



# Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 9, No. 2

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

March 2008

## Town Centers on Cusp of Major Redesign

By Sue Bass

Belmont’s three major business centers are poised for a dramatic leap to more concentrated development—development that planners hope will bring a part of Belmont’s “Working Vision” to reality: “Thriving business centers contribute economic stability while offering places for residents to dine, shop, and socialize.”

As early as next year, the \$50 million Cushing Village project could break ground in Cushing Square on the two blocks bounded by Trapelo Road, Common Street, Belmont Street, and Williston Road. Chris Starr, representing Smith Legacy Partners, envisions an upscale grocery store, a high-end restaurant, a drug store or other major retailer, and many smaller shops (including existing businesses such as Starbucks). The two-acre site is also being designed to include 150 housing units aimed at empty nesters; 230 parking spaces, most of them underground; a clock tower and 1,000-square-foot public atrium on the site of the former S.S. Pierce building; a pocket park on Horne Road; numerous street trees; and other amenities.

Starr has acquired control of most of the land needed for the project and has scheduled a meeting with the Selectmen to discuss obtaining the final parcels from the town. Starr’s plan requires closing off and building over the Common Street end of Horne Road. He plans to replace the municipal parking lot with a garage, retail shops, and housing. Some of the parking would be open to the public to replace the parking spaces lost from the municipal lot and Starbucks.

The design of Cushing Village has a residential

look to fit in with the neighborhood, Starr said, reminiscent of the “picturesque” style popular at the turn of the last century. At the same time, the new buildings will have four stories above ground and one or two levels of parking below—making them much taller than the one- and two-story buildings that make up most of Cushing Square now.

Starr’s development was authorized when an overlay zoning district for Cushing Square was approved by Town Meeting in November 2006. An overlay district does not repeal the underlying zoning for an area but allows developers an alternative: they can build more densely if they submit to additional

*continued on page 12*

### In This Issue

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Environmental Events . . . . .</b>               | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Selectman Candidate Answers Questions. . .</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Shoveling Snow Keeps Sidewalks Safe . . . .</b>  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Making Your Yard Eco-Friendly . . . . .</b>      | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Town Gets \$11.6 Million Loan for Sewers . .</b> | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Speedy Permits Limit Public Input . . . . .</b>  | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Why Do We Need a Roads Override? . . . .</b>     | <b>20</b> |

# Environmental Events Calendar

## **Residential Solar Hot Water and Wind Power.**

Monday, March 10, 7-9 p.m. Mark Durrenberger, owner of New England Breeze in Hudson, MA, will discuss solar hot water and residential wind turbine installations at Lexington's Cary Memorial Library, 1625 Mass Ave. A representative from Keyspan will also share their rebate incentive program for domestic solar hot water installations. This free program is sponsored by the Lexington Global Warming Action Committee. For more information, see [www.lexgwac.org/HomeEnergyForum.html](http://www.lexgwac.org/HomeEnergyForum.html).

**Global Warming: the Danger of Delay.** Thursday, March 13, 7 p.m. MIT System Dynamics Professor John D. Sterman will talk about why reducing the rate of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere does not quickly reverse the process of global warming, and why so many people want to wait and see when they are told that there can be devastating consequences of inaction. Sterman will speak at the Alcott

School, 93 Laurel St., Concord. This program is part of a speaker series offered by Concord Climate Action Network and Concord-Carlisle Adult and Community Education. For further information call the CCACE office at (978) 318-1540, or send an email to [ConcordClimate@Yahoo.com](mailto:ConcordClimate@Yahoo.com).

## **Low Carbon Diet Introductory Workshop.**

Thursday, March 13 and Wednesday, April 16, 7-9 p.m. It is easier than you think to adopt practices that reduce carbon dioxide emissions and help the planet, while saving you money at the same time!

Lexington's Global Warming Action Committee will offer practical advice for reducing household energy use, and cutting the amount of carbon that is released into the atmosphere. This free program will take place at the Cary Memorial Library, 1625 Mass Ave. For more information, see [www.lexgwac.org](http://www.lexgwac.org).

**Zakim North Blue Cities Forum.** Tuesday, March 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m. The Charles River Watershed Association will hold a public forum featuring the CRWA's work in the Zakim North Area as part of our Blue Cities Initiative. We will demonstrate ways in which the Zakim North area of Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown can be a model for urban environmental restoration. Registration required. Meet at East End House, Cambridge. For more information visit [www.crwa.org/projects/ESUD/ZNbluecities.html](http://www.crwa.org/projects/ESUD/ZNbluecities.html).

**Timberdoodle Trek.** Tuesday, March 25, and Thursday, March 27, 5:15-7:15 p.m. Habitat invites you to witness one of the first signs of spring: the remarkable courtship rituals of woodcocks. The male woodcock, a.k.a. "timberdoodle," sings and dances for his prospective mate in a performance you won't want to miss! Rain dates: Wednesday March 28 and Friday March 30 at the same times. Registration required. Fee: \$8 for Mass Audubon members; \$10 for nonmembers. Call (617) 489-5050 for more information.

**Reducing Household Waste.** Tuesday, April 1, 7-9 p.m. Join Lexington's Global Warming Action Committee for an evening with Robert Beaudoin,

*continued on page 9*

## **Belmont Citizens Forum Officers and Directors**

Grant Monahon, President  
John Dieckmann, Vice President

Mark D'Andrea, Treasurer  
Evanthia Malliris, Secretary

Sue Bass Sumner Brown Anne-Marie Lambert

**Newsletter Editor:** Meg Muckenhoupt

**Artwork:** Ann Coit Sifneos

**Intern:** Daniel Selgrade

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](mailto:editor@belmontcitizensforum.org)

# Selectman Candidate Answers BCF Questions

Every year, Belmont voters elect one member of the town's three-person Board of Selectmen. This year, Ralph Jones will be running unopposed. The Belmont Citizens Forum asked Jones to respond to the following questions.

## 1. Of your past involvement in town government, which position did you like most, and where do you feel you had the most impact?

Thank you to the Belmont Citizens Forum for the opportunity to address these important questions.

I like the Warrant Committee because of the range of issues related to the budget. I had the greatest impact through my chairmanship of the Sewer and Stormwater Committee. We were able to pass the largest single investment (to date) in our sanitary-sewer infrastructure, thereby reducing pollution of stormwater.

I also was pleased to help prepare the town's successful application last year for \$11.6 million in low-interest loans (at 2 percent interest) from the Massachusetts Water Pollution Abatement Trust.

## 2. How can Belmont pay for our backlog of postponed infrastructure work?

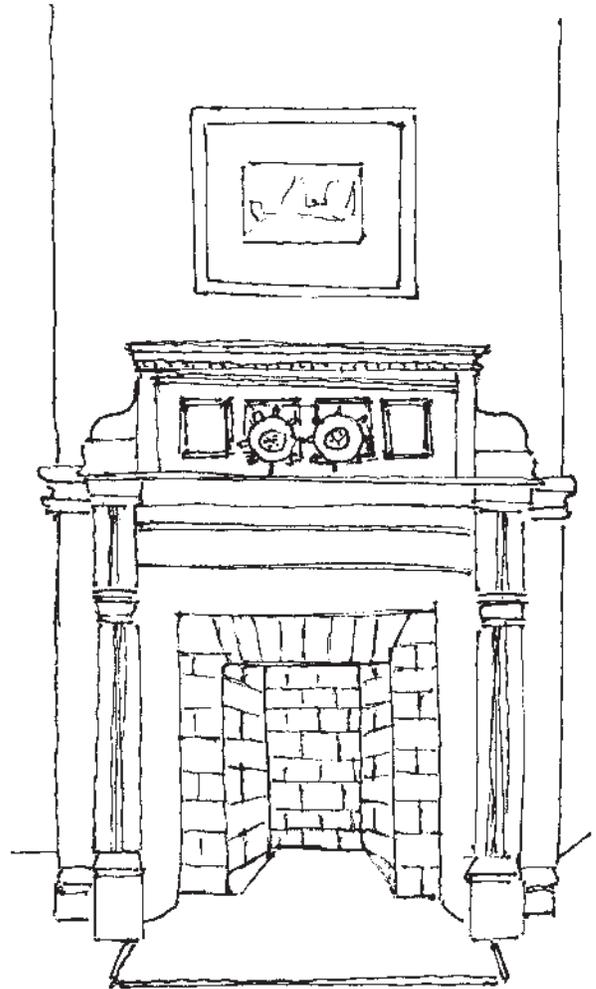
I outlined the backlog of postponed infrastructure work in a speech to Town Meeting in April 2007. It is huge and growing.

