



# Belmont Citizens Forum

## New Trapelo Road Corridor Coming Soon

By Sumner Brown

The Trapelo Road and Belmont Street rebuild is coming soon. Glenn Clancy, director of Belmont's Community Development reports, "Mass DOT wants to bid the project by the end of June . . . I expect the project to be underway in earnest in the spring of 2013 with a completion by the end of 2014 . . . State and federal funding is secure and is already programmed for this project."

Everyone in Belmont should be aware that this project is more than repaving 2.46 miles of Trapelo Road and Belmont Street. This project aims to transform a gritty strip of Belmont into an attractive destination in less than two years.

Confusing traffic patterns that tempt antisocial driving behavior will be eliminated. Bicycling will be encouraged with bicycle lanes and parking racks. Sidewalks and curbing will be redesigned with amenities and handicap access. New traffic signals will help. Drainage will be redone. And the street will be landscaped with hundreds of trees and shrubs.

### Planning Started with BCF, MAPC grant

The Trapelo Road/Belmont Corridor project began in 2002, when both the town and the Belmont Citizens Forum became interested in changing the way Trapelo Road and Belmont Street work.

The corridor was dangerous for pedestrians. In the period 1988 to 2002, Trapelo Road had 27 percent of Belmont's pedestrian accidents on less than two percent of Belmont's roads. Today, some parents who cross Trapelo Road while walking their children to the Butler School push shopping carts ahead of them in a crosswalk so that if a car does not stop it hits the cart instead of them and their child.



TOWN OF BELMONT

Belmont Street in summer...



TOWN OF BELMONT

...and what it could look like after it's rebuilt.

The Belmont Citizens Forum also became interested in this project because we advocate protection of open space. This project demonstrates that we can promote economic development without sacrificing open space—unlike the McLean development and the sad, failed attempt to get commercial development at the

Uplands. And this project, unlike McLean and the Uplands, will promote economic development without increasing rush-hour traffic.

The Belmont Citizens Forum formed a committee to look at the entire Belmont/Trapelo corridor in the spring of 2002. The committee decided that the most effective way to call attention to the street was to show a large audience just what the problems were. Committee members photographed every building on the street, eventually creating a 17-minute presentation with more than 100 slides spotlighting Trapelo Road's problems. The BCF showed the movie at the Studio Cinema in October 2002, and got Belmont's attention.

## Belmont Citizens Forum

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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](mailto:info@belmontcitizensforum.org).

The presentation was well timed. In September 2002, the town was awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to study the street. The Belmont Citizens Forum helped the town focus its efforts by commissioning students from the Boston Architectural College to study the corridor, and MacPhail Architecture Collaborative hosted a show about the street.

After the October 2002 slide show, the Belmont Citizens Forum asked urban planning students at MIT to study Trapelo Road while the town used the MAPC money to commission the Cecil Group to report on the the corridor. Both reports appeared in 2004. The Cecil Group's report addressed economic development for Belmont generally and focused on the corridor. It recommended processes for making decisions.

The MIT report focused on what should be physically done to the corridor. It was inspiring, and it cost Belmont nothing. The students looked at the street and talked to locals. They suggested trees with pavement. Will Brownsberger, who was then a Selectman and is now our state Senator, supported this project.

## Same Service, but Safer

You might think that the way to improve pedestrian safety is to provide more crosswalks with walk lights. That does not work here. One requirement of this project was that "level of service" could not be compromised. That means cars cannot be inconvenienced more than they already are. Travel times by car must be as good or better after the work is done.

The number of intersections with traffic lights will be the same, but the traffic lights will be different. Many will be linked together to coordinate traffic movement, and they will have video sensors to detect traffic. Other sensors will give emergency vehicles priority. But for someone walking to the Butler School from Waverley Street, there will not be a more convenient crosswalk with a light.

The improvements for pedestrians involve correcting an historic remnant of the streetcars which ran on tracks in the middle of Trapelo Road until 1958. When the tracks were paved over, the road became wide enough that drivers get confused about whether they have one or

two lanes in each direction. The 76-foot-wide road is also a dangerously long distance for pedestrians to cross. The new design will have wider sidewalks in most places and mostly single lanes in each direction with left-turn lanes, bike lanes, and bump-outs at crosswalks.

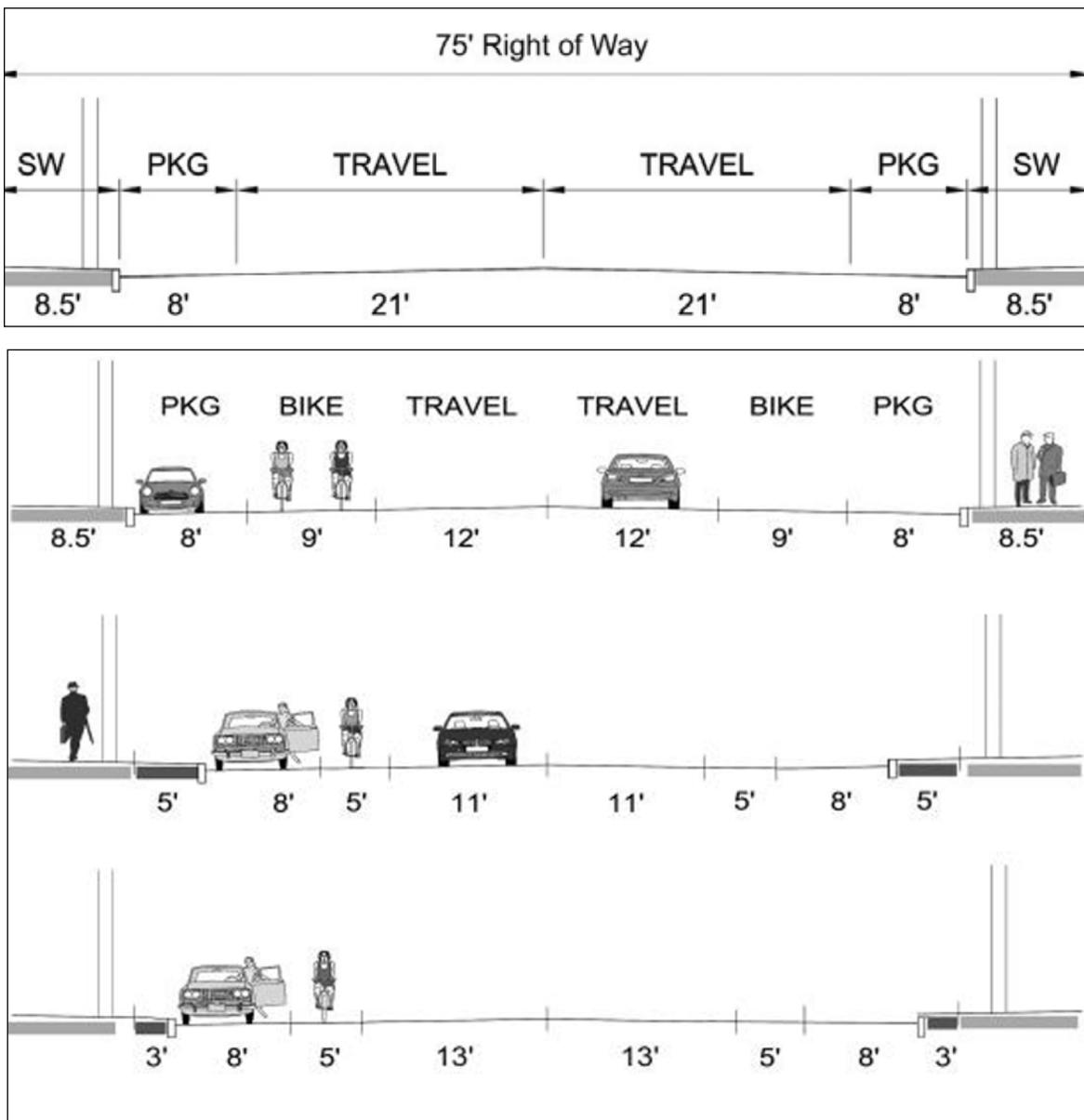
### Plans Almost Complete

In 2005 the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT) became involved. Mass DOT received the preliminary 25 percent plans from our Director of Community Development, Glenn Clancy, in 2007. Clancy sent the 75 percent plans to Mass DOT in

