



## Selectmen Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Every year, Belmont voters elect one member of the town's three-person Board of Selectmen. This year, Sami Baghdady and Roger Colton are running for the seat. The Belmont Citizens Forum asked the candidates to respond to the following eight questions. The candidates were limited to 1,200 words total, or an average of 150 words in response to each question.

### **1. Do you favor an off-road community path? Should it connect to the existing path from Blanchard Road to Alewife? How will you lead Belmont to a compromise on this issue?**

#### **Sami Baghdady**

I am generally in support of a community path that will run from Alewife Station to Waltham. However, as selectman I will wait for the recommendations of the Community Path Advisory Committee before taking a position on the path's route.

I certainly could not support a community path that would divide the community. But, as a licensed and practicing lawyer who helps people achieve consensus all the time, I think I have the proven skills to lead Belmont to a compromise on the location of the community path.

Under my leadership of the Planning Board, we were able to bring a consensus of support by the Cushing Square residents, the business community, and the developer to grant site plan approval to one of the largest commercial and residential developments in the history of Belmont. I look forward to providing similar leadership as we work towards solutions for a community path that serves all our residents.

#### **Roger Colton**

I favor an off-road community path connecting to the existing path to Alewife. Town leadership, however, should

withhold judgment on what route is appropriate until receiving the recommendations of the Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC). To ask CPAC to investigate the issue, but then to make up one's mind prior to receiving the committee's work-product, is disrespectful of the community volunteers who are devoting hundreds of hours to the task. The community path route should serve the needs of the broader community while protecting the neighbors affected. Structural and design responses addressing neighborhood impacts should be implemented.

If necessary, the Belmont Center to Waverley path segment should proceed even if additional deliberation on the remaining route is appropriate.

### **2. The MBTA will be shutting down the Fitchburg line on weekends in the summer of 2014 and 2015 for track work. Should Belmont be seeking to take advantage of this construction to build a tunnel under the railroad tracks at Alexander Avenue to allow students who live north of the tracks to commute to the high school safely? If so, is this something you will work to bring about?**

#### **Roger Colton**

The first report recommending a tunnel under the railroad tracks was prepared 30 years ago, in 1984. Thirty years is long enough. As the MBTA moves forward with its repairs to the Fitchburg line, Belmont should seek state transportation funding, along with MBTA cooperation, to build that tunnel. A tunnel would not only create a safe alternative to kids crossing the tracks to go to school, it would also create a safe route for Winn Brook neighborhood residents to the pool, the Library, the post office, the tennis courts, and the athletic fields.

## **Sami Baghdady**

I hold the safety of our high school students paramount. However, to my knowledge the construction of a tunnel under the railroad tracks has not been fully studied yet. Will the MBTA grant the town an easement to construct a tunnel under the track? What will the cost be to the town to construct the tunnel? How will we pay for the project?

With the help of our state senator and representative, we need to explore whether the MBTA will pay for some or all of the

tunnel construction based on public safety considerations.

Finally, if this project is a significant capital expenditure by the town that requires a debt exclusion, then we would need to decide as a community where the tunnel would fall in line with our other capital priorities.

### **3. None of Belmont's Planning Board members are trained planners, nor has the town replaced former Planning Manager Jay Szklut. Does this concern you? If so, what will you do?**

#### **Sami Baghdady**

While Belmont's Planning Board does include one professional planner, Karl Haglund, I believe having a lawyer, an economist, a builder, a business owner, a commercial appraiser, and similar skill sets also helps. The Planning Board should be made up of residents who have a mix of skills, and who can best represent the visions of the residents for their community.

The professional planner should be the staff person who helps the Planning Board implement the town's policy decisions. Belmont does in fact have a professional planner, Jeffrey Wheeler, who is providing excellent support to the Planning Board.

#### **Roger Colton**

Belmont's Planning Board should include trained planners. The lack of planning expertise has impacts on more than land-use decisions. For example, the 2010 Belmont Comprehensive Plan has an entire section on "public facilities and finance" planning for the town. Of the "short-term" (1-2 year) recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan for which responsibility was placed with the Planning Board, zero were implemented.

Replacing the Planning Manager should be a priority. The "economic development" in the Trapelo Road corridor in recent years has consisted of three more new banks (replacing three local businesses: Guilotti's, Greer's Sea Food, and Video Plus). While Belmont cannot develop its way out of its current financial problems, pursuing responsible new mixed-use

## **Belmont Citizens Forum**

### **Officers**

Grant Monahan, President  
John Dieckmann, Vice President  
Evanthia Malliris, Secretary  
Radha Iyengar, Treasurer

### **Directors**

Sumner Brown David Chase  
Anne-Marie Lambert Vince Stanton Jr.

### **Newsletter**

Meg Muckenhaupt, Editor, Production  
Susan Jones, Photography  
Sue Bass, Newsletter Committee,  
Director Emerita

**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).

development to generate economic vibrancy is needed. A professional planner is needed.

