



Demolition Delay To Protect Specified Sites

Historic protection bylaw limited to pre-selected properties

By Meg Muckenhoupt and Virginia Jordan

Belmont’s Historic District Commission (HDC) will again bring a demolition-delay bylaw before Town Meeting this fall, with a different focus from the bylaw that was withdrawn this spring. This version only affects pre-specified buildings, rather than imposing a delay on every building over a certain age. The HDC will prepare a list of protected buildings for discussion in September.

The demolition-delay bylaw is intended to give Belmont residents and town officials time to plan to preserve historic structures that are in danger of being torn down. If someone applies to demolish such a building, advocates for historic preservation would have a year to work to save it, for example by finding potential donors to buy the site, or finding locations where the structure could be moved, or by working

with the owner on zoning. The HDC has been reviewing a demolition-delay bylaw at least since July 2009, when a 30-day demolition-permit application period expired for the Our Lady of Mercy rectory.

The spring 2012 version of the demolition-delay bylaw used a broad definition of which buildings would be affected. The HDC had originally proposed that any “significant building” over 50 years old could require HDC approval before it could be demolished. Several criteria defined significance: the structure could be on or eligible for the National Historic Register, associated with historic people or events, or architecturally important.

That standard potentially affected a staggeringly large proportion of Belmont properties, according to the Planning Board. Property

owners would not necessarily know if their buildings were subject to a demolition delay until they applied for a demolition permit—and every year more could end up on that list, thanks to the moving-target 50-year standard. “There was a concern with the 50-year [standard] that every year the store of historic properties would increase,” said Sami Baghdady, Belmont Planning Board chair.

At meetings of Belmont’s Economic Development Advisory Committee last spring, Andy Rojas, a committee member, estimated that more than



The Belmont Woman’s Club, also known as the 1853 William Flagg Homer House, in the Pleasant Street historic district.

BELMONT CITIZENS FORUM

80 percent of Belmont's buildings are more than 50 years old. Paul Bell, co-chair of the Historic District Commission, argued that only two of the 42 demolition permits issued between 2008 and 2011 would have been affected.

The Planning Board wanted to limit the bylaw to buildings erected before a particular year. Before the bylaw was withdrawn last spring, the Planning Board submitted an amendment to limit the demolition-delay bylaw to structures built before 1921.

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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.

The HDC's version of the bylaw for fall Town Meeting will contain several changes from the spring 2012 draft:

Locales excluded: The Cushing Village and South Pleasant Street areas and a portion of Waverley Square will be exempt from the bylaw. The Planning Board pushed for these exclusions. "We didn't want to hold up several potential developments . . . after so many public meetings and public progress," said Baghdady.

Civic buildings excluded: Municipal buildings including the Underwood Pool and the Municipal Light Building will not be subject to the demolition delay, in part because the HDC and the Planning Board have agreed to work together to ensure discussions with stakeholders about these buildings. "The Homer building was at one time considered for demolition," said Michael Smith, HDC Chair. "The study . . . did not include the Historic District Commission in the Committee. We're asking for a seat at the table."

Homes covered: The proposed list of properties was not available as of press time, but Smith said, "We're going to be very, very clear about it. . . [T]ake the *Town of Homes* book and you'll get a good sense of the properties." The book Smith referred to is *Belmont: The Architecture and Development of the Town of Homes*, prepared for the Belmont Historic District Commission and dated 1984. It's often called "the green book" for its cover.

HDC chair Smith plans to present the proposed list of affected properties to various town boards and committees. The Board of Selectmen, the Warrant Committee, the Planning Board, the Capital Budget Committee, the Economic Development Advisory Committee, and precinct meetings would have a chance to comment on the list.

After the list has been vetted, it should become available on the Historic District Commission's page of the Belmont town web site, www.town.belmont.ma.us.

Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*. Virginia Jordan is a Precinct 6 Town Meeting member.

