



Belmont Citizens Forum

Rail Trail Gets Back on Track to Belmont Center

Fencing, Landscaping Near Channing Road Need Careful Study



Crosby | Schlessinger | Smalridge

An illustration of how the proposed bike path might look. This style of fence was approved by the MBTA for the Alewife-Brighton Street section of path to be constructed next year.

By John Dieckmann

The Belmont Citizens Forum has purchased 2.4 acres of land to provide a right-of-way for a bicycle and pedestrian path from Belmont Center to Brighton Street. The parcel runs parallel to the commuter-rail tracks behind Channing Road and is approximately 30 feet wide and 3,560 feet long (see map on page 10). Combined with the path from Brighton Street to the Alewife T station, which is scheduled to

be upgraded next year, this new path would provide an easy walk or bike ride of less than two miles from Belmont Center to the subway and the eastern end of the Minuteman Bikeway.

In the coming months, the Citizens Forum will be discussing key issues of trail design and funding with the town government, the MBTA, state agencies, elected officials, local and regional rail-trail and environmental groups,

Continued on page 10

Belmont Committees Work to Improve Trapelo Redesign

To the Editor:

The Belmont Citizens Forum has been an active and important voice in support of effective planning for the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor as well as for preservation of Belmont's historic barns. The two articles on these subjects in the September/October 2008 issue of the *Newsletter* are informative but missing some important pieces of information.

Planting of trees and streetscape improvements along Trapelo Road and Belmont Street are still under way. Recently, the Historic District Commission (HDC) and the Shade Tree Committee (STC) have jointly engaged the town and the road planners, BSC Engineers, in an effort to improve the 25 percent [design stage] plans that have been submitted. Guided by the recommendations of the Planning Board's Planning Standards for East Belmont Street/Trapelo Road (March 18, 2005), the Belmont Community Development Plan (the Cecil Group, February 2004), the Economic Development Study (September 2003), and the MIT plan sponsored by the Citizens Forum, the HDC and STC are working to achieve tree selection and placement, as well as streetscape improvements, that strengthen the visual definition of the road's various commercial, residential, and transitional districts.

As we learned from the Pleasant Street reconstruction, it is not enough to expect that the state and its engineers will follow through with detailed planning that meets the town's needs and expectations. There has to be oversight of the engineer's design work by interested and qualified advocates for the town. The HDC and STC have come together to offer some of this oversight.

Regarding Mr. Starr's proposed development in Cushing Square, the HDC has met with Mr. Starr to voice our concern that the current plans do not include preservation of the historic S.S.

Pierce Building at the corner of Trapelo Road and Common Street. This modest architecture, well scaled to a domestic neighborhood, is important because it was characteristic of the type of corner building which the Pierce company chose throughout the city for its markets. Mr. Starr agreed to look more carefully at this portion of the project, but gave no assurances that the building would be saved. We intend to continue our advocacy for preservation of this building and we hope that as preservation advocates, the Citizens Forum will do the same.

Barn Bylaw

The second article, on the proposed barn bylaw, highlights the importance of preserving the town's diminishing stock of historic barns. The HDC supports the idea of a by-law that would encourage adaptive re-use of the barns, but we would like to see language added to the residential portion of the bylaw that would limit (a) the size of any new living unit and (b) the number of additional on-site parking spaces that would be allowed. The HDC is in discussions with the Planning Board and town staff regarding these limitations.

Arleyn Levee and Michael Smith
Belmont Historic District Commission

CPA Report Available On Line

The Belmont Community Preservation Act Study Committee has released its final report. The committee recommends:

- 1) Belmont should adopt the CPA
- 2)... with a surcharge of 1.5%, and
- 3)... exemptions for the first \$100,000 in property value and for low-income persons

Read the report at www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/Belmont_MA_BComm/CPAReportpresentedtoBOS10-06-08.pdf

Waltham, Lexington Shared Goal of Open Space at Met State

To the Editor,

I heartily enjoyed Dan Lech's piece on Beaver Brook North in the July *Newsletter*. It is really the hidden gem of this region's green space, with splendid trails and so many cultural highlights. Beaver Brook North is a core property on the emerging Western Greenway, a thousand acres of linked open space, with a nine-mile loop trail planned. A part of this Western Greenway Trail is already laid out from the Habitat Sanctuary in Belmont to Beaver Brook North—look for the green-and-white oak leaf markers.

For the record, I would amend some of the information about the tri-community disposition process in the 1990s [for the former campus of Metropolitan State Hospital.] It's not quite right that Waltham just wanted a golf course, Lexington housing, and Belmont a reservation. While the proposals changed over the years (Belmont proposed early on to put a cemetery on its land), the three communities all agreed that the majority of the land in each community should be preserved by becoming part of an Massachusetts District Commission reservation. Beaver Brook North Reservation has 155 acres in Waltham, 66 in Lexington, and 33 in Belmont.

The development of a golf course was seen as tenuous right from the beginning, so the agreement stipulated that the golf course site (the magnificent front lawns along Trapelo Road) would also be incorporated into the reservation if the golf course didn't materialize. And the Administration Building was reserved to serve both as the clubhouse for the golf course and the visitor's center for the reservation. Its future is unclear at the present time.

Beaver Brook North Reservation is the result of an exemplary public process with unprecedented cooperation among state agencies, the legislature and the three communities. One can only hope that the community will be so well-served and involved in the eventual Fernald Center disposition.

Marc Rudnick, Waltham

Belmont Citizens Forum

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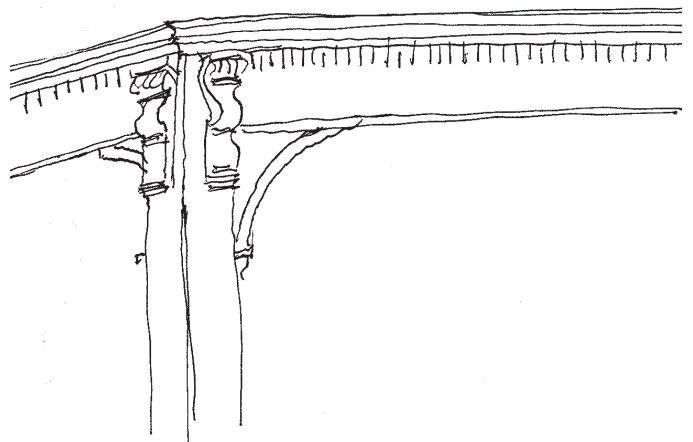
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Belmont Citizens Forum Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums. Our newsletter is published six times a year in 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 info@belmontcitizensforum.org



Ann Coit Sifneos, Newsletter Artist, Retires

By Sharon Vanderslice

Publishing a news magazine that relies almost exclusively on volunteer contributors for its content necessarily involves an element of suspense. As deadlines approach, one is never sure which articles will actually get written, how much editing those articles will require, or even how many pages will need to be printed. In the nine years since the inaugural issue of the Belmont Citizens Forum's *Newsletter* however, there is one contributor who has never failed to deliver: Ann Coit Sifneos.