2011. The state requires a sequence of plans: 25 percent, 75 percent, and final. At each stage the plans become more detailed and incorporate comments from the previous stage.

The 75 percent plans, which are detailed engineering documents, will soon become the final documents for construction. Then bidding for construction work can begin. You can download the 75 percent design plans, with 190 pages of engineering drawings, from Belmont's web site.

The comments came mostly from engineers who work for the state. They sent comments to BSC Group Inc., Belmont's consultants, who



TOWN OF BELMONT

Before and after: the current cross-section of Trapelo Road (top) and three different possible layouts for two-lane segments of the road.

created the design. The comments are from experts who checked details. It is nothing like Town Meeting. For example:

**Comment:**

Tack coat shall be applied at the rate of 0.05 gallons per square yard to paved surfaces and 0.07 gallons per square yard to milled surfaces.

**Response:**

This has been added to the pavement notes.

The process by which the design plans get reduced to an estimated budget before bidding starts deserves explanation. From the design, the cubic yards of class A rock, for example, that must be excavated get estimated (820 cubic yards). The expected price per yard is \$78, based on recent experience. The total: \$63,960 for excavating class A rock. Repeat for 291 additional items. The resulting cost is \$14.1 million. Then add roughly \$360,000 for traffic police, MBTA

work, and work that Belmont Municipal Light will do. This estimate, calculated by BSC Group, Inc., was sent to the state.

The cost for this road project is estimated to be \$14,591,678, with federal funds paying for 80 percent of the work and state funds covering the remainder. If the costs of contingencies from unanticipated problems do not exceed 10 percent of the estimated cost, Belmont will pay no more except for any additional engineering required for contingencies. We have already spent about \$2.5 million for the 25 percent and 75 percent designs and new water pipes.

A federal earmark for \$329,000 (thank you, Ed Markey) is paying for transforming the 75 percent design to 100 percent design. The contingencies for the Pleasant Street project were six percent, so we have an excellent chance of staying below 10 percent and avoiding additional cost for the reconstruction.

Sumner Brown is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



TOWN OF BELMONT

Trapelo Road at Church Street (left) and what it could be after the reconstruction (right).

# MAPC Shows Potential Bike Path Routes

By Meg Muckenhaupt

The Mass Central Rail Trail is off to a fine start, except for one sticking point: Belmont. The town is missing a connection between two bike path segments.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation has constructed a bicycle path between the Alewife MBTA station and Brighton Street, Belmont. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) signed a 99-year lease with the MBTA in December 2010 to develop a trail along the rail corridor between Berlin and the Belmont/Waltham town line. The issue is how to connect these two paths.

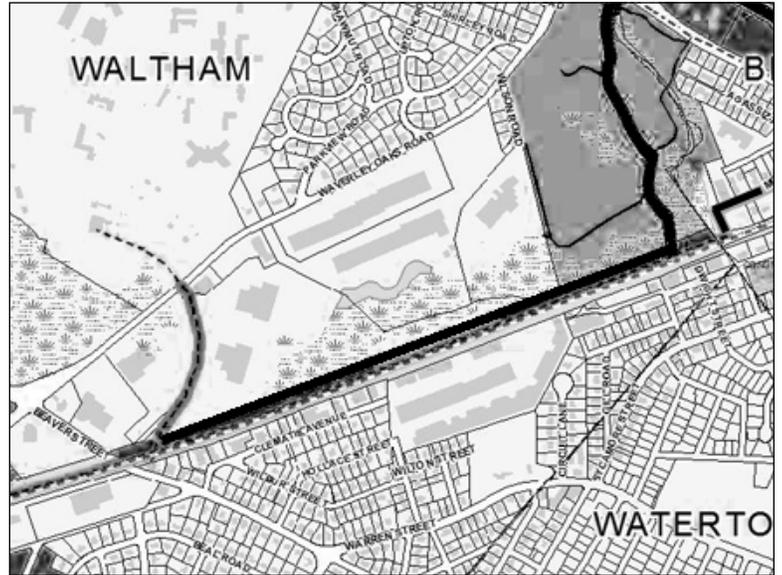
That's the question the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) addresses in its new report, "Belmont/Waltham Community Trail Alignment Study," released in January.

Even apart from the T station, Alewife is a nexus of off-road bike trails: the Linear path to Davis Square, the Alewife Brook path to Medford, and the planned path through Watertown to the Paul Dudley White trail system along the Charles River. A trail that connects Alewife to Belmont Center, Waltham, and beyond would give Belmont residents many more ways to shop and commute. Unfortunately, sales of MBTA right of ways (ROWs) to private owners over the years have made finding a route for a rail trail challenging.

The MAPC incorporated "relevant aspects" of two previous studies into the current report: the Central Massachusetts Rail Trail Feasibility Study, and the Belmont Bikeway Preliminary Feasibility Analysis, both published in 1997. The Belmont/Waltham connection merited its own report because any trail that links to Alewife is much more useful than a trail that stops short.

## The Alignments

The MAPC report states, "This is not an engineering study or cost estimate study. It's a first step at evaluating locations and building community consensus for subsequent engineering design and cost study." To evaluate locations, the authors divided the corridor between Waltham and Brighton Street into five



MAPC/ MEG MUCKENHOUP

The MAPC's proposed Waltham routes (in black).

segments: Waltham, Waverley Square, the Route 60 corridor, Belmont Center, and Channing Road/High School.

### 1. Waltham

The DCR has leased the MBTA's 80-foot-wide right of way between Linden Street and Beaver Street. Beyond Beaver Street, though, there's barely enough room to provide an 11-foot clearance between the tracks and a rail trail on the right of way, and a power line runs through the right of way. It will be impossible to build the trail without moving the power line. Also, a segment of the right of way beyond Beaver Street is privately owned by Duffy Brothers. The MAPC report encourages the city of Waltham to work with private property owners to find a route for the trail.