**4. Did the Cushing Square Overlay District work as intended? Should the bylaw have been more specific (e.g., regarding setbacks, height, size)? Should Belmont's other business districts be rezoned along similar lines?**

**Roger Colton**

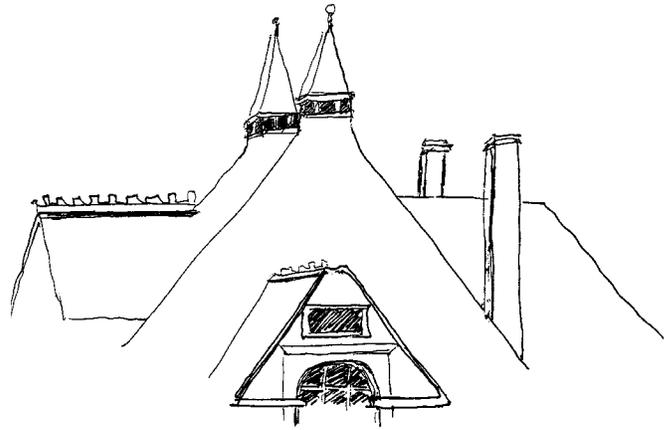
The permitting process for Cushing Village was unduly difficult and lengthy for the neighbors, for the developer, and for the rest of Belmont, whose residents continue to see a hole in Cushing Square after four years, and who continue to go without the additional tax revenue to be generated by the development.

In January 2010, before the developer filed his application for a permit, I published a guest opinion in the *Citizen-Herald* explaining how the Planning Board could use available tools to proactively assess the potential impact of a Cushing Square development. The Planning Board chose to be reactive rather than proactive, waiting for the developer to make his proposal, only then to respond to that proposal.

Belmont's business districts should be made subject to overlay zoning regulations. In addition to traditional dimensional requirements, however, these overlay districts should consider incorporating "form-based zoning." Consideration of form-based zoning for our business districts was recommended in Belmont's Comprehensive Plan, but has gone unacted upon.

**Sami Baghdady**

Most bylaws are copied from other communities, and have a track record of implementation. However, the Cushing Square Overlay District bylaw was uniquely drafted for Cushing Square. It is very difficult to predict the outcome of a zoning by-law until it is tested, and Cushing Village was the first test of the Overlay District. From that process, the Planning Board learned that the bylaw contained a floor area ratio that could never be achieved, that the bylaw did not adequately limit the fourth story component of a development so as to be in character with the Belmont community,



ANN COIT SIENEOS

and that more focus should be directed toward commercial and retail development.

By bringing the Cushing Square residents, business community, and developer together, the Cushing Village approval process was able to account for the shortcomings of the bylaw. As a result, Cushing Village is a project which will bring much vitality to Cushing Square, and will generate a positive financial return to the town. With the lessons learned, the Planning Board should revise the bylaw and evaluate the zoning of Belmont's other business districts.

**5. In the next decade, land owners along South Pleasant Street may want to build more densely. Yet 750,000 square feet of new development is already allowed across the street on the McLean land – a senior complex with more than 400 housing units and a 150,000 square foot research and development building. Should density on South Pleasant Street be kept low because of the future McLean construction?**

**Sami Baghdady**

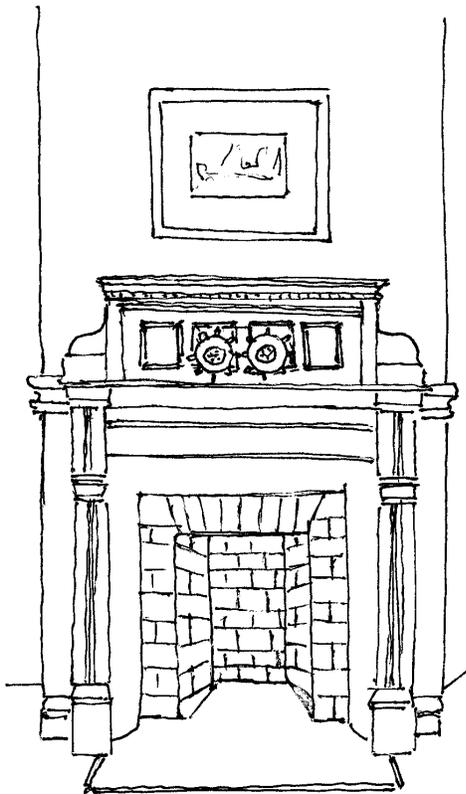
Although an assisted living complex and research and development facility have been part of the zoning of the McLean land for about 15 years, there has been no development and the land sits vacant. Nevertheless, regardless of any future development on the McLean property, any planning along South Pleasant Street needs to carefully consider the impact that greater density may have on increased traffic flow and the character of our town.

## Roger Colton

Belmont needs to define what it wants to be, not only next year, but in the next 10 years and 20 years. Belmont has fallen into the rut of only responding to the development proposals of others. Being reactive allows Belmont to make changes in proposals at the margin, but effectively allows the developer to set the fundamental terms of the debate. South Pleasant Street should be subject to a comprehensive planning process. We must then implement the results of that process.

Given years of inactivity at McLean, we should not presume that the existing zoning should continue indefinitely.

It is the follow-through, as well as the planning, that is important. Belmont engaged in a comprehensive planning process for South Pleasant Street in 1996. Led by Will Brownsberger (before he was selectman), the South Pleasant Street Land-Use Committee issued a series of land-use and zoning recommendations. Those recommendations have been largely ignored. For South Pleasant, proactive planning is necessary. But follow-through is also necessary.



ANN COIT SIFNEOS

**6. Belmont sewage persistently seeps into the storm water system, causing pollution of rivers and streams. During and after rains, stormwater gets into our sanitary sewers, which increases our water and sewer bills because we unnecessarily send stormwater to Deer Island for treatment. Are these problems priorities for you? How do you suggest addressing them?**

## Roger Colton

Controlling stormwater runoff is a priority. I authored the town's new stormwater management bylaw, designed to control stormwater runoff from new development. Belmont should aggressively enforce this bylaw. I also helped negotiate an agreement with the Cushing Village developer to plant 100 new trees around town, beyond those trees that are part of that project's normal landscaping. By absorbing water, trees help reduce stormwater runoff.