Water Trouble

A Public Forum on Storms, Floods, and Pollution

Presented by the Belmont Citizens Forum
Thursday, September 13, 7-9 p.m.
Winn Brook School
97 Waterhouse Road, Belmont
Free and open to the public

Learn how you can make a difference
in improving water quality and reducing
flooding in your neighborhood

Moderator:
Fred Paulsen

Panelists:
Kathleen Baskin, Director of Water Policy,
Mass. Executive Office of Energy &
Environmental Affairs

Glenn Clancy, Belmont Director of Office for
Community Development

Patrick Herron, Mystic Monitoring Network
Director, Mystic River Watershed Association

Ralph Jones, Belmont Selectman

Richard Vogel, Director, Tufts University's
graduate program, "Water: Systems, Science,
and Society."

Panelists will discuss

- Water quality in Belmont's waterways and the Mystic River watershed
- Flooding in the Winn Brook neighborhood, North Cambridge, and East Arlington
- Proposed developments in the Alewife Reservation/Uplands area.

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*The Belmont Citizens Forum is grateful for their
support of this important event.*



Flooding on Route 2 near Alewife, 2001.

Citizens Can Reduce Stormwater Pollution

By Tom Miller

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified stormwater runoff as “the leading remaining cause of water-quality problems” in the United States. In Belmont, stormwater drains into the Charles River and the Mystic River. The EPA has given a grade of “D” to the Mystic’s water quality because it is fit for swimming only 46 percent of the time.

In the last 10 years, Belmont, like most towns in Massachusetts, has developed a stormwater management program under the EPA’s National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program. But the town alone cannot keep stormwater clean. Citizens have a crucial role to play, and everyone can make a difference.

In Belmont, stormwater drains into the Charles River and the Mystic River. The EPA has given a grade of “D” to the Mystic’s water quality because it is fit for swimming only 46 percent of the time.

To prevent water pollution, it is important to know how stormwater affects rivers and lakes. In undeveloped areas free of impervious surfaces, water from rain and snowmelt is absorbed into the ground. However, in urbanized areas like Belmont, much of the ground is covered with impervious surfaces such as roads, sidewalks, parking lots, and buildings. In fact, 34 percent of Belmont’s surface area is impervious to water.

Instead of being absorbed, stormwater runs along streets, sidewalks, and rooftops into the storm drains located along the roadside. As the water flows into the drains, it picks up pollutants from both roads and yards, including fertilizer, pesticides, paints, pet waste, car fluids, and road salt.

Unlike sewage discharge, stormwater is not cleaned before it enters local waterways. In other words, it bypasses the water treatment process entirely because it doesn’t go into the sanitary sewer. Pollutants in stormwater runoff go

straight into rivers and lakes, where they harm fish, plants, and other organisms, and make swimming, boating, and fishing hazardous.

So what can citizens do to prevent stormwater from polluting local rivers and lakes? Making small changes to daily activities, participating in public permitting processes, and getting legislators to consider regulations all help to improve water quality. Since everyone depends on clean water, everyone can play a part in keeping pollutants out of storm drains.

Lawns and Gardens

Lawns and gardens have a significant impact on water quality, as stormwater runs through yards and into storm drains. To keep this water clean, avoid using fertilizers and pesticides, which harm aquatic ecosystems. If it is necessary to use these chemicals, use organic, nontoxic products, use only the amount you need, and do not apply chemicals before a rainstorm. To find out if you really need to use fertilizer, and if so what kind and what amount, consider getting your soil tested. The University of Massachusetts Amherst Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Laboratory tests soil for a small fee.

When you water your lawn, don’t overwater, and make sure the water doesn’t run off into the storm drains. Consider installing a rain barrel, which catches rainwater and prevents it from running off into the storm drains. You can then use the rainwater to water your garden! And when cleaning your sidewalk and driveway, don’t hose them down so yard waste goes into the storm drains. Instead, sweep up leaves, grass, and other plant materials from these surfaces and compose or mulch them, or bag them as yard waste to be collected with your recycling. Direct your gutter downspouts onto vegetated areas instead of paved surfaces. The water will be absorbed by the soil instead of running off onto the pavement.

