

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol.1, No. 5

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

September 2000

Cell Antennas: Coming to a Rooftop Near You

By Sharon Vanderslice

Cellular phones are everywhere these days, and so, it seems, are the antennas that make it possible to receive and transmit phone calls without the use of wires. Cellular calls are carried by radiofrequency microwaves and can be "handed off" from one cell antenna to another as the caller drives from one geographic area or "cell" into another.

Police and fire personnel have used mobile phones for decades, but the newest digital systems allow users to send electronic messages via computers and Palm Pilots as well as by phone--all without the use of wires.

As with any new technology, however, there are drawbacks. The new digital systems (sometimes called PCS systems) require a network of antennas spaced two to eight miles apart *across the entire country*. At least four companies are licensed to provide the service and each must have its own antenna network, operating at a different frequency. This means that hundreds of thousands of antennas will be installed in the United States over the next few years.

At present, there are four antenna sites in Belmont, each with multiple antennas: one on top of the Watertown Savings Bank, at 30 Church Street in Waverley Square; another on top of the Belmont Manor apartment building, at 125 Trapelo Road in Cushing Square; and a third on top of the police station, at 460 Concord Avenue in Belmont Center.

Summary: By law, Belmont cannot prohibit cell antennas in town. But deciding where to put them in this densely populated town is a challenge.

The fourth is on the McLean property, on land that has been allocated to the new town cemetery on Belmont Hill. A fifth site, a free-standing monopole to be erected in the town's Highway Yard off Waverley Street, was nixed by the selectmen because of strong opposition from neighborhood residents. In fact, all of these sites, except for the police station, faced opposition.

Neighbors Object to "Visual Blight"

What's so terrible about a cell antenna in your backyard? In petitions and in public hearings, residents have raised multiple objections. A cell antenna is unsightly because it is so tall. To provide efficient coverage in its territory, an antenna must be taller than the trees and buildings around it. A free-standing lattice tower or pole, on which many antennas are mounted, can stick out like a sore thumb in a residential neighborhood, spoiling the view and,

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Cell Antennas Raise Aesthetic, Health Concerns

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some say, decreasing property values. Town Meeting Member Mark D'Andrea, a vocal opponent of the Highway Yard pole, said that once such sites are approved for one wireless company, they tend to attract antennas from other companies and can quickly become what he called "pole farms."

Poles mounted on existing buildings can detract from the appearance of the building, especially if the structure is of historical significance, and can clutter the skyline. In a letter to the chairman of Belmont's Zoning Board of Appeals, in 1997, Dorothy Delandis and Charles Ocnos of Trapelo Road wrote: "When we first came to our dwelling, the building now numbered 125 Trapelo Road [the Belmont Manor apartments] was not there, and we could see as far as the Oakley Country Club from our front porches." Allowing Omnipoint to install cell antennas atop that apartment building, they complained, would be "adding another eyesore to a non-conforming building in Cushing Square."

Seventy-one Waverley Square residents signed a petition in 1997 protesting a Nextel installation at 30 Church Street, near the Waltham border, describing it as a "visual blight to the neighborhood environment." They asked, "Are twelve antennas sitting 45 feet high an appropriate 'Welcome to Belmont' sign?"

Cellular antennas can be hidden inside such existing structures as church steeples, but these steeples do not always meet the needs of wireless companies, and the churches may refuse to sign these

contracts for other reasons. The First Congregational Church of Waverley has already declined to house an antenna on its property.

Noise Bothersome to Some, Not Others

Noise pollution is also an issue. Antenna sites generally require air-conditioning units and backup generators to keep the power flowing. This equipment is enclosed in a cabinet at the base of the pole. When Belmont's Zoning Board of Appeals granted a permit to Nextel to erect 12 antennas at 30 Church Street, the company assured the board that the installation would comply with the town's noise by-law. But abutters of other potential sites remain worried.

Police Chief Ronald Blanchette, whose office looks out over a diesel-powered backup generator behind the police station, says this generator creates about as much noise as a diesel truck idling at a traffic light. Since the generator is used only for backup purposes, however, it is turned on for just 15 minutes every Tuesday morning. The required air-conditioning equipment at this site cannot be heard from the street, as it is installed in the attic of the station.

Does Radio Frequency Radiation Have Biological Effects?

For some residents, the greatest concern is the possible health risk associated with long-term exposure to low-frequency radiation. Judith Ananian Sarno and Ann Oteri, of Waverley Terrace, are relieved that no monopole will be going up in the Highway Yard, but say they'd rather not see a pole go up in anyone else's backyard either. "I don't want a monopole in Belmont anywhere," said Oteri, "unless they put it up on the hill" on the McLean property.

Whether or not cellular technology is a hazard to human health is still being debated. Telecommunications companies say there is no risk, period. But not all scientists agree.

After the Follen Church in Lexington, a Unitarian church on Massachusetts Avenue, agreed to allow Nextel Communications to install antennas in its steeple, it was subjected to weeks of picketing by

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neighbors, who objected to the possible health risks, particularly since the antenna was located next door to a school. The picketers cited studies showing immune-system abnormalities, DNA strand breaks, and malignant cell growth in animals exposed to non-ionizing radiation. Some research suggests that non-thermal radiation could accelerate neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.

Research by Henry Lai and B. Wang at the University of Washington showed that rats exposed to 2450 MHz of radiation, the frequency you would be exposed to while holding a cell phone to your ear, had significant memory loss. An industry-sponsored study reached similar conclusions, prompting wireless consultant George Carlo to prohibit his children from using cellular phones.

Dr. Auman Bose, of the Bose Corporation and MIT, said in a speech to Wayland Town Meeting, in 1998: "I am now convinced that there is a real danger from these emissions."

Other scientists claim that the amount of radiation emitted by cell antennas is insignificant compared to other sources of radiation in the environment.

Doing research on the environmental effects of low-frequency radiation is unquestionably complex.

Effects may vary with duration of exposure, the frequency of the radiowave, the rate of energy absorption, the distance of the subject from the source, and other factors, such as whether the subjects have been exposed to carcinogens in the environment. In addition, the average person may be exposed to radiation from many sources in the course of a day.