Belmont should adopt a "stormwater utility," a method of funding stormwater projects that removes those charges from sewer bills and places them in a separate stormwater fund. This will allow the town to access state and federal funding that otherwise is unavailable. Using these funds increases Belmont's ability to control stormwater and reduces the costs that must be borne by Belmont residents.

## Sami Baghdady

Belmont owns more of its utility infrastructure than many towns in the area. Ensuring that we construct, manage, and maintain this enormous investment efficiently is both a central priority for me, and critically important for the long-term financial functioning of the town. This logic applies to all areas of town involvement, not just water; though tightening sewer and stormwater systems is a wonderful opportunity to generate significant environmental and fiscal benefits.

I see three immediate leverage points here: continued cost-sharing with MWRA for priority inflow and infiltration projects; investment to identify and fix any gaps in our system; metering and monitoring so we can better measure intra-system performance and cost drivers; and continued inflow and infiltration surcharges on new developments in town where appropriate.

As Planning Board chair, I successfully obtained from the developer of Cushing Village an infiltration contribution in the amount of \$179,850, to be applied for the reduction of inflow and infiltration into the town's sewer system.

Belmont Citizen Forum's suggestion to require checking for illegal sewer connections at the time of a property sale is also of interest to me. This idea originally came from the Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee in 2003. We could have realized reduced pollution of our rivers and streams and considerable savings in our water and sewer bills if the inspection had been required over the past 11 years. Even if correction of that problem were not required in order for a transaction to go through as BCF had advocated, many property owners would decide fixing the problem makes sense, and the town would gain valuable knowledge with which to prioritize activities going forward.

## **7. What should the town be doing to leverage municipal grant opportunities and climate change studies in order to improve stormwater quality and to be prepared for the impact of sea rise in the Northeast?**

### **Sami Baghdady**

As with many of the new public safety issues we have grappled with in the last 12 years, the most efficient route for Belmont to follow with regards to climate change is likely by participating in regional initiatives to jointly identify risks and possible mitigation strategies, including the evolving public/private/nonprofit alliances.

Any effective response is likely to be complicated, long-term, expensive, and involve new types of coordination well beyond our own town borders. If municipal grants are available for this type of joint planning, that would be helpful. Care is needed, however, to avoid pursuing grants that instead target more unilateral strategies.

Belmont is an inland community. My primary focus on stormwater will be on actions that help the town retain our open space. In addition to providing significant quality of life benefits, open space often provides a variety of

## **Get This Newsletter Online**

Want to receive this newsletter electronically? Join the Belmont Citizens Forum e-mail list!

You'll get a link to the newsletter when it is posted on the BCF website and occasional mailings about important meetings in Belmont. We send out mailings about once per month.

Subscribe today at [www.belmontcitizensforum.org/contact](http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org/contact).

environmental services, including stormwater management.

### **Roger Colton**

I am now working with the joint Arlington/Belmont Stormwater Work[ing] Group. We have identified specific locations in Belmont/Arlington where stormwater facilities will have the greatest impact in reducing runoff. These projects will be submitted to the state for funding. Pursuing regional collaborations makes Belmont more competitive for state grants.

Belmont should also actively protect its interests in regional climate change studies. For example, the current development of 2,400+ new housing units in the Alewife area of Cambridge results in increased stormwater runoff, and thus increased flooding in Belmont.

That development, which increases congestion on Route 2 generally, and at the Alewife rotary specifically, also causes drivers to exit Route 2 to cut through Belmont on Mill Street, Lake Street, and through Belmont Center. The resulting traffic congestion is not only a nuisance to Belmont residents, but is also a cause of auto pollution that contributes to climate change.

Addressing flooding, as well as the congestion arising from the cut-through traffic off of Route 2, which contributes to climate change, involves related efforts. Belmont must participate in processes such as the Cambridge climate adaptation study, which can affect the massive construction of housing in the Alewife area. As

a member both of the Stormwater Work[ing] Group and the Belmont Energy Committee, I have met with the Cambridge staff coordinating the climate studies about how those studies will affect Belmont and about how Belmont representatives can participate.

### **8. What should the town be doing to make more progress against the five-year plan included in the town's 2008 Open Space**

#### **Belmont Historical Society Awards**

The Belmont Historical Society invites community members to nominate projects that have furthered the preservation efforts in Belmont for the David R. Johnson Preservation Award.

Awards will be presented at the Belmont Historical Society's Annual Meeting to be held May 14, 2014. Properties throughout the town, not just in the historic districts, are eligible for nomination.

The categories for nomination are:

- Private residences
- Commercial properties
- Publicly-owned properties
- Properties owned by nonprofit institutions
- Landscape projects
- Preservation of open space & land conservation

In addition, nominations for individuals, companies or institutions that have made significant contributions to historic preservation in Belmont will also be considered.

Download a nomination form at [www.belmonthistoricalsociety.org/preservation-awards](http://www.belmonthistoricalsociety.org/preservation-awards) or call (617) 993-2878. Please submit your nominations to the Belmont Historical Society by April 15, 2014.

### **plan? Should a new five-year plan be written which takes into account new information about climate change?**

#### **Roger Colton**

Recent information documents that climate change is resulting in changed flood plains and increased flooding potential throughout the Boston metropolitan area. This new data will have a substantial impact on Belmont. Decisions regarding open space needs in light of the new flood plain assessments are required to protect the Winn Brook and Waverley neighborhoods in particular.