The cost of this infrastructure will be paid primarily by taxpayers and ratepayers. We can get some grants (as we have for drinking water); we can get subsidized loans (as we have for sewers). We can get state matching funds for school buildings, libraries, and projects supported by the Community Preservation Act. Ultimately, however, we all will pay.

If we manage our assets efficiently and invest optimally, we can save tens of millions of dollars over the next 30 years. If we fund timely maintenance of our infrastructure, we can significantly reduce the cost of infrastructure replacement. Unfortunately, all too often, our approach has been to "build, neglect, fail, and rebuild." Consider the condition of the Underwood Pool.

Ideally, all town departments should demonstrate

that they are budgeting sufficient amounts for maintenance (e.g., approximately 2 percent of depreciated replacement cost). Ideally, all new proposed buildings should include an analysis of the life-cycle cost of the new infrastructure and explain how this will be funded (since the cost of operation and maintenance



typically exceeds the cost of new construction). The only plan for infrastructure investment that meets these criteria is the Report of the Pavement Management Committee, submitted to the Selectmen in 2007.

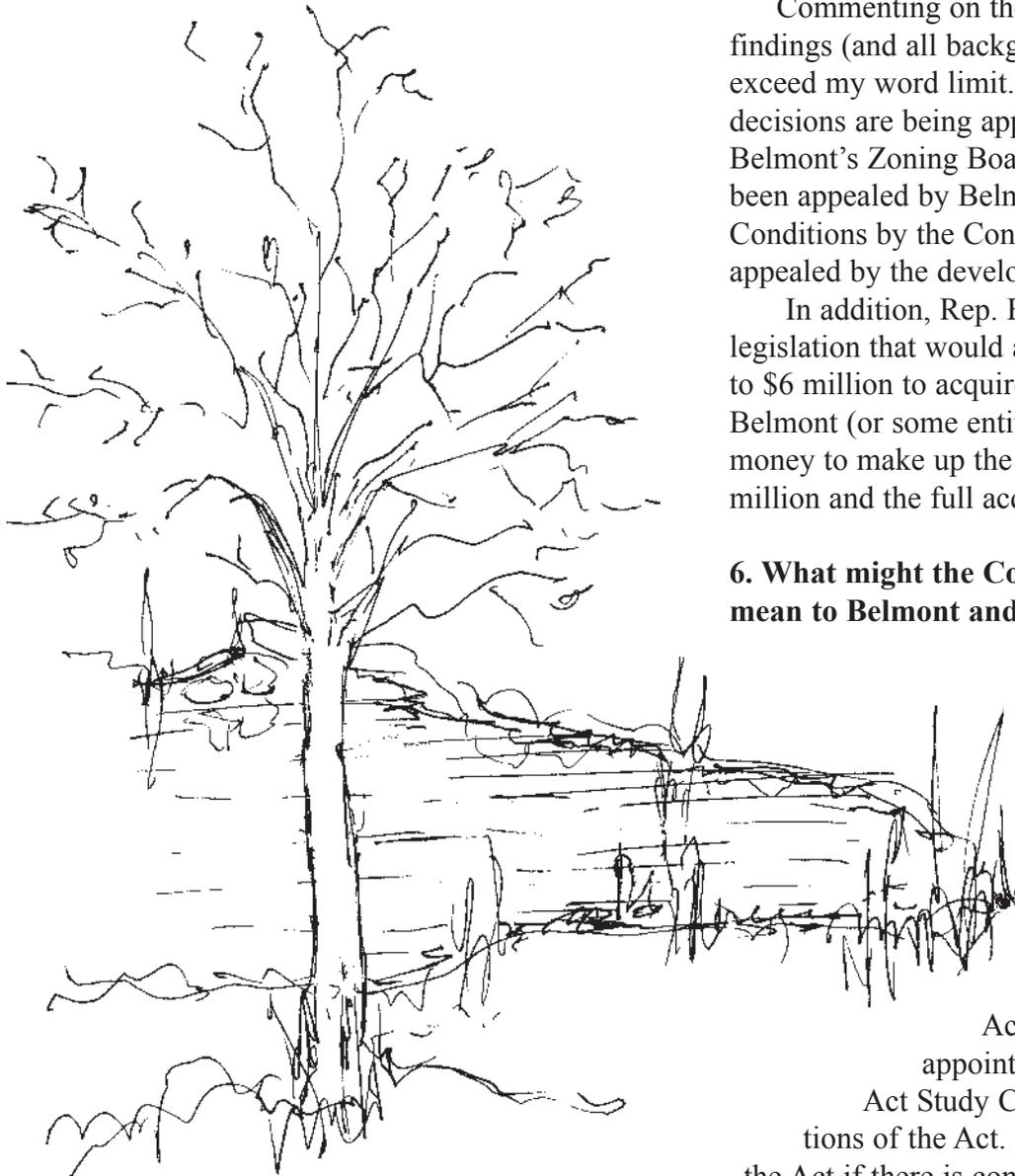
For assets with long useful lives (e.g., sub-surface water and sewer pipe that will last 100 years), we are facing an immediate need to replace pipe that was installed during a 20- to 40-year period in the 20th

*continued on page 4*

century. Making one generation in the 21st century fund the entire cost of replacing this infrastructure seems inconsistent with a basic sense of intergenerational equity. Accordingly, I recommend the use of debt (of longer durations) to ensure that the cost approximates the useful life of the asset.

**3. Should Belmont try to attract new business? What sort? What should we do to attract it?**

Yes. One step would be to have a comprehensive zoning plan (as recommended by the Planning Board). Such a plan might help reduce uncertainty for



developers.

**4. Should Belmont allow or encourage increased density in business and residential areas? Where and how much?**

Using a smart-growth approach, there should be increased density along major routes of public transportation. To ensure that the growth is consistent with the town's character, one could consider "form-based zoning," as proposed by the town's Planning Division.

**5. What is your opinion on the Conservation Commission's ruling on the planned Uplands development? Do you see any prospect for preventing the construction of housing at the Belmont Uplands?**

Commenting on the Commission's technical findings (and all background documents) would exceed my word limit. At present, two major decisions are being appealed. The decision of Belmont's Zoning Board of Appeals from 2007 has been appealed by Belmont residents. The Order of Conditions by the Conservation Commission has been appealed by the developer.

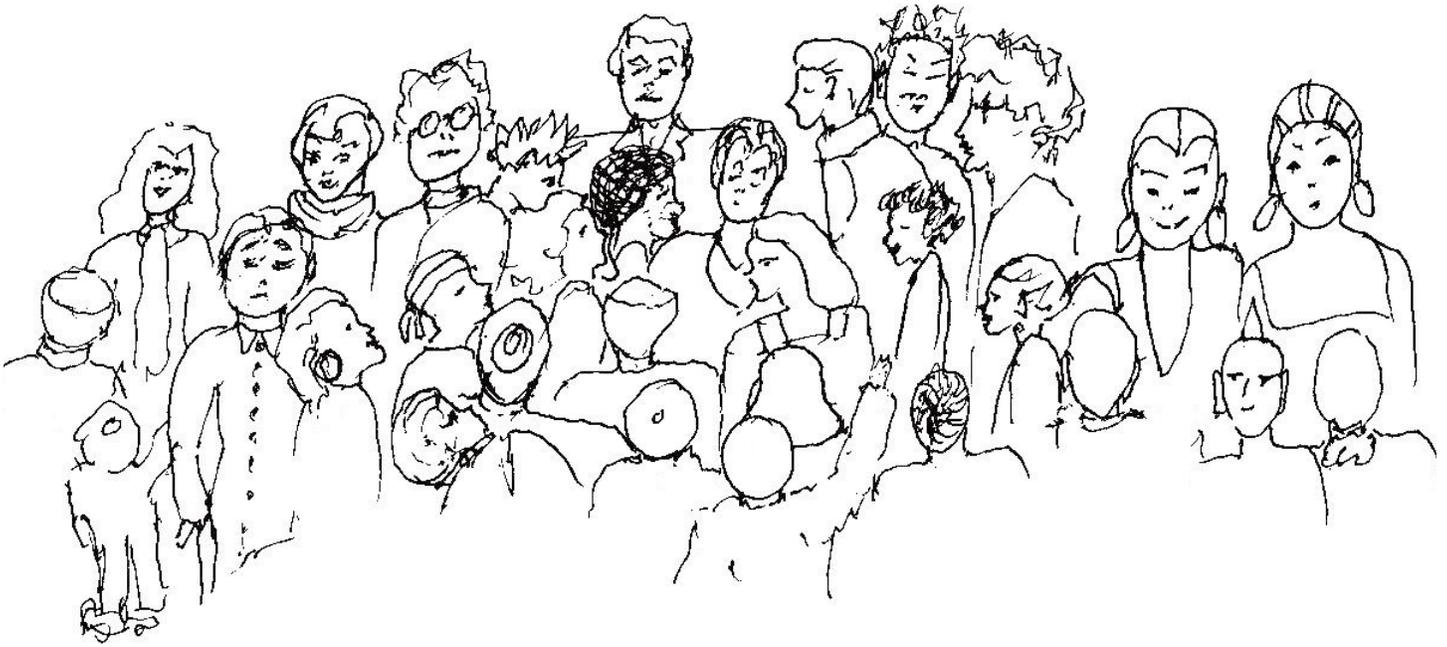
In addition, Rep. Brownsberger has sponsored legislation that would authorize the state to spend up to \$6 million to acquire the Uplands property, but Belmont (or some entity) would need to find the money to make up the difference between the \$6 million and the full acquisition cost.