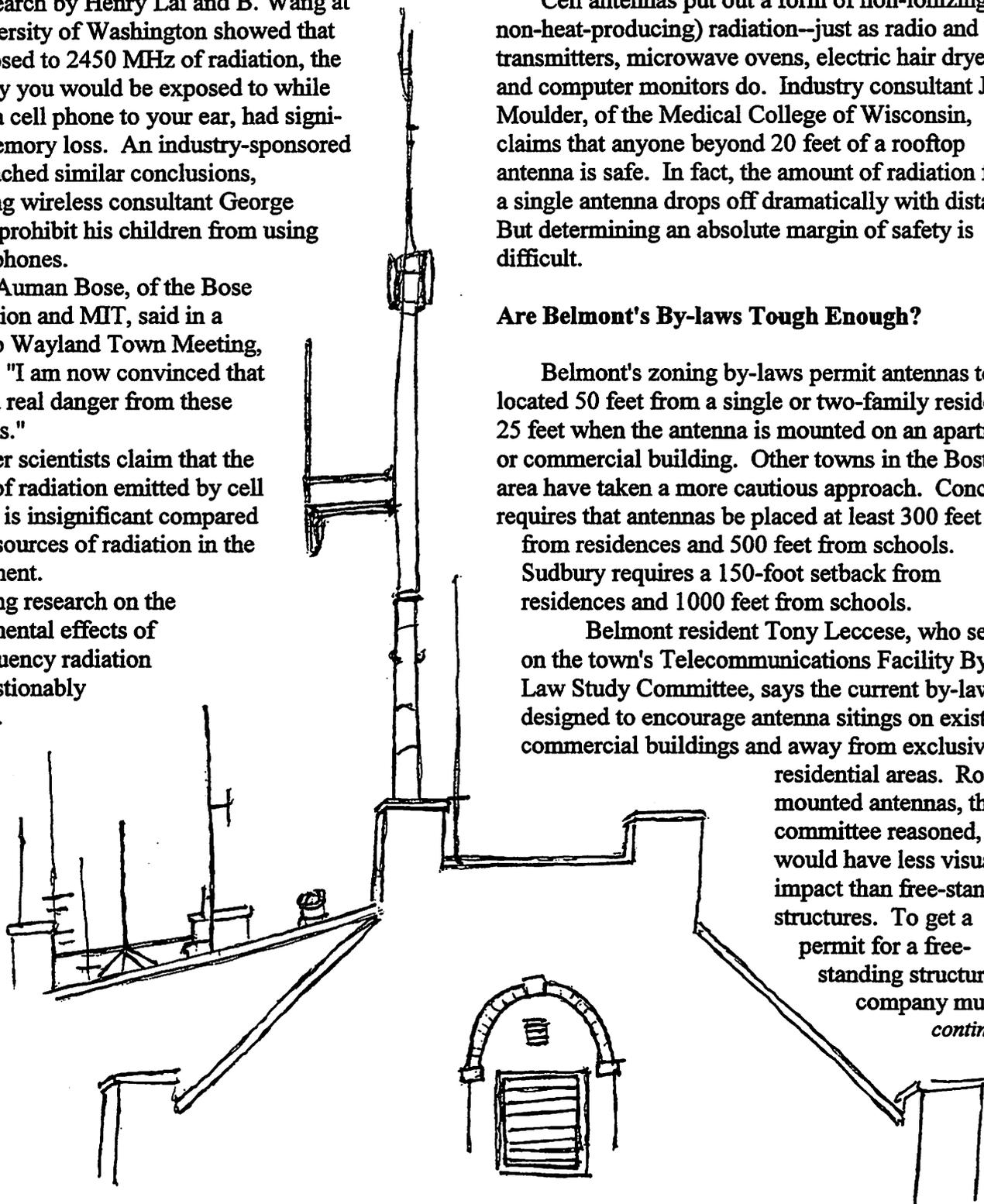
Cell antennas put out a form of non-ionizing (or non-heat-producing) radiation--just as radio and TV transmitters, microwave ovens, electric hair dryers, and computer monitors do. Industry consultant John Moulder, of the Medical College of Wisconsin, claims that anyone beyond 20 feet of a rooftop antenna is safe. In fact, the amount of radiation from a single antenna drops off dramatically with distance. But determining an absolute margin of safety is difficult.

Are Belmont's By-laws Tough Enough?

Belmont's zoning by-laws permit antennas to be located 50 feet from a single or two-family residence, 25 feet when the antenna is mounted on an apartment or commercial building. Other towns in the Boston area have taken a more cautious approach. Concord requires that antennas be placed at least 300 feet from residences and 500 feet from schools. Sudbury requires a 150-foot setback from residences and 1000 feet from schools.

Belmont resident Tony Leccese, who served on the town's Telecommunications Facility By-Law Study Committee, says the current by-law is designed to encourage antenna sitings on existing commercial buildings and away from exclusively residential areas. Roof-mounted antennas, the committee reasoned, would have less visual impact than free-standing structures. To get a permit for a free-standing structure, a company must

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Cell Antennas, *continued from preceding page*

prove that no existing structure would satisfy its needs.

The committee also recommended that no visible antennas be permitted in a historic district and that any free-standing ones must be at least 500 feet away.

In trying to regulate cell antennas, local planning and zoning boards find themselves between a rock and a hard place. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, passed by a U.S. Congress eager to encourage wireless technologies, limits the rights of municipalities to control the placement of these antennas. According to the act, a town may not prohibit antennas altogether or pass regulations that have "the effect of prohibiting the provision of personal wireless services." Nor may a town deny permits based on possible health risks so long as the antenna site is in compliance with safety standards set by the Federal Communications Commission.

In 1998, the town of Belmont issued a Request for Proposals, offering 35 town-owned properties as possible sites for cellular antennas. These sites included the four elementary schools, the middle and high schools, various town playgrounds and parking lots, the three fire stations, the Highway Yard, the police station, the cemetery office, and the Town Hall. Wireless companies were invited to bid on the sites, with annual rent to be paid to the town. (Belmont is currently collecting \$18,000 a year from Sprint for the pole on top of the police station.)

Judith Sarno thinks the town should declare a moratorium on new antenna sites and rewrite the zoning by-laws to require greater setbacks from residences, schools, and other places where children congregate. She says the federal government is currently studying the effects of microwave radiation on children. "It'll be years before they have answers to this," she said. "Meanwhile, there'll be a whole generation of children affected."

Real estate agents have told her that the obtrusive appearance of these antennas, as well as the fear of health risks, would lower property values. Sarno believes that people who own houses near cell antennas should get tax abatements. Indeed, the *New York Times* recently cited a case in Ho Ho Kus, New Jersey, in which a tax assessor determined that the

What Can Citizens Do?