### 2. Waverley Square

The MAPC details two very different possible routes for cyclists traveling from the Waltham border to Waverley Square. The report recommends Alternative 2A, "Beaver Brook," which takes a scenic jog a third of a mile from the railroad right of way through the Beaver Brook Reservation, crosses Trapelo Road and Mill Street at their intersection, then returns to the right of way. That lengthy detour may be safer than Alternative 2B, "Trapelo Road and Side Streets,"



The MAPC's Waverley routes (in black/dark gray.)

which takes riders up Moraine Street and onto Trapelo Road. After fighting through Waverley Square traffic, cyclists would take Grant Avenue up to the B Street public works yard and return to the right of way. To make road crossing easier, the MAPC suggests building a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge across Route 60/Pleasant Street and the railroad tracks, either at the corner of White Street and Grant Avenue or at the end of B Street.

### 3. Route 60 Corridor

The MAPC's two suggested routes for the Route 60 segment run on opposite sides of the street. Alternative 3A, "Route 60," would keep bicyclists on the McLean side of Route 60, cycling up and down the steep inclines



The MAPC's Route 60 paths (in black/dark gray.)

around Snake Hill Road before crossing Route 60 at the Clark Street footbridge. Alternative 3B, "Public Works/Belmont Housing," runs on the south side of Route 60 through the public works yard at the end of B Street, on through private property to Pearson Road, and across a new path segment on private property on Clark Lane to Royal Road.

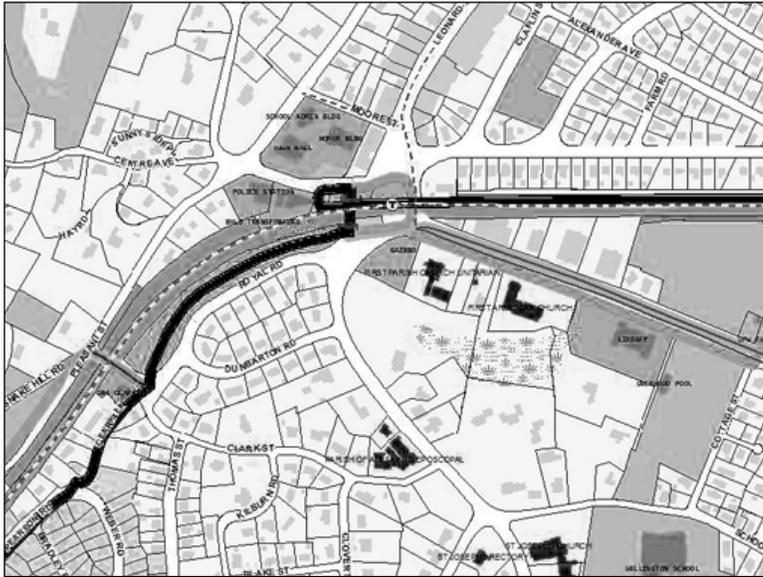
The MAPC recommends Alternative 3B, "Public Works/Belmont Housing," because it doesn't involve building a path on steep, easily eroded hillsides, and the bike path would be more accessible to the neighborhood.

### 4. Belmont Center

The western part of the Belmont Center segment is easier to plan than the eastern half. According to the MAPC, the "clear option" between the Clark Street footbridge and Belmont Station is the town-owned land between the railroad tracks and Royal Road—land that Belmont designated as a passive recreation site in its 2008 Open Space and Recreation Plan. Because the area near Belmont station is wet, the MAPC suggests putting in boardwalks for the path.

East of Belmont Station, the MAPC suggests either Alternative 4A, "Shared Use Path over Concord Avenue," or Alternative 4B, "Concord Avenue". Alternative 4A's path would run from the south side of the tracks, either through the existing tunnel or on a new widened sidewalk/trail through the underpass, then circle back up to the platform level so cyclists could continue on the north side of the tracks. The trail would continue along the 70-foot-wide right of way co-owned by the Belmont Citizens Forum (northern 30 feet) and the MBTA (southern 40 feet).

Option 4B is simply to route cyclists along Concord Avenue. The MAPC suggests that a shared-use path could be built from the Concord/Leonard/Common intersection to the edge of the high school property across from the Underwood Pool at Cottage street—but also warns: "A shared use path however, would require signif-



The MAPC's Belmont Center paths (black/dark gray.)

significant widening of the sidewalk impacting parking, the bike lane, or landscaped median."

The MAPC recommends the route over the underpass to avoid the "complex traffic movements" at the Concord/Leonard/Common intersection. In short, it's hard to make a safe route that involves crossing that intersection; Alternative 4A avoids it altogether.

### 5. Channing Road/High School

This segment is the most complicated of the lot. The MAPC offers three different routes between the Channing Road/Alexander Avenue intersection and Brighton Street, only a little over half a mile as the crow flies.



The MAPC's High School paths (in black/dark gray.)

Alternative 5A, "Mass Central Railroad Alignment," would follow the rail line straight along the Belmont Citizens Forum site to privately owned property just west of Brighton Street; the DCR has secured an easement to put a path through that property. This "rail with trail" option would involve building a barrier fence to keep users away from the trains. A similar fence has been erected along the Brighton Street to Alewife path.

Alternative 5B, "Concord Avenue/High School Property," would connect Concord Avenue to a path on the south side of the tracks via a north-south path on the west side of the skating rink and the fire access road behind the high school. That road eventually reaches Hittinger Avenue. Alternative 5C, "Claypit Pond," would use the dirt path that follows the south side of Clay Pit Pond to get to Hittinger Avenue.

The MAPC did not recommend any of these three options, saying that the town needed to "consider the advantages and opportunities of each proposal"—which means that Belmont should develop a political consensus about the path's location. Alternative 5A provides the most direct access between Belmont Center and Brighton Street and avoids putting bicyclists through several hazardous street crossings, but some Channing Street residents object to having a bicycle path near their houses. Alternatives 5B and 5C provide access to the library, the pool, and the rink—but it would be difficult for cyclists to make their way west on Concord Avenue safely, and getting from Hittinger Street to Brighton Street would involve riding along busy Blanchard Road.

### Alexander Avenue Underpass Needed

The MAPC made one other important recommendation in the report: to build a tunnel from Alexander Avenue to the high school site. The authors noted that there is no safe way to cross the railroad tracks for a mile between Belmont Center and Brighton Street. Instead, there is a clear path across the live rail line from Alexander Avenue and through a cut segment of the

fence onto the high school fields. As the MAPC authors put it, "Whatever option is ultimately chosen, an underpass at Alexander Ave [sic] is an important connection that needs to be constructed to provide safe access between two split sides of town."

### *First Step: Bike Path Planning Committee*

Belmont's Board of Selectmen voted in August 2011 to appoint a Bike Path Planning Committee to create the trail. After the committee is appointed, the MAPC recommends that Belmont build the rail trail in phases. The first phase is to establish interim trails on the town-owned McLean Hospital conservation land between Mill Street and Route 60, and the Royal Road parcel at Clark Street. The second phase could create a trail from B Street across the Department of Public Works and Belmont Housing Authority sites. The third phase would entail commissioning a feasibility study for the entire trail from Waltham to Brighton Street.



SUSAN JONES

However, as of this writing, the Selectmen have received at least 20 applications for the committee but have not made any appointments. Until the Selectmen take the first step, the bike path through Belmont will remain a report, and there will be no safe, off-road route through Belmont to Alewife.

The complete report is available at [mapc.org](http://mapc.org). Click on Bicycle Transportation Projects.