**6. What might the Community Preservation Act mean to Belmont and do you support it?**

The CPA would provide some state funds to supplement town appropriations in three major areas: open space (excluding recreation), historic preservation, and community housing.

Proposed expenditures must meet the requirements of the

Act. The Selectmen have appointed a Community Preservation Act Study Committee to study the implications of the Act. I support Belmont adoption of the Act if there is continued, assured state funding.



*Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, January 2007, page 16.

### **7. Do you support a wetlands bylaw?**

I support a wetlands bylaw with the following elements. First, it should adopt, by reference, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection water-quality standards (designated uses, criteria for meeting those uses, and methods for measuring whether criteria have been met). If the Belmont Conservation Commission wishes to deviate from these scientifically evaluated water-quality standards, it should defend scientifically its designated uses, water-quality criteria, and methods for measurement.

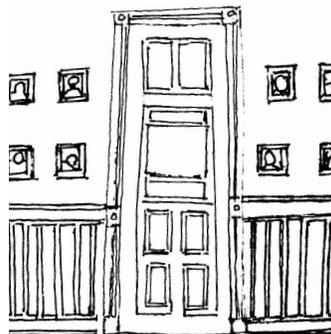
Second, a local bylaw should not be vague; nor should it grant unlimited authority. The bylaw should not authorize the Conservation Commission to regulate what it cannot measure.

Third, water bodies should have minimum-size definitions, just as they do in state wetlands regulations, e.g., a “pond” must have some minimum surface area (observed or recorded).

Fourth, a local bylaw should provide for transparency and due-process protections for property owners, including the right of appellate review of decisions on the merits of those decisions. The Citizens Forum has vigorously defended the right of citizens to appeal administrative decisions. See, e.g., “Who Makes the Rules for the Environment?” in the

### **8. Belmont’s sanitary sewers leak sewage into Little Pond. What can Belmont do to make Little Pond and the rest of the watershed cleaner?**

First, we should continue to fund relining of our sanitary sewers. The relining will extend their useful life by approximately 100 years, and it will reduce leaking into our storm drains. We started the process of relining, but have more to do. Second, Belmont should adopt a stormwater bylaw that promotes best practices to control stormwater pollution. For an excellent discussion, see “Simple Steps Can Cut Stormwater Pollution,” *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, March 2007, page 7. Third, we should continue funding programs to reduce inflow and infiltration (I&I).



### **9. What would you do to increase pedestrian safety in Belmont?**

My first political activity occurred about 25 years ago when I helped to form a citizens’ committee on Goden Street to try to increase pedestrian safety (particularly the safety of children). The town’s Traffic Advisory Committee is a permanent committee that has done great work influencing the design of new street construction. I recommend that

*continued on page 6*



Selectman continued from page 5

we continue to follow the recommendations of the Traffic Advisory Committee and introduce traffic-calming measures as we reconstruct or repair the town's streets.

**10. Would shuttle buses benefit Belmont? On what routes? How do you suggest that we get them?**

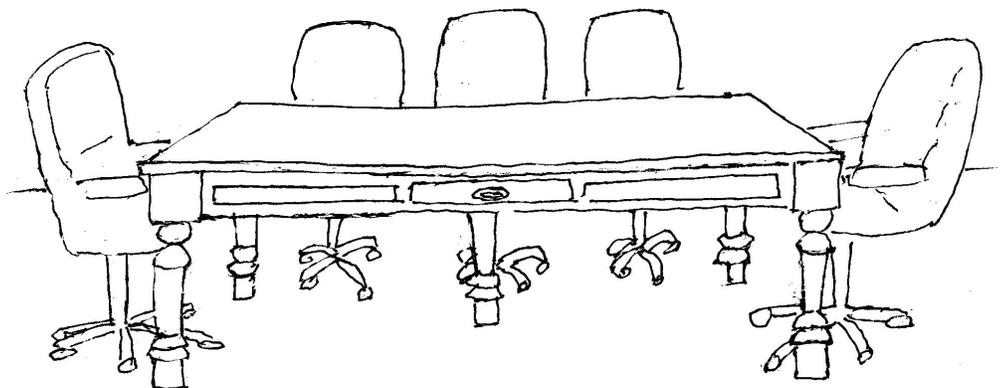
Additional public transportation could help reduce traffic and greenhouse gas emissions.

**11. Do you support a bike path from Alewife Station through Belmont along the railroad right-of-way? If so, there does not appear to be enough room on the right-of-way west of Belmont Center for a bike path beside the existing tracks. Where can it go?**

I support the bike path, and I

believe that we are close to finishing all necessary steps to bring the bike path from Alewife to Belmont. My firm (the Cadmus Group) has been designated as a "Best Workplace for Commuters" because we provide indoor bicycle racks and subsidize employee use of public transportation. I do not know where the bike path can go west of Belmont Center.

*The annual town election will take place on Monday, April 7. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, see the town web site.*



# Shoveling Snow Keeps Town Sidewalks Safe

By Anne Paulsen

When the snow flies, we resign ourselves to treacherous driving and walking. When we look out the door the day after a snowstorm, though, we see well-plowed streets alongside uncleared sidewalks. These impassable walkways trap many people in their houses and create traffic congestion, as people decide to drive short distances instead of taking a chance on foot. While both sidewalks and streets are public ways, in our car-driven society they do not receive equitable treatment.

Many of us in Belmont use cars, but others have no option but to get around on foot. For children, elderly residents, and people with disabilities, this time of year is especially treacherous. It's no surprise that the number of falls and fractures spikes during and following bad weather. For some, a fall might simply limit physical activity for a few weeks, but for others it can be life-threatening or can permanently limit mobility. Walking in Belmont can be a year-round activity: ours is a compact town, with easy pedestrian access to public transportation, neighborhood shopping, and schools. Why then have only minor efforts been made to improve snow removal from sidewalks?

It's an issue of both time and cost, according to Peter Castanino, director of Belmont's Department of Public Works, who is sympathetic to the plight of the pedestrian. The policy in Belmont is to plow the 85 miles of streets first, keeping them as wide as possible. Only then does the town send crews out to clear well-traveled sidewalks and those close to schools, followed by the sidewalks near the commuter rail stations and important bus stops. Altogether, the town plows 28 miles of sidewalks.