B. Blake Levitt, author of *Electromagnetic Fields: A Consumer's Guide to the Issues and How to Protect Ourselves*, recommends that town planners and residents do the following:

1. Establish by-right zones for cell antennas away from populated areas.
2. Require justification for every new antenna. Make newcomers lease space on existing towers rather than establish new sites, unless they can prove from an engineering study that existing sites won't work.
3. Group together as many users as possible (although some Belmontians say this could create an eyesore.)
4. Establish regular emissions monitoring by licensed RF engineers to ensure that all facilities are within FCC safety standards. Require the companies to pay for this monitoring. (Belmont does this already.)
5. Require pre- and post-testing. Measure radiation before a transmitter goes on line and after, to assess what is being changed in the environment.
6. Urge legislators to preserve community rights in tower siting. (A bill that would have restored power to local zoning boards was passed by the Legislature this year but was vetoed by Governor Cellucci. You can express your opinion on this subject by calling State Representative Anne Paulsen at 722-2140 or State Senator Steve Tolman at 722-1280).
7. Encourage satellite-based systems, which will greatly reduce the number of ground-based transmitters. (These require higher-powered handsets for wireless phone users but may reduce the risks to bystanders.)
8. Get the federal government to sponsor more research on the effects of non-ionizing radiation on human health--with matching funds from industry. (Congressman Mike Capuano's local office is at 621-6208, Senator John Kerry's at 565-8519, and Senator Ted Kennedy's at 565-3170.)

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A Step-by-Step Plan to Save the Alewife Land

By Stewart Sanders

Little Pond and its surroundings in Belmont are remnants of the Great Fresh Pond Marsh. Every year since 1977, I have watched the herring arrive in Belmont from the Atlantic to spawn near the outlet of Winn Brook. They survive the trip when there is a flow of reasonably clean water with sufficient dissolved oxygen; they do not eat during the few days they are away from the ocean.

The limiting factor for the eggs is silt. If it covers the eggs, they won't hatch. What silt there is comes from runoff from roads and parking lots and from mud stirred up by carp in the water. Once hatched, the young herring must escape the carp and get sufficient oxygen to return to the sea. Nearby Lower Mystic Lake, which is in the same watershed, produces two species of river herring, and their young routinely return to the ocean before the first frost.

Belmont's Board of Selectmen requested a one-year moratorium on development of the Alewife area in order to conduct studies, so now is the time to

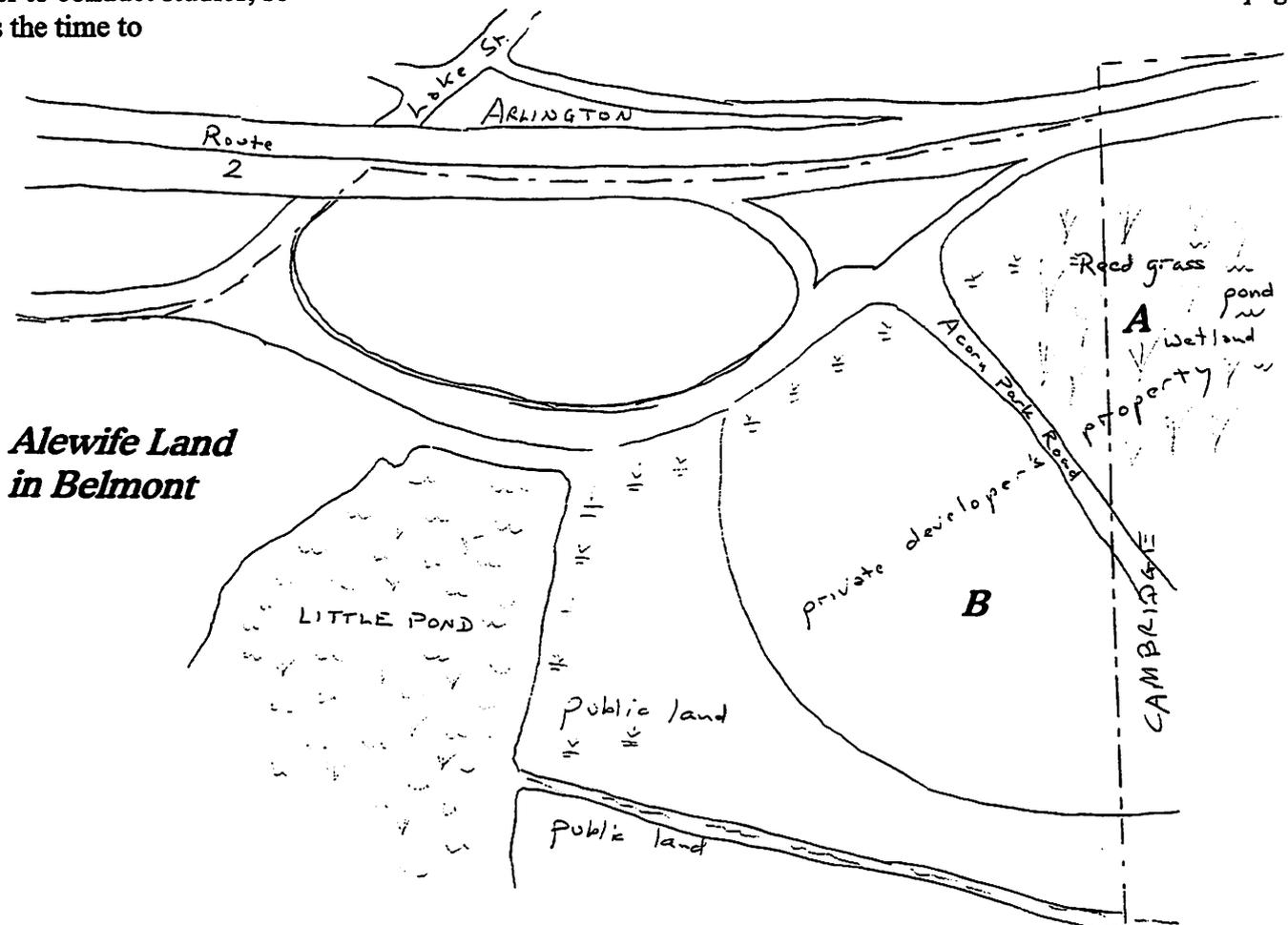
check for the presence of fingerling alewives and blueback herring in Little Pond. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, which is responsible for maintaining a healthy population of herring, will assist us in improving the spawning conditions in the Alewife area of Belmont.

Preserving this property will do more than improve fish habitat; it will also encourage the presence of other wildlife and act as a natural floodplain for the low-lying residential areas of the town.

I urge the Town of Belmont to state clearly and publicly that we intend to keep the green areas of Alewife green and the wetlands wet. If we do not act, the wetland areas (labeled "A" in the map below) may become parking lots. Illegal dumping may contribute further to fill this land, and accumulated bio-mass may hasten the area's transformation from pond to meadow.

If we act, we can (1) increase natural flood water storage and reduce flooding, (2) open a channel for kayaking from Little River to the wetland,

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(3) expand the habitat for aquatic plant and animal life, and (4) improve the quality of the air and water.