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

## **Bike Path Right of Way Easement**

Last September, a Memorandum of Agreement was concluded between the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the purchasers of the Sacca parcel at 40-42 Brighton Street, providing a permanent easement for a bike path to pass over the railroad side of the Sacca property. The easement provides a route for the community path to continue west from its current endpoint at Brighton Street, just north of the commuter rail right of way, to the west end of the Sacca property. There it meets the 3,560-foot strip of land parallel to the commuter rail tracks that was purchased by the Belmont Citizens Forum several years ago.

Together the BCF land and the easement area would provide a continuous right of way for an off-road bicycle path stretching from Belmont Center to Alewife Station and beyond. Although the Metropolitan Area Planning Council has identified this route as one of the viable routes through Belmont, the town has not yet approved a route through Belmont. The Board of Selectmen is currently establishing an ad-hoc committee to recommend where and how a bike path should be located in Belmont. The Forum encourages residents and members of the community to add their voices to the work of this committee.

# Dialogues Continue on Belmont Uplands' Fate

By Anne-Marie Lambert

Midwinter residents and visitors to the Belmont Uplands' silver maple forest continue a lively dialogue about the fate of this rare urban wild. In the forest itself, guided tours sponsored by the Friends of Alewife Reservation reveal evidence of coyote, otter, merganser duck, vole, heron, raccoon, deer, red fox, and cottontail rabbits. Tours are led by wildlife expert David Brown: two more are scheduled for March and April. (See Environmental Event Calendar, p. 18. )

While the forest itself appears to be thriving, the area has changed since Brown's extensive 2004 survey of wildlife in the reservation.

Changes include:

- reduced cattail habitat as the tall phragmites reeds invade,
- reduced meadow areas for use by woodcocks in their early spring mating season,
- more silt deposits in the man-made Little River due to increases in paved surfaces in the watershed,
- less evidence of beavers, and
- more evidence of dogs.

Should O'Neill Properties' proposed residential development replace existing habitat, raccoons

and Canada geese may become the rarest species in the area.

In the courtroom, both the Coalition to Preserve the Belmont Uplands (CPBU) and the Belmont Conservation Commission are awaiting dates to have their appeals heard of the December rulings by Middlesex Superior Court Judge Jane Haggerty. In January the same judge denied a request by CPBU for an injunction against the start of construction until their appeal is heard. In the concert hall, the BCF, CPBU, the Friends of the Alewife Reservation, and several other co-sponsors presented benefit concert to a packed house of 400 on February 5.

At the State House, hydrology expert Scott Horsley educated state legislators of districts in the Alewife basin about the basin's hydrology on February 14. Sponsored by cooperating stakeholders from all three affected towns, the lecture explained the correlation between the percentage of impervious surface in a river watershed and fish health in the river, the importance of evapotranspiration in reducing "mounding" of ground water during peak storm periods, effective strategies for slowing the current "fire hose" of runoff into the ocean, and the long-term effects of sea level rise on groundwater.

Early in the presentation, Horsley observed that the city of Cambridge's more than \$100

million project across Little River from proposed developments on Acorn Park Drive is designed to slow peak storm-water infiltration from Cambridge.

During the Q&A, EK Khalsa, Executive Director of the Mystic River Watershed Association, observed that the Belmont Uplands' silver maple forest is a natural biomass-based stormwater infiltration system. Public and private groups throughout the nation are funding man-made systems to do the same thing, Khalsa said, and the cost to the state of compensating for the loss of the Uplands may equal the land's value for private development.

As experts like Horsley, Brown, Khalsa and others observe the current transitions in our natural and man-made



Animal tracks in the snow at Alewife Reservation.

environments, private owners of properties near coastal wetlands continue to attempt to develop profitable projects such as malls, office parks, and housing.

O'Neill's Massachusetts agents are having active conversations with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation about restructuring the originally proposed conservation restriction, with the Department of Transportation on the maintenance of sewer lines along Frontage Road, and with the town of Belmont on a variety of other conditions for issuing a building permit and starting construction. These issues and many other items are being tracked by Belmont's building inspector and director of the Office for

Community Development, just two people, in a town with few comparable developments in its 150-year history.

Spring will bring action in the courtroom, at the negotiating table, and, ultimately, in the forest. Without active leadership and favorable decisions by the court or the legislature, we may need new flood-control measures to replace the Belmont Uplands.

The remaining FAR-sponsored nature walks may be among the last opportunities to witness the forest, an ecologically rich urban wild, rather than a thin linear park for dog walks.

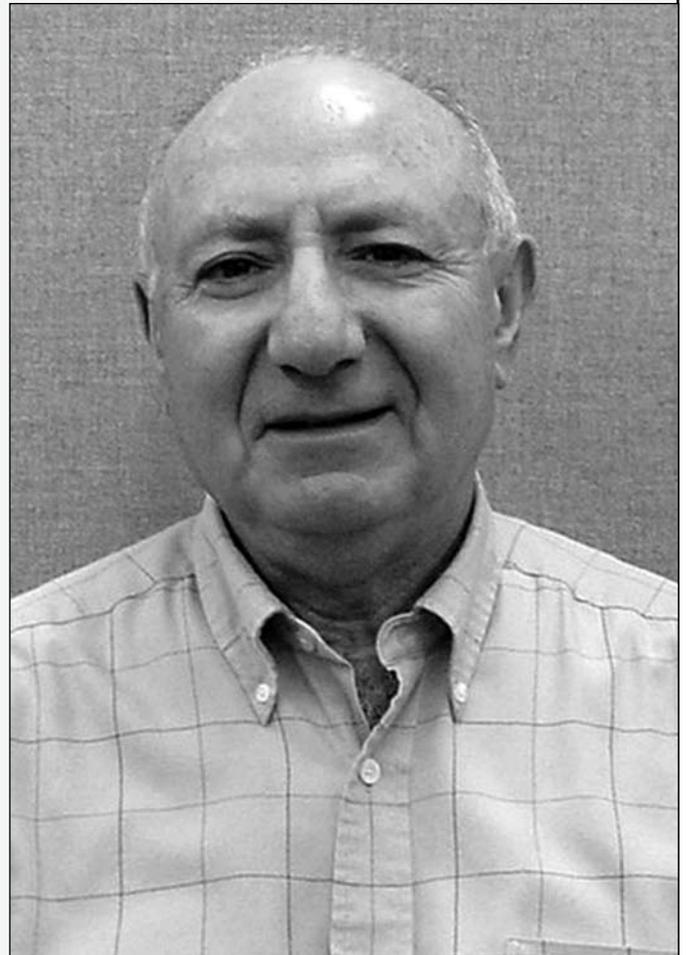
Anne-Marie Lambert is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum

## Mark D'Andrea Retires from Belmont Citizens Forum Board

After serving as the Belmont Citizens Forum's treasurer since 2004, Mark D'Andrea retired from the board at the end of 2011. His long (eight years) service in this capacity is greatly appreciated by the board. This volunteer function has been time consuming, as the treasurer has been responsible for handling the many small donations we receive every year, keeping the bills paid and our bulk mail account with the post office up to date, keeping the books, and generating data for the annual filings of the 990 form with the IRS and form PC with the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office Public Charities Division.

Mark was a member of the BCF board since 2000 and led the BCF Traffic and Transportation Committee in the early part of the last decade. An enduring result was the adoption by the town of the international style crosswalk. The Citizens Forum sponsored the first five of these crosswalks to demonstrate both their efficacy and durability.

