



Getting to Alewife Station Isn't Easy

Reports Detail Obstacles for Buses, Bikes, Pedestrians, Cars

By Meg Muckenhoupt

Over the next decade, new multi-use paths will make it easier for bicyclists to get to Alewife Station—but the area still needs better road management and more car-free bridges to help pedestrians and bus riders get there. Those are the conclusions of two reports, released in May by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization's Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS), detailing Alewife's strengths and shortcomings for car-free travel. The MAPC report concerned bicycle and pedestrian access to the station; the CTPS report described bus access to the station.

Alewife Parking Is Packed

There are good reasons to study bus, pedestrian, and bike travel to Alewife. Auto traffic into and out of the station is notoriously slow during peak traffic hours thanks to congestion along Route 2 and Route 16.

According to the MBTA's website (www.mbta.com), the Alewife garage has "average weekday availability" of less than 1 percent—that is, the garage has no open spaces at all. The station's 2,733 parking spaces commonly fill up by 9:30 a.m., leaving late-morning commuters with no place to park. According to the CTPS study, 32 percent of the cars parked at Alewife come from Arlington, Lexington, or Belmont—three communities that should have easy car-free access to Alewife.

Although the garage was designed to accommodate two more stories of parking, which would add 1,300 spaces, those levels won't be built any time soon. The MBTA hasn't inspected the structure to make sure it can still safely support another two levels, and building

that parking would cost \$30 to \$35 million, according to an MBTA spokesman quoted in the *Boston Globe* last year. Given that the MBTA is already carrying a debt load of \$5 billion, don't expect it to start new projects any time soon.

Meanwhile, developers are planning new large-scale apartment and office complexes for neighborhoods near Alewife—ensuring that even more people will be trying to get in and out of the Alewife area at rush hour. The controversial 299-unit 40B project at the Belmont Uplands is still in litigation, but other development is proposed nearby in Cambridge: a 240-unit apartment complex at the Faces nightclub site on Route 2; a 260-unit residential complex on Fawcett Street, off Concord Avenue near the Fresh Pond rotary; and a 337,800-square-foot office complex on Cambridge Park Drive.

The recession may delay these projects, but in the end, something is likely to be built. Traffic at Alewife will get even worse—unless car-free commuters can get to Alewife easily.

Buses Blocked from Station

The CTPS's Alewife studies detail bus travelers' woes. Traffic jams often keep buses on Routes 2 and 16 from entering and exiting Alewife Station. Buses headed east on Route 2 can't reach the off-ramp to the Alewife Station Service Road and even get stuck west of Lake Street. Buses trying to leave the station for Route 2 West or Route 16 North are delayed in the single-lane jughandle that crosses under Route 16. (See illustration on page 3.) According to the CTPS study, the average evening rush-hour delay on this stretch of road is over seven minutes. Making matters even more complicated, the junction of

Routes 2 and 16 is actually four intersections, each with its own set of traffic lights.

After analyzing eight scenarios for rotaries, extra lanes, and flyovers, the CTPS bus access report recommended three changes to the junction of Routes 2 and 16: restriping lanes in two locations and adding a third lane along Route 2. Route 2 East could be marked with two left-turn lanes to Route 16 North much further back from the intersection to keep cars turning left from blocking through traffic. The Alewife Station Access Road jughandle could also be striped as two lanes far back toward the station, so that travelers turning onto Route 16 North don't get stuck behind all the cars heading for Route 2 West. Those new lanes would let vehicles

that are going to the less crowded routes get through the intersections more quickly, reducing the backups that keep buses from reaching Alewife and leaving the station.

However, CTPS admits that restriping lanes won't tame Alewife's traffic tangles. According to the report, what would really speed things up is adding a third lane along Route 2 westbound from the Alewife Station Access Road jughandle to just past where Route 2 passes over the Minuteman Bikeway. Unfortunately, there isn't any extra land there to accommodate a third lane. Instead, the CTPS suggests taking over "an existing and potentially abandoned sidewalk" alongside Route 2 West between the Route 16 intersection and the Bikeway overpass.

That particular stretch of sidewalk may not appear useful to highway planners, but it links the Route 2 pedestrian overpass by the Lanes and Games/Faces site to the Alewife Brook Reservation as well as to Cambridge—or at least it would if it were possible to safely cross Route 16 at the point where the sidewalk ends. Lacking a traffic signal, walkers are stranded next to Route 16 South across from Whittemore Avenue, Cambridge, and can't reach the sidewalk on the east side, next to Route 16 North. That unloved Route 2 westbound sidewalk is almost completely blocked by Japanese knotweed stalks. Still, there is an obvious path trodden alongside Route 16 south from the end of the sidewalk to Massachusetts Ave. Someone is walking there.

More Bike Paths to Come to Alewife

Over the next few years, Alewife Station seems likely to become a regional bicycle hub, with off-road paths radiating out to Medford, Bedford, Belmont, and Watertown. The Minuteman Bikeway from Alewife to Bedford is already one of the most popular bicycle paths in the country, with an estimated two million users a year. This fall, the Massachusetts Highway Department plans to upgrade the Linear Path, which runs from Cedar Street, Somerville, through Davis Square to Alewife and pave the existing packed-dirt path from Alewife to Brighton Street, Belmont. The Belmont Citizens Forum is working to extend that path to Belmont Center.

