



Housing Availability Affects Business Climate

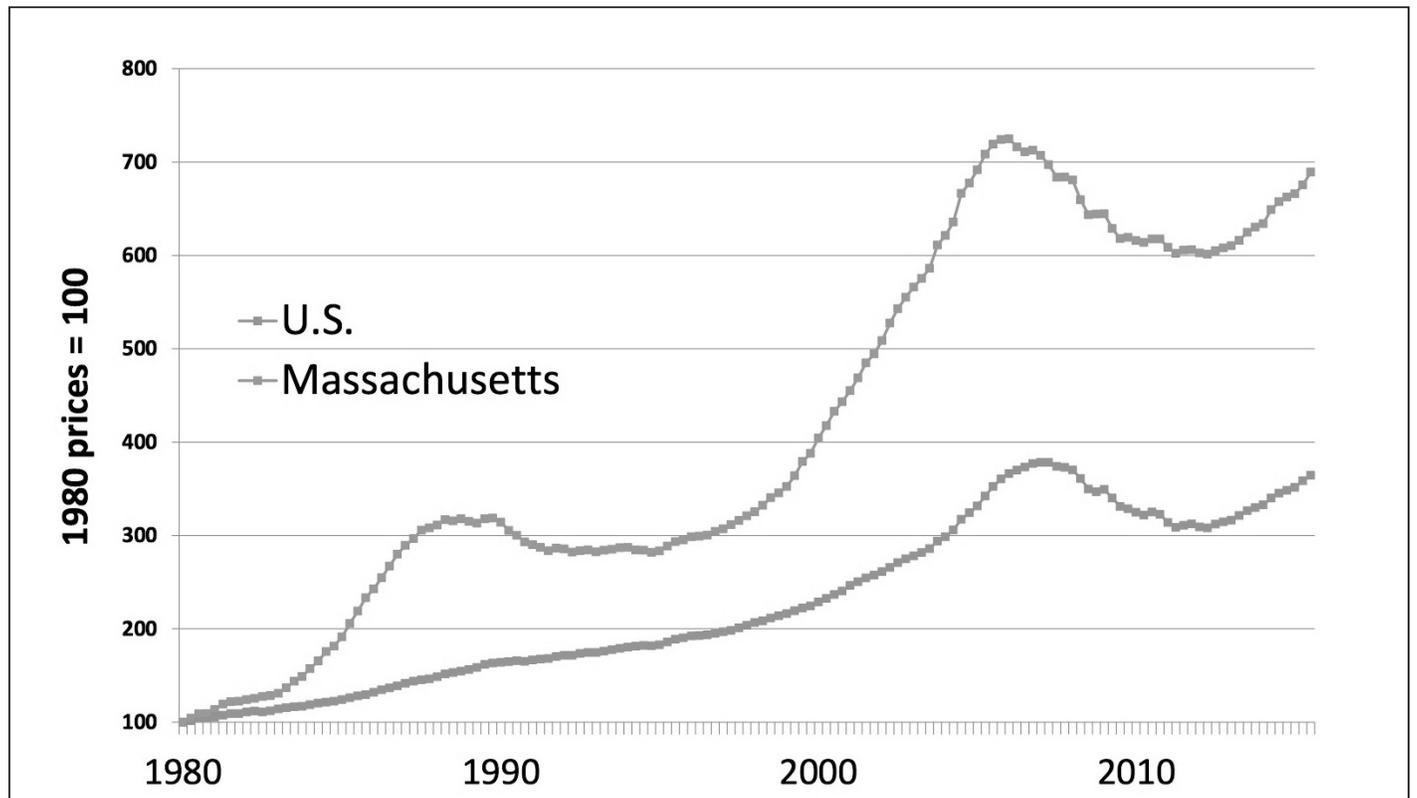
Zoning: *Re-drawing Between the Lines*

By Vincent Stanton Jr.

