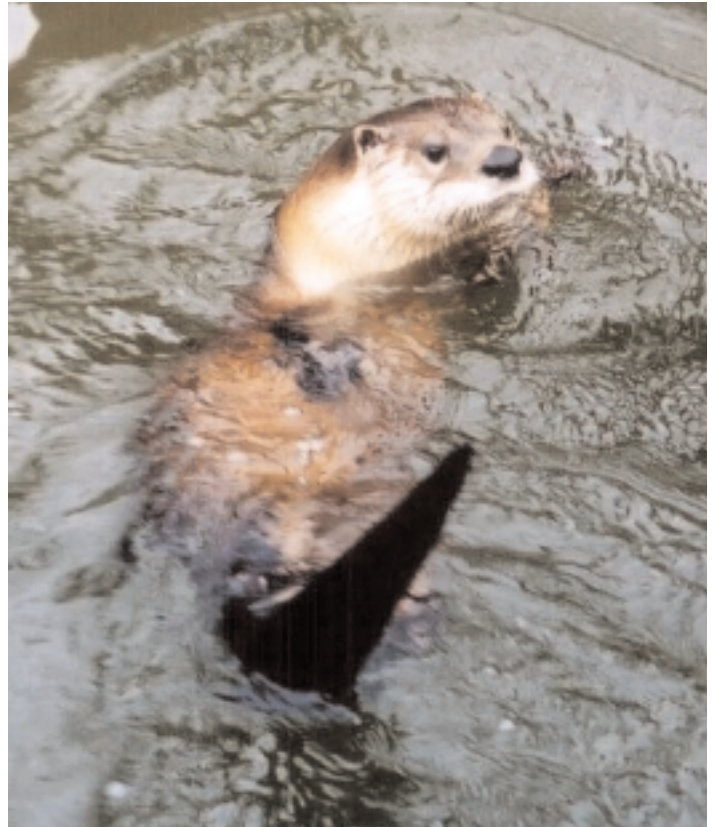
The Alewife Reservation

The Alewife Reservation consists of 120 acres managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. A part of the Mystic River Watershed, the Reservation is all that remains of the Great Swamp, which reached as far as Fresh Pond on the south and Little Pond on the west in 1777. Residential development has shrunk the Great Swamp, but the Reservation is still a wet place. It encompasses Little Pond, Blair Pond, Yates Pond, Perch Pond, and Little River, and runs along Alewife Brook. To the north are Route 2, the Belmont Uplands, and the Bulfinch Companies' Discovery Park. Cambridge borders the Reservation to the south and east, and Little Pond lies to the west.

The Alewife Reservation, Belmont Uplands and Arlington wetlands form a single ecosystem. The area helps control flooding and provides habitats for predators that hold in check the populations of prey species. However, the Alewife Reservation's wetlands — including Little River, Little Pond, and Blair Pond— collect storm water run-off, and are silting in. Today, stretches of Little River are no more than a foot deep. The central marsh area, between the Uplands' silver-maple forest and Discovery Park, is also filling in. The loss of wetlands in the Alewife area is worsening flooding problems. Later this year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will release revised floodplain elevations for the area; a rise of twenty-eight inches over the elevation of the 1982 floodplain is expected (see "What is a Floodplain Map? And

Why Does it Need to be Updated?", Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, March 2005, www.belmontcitizensforum.org).

To reduce local flooding and increase recreation and environmental education at the Reservation, the Metropolitan District Commission (now the



River Otter. Photo by Mike Arnott.

Department of Conservation and Recreation) created several master plans to revitalize the Alewife Reservation, Alewife Brook, and Blair Pond. Under the master plan, the state is working to restore the flow of water through the culverts under Route 2 from Arlington's wetlands to the Alewife Reservation.

Other agencies are also working to restore the Alewife Reservation's value as a wetland. The city of Cambridge plans to build a stormwater wetland basin on the south shore of Little River, and the state is also cooperating with the Bulfinch Company to revitalize the central marsh area. The Bulfinch Company has already torn out and reseeded what used to be the Arthur D. Little parking lot at the west end of Discovery Park, and the Alewife master plan calls for

In The Midst of Dense Urban Development

returning that area to wetland. That project will require considerable funds to remove and relocate the fill under the parking lot. Bulfinch also plans to remove the office buildings between Acorn Park Drive and Little River, one of which they have already removed.



Great Blue Heron. Photo courtesy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Diverse Species Make Alewife Their Home

For so heavily settled an area, the Alewife Reservation's wildlife is amazingly diverse. Prey species including white-tailed deer, eastern cotton-tail rabbits, woodchucks and voles, muskrats, short-tailed shrews, striped skunks, and raccoons all live in the Reservation.