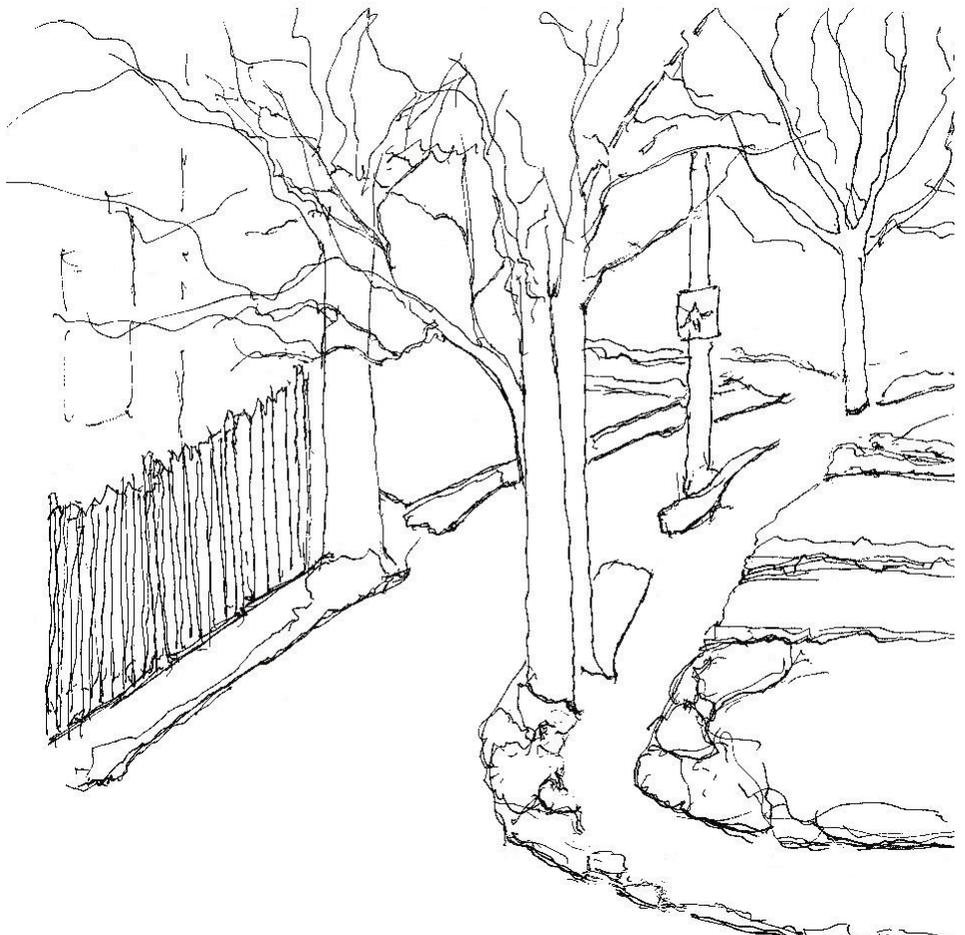
Plowing sidewalks is slow work, and the equipment the town uses is not always efficient. In heavy snowstorms, the sidewalk plows can leave snow mounded behind them, which means that a second plowing

is sometimes required to clean up leftover snow. Despite receiving training in the art of snow removal, some street-plow drivers push snow back onto the sidewalks, making it harder to clear the sidewalk and practically impossible to clear corners.

In addition to the sidewalks for which the town takes responsibility, there are the sidewalks in front of businesses and stores. Commercial establishments are required by town law to clear their walks within 12 hours of a storm's end. But that still leaves about 60 miles of sidewalks to be cleared voluntarily—or not at all.

Many homeowners do shovel, but when there is even one uncleared sidewalk in a neighborhood, pedestrians—including school children—are forced into the street, creating a hazardous situation for both walkers and drivers. Some cities and towns have adopted bylaws requiring homeowners to shovel, but our Town Meeting has turned down such proposals at least twice.

*continued on page 8*

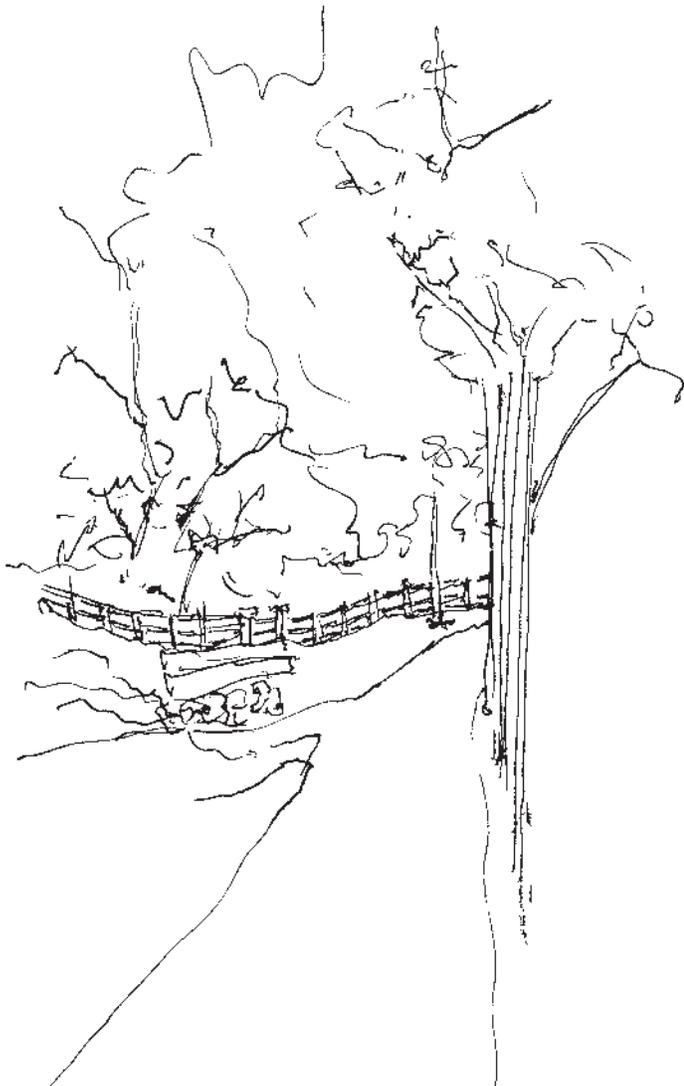


**Snow** *continued from page 7*

Even with bylaws in place, communities have difficulty with enforcement. In Belmont, a bylaw makes it illegal to dump snow on sidewalks or any public way. Yet we all still see the mounds left on sidewalks and at the property lines after private plows have cleared a driveway.

Walk Boston, an organization dedicated to improving walking conditions in Massachusetts, has developed several recommendations to improve winter sidewalk conditions. These recommendations require the involvement of elected officials, town employees and departments, homeowners, property managers, and community organizations. They include:

- Creating a norm of snow and ice clearance through social-awareness campaigns that make uncleared sidewalks and street corners as unaccept-



able as litter.

- Identifying a municipal point person for snow removal whom residents can contact to get assistance or report an uncleared sidewalk. A single well-advertised, properly staffed phone number is needed for this service.
- Setting priorities for sidewalk clearance to identify the most critical sidewalks, ensuring that public snow clearance and enforcement focus on the most important locations. These priorities should be publicized so residents know which sidewalks will be cleared.
- Improving monitoring by municipal workers who are already outdoors and can see trouble spots, so that they can address problems immediately.
- Designing sidewalks to make snow removal easier, especially at common trouble spots such as curb ramps.
- Training municipal and private snow-plowing personnel so that plow drivers are sensitive to the needs of pedestrians and are proficient in techniques that aid clearance of sidewalks, curb ramps, crosswalks, and pedestrian crossing islands.

Belmont already trains the plowers who work for the town and publishes pamphlets reminding residents that they cannot block public ways with snow. Still, there is no serious discussion about how to keep sidewalks accessible in winter months, and there is no public input about which sidewalks should be plowed.

Belmont could improve the situation in several ways:

- Give prompt attention to calls from residents about trouble spots, to show that the town takes the needs of pedestrians as seriously as the needs of drivers.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of high-school students who are willing to clear sidewalks, whether for pay or as a community service, and publicize the availability of this list.
- Use the local media and cable channels to remind residents of the need to keep our sidewalks clear, to encourage them to assist neighbors who need help,

and to thank them for participating in a community-wide effort.

We all take great pride in our town during the other seasons of the year, as we tend our private gardens, protect the street trees, and enjoy the flowering bushes, trees, and public spaces that make our town special. With a little more attention given to our sidewalks after snowstorms, we can maintain that community pride throughout the winter while protecting the health and safety of all our residents.

—Anne Paulsen served as Belmont's state representative for 14 years.

---

---

### Events continued from page 2

Superintendent of Environmental Services for Lexington. Beaudoin will describe the town's successful recycling program and share ways to reduce the cause of one of the largest carbon dioxide emissions in a household—trash. This free program will be held at Lexington's Cary Memorial Library, 1625 Mass Ave. For more information see [www.lexgwac.org/HomeEnergyForum.html](http://www.lexgwac.org/HomeEnergyForum.html).

### Sustainable Belmont Monthly

**Meetings.** Wednesday, April 2, and Wednesday, May 7, 7-9 p.m. Located in the Flett Room of the Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Ave., these meetings are open to the public. Contact [sustainablebelmont@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablebelmont@gmail.com) for more information.

**Certifying Vernal Pools.** Saturday, April 12, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Come learn about these important wetlands, why they need protection and what the certification process involves. We will begin at the Habitat visitor center, then drive to a pool location at Rock Meadow in Belmont to search for wood frog eggs, fairy shrimp, and salamander larva. Wear footwear appropriate for very muddy woodlands. Fee: \$15 for Mass Audubon members; \$19 for nonmembers. Call (617) 489-5050 for more information.



### 9th Annual Earth Day Charles River Cleanup.

Saturday, April 26, 9 a.m.-noon. On Earth Day, the Charles River Watershed Association welcomes over 2,000 volunteers to help beautify the Charles River, picking up trash and cleaning the riverbanks at over 40 sites from Dover to Boston. We provide cleaning supplies and instructions. For more information, visit [www.charlesriver.org/cleanup.html](http://www.charlesriver.org/cleanup.html).