Last month the Massachusetts Senate, for the first time in over two decades, passed legislation that would significantly alter state zoning law. The proposed legislation (which will not become law this year as there is not yet a corresponding bill in the House) would superimpose on local zoning a new set of rules designed to encourage greater housing density, particularly near jobs and mass transit.

The new law would reduce the considerable freedom that cities and towns currently have

to formulate their own zoning laws in three ways. One is providing financial incentives to municipalities to adopt zoning law changes that comply with state or regional planning agency guidelines, two is reducing the voting threshold required to change municipal zoning laws (e.g., from a two-thirds supermajority of Town Meeting to a simple majority), and three is simply mandating changes in municipalities that do not pass zoning law reforms compliant with the new requirements. The overall effect of the changes would be to provide more “by right”



FEDERAL HOME PRICE INDEX (WWW.FHFA.GOV)

The Massachusetts average housing cost is represented by the top line. The Massachusetts average was the same as the national average in 1980, but has climbed considerably faster since then.

development (discouraging use of the special permit process), to shorten and streamline permitting timelines, and to incentivize “smart growth.”

As Senator Will Brownsberger has explained, this was not an easy vote for legislators, as it inserts them into a complex web of hyper-local issues—including the look and feel of a community—about which constituents hold strong feelings. Nonetheless, the Senate was moved to take up and pass the bill by accumulating evidence that the high cost of housing

has become a drag on the Massachusetts economy and threatens to become worse.

A June 14 housing forum organized by the Belmont Housing Trust and the Belmont League of Women Voters provided an opportunity to think about the effect these changes in state law would have on Belmont. Clark Ziegler, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), a quasi-public non-profit housing finance agency, explained how other cities at the forefront of the knowledge economy are building affordable housing much faster than Greater Boston, with Austin and Houston leading the pack.

More importantly, Ziegler showed, using US Census data, that growth of the young, educated workforce in the metropolitan Boston area has lagged other innovation centers, despite Boston’s outsized pool of college graduates. From 2008-2012 the young, highly educated workforce grew by 25% in Denver, 17% in Dallas, 16% in Portland, 15% in Seattle and 13% in Austin, TX, while Boston gained only 7%.

Rent or buy—both are expensive.

Metropolitan Boston has the third highest average rent among the top 50 metro areas that could be considered competitors. Only New York City and the San Francisco/Silicon Valley area are more expensive. In addition, Massachusetts has the ninth highest average rent of all states. As the Boston area competes for talent and manpower, cities and towns need to provide housing that people can afford upon arrival—not after they have climbed the career track.

Today, the average Greater Boston home is worth nearly \$700,000, nearly twice the national average of \$370,000. . .

In 1980, homes in Greater Boston were about the same average price as those in most other major metropolitan areas. Today, the average Greater Boston home is worth about \$700,000, nearly twice the national average of \$370,000 for major metropolitan areas (chart on page 1).