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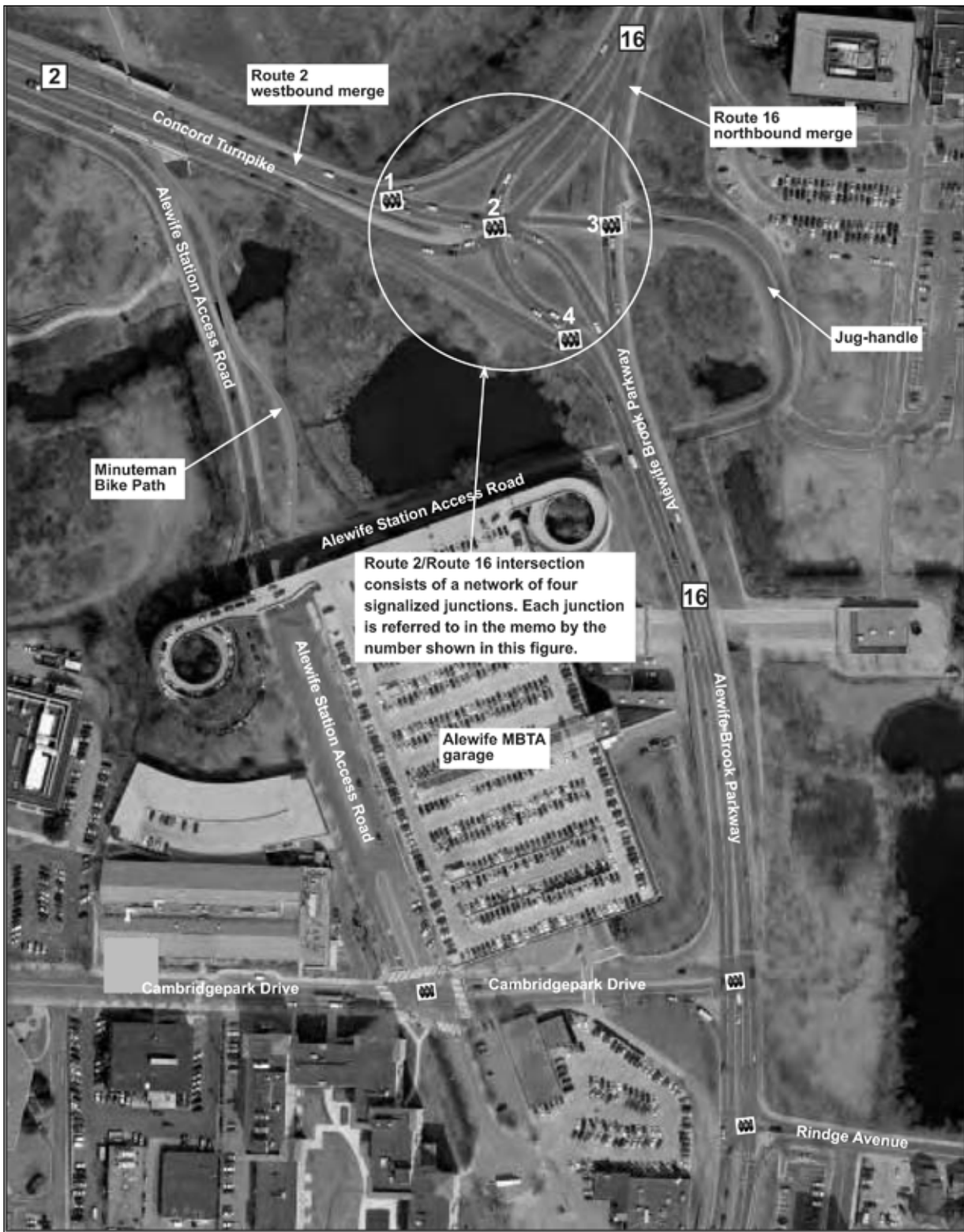
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Newsletter

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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



CTPS

FIGURE 1
Roadway Network

**Route 2/Alewife
Brook Parkway
Traffic Study**

CENTRAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING STAFF

The road system surrounding Alewife Station.

To the north, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has planned two trails to link Alewife to the Mystic River. A 10-foot-wide “stabilized surface” will run west of Alewife Brook from the Minuteman Bikeway to Broadway in Arlington, then cross over the brook to Somerville and continue north to the Mystic River. After the main path crosses to Somerville, an eight-foot-wide asphalt trail on the Arlington side of Alewife Brook will continue north to Arizona Terrace, Arlington. Design work for that project is complete; it should be put out to bid this summer. Once this Alewife Greenway is built, there may be less reason to retain the knotweed-covered sidewalk alongside Route 2 west, freeing up that space for the third lane recommended by the CTPS report.

To the south, Alewife bicyclists will one day be able to reach the Charles River via the Watertown Branch Trail, a path planned to run along a near-abandoned rail line that stretches from Danehy Park in Cambridge through Fresh Pond Reservation to School Street in Watertown. DCR plans to put the segment from School Street to Arlington Street out to bid in July. The segment from Grove Street to Cottage Street has been assigned to architects but has not yet been designed, while the segment from Cottage

Street to Fresh Pond still has a single weekly rail delivery and is not being actively developed.

Still more sites have the potential for bike paths, although they are not currently being developed. According to the MAPC report, the Minuteman South extension could run from Danehy Park in Cambridge across a proposed MBTA track crossing to the north side of the tracks, then to Sherman Street and on to Porter Square. The MAPC has proposed a trail from Fresh Pond to Spy Pond via a complicated route that involves two yet-to-be-built bridges across the MBTA tracks and the Little River, ending at a poorly specified sidewalk to Lake Street. (See map on page 5.)

More bike parking is likely to be needed before long. In September 2008, the MBTA opened two new 100-spot bike cages at the station, more than doubling the bike parking at Alewife, to 374 spaces. These spaces are already filling during fair-weather commuting hours—but it’s far easier to install more bike parking than to put another story on the garage. The CTPS is currently preparing a bicycle demand study for the MBTA to see just how many bike racks Alewife needs.

Roads, Tracks Keep Walkers Out

Many new bike paths are planned to connect communities with Alewife, but it can be hard for

people living and working just two streets away to get there. Concord Avenue pedestrians must cross several parking lots and traverse a windy, unsheltered bridge to get to the station, a harrowing journey on icy January mornings.

In light of the increasing development in the Quadrangle area off Concord Avenue in Cambridge, the city of Cambridge will be studying the feasibility of a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the railroad tracks. Another bridge has been proposed to cross an active rail line and link the Fresh Pond shopping center with Danehy Park and the planned



The CTPS has proposed replacing this overgrown sidewalk alongside Route 2 West with another westbound travel lane. Alewife Station is visible on the left.