Belmont's 2008 Open Space Plan, however, was not merely the "open space" plan. It was the "Open Space and Recreation Plan." Too many "plans" in Belmont lack follow-through, and too many decisions in Belmont are made without reference to already completed planning work. Whether it is the propriety of batting cages at the Grove Street Playground, the need to adequately maintain the Butler and Oakley playgrounds, or the need to adequately maintain the town's tennis courts, the need in Belmont is not merely to prepare the plan. The need is to follow through to ensure the plans (such as the Open Space and Recreation Plan) are implemented.

#### **Sami Baghdady**

The most immediate pressure to open space in Belmont is not climate change but continued and expanding development pressure. This includes efforts to rebuild existing parcels bigger and covering more of the lot, as well as major developments on Belmont's few remaining large parcels of open space. Managing our existing park system in the face of growing demands is also important in order to protect the long-term viability of the parcels and ensure a high quality experience for all users.

Including climate change and other new pressures on land within the town makes sense during any rewrite of the plan. However, in the short term I think we should focus on how well the town has met the goals from the last open space plan; and the most important current threats to our existing key open space assets.

# Depaving Sites Wanted

The Belmont Citizens Forum is looking for a private site in Belmont for a prototype volunteer-based depaving project that would transform the space into a permeable surface. Ideally, the space should be a minimum of 260 square feet (25 square meters) and fully or mostly paved with asphalt, concrete, or another impermeable surface.

Depaving means removing asphalt or concrete pavement and reclaiming the space for green stormwater management. Digging up concrete and asphalt will reduce stormwater runoff pollution, provide land for habitat restoration and native plants, and create more open space.

Depaving initiatives have occurred across the country, two of them headed by organizations in Portland, Oregon. City Repair, a sustainable-living nonprofit organization, pioneered the concept of depaving in 2007. Depave.org, a small volunteer organization, has helped spread the word about depaving to other US communities.

For example, in Los Angeles, an organization called North East Trees has converted paved areas within public schools to environmentally sustainable spaces. In New York City, the youth group Aspira tore up a parking lot and turned an abandoned basketball court into an extension of a community garden.

In Seattle, gardeners have reclaimed traffic medians. In Houston, a nonprofit group is turning paved schoolyards into public parks. In Davenport, Iowa, a downtown parking lot was turned into a fruit-and-nut orchard. Closer to home, where many yards are paved from border to border, Somerville Climate Action has organized many work parties to depave private and public spaces.

Depaving involves cutting the paved surface with a diamond saw, breaking it up with a sledgehammer, or prying it up with hand tools. The labor requirements and time involved depend on the size of the space, the thickness and age of the pavement, and the disposal site. The paving material is often recycled. The soil at the reclaimed site will then need appropriate preparation for its incarnation as a productive green space by the site owner.

BCF welcomes your ideas for a private space in Belmont that could use depaving. With the help of volunteers, BCF plans to conduct the depaving of both public and private spaces in the future. Please e-mail your ideas and contact information to [bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com](mailto:bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com). Thank you for helping to make Belmont greener!



# Citizens Comment on Path Options

By *Evanthia Malliris*

The Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC), formed by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) in 2011, presented three options for a community path through Belmont at a public meeting on January 22. The community path would be a multiuse path for walking, biking, pushing baby strollers, etc. Attended by more than 300 people, the meeting was designed to gather citizen input on the three path options recommended by CPAC.

In his opening remarks, Mark Paolillo, BOS chair, commented that the BOS had received many e-mails in support of a community path—and some not in support.

---

**“This kind of development is the future.”—Belmont resident Dwayne Bronson**

---

Paolillo reminded the audience that the BOS is an advocate for a community path through Belmont, and that the issue is, “Where does it go?” He offered assurances that the board would “not ignore the concerns of abutters,” and hoped to come to a resolution and a solution, hearing everyone’s concerns.” Paolillo praised the CPAC for having done good work.

CPAC chair Jeff Roth explained that the purpose of a community path is to improve public health and access to local businesses while also connecting Belmont to the rest of the state via the Mass Central Rail Trail. Ultimately, this would establish a safe, continuous route all the way to Berlin. He characterized the committee members as diverse, representing a range of issues and ideas. Roth presented the committee’s recommendations for three route options for a safe, multiuse path from Brighton Street to Belmont Center, the most controversial stretch

of the route, in addition to several options for other parts of the two-mile crossing of Belmont. The options were based on extensive engagement with the community, including several public meetings and a comprehensive survey that yielded more than 1,500 responses.

Roth stressed that CPAC was not tasked with carrying out a formal design and engineering study for a future path. Each option considered security, privacy, and safety concerns:

1. **Bicycle lane and sidewalk:** A striped path that shares the road, such as that on Concord Avenue, from the bridge underpass to Brighton Street. Users would be very close to car traffic.
2. **Cycle track and sidewalk:** A path between the street and sidewalk, on the same level as the sidewalk, such as that on Concord Avenue in Cambridge, which extends from Brighton Street to Fresh Pond Circle. This offers more protection to users than Option 1. Driveways, intersections, and on-street parking are concerns.
3. **Off-road, shared-use path:** A path that would run along the MBTA tracks, from Brighton Street west to Belmont Center. CPAC has researched high sound barrier walls, types of shrubbery, fencing, etc., used successfully on other multiuse trails, to shield the back yards of Channing Road residents from this off-road path.