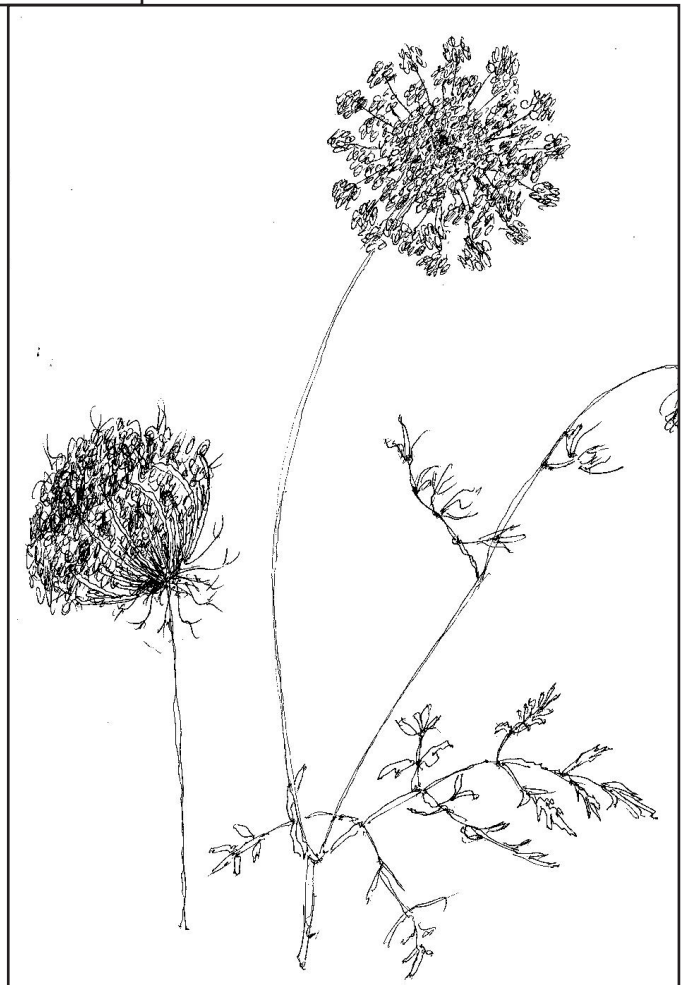
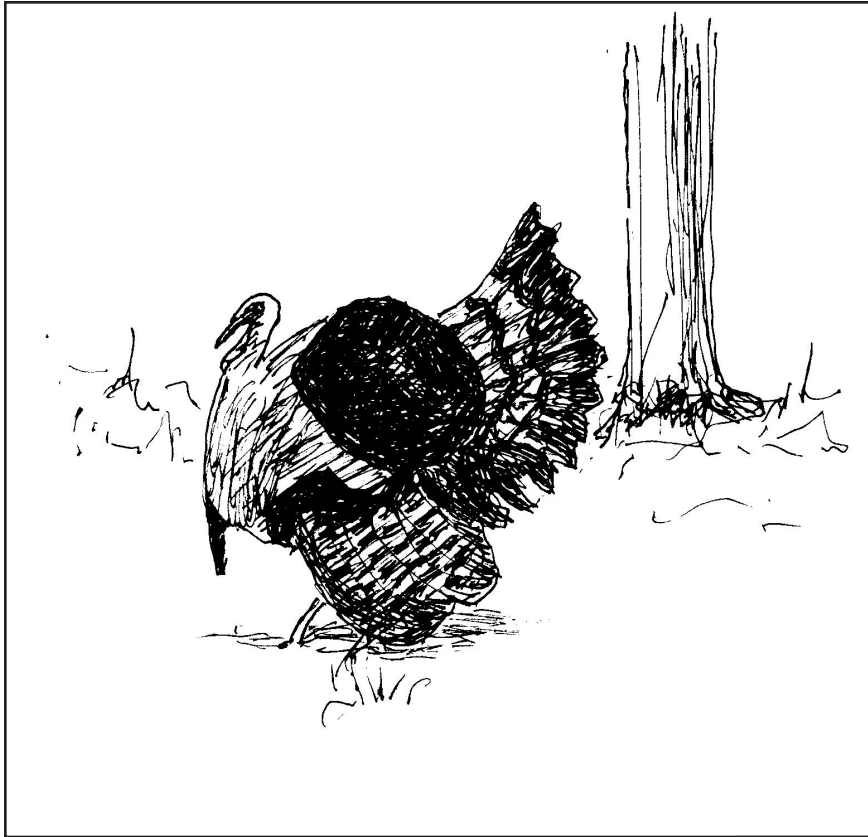
In that time, she has produced close to 250 drawings chronicling the built and natural environment of Belmont's four square miles. Historic facades, marshland panoramas, tiny roadside flowers, soaring copper beeches, streetscapes and church spires, streams and ponds, bike paths and railroad tracks have all

been faithfully rendered by the point of her pen. The resulting library of illustrations stands as a testament not only to Ann's artistic talent but also to her love for this town, which has been her home for 54 years.

This month, Ann retires from her role as volunteer illustrator. The *Newsletter* will continue to feature many of her drawings, but new pictures will come from others. While Ann enjoys a respite from sketching on sidewalks in all sorts of weather, readers will miss her simple, elegant vision of the community. We salute her and offer our deepest thanks for her generosity, which serves as a model for all who work to keep Belmont a great place to live.

Sharon Vanderslice was editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* from 2000–2003.





A sample of Ann Coit Sifneos's illustrations.

Growing Recycling Market Changes Belmont's Rules

Fees, Commodity Prices Transform Local Policy

By Meg Muckenhoupt

This fall, travelers through Belmont's squares have been greeted by sandwich boards declaring, "CORRUGATED CARDBOARD MUST BE RECYCLED." Whether you're alarmed or amused by this abrupt command, the message is clear: recycling conditions in Belmont have changed, making it easier to keep materials out of the waste stream and more important to the town's finances to do so.

Trash Costs Big Bucks

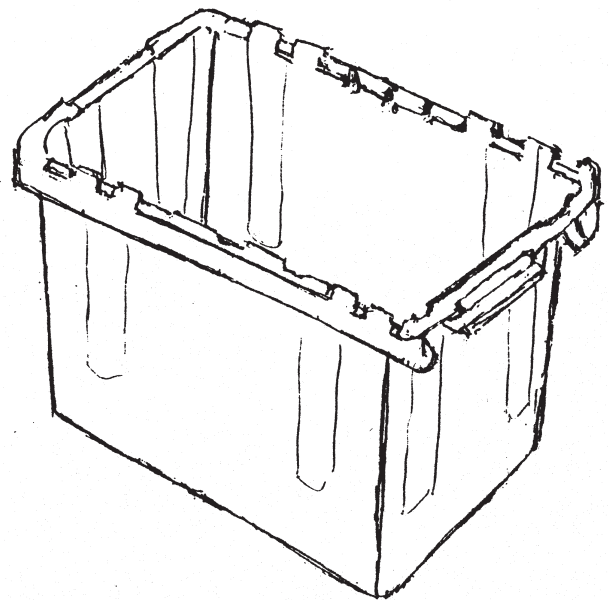
In one sense, nothing about cardboard recycling has changed. It has been illegal to dump "recyclable paper" at landfills, incinerators, and transfer stations since April 1, 2000, thanks to the Massachusetts Waste Ban, a state law restricting where waste can go. Pretty much all cardboard that isn't soiled (such as pizza boxes) or coated with wax is recyclable, yet Belmont residents did not have the option of recycling cardboard for years.

The problem was cost. When the town's current contract with FW Russell Disposal was negotiated eight years ago, Russell said that it would haul corrugated cardboard if Belmont either paid an additional \$20,000 per year or extended Russell's contract for two years (through 2011) with a 3 percent pay increase per year. Belmont declined both alternatives and therefore did not collect corrugated cardboard for recycling—a clear violation of the Massachusetts Waste Ban. Instead, Belmont got a contract charging a fixed price for picking up solid waste and recycling but variable costs for burning the waste at a North Andover incinerator. In other words, the cost of incineration can increase—which doesn't affect recycling.

Over time, the economics of incineration and recycling changed. As of December 2007, Belmont was paying \$69.50 for each ton of waste transported to the incinerator. Of this total waste, about 1,800 tons were corrugated cardboard, according to estimates based on

surveys by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); that adds up to \$125,100 a year for Belmont residents to throw away corrugated cardboard. By September 2008, incineration costs had risen to \$71.50 a ton, making cardboard disposal cost \$128,700 a year. Rising fuel prices were to blame: "Energy is a big cost of picking up anything," said Doug Koplow, chairman of Belmont's Solid Waste and Recycling Advisory Committee (SWARAC). In December 2007, SWARAC advised Belmont's Board of Selectmen that, based on neighboring towns' recycling rates, it made sense to begin recycling corrugated cardboard.