Landscaping

Ask your landscaper about environmentally friendly landscaping options. Choose native plants that need less water and fertilizer, limiting the runoff and chemicals from your

yard. Consider planting a rain garden, which provides a natural place for rainwater to be absorbed into the ground, and fill in bare soil patches with plants so that their roots will absorb more stormwater. If you are repaving your driveway, look into using permeable pavement which allows rainwater to soak through.

Car Care

Motor oil, antifreeze, and gasoline contain toxic chemicals. When changing car fluids, make sure that no fluid goes into storm drains or into the soil. Collect fluids in a container and take them to a hazardous waste site. Recycle used motor oil. Check your car for leaks to make sure that it is not dripping fluids on the roads, where it can be washed into storm drains.

When you wash your car, take it to a commercial car wash if you can. Washing your car in your driveway means that the soapy water runs into the street and into storm drains, while water from commercial car washes is directed into the sanitary sewer system and reaches the water treatment plant. If you do wash your car yourself, use as little soap and water as possible, and wash it on a surface that will absorb the water, such as a lawn, rather than on your driveway.

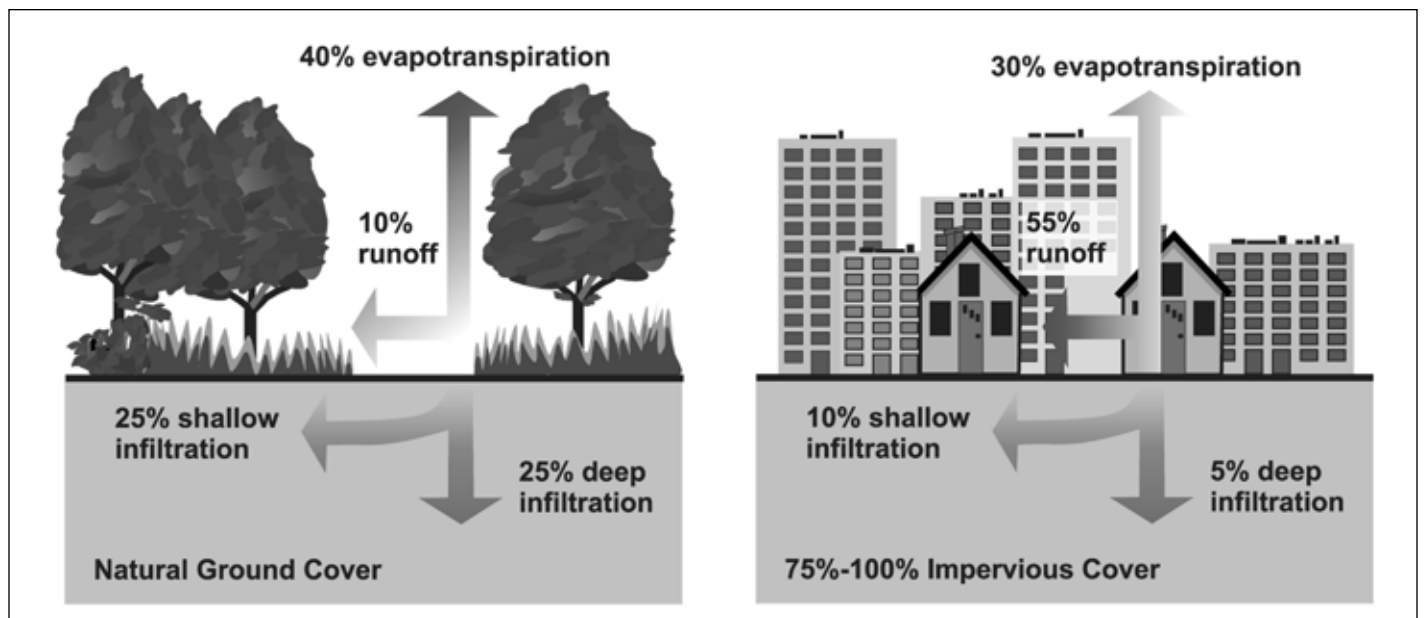
Pet Care

It's important to keep pet waste out of local waterways because it contains harmful bacteria. If you leave pet waste on the ground, stormwater will wash it into storm drains. Always dispose of pet waste in the trash or a toilet. Never push pet waste into storm drains. Help educate other Belmont pet owners about the importance of keeping pet waste out of storm drains.