Abutters to any part of the proposed path in Belmont were invited to voice their opinions, followed by the general public. Channing Road resident Karen Gut stated that she was not worried about property values declining, or about crime or privacy issues if a path was built along the railroad tracks. She would feel safer cycling along the tracks rather than alongside cars. She felt that the off-road solution would do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Several people who regularly cycle to work advocated for an off-road path, citing safety concerns, including one personal account of an accident resulting in broken bones. Russell Leino, who rides his bike to Alewife daily, thought that

an off-road route on the rail trail was the best way to eliminate tangible safety concerns. He emphasized that there could be real risk to not making an off-road path.

Alex Corbett expressed his worry that Channing Road residents did not know that a path might be put in behind their homes. Selectman Paolillo reassured him that that they would be given every consideration. Andrew Schwartz would like to see road improvements in the Channing Road area, no matter where or if a path is built.

Channing Road resident Anne Tierney said she was not bothered by train noise, but that she could hear conversations from the railroad tracks area and this would concern her if a path is built there. There was agreement that privacy for residents is a key issue of the off-road path option.

Art Krieger commented that the cycle track on Concord Avenue in Cambridge works well because there are no driveways; this would not be the case in Belmont. Krieger said that given the thorough planning that's gone into the path, it's time to make a decision based on engineering and concerns of abutters—and to get the path built.

Several residents had questions about how the continued maintenance of the path such as patrolling, lighting, and clean up would be funded. Selectman Andres Rojas said that the first job in getting a path built would be to set up a structure to fund it, and include maintenance costs. It was observed that the Department of Conservation and Recreation has been maintaining and patrolling the Beaver Brook area, and would make a good manager for a path.

Laura Vanderhart, who lives in the Beaver Brook area and had been a Minuteman Trail abutter in Arlington, stated that as a Butler parent—and as a representative of other parents—she was excited about being more connected to Belmont and having a safe route to the high school. She wanted to feel that the town is looking to the future.

Grant Monahon, Belmont Citizens Forum president, spoke on behalf of the organization, which owns the land adjacent to the tracks where option three would be located. He said that the BCF will be happy to work with CPAC



SUSAN JONES

and the Board of Selectmen to look at protective measures that address concerns of Channing Road families.

Monahon thought that privacy could be addressed with well designed landscaping, fencing, and berms, which would also mitigate water runoff into backyards. This would allow for a balance to be struck between a safe, off-road path solution for the greater community and the abutters' real concerns about what they believe to be the impact on their specific neighborhood. Monahon expressed hope that this could develop into a constructive conversation.

CPAC will be holding a Public Forum on its final recommendations on Wednesday, March 26, and is tentatively scheduled to brief the Board of Selectmen on these recommendations on Monday, March 31.

To be notified about meeting times and other news, sign up at [groups.google.com/forum/?hl=en#!forum/belmont-community-path](https://groups.google.com/forum/?hl=en#!forum/belmont-community-path) or check the CPAC website, [www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public\\_Documents/BelmontMA\\_BComm/CPAC/CPAC](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_BComm/CPAC/CPAC). The handout from the January 22 meeting is also on the website.

Evanthia Malliris is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

# Acorn Park Drive Hotel Project Disputed

Once more, will redevelopment at Acorn Park withstand flooding? Not necessarily, according to a citizen appeal to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). At issue is a proposed four-story, 85,000 square foot hotel, one of four more buildings planned for Acorn Park Drive.

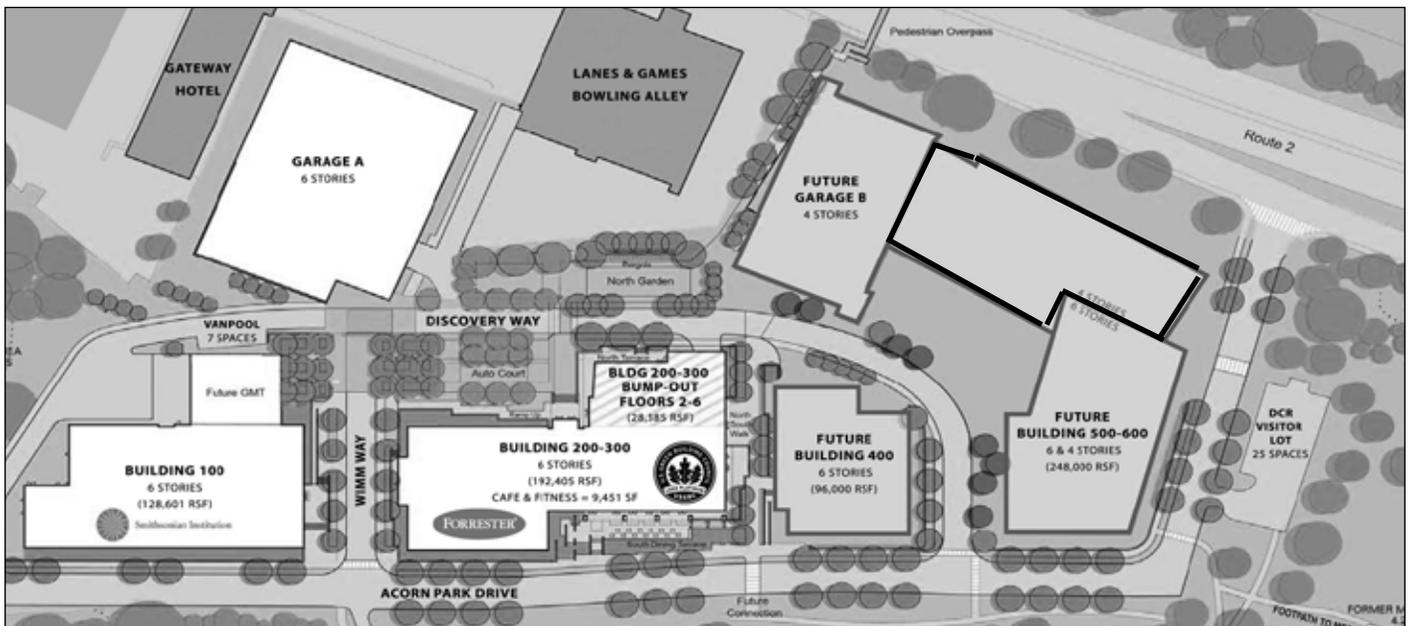
In November 2013, DEP granted an environmental permit for the hotel, subject to the required Notice of Intent, and in accordance with a 2004 Master Plan for Discovery Park, the area roughly enclosed by Route 2, Acorn Park Drive, and Lanes and Games. But a number of citizens, having witnessed the effects of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, feared there is insufficient understanding of both climate change overall and the regional impact of thousands of new residential units constructed in the surrounding area since 2005 (e.g., on Cambridgepark Drive and the recent Vox on Two condominiums on Fawcett Street.) They expressed concern that the hydrology and flooding risk of the surrounding area may have changed significantly since the studies on which the 2004 Master Plan is based.