While the cost of hauling trash has increased, the value of recovered paper—the paper companies take from recycling bins—has fluctuated impressively. It takes less energy and water to make recycled paper than to make new paper from trees, and mills in Asia have gotten better at using mixed-fiber loads of office paper, cardboard, and other products. Unfortunately, the worldwide economic slowdown has dampened demand. According to the *Boston*



Herald, last July New England's market price for collected cardboard was about \$105–\$115 per ton; as of November 1, cardboard was selling for \$40–\$45 per ton. Recycling is still cheaper than burning trash, but it isn't going to make anyone rich this year.

Belmont Can Increase Recycling Rates

EPA data suggest that more than one-third of Belmont's trash is paper and paper products like cardboard. However, only 14 percent of Belmont's waste is paper in recycling bins; the remaining paper — that is, 19 percent of all waste— is hauled away as trash at \$71.50 per ton. Overall, Belmont recycles about 40 percent of the waste that could be recycled. Neighboring Lexington puts 58 percent of its recyclables into recycling bins; if Belmont could recycle that much, SWARAC estimates that the town could save \$190,000 a year.

It's clear that Belmont residents can increase recycling rates; the question is how to persuade them to do so. Some towns (including Lexington, Billerica, and Andover) enforce the Massachusetts Waste Ban by having haulers leave behind visible recyclables included with the trash; the hauler leaves the recyclables on the curb with a notice stating why they were left behind.

Another program that increases recycling rates is Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT), also known as unit pricing. Under PAYT, the cost of trash hauling is paid by those who put out trash—rather than being included in property taxes—and residents are charged by the number of barrels or bags of trash they put out. In the 124 Massachusetts communities that have enacted PAYT, residents have reduced the amount of waste they put on the curb between 20 and 35 percent. Municipal departments also increase their recycling when they “pay” for their own trash hauling out of their budgets.

Unfortunately, both of these initiatives can lead to hard feelings among residents who resent having their trash left behind and paying for it to be taken away. Better education and outreach can also reduce waste, but it tends to be less effective than these more coercive alternatives.



Technology Makes Recycling Easier

Ten years ago, recycling facilities couldn't separate brown, green, and clear glass. Commingled glass was useless for many purposes, and commodity brokers would not buy it. Now sorters can sort glass easily, and no one thinks twice about mingling different colors of glass in bins.

Today's recyclers are taking this a step further and adopting “single-stream” recycling, in which all recyclable materials—glass, plastics, metals, paper—are commingled in bins and trucks and sorted at the recycling plant. In U.S. communities that have implemented single-stream recycling, recycling rates have increased anywhere from 25 to 100 percent.

Implementing single-stream recycling costs money: haulers need new trucks and residents need new bins. Despite the cost, Belmont may soon join other single-stream recycling communities; Koplou predicts that Charlestown's FCR Recycling, which handles Belmont's recyclables, will eventually retrofit its plant for single-stream recycling.

Belmont will be putting its next waste and recycling collection contract out for bid in 2009, to take effect in 2010. With some planning, Belmont can save money—and the environment.

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

Program Highlights Walkers' Risk from Snow, Cars

by Dan Barton Lech

In Belmont, you're never more than two miles from anywhere else in town. Belmont's small area—just four square miles—makes for a highly walkable community, remarked former state representative Anne Paulsen at the October 23 "Walking in Belmont" forum, sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum, the Belmont Council on Aging, Sustainable Belmont, and the Vision 21 committee. Moderator Paulsen and panelists noted that Belmont has made some improvements to pedestrian problems but also described several ongoing barriers to walking safely through town. Topping most panelists' lists was snow-covered sidewalks.

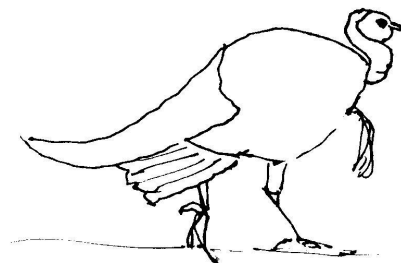
Good Design Makes Streets Safer

The first speaker was Rosa Carson of Walk Boston, a nonprofit organization that works to improve walking conditions across the state. According to Carson, there are many ways communities can encourage walking:

- Build sidewalks that are at least five feet wide. This allows for two or three people to walk abreast without stepping into the street.
- Use cement or asphalt instead of brick for sidewalks. Brick is uneven and undesirable for wheelchairs, strollers, high heels, etc.
- Minimize the distance from one curb to another at crosswalks.
- Make streets narrower. Narrow streets reduce drivers' speeds.
- Include on-street parking. The cars act as a buffer between pedestrians and the road.
- Encourage countdown timers at walk lights to simplify pedestrians' decisions.

Walk Boston also encourages citizens to advocate for pedestrian rights. Carson recommended contacting Belmont's public-works department if a crosswalk is faded or in disrepair and requesting upright crosswalk signs (the bright signs in the center of crosswalks that urge drivers to slow down and yield). She also suggested creating snow committees to encourage snow removal.

Glenn Clancy, Belmont's Director of Community Development, had good news and bad news for pedestrians. Clancy noted that the town has already made pedestrian-friendly improvements at White Street and Bright Road, and plans to build a crosswalk on the newly repaved Mill Street. That crosswalk will connect Rock Meadow to paths leading to Habitat, and thus to the Western Greenway. Unfortunately,



Clancy also pointed out that since the roads override did not pass this spring, there is little or no money for further such improvements. Sidewalks are not part of the budget for any road-repaving project, even if the street being redone already has a sidewalk.

More Traffic Endangers Pedestrians

Sergeant Kevin Shea of the Belmont Police Department laid out some circumstances that endanger walkers. Unsafe driving practices like speeding, failure to yield to pedestrians, and failure to stop at traffic lights and stop signs were high on the list. Shea pointed out that Belmont has an increasing amount of "cut through" traffic—out-of-town commuters using our roadways to skirt more congested routes. This increase in traffic leads to more automobile-pedestrian accidents. Walkers also endanger themselves through improper cell-phone use and through what Shea called "optimistic estimation" of the amount of time left to cross the street.

According to Shea, over the past ten years there have been 132 accidents involving pedestrians, resulting in 112 injuries and 4 deaths. So far in 2008, there has been only

one accident involving a pedestrian and one involving a bicyclist with no serious injuries. Shea also pointed out that a recent audit showed that all of the town's major crosswalks have been repainted and all of the walk signal lights are functioning.

Seniors, Children Stopped by Snow

Nava Niv-Vogel, director of the Belmont Council on Aging, gave voice to seniors' specific concerns about walking, in particular snow removal. To address these concerns, the Council maintains a list of high-school students who have volunteered to shovel snow and has canes and walkers available for those seniors who need them. The Council also runs seminars with the Belmont police to discuss seniors' concerns about their mobility in town.

Peggy Eisenbach and Karen Parmett represent the Belmont chapter of Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS), a program that promotes healthy alternatives for children and parents in their travel to and from school. Like Niv-Vogel, Parmett emphasized that snow removal was a major safety issue. The SRTS program aims to reduce congestion, air pollution, and traffic conflicts near schools while increasing the health and mobility of school-aged children. Eisenbach said that walking to school also gives children a heightened sense of responsibility and instills a sense of community by bringing children into closer contact with their neighbors.