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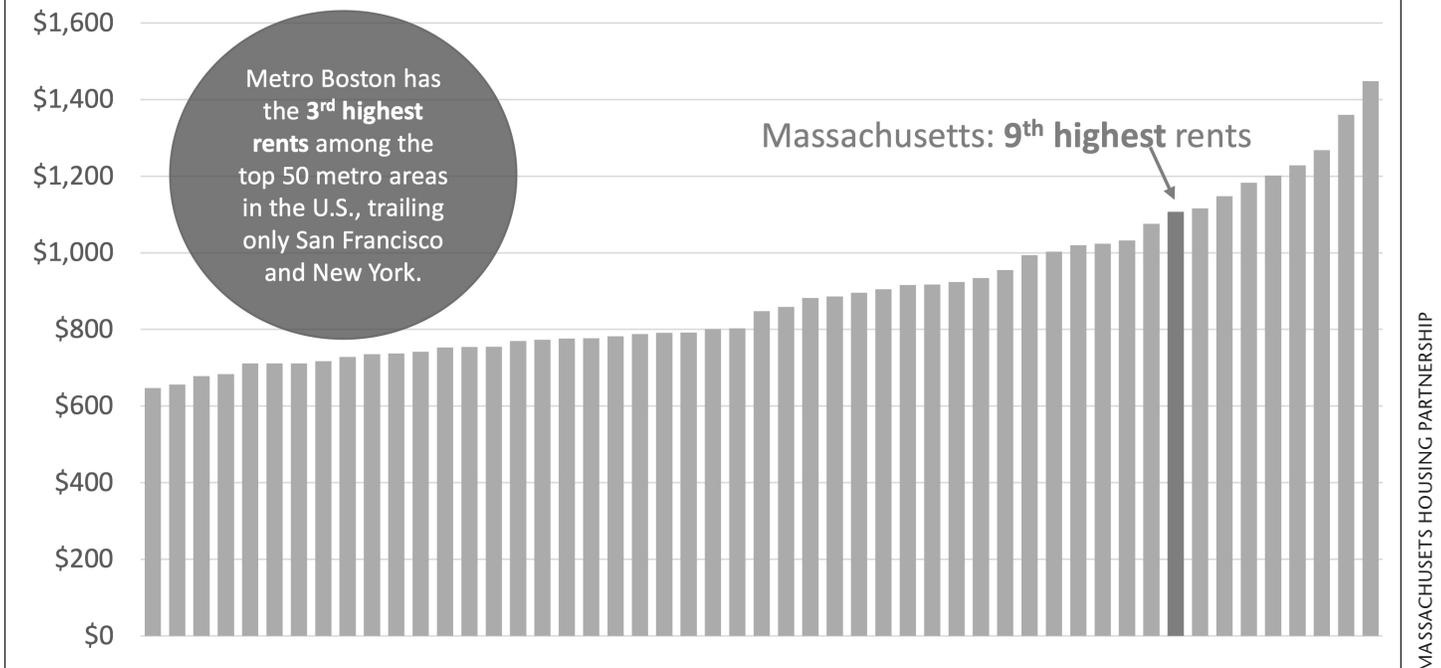
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Belmont Citizens Forum Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums. Our *Newsletter* is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

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Median Rent by State



According to the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, Metro Boston's high rents put the state at a distinct competitive disadvantage when recruiting talent for the area's key industries.

Low supply and high demand keep prices high. To support growth and meet demand, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) estimates that Massachusetts needs 500,000 additional housing units between now and 2040, and 425,000 of them should be in Greater Boston.

As Ziegler and Christopher Oddleifson wrote in the March 30, 2016, online edition of *CommonWealth*, "Demographic projections from the MAPC show that we need to produce nearly half a million new housing units in Massachusetts by the year 2040 to prevent job losses and achieve only minimal growth. Two-thirds of that projected demand is for multi-family homes, such as townhouses and apartments, and much of it in cities and close suburbs with good access to jobs and transportation."

How did we get here?

Part of the answer lies in declining housing production. In the 1970s, over 30,000 new homes were built in the state. In the current decade—at the current rate—only an estimated 13,000 units will be built.

Zoning in Massachusetts is regulated mainly by the state's 351 cities and towns, each serving an average of fewer than 11,000 residents. In many other states, county or regional boards handle zoning. In Massachusetts' segmented system, as Ziegler and Oddleifson point out, "Resistance to new housing often comes in the form of downzoning—allowing housing development in fewer places or at lower densities than was allowed in the past. It also comes in the

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form of discretionary zoning codes (as opposed to zoning as-by-right) that make local decision makers especially susceptible to community pressure.”