This is what town officials should do to save the 3.29 acres of wetlands in Belmont:

1. Read the Jason Cortell study prepared for Arthur D. Little, Inc., a few years ago. It evaluates the restoration potential of the site and shows the benefits of an increased capacity to hold storm water and reduce flooding.
2. Form a project team or request that an existing committee, such as the Conservation Commission, the Belmont Land Trust, or a subcommittee of the Coalition for Alewife, coordinate a project team. The property owner will need to be persuaded to participate.
3. Determine from the Massachusetts Wetlands Restoration and Banking Program (626-1177) whether the effort is likely to succeed. If the W.R.B.P., after conducting a preliminary evaluation, concurs with our views, move to step 4.
4. Submit a GROWetlands Project Nomination Form, involving the property owner and the City of Cambridge, and persuade the W.R.B.P. to join us in developing a work plan for the project. The Associated Industries of Massachusetts helps support this State program.
5. Enlist volunteers to solicit public support and raise funds. W.R.B.P. will help us to gain technical assistance and obtain permits. This task will require a considerable amount of time and effort, and the cost may be substantial, but there are resources waiting to help us.

The Belmont uplands (marked "B" on the map on the previous page) is another area we should preserve. This 8.92-acre parcel is (1) a beautiful and pleasant place to walk, (2) a filter that holds rainwater and recharges the pond and river, (3) a place to deposit material removed from the wetlands and Little Pond during restoration, and (4) a habitat for meadow mice, cottontail rabbits, red-tailed hawks, and American woodcocks.

The Town should first commit itself to keeping the area open woods and fields, not allowing it to

become buildings and roads. Then a committee can ask the Trust for Public Lands to help calculate the land price, negotiate with the owner, and oversee legal matters. It can also serve as a fund-raising consultant.

Preserving the uplands will require a great deal of time and effort. The cost will be high, and there will be a loss in revenue to the developer and the town. Yet this is one of the last remaining parcels of open land in town. If we take the easy route and allow this property to fall prey to development, the upland trees will be lost. Eventually the little pond and wetlands between Acorn Park Road and Route 2 will be gone too. Now is the time to act.

Stewart Sanders is an amateur naturalist and author of An Alewife Area Ecology Guide. Copies are available in the Belmont library.

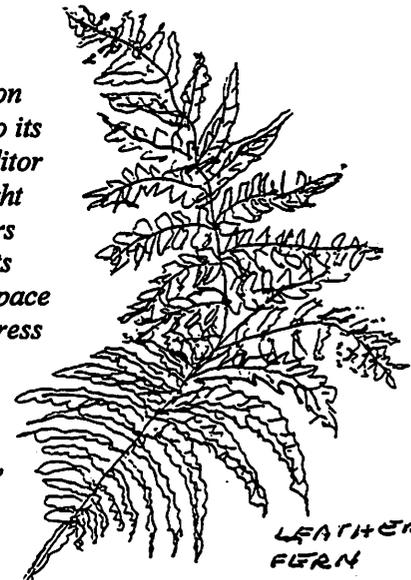
A Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

I appreciated Rosemary Burke's article on 'pedestrian-friendly roads' but would like to say that the pedestrians in this community could show more consideration of cars as well. There are enough cross walks -- some with buttons and, now, even sounds to make it easier and safer to cross roads without antagonizing drivers.

Karin Vanderspek
White Street

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LEATHER LEAF
FERN

The Planning Process in Belmont: What Is the Common Good?

By Jane Sherwin

What will the town of Belmont be like 20 years from now? Will it be a quiet community of homes, a greenway with bikes and parks, a center for high-tech activity?

If Paul Solomon, chair of Belmont's new Vision 21 Committee, has his way, the current residents of Belmont will decide. In the coming months, this committee of 43 people will be conducting interviews with local organizations and residents from every part

Summary: Using suggestions from residents and advice from a new town planner, Belmont hopes to draw up a master plan for the town's future.

of town. The committee will also send questionnaires to residents, included with their electric light bills, hold large public meetings, and even knock on doors to talk with our townspeople.

Solomon, a retired pediatrician who has lived in Belmont for 38 years, says the purpose of the Vision 21 Committee is to advise the Board of Selectmen and town officials on issues related to long-range planning.

In June, the town hired a Senior Planner, Timothy Higgins, who reports to Town Administrator Mel Kleckner. (See article on page 11.) Higgins will review site plans for the McLean development and will also help to define Belmont's long-range goals.

According to the American Planning Association, the role of a planner is to analyze statistical and geographical information, convene different interest groups to work toward consensus about the future, and draw up a blueprint for transportation engineers, architects, developers, and housing officials.

Why Do We Need a Planner?

Alan McClennen, Arlington's director of Planning and Community Development, says it is common for residents of towns like Belmont, which are heavily settled, to assume that no formal planning is needed.

But change, as we have seen, is constant, even in a quiet town. McClennen, who lived for many years on Claflin Street in Belmont, points out that the population grows or declines, incomes rise or fall, birth rates change, the economy collapses or booms, automobile use accelerates. An effective planning office can nudge a town's officials to think about the future and be prepared for change.

Ten years ago in Belmont, for example, a planner could have asked what would happen to the McLean property if the hospital experienced increased financial pressures. How would our community be affected? How could we prepare for the resultant changes and still meet our town's goals?

Representative Anne Paulsen has observed that, in addition to changes from development, we ourselves sometimes create pressure. In a town the size of Belmont, which is only two miles wide, people should be able to walk or ride a bicycle, but because everyone is in a hurry or concerned about their children's safety, they use cars. With the help of the Vision 21 Committee led by Solomon, someone Paulsen describes as "an exceptional person with strong leadership skills," concerned residents should be able to articulate their wishes for safe transportation and to work with town officials to find appropriate solutions.

What Makes Good Planning Possible?

McClennen says that successful long-range planning calls for maximum citizen participation and sustained interest. Residents may have a broad goal, like excellence in education, but are more likely to participate if they can identify with a specific activity or concern like the quality of the school buildings, the way these buildings are heated and cooled, or the methods for hiring teachers.

Everyone needs to understand, however, that planning involves a *very* long-range view. In Arlington, McClennen said, "some projects that were started in 1974 are just now close to completion, because town officials were simply not ready before

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Town Hall Complex: Renovate or Replace?

By Sue Bass

Having spent \$1.26 million to make Belmont's 1882 Town Hall accessible to the disabled, and on the brink of spending at least \$7.5 more on the Town Hall complex, Belmont is hesitating. The \$5 million reconstruction of the Town Hall Annex was supposed to begin last May, under federal court order. But the work has not started. The town says it needs to give this entire project more thought.

Belmont was sued in 1995 under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by John Gallagher, who complained that the town had done little to make its facilities accessible to handicapped people. Gallagher, who was then a member of the town's Disability Access Commission, is blind and must sometimes use a wheelchair because of a spinal disorder. The town settled the case in 1996, agreeing on a construction timetable. Though the schedule was amended in 1998 to give Belmont more time, the work is far behind. U.S. District Judge Reginald C. Lindsay has scheduled a conference for September 21 to discuss deficiencies in the Town Hall renovation and the delays in other projects.