Parmett suggested creating a neighborhood "walking school bus," in which a group of children

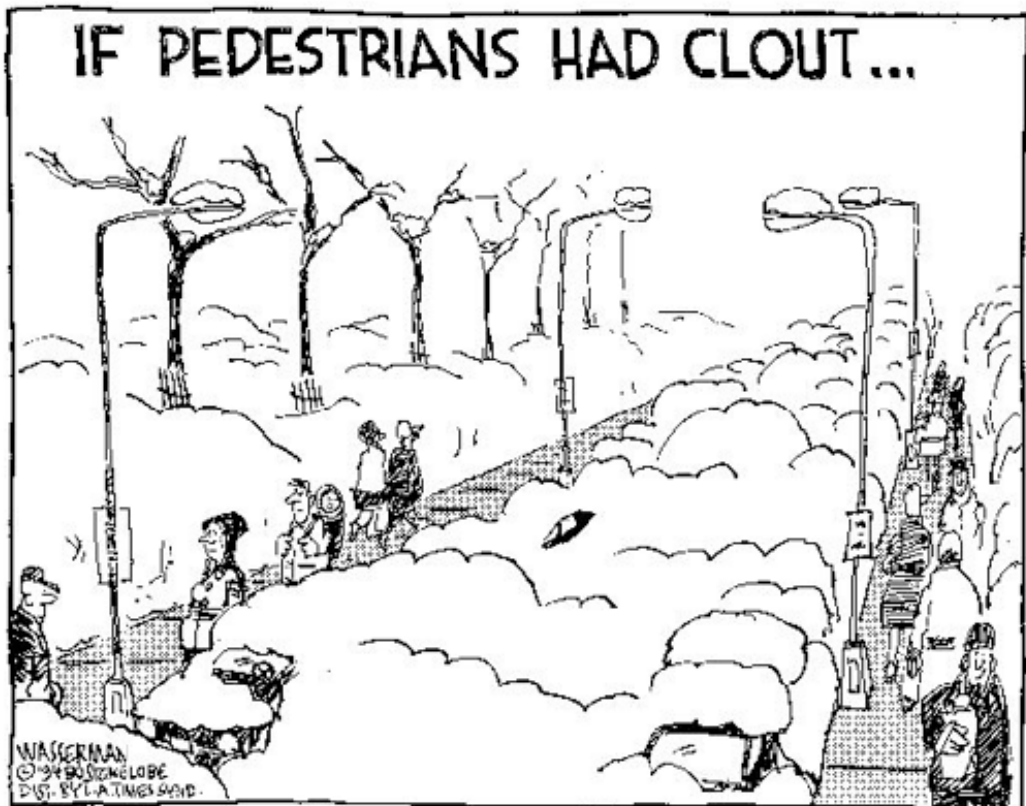
walk together escorted by parents. This year, Belmont participated in Massachusetts Walk to School Day (May 7, 2008) and International Walk to School Month (October 2008); Chenery was the first middle school in the state to participate in these programs.

Following the presentations, there was a brief question-and-answer session during which audience members shared suggestions of pleasant walking routes, including the Western Greenway and the area surrounding the reservoir near Payson Road.

Walking Talk November 18

A second informal walking forum will be held on Tuesday, November 18 at 7:30 p.m. in the Belmont library's Assembly Room. For more information, contact Anne Paulsen at annempaulsen@gmail.com.

Dan Lech is a 10-year Belmont resident, wine professional, and musician who is attempting to think globally and act locally.



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Bike Path, continued from page 1

owners of abutting properties, and the general public.

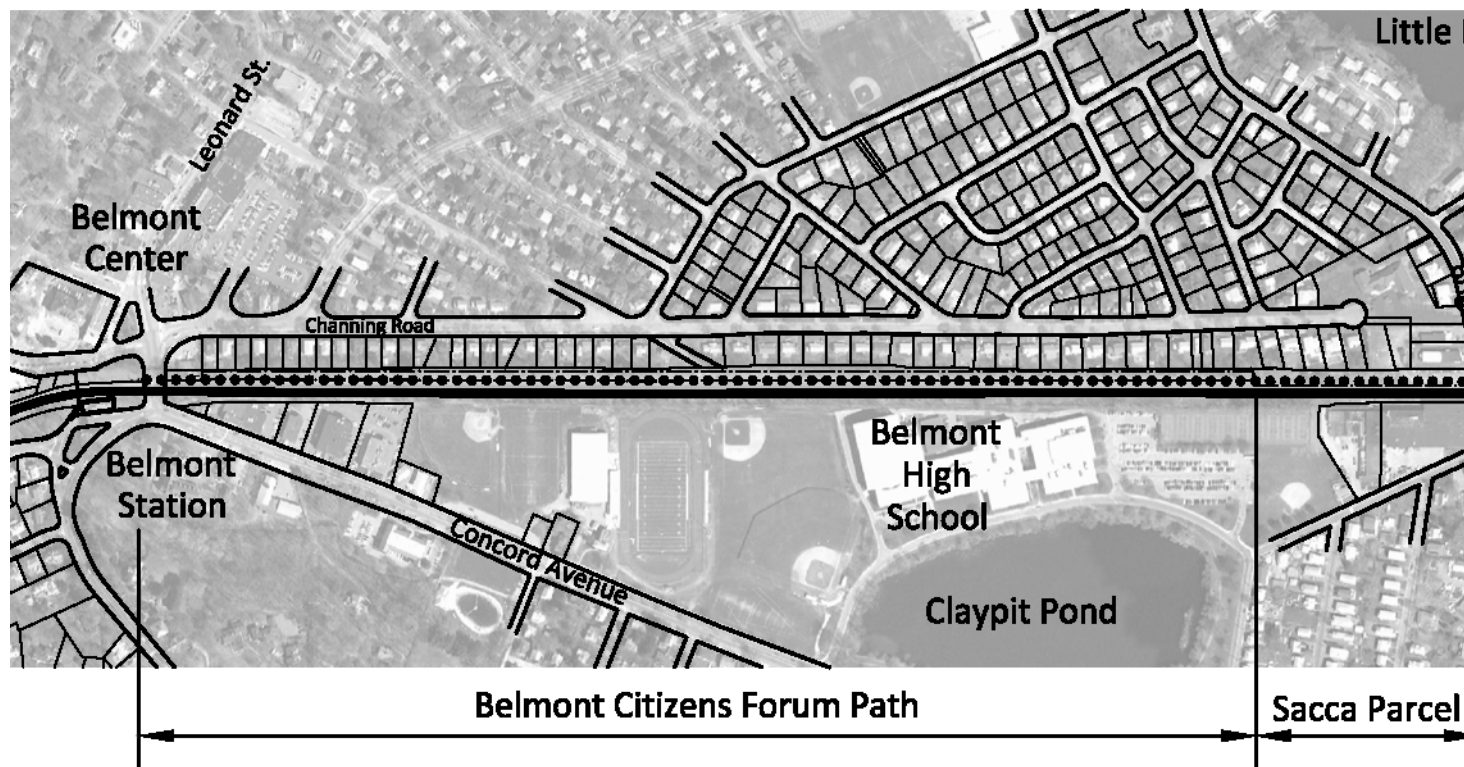
Improving bicycle and pedestrian access has always been part of the Citizens Forum's mission to limit traffic and preserve Belmont's natural and historical resources. The Citizens Forum's first public forum, in 2000, was about controlling traffic; so was last fall's forum. The organization's first donation to the town was \$2,500 for five model crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety. Now those international-style crosswalks have been adopted as standard practice for Belmont. The Citizens Forum hopes this bike and pedestrian path will also lead to a townwide policy, promoting more safe pathways for walking and biking.

Although local funding will be necessary to move forward with a community path, this parcel of land was purchased by the Citizens Forum with money from the mitigation fund created by the developers of the Woodlands town houses on the McLean property.

Path is Link to Wayside Rail Trail

The purchase of this land is a first step toward creating a bicycle and pedestrian path from Belmont Center to Brighton Street that will ultimately be part of the Wayside Rail Trail, a planned 26-mile shared-use path from Boston to Berlin, passing through Somerville, Cambridge, Belmont, Waltham, Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, Hudson, and Berlin, primarily along the right-of-way of the former Central Massachusetts Railroad (see map on page 12). The Wayside Rail Trail is in turn the eastern segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail, which will run from Boston to Northampton, covering a distance of 104 miles; 24 miles of the trail are currently open.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is close to signing a 99-year lease with the MBTA for a bike path on the 26-mile abandoned Central Mass Railroad right-of-way that runs west from Waltham to Berlin. This is a significant development. Since that right-of-way has been resolved, those towns along this stretch that wish to develop the



A map of the complete off-street route from the Belmont Center train station to Alewife station.

Wayside/Mass Central Rail Trail (currently all of the towns except Weston) can now start the design process.

Purchase Kick-Starts Path Planning

The Belmont Citizens Forum acquired the property to clear the way for the lengthy bike-path design and construction process. The normal procedure for designing and constructing a rail trail is first to define the proposed route and obtain access. The design process then includes detailed design with intermediate design reviews, followed ultimately by funding and construction. Without the trail right-of-way clearly established, the design feasibility study could not begin.