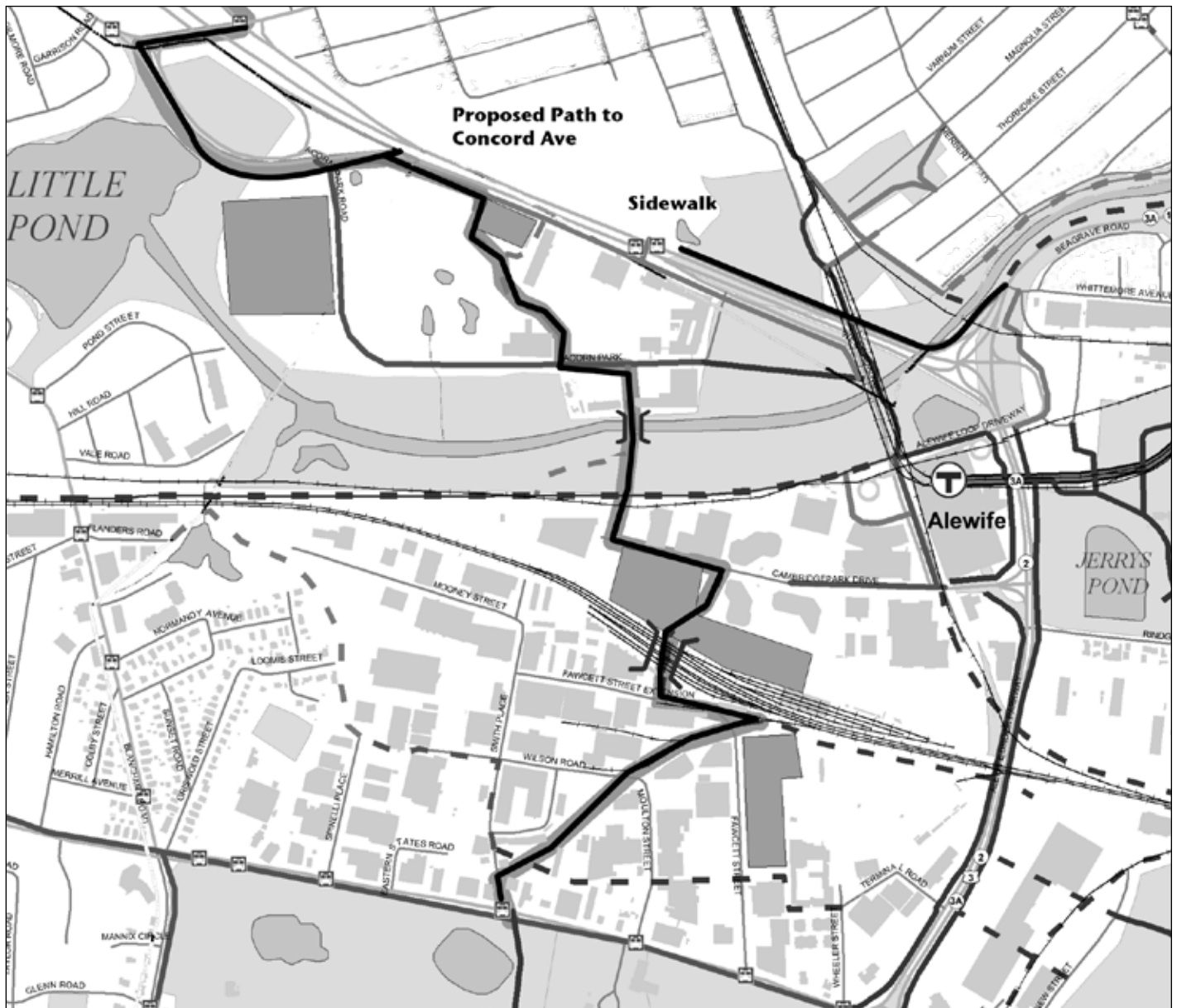
Watertown Branch bicycle path.

The MAPC report also faults poor walking conditions. In winter, the Minuteman Bikeway isn't plowed between the Route 2 underpass and Alewife station, and the path there is poorly lit. The glare from headlights blinds westbound walkers and cyclists along the dim path. The bollards on the pedestrian bridge just south of Route 2 on the Minuteman path prevent sidewalk plows from clearing snow. The path to Acorn Park Drive is muddy and unlit. The report also deplores the condition of the

sidewalk between Acorn Park Drive and Lake Street (along the Lake Street entrance to Route 2 East). That stretch of sidewalk, which passes the Belmont Uplands site, is narrow and "in poor condition," according to the MAPC. All these conditions can be corrected at relatively low cost—if there's a will to do it.

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

MAPC/ MEG MUCKENHOUP



A map of proposed Alewife area bike paths and sidewalks. The proposed path to Concord Avenue is shown by a thick black line; the sidewalk that may be made into a third traffic lane is also a black line. Other proposed paths are dotted lines: gray dotted lines are walking paths; black dotted lines are bike paths.

Western Greenway Trail Grows Longer

By John Dieckmann

Over 3,800 feet of new trail will be blazed and 560 feet of new boardwalks will be built this summer in the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Beaver Brook North Reservation, extending the Western Greenway trail by roughly a mile.

The new segment of the trail will run from Walnut Street to the Metropolitan Parkway at Avalon at Lexington Hills, close to the Lexington-Waltham town line. With this project completed, the blazed portion of the Western Greenway Trail will extend from the Habitat Sanctuary on Belmont Hill through the McLean land, Rock Meadow, and Beaver Brook North to Walnut Street, connecting green spaces in Lexington, Belmont, and Waltham.

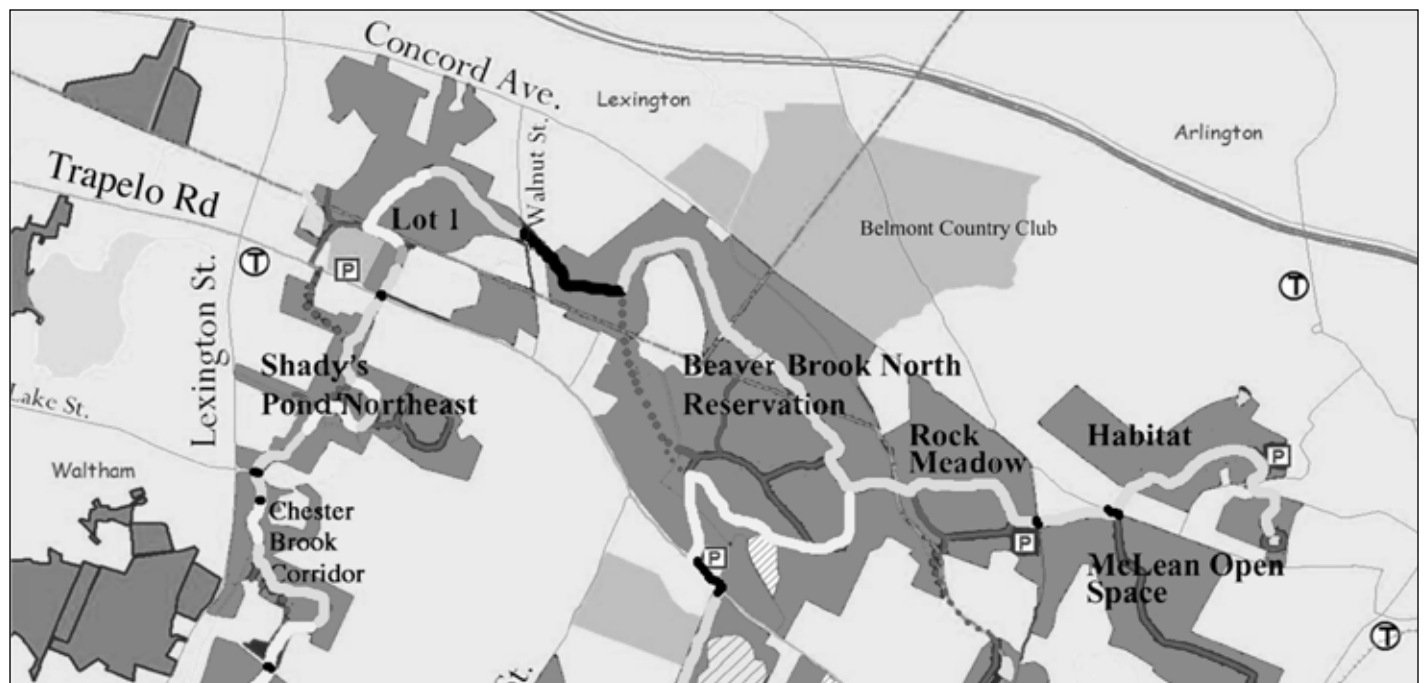
The trail project has been organized by the Friends of Beaver Brook Reservation, the Friends of the Western Greenway, the New England Mountain Bike Association, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. A DCR Rivers and Trails grant will provide for the cost of