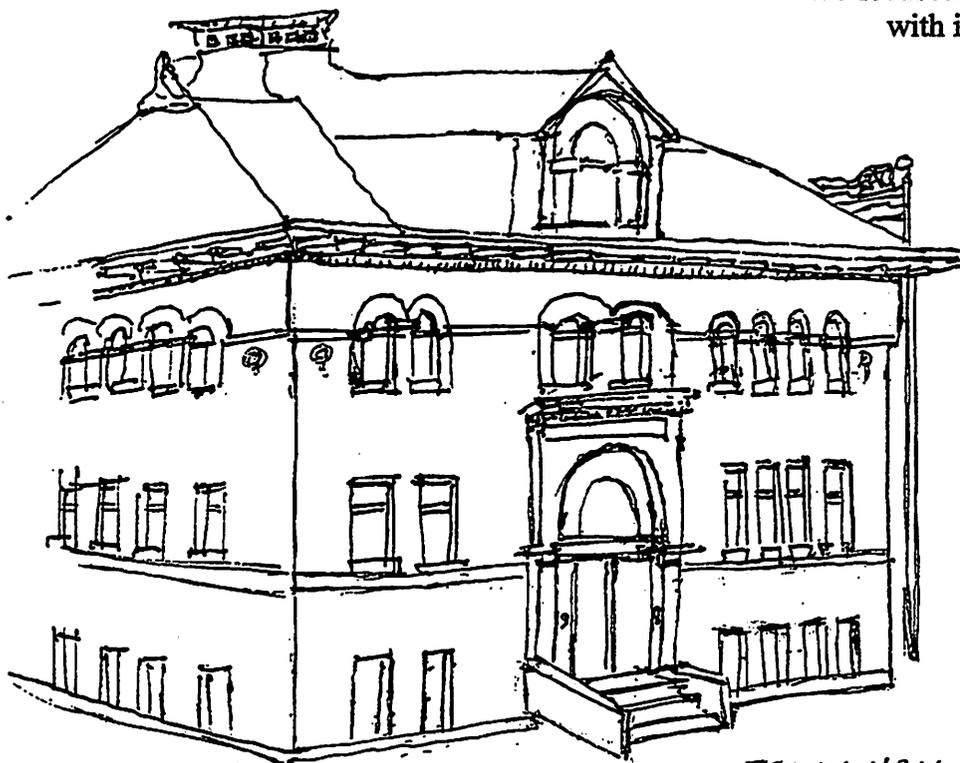
Meanwhile, the selectmen agreed last month to

recruit a professional team of consultants to study whether reconstruction of the Annex and the school administration building is the most efficient way to make the rest of the town's offices accessible to the handicapped. The consultants will consider other uses for four town buildings: the Annex, the school administration building, the soon-to-be-vacant light company building across Concord Avenue from Town Hall, and the police station, which is on the corner of Pleasant and Concord, next to the light company. Among the possibilities, in addition to office space for the town, are affordable housing, condos, and commercial office space.

The historic character of the buildings is an important factor. Renovating the 1902 School Administration building, on Pleasant Street across from the Belmont Woman's Club, to comply with ADA might destroy its architectural integrity. Built as the Underwood Library, a gift from Henry O. Underwood in memory of his parents, the building is elegant inside and out, with bay windows, curved rooms, interior arches, circular staircases, a two-story gallery, and many changes of level – up a few steps here, down a step there. Making it fully accessible could spoil its beauty.

"We focused on the disadvantages of tampering with it," explained Pat Bruschi, a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Town Hall Complex Space Needs. But another factor must have been the price tag, which Bruschi believes could be much larger than the rough estimate of \$2.5 million, twice what the Town Hall renovation cost. It might be far more respectful of the building to sell it, perhaps for a single-family residence, perhaps for condos.

The Belmont Historical Society would love to have the School Administration building for a museum, since the society has outgrown its space at the library and is not



TOWN HALL ANNEX

likely to get larger space in the library expansion now being planned. But the society's president, Victoria Haase, is uncertain that the society could afford to compete with developers to buy the building, if the town required that. "That would be a stretch," she said.

Another big question is the Town Hall Annex, built in 1897-8 as a high school. Because every office would have to be rebuilt, with wider doorways and more internal space, so that employees in wheelchairs could maneuver among the file cabinets, the reconstruction would involve much more than

Summary: Constructing new municipal buildings to comply with disability access requirements may be cheaper than renovating our existing ones. But preservationists say money isn't everything.

just adding an elevator and larger rest rooms, Brusch said. The \$5 million price tag – four times the cost of the Town Hall renovation – would give the town a nice building, but the Annex would not provide enough extra space to accommodate the school administration staff, and there's not enough room for them at any of the town's schools, either.

"Where this got started was people saying, 'Why are we paying \$5 million without getting any more space?'" Brusch remarked. When that question was asked last May, the selectmen created the Ad Hoc Committee to come up with a game plan. The committee recommended that the town hire a consultant team to do a feasibility study of various options, including moving town offices out of the Town Hall Annex.

Perhaps the town could get more efficient accessible office space at a lower price if it built a new building, either on the site of the Annex or elsewhere, Brusch said. There is other town-owned land nearby. A developer could be awarded a contract to put a new town office building on one of the Belmont Center parking lots, on Claflin and Alexander streets, with underground parking built in.

Both the Annex and the School Administration building are protected by the town's Historic District Commission. Any exterior change to either one would require its permission, and the commission is not likely to approve of demolishing the Annex. For that reason, Brusch found the idea of moving town offices an attractive plan – "and then renovating the Annex for affordable housing. We think we could

get a lot of units," she said. "Or it could be condos. But we need affordable housing."

Brusch is an old hand at town construction. She served on the committees responsible for additions and renovations to the Winn Brook and Burbank schools in the 1980s, for the plans and construction of the new Chenery Middle School in the 1990s, for the renovation of Town Hall in the last few years, and for plans for the Town Hall Annex. She chairs the town's new Permanent Building Committee.

Brusch believes that, when we take into account the cost of disposing of lead paint, asbestos tiles, and PCBs, building renovation is more expensive than is generally realized. "My own very personal experience of five buildings in 15 years is that new is cheaper," Brusch said.

"That's why 50 percent of the beautiful buildings in this town are gone," said Linn Hobbs, a member of the Historic District Commission. "It's the same mentality. 'New, cheaper' progressively destroys the character of the town. It's absolutely criminal, the stuff that has disappeared."