Illicit Sewer Connections

In Belmont, it is illegal to discharge stormwater into the sewer system. The sewer system is separate from the storm drain system and is designed for sanitary waste only. When stormwater is sent into sewers, the sewage system will back up and leak into the stormwater system, contaminating stormwater and causing flooding. Belmont has spent millions of dollars separating sanitary and storm sewers to clean up local waterways. (See "Illegal Sewer Connections Cost Big Money," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, May 2012).

Throughout Belmont, there are many examples of illicit discharges, including sump pumps and gutters that drain into the sewer system instead of onto the ground or into storm drains. Spot inspections of 600 Belmont homes found 213 such apparently illegal connections



Relationship between impervious surface (pavement, buildings) and stormwater runoff. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, as little as 10 percent impervious surface in a watershed can produce measurable deterioration in water quality in streams.

in Belmont. Illicit sewer connections increase the volume of sewage sent to Deer Island for treatment and raise the cost of processing sewage for all Belmont homeowners. If you are aware that your house or business has an illegal connection, it is your responsibility as a good citizen to correct this by removing the connection from the sewer. Your neighbors will thank you!

Policy Enforcement

In the Alewife Brook Reservation area, several large proposed developments are underway, and are seeking permission to build, spurring review

of their compliance with the Clean Water Act, Wetlands Protection Act, Federal Emergency Management Agency regulations, and local regulations. These developments include:

- The Uplands proposal for 298 residential units in Belmont
- A likely proposal for an additional two office buildings and a garage on Acorn Park Drive in Cambridge
- The 160 Cambridge Park Drive proposal for an additional 398 units

By increasing the amount of impervious surface in previously undeveloped areas, these developments will exacerbate stormwater pollution. Express your concern for water quality so that permitting authorities and regulators will be more likely to enforce stormwater regulations diligently. Don't assume your local representatives and volunteer boards have the resources and creativity to do it alone. Typically, they welcome citizen input, assistance, and ideas.

Policy Changes

Existing federal and state laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act have established standards for reducing stormwater pollution. However, taking action to meet these standards is often left to cities and towns. Many communities are enacting local bylaws which include prohibitions on illegal discharges and illicit connections to the storm drain system. Some communities have established stormwater management user fees to influence new developments and promote behavior that keeps stormwater clean.

As a citizen, you can research what other communities are doing, and encourage your selectmen and Town Meeting members to consider local bylaws that protect water quality.

Preserve Open Space

Open, undeveloped space is critical for absorbing stormwater, preventing runoff and flooding. As a citizen, you can assist with efforts to identify open space in the area and support the acquisition of open space for preservation.

Tom Miller was a summer intern with the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Stormwater Resources

PBS Frontline

"Primer: Stormwater Runoff Pollution"
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/poisonedwaters/themes/runoff

Environmental Protection Agency

"Polluted Runoff"
www.epa.gov/owow_keep/NPS/index.

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

"Nonpoint Source Pollution"
www.mass.gov/dep/water/resources/nonpoint

Town of Belmont

"Stormwater Management Program"
www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/F00010E1A/IIPProjects/stormwater-program/stormwaterindex

City of Cambridge Department of Public Works. "Stormwater Management."

www.cambridgema.gov/theworks/ourservices/stormwatermanagement

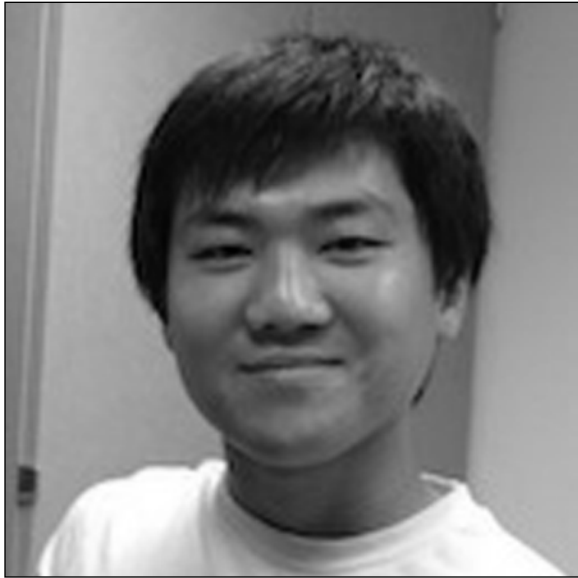
University of Massachusetts Amherst Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Laboratory