Mark is quite busy keeping up with his grown children and 12 (and still counting) grandchildren, while continuing to as General Electric's go-to guy for metallurgical quality control in their gas turbine and jet engines. We wish him the best.



Mark D'Andrea

# Selectmen Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Every year, Belmont voters elect one member of the town's three-person Board of Selectmen. This year, Dan Scharfman and Andres Rojas are running for this seat. The Belmont Citizens Forum asked the candidates to respond to the following questions. They were given nine questions and limited to 900 words total, or an average of 100 words in response to each question.

## 1. Do you support a regional bike path system? If so, what steps would you take as a Selectman to make Belmont part of this system?

### Rojas

I absolutely support a regional bike path system. The benefits for transportation, recreation, sustainability, and community connectedness are obvious. Two issues must be resolved—ensuring local support, and lobbying on the regional level for funding and completion of the system. I support a potential bike path on the Royal Road open space parcel as well as a connection between Brighton Street and Belmont Center. MAPC developed three route options (with no recommendation) for this segment and I would expect that all three options would be fully evaluated. Pre-selecting any of the 3 options—particularly the one with the most resident opposition and controversy—is not in the best interest of the Town. Having broad public support is vital.

### Scharfman

I support local and regional multi-use community and bike paths. As Selectman I would support making these paths a part of comprehensive planning. I will work to engage abutters so we learn from those who know the land and local conditions best and have the best chance of developing resources that are welcomed and sustainable. Also, recognizing that Belmont's infrastructure will require many in-road paths, I'd support a paving plan that makes bike travel safe and feasible.

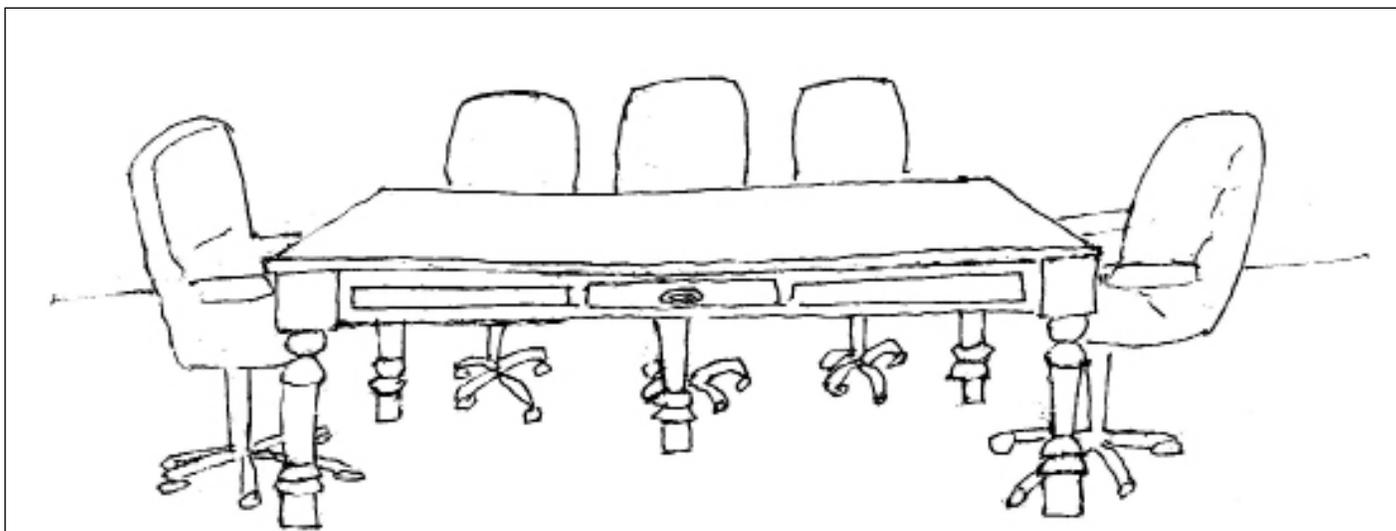
## 2. What can the town do about rush-hour traffic through Belmont?

### Scharfman

On our own, Belmont can't solve this problem—the issue is regional. Regional corridors criss-cross our town, with open space, railroad tracks, ponds, and other features funneling traffic.

In the long term, we need to work with groups like the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the MBTA on solutions. Traffic calming can improve safety, better paving will reduce noise, and smart commercial growth will at least yield tax revenue from vehicles passing through.

As Selectman I will support efforts to improve our bike lanes, sidewalks—to enhance our walkability, support walk-to-school programs, and encourage ride-sharing. I will work hard to sustain and improve public transportation alternatives.



## **Rojas**

Unfortunately, the municipal level is not the most relevant venue for dealing with the rush-hour traffic problem. Ultimately the solution is to foster a general mode shift, making bus and commuter rail service more effective. That said, I think Belmont's position should be that Route 2 is the best facility for handling traffic in the northwest corridor—and that everything possible should be done to utilize it to the fullest, starting at the octopus. That means making the Fresh Pond/Alewife Brook Parkway work better. Cambridge's strategy seems to be to ignore Route 2's regional function and to promote development and traffic management practices that hinder its flow, intentionally diverting traffic into the Belmont/ Trapelo corridor, down Grove St., Concord Ave., etc. I would engage Cambridge, via MAPC, in developing a comprehensive and objective approach to improving access to Route 2 from the river.

### **3. What is your reaction to the MBTA's proposal to cut bus lines to Belmont? Do you have a strategy for addressing this issue?**

## **Rojas**

The proposed reductions in transit service are a tragic result of the economic crisis, misunderstanding of the role and social value of public transit, and to some extent probably poor planning and management by the T.

Forward funding appears to be a disaster—it doesn't account for unavoidable operational cost increases (employee health care and fuel), much less the importance of improving/increasing service. Part of the forward funding deal saddled the T with additional debt—including for the Central Artery project. The T is now in a hole it may never get out of. It can't count on a steady funding stream since sales tax revenues (the T gets 20 percent of them) go up and down. The reductions in service are a death spiral that must be stopped. How? Community groups are organizing to make a stand at the hearings the T will soon hold. Belmont needs to join with our neighboring communities to fight cutbacks.

## **Scharfman**

Possible MBTA cuts concern me deeply. We need to work with our neighboring towns to press our representatives and the MBTA to understand the critical role that bus and electric bus routes play in our regional transit system, and in our local and commuter economies. The roads are too crowded to absorb additional load from lost Belmont MBTA routes, not to mention increased pass-through traffic as neighboring towns lose their routes. In the long run, public education and service improvements will increase ridership. Loss of MBTA routes will make every one of our road problems worse—parking, traffic, maintenance, pedestrian and bike safety.

### **4. How would you go about establishing a shuttle bus route from Belmont Center/ Cushing Square to Alewife station?**

## **Scharfman**

I see this question as closely linked to the MBTA question. I'm not familiar with work that may have been done on this issue, but if the MBTA cuts service, Belmont residents will need access to Alewife. I'll ask relevant town committees to explore self-funded, scheduled, multi-stop service that at the least includes parts of town that have lost MBTA service. Perhaps we could build on Belderbus vans and routing to start a pilot program, asking riders to pay a fee similar to the Alewife parking fee for the convenience of the ride.