materials for the boardwalk, trail blazes, and signage, with all work to be done by volunteers.

Volunteers are needed to build the trail. The work will be done on a series of Saturdays—July 18, August 1, August 8, August 22, and September 26—from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tools, instruction, and lunch will be provided. Bring your bottle for bottomless refills of ice water. Volunteers can come for part of the day or a full day of trail building.

Future work will extend the Western Greenway Trail across Walnut Street into Lot 1 and connect that site to the rest of the Western Greenway loop in Waltham and to the West Lexington Greenway. With the connection to the West Lexington Greenway and trails in Lincoln conservation land, it will soon be possible to walk from Belmont to Walden Pond on a route that is more than 90 percent off-road and mostly in the woods.

John Dieckmann is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



A partial map of the Western Greenway. The new trail is shown by a thick black line (middle). Light-colored lines indicate existing trails; darker lines show unimproved trails.

McLean Developer Abandons Project

By David Chase

A developer has given up on building on McLean Hospital land. Unable to raise the capital to build the development, Brookdale Senior Living returned deposits made by the Freedom Commons's potential residents in March and ceased all work on the complex.

In 1999, American Retirement Corp., which has since been bought by Brookdale, planned to build 486 units of independent living apartments, assisted living residences, and nursing home beds.

Brookdale is still trying to find another developer to whom it could transfer its rights in the project. However, in the current economy, other real estate developers face similar financial challenges trying to raise money.

The Freedom Commons continuing care retirement community was supposed to be a 600,000-square-foot complex six stories high. The number of units was reduced to 400 units with the same footprint in 2006. In March, that number of units fell to zero.

Brookdale is still trying to find another developer to whom it could transfer its rights in the project. However, in the current economy, other real estate developers face similar financial challenges trying to raise money.

McLean Hospital has already committed substantial financial resources to the project, including building Olmsted Drive—the road off Pleasant Street that McLean constructed on an easement through protected open space. Named Olmsted Drive in honor of the brilliant designer of Boston's Emerald Necklace parks, the street is currently a road to nowhere.

According to Michele Gougeon, McLean's chief operating officer, McLean is talking with a number of potential developers in the hope that a similar continuing care retirement community will eventually be planned and built. However, unless a developer adopts Freedom Commons's plans in virtually every detail, any new developer will have to go before Belmont's Planning Board to get approval of a site plan.

David Chase is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



Junction Brook.

Bees Find Homes in Belmont

By Meg Muckenhoupt

Bees have many admirers. Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, praised them in 1704 for "furnishing mankind with the two noblest things, which are sweetness and light" through their honey and beeswax, which is used to make candles. When European settlers arrived in North America, they brought honey bees with them – and today those bees' descendants are pollinating crops and creating sweetness all over the country. Altogether, they pollinate more than \$18 billion worth of crops in the United States each year, according to a 1999 study by Cornell University entomologists (adjusted for inflation).

Belmont has its own share of beekeepers. The most prominent local apiculturist is Ottavio Forte, whose house on Claflin Street is graced with a giant bee sculpture and a "Belmont



Ottavio Forte shows off his backyard bee hives.

Flowers Honey" sign. Forte began keeping bees 15 years ago, when neighbors across the street had a swarm of bees in their yard. The bees reminded Forte of his childhood in Italy, and he began learning about beekeeping. Today, Forte's two hives house about 120,000 bees apiece.

Bees are "delicate animals," according to Forte, and beginners need to learn how to keep their hives healthy. Forte recommends contacting the Middlesex County Beekeepers Association, www.middlesexbeekeepers.org, which holds many classes for new beekeepers. Once you know what you're doing, though, bees are very rewarding for little work, Forte said. "You can go out of town and leave them alone," Forte said, "And they make honey. What do dogs do?"

Leon and Sophia Navickas added bees to their Juniper Road back yard just last April after taking a class in beekeeping at Codman Farm in Lincoln, www.codmanfarm.org. The Navickas hives are an extension of the family's love of gardening and the outdoors, and their desire to help sustain a healthy environment in Belmont.



MEG MUCKENHOUP

MEG MUCKENHOUP

Still, for the Navickas family, the real enjoyment comes from simply having the bees close by. "They're really fun to watch," said Sophia Navickas.

With bee colonies threatened throughout the U.S. by the still-mysterious Colony Collapse Disorder, it's more important for everyone to help bees stay healthy. Use pesticides carefully so that they won't kill bees, and plant flowers, shrubs and trees that they can visit. For more information, including a planting guide, see www.pollinator.org.