Both of those changes have occurred in Belmont: the minimum area required for a buildable lot is greater today compared to decades ago, and increased discretionary power has been granted to the planning board via the special permit process. However, to put those changes in context it should be noted that:

1) Belmont was substantially built out by the 1960s, with the majority of construction since then replacement of existing houses, and 2) the main driver for restrictive zoning changes in Belmont in recent years has not been resistance to new housing *per se* (after all, the 117-unit Cushing Village was permitted, albeit not yet constructed), but rather concern about the undesirable aesthetic and physical aspects of new houses that are vastly out of scale with the existing neighborhood (“McMansions”).

Housing is up, but only in five cities.

Overall housing production in the Boston metropolitan area was up significantly in 2015, in line with the growth target recommended by MAPC. However, just five municipalities, all in metro Boston’s inner core (Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Charlestown, Somerville) accounted for 62% of housing production in 2015, according to MHP data. For example, in South Boston’s Waterfront District, in Cambridge across the highway from the Museum of Science, and in Somerville’s Assembly Square, substantial new housing developments opened, all consisting entirely of multifamily units, mostly in high rise buildings.

The housing stock in Belmont (9,760 units in 2015) . . . will jump by over 4% in the next few years. . .

The housing stock in Belmont (9,760 units in 2015) has been increasing very slowly for decades, but will jump by over 4% in the next few years as the Royal Belmont on Acorn Park Drive fills up (298 units of one-, two-, and three-bedrooms) and Cushing Village (117 units) is



JOHN DICOCOCO

The condominiums recently built on Trapelo Road are one example of higher density housing that maintains the local aesthetic.

finally built. Still, the town will not come close to its 1960 population, which exceeded 30,000 at the peak of the baby boom. Today, the population is about 25,000.

Paradoxically, the McMansions that have triggered zoning bylaw changes in recent years often hold no more residents than their smaller predecessors, suggesting that the real challenge in Belmont is not so much to change buildable lot area or reduce restrictions on house size as it is to identify new locations – with Cushing Village as the obvious model – for substantial housing development.

More affordable homes needed.

The Senate bill would require more affordable and inclusionary units, whose occupants’ income is limited to 80% of the region’s median income, within almost every new development in every municipality. Right now, Belmont, like virtually all the Boston suburbs, lags behind the state requirement that 10% of all housing units be affordable.

Chapter 40B of state law allows developers to override local zoning in towns that do not meet the 10% affordable housing threshold. Because it was permitted under Chapter 40B, 100% of the 298 units in the Royal Belmont development count toward that 10%; however there is little prospect of the town reaching the 10% level in the foreseeable future. Sen. Brownsberger supports revisiting Chapter 40B as part of zoning law reform, because it provides no incentives to

locate new housing near jobs, transit or other infrastructure, or to preserve open space.

Belmont has thought about these problems.

Central aspects of the new legislation were anticipated by the 2010 Belmont Comprehensive Plan developed by the Planning Board, the Comprehensive Planning Committee and the town's Department of Community Development, with broad community input. In fact, if Belmont were adhering to the 2010 plan, the pending state legislation might have comparatively little effect.

'As seniors look to downsize but remain in Belmont, there are few opportunities for them to do so on a modest, fixed budget.'

As the 2010 plan notes, the housing crunch affects people who already live in Belmont as well as young people entering the workforce: "As seniors look to downsize but remain in Belmont, there are few opportunities for them to do so on a modest, fixed budget.

Also, young adults and young families looking to buy a first home, or to rent an affordable one, do not have many options in Belmont. Another group in need of housing in Belmont is the workforce. This cohort, both commercial and municipal, requires a range of housing that is not often or easily found in Belmont. Because the town's housing market is inaccessible to so many groups, Belmont is experiencing a slow, but steady homogenization of the population. This lack of diversity will hurt Belmont in the long run."

Among the prescriptions in the 2010 plan (See sidebar: Housing Strategies) are recommendations to encourage mixed use development and multifamily or townhouse development in the village centers and corridors; to provide density bonuses for housing development that provides benefits such as historic preservation, shared or underground parking, or air rights development where appropriate; to identify opportunities for higher density mixed-use and multifamily housing as part of a vision for commercial areas,

and a host of other ideas that anticipate the senate bill.