www.umass.edu/soiltest

Meet the Forum's Summer Interns

The Belmont Citizens Forum would like to thank the three interns who have been assisting the Belmont Citizens Forum this summer: Nick Manos, Tom Miller, and Shuntaro Shiota. All three are 2010 graduates of Belmont High School.

SHUNTARO SHIROTA



Shuntaro Shiota

Shuntaro Shiota is majoring in East Asian studies at Oberlin College. Shuntaro organized two nature walks for Boston's Japanese-speaking community this summer. The walks went through Belmont's Habitat Audubon Sanctuary.

ANNE-MARIE LAMBERT



Participants in the BCF Japanese nature walk listen to Reischauer house owner Bill Hunt.



TOM MILLER

Tom Miller

and visited the Reischauer Memorial House. This residence is affiliated with the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University.

Tom Miller is majoring in psychology with a minor in government at Harvard University. Tom supported the BCF's September 13 Water Trouble event by designing a participant survey, researching Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood maps of Belmont, and writing for the *BCF Newsletter*. Tom's article on reducing stormwater pollution appears on page four of this *Newsletter*; he also assembled this issue's event calendar.

Nick Manos is majoring in economics at the University of Southern California. Nick assisted Karen Parmett, the BCF's Program Director, with database and web site work. Nick developed a report on pedestrian tunnels installed under railroad tracks in many communities, detailing how much they cost, engineering issues, safety concerns and so on. Look for an article based on his work in the November/December *BCF Newsletter*.

Thank you, Nick, Tom, and Shuntaro, and good luck with your studies as you return to school this fall.

McLean's Campus Then and Now

In July 2001, environmental consulting firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin released a Draft Environmental Impact Report titled McLean Hospital Redevelopment. That report featured historic photos of McLean buildings and landscape that were to be preserved during construction of housing and research space, and features that were to be razed.

Although American Retirement Corporation abandoned the planned Freedom Commons senior housing development in 2009, the Northland Corporation's Woodlands at Belmont Hill development has transformed the central McLean campus with 121 townhouses, condos, and carriage residences, while the Waverley

Woods apartments now provide 40 units of affordable housing at the edge of the site along Trapelo Road. The 150,000-square-foot Belmont Technology Park research and development center proposed by Belmont ValueRealty is still unbuilt, visible only in site plans by Tsoi/Kobus & Associates.

McLean's forest has changed as well. Along Pleasant Street and what is now Olmsted Drive, 70-to 90-year-old oak and hickory trees were cleared. Today, honey locusts, sumac, and quaking aspens are slowly growing in, making an abrupt species transition in the open space between the woods and the street.

—Meg Muckenhoupt

VANASSE HANGEN BRUSTLIN



The "Upham Bowl" of the McLean central campus in 2001 (above) and in August 2012, with the Woodlands at Belmont Hill residences (below).

MEG MUCKENHOUP





A view of the Upham Memorial Building from the Woodlands at Belmont Hill. The front (east) side of building is visible in the photos on the facing page.



The entrance to the Belmont Technology Park site. A sketch of the unbuilt complex is available at www.massbio.org/writable/real_estate_listings/image_2/btp.jpg.

Environmental Events

By Tom Miller

Look Closely! Photographs by Neil Tischler **Saturday, September 1—Sunday, September 30**

Monday-Friday 8:30a.m.-4:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday 10a.m.-4 p.m.