Meg Muckenhaupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*



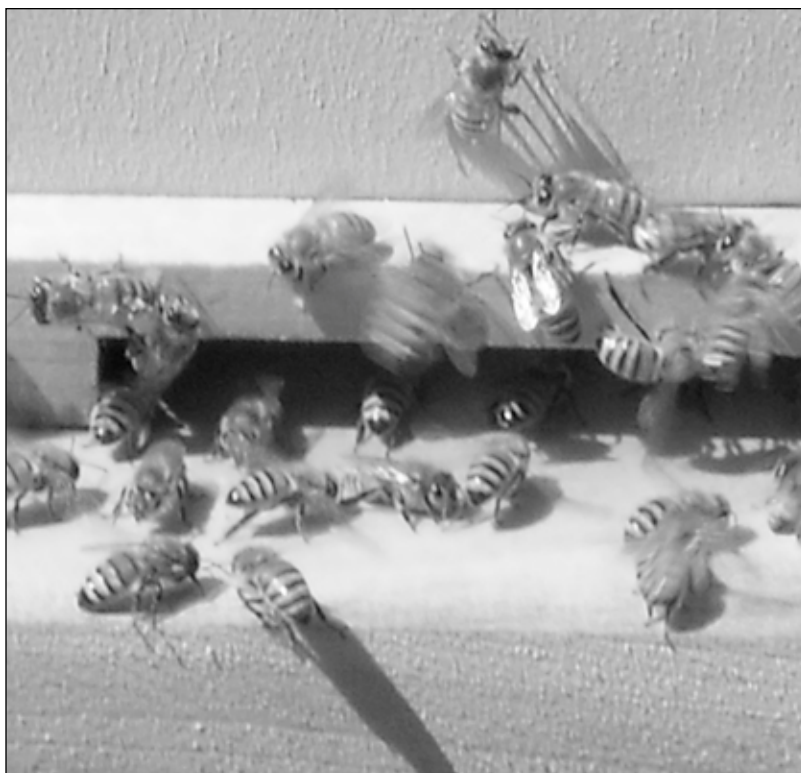
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Leon Navickas examines a drone frame, a board designed to encourage bees to lay drone eggs. The frame helps reduce Varroa mite infestations.



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Forte created this kinetic sculpture which looks down over his hives.



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A busy day at the Navickas hives.

Waverley Trail Runs through History

By Sue Bass

A green line is painted on several sidewalks running through Waverley Square. Like the red line on the sidewalk that marks Boston's Freedom Trail, the new Waverley Trail's green line leads walkers through history—the history of the Waverley Oaks, which spurred the international land conservation movement and the creation of the first metropolitan park system. The trail runs from the former fire station, now

the Engine 1 condos, at Waverley Street and Trapelo Road in Belmont to the Beaver Brook Reservation parking lot off Waverley Oaks Road in Waltham.

The history illustrated by a walk along the Waverley Trail is significant. The Waverley Oaks—a grove of about two dozen ancient trees at the intersection of what is now Trapelo and Waverley Oaks roads—drew people from all over

the region, by train beginning in the 1840s and by trolley car beginning in the 1890s. According to Wes Ward of the Trustees of Reservations, the world's first land trust, in the 1890s Boston's Metropolitan Park Commission outbid the Trustees to buy the land surrounding the Waverley Oaks, now the southern segment of the state's Beaver Brook Reservation.

At a ceremony June 18 to mark the installation of the trail's final six informative panels, former state Rep. Anne Paulsen said that when her father was a child, his family used to take the Park Street subway from South Boston to Harvard Square and then the trolley to Waverley Square to picnic under the oaks. Only one of the original trees remains, but new generations of oaks have sprung up around them.

The June 18 installation brings the total to 22 panels at 12 locations along the trail, including a panel donated by the Belmont Citizens Forum; the first were installed in 2007. Among the fascinating details the panels impart is that Trapelo Road was once a path for Indians traveling between summer and winter homes;



The last of the Waverley Oaks.

MEG MUCKENHOUP

that Emilie Edgar, whose parents ran a huge commercial greenhouse in Waverley Square, grew up to marry the druggist across the street, Alexander Corbett; and that the Waverley Oaks were a destination for the Boston Wheelmen and other bicyclists as early as the 1890s. The texts of most panels are available at www.waverleytrail.org/TourTrail.

The trail is almost finished, according to the person who had the idea and led the campaign, Jim Levitt of Belmont, director of the program on Conservation Innovation at the Harvard Forest and a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government. The last step will be to replace the green line, whose paint is already fading, perhaps with metal medallions of an oak leaf. When Trapelo Road is reconstructed—

work that might start as early as next year with federal stimulus funds—those medallions will be embedded in the new sidewalk. To donate, make a check to the Belmont Land Trust, the project's fiscal agent, and mark that it's for the Waverley Trail. The Land Trust's address is PO Box 79138, Belmont, MA 02479-0138, www.belmontland-trust.org.

Sue Bass is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



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A Waverley Trail signpost.

Charles River Watershed

A watershed is an area of land that drains rain and snow into groundwater rivers, streams, marshes, and eventually, the ocean. All of the land in Massachusetts is part of some particular watershed; Beaver Brook and the Waverley Oaks are a part of the Charles River Watershed. Watersheds are important for many reasons; they are a key link in the water cycle; they provide a habitat for innumerable plants and animals that live on land, in the air and water; and they provide many people with drinking water – in Belmont and Waltham, we get our drinking water from a series of reservoirs fed by the Swift River and its watershed.

Unfortunately, today many watersheds carry more than clean water; they also serve as wet highways for a wide variety of pollutants, including oil, pesticides, and excess fertilizers. Those pollutants can cause serious damage to land and water resources used by people and wildlife. Citizen scientists, such as those that work with the Charles River Watershed Association and the Mystic River Watershed Association, work tirelessly to monitor and improve water quality in cities and towns throughout the region.

—Text from the Waverley Trail panel donated by the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Homeowner Begins Belmont Solar Installation

By Dan Lech

I could tell that my porch was getting plenty of sunlight. Its paint cracked and peeled almost annually, requiring a fresh coat. As alternative energy made its way into the headlines, I wondered if my south-facing 1890s farmer's porch might be a suitable home for solar panels. I was interested in solar energy because I wanted to be "part of the solution" in regards to lowering carbon emissions and our nation's fossil fuel dependence. Saving some money on my utility bills wouldn't hurt either. To find out more, I attended Sustainable Belmont's solar energy seminar in March.

The seminar's speaker was Allison McFeely, a representative from groSolar, the fourth largest installer of solar power in the United States. According to McFeely, there are two basic options for home solar installations: solar electric installations, which converts sunlight into electricity; and solar thermal installations, which use the sun's heat to generate hot water.

The two processes use completely different methods to harness the sun's energy. Solar electricity is made by photovoltaic panels.

These panels use silicon cells to convert the sun's light into DC power, which is converted to AC power using an inverter. In optimal circumstances this system can provide a significant portion of a home's electricity needs.