What next?

It seems likely that change is coming to Belmont and every neighboring community. Yet, because Senate bill 2311 will not become law this session, there is still time to try to shape the change.

While the Cushing Square Overlay District exemplifies village zoning of the type promoted by the proposed legislation, Belmont residents have not yet had a chance to see how that development works out.

The zoning in Belmont's other business districts discourages uses that were standard in historic villages. For example, Belmont's Local Business III districts, do not allow for any residential uses, even though they contain existing mixed-use buildings, which were the dominant historic building form.

However, while Cushing Village may be a model, there are other aspects of the Senate bill about which many Belmont residents would likely object, including the substantial loss of local control over zoning.

While the Senate bill already recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate (for example regional planning agencies are given an expanded role in drafting model by-laws, and in reviewing municipal applications to become a "certified community"), it might be that more incentives and fewer mandated changes would work as effectively, while politically more palatable.

Dear legislator: ready to act?

Thus one question that could be posed to legislators is whether the balance of carrots and sticks is optimal; whether the same overall increase in housing production might be achieved – although differently distributed – by more carrots and fewer sticks.

One thing seems certain: Belmont's historical aversion to planning (or at least to taking planning seriously) will be an impediment to achieving optimal outcomes for the town.

Vincent Stanton Jr. is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Belmont's 2010 Strategic Plan for Housing

Following are the recommendations of the *2010 Belmont Comprehensive Plan* regarding housing policy, from page 52. See the full plan online at: <http://bit.ly/29v4sPV>

Promote a walkable/bike-able community of neighborhood villages and connecting corridors with a variety of housing options.

- Encourage mixed use, multifamily, and townhouse development in the village centers and corridors.
- Consider providing density bonuses for housing development that provides benefits such as historic preservation, shared or underground parking, or air rights development where appropriate.
- Propose reductions to on-site parking requirements for housing in village centers that is accessible to public transportation.

Supplement property tax base with renovation and redevelopment.

- Prioritize housing as the reuse alternative for historic buildings located in walking distance to transit and commercial centers.
- Develop design guidelines to shape new development.
- Include representatives of historic preservation, architecture, development, and community-wide residents in a review of land use and building changes.
- Identify opportunities for higher density mixed use and multifamily housing as part of vision for commercial areas.
- Consider allowing flexible dimensional, site plan, and residential uses throughout town for properties that meet design criteria, in order to facilitate preservation of open space and historic features.

Amend zoning to allow/encourage creation of more smaller housing units, including rental housing.

- Consider allowing accessory/in-law apartments.
- Consider allowing three-family structures in areas where they are historically located.
- Consider allowing attached single-family and townhouse development where appropriate.
- Maintain meaningful and economically feasible inclusionary zoning bylaw.

Preserve and upgrade existing housing stock.

- Consider a 90-day demolition delay by-law.
- Consider encouraging building renovation by providing tax relief for improvements compatible with sustainability and historic preservation.
- Consider allowing division of existing homes into multiple units, retaining single family appearance.
- Consider adopting design and dimensional standards that encourage historic preservation.
- Propose design standards that require homes to be in scale with existing neighborhood.

Reduce carbon footprint of new housing construction.

- Consider adopting energy-efficiency building code standards and incentives.
- Consider requiring LEED checklist for all new development.

A Carrot-and-Stick Approach

Senate Bill 2311 is difficult to summarize as it consists of dozens of additions and substitutions to existing law, many consisting of as little as a word or sentence, and seldom more than a few paragraphs. There is no preamble that explains the purpose of all the tweaks. Also, to fully comprehend the proposed changes requires understanding the underlying law, which is extensive.