### River Science Festival at Herter Park, Brighton.

Sunday, April 27, 1-4 p.m. Join the Charles River Watershed Association for festivities, food, entertainment, and science activities for children of all ages. Activities include an eco-boat trip, model watershed, and exhibits about all aspects of the river. Meet at Herter Park, Brighton. For more information e-mail Rebecca Scibek at [rscibek@crwa.org](mailto:rscibek@crwa.org).

# Making Your Yard Eco-Friendly This Spring

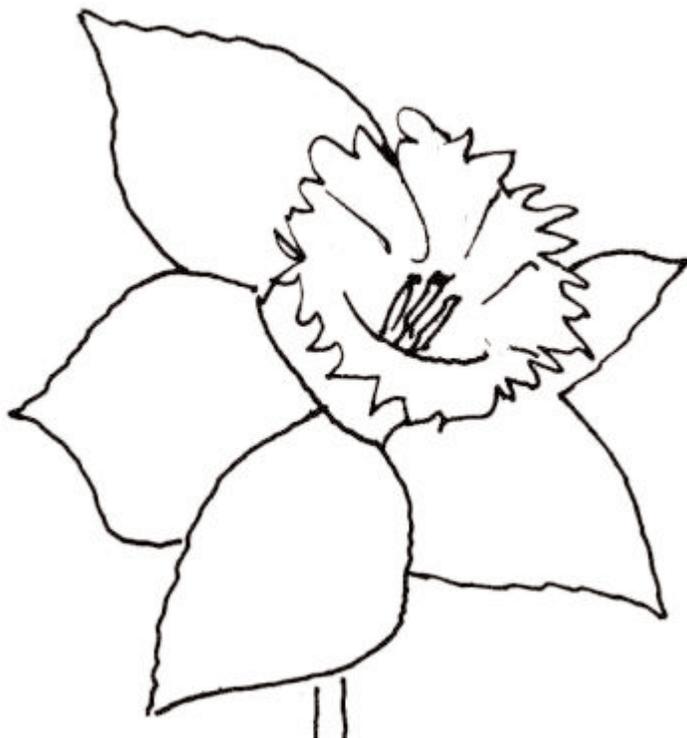
By Meg Muckenhoupt

It may be hard to believe, but winter will end soon and the lawn and garden season will begin. Whether you're eagerly sharpening your pruners or dreading another year of mowing, consider taking a few steps to make your yard a little easier to maintain, and a little more environmentally sustainable as well.

## Get a Soil Test

The University of Massachusetts Amherst offers one of the best gardening and lawn bargains in the state. For just \$9, you get a complete soil test of pH, nutrients and lead levels, plus advice on how to make your soil better based on what you'll be growing in it—and they'll e-mail you the results!

Having specific recommendations for your yard's soil means that you won't run the risk of dumping excess fertilizer on your lawn or tomatoes. Too much fertilizer not only won't help your plants grow, but will dissolve and run off into a storm drain during the next big rainstorm—straight into Little Pond, which really doesn't need any more chemicals added to the existing murk. It's a pretty expensive way to pollute local waterways. Save yourself some money and guilt, and get the test at [www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest/soilbrocha.htm](http://www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest/soilbrocha.htm)



## Pick Up a Composter

Compost is cheaper than fertilizer, helps build organic matter in your soil to feed plants, worms, and other garden-friendly organisms, and reduces the town's garbage bill. If that wasn't enough motivation, you can pick up rodent-resistant compost bins from Belmont's Department of Public Works (DPW) for just \$20, thanks to a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). You can expect to pay \$60 or more for a bin on-line.



The DPW offers two composters made from a minimum of 50 percent post-consumer recycled plastic collected or processed in Massachusetts. The Earth Machine is 33 inches high, is cone-shaped, and can hold 11 cubic feet of compost. The New Age Composter stands 32 inches high and will make up to 24 cubic feet of brown gold. Both models can be purchased at the DPW office on the first floor of the Homer Municipal Building, 19 Moore Street. Call the DPW at (617)993-2690 for more information.

Composting does take a little attention to keep a bin smelling like good, damp earth, and not the sewer line under the street. There are things you should never put into your compost (meat, bones, animal fat), and beginners typically pile on too much "green" waste, like kitchen scraps and grass clippings, and not enough "brown" matter, like dry leaves or paper. Fortunately, there are plenty of websites, like [www.compostguide.com](http://www.compostguide.com), to help novices understand and nurture their compost, and make their yards a shade more green.

## Buy a Rain Barrel

Roughly 600 gallons of water pours off a 1,000-

square-foot roof during a one-inch rain storm—enough to water a 25 foot by 10 foot lawn for a month. Why pay for water piped in from the Quabbin Reservoir when you can get it for free in your own back yard?

Rain barrels are, well, barrels attached to the bottom of a gutter downspout that typically hold 55 gallons of water. Thrifty homeowners can link two or more barrels together with hoses to get every last drop from summer showers. The water in a rain barrel can't be used for drinking or washing, but it's perfect for watering lawns and gardens.

Many Massachusetts towns—including Arlington and Cambridge—sell rain barrels to residents at a discount thanks to yet another DEP grant, but Belmont does not. Expect to pay \$90 for a basic blue barrel at the New England Rain Barrel Company ([www.nerainbarrel.com](http://www.nerainbarrel.com)), which supplies towns in the DEP program; \$150 for green, brown or gray rain catchers made from recycled olive barrels by the Great American Rain Barrel Company ([www.tgarb.com](http://www.tgarb.com)); or, for a more rustic look, \$300 for an oak whiskey barrel by Aaron's Rain Barrels ([www.ne-design.net/oak-whiskey-barrel.html](http://www.ne-design.net/oak-whiskey-barrel.html)). Be

aware that the New England Rain Barrel Company requires customers to pick up their barrels on-site in Leominster, so car-pool with a friend!

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



## Upcoming Events for Gardeners

**33rd Annual Gardeners Gathering.** Saturday, March 22, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. The Gardeners Gathering is an annual citywide event for community gardeners and other garden enthusiasts. There are fun activities and workshops, and gardening and green-space organizations are on hand to talk about their work. Sponsored by the Boston Natural Areas Network at the Curry Student Center, Northeastern University. For more information, see [www.bostonnatural.org/cgGardenersGathering.htm](http://www.bostonnatural.org/cgGardenersGathering.htm).

**Middlesex Conservation District Plant Sale.** Friday, April 25, 3-6 p.m. and Saturday, April 26, 8 a.m.-noon. The Middlesex Conservation District, a nonprofit environmental agency, will be holding its annual Spring Plant Sale at the 4H Fairgrounds, 51 South Chelmsford Road, Westford. The sale will include tree and shrub seedlings, perennials, herbs, fruits, groundcovers, and garden supplies (compost bins, rain barrels, fertilizer, etc.). All items may be ordered in advance and picked up on sale days. Proceeds benefit the MCD's environmental programs. Download an order form from [www.middlesexconservation.org](http://www.middlesexconservation.org) or calling (978) 692-9395 for a brochure.

**Healthy Lawns and Landscapes.** Tuesday, April 29, 7:30-9 p.m. The Citizens for Lexington Conservation's annual meeting will be devoted to a free Healthy Lawns and Landscapes workshop by Ann McGovern, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Learn how you can have a beautiful yard without using chemicals that can harm pets, children, and the environment. The workshop runs at Lexington's Cary Memorial Library, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue. For more information see [www.lexingtonma.org/clc/HomePage.htm](http://www.lexingtonma.org/clc/HomePage.htm).

## Planning *continued from page 1*

municipal review. The Cushing Square overlay district, for example, gives the Planning Board substantial oversight over the design of Cushing Village. However, the overlay zoning made no change in the town's inclusionary zoning bylaw, which requires approximately 25 percent of the housing to be affordable.