## **Rojas**

Obviously the T is in no shape to start a new route, and the solution may have to come from the private sector. Perhaps there is a Transportation Management Organization that could help. It may be possible that organizing businesses in Belmont Center and Cushing Square might lead to a fare-based, business-subsidized service to Alewife Station. A shuttle connection is potentially an important factor in the re-development of Belmont's business centers. I support more inter-connectedness between our business nodes, and would pursue all viable options.

### **5. Do you favor preserving the Uplands? If so, how?**



### **Rojas**

I am in favor of preserving the Uplands and fighting the proposed housing project. Belmont must fight for its economic future and its environmental integrity. Again, this battle requires allegiances with larger regional and legislative networks. I support all efforts to maintain the Uplands as open space for the entire town to enjoy.

### **Scharfman**

Yes. I believe that preserving rather than building on the Uplands is the best course, so let's push for public acquisition by town, state, and/or private conservation groups. Unfortunately, this may not be possible, but we can't give up yet. If acquisition proves impossible, all relevant town bodies must do what we can to push the developer to lowest-impact building practices, to offset the substantial costs of linking this parcel to Belmont's municipal infrastructure and services, and to make the project a realistic solution to some of Belmont's affordable housing needs.

### **6. How would you tackle recurring flooding and water pollution issues in Belmont?**

#### **Scharfman**

First, we've got to maintain our aging sewer and storm drain systems properly—no more clogged culverts and leaking joints. Second, to the extent we can, we should develop an inventory of problems waiting to happen like the underground tanks at the Burbank—and then remediate proactively. This would include identifying critical drainage sites like the Uplands early enough that we can restrict, acquire, or otherwise act before developer plans on are the table. Third, we need to promote permeable surfaces and other residential and commercial best practices through education.

#### **Rojas**

The recurring flooding and water pollution issues facing our town are serious and difficult to deal with. I would coordinate all efforts of town departments to undertake a missioncritical analysis of the individual components of these problems. Connecting specific tasks with a phased and targeted infrastructure improvement plan will be a big step in addressing them. Other specific issues are regional and need to be addressed through coordinated activities with our neighboring towns. Belmont's water management planning and environmental enforcement are absolutely crucial to the health of our community.

### **7. What would be the most important goal for rezoning South Pleasant Street/ Waverley Square?**

#### **Rojas**

The most important goal in the economic re-development of the South Pleasant Street district is to increase our tax base while preserving the character of our town and exhibiting great sensitivity to neighbors. I have been working with all parties for several years now, and I do believe that through a well-designed public process and with strong design and site plan review, we can achieve a consensus zoning package and design that meets these goals. It takes experience and understanding of the specific issues to make this a reality—I will continue to support the Planning Board in doing just that.

**Scharfman**

Any goal for that section of town needs to be part of our overall plan for Belmont. The principles of Smart Growth suggest that we look for higher-density, mixed-use development in Waverley Square to make that area as walkable and livable as possible, perhaps moving to more car-oriented retail and light commercial businesses along South Pleasant Street. We cannot forget that people live right across the tracks and will see and hear what’s built even if they can’t easily walk to it, as anyone who remembers the kennels will attest.

**8. Is the Cushing Village project appropriate for that neighborhood?**

**Scharfman**

A comprehensive multi-use project is definitely appropriate for Cushing Square. We urgently need housing that serves empty-nesters, first-time buyers, and lower-income residents. And we need dense, attractive streetscapes to revitalize Cushing Square. Response to the most recently released plan has been positive—including neighbors. I believe we finally have a project that’s going to work! Let’s let the appropriate town bodies evaluate the details of the proposal and support them and the developers in making this, the best practical outcome, a reality.

**Rojas**

The Cushing Village project is now an active project that is in an open public hearing before the Planning Board. I, therefore, can’t provide any specific thoughts regarding the project. While critical to Belmont’s economic development, Cushing Village must be neighbor-sensitive, sustainable, and reflect the character of our community.

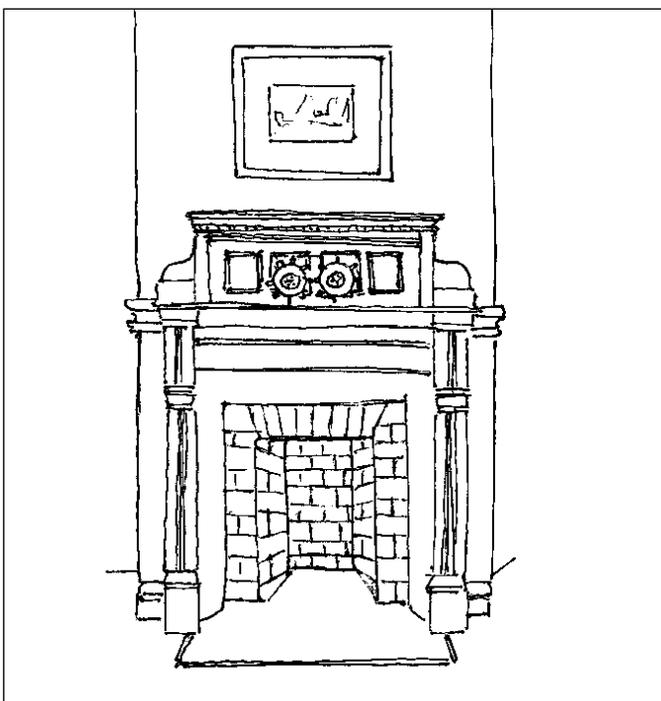
**9. In light of the Clark House crisis, how can Belmont better husband its historic resources? Is that a high priority for you?**

**Rojas**

Historic preservation of our Town’s cultural resources is very important. I have been professionally involved for over 25 years in historic restoration and preservation. We must identify, inventory, assess, and prioritize all of Belmont’s historic resources—so that no crisis takes us by surprise. I would use the special permit and design and site plan review processes to encourage project proponents to respect historic resources. Encouraging economic development while preserving Belmont’s historic resources is possible, preferable, and my goal.

**Scharfman**

A process like the one followed by the Capital Projects Overview Committee is the right place to start—let’s ask the Historic District Commission and nonprofit partners to prepare an inventory of important assets, with suggestions for how to handle them. With that in hand let’s reach out to owners to let them know that Belmont wants to help safeguard our shared historic resources. Private donors and nonprofits, bolstered by CPA funds, can do amazing things with some encouragement from Town Hall – the successful move of the Clark House proves that. Historic properties are essential to the character and quality of life in our town. Working together we can continue successes like preserving Sergi Farm and the saving the Clark House, and thereby preserve our sense of place.



ANN SIFNEOS

# Arlington Land Trust Examines Mugar Site

By Ginna Johnson.

Driving over the bridges and ramps around Route 2 and the Alewife Brook Parkway, it's easy to forget the area is a big, flat wetland named the Great Swamp. Filled by glaciers millennia ago, the Great Swamp stretches from Fresh Pond north to East Arlington. Huge areas of Belmont, Cambridge, and Arlington drain to the low-lying region. Stormwater runoff once flowed to the Charles River, but a glacial deposit of silt, gravel, and cobbles—at what is now Huron Avenue, Cambridge—blocked that drainage. Water started moving slowly north to the Mystic River along Alewife Brook.