The Cambridge Conservation Commission granted the permit (an Order of Conditions) on November 18, 2013, based on their view

that the hotel project complied with both the Master Plan and Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) requirements. The main request of the citizen appeal is to delay permitting until the results of a Cambridge climate change vulnerability study are available, likely at the end of 2014.

In response to the 10-citizen appeal in November, Heidi Davis, Acting Section Chief of the DEP's Wetlands program, conducted an informal visit to the site at 500 Acorn Park Drive on January 15. The purpose of the visit was "to determine if the area is significant to the interests of the [Wetlands Protection Act] and to informally discuss those issues relevant to the referenced project."

During the January 15 visit, days after a rain storm, Davis and the other participants saw large pools of water on the very flat, grass-covered site. The site is already designated as a Bordering Land Subject to Flooding, and portions are in a FEMA floodway. Although the area includes natural places for water to settle after rain storms, such as a two-foot deep gravel swale across the center of the site, at the time of the visit, water was pooled on top of the frozen clay soil rather than infiltrated into the soil. Water also pools on the site in warmer seasons.



Map of Cambridge Discovery Park showing the hotel site (black outline on right.)

The hotel site is part of a 27-acre parcel occupied from 1953 to 2004 by 11 buildings owned by the former Arthur D. Little Corporation (ADL). In the 1980s, a high-speed exit ramp was built next to the site, in order to provide access to the then-new Alewife T station. In 1998 and 1999, ADL sold its 42-acre parcel to Brian O'Neill, who then sold a 27-acre sub-parcel to the Bulfinch Companies (the remaining 15 acres where residential units are being proposed are known as the Belmont Uplands).

Bulfinch hired the planning and engineering consultants BSC Group to redevelop the 27-acre sub-parcel. A negotiated 2004 Master Plan for Discovery Park requires the redevelopment to proceed in stages, none of which can decrease stormwater storage or increase impervious surface from the 2004 levels. The Plan also requires that each building go through a separate environmental permitting process with the Cambridge Conservation Commission.

During the January 15 site visit, BSC representatives explained the site's history, and provided details about the project's stormwater management plan. Like the neighboring buildings, the elevation of the first floor of the hotel would be 10.8 feet above sea level. Based on conversations with former FEMA contractors, BSC stated that they consider this a "worst case" elevation level during a 100-year flood and that that they were proud to have chosen this level in 2004.

The four-story hotel would be much shorter than the neighboring buildings; it would be built on spread-footings rather than deep pilings into bedrock. Compensatory stormwater storage would be located between the level of the ground and the level of the first floor. In its height and foundation type, the proposed hotel building is similar to the proposed residential units on the Belmont Uplands site. Both sites are also vulnerable to stormwater flooding because of their clay soils.

BSC explained that all 11 original ADL buildings were removed in 2004 and two office buildings and a parking garage subsequently constructed. At the same time, a former parking lot was restored as a meadow, and a path to the subway built. Building 200/300, currently occupied by Forrester Corporation, was

## Petition to Halt Local Building

Cambridge residents living near Fresh Pond Parkway and Concord Avenue are asking Cambridge to halt high-density projects nearby until a new master plan is developed.

Concerned residents of Belmont, Cambridge, and other areas can contact the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance at [freshpondresidents@gmail.org](mailto:freshpondresidents@gmail.org). Their petition is online at <http://bit.ly/1ldmoPL>.

constructed in 2010-2011, along with one of two planned garages. Pending development in the Master Plan for Acorn Park Drive includes four more buildings: the hotel project, two more tall office buildings, and a garage. Unlike the ADL buildings, this development is planned for one side of Acorn Park Drive only, that farthest away from Little River and closest to Route 2.

In response to concerns about wildlife that benefits from the meadow restored in 2005, Section Chief Davis explained that WPA protects wildlife habitat and not individual wildlife. In order to evaluate whether further amendments are warranted on the Order of Conditions for the hotel site, in the coming months DEP will be analyzing both BSC's data and the detailed documents submitted by the citizen participants after the January 15 site visit.

There has been surprisingly little movement towards completing the building permit application for the Residences at Acorn Park on the Belmont Uplands property since a legal appeal was dismissed by the state appeals court in September. Glenn Clancy, director of Community Development in Belmont, reported in a February 14 interview that there had been no submissions to his office since October 2013. The Uplands has also been absent from both the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals and the Belmont Conservation Commission, which would need to close outstanding conditions for a building permit.