## Neighbors Praise Cushing Plans

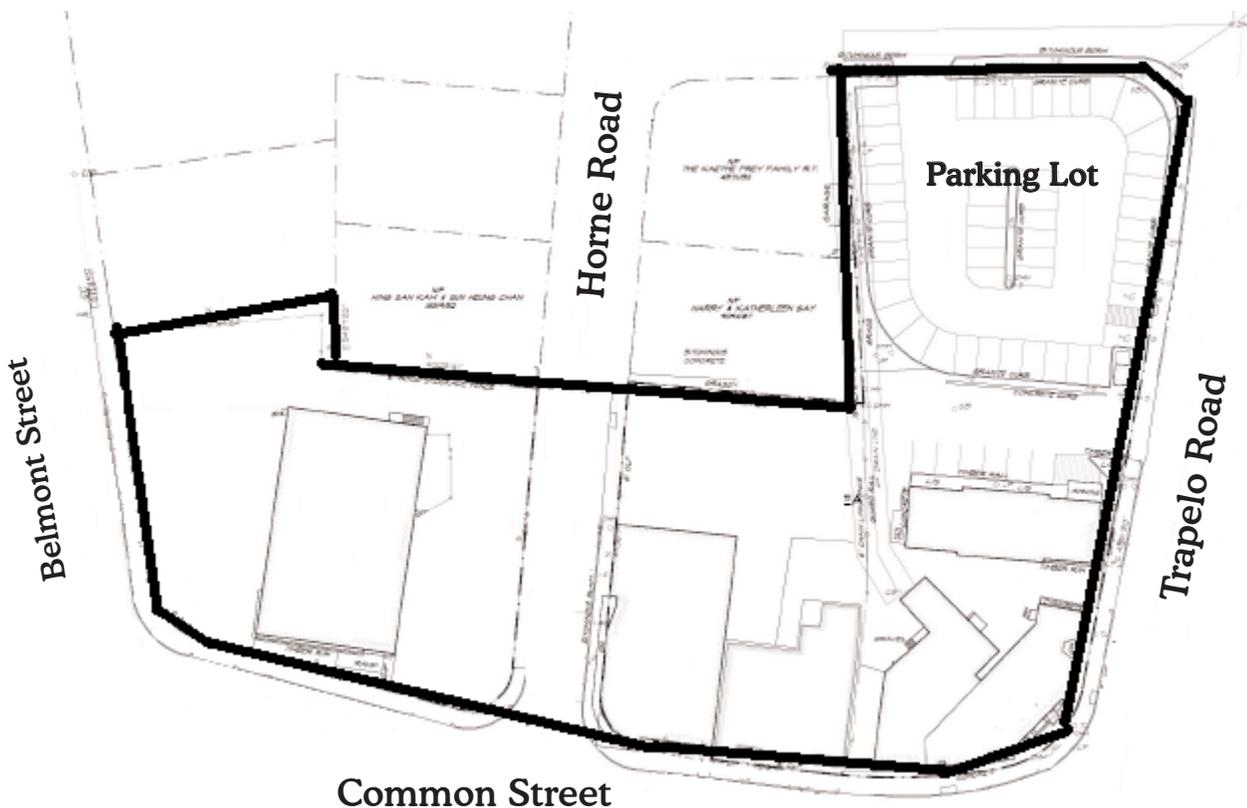
The reaction to the Cushing Village proposal after an initial meeting with the Planning Board was favorable—"Amazing!" said board member Sami Baghdady—and neighbors, too, were pleasantly surprised. "This could be a wonderful addition to the Square and the whole town," said Don Becker, who lives on Horne Road, behind the proposed development. Linda Fox, also of Horne Road and whose house would directly abut Cushing Village, said, "I think it's going to be quite a revitalization, if it all works out as they say."

Details are still negotiable. At a meeting with a small group of neighbors, Steve Carlini of Horne

Road urged Starr and his architect, Peter Quinn of Cambridge, to build a pedestrian passageway between two of Starr's buildings to preserve the link between Horne Road and Common Street. Such a passageway would not only save Horne Road residents a walk around a long block but could provide residents of Starr's apartments an alternate access route to shops.

This suggestion is now being seriously considered. "I think there's real opportunity there," Quinn said. The passageway would most likely go through Starr's buildings on the second level, about eight feet above street level, the level where the grocery store would be. Starr and Quinn had already planned that the grocery would be directly accessible from garage spaces on that level, so adding a pedestrian passageway between the store and the garage might be practical.

Starr said he's investigating green building technologies, including geothermal energy for heating and cooling. He readily promised neighbors to add a bus shelter on Trapelo Road and to provide bike racks for residents and shoppers. He said he currently is planning to market the housing as apartments but will build the units to condominium standards, with amenities like granite countertops. Many more details



*A view of the planned development from above. The thick black line marks the boundaries of the Starr plan, which will involve building on the parking lot and a portion of Horne Road. Graphic courtesy of Chris Starr.*



*A view of the proposed Cushing Village development, as seen from Common Street. Courtesy of Chris Starr.*

## The Cushing Village Floor Plan

Of Cushing Village’s three linked buildings, one would face the Common Street-Trapelo Road corner; a second would run north from Belmont Street along Common, closing off Horne Road, to join the first building; the third would run from Williston Road east to join the first building.

The ground floors of all three buildings will provide retail space, and the corner building will have a second level of retail—a grocery store. The Belmont Street and Williston Road buildings will have three floors of apartments; the corner building will have two floors of housing above the grocery store. Below ground will be parking. Because of the slope of Common Street as it approaches Belmont Street, two levels of parking are possible under that building.

will unfold over the months ahead as Starr and Quinn present specifics to the Planning Board. “We have to look at it very carefully,” said Jenny Fallon, chair of the Planning Board. “But basically, this is what we asked for.”

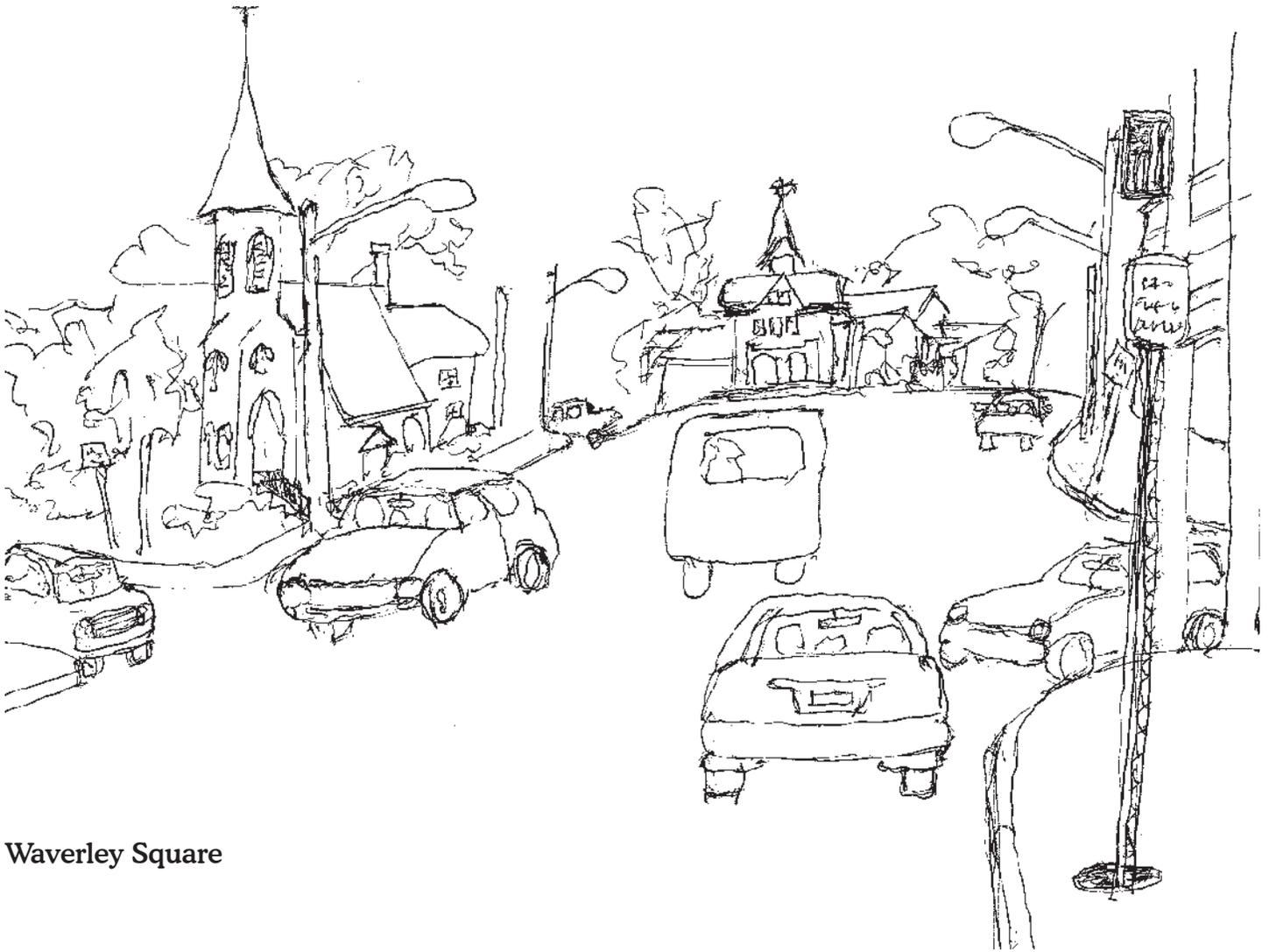
### Town Makes Plans for Center

Belmont Center could be in for a similar transformation, if the proposals developed by the Belmont Center Planning Group over the last three years are implemented. The group of seven citizens appointed by the Selectmen has recommended that Town Meeting adopt an overlay zoning district for Belmont Center similar to the one adopted for Cushing Square

or adopt a different zoning tool called “form-based zoning” to influence the design of new development. The intent is “to provide incentives for property owners to provide attractive and more desired retail uses at the ground floor,” according to the draft final report. “The new zoning should encourage upper floor residential use in the commercial district, which will also make the Center a more vital place by providing 24-hour occupancy.”