Experience the variety and brilliance of nature through close-up photographs of subjects ranging from winter's frost patterns to summer flowers. www.massaudubon.org, (617) 489-5050. *Mass Audubon Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Meet Me at the Mystic

Saturday, September 8, 9 a.m.—noon

Celebrate the Mystic River and watershed with canoe and kayak paddling, artists, and musicians. www.mysticriver.org, (781) 316-3438. *Mystic Lakes Dam, Medford.*

Welcome to Fresh Pond!

Saturday, September 8, 1-3 p.m.

Join Fresh Pond Chief Ranger Jean Rogers to learn about Fresh Pond and volunteer opportunities. For newcomers and frequent visitors and will include a walk to the Kingsley Park overlooks. Registration required. www.friendsoffreshpond.org, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com, (617) 349-6489. *Water Purification Facility Parking Lot, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

Here Comes the Sun Film Screening

Wednesday, September 12, 7:30–9 p.m.

Here Comes the Sun documents the emergence of solar power technologies that could solve the global energy crisis. Mark Sandeen, the chair of Sustainable Lexington, will describe efforts to bring solar power to Lexington. Sponsored by Lexington Global Warming Action Committee. www.lexgwac.org, info@lexgwac.org. *Large Meeting Room, Cary Memorial Library, Lexington.*

Water Trouble: A Public Forum on Storms, Floods, and Pollution

Thursday, September 13, 7-9 p.m.

Expert panelists will talk about the facts and effects

of pollution and flooding caused by excess storm water. Complete details on page 3. Free and open to all. Co-sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum. Information: belmontcitizensforum.org. *Winn Brook Elementary School cafeteria, 97 Waterhouse Road, Belmont.*

Belmont's Annual Green Garden Tour

Saturday, September 15, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Take a self-guided tour of ten organic flower and vegetable gardens in Belmont. Learn about composting, rain barrels, backyard chickens and bees, and other sustainable practices. www.sustainable-belmont.org, sustainablebelmont@gmail.com. *Pick up a map at Beech Street Center, 266 Beech Street, Belmont.*

Hub on Wheels

Sunday, September 23, 6:30 a.m.—1:30 p.m.

Participate in the annual bike ride through Boston, including a car-free Storrow Drive. Choose a 10-mile, 30-mile, or 50-mile route and explore Boston from a new perspective. Fee: \$45. Registration required. www.bostonbikes.org. *City Hall Plaza, Boston.*

Volunteer on National Public Lands Day

Saturday, September 29, 9:30 a.m.—2:30 p.m.

Work on projects at Fresh Pond, including seed collection, visitor census, trail maintenance, and weeding. Bring a bag lunch and water. Tools provided. Registration required. www.friendsoffreshpond.org, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com, (617) 349-6489. *Ranger Station, Water Purification Facility, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

Little River Nature Poetry Walk

Sunday, September 30, 4-6 p.m.

Come on a beautiful nature walk and poetry readings along Little River in Cambridge and Belmont. The walk will travel along the river, meadow, and forest habitat that is home to wildlife such as red foxes, coyote, river otter, cottontail rabbits, snapping turtles, and more than 40 species of birds, including wild turkeys and great blue herons. Sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum

and Friends of Alewife Reservation. www.belmontcitizensforum.org, bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com. Acorn Park Drive parking lot, Cambridge.

Sustainable Belmont Talk: Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

Wednesday, October 3, 7-9 p.m.

Jeff Deyette, energy analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists, will discuss practical steps to substantially reduce your carbon footprint at little to no cost. www.sustainablebelmont.org, sustainablebelmont@gmail.com. *Selectmen's Meeting Room, Belmont Town Hall, 455 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Climate Science and Public Policy Speaker: David Keith

Sunday, October 21, 7-9 p.m.

David Keith, Gordon McKay Professor of Applied Physics at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, will discuss climate science, energy technology, and public policy at this meeting of the Lexington Global Warming Action Committee. www.lexgwac.org, info@lexgwac.org. *Cary Hall, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue, Lexington.*

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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:

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- 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:

\$50 \$100 \$150 \$250

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

Thank you!

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If you have questions, please e-mail us at 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.

Belmont Citizens Forum
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Water Trouble Flooding Forum
Thursday, September 13, 7:30 p.m.
See p. 3 for details

September/October 2012



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