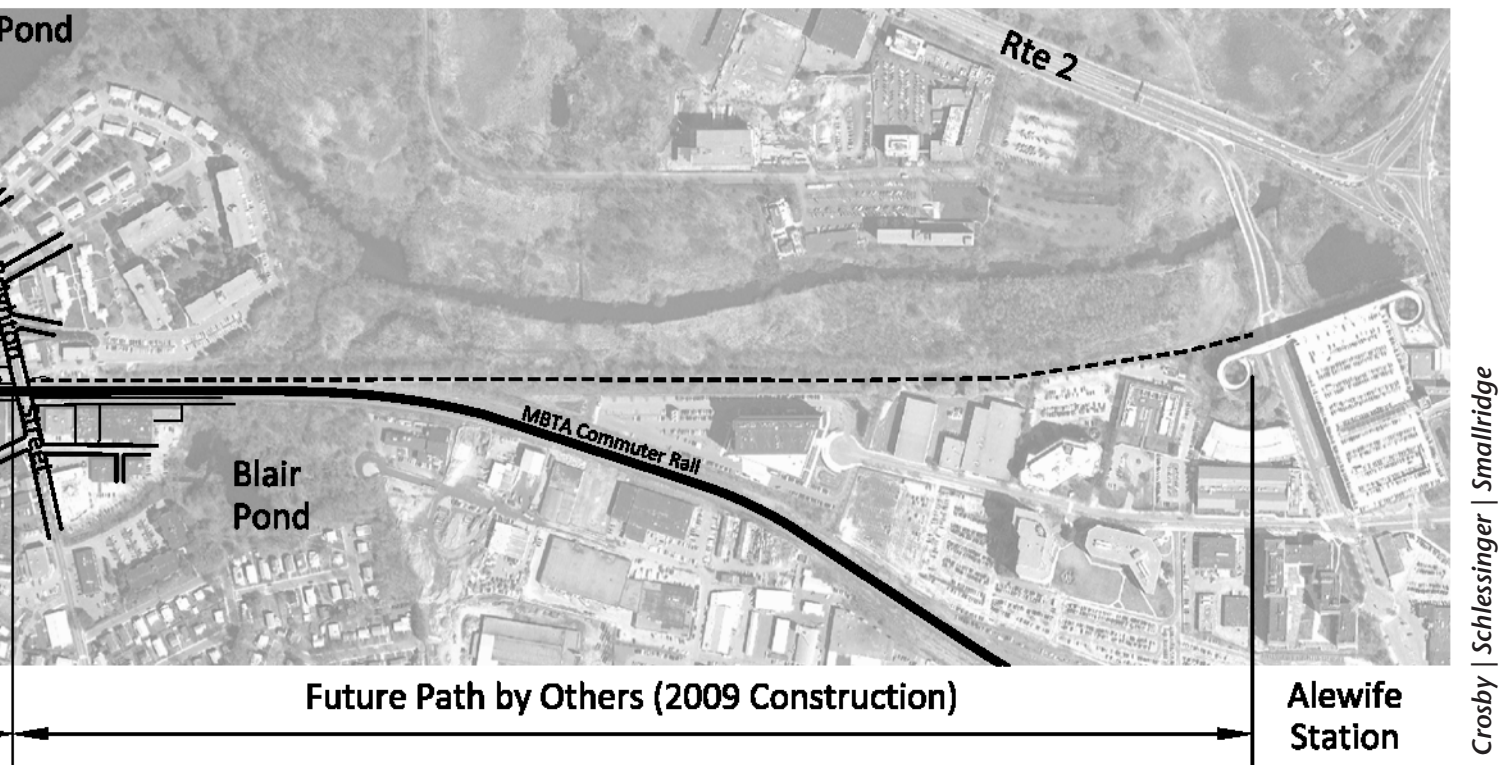
Until now, the route for the rail trail through Belmont has been uncertain. Unlike Waltham and the other towns to the west, where the route is clear-cut—following the railroad right-of-way—in Belmont, the Mass Central Rail Trail right-of-way coincides with the active commuter-

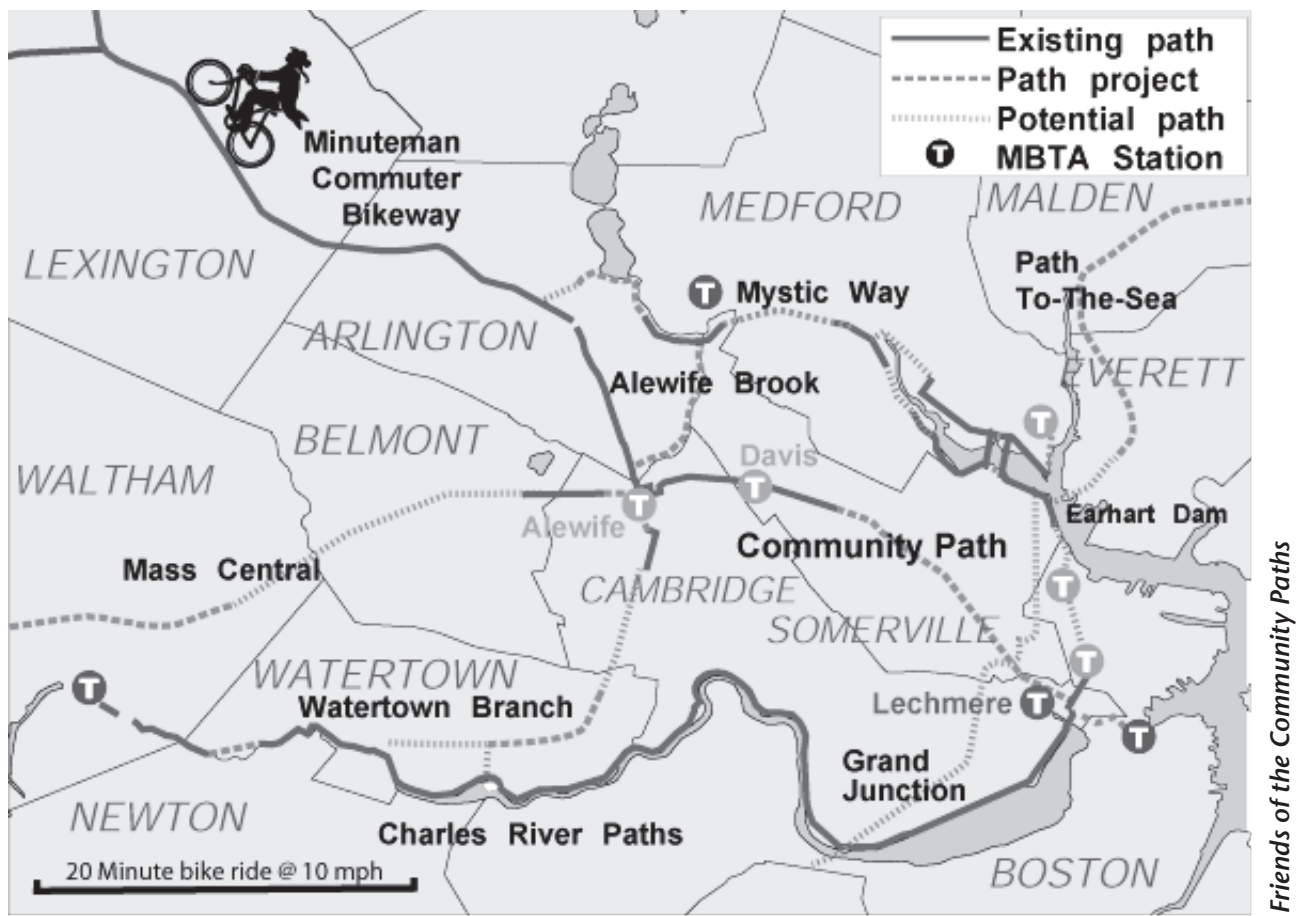
rail line. Parts of the right-of-way had also been sold to private parties.