The Belmont Center proposal envisions the possibility of even greater density than proposed for Cushing Square—“up to 5 stories in specific interior locations (i.e., the municipal parking lot and the sites

*continued on page 14*



## Waverley Square

### **Planning** *continued from page 13*

on the north side of Concord Avenue).” That is the side where the post office and other commercial buildings back up to the train tracks. Development should be subject to design oversight that is sensitive to historic preservation, the report cautions. It also stresses the importance of reducing development as it nears residential neighborhoods.

Vickie Alani, chair of the Belmont Center Planning Group, said the fifth story would be available only in limited locations such as next to the railroad tracks, not at the street frontage. She said that a fifth story on Concord Avenue would face the attic level of buildings across the tracks on Channing Road, because the elevation of Concord Avenue is so much lower than that of Channing Road. Similarly, Alani said a fifth story on the Belmont Center municipal parking lot would be in the center of construction there and would be invisible at street

level from all sides. She noted that such height would only be available to developers whose construction plans offered extensive amenities to the town.

### **Waverley Square Outreach Planned**

Waverley Square will not be left out of the town’s revitalization plans; Belmont has just hired Ken Buckland of the Cecil Group to oversee the square’s development plans. In the first phase of the project, which costs \$15,000 and will begin later in March, Buckland will gather suggestions from residents, landowners, and business owners. Jay Szklut, Belmont’s Planning and Economic Development Manager, said the Planning Board hopes to bring a Waverley Square zoning proposal to Town Meeting this fall.

—Sue Bass is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

# Town Gets \$11.6 Million Loan to Fix Sewers

By Sue Bass

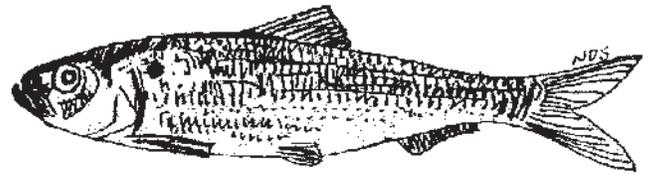
Belmont has been granted up to a \$11.6 million loan to continue repairs on its leaky sewer system. This two percent Clean Water Act loan is in addition to the nearly \$3 million spent in the last few years from town bonds. The loan will enable Belmont to substantially reduce the town's pollution of the Mystic watershed, the destination of most of the town's stormwater.

The money was requested for three projects, explained Ralph Jones, chairman of the town's Sewer/Stormwater Committee. About \$3 million will be spent to reline sewers and eliminate illicit connections (where household sewer pipes were mistakenly connected to town storm drains) in areas that discharge stormwater into Wellington Brook. That project is a response to an order issued by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) last July after high levels of *E.coli* bacteria were found in Clay Pit Pond, which is fed by Wellington Brook.

Another \$700,000 is earmarked for replacing two electric sewer pumps on Belmont Hill—the current ones are about 50 years old, Jones said—with new pumps that will use less power and be easier to maintain. Almost all of the town's sewer system is gravity-fed, Jones explained, but on Stony Brook and Woodbine roads, the sewage must be pumped up to

the nearest downhill pipe.

The largest portion—perhaps \$6 million—is aimed at sanitary sewer overflows and flooding in the Winn Brook neighborhood. However, Jones cautioned that the town may not yet have found a workable solution. At a recent meeting, a contractor proposed 11 solutions, but some members of the Sewer/Stormwater Committee were not persuaded that any of them will work. “The last thing we want to do is spend \$5 million on something that doesn't work or creates problems elsewhere,” he said. Rather than



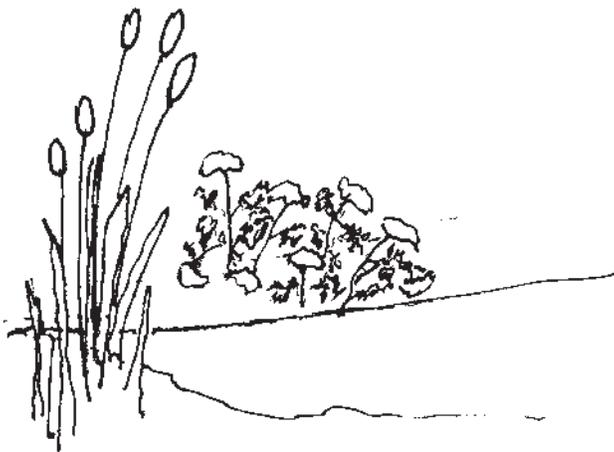
Blueback Herring

installing bigger pipes that send flooding downstream to Cambridge, he said, Belmont should come up with a solution that really solves something.

The money would come from a state revolving fund created with federal funds under the Clean Water Act and administered by the state DEP. Belmont Town Meeting must authorize the loan, Jones said. The first two projects will probably be presented to Town Meeting in April, but the Winn Brook work is more likely to come before a fall Town Meeting.

Meanwhile, the Citizens Forum has still received no final decision on the challenge it raised in 2006 after the DEP granted a sewer-connection permit to McLean Hospital. The permit was for two planned developments on McLean's land—the continuing-care retirement community now being marketed as Freedom Commons and the research-and-development complex planned by Belmont ValueRealty Partners. A magistrate hearing the case recommended approving the permit last May, but that decision cannot be appealed until the DEP commissioner issues a final decision.

—Sue Bass is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



# Plan for Speedy Permits to Limit Public Input

By Sue Bass

A state proposal to speed up environmental review and permitting of major developments is drawing complaints from environmentalists and developers alike.

The proposal, drafted as a pilot project by the Patrick administration's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), would integrate into a single process the state's overall environmental reviews and the specialized reviews that agencies perform before issuing permits. It would begin with an invitation-only meeting between the developer's representatives and representatives of state agencies that would need to grant permits. That meeting would be organized by EOEEA staff who administer the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), which by law coordinates environmental reviews.

"The purpose of the meeting would be to agree on the degree of design detail needed for review, to identify major regulatory hurdles to the project, and to compose a team of agency reviewers who would represent the respective state agencies through MEPA and permitting," the proposal explains. The team created at that meeting, which would likely involve high-level agency staff, could arrange "fast track"

status for permits, the proposal states. The full document is on line at [www.mass.gov/envir/mepa/notices/012308em/5.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/envir/mepa/notices/012308em/5.pdf).

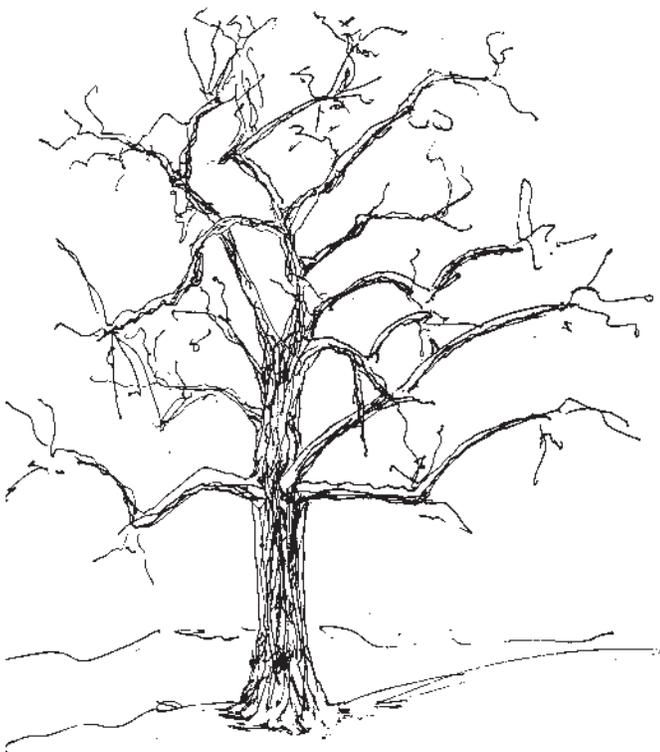
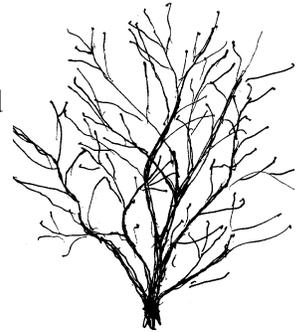
## Reviews Might Favor Pet Projects

In a letter to Ian Bowles, the cabinet secretary who heads EOEEA, the Belmont Citizens Forum commented, "We agree that the MEPA process needs improvement. For example, promises made in environmental impact reports are not always kept, and no one routinely checks to see whether they are kept.