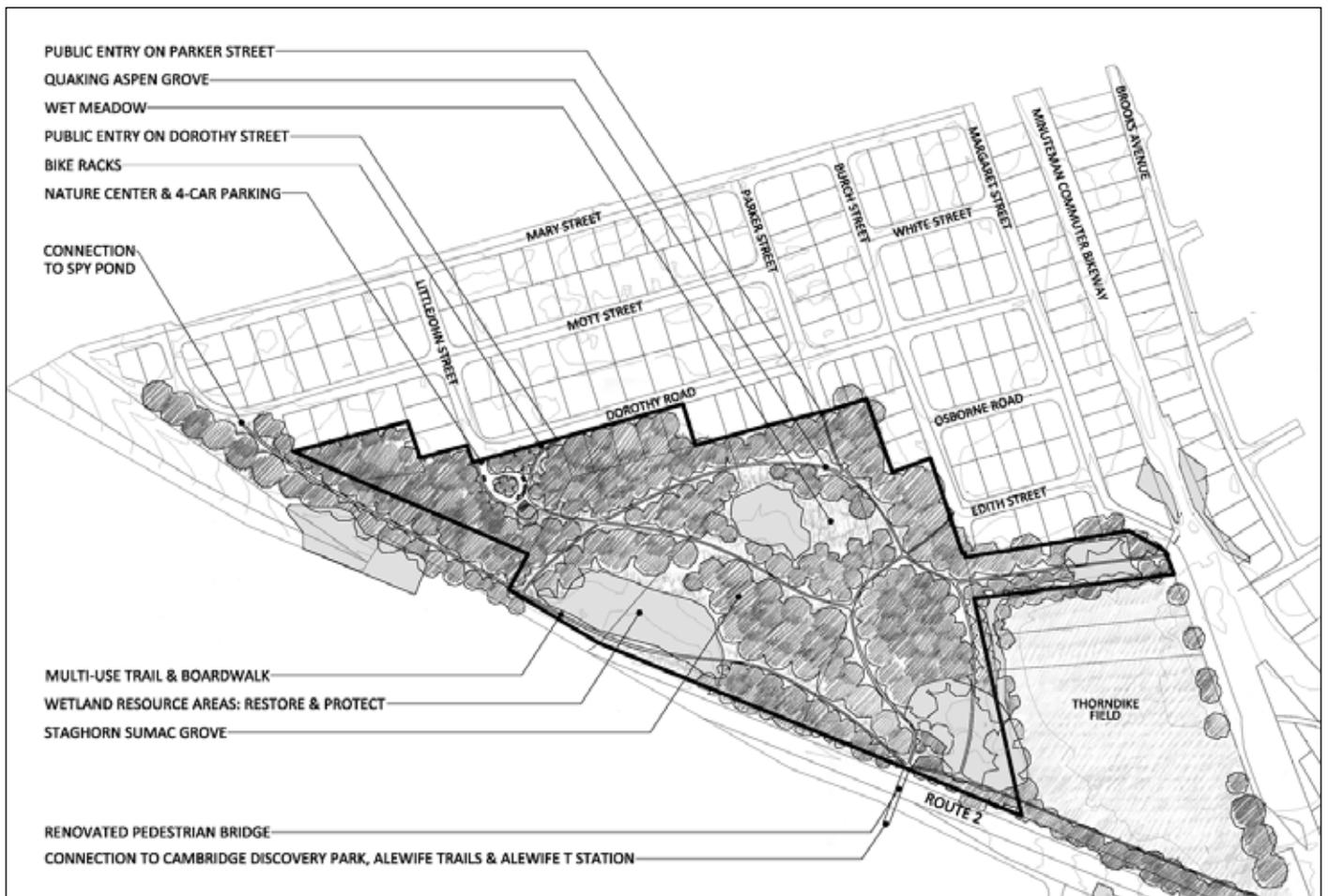
How flat is the region? In the six and a half miles from the Alewife T Station to the Amelia

*Published by permission of the Arlington Land Trust*

Earhart Dam on the Mystic River in Medford, the water elevation drops only five inches. It's no surprise that the area is subject to flooding!

After generations of transportation and commercial development in Cambridge and residential development in East Arlington, one of the last remaining open spaces in the Great Swamp is the 17-acre Mugar property. The parcel is located in Arlington along the north side of Route 2 opposite Lanes & Games Bowling Alley. The site is owned by the Mugar family, which has proposed a variety of development plans over the past 50 years, ranging from a large grocery store to commercial and office development to a large multifamily housing complex.

At Route 2 speeds, the property appears neglected with its stands of tall phragmites reeds and highway litter. However, Arlington residents understand the critical role the parcel plays in flood prevention and its potential as open



A plan for the proposed "Conservation Option" for the Mugar parcel.

space. If the site were developed with impervious roofs and parking the stormwater runoff could contribute to the flood hazard zones in East Arlington and in turn slow drainage from the properties in Belmont and Cambridge along the Little River—on the south side of Route 2.

Because it remains undeveloped, the Mugar property acts like a big sponge, storing and absorbing precipitation. Over two-and-a-half acres of the property are vegetated wetlands whose soils and plants not only absorb stormwater runoff but also filter and store the pollutants in runoff, improving water quality. Wetland vegetation also provides breeding grounds and food sources for a range of insects, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and birds.

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**With over a third of a mile frontage along Route 2, the property also creates a green gateway to Arlington**

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As open space, the Mugar property would complement Arlington’s existing conservation lands for habitat preservation and passive recreation. With over a third of a mile frontage along Route 2, the property also creates a green gateway to Arlington. In 2001, Arlington Town Meeting passed a resolution to “preserve the conservation, recreation, and open space uses of the property.”

## The Conservation Option

Having successfully protected Elizabeth Island in Spy Pond, the Arlington Land Trust (ALT) decided to initiate a conversation about the future of the Mugar property. Past development proposals for the site detailed large buildings, expansive parking lots, and small planting strips. But what, ALT wondered, would the site look like if it were protected open space for the community? ALT decided to re-envision the Mugar property.

ALT recruited Esker Company to collaborate with them during the fall of 2011. ALT and Esker Company studied the site’s wetland resource areas and topography and began to develop a schematic plan that we dubbed the “Conservation Option.” The plan illustrates a trail system with numerous neighborhood

entries. Paths could be laid out so visitors could experience the different vegetation and beautiful spaces throughout the parcel—including wetlands, wet meadows, and aspen and sumac groves. We added loops so visitors could take short walks or longer forays. A multi-purpose trail could parallel Route 2, extending commuter trails by connecting to the Minuteman Bikeway, Alewife T Station, the Alewife Greenway Path, Discovery Park (across a renovated pedestrian bridge), and perhaps even to Spy Pond.

A nature center—we started calling it the Mugar Nature Center—could be located on the high ground at Littlejohn Street. An informal gravel drive could serve as a drop-off area and provide a few spots of accessible parking. A small structure could provide a community meeting place, classroom space, and equipment storage. The entry could be on the north and the south-facing side could have big sliding barn doors that open to an informal outdoor classroom, perhaps a log circle or stone council ring.

It is easy to imagine how the Mugar Nature Center could be used. Programs could include interpretive walks for plant identification, bird-watching, salamander sighting, animal scat and track identification, after-school or vacation camps and classes, a native plant nursery, and annual rites like spring peeper parties, fairy house construction, or snowshoeing.