Nonetheless, the carrot-and-stick approach that characterizes the Senate bill can be conveyed in some measure by the following excerpts which (i) provide incentives to “certified communities,” and (ii) make it easier to pass zoning by-laws (which currently require a 2/3 supermajority) that conform to new state guidelines. Read the entire bill at:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/189/Senate/S2311>

Line 13: “The secretary of housing and economic development, ...following a public hearing and opportunity for stakeholder feedback, shall develop a municipal opt-in program to advance the state’s economic, environmental and social well-being through enhanced planning for economic growth, land conservation, workforce housing creation and mobility. The program shall include guidelines and criteria to evaluate municipal applications. Applications meeting program guidelines and criteria shall receive status as a certified community. Certified communities shall be entitled to certain privileges and powers and shall be required to provide certain incentives to benefit persons seeking local permits and local land use approvals.”

“The executive office of housing and economic development shall develop guidelines for a city or town to receive status as a certified community. The guidelines shall promote: (i) prompt and predictable

permitting of commercial or industrial development within economic development districts that allow for an appropriate amount of development to proceed as of right and within a specific reasonable time; (ii) prompt and predictable permitting of residential development within residential development districts that allow for the appropriate amount of development to proceed as of right and within a specific reasonable time;

The guidelines shall promote . . . open space residential design for certain zoning districts meeting minimum lot area thresholds for single-family residential development. . .

(iii) open space residential design for certain zoning districts meeting minimum lot area thresholds for single-family residential development; (iv) low impact development techniques; (v) natural resource protection zoning in areas of significant natural or cultural resources; (vi) development agreement contracts between a municipality and a holder of development rights to express the conditions to which the development will be subject; (vii) consolidated hearings and permitting for large development projects; and (viii) joint applications from 2 or more contiguous municipalities who together meet the goals of the program...”

Line 247: “...provided, however, that if a city or town has failed to meet the minimum requirements ..., a zoning ordinance or by-law that is consistent with these requirements shall be adopted by a vote of a simple majority of all members of the town council or ... by a vote of a simple majority of town meeting.”

Summary by Vincent Stanton Jr.

Pilot Project Tests LED Streetlights

Getting Smarter About Light in Belmont

by Anne-Marie Lambert

Can you see me now?