Richard Cheek, the commission's co-chairman, said, "Since the chief responsibility of the Historic District Commission is to protect buildings in the district, we'll continue to support the rehabilitation of the Town Hall Annex, preferably by the town, but if not, then by someone else."

There are disadvantages to moving town offices even a couple of blocks away from the Town Hall complex. "I don't think it's really efficient for the residents or town departments to have three departments here, three departments there, and three departments someplace else," said Timothy McCarthy, manager of the municipal light company, who is also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Town Hall Complex Space Needs.

Another potential site for town offices is the light company building, since the company is moving early next year into a new \$2.6 million building in the town yard on Prince Street. (The electric substation must stay, however.)

The 1934 light company building could also be torn down and replaced with a parking garage. Currently, town employees, visitors, train commuters, and shoppers compete for the limited parking spaces in Belmont Center. The consultant team the selectmen have agreed to hire will also look into the

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Town Hall Complex, continued from Page 9

proposal, advanced earlier this year, for a new parking lot next to the light company building, which would involve cutting down a number of trees. "My emphasis is definitely on parking first," said Kevin Looney, the town's manager of buildings and grounds.

The town probably won't send out a request for proposals from consultants until after the meeting with Judge Lindsay later this month. But the Ad Hoc Committee has recommended that the consulting team include a real estate consultant, an architect, a planner, a professional cost consultant, and a parking expert. Perhaps it should also consider an expert on historic preservation.

The selectmen are torn between the desire to make this study thorough and the realization that it may be too late, because the federal court is likely to be impatient with further delay. At their meeting on August 28, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney remarked, "Once we do this, we're not going to do it again. I'd like us to look at it in terms of what we'd like Belmont Center to be like in the next 50 to 60 years."

But the others emphasized that there was not much time. "I'm worried about the court action," said Bill Monahan, chairman of the Board of Selectmen. "We need to be prepared for that. We need a plan."

Sue Bass is a Precinct 3 Town Meeting Member.

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aggregate value of property near a cell phone tower would drop as much as \$660,000.

The Best Sites for Cell Antennas

B. Blake Levitt, author of a widely cited book, *Electromagnetic Fields: A Consumer's Guide to the Issues and How to Protect Ourselves*, recommends that towns establish by-right zones for cell antennas on town-owned property far from residential areas.

In Belmont, the old incinerator site comes to mind. But Chief Blanchette says that area of town, on Concord Avenue near the Lexington line, is not feasible, partly because it is too close to powerful AM radio transmitters that cause interference.

In 1998, the By-Law Study Committee recommended against creating a special district for antennas, because "in light of the density of the Town and the general areas in which providers indicated that new facilities were most likely to be needed, it was not feasible." Some residents say they don't care if they live in a wireless dead zone, since these antennas primarily benefit drive-through commuters.

After the controversy over the Highway Yard pole, James W. Flett turned down a request from Cellular One to put a monopole on his Pleasant Street property because he was unwilling to offend his neighbors. "It was some pretty easy money, but I didn't want people to get all worked up about it. I'm too old for that," he said.

What About the McLean property?

The town's oldest cell antenna site is on the McLean land near the intersection of Concord Avenue and Somerset Street. According to Chief Blanchette, this 80-foot tower now holds separate antennas for the police, fire, light, highway, and recreation departments, as well as for the Council on Aging. Each department uses a different radio frequency.

The site is a good one for communications purposes. Blanchette says his department can cover the whole town from this one site. (The whip antenna mounted on the Sprint pole atop the police station is only a backup.) But, he says, this tower was not designed to hold so many antennas, and it

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In Memoriam

Judith K. Record

December 9, 1944 - September 11, 2000

A dedicated open space advocate who worked tirelessly on behalf of the town.

She will be missed.

Belmont's New Town Planner

By Jane Sherwin

Timothy Higgins, Senior Planner for Belmont since June 5, can look out his second-floor office window and see the flagpole and cannon on the Town Hall lawn, but only when he takes a moment from studying the McLean property maps on his desk. He reports his assessments to Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, and, with the help of Jeff Wheeler, the Planning Coordinator, provides the Planning Board with technical expertise and advice on decision-making.

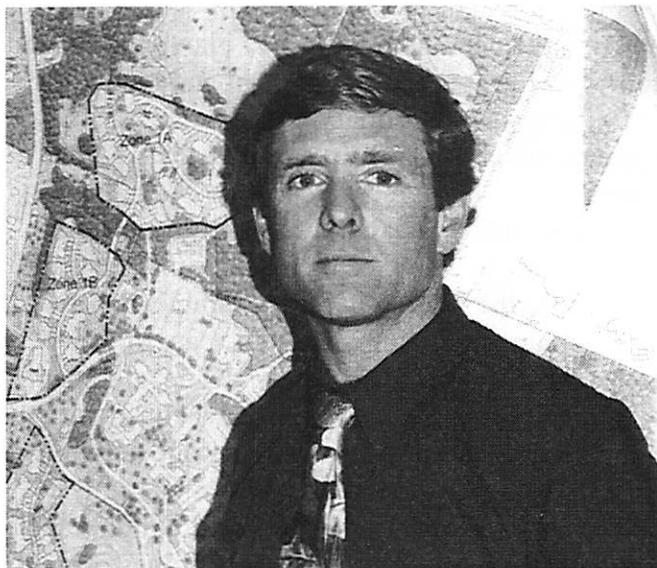
Higgins came to Belmont from Foxborough, where, as Mel Kleckner remarked last spring, "he survived the Patriot wars." His biggest challenge in Foxborough, of course, was the stadium project. As Town Planner, he was involved in protecting the town's interests during stadium construction and in creating a new 300-acre Economic Development Area.

Higgins says that the stadium project presented many of the challenges that Belmont faces with the McLean property, that is, protecting residential abutters from undue noise, light, and other disturbances, as well as the effects of increased traffic. Higgins found traffic the toughest issue for Foxborough, because 20,000 vehicles will enter and leave the community within two short periods on every game day.

Higgins was also involved in developing the plan for the Foxborough State Hospital property when the hospital closed in 1993. The town is still awaiting approval of the plan, which included affordable housing, open space and recreation, economic development opportunities, and assisted living.

How do Foxborough's stadium and hospital projects compare to McLean? There are several similarities, but Higgins finds the largest difference to be location. Foxborough, on Route 495, has substantial open space, and development is a familiar challenge. The McLean property, on the other hand, is precious open space in a densely developed area, and feelings run high over the issues.

The decision of Partners Health Care to develop the property, originally chosen as a hospital site by



Tim Higgins, who recently came to Belmont from Foxborough, studies maps of the McLean property.

landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted, has severely tested the town's ability to plan for its future.