## Arlington Land Trust’s Next Steps

ALT is currently planning dates to meet with East Arlington neighbors to discuss their reactions to the proposed conservation plan and to understand their priorities for the Mugar property. The biggest step—hurdle might be a better word—is securing ownership and permanent protection for the site. But ALT feels that only by starting the discussion can options for conservation be discovered.

If you support ALT’s mission for open space conservation, visit [arlingtonlandtrust.org](http://arlingtonlandtrust.org). Keep tabs on the Mugar property initiative and let ALT know your vision for this important natural resource area in the greater Alewife region.

Ginna Johnson, ASLA, is a principal at Esker Company Landscape Architecture LLC, Lexington, MA.

# Thomas Clark House Finds Temporary Home



By Meg Muckenhoupt

On February 18, the historic Thomas Clark House moved. After 250 years in one location, the house was taken off its foundation, put on a truck, and driven from 59 Common Street to a temporary home at 305 Concord Avenue. The house's fate remains uncertain; it will need to be moved again—hopefully to a permanent location—by January 2013.

In the meantime, the house's fans can check on its status on its Facebook page, "Save the Thomas Clark House," and on a new web site set up by the Architectural Heritage Foundation of Boston, [www.thomasclarkhouse.com](http://www.thomasclarkhouse.com). The web site features a video of the house being moved.

The Facebook page quotes a Massachusetts Historical Commission statement about the house: "Thomas Clark played a major role in the American Revolution, serving as a Minuteman in Captain Benjamin Locke's company at Lexington and Bunker Hill. In April of 1775, Parson Samuel Cooke, first minister of the Menotomy Meetinghouse built on the 'Kings Highway' in 1730, was driven to this house for safety."

Whether the Thomas Clark House can be driven to safety is still unclear. The Belmont Citizens Forum published a review of the house's history in the January/February 2011 *Newsletter*, "Can the Historic Clark House be Saved?" To be part of Thomas Clark House's future, contact the Architectural Heritage Foundation at (617) 861-4049 or [clarkhouse@ahfboston.com](mailto:clarkhouse@ahfboston.com).

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



SUSAN JONES

## Environmental Events

### Alewife Wildlife Walk

**Saturday March 10, 9 a.m., and Sunday, April 15, 1 p.m.**

Join the Friends of the Alewife Reservation and naturalist David Brown to search for signs of wildlife and birds and to discuss current challenges to this unique environment. Free. [www.friendsofalewifereservation.org](http://www.friendsofalewifereservation.org), (617) 415-1884. Meet at the Acorn Park parking lot.

### MBTA Public Hearing on Service Cuts

**Monday, March 12, 5:30-7:30 p.m.**

Come and voice your opinions about planned MBTA service cuts and fare hikes. Full details on the plan are available at [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com), or contact Trish Foley at (617)973-7073 or [fareproposal@mbta.com](mailto:fareproposal@mbta.com). Veronica Smith Senior Center, 20 Chestnut Hill Avenue, Brighton.

### Sugaring Celebration Session

**Saturday, March 17, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-3 p.m.**

Bring the kids and grandparents and learn how maple syrup is made from sugar maple trees. Enjoy sugaring activities, hear stories, and visit tapped maple trees. Fee \$8 Audubon members, \$10 non-members. Sponsored by Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary. [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), (617) 489-5050. Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.

### A Tale of Two Watersheds

**Sunday, March 18, 1-3 p.m.**

Cambridge City Engineer Owen O'Riordan will describe the relationship between Alewife/ Fresh Pond Reservation watersheds, show plans for stormwater detention basin project being built at Alewife Reservation, and explain how the project will affect Fresh Pond Reservation and nearby neighborhoods. Free, registration required. [friendsoffreshpond.org](http://friendsoffreshpond.org), [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com), (617) 349-6489. Maynard Ecology Center, basement of Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue Cambridge.

### EcoFest 2012: Locavoricious...about Food

**Saturday, March 21, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.**

Visit booths and enjoy lectures and demonstrations on ecological topics. Cosponsored by the Arlington Garden Club, the Arlington Public Works Department, and several other groups. Free. [ecofest@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:ecofest@town.arlington.ma.us). Arlington Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington.

### Sustainability by Design

**Wednesday, April 4, 7 p.m.**

Sustainable Belmont presents Dr. John Ehrenfeld, author of Sustainability by Design: A Subversive Strategy for Transforming our Consumer Culture. [www.sustainablebelmont.net](http://www.sustainablebelmont.net). First Church in Belmont, 404 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

### Earth Day Charles River Cleanup

**Saturday, April 21, Time TBA**

More than 3,000 volunteers from 35 towns in the Charles River watershed will join the Charles River Watershed Association to clean the banks of the 80-mile Charles River at the 13th Annual Earth Day Charles River Cleanup. Info: [CRWA.org](http://CRWA.org), (781) 788-0007. Various locations on Charles River.

### Run of the Charles Canoe and Kayak Race

**Sunday, April 29, various times**

Join the Charles River Watershed Association for New England's largest canoe and kayak race. There will be 6, 9, and 19 mile races, a 24-mile, five-leg canoe relay race, and a 26-mile professional marathon. [crwa.org](http://crwa.org). (781) 788-0007. Various locations along the Charles River.

### Sexual Secrets: Tales of Species, Seedlings

**Wednesday, May 2, 7-8:30 p.m.**

Wayne Mezitt, Chairman, Weston Nurseries, will give an expert nurseryman's point of view on how plants are selected and bred for new characteristics, and what it really takes to successfully propagate both native and non-native trees, shrubs, and plants for the consumer market. Free. [grownative-mass.org](http://grownative-mass.org), (617) 354-0502. Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge.

## Radha Iyengar Joins BCF Board

The Belmont Citizens Forum welcomes Radha Iyengar to the BCF's Board of Directors. A Belmont resident since 1986, Radha has a Ph.D. in chemistry and is currently an independent intellectual property consultant in the pharmaceutical/biotech industry.

Radha's volunteer work has included serving as a board member-at-large for the Cheney Middle School's Chenex after-school program and helping maintain trails at the Habitat Audubon Sanctuary. The BCF Board looks forward to working with Radha.



Radha Iyengar

# 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 \$4,000 to publish each issue of our newsletter. Please donate for this purpose:

\$25    \$50    \$100    \$250

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If you have questions, please e-mail us at [info@belmontcitizensforum.org](mailto:info@belmontcitizensforum.org). 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.

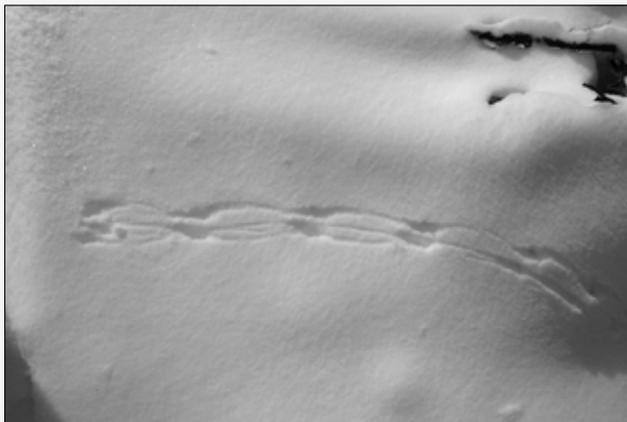
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