Now, the Citizens Forum's purchase makes the right-of-way from Brighton Street to Belmont Center available for bike-path planning. An easement along the edge of the Sacca parcel that starts at Brighton Street will be needed in order to complete the Brighton Street to Belmont Center section of the community path. No route beyond Belmont Center has yet been determined.

Alewife to Brighton Path Due in 2009

Construction of the path from the Alewife T station to Brighton Street (officially referred to as the Belmont extension of the Minuteman Trail) is scheduled to commence during 2009. Over the past two years, the town has provided the necessary support for this process by locking up the right-of-way for the 680 feet of this trail segment that is in Belmont. The final piece of the puzzle was the granting of an easement by the Hill Estates for the trail to pass over an elongated, diamond-shaped, 4,500-square-foot





A map of existing and proposed bicycle paths near Belmont.

parcel located within the trail route. Selectman Angelo Firenze worked closely with both state officials and the owners of the Hill Estates to complete this easement.

Rail Trail Stalled Since 1997

In 1997, the Wayside Rail Trail looked as if it might soon be a reality. However, the project stalled soon afterward, due to a number of developments: Weston withdrew from the project; and the funding formula for rail-trail projects changed from 20 percent state funds and 80 percent federal highway funds to 10 percent local funds, 10 percent state funds and 80 percent federal funds, with local funds to be committed first. The 10 percent local-funding requirement was ostensibly to ensure that the local community demonstrate real support for

the project. That change also coincided with Big Dig costs spinning out of control.

For Belmont, the loss of Weston's participation was not a great concern. The combined Belmont and Waltham segments would be nearly 10 miles long and connect to the Alewife T station and the Minuteman Bikeway, providing a valuable asset for both recreation and commuting. The local-funding requirement, on the other hand, was and is a serious issue, given Belmont's ongoing budget squeeze. Neighborhood concerns also remain unresolved. With good input from abutters and others, the Citizens Forum believes that planning and design can address many of the issues and concerns that may be expressed.

John Dieckmann is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Q&A

Answers about a Community Path Through Belmont

Q. What is the Citizens Forum proposing?

A. A new stretch—less than a mile long—of a community path through Belmont. It will create a short route for pedestrians and bicyclists from Belmont Center to Brighton Street. At Brighton Street, it will meet an existing gravel path, scheduled to be paved and improved next year, to the Alewife T station. The total distance is 1.7 miles—a 10-minute bike ride or a half-hour walk. At commuting times, it takes longer to drive and now costs \$7 to park.

Q. What is a community path?

A. It's a wide path, usually paved, that is shared by bicyclists and pedestrians for exercise or commuting. No motor vehicles are allowed. A shared-use path is a wonderful amenity that will be used by a large part of the town's population. It should enhance the quality of life in Belmont and bring more business to Belmont Center.

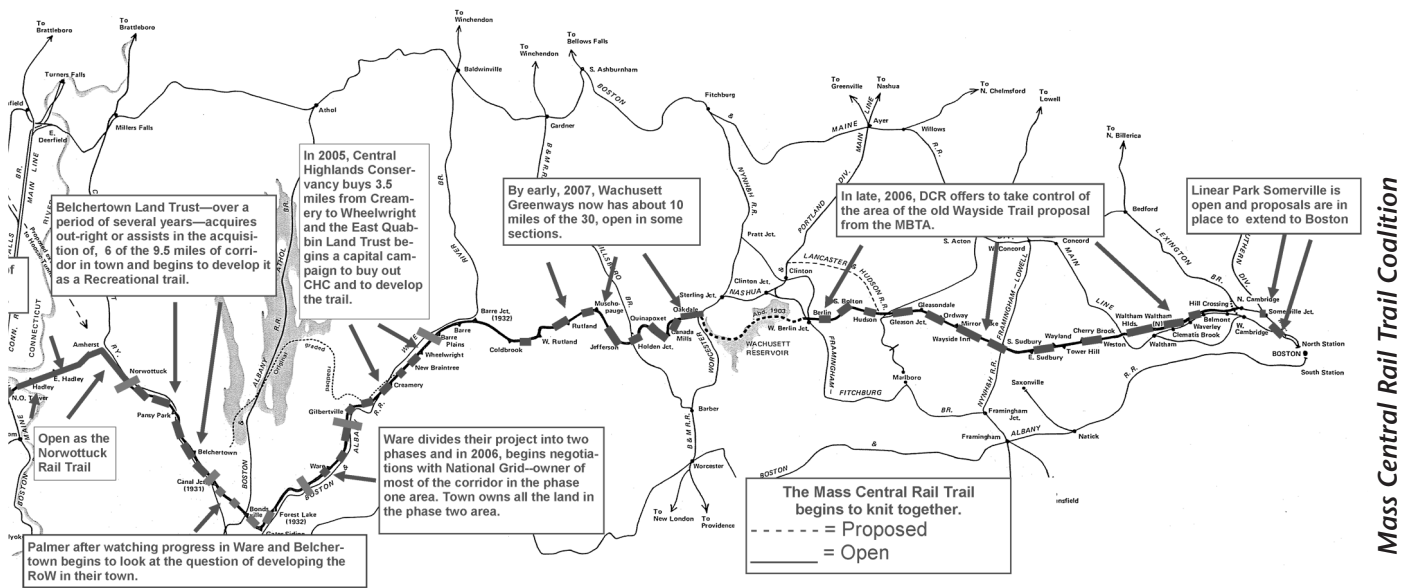
Q. Why is a community path from Belmont Center to the Alewife T Station important?

A. It will be a convenient route to the Red Line subway and will provide easier access to a network of bike paths leading in all directions from the Alewife T station, including the Minuteman Bikeway. Belmont's path is part of the Mass Central Rail Trail, expected one day to stretch 104 miles from Boston to Northampton, generally along the route of the former Massachusetts Central Railroad line. It would give residents improved low-cost travel options to and from Boston, save energy, and reduce greenhouse gases from auto exhaust.

Q. I don't bike and I'm not likely to walk to Alewife. Why would I want a path?

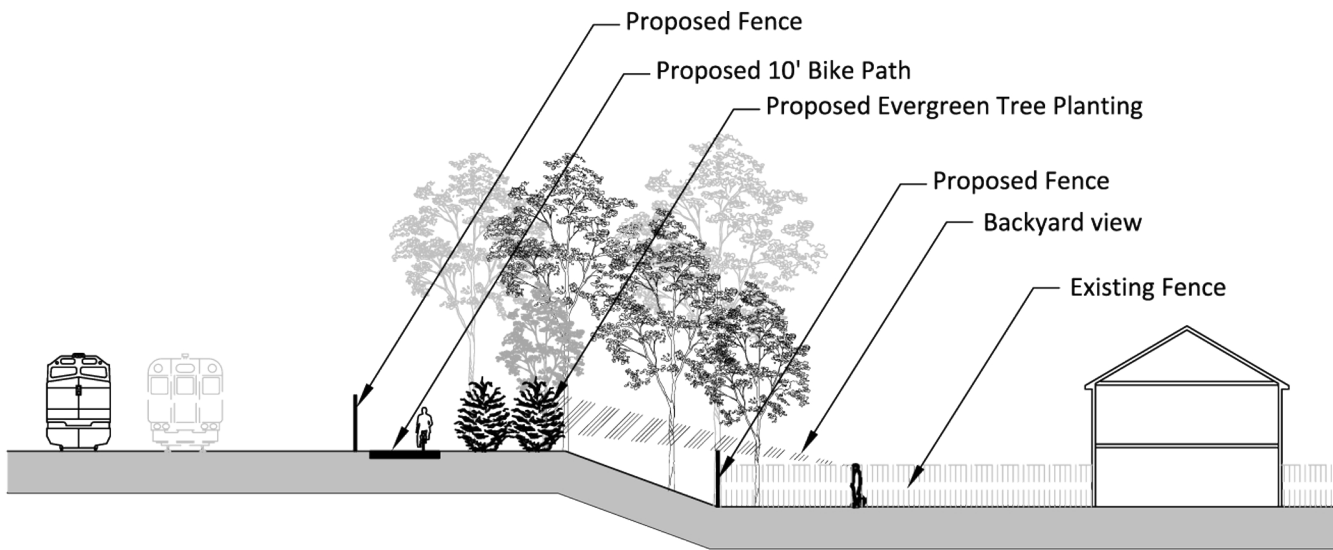
A. Virtually every bicycle commuter takes a single-occupancy car off the road. We should all see a difference in the amount of traffic in Belmont once a community path is in full operation.