However, this was not the solution for me. Allison pointed out that I would need at least 10 three-foot by five-foot photovoltaic panels to make the system efficient, well over what my porch roof would hold. That system was also out of my price range. A 10-panel system starts at around \$20,000, before tax incentives and rebates—but even after those discounts it was more than I could afford.

Solar thermal installations are very simple. Solar hot water panels are actually flat, shallow, aluminum boxes with a glass top. They house pipes carrying a mixture of water and propylene glycol (a non-toxic antifreeze that allows the system to operate in the winter). The boxes are painted black to absorb heat while the glass top makes the panel act like a car in a sunny parking lot, magnifying and trapping the heat of the sun.

That heat is transferred to the liquid in the pipes. A pump then circulates the heated liquid—which can reach 200 degrees Fahrenheit or more on sun-filled days—down into the basement and into a glass-lined storage tank, where the antifreeze mixture flows through coils. The heat is transferred from the antifreeze mixture to the potable water in the tank; the antifreeze mixture is never in contact with the potable water.

That pre-heated water is then transferred to the conventional water heater tank. Temperature sensors in the roof panels and the tank help regulate the system's operation; if the water in the tank gets too hot, there is a small "steam-back" tank that converts some of the water



MARYLAND ENERGY ADMINISTRATION

Rooftop solar hot water panels in Maryland.

to steam to relieve pressure and lower the temperature to the needed range. [According to the U.S. Department of Energy, solar hot water systems lower water heating bills by 50 to 80 percent, depending on the system —*Editor*]

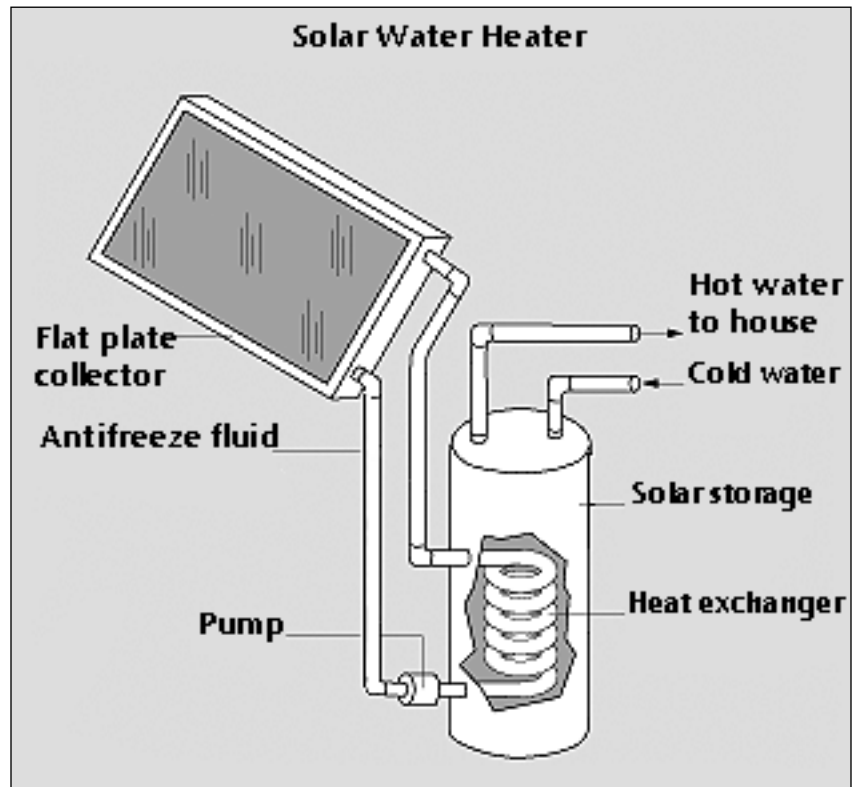
A system that would cover my home's hot water needs started in the \$10,000 range. That was still a little out of the comfort zone for a family whose income is provided by a public school teacher and a retailer. That's where the incentives, tax rebates, and interest-free loans come into play. Some of these money-saving measures were obvious, while others took a bit more digging.

The federal and state tax rebates were outlined at the groSolar presentation. Massachusetts offers a \$1,000 state tax credit on the purchase of any solar system—electric or hot water. In addition, the federal government offers a 30 percent tax credit, an increase from last year's 20 percent credit, thanks to this year's stimulus package.

Massachusetts offers a \$1,000 state tax credit on the purchase of any solar system—electric or hot water.

That credit puts a solar thermal system in the far more manageable \$6,000 to \$7,000 range. We were seriously considering installing a thermal system at that price by taking out a home improvement loan when we learned of additional opportunities.

A friend of a friend who had a solar thermal system installed in Arlington told us about



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

A schematic drawing of a solar hot water system.

the MassSave loan program, which provides seven-year interest-free loans for purchasing solar systems. [As of press time, it was not clear whether this loan was available to homeowners who are not National Grid electricity customers —*Editor*.] This program, run by the state in conjunction with local utility companies, requires that applicants receive a MassSave home energy audit. The free audit is conducted by a licensed professional who examines a home's energy efficiency and makes recommendations on improving it.

The third solar contractor who visited our home to give an estimate told us about a \$1,500 rebate for solar projects from National Grid, the company that supplies natural gas for our water heater.

If this all panned out we'd be talking about a \$4,500 solar thermal system which could be financed, interest free, over the course of seven years. This was starting to look like a slam-dunk, no-brainer decision.

Now we had to find out if our house was a legitimate candidate for a system. An internet search for solar contractors turned out to be more convoluted and less directly helpful

than I'd hoped. There wasn't a solar contractor directory or a Consumer Reports-type solar comparison site. Of the companies listed, some were large "solar-only" companies like groSolar. Others were local or regional contractors who had added solar installation to their repertoire of kitchen remodeling and roof repair. Some sites included a short form to fill out to indicate what type of solar system you were looking for and where you were located. I filled out four or five of these. Some of the companies responded, others did not.

To further investigate, we attended the Down:2:Earth Sustainable Living Expo at the Hynes Convention Center. Along with stainless steel water bottle vendors, replacement window companies, and an organic wine tasting there was a section devoted to alternative energy companies.

The first kiosk we visited was for a company called Nexamp Solar, one of the companies I had found on the Web. The representative asked a few basic questions including our address. She pulled up a satellite image of our house on her laptop and quickly informed us that, no, our home wasn't a good candidate for solar. She didn't really elaborate on how she came to such a conclusion by looking at one satellite picture, but she seemed pretty sure about it. Maybe this wasn't going to work out for us after all.