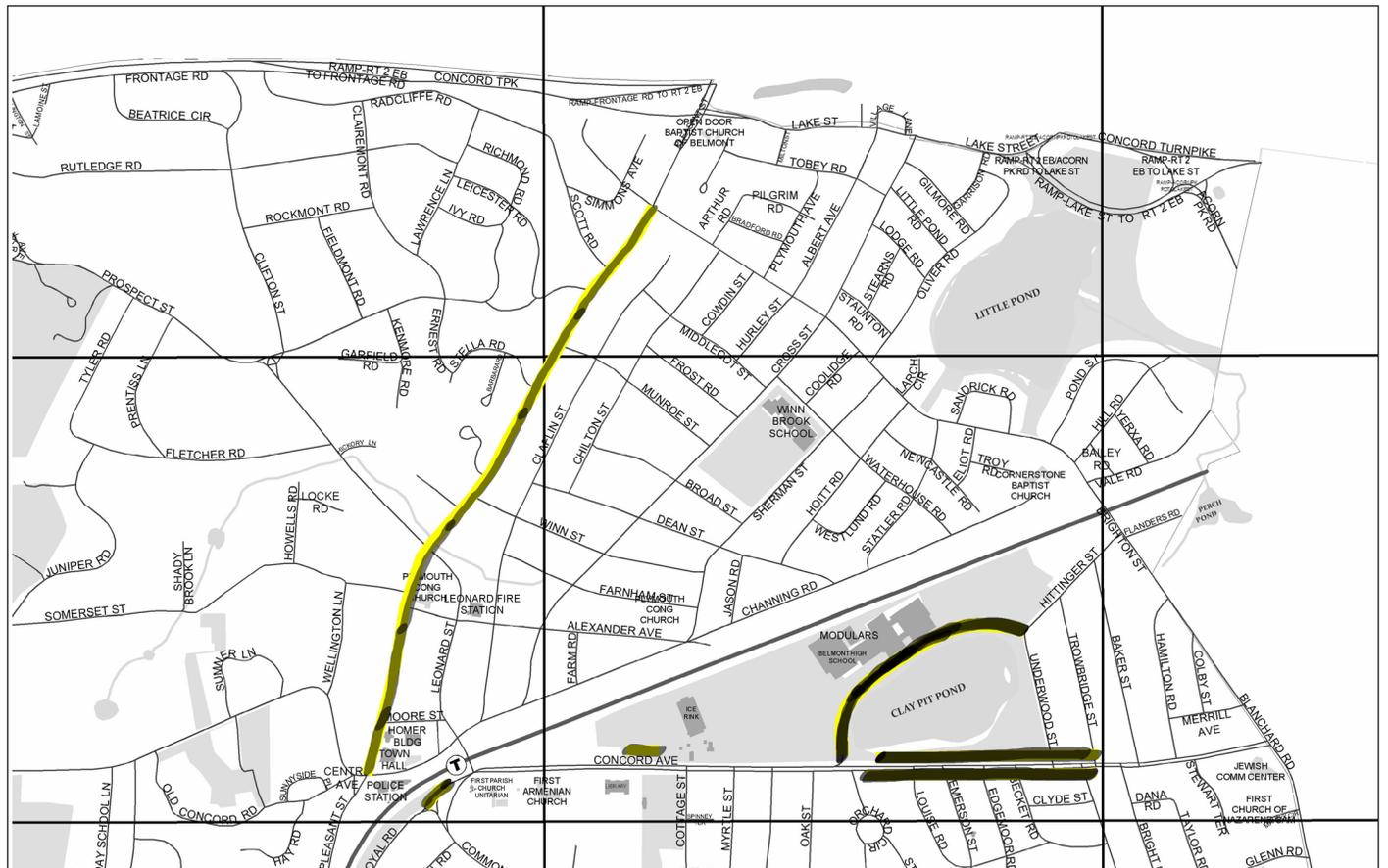
The Belmont Light Department is working to improve the efficiency of our streetlights. A grant from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources funded the replacement of 100 of today's 2,400 high-pressure sodium bulbs with LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs. This pilot project replaces 98 100-watt bulbs and two 250-watt bulbs with a variety of LED products.

The pilot project alone is expected to save 26 megawatt hours (MWh) per year, with a payback period of just over four years.