Tim Higgins has had experience in planning since 1981, when he received his degree in natural resources management from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He earned a master's degree in regional planning two years later. In his first year after graduate school, he staffed the Old Colony Planning Council, helping it develop an open space plan and a Route 123 Corridor Improvements Plan. He also served on the advisory committee that produced the Department of Environmental Protection Stormwater Management Guidelines now in use in the Commonwealth.

During his time in Belmont, Higgins has come to appreciate Pleasant Street, with its historic homes and specimen trees, and the walk around Clay Pit Pond. He grew up in Brockton and lives in Easton, a town with a rich architectural heritage, the site of several buildings by the renowned architect H. H. Richardson.

Higgins believes that helping people become comfortable with change is central to his task. This means getting residents involved in the planning process, providing them with the necessary information, and helping them retain control over the ways in which change occurs. You may get in touch with Tim Higgins at the Office of Community Development, 489-8229, or (even better) at THiggins@town.belmont.ma.us

The Planning Process, *continued from Page 7*

now to implement them." A good planner keeps an eye out for the appropriate moment and has, at his or her fingertips, the information that formed the bases of past decisions. A good planner is, then, a good historian.

McClennen noted that it may be too easy for town officials to convince themselves that they are prepared for the future; that, for example, their current zoning regulations will take care of every problem that arises. But when a new development cycle begins, planners may be overwhelmed with the minutiae and therefore narrow their concentration. By participating in a committee like Vision 21, a planner can keep abreast of residents' opinions and priorities, and remind town officials of these goals.

Can Town Planning Succeed in Belmont?

Tim Higgins is not Belmont's first town planner. Some years ago, Belmont hired Lou Mercuri, who is now employed by the City of Newton. Anne Paulsen, who was running for the office of selectman at that time, made the need for a town planner the focus of her campaign. But the town was unable to give Mercuri useful guidelines, because it was not yet committed to long-range planning.

Since then, Belmont has relied on consultants and various volunteer committees to prepare reports and make recommendations on individual projects. Nearly 100 such studies were completed between 1960 and 1999. (The League of Women Voters is now collecting and indexing these studies to make them available for public review.) Higgins wonders how the town has managed a project like the McLean development so far without a professional staff to coordinate all of its many complex aspects.

Belmont's new planning capacity will be tested soon by more than the Partners Health Care/McLean development. Higgins observes that the Alewife wetlands and the commercial strip along South Pleasant Street are also of central concern. He says that the town must consider the financial advantages of office buildings near Alewife (increased tax revenue and low traffic impact, with Route 2 as chief access) in light of the possible protection of the open space through an MDC purchase. The property is currently zoned for residential use.

According to Rolf Goetze, a former member of Belmont's Planning Board, decisions that affect the whole town should be based on a shared vision of the town's future. Town planning should enable residents to come together to respond to the question, "What is the common good?"

Such a process will strengthen Belmont's sense of community. In a recent interview, Rep. Paulsen said that we should be committed to drawing new residents into the fabric of the town. Vision 21, she said, is an opportunity to make families "understand how important they are to the town, and how valuable their ideas for its future are."

Jane Sherwin has lived in Belmont for 20 years and is the mother of two children in the Belmont schools.

Both Senior Planner Tim Higgins and Vision 21 Chair Paul Solomon welcome your comments and suggestions. You may also contact any member of the Vision 21 Committee.

Contacts:

Tim Higgins, Office of Community Development,
489-8229 or THiggins@town.belmont.ma.us
Paul Solomon, Vision 21 Committee, 484-0117
Solomon@massmed.org

Sources:

American Planning Association www.planning.org
International Association for Public Participation
<http://www.pin.org/>

Help Plan Belmont's Future

Vision 21 invites you to share your ideas at a mass focus group.

**Belmont High School
Wednesday, September 20
7 - 9 PM**

Vision 21 Committee

Anne Marie Aigner
Coleen Baird
Richard Betts
Carl Brauer
Jeanne Brown-Lewis
Melissa Bruno
Rosemary Burke
Edward Clancy
Kim Clark
Elizabeth Corwin
Elizabeth Cowen
Myron Cronan
Susanne Croy
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Mary Jane Sullivan
Sue Timberlake
Francis Williams
Barry Winston
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William P. Monahan, ex officio

Citizens' Views Are Critical, Says Arlington Planner

Every year, Arlington residents receive, with their annual census report, a copy of the town's long-range goals and a brief questionnaire, asking whether they think the town is meeting those goals. Arlington's Vision 2020 Committee presents these responses to town officials and works with them to keep the town focused on its vision for the future.

The goals were drawn up after a two-year study, between 1990 and 1992 of the town's history and of its achievements. Using townwide focus groups, participants identified town strengths and the values that Arlington would want to be known for in the future. In 1999, the Vision 2020 Committee won an award for its work from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Alan McClennen, director of Community Planning and co-chairman of Vision 2020, says that Arlington has an effective planning process because the town is committed to the long-range view and because it has a strong town-manager form of government. McClennen has worked with Donald Marquis, the Arlington Town Manager, for 26 years, and he is the third town planner.

State Representative Anne Paulsen says that she follows with admiration Arlington's efforts to address its future. "Arlington has been able to deal with many issues, such as the fate of Spy Pond and related environmental questions, historic elements, education, and human rights."

Is it reasonable to compare Arlington and Belmont? Arlington, after all, has a population of 44,000, almost twice that of Belmont, and Belmont is 200 years younger. Arlington's director of Community Planning has a staff of three, while Belmont's new Senior Planner is aided by only one Planning Coordinator.

But Alan McClennen thinks that Belmont's smaller size is an advantage, because a larger proportion of its population can become involved. Paul Solomon, who chairs Belmont's Vision 21 Committee, believes that Belmont can learn a great deal from Arlington, and his committee has received substantial advice and counsel from Alan McClennen. Cavas Gobhai, an internationally known consultant who is facilitating Belmont's Vision 21 activity, has also worked closely with Arlington in its planning process.

--Jane Sherwin

Sources:

Arlington's Vision 2020 <http://arlington2020.org/>
History of Community Involvement in Arlington
<http://www.town.arlington.ma.us/aredev99.htm#redev8> (click on Vision 2020)
Alan McClennen, Director of Community Planning, Arlington
amcclenn@town.arlington.ma.us

Crosstown Bus, continued from Page 16

proposal several times and on December 14, 1999, voted unanimously to approve it. Douglas said it was suggested that the letter to the MBTA might receive more notice if it came from the selectmen, and so it was submitted to Town Administrator Mel Kleckner. Though Douglas said he personally handed it to Kleckner, Kleckner said the matter never formally came before the selectmen. Nine months later, the letter has still not been transmitted to the MBTA.