The next vendor we visited was Repower Home. This was a company that up until the beginning of the green revolution had focused on installing the "Gutter Helmet," which keeps leaves from clogging your gutters. They used four foot by seven foot solar thermal panels produced by the German company Shuco. The

representative wasn't sure if his panels would fit on my porch roof but he was willing to come out and take a look. Our solar exploration was back on track.

We scheduled an appointment with Matt from Repower, and he was the first solar rep to come to our house and make an evaluation. Matt spent some time taking measurements and assessing

our exposure and determined that, yes, we were indeed a good candidate for solar thermal. However, the job would take some creativity.

Given that the porch roof was only six feet from top to bottom, the seven-foot panels would have to lie head-to-head lengthwise, and the plumbing would have to be re-positioned to come out from the sides of the panels instead of the tops. Matt thought we would

also have to cut a hole in the porch roof and run a soffit down the wall of our porch to encase the pipes heading towards the basement. He was extremely knowledgeable on the workings of the system and we learned a lot from his presentation.

The idea of having to jury-rig a system didn't appeal to us, however, and raised doubts about the viability of the project. In fairness, Matt explained that his engineers would have to make the final assessment on these solutions and he wasn't giving the final word by any means. He quoted a price of \$10,000 and explained that the tax rebates would bring that down to \$6,000.

The next appointment was with Allison McFeely from groSolar, the same person who had given the presentation for Sustainable Belmont. She used a device called a Solar Pathfinder, which measures the amount of sunlight an area receives during the course of a day. The device



The Solar Pathfinder

is a half-sphere of tinted glass over a plate which contains markings and measurements. The glass creates a reflection of trees and other obstructions, which are measured on the plate. A picture is taken of the Pathfinder and the information fed into an on-site computer that then calculates the site's sun exposure over the course of an entire year.

McFeely informed us that our site had an "excellent solar orientation with the porch facing 180 degrees magnetic south with a roof pitch of 30 degrees" and limited obstructions. Because her company uses four-foot by six-foot panels (produced by Heliodyne in California) they could fit comfortably side by side on our roof without adjustment. The piping could be run unobtrusively down the side of the house without cutting into the porch roof. She thought the roof itself would have to be inspected to be sure it had sufficient support to satisfy building code but that reinforcing it wouldn't be a major issue. The total estimate for the job, before incentives, was \$11,336.

The final visit was from Stephen, the general manager of Go Green Industries. Stephen had installed the solar thermal system in Arlington my friend told me about. Go Green is a Westford, MA, solar installer that focuses on solar thermal projects.

Like Allison, Stephen agreed that our porch was a "perfect situation" for solar thermal. His company used panels produced by Viessmann in Germany. These were three-and-a-half-foot by eight-foot panels but Stephen didn't see any problem laying them length-wise across the roof. The panels might stick out a few inches over the edge, but he thought that overhang would make the plumbing easier.

Stephen was a hands-on contractor; he knew the product and process from start to finish without having to consult with other engineers. It was during his visit that we learned about the National Grid \$1,500 rebate. He also said he could help us with the application for the MassSave interest-free loan and that he had helped process many in the past. His quote was the lowest of the three at \$8,945 pre-incentive.

Each of the three contractors who visited our home was extremely knowledgeable and courteous and we feel that any of them could

Renewable Energy on the Web

www.energysavers.gov/your_home
U.S. government site with ideas for saving energy and information on renewable electricity and water heating

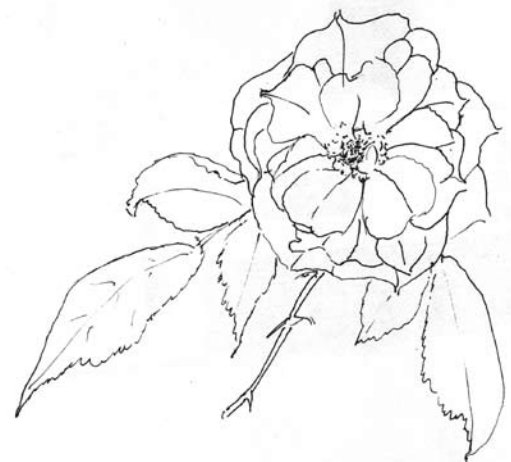
www.mass.gov search:renewable energy
The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs provides information on home renewable energy installations and tax credits

www.masssave.com
A public/private partnership dedicated to helping Massachusetts residents save energy. Information on zero-interest loans for renewable energy installations is available at www.masssave.com/about/heat_loan.php

have done an excellent job installing our solar thermal system. In the end, we chose Go Green as our solar contractor.

Our installation is scheduled for late July. I will report on our system's installation and performance in an upcoming issue of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*.

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





Wanted: Interns and Copy Editors

The Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) is seeking volunteer interns and copy editors.

Interns may work on a variety of tasks including writing the events calendar and other articles for the newsletter, maintaining an e-mail list, researching grant opportunities, and organizing forums on topics of interest to Belmont residents. The BCF will adapt the position to the intern's interests and skills. Interns should plan on working five hours a week for the Forum for three months or more.

The BCF is seeking copy editors to help produce future issues of this bimonthly newsletter. Prior professional copy editing experience, although helpful, is not required; patience, a sharp eye, and a love of language are all that is necessary.

For more information or to apply for either position, contact info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

Environmental Events

Invasive Plants Identification Workshop **Tuesday, July 14 and Tuesday, August 18, 6–7:30 p.m.**

Learn to identify and combat the most common non-native invasive plants that are having a negative impact on our yards, gardens, and natural areas. Botanists from the New England Wild Flower Society will lead this walk using Fresh Pond's weeds as examples. Registration required. Information: 617-349-6489, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com. Cambridge Water Department, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.

Public Meeting on Upland Meadow Restoration

Tuesday, July 14, 7:30 p.m.

A proposal to restore upland meadow areas in Arlington's Great Meadows will be presented. The main speaker will be Jeffrey Collins of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Ecological Extension Service, an expert in the ecological management of natural lands. Information: www.foagm.org. Follen Community Church, 55 Massachusetts Avenue, East Lexington.



Invasive Garlic Mustard

Beaver Brook North Trail Building **Saturdays, July 18, August 1, August 8, August 22, and September 26, 8:30 a.m.**

Join members of the Lexington Conservation Stewards and Friends of the Lexington Bikeway in this year's efforts to improve trail access to conservation land. No experience necessary. Tools and training will be provided. Lunch provided for those who can spend the day, but come for part of a day if that is what your schedule permits. Information: 781-862-0500 x240, landstewards@ci.lexington.ma.us. Meet at Metropolitan Parkway South at 480 Trapelo Rd. across from Forest Street, Lexington, and follow signs to trail work parking near the abandoned Metropolitan State Hospital administration building.