However, that's not one of the issues addressed in the draft proposal submitted for public comment. The issues seem to

be those that concern developers. Though it may not have been your intention, this looks like a proposal to give favored treatment to certain projects and help them avoid public scrutiny. We urge you to withdraw this entire plan and to begin a new effort— involving environmental advocates as well as developers this time—to identify and correct the flaws in MEPA."

A joint letter signed by 15 environmental organizations, including the Citizens Forum, raised similar concerns. "This administration appears to view public participation as expendable. Though the document states the process is 'not intended in any way to eliminate or circumvent public input or review' and will 'encourage public input into a project at an early stage,' it is unclear how designing a process that specifically excludes the public and other key stakeholders at the very first stage of review can achieve this goal," said the group. Other signers were the Berkshire Environmental Action Team, Clean Water Action, the Connecticut River Watershed Council, Inc., the Eel River Watershed Association, Friends of the Blue Hills, Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation, the Housatonic River Initiative, the Ipswich River Watershed Association, the Massachusetts Watershed Coalition, the Merrimack River Watershed Council, the Mystic River Watershed Association, the Parker River Clean Water Association, Public Employees for Environmental



APPLE

Responsibility, and the Taunton River Watershed Alliance.

Other environmental groups also raised serious concerns about the proposal. The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, while calling it “a well-intentioned effort,” suggested some of the provisions might violate state law. Alternatives for Community and Environment expressed the fear that, without ample public input, hazardous developments would end up in the environmental justice communities it serves. The Neponset River Watershed Association stressed its concerns with the “expectation...that the agency reviewers would be senior officials... In our experience, there are few senior agency officials who have sufficiently detailed knowledge of all the permitting programs within their agency’s jurisdiction to ascertain the necessary degree of design detail needed for MEPA and permit reviews. ... Once an agreement has been reached by senior officials, it will be very difficult for it to be revised based on legitimate concerns of lower level staff.”

### Agency Impartiality at Stake

The EOEEA also received comments from the Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP), which represents the commercial real estate industry. A major concern for NAIOP was the expense of preparing a large quantity of detailed documents at the beginning of the process. In closing, however, the group commented, “MEPA’s goal has always been to be an impartial arbiter—a process where a multitude of interests, some divergent, can play out and usually be reconciled. As presented, this process forces MEPA to stake out a position (choose sides) early in the process—which we think could put in doubt MEPA’s impartiality.”

—*Sue Bass is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.*



## Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Thank you for raising awareness of the environmental impact of bottled water in the January 2008 issue of the Belmont Citizens Forum newsletter. I wanted to address two points made in the article:

- **Fossil fuel consumption:** The Pacific Institute recently released a study that showed the amount of oil used to manufacture plastic water bottles is much higher than what is listed in the article. According to the Pacific Institute, about 17 million barrels of oil are used to make the plastic water bottles used in the United States each year—not the 1.5 million barrels cited in the article. The study findings and methodology are on-line at [www.pacinst.org/topics/water\\_and\\_sustainability/bottled\\_water/bottled\\_water\\_and\\_energy.html](http://www.pacinst.org/topics/water_and_sustainability/bottled_water/bottled_water_and_energy.html).
- **Bottled water on airplanes:** While the federal government still bans bottled liquids at the security gate, you need not be relegated to buying bottled water after security. You can bring an empty bottle with you through security and fill it at a water fountain later.

For some people, bottled water will remain the preferred choice. And sometimes you might be in a situation where you need water and do not have access to a water fountain and refillable container. In these cases, you can still take steps to minimize plastic consumption by buying the largest bottle possible rather than many smaller bottles.

Sincerely,

Heather Tuttle



### **Roads** *continued from page 20*

a scale of 0-100.

- Roads rated 93-100 require no work (Pine Street).
- Roads rated 85-92 require applications of asphalt "crack seal" to keep water from getting into the road and damaging the road base (Bow Road).
- Roads rated 72-84 require crack seal and asphalt patches (Lincoln Street).
- Roads rated 60-71 need a full new overlay of asphalt, or need to be milled (ground down) and then receive overlay asphalt—much like and old hardwood floor needs to be sanded and refinished (Hurley Road).

# We need you.

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

## I can devote time to:

- Archaeology & Historic Preservation
- Environmental Protection
- Planning & Zoning
- Traffic & Transportation
- Mailings
- Newsletter
- Web site

## I can help pay for this newsletter:

*It costs about \$4000 to publish each issue of our newsletter. Please donate for this purpose:*

\$25    \$50    \$100    \$250

## I can help pay for hiring sewer experts:

\$100    \$500    \$1000    other  
 Please contact me about a gift of stock.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have questions, please call (617) 484-1844. The Belmont Citizens Forum is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your donation is deductible from federal taxes to the full extent provided by law.*

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

- Roads rated 0-59 are beyond repair (Poplar Street, Grant Avenue).

About 70 percent of Belmont’s roads—48 miles—are rated below 60 and need total, full-depth reconstruction.

If you’ve been following various financial discussions in Belmont, you have surely heard deliberations about a proposed Proposition 2 1/2 override, a “debt exclusion” for a new Wellington Elementary School, and a “roads override.”

Very briefly, property taxes—the aggregate for an entire town—can only rise 2 1/2 percent per year (not counting growth, like new buildings) unless the voters allow an override, through a ballot question. This was the key point of Proposition 2 1/2, which went into effect in 1980. Belmont’s last successful override was in 2002. However, state aid to cities and towns dropped 20 percent that year, essentially erasing the effect of that override.

A “debt exclusion” is additional property tax levied to pay the debt for a specific project, lasting only as long as the bonds issued by a town to finance the debt. For example, we are more than halfway through paying Chenery’s 20-year bond.

What we informally call a “roads override” is a

new type of override, created by the state legislature in 2003, which allows a town to ask voters for money for a specific purpose, placing it in a stabilization fund. In our case, that money would be legally reserved for roadwork. It could never be “raided” for other purposes. The amount levied would grow at 2 1/2 percent, just like a regular override, and the Board of Selectmen could vote to reduce or eliminate it in the future. Note that only the Selectmen can put any of these overrides on the ballot.

The Pavement Management Committee determined that it would take about \$80 million to fix the roads. So why not do a large debt exclusion? Simply put, Belmont will never be finished fixing the roads. No town can be. Even roads replaced today will need maintenance 20 years from now. The committee determined that \$2.5 million per year would be the right amount to raise the level of roads to an acceptable level and maintain them there. A road-stabilization-fund override is simply a transparent, dedicated funding mechanism for roadwork.

We all know about neglecting maintenance of our infrastructure. Most people in town do not want to go down that road again.

— John Bowe is chair of the Belmont School Committee and a member of the Warrant Committee.

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

**Address Service Requested**

Nonprofit Org.  
U. S. Postage Paid  
Boston MA  
Permit No. 56393

***People Are Asking***

## **Why Do We Need a Roads Override?**

*By John Bowe*

Anyone who has driven on Belmont roads in recent years has experienced their deplorable condition. For decades, the town simply has not been given the resources to maintain them properly. In 2006, the Board of Selectmen formed the Pavement Management Committee to “define long term strategic options to address Belmont’s roads, sidewalks and intersections and to build public consensus on an approach,” as is stated on that committee’s page on the town web site..

This task is more complex than one might think, since many issues must be considered, including safety, public expectations, utility work, traffic calming, drainage, prioritization of arterial and local streets, and, of course, funding.

The Office of Community Development manages 70 miles of Belmont roads. It gets about \$1 million a year from the Town to pay for roadwork, which includes sidewalks and design work. In addition, Belmont gets about \$300,000 a year of Chapter 90 funding from the state for road construction.

### **Most of Belmont’s Roads Rate F**

Our roads are rated using a system, developed by the Army Corps of Engineers, that rates conditions on

*continued on page 18*