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

# Belmont Center Improvements Await Funding

By Sumner Brown

I talked with Glenn Clancy, director of Belmont's Office of Community Development, about all the digging up of streets in Belmont Center.

**Belmont Citizens Forum** I found a document, "06-01-11 Belmont Center Concept Plan.pdf" on the Community Development section of the town's website. Are these the plans?

**Glenn Clancy** Yes, they are, but we do not know how we are going to pay for the work.

We asked for funding from the state last year under the MassWorks infrastructure program. Our application was weak because we had no affordable housing in our proposal. We had everything else: public transportation, bicycles, city center redevelopment, roadway safety.

If we had received state funding, we would have been required to start surface work this summer. We had to have the below-grade utility

work completed by now. That is why we did all the digging last year. We were ready to start work this spring, but unfortunately we did not get the grant.

**BCF** What was the utility work?

**GC** We replaced water mains and gas lines. If a storm sewer or sanitary sewer has a major problem, we will do that as we repave. If sewer or drain inspection shows a hairline crack, we will note it and reline that section in the future when we have relining money.

Electric and phone utilities rarely require repairs prior to road reconstruction. Typically there are already conduits in place and any upgrades can be addressed without the need for excavation. Oftentimes these utilities are overhead and not a concern.

**BCF** The online documents describe many goals for this work. The most important were traffic



TOWN OF BELMONT

Streetscape proposed in the 2011 Belmont Center Concept Plan, available on the Belmont town website, [www.town.belmont.ma.us](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us).

operations and parking. But you found these were intractable.

**GC** The Traffic Advisory Committee considered making Leonard Street one-way, paired with Claflin Street the other way, considered traffic lights, considered a rotary just north of the railroad bridge, considered closing Leonard Street.

There is no better way to get traffic through Belmont Center. So we must accept severe traffic congestion for two hours twice a day on work days. That is what it is. The rest of the time, Belmont Center can be a pleasant, quaint downtown.

The plans show improvements that will make Belmont Center safer for pedestrians and cars, and more attractive during most of the hours of the week when we are not suffering rush hour congestion. We can improve the streetscape with wider sidewalks, plantings, flower boxes, benches for pedestrians, improvements to green spaces, and decorative street lights.

Parking is limited. Merchants feel strongly that reduced parking would hurt business. The plan adds about 10 public parking spaces out of a few hundred, but it would not change parking much. Implementation of a parking management plan will help take advantage of parking inventory in Belmont Center. We will get more useable green spaces by rearranging parking near Belmont Savings Bank.

**BCF** [At this point, Glenn opened a huge plan of the proposed Belmont Center improvements and started pointing. You can find the document by searching for "06-01-11 Belmont Center Concept Plan.pdf." on Google.com.]

**GC** This will make pedestrian access easier. The intersections at Channing and Claflin and Cross Streets will have curb extensions at cross walks. The cross walks at Leonard, Concord, and Channing are completely different, with shorter crossings and more helpful islands. Leonard Street will have just a single lane in each direction. So Leonard Street will be less wide, the sidewalks will be wider, there will be painted bike lanes. The cross walks will have curb extensions. Then on the south side of the bridge, there is a new cross walk with an island just east of the bridge. Yes, but all of Leonard

Street except for the bridge section will be single lane in each direction.

Concord Avenue between the old electric light building and the bridge will be widened. This adds parking spaces on the Belmont Savings Bank side and the road will shift closer to the train tracks. If we can secure funding and the approvals from the MBTA we will be able to get a nice green space between the road and the tracks. The pedestrian tunnel will be shorter.

The delta in front of Belmont Savings Bank will be changed to make it a more useful, larger green space. The driveway to the bank's parking garage will be retained as will the three parking spaces to the left of the bank. This new green delta could be a wonderful location for the holiday tree lighting instead of hidden away near the [old] fire station. Getting consensus for this change took time. One member of the Traffic Advisory Committee was adamantly against it because six parking spaces are lost. But Bob Mahoney, president of Belmont Savings Bank, looked at our proposal and said he could live with it. The bank loses six spaces but retains three new spaces close to their door and will benefit from many new spaces on Concord Avenue.

We tested the single lane traffic flow on Leonard Street with traffic cones. People did not mind it. Some people fear that traffic will back up on Clifton Street, but that happens with what we have now. The bottleneck is the bridge, not Leonard Street. A single traffic lane will make turns to and from Concord and Channing safer. It is better for pedestrians and bicyclists.

**BCF** What happens next?

**GC** We have to find a way to pay for it. Estimated construction cost is \$2.5 million. We could resubmit a grant application to the state. We could ask Town Meeting to bond it. We could use pavement management money to do the work, but this would delay street work on other streets for a year or two. If worse comes to worst, we could just repave without the changes. I'm hoping we can find a way to fund it and finish construction in 2015.

**BCF** When was the last time Belmont Center got road work?

**GC** Some years ago one part of Leonard Street got repaved because the potholes were so bad

they endangered pedestrians crossing the street. Other than that, I have been in Belmont 29 years and I can remember nothing.

Several years ago I told the selectmen that the Belmont Center pavement badly needed rebuilding, which everyone knew. What I pointed out was that we could either just repave, or we could consider design changes before repaving. The selectmen supported looking for improvements of the sort that are about to happen on Trapelo Road. The Traffic Advisory Committee has been involved.

If we do not make improvements now, our next chance may be in 30 years.