The alewife herring swim from the ocean up the Mystic River each year into Little Pond, Spy Pond, and other local water bodies to lay their eggs—approximately 60,000 per female! Their round trip takes about five days and usually happens between Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Belmont resident Stew Sanders has monitored alewife herring migrations since 1977. The Alewives missed their annual trip last year, raising some concern, but Sanders reports that they returned again this year, ready to lay their eggs in Little Pond and Spy Pond again.

Even more surprising is the diversity of predator species in the Belmont Uplands abutting the Reservation. Eastern coyotes visit there to hunt and to give birth. Red foxes live there, and a gray fox was found next to the Reservation, run over by a car.

Other local predators include long-tailed weasels, fishers, mink, and river otters whose belly-sliding tracks are especially visible in the snow.

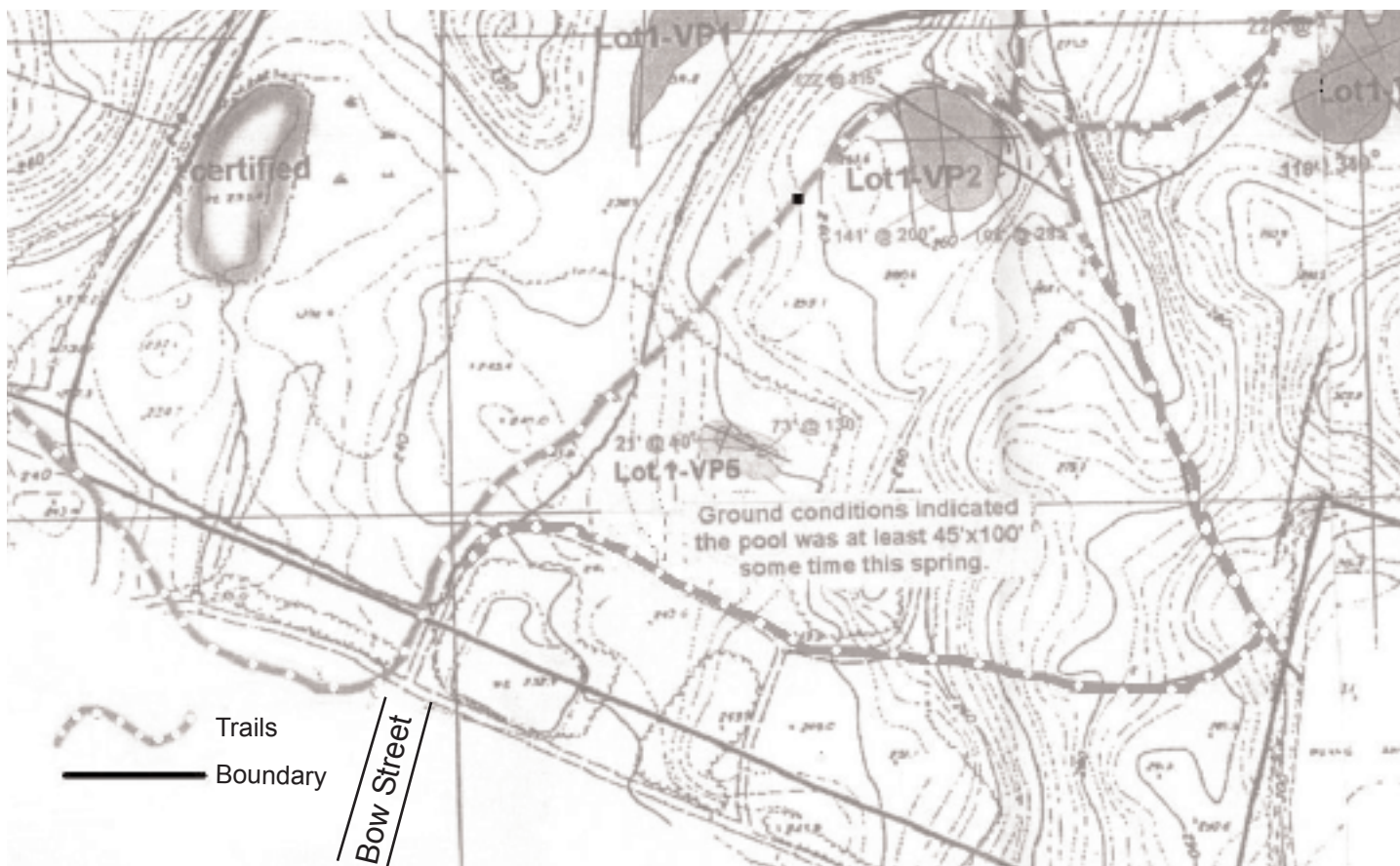
All of these predators are vital to the ecosystem. They control the population of the prey species, which left unchecked can be real pests. However, these predator species are very sensitive to their surroundings, more so than their prey, and require wilds in which to live. If we lose our urban wilds, we will also lose the predators that need those habitats.