Charles River Chestnut-Pulling Sessions **Sunday, July 19, 10 a.m.–2p.m.**

Water chestnut, an invasive aquatic plant in the Charles River, grows very densely and can choke shallow sections of the river. In order to prevent water chestnut from spreading, the plants need to be removed before they drop their spiky seeds into the river in early August. There will be a short training session before volunteers are sent out onto the river in canoes to pull the chestnuts. Any volunteer who completes the training session can come back to Charles River Canoe & Kayak to pull chestnuts again at any time through August 9, free of charge. Information: Charles River Watershed Association, 781-788-0007 x243, www.crwa.org. Register for location.

Trees of Fresh Pond

Sundays July 19-August 9, 1-3 p.m.

Learn and practice tree identification skills this summer. Join the Friends of the Fresh Pond Reservation for one, or several consecutive Sunday afternoons in July and August to learn to identify many of the more than 50 tree species growing on the Reservation. Participants will observe leaves, bark and buds, create leaf rubbings, and use Tree Finder keys for identification and to map locations. Each program will include a few trees from the previous program to reinforce skills. Registration required. Information: 617-349-6489, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com. Various locations: see www.ffpr.org for details.

Fresh Pond Reservation Walkabout **Monday, July 20 and Monday, August 3, 6–8 p.m.**

Chip Norton, Cambridge Watershed Manager, will give a tour of Fresh Pond Reservation's conservation and recreation areas, using maps and diagrams to help illustrate the goals for this major restoration project. Registration required. Information: 617-349-6489, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com. Cambridge Water Department, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.

Evening Walk in the Upper Cambridge Watershed

Monday, July 27, 6–8 p.m.

Chip Norton, Cambridge Watershed Manager, will lead a hike on city of Cambridge property in Lincoln and Lexington, just north of Hobbs Brook Reservoir. Participants will review the natural and cultural history data that have been collected as part of the Hobbs Brook Watershed. A carpool from the Water Department parking lot will leave promptly at 6:10. Registration required.

Information: 617-349-6489, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com. Cambridge Water Department, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.

Summer Evening Mushroom Walk

Tuesday, July 28, 6-7:45 p.m.

It's that time of the year when mushrooms of all colors, shapes, and odors start popping up. Join Habitat staff for a casual walk on the sanctuary and keep your eyes open for a variety of fungi from puffballs to stinkhorns and a few surprises along the way. \$12 Massachusetts Audubon members, \$15 nonmembers. Registration required. Information: 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.

3rd Annual Tour de Farms Bike Tour

Saturday, August 1.

Go on a bike tour of urban farms (15 mile loop, 4 farms) or suburban farms (40 mile loop, 4 farms). Urban loop begins at 9 a.m., suburban loop starts at 8 a.m. Participants will sample fresh, locally grown food, discover the benefits of local agriculture, and learn how they can actively support local farms. Sponsored by seven groups including the Boston Natural Areas Network and Farm Aid. Information: 617-354-2922, jen@farmaid.org, urbanadventours.com. Start at Franklin Park, Boston.

Sustainable Belmont Meetings

Wednesdays, August 5 and September 2,

7–9 p.m. Join Sustainable Belmont members to discuss ways to make Belmont more energy efficient over the long term. Information: sustainablebelmont@gmail.com, www.sustainablebelmont.net. Flett Room at the Belmont Public Library, 330 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

Tour of the Water Purification Facility

Monday August 10, 6-7:30 p.m.

Come learn how water that falls as rain in the western suburbs is transported to Cambridge, purified into drinking water in the Water Purification Facility, and piped to local homes and businesses. Members of the Cambridge Water Department staff will describe the process, answer questions, and give the group a tour of the



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building. Registration required. Information:
617-349-6489, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com.
Cambridge Water Department, 250 Fresh Pond
Parkway, Cambridge.

Waltham's First Open Space: the Waltham Common

Saturday, August 22, 10 a.m.

Join Waltham Land Trust Co-founder George A. Darcy III for a guided tour of the Waltham Common, focusing on the Common's history and stately trees that grace its hallowed grounds. Information: 781-893-3355, info@waltham-landtrust.org. Gazebo, Waltham Common, 650 Main Street, Waltham.



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

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.

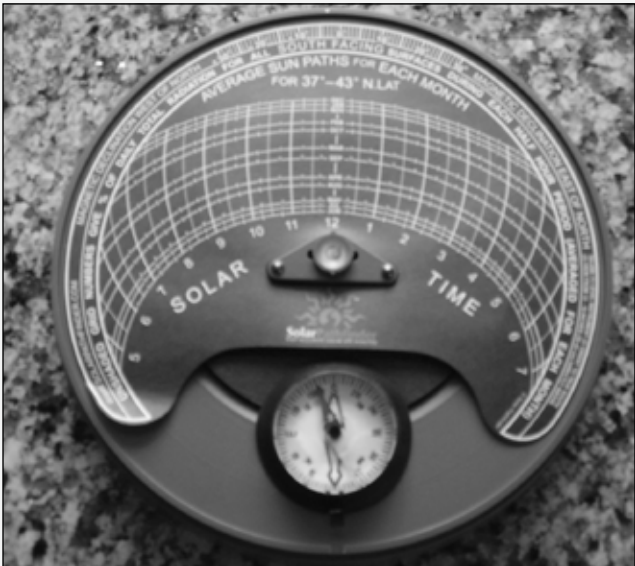
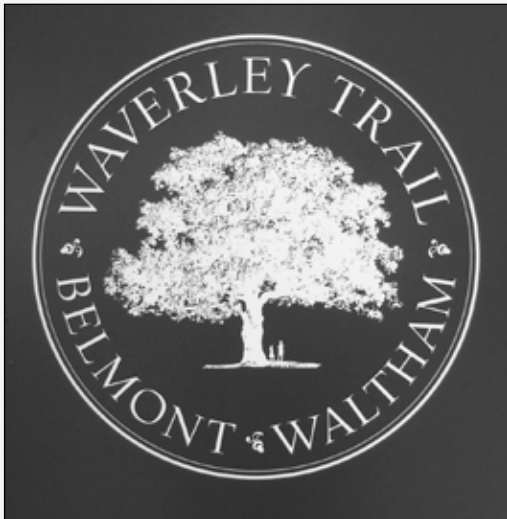
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