Q. What's the route in Belmont?



Mass Central Rail Trail Coalition

Year by year, mile by mile, segments of the Mass Central Rail Trail are being built by municipalities and organizations from Northampton to Boston.



Proposed Detailed Cross Section

This drawing is not to scale and is for communication purposes only.

Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge

A conceptual drawing of a cross-section of the proposed path between Brighton Street and the Belmont Center train station.

- A.** From Belmont Center to Brighton Street it would parallel the commuter rail tracks on the railroad embankment between the west-bound track and Channing Road. The Belmont Citizens Forum has purchased a strip of land on the north side of the embankment that the railroad sold off decades ago. Most of that land will serve as a buffer, with landscaping to shield abutters.
- Q.** What's the likely route west from Belmont Center?
- A.** Bringing the community path to Belmont Center would be a major milestone. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has signed a 99-year lease with the MBTA for a bike path on the 26-mile abandoned right of way from Waltham west to Berlin, but the connection between Belmont Center and Waltham has not yet been determined.
- Q.** Won't it be visible from backyards along Channing Road?
- A.** Not with proper landscaping. Our hope is to work closely with the abutters to design landscaping and fencing to screen the Channing Road houses and the path from each other.
- Q.** Will the path be lighted at night?
- A.** The community should decide whether lighting would be desirable and if so, what kind. The Minuteman Bikeway is not lit. If lighting would improve safety, it should be possible to design effective, low-energy lighting without shining lights into anyone's home.
- Q.** Will the community path affect the value of nearby homes?
- A.** Experts say that properties close to a trail sell for a slightly higher price and sell more quickly. Realtors frequently mention the path in ads to attract buyers. Many homeowners who abut the Minuteman Bikeway have installed gates to improve their access to the path.
- Q.** Who will pay for the community path?
- A.** The Citizens Forum has acquired much of the land and expects to transfer it to the state. Eighty percent of the construction costs will come from federal funds. In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Highway Department typically pays another 10 percent, and local sponsors fund the remainder. The 10 percent local portion

could come from Community Preservation Act funds and private donations.

Q. Will the community path become a financial burden to the town?

A. Path maintenance is inexpensive. In fiscal year 2006, Lexington's Park and Forestry divisions spent roughly \$700 per mile on the Minuteman Bikeway.

Q. Will the path be safe?

A. Paths next to active rail lines – known as “Rails with trails” – have been a success and are increasingly accepted. Most recently, the MBTA, the DCR and other state agencies have designed and approved the community path to be built from Brighton Street to Alewife T station with a black steel picket fence to separate tracks and trail similar to the illustration on page one.

Q. What about crime?

A. Generally, community paths do not attract criminals. An open and well-traveled community path should be an improvement on current conditions behind Channing Road. It will be more accessible to Belmont police and will prevent the unsafe situation where children cross the active tracks and congregate out of reach of law enforcement. The Arlington and Lexington police departments have 16 years of experience in policing the Minuteman Bikeway, one of the most heavily used community paths in the United States. Arlington Police Chief Fred Ryan told us that the “value of the Minuteman Trail as a recreational asset far outweighs public safety issues, which are few and far between.” Lexington Police Lt. Mike O’Connell said, “Thousands of people enjoy walking, biking, jogging, skiing, snow shoeing, or roller blading on the Minuteman Bikeway. There are few problems that occur except when people over-exercise during hot weather, collide accidentally with each other on the path, or use unsafe practices when crossing roadway intersections... I would therefore encourage neighboring towns to adopt similar safe and healthy recreation areas for their residents, too.”

Q. Isn't a route on the streets – Concord Avenue to Underwood Street and Hittinger Street to Brighton Street – just as good?

A. People don't feel as safe riding on the streets, especially riding through traffic at Belmont Center. Though Concord Avenue and Underwood Street are now striped, they're not heavily used. A May 2007 study of bike commuters at the Alewife garage during the morning rush hour found only 4 of 68 were from Belmont. A street route isn't the same as an off-road, shared-use path reserved for non-motorized vehicles. Safety and congestion on our streets will not improve.

Q. Why not run the path on the other side of the train tracks, behind the high school?

A. The high school side does not have adequate room along the railroad right of way for a community path and would not achieve a safe, off-road route for pedestrians, bike riders, baby carriages, or commuters. Instead of crossing Belmont Center over the stone railroad bridge, that route would add more traffic to Belmont's most congested spot, under the bridge.

Q. How long will it take to complete this new stretch from Belmont Center to Brighton Street?

A. That depends on many factors. Planning and funding take time, but construction can be quick. The 11-mile Minuteman Bikeway took 15 months to build.

Q. How can I help get the community path built?

A. The town's leaders need to know that the public would like to see the path in Belmont. Send an e-mail to the Board of Selectman saying that you support the bike trail in Belmont (selectmen@belmont.town.ma.us). Also, a community path friends group is organizing. To join it, e-mail info@belmontcitizensforum.com, write the Belmont Citizens Forum at PO Box 609, Belmont, MA 02478, or call 617 484 1844.

For information on progress on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail see page 16.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Shifts into High Gear

Thanks to key town votes last April in four communities, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is coming closer to reality. The Bruce Freeman Trail is a proposed rail trail through the communities of Lowell, Chelmsford, Westford, Carlisle, Acton, Concord, Sudbury, and Framingham, following the 25-mile route of the old New Haven Railroad (see map). Construction of Phase I -- 6.8 miles in Lowell and Chelmsford -- is underway.

Concord Town Meeting voted to accept the town's proposed design and to fund asphalt paving for the entire length of the trail in Concord, and provided \$50K for further work on the project.

Sudbury Town Meeting voted to purchase the right-of-way from Route 20 to Framingham

Framingham's Board of Selectmen voted to put out a request for proposal of the Framingham portion of the trail. The Selectmen also voted to become the receiver of the land when negotiations lead to a purchase.

Acton Town Meeting voted to allow the town to enter into inter-municipal agreement with Carlisle and Westford to construct the portion of the trail that connects those towns.

For more information, see <http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org>

Neighborhood Support Meeting For Uplands Silver Maple Forest

December 2, 2008

7:30–9:30 p.m.

Winn Brook School

97 Waterhouse Road, Belmont

Learn about the Uplands woodlands and wildlife and the effect planned development will have on the environment and Belmont neighborhoods.

Speakers include:

State Representative Will Brownsberger
Stanley Dzierzeski and Thomas Bracken, Coalition to Preserve Belmont Uplands
Gerard Natoli, Winn Brook neighbor
Ellen Mass, Friends of the Alewife Reservation
Sue Bass, Belmont Citizens Forum

Sponsored by

Coalition to Preserve Belmont Uplands and Winn Brook Neighborhood

Belmont Land Trust

Friends of Alewife Reservation

Belmont Citizens Forum

For more information, call 617-415-1884



Waltham Group Plans to Reuse Fernald Land

Clustered Housing, More Open Space Would Fill Local Needs

By Steve LaFerriere

A recent court ruling makes it more likely than ever that Waltham's Fernald Center will be closed, leaving the 196-acre site open for redevelopment. On October 1, a federal appeals court overruled a 2007 decision compelling the Commonwealth to allow Fernald's residents to remain if they desired. Immediately after the decision, the Patrick administration announced that it would start relocating residents. Still, closure may not be imminent. The Fernald League, an advocacy organization for the residents, may challenge the ruling in the US Supreme Court.