Bird life is also plentiful in the Uplands. The red-tailed hawk and the great horned owl, both predators, reside in the Uplands silver-maple forest, just east of Little Pond. They need the tall silver maples to stay out of reach of the pestering of crows. Other species include the American woodcock, the Carolina wren, the hooded merganser, the yellow warbler, two species of heron—the great blue and the black-crowned night—and even the wild turkey. Wild turkeys had vanished from the Alewife area, and Massachusetts, by the 1850s. Since the birds were reintroduced to the state in 1972, wild turkeys have recovered remarkably well, and there are now 15,000 of them in Massachusetts.

The Uplands attracts invasive species, too. Invasive plants include purple loosestrife, Japanese knotweed, and the tree-strangling Asiatic bittersweet vine. Canada geese linger here for the plentiful berries and plants. Carp are bottom-feeding fish; they stir up the mud in ponds and make breathing difficult for Alewife herrings, for whom the area is named.

Copies of Arnott's presentation are available at the Belmont Memorial Library.

— *Eric H. Anderson is a Belmont resident and will be attending the University of Michigan Law School in the fall.*



A partial map of trails and vernal pools in Lot 1. Map provided by Roger Wrubel.

Visiting Lot 1

Lot 1 is unofficially open to visitors. This state-owned property has no posted "No trespassing" signs - but it doesn't have any welcome mats on the property either. Fall and spring are the best times for visiting, when plants have died back, and the paths are relatively open. In summer, trails can be overgrown, and some footpaths can be covered in poison ivy.

That said, it is an astonishing place. To be in Lot 1 is to be somewhere quieter, more sweet-smelling, and several degrees cooler than Belmont's main streets. Two hills protect the place from all but the most persistent traffic noise. The forest is almost silent; a hermit thrush's song sounds strong and clear in the still air. In the summer, two meadows burst with wildflowers: purple vetch, lemon-yellow birds-foot trefoil, red clover, and white daisies. An abandoned colonial road called Bow Street still runs past stone walls in the quiet woods, a relic of the area's first settlement in the 1600s.

To enter Lot 1, visitors have a choice of two main routes. From the baseball field off Trapelo Road (two streets before Lexington Street, just before Bow Street), walk to the left of the field, and follow a small path there. Alternately, adventurers can follow a small path at the end of Bow Street. Both paths will take adventurers through meadows before entering the main oak-hickory forest.

— Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

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Lot 1 *continued from page 20*

groundcover and in the interior lack of invasives. There is some buckthorn, which could easily be pulled out at this stage. This is worth fighting for.” This is a mature upland forest with deep humus-rich soil, unlike the forested wetlands or the scrubby upland forest growing on ledge that characterizes so much of our remaining open space forests.

Vernal Pools

A small group of volunteers led by Erika Whitworth, an instructor at Habitat, is in the final stages of collecting documentation to certify a total of five pools found on the property as vernal pools. Together with the two certified vernal pools identified in previous years, this would make for a total of seven vernal pools over 54 acres, a concentration that is unequalled in any of our surrounding communities. The deep, rich forest soil's capacity to retain water is critical for preserving these vernal pools.

Bird Life

From our first foray onto the property this spring,

we were struck by the large number of owl pellets scattered over the forest floor. The concentration of owls in the winter months must be impressive. As the spring migration progressed, we saw woodcocks, several species of warblers, including blue-winged warblers, hermit thrushes, many orioles, orchard orioles, rose-breasted grosbeak, and a great crested flycatcher, to name just the highlights. The variety of habitats (including open meadows) evidently supports a wide range of migratory species passing through, as well as nesting for summer resident migrants. On a trip in early June, I was serenaded by at least three hermit thrushes scattered throughout the forest.

In short, this is a jewel of a property in our inventory of local open spaces.

- Keith Ohmart is a Lexington resident and vice president of Citizens for Lexington Conservation.



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People Are Asking

What's So Special About Lot 1?

By Keith Ohmart

Lot 1 is a 54-acre parcel of undeveloped land on the Lexington/ Waltham border, just off Trapelo Road. Part of the former Middlesex County Hospital site, Lot 1 is a key link in the Western Greenway. Lot 1 is also owned by the state, and is the subject of ongoing controversy. The state Division of Capital Asset Management is seeking to sell the parcel. Many local residents would like to see the land preserved. Below, Keith Ohmart, the vice president of Citizens for Lexington Conservation, explains why.

— Editor

I have observed Lot 1 in my many walks this spring while participating in the vernal pool certification project. It reminds me why we are trying to preserve the property: for its intrinsic value.

Forest

The beauty of the forested portion has struck all of us who have walked the property, but I think a quote I received from Nell Walker, a member of the Lexington Tree Committee and local landscape architect, sums it up best. “I am still thinking about that pristine (almost) oak upland you led us into on the CLC [Citizens for Lexington Conservation] walk last Sunday. It is one of the most if not the most unspoiled areas in Lexington, in terms of the native

continued on page 19