Two earlier efforts to add a crosstown bus route also came to nothing. In 1984, the MBTA's Northwest Corridor Service Study, which was considering changes in bus routes in anticipation of the March 1985 opening of Alewife Station, recommended a crosstown bus through Belmont, from Watertown to Alewife. The routes turned out to be controversial, however. MBTA documents show there was opposition to buses on Cross Street. Others remember opposition – perhaps from only one person – to buses on Common Street.

In the end, the MBTA dropped the effort. The January 1985 final report of the Northwest Corridor Study concluded: "Frequent discussions with the Board of Selectmen in Belmont, and with local residents, have revealed that none of the proposed routings through Belmont would be acceptable to the town, while still maintaining the passenger levels needed to support the route."

In the early 1990s, the Traffic Advisory Committee tried again. Linda Oates, a member from 1987 to 1999, said the committee suggested many different ways to get a crosstown bus, including service by a private vendor. "It wasn't feasible," she said.

Party Time!

The Belmont Citizens Forum will celebrate its first anniversary at a cocktail party on Saturday, October 21 from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

*For more information,
call Meredith Lord at 484-2969.*

Taken one at a time, the individual problems seem solvable. For example, senior citizens – considered potential major users of the crosstown buses – don't like to stand while waiting for a bus. Surely that's a problem that the Benches for Belmont program could deal with. Similarly, a route objection that came from just one individual ought not to block a bus that many people would find useful.

A New Bus Route vs. Extending an Old One

But the ultimate problem, Oates said, is that the MBTA told her, "If you add a bus or service at one point, then you have to take away a service at another point." Oates said she doubted that any reduction in the service from Harvard Square would be popular with the commuters who depend on those routes.

Maureen Trainor, operations planning manager for the MBTA, recalled telling Oates, "We don't think it's going to fly. We tried it before."

Though the crosstown bus considered in 1984 would have been an addition to the service provided to Harvard Square, Trainor said that any crosstown service the MBTA installed now would probably mean just extending an existing route. Thus, if the #74/75 bus continued to Cushing Square instead of turning around at Belmont Center, the MBTA would stretch out the schedule rather than adding an extra bus and driver to the route. That would decrease the frequency of the bus runs.

What Trainor recommends instead is pushing the McLean developers to provide service from their new complex not only to Waverley station but across town to Belmont Center and opening that service to the public. Shuttle buses from McLean are certainly a necessity, one that the town is working on; but they are scarcely the ultimate solution.

Perhaps something like the Lexington bus service, Lexpress, would help more. Three small buses travel on six routes around Lexington and as far away as the Burlington Mall. The buses provided 101,000 passenger rides during 10,072 hours of service in 1999, or about 10 passengers an hour. The operating budget runs to about \$250,000 – nearly \$74,000 from sales of tickets and passes in 1999, \$80,000 from an annual MBTA grant, and about \$100,000 subsidized by the town from such accounts as parking meter revenue. Lexpress sometimes gets other subsidies, like one from the Lahey Clinic, and earns advertising revenue to pay for route maps. *Continued on p. 15*

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.

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- Environmental Protection
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The Belmont Citizens Forum is a nonprofit organization. We expect that your donation will be tax deductible. If you have questions, please call 484-0809.

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

Cell Antenna, continued from Page 10

needs to be rebuilt—perhaps by a private company that wants to install an antenna of its own. The Cemetery Commission believes the tower should be relocated so that it won't clutter up the new cemetery. The town is considering a spot 1000 feet back from Concord Avenue and about 600 feet from the Belmont Day School. This location would require a new road on the McLean land to service the tower, a prospect that angers open space advocates. Moving the antennas into the open space would apparently require the approval of Belmont Town Meeting.

Controversies like these have prompted telecommunications companies to seek relief at the State House. Earlier this year, the industry, along with the Massachusetts Municipal Association, proposed a bill that would have streamlined the permit process by eliminating zoning board reviews, public hearings, and notification of abutters. Citizens groups were in an uproar. The MMA subsequently withdrew the bill, but the fact remains that, in the State of Massachusetts, cell antennas are considered public utilities. This means that local zoning ordinances governing their placement can be overridden at any time if the wireless companies choose to go to court. As one activist put it, "Telecommunications companies have the towns in terror of being sued."

Some residents hope that if we stall long enough, the whole problem will go away. Already, a small New Hampshire company, Transcept, Inc., is selling toolbox-size devices that hang from telephone and utility wires and hook up to cable TV or fiber-optic lines. The company maintains that this technology could replace traditional cell towers in some areas.

Sharon Vanderslice is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 2.

Crosstown Bus, continued from Page 14

A system like Lexington's could well be combined with Belmont's Belderbus, which is available to Belmont senior citizens by appointment.

The Traffic Advisory Committee has discussed the possibility of a 20-passenger bus that would offer free rides between the three town centers (Waverley, Cushing, and Belmont Center). Such a bus could be funded, in part, through a grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The next opportunity to apply for this grant is January 2001.

Hard as the TAC has worked on this issue, it's time for others in Belmont to put a hand to the wheel. Surely we shouldn't wait another 16 years before giving a lift to those who need a crosstown ride.

— Sue Bass

**Belmont Citizens Forum
P. O. Box 609
Belmont, MA 02478**

Address Service Requested

People Are Asking

Why doesn't Belmont have a crosstown bus?

At least three times in the last 16 years, Belmont residents have made a serious effort to get a crosstown bus to connect Waverley and Cushing squares to Belmont Center. Perhaps the bus would continue to the MBTA station at Alewife. Perhaps it would start at Watertown Square or in Waltham and run through Belmont. Perhaps, instead of ending at Alewife, it could go to Mass. Ave. in Arlington. Think of letting the kids go to the movies in Arlington or Waltham without having to drive them!

Lots of ideas have circulated – but no bus. With the McLean development about to increase the amount of traffic in the area to even more uncomfortable levels, this is the right time to improve the town's public transportation. Currently, that consists of four routes radiating out of Cambridge: the commuter rail train from North Station and Porter Square, with stops at Waverley Square and Belmont

Center; the #73 trackless trolley from Harvard to Waverley squares; the #74/75 bus from Harvard Square to Belmont Center; and the #78 bus from Harvard Square past the Mormon Temple to Arlmont Village, at the corner where Belmont, Arlington, and Lexington touch. You can get out of Cambridge, but there's no convenient way to get from one Belmont town center to another.

The latest proposal comes from the orthodontist Joel Douglas, a member of Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC). Douglas drafted a letter last fall to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which oversees the commuter rail and bus lines. He suggested a route from Waltham past Bentley College onto Trapelo Road, past the new developments at Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham and McLean Hospital in Belmont, through Waverley and Cushing squares, across town on Common Street to Belmont Center, and then continuing to Alewife via Concord Avenue, passing the high school, the library, and the Fresh Pond Mall.

The Traffic Advisory Committee discussed the
continued on Page 14