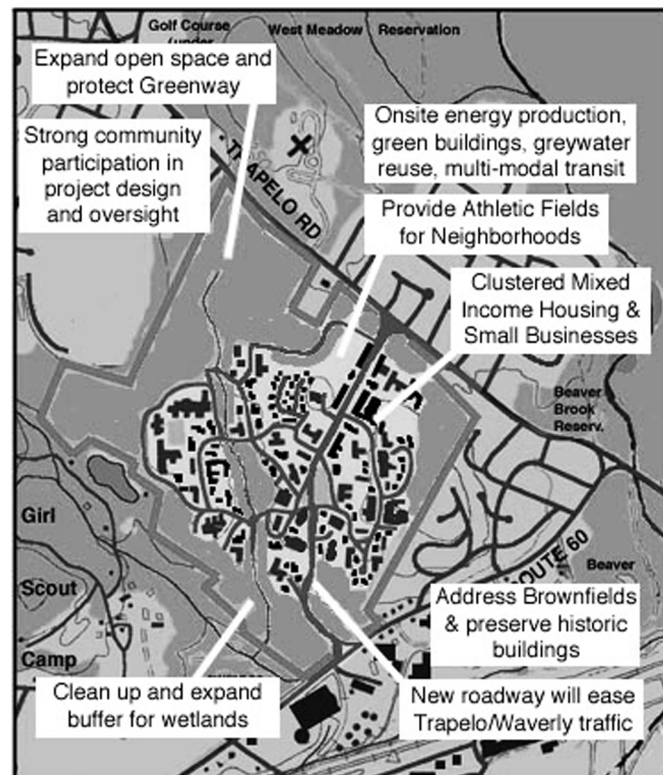
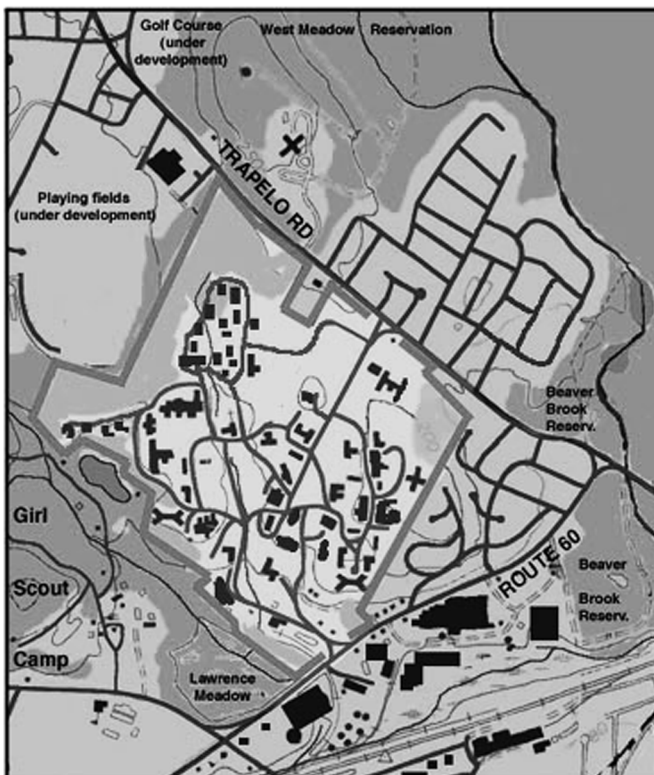
Site Housed 2000, Had Working Farm

Located on Trapelo Road near the intersection with Route 60, the Fernald Center site has

over 80 acres of open space and more than two dozen buildings. Forty acres of the site lie on the planned Western Greenway, a six-mile loop of trails through open space in Belmont, Lexington, and Waltham.

Forty years ago, the 196-acre Fernald property was home to more than 2,000 residents, and fruit and vegetables were farmed on the site to feed them. After a shift in policy toward group homes and a cut-off of new admissions around 1975, the population dwindled to 163 residents. For over five years, the state has tried to close the facility and sell off the Fernald land. The Massachusetts Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) sees the property as a prime development location;

continued on page 18



STEVEN LAFERRIERE/ FERNALD WORKING GROUP

Current conditions at the Fernald site are shown on the left. The map on the right illustrates the kind of changes proposed by a coalition of Waltham organizations.

Fernald continued from page 17

selling it would add millions of dollars to state coffers.

Unfortunately, the Fernald site has a history of environmental degradation. Toxic areas on site include above-ground asbestos contamination, a power plant, unknown old dump contents, buildings with lead and asbestos, and possible garage and maintenance buildings contaminants. In 2003 a local developer estimated it would cost \$10 million just to clean up the known environmental problems.

Fernald Group Envisions Diverse Uses

Local community members see the land as much more than just a parcel to be developed.

The Fernald Working Group is a coalition of local residents and community-based organizations working toward establishing a plan for the Fernald land if and when it is made available by the Commonwealth. The Working Group is neutral on the question of the tenure of the current residents and other services now on the site. The group's vision reflects community needs, including open space preservation and recreation and the reuse of historic buildings in environmentally appropriate ways to promote affordable housing.

The Group favors restoring environmental features like daylighting culverted streams, creating affordable housing, and mitigating traffic. The map on page 17 illustrates how the campus looks now, and how it might look when housing and businesses are clustered to create more open space and preserve wetlands. A new street linking Trapelo Road and Route 60 would ease traffic, while clustered housing and businesses would make it more practical to create more transit options to serve the site.

Some of the likely uses might include housing of a variety of types to serve a variety of income levels; small retail businesses; transportation links by bike, bus and rail; housing for employees of the businesses; performing arts spaces; a library branch; community gardens; a neighborhood playground; and a historical museum to memorialize the history of the Fernald Center.

The site could utilize renewable energy sources including solar and wind power and could

feature a sewage treatment plant to provide jobs and yield gray water for landscape purposes. These features would lower operating costs.

Alternative Plans Need Local Support

Open space and historic preservation don't yield high property prices, so vigorous, proactive, citizen support is needed to obtain local control over the disposition of the Fernald Center. If and when the Supreme Court decides to take up the Fernald case, the center's closure could be merely months away. To become more involved keep reading the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* and other local papers and web sites. For more information about the Fernald Center or the Fernald Working Group, please contact Steve Laferriere at steve@watchcdc.org.

Steve Laferriere is a member of the Fernald Working Group.



Environmental Events

Evergreen ID and Tea

Saturday, November 15, 9:30 a.m.–12:30

p.m. Learn how to identify a number of evergreen trees and shrubs as well as some deciduous plants that are easy to identify without their leaves.

The class will end by sampling herbal teas made from two of our tree identification subjects! \$15 Mass Audubon members, \$19 nonmembers. To register, contact Habitat: 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road.*

Walking Talk

Tuesday, November 18, 7:30 p.m.

A second informal walking forum will continue discussions from the October 23 Forum (See "Walking Forum Highlights Safety, Snow.", p. 8.) For more information, contact Anne Paulsen at annempaulsen@gmail.com
Belmont Library Assembly Room.

CWRA Annual Meeting.

Wednesday, November 19, 5:30 p.m.

Join the Charles River Watershed Association (CWRA) and learn more about its accomplishments at the local and regional levels in science, policy, and urban restoration. Keynote speaker Dr. Sarah Slaughter of MIT will discuss "Designing Sustainable and Resilient Communities." Tickets are \$40 and up for cocktails and buffet dinner. Information: 781-788-0007, www.crwa.org/annmeeting.html. *Newton Marriott Hotel, 2345 Commonwealth Ave., Newton.*

Why this Crazy Weather?

Monday, November 24, 7-8:30 p.m. Brian Rogan from the Museum of Science will talk with the Friends of the Fresh Pond Reservation about climate change and storms: how ocean currents and the movement of air affect weather, and what changes may result from warming temperatures. Information: 617-349-6480, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com, www.friendsoffreshpond.org. *Maynard Ecology Center, Basement of Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge.*

Winter Solstice Celebration.

Sunday, December 14, 1-3 p.m. Soon, the sun will reach its southernmost point in the northern hemisphere. Traditional solstice activities and stories, warm cider, and a few surprises will be part of the day. \$8 Mass Audubon member adults and children, \$10 nonmembers. To register, contact Habitat: 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper 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
- Community Path
- Walking in Belmont
- 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

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.

November/December 2008

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