Sumner Brown is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

## Lone Tree Hill Earth Day April 12

Come work together with fellow Belmont residents for a hands-on cleanup and to perform trail maintenance on Belmont's Lone Tree Hill Conservation Land.

Lone Tree Hill spans close to 100 acres. The site is shaped like a backwards C and is enclosed by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street. It was dedicated as town conservation land in October 2011.

Come learn more about this valuable piece of Belmont's open space while helping maintain the area. Learn more about the trails that run through Lone Tree Hill and the meadows and open space that are home to many species of birds and mammals, and other organisms.

Meet on **Saturday, April 12, at 9 a.m.** at the green-and-white "Belmont Bikes" tent on Pleasant Street at the Lone Tree Hill Conservation area Coal Road kiosk. For a map of Lone Tree Hill, visit [www.belmontcitizensforum.org](http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org). For more information contact the Belmont Citizens Forum at [bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com](mailto:bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com).

## Environmental Events

### Herring Monitor Training

**Saturday, March 22, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.**

Train to count herring migrating past the Mystic Dam to track fish populations for the Mystic River Watershed Association. Part of the training will be outdoors. Registration required. [mysticriver.org/herring-monitoring](http://mysticriver.org/herring-monitoring). *Medford Boat Club, 1001 Mystic Valley Parkway, Medford.*

### CPAC Public Forum

**Wednesday, March 26, 7 p.m.**

Belmont's Community Path Advisory Committee will review their recommendation for a route for a multi-use path through Belmont. See p. 9 of this newsletter for details. For updated information, see [www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public\\_Documents/BelmontMA\\_BComm/CPAC/CPAC](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_BComm/CPAC/CPAC). *Location TBA.*

### Arlington EcoFest

**Saturday, March 29, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.**

How can we use our natural resources again and again? Demonstrations and displays will show new techniques to reduce waste. Activities for the whole family include workshops, music, and time to meet pygmy goats. [www.arlingtonma.gov](http://www.arlingtonma.gov). *Arlington Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington.*

### Accessible Beginners' Bird Walk

**Saturday, March 29, 1-3 p.m.**

Join the Friends of the Alewife Reservation for a beginners' bird walk to two spots on the Reservation accessible by wheelchair or a short walk from the Alewife MBTA station. All are welcome. [www.friendsofalewifereservation.org](http://www.friendsofalewifereservation.org). *Entrance to parking, Alewife MBTA station, Cambridge.*

### Sustainable Belmont Monthly Meeting

**Wednesday, April 2, 7-9 p.m.**

All meetings are open to the public. Active members will share progress on various initiatives; discussion and planning will ensue. [www.sustainablebelmont.net](http://www.sustainablebelmont.net). *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

## Second Annual Goat Gala

**Thursday, April 24, 4-6 p.m.**

Help Habitat welcome back the goats. Meet the newcomers, including bucklings and babies, and learn more about goats, their lives, and what they'll be doing at Habitat this year. Walk a goat, sample goat cheese, help with farm chores, or play goat games. Free. [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org). *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

## Statewide Volunteer Day

**Saturday, April 26, 9 a.m.-noon**

Bring your family, friends, and others who want to make a difference! Volunteers will be working in the meadows, removing invasives, and doing other conservation projects. Community service hours given. Free, but registration is required. [www.massaudubon.org/workforwildlife](http://www.massaudubon.org/workforwildlife), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org). *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

# Thank you for your continued support.

Your contribution makes a difference!

Each Newsletter issue costs about \$4,000 to publish. Thank you for your support.

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

**Thank you!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Make checks payable to:  
Belmont Citizens Forum

Mail to: PO Box 609, Belmont, MA  
02478

Give securely online:  
[www.belmontcitizensforum.org](http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org)

**Contact us:** [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 your donation go farther with matching funds*

Does your employer have a matching gift program?

Yes, my employer matches my charitable giving. Please contact me for details.

## *BCF depends on volunteers.*

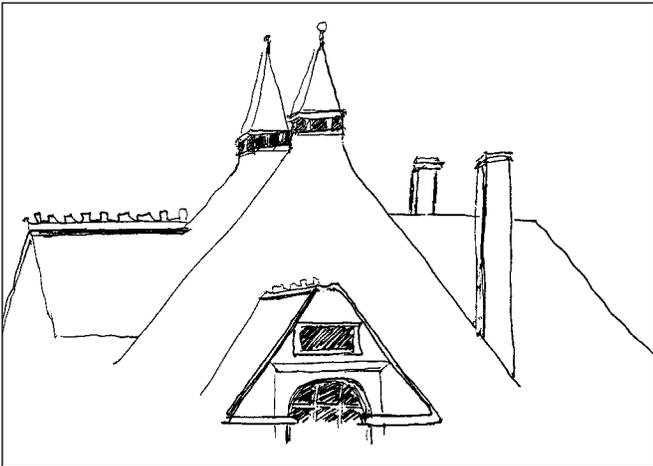
Join us in helping to maintain Belmont's small-town atmosphere.

- Writing or editing for the Newsletter
- Community path work
- Newsletter mailings
- Event organizing

Belmont Citizens Forum  
P.O. Box 609  
Belmont MA 02478  
Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Org.  
US Postage PAID  
Boston MA  
Permit No. 56393

**March/April 2014**



**Candidates Answer BCF Questions . . . . . 1**  
**Forum Seeks Space to Depave . . . . . 4**  
**CPAC Presents Path Options . . . . . 8**

**Acorn Park Hotel Disputed . . . . . 10**  
**Belmont Center Awaits Funds . . . . . 12**  
**Goat Gala and other Events . . . . . 14**