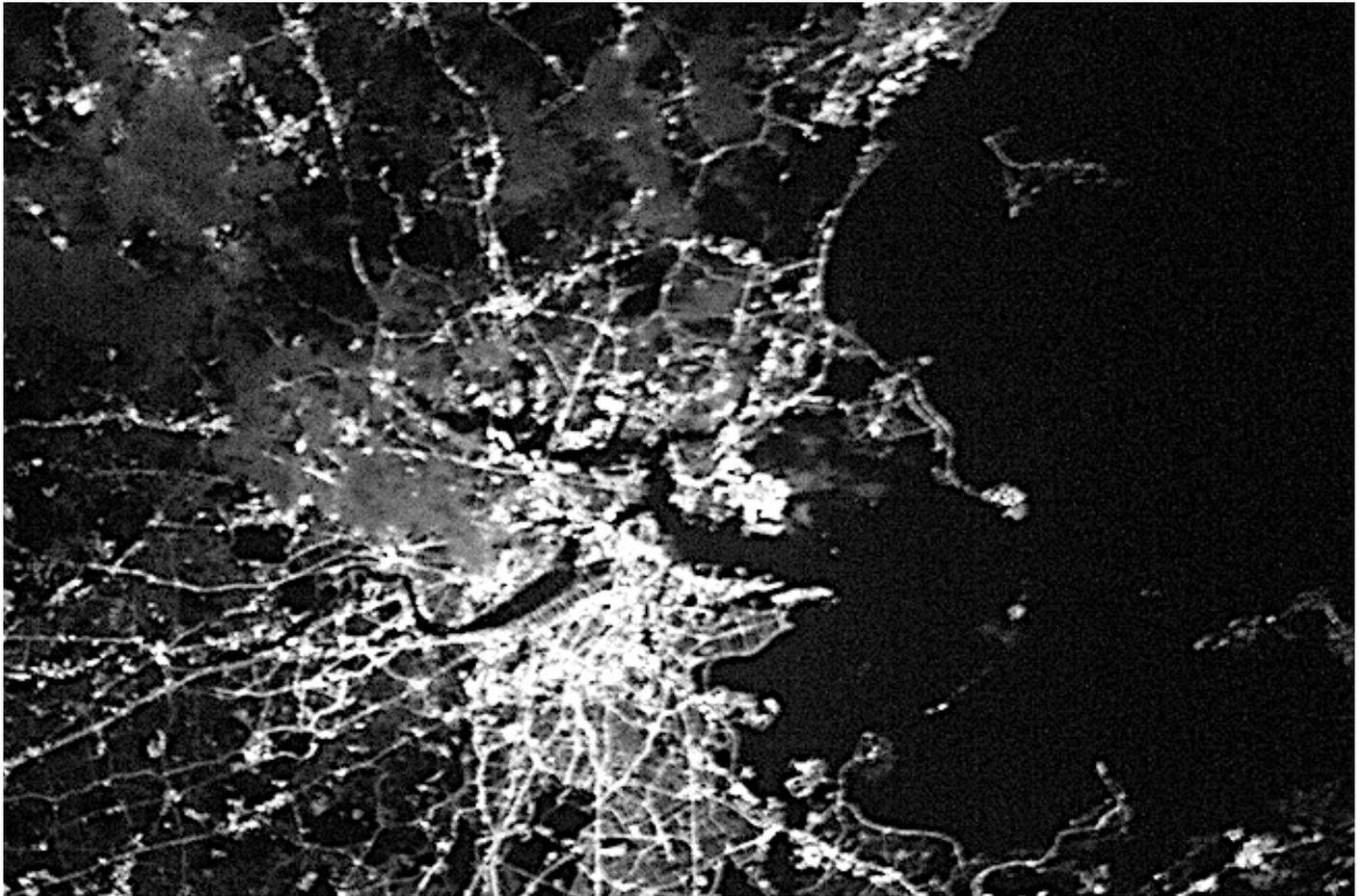
In the coming year, Belmont Light will evaluate the pilot installation for criteria including brightness, shadows, and intrusiveness in the neighborhoods where they are installed. (The town now has 2,392 streetlights.)

Lighting technology is changing rapidly at the same time that scientists are learning more about the impact of light on our sleep and on our health. LEDs are smarter and more efficient than old technologies but can also be much brighter. They particularly increase our exposure to blue light, which has negative effects. (More on that below).

On June 7, the Boston Area Sustainability Group (BASG) hosted a showing of *The City Dark*, a 2011 documentary about light pollution by filmmaker Ian Cheney. The film lamented the loss of places where stars in the night sky were visible and showed vivid images of migrating birds and turtles confused by light from buildings and streets. In recent decades, artificial light has masked the beauty of the night sky in more and more places. Belmont is



Dark lines covering Pleasant Street, sections of Concord Avenue, and the high school entrance road indicate placements of the pilot LED lights.



NASA

Greater Boston at night as seen from space.

part of the big bright light surrounding Boston in NASA's 2012 composite image of the earth at night. (See nightearth.com.)

The City Dark

The documentary was followed by two brief presentations—one about the factors leading to dramatic increases in the amount of blue light to which we are exposed every day, and one about scientific research on the effects of different types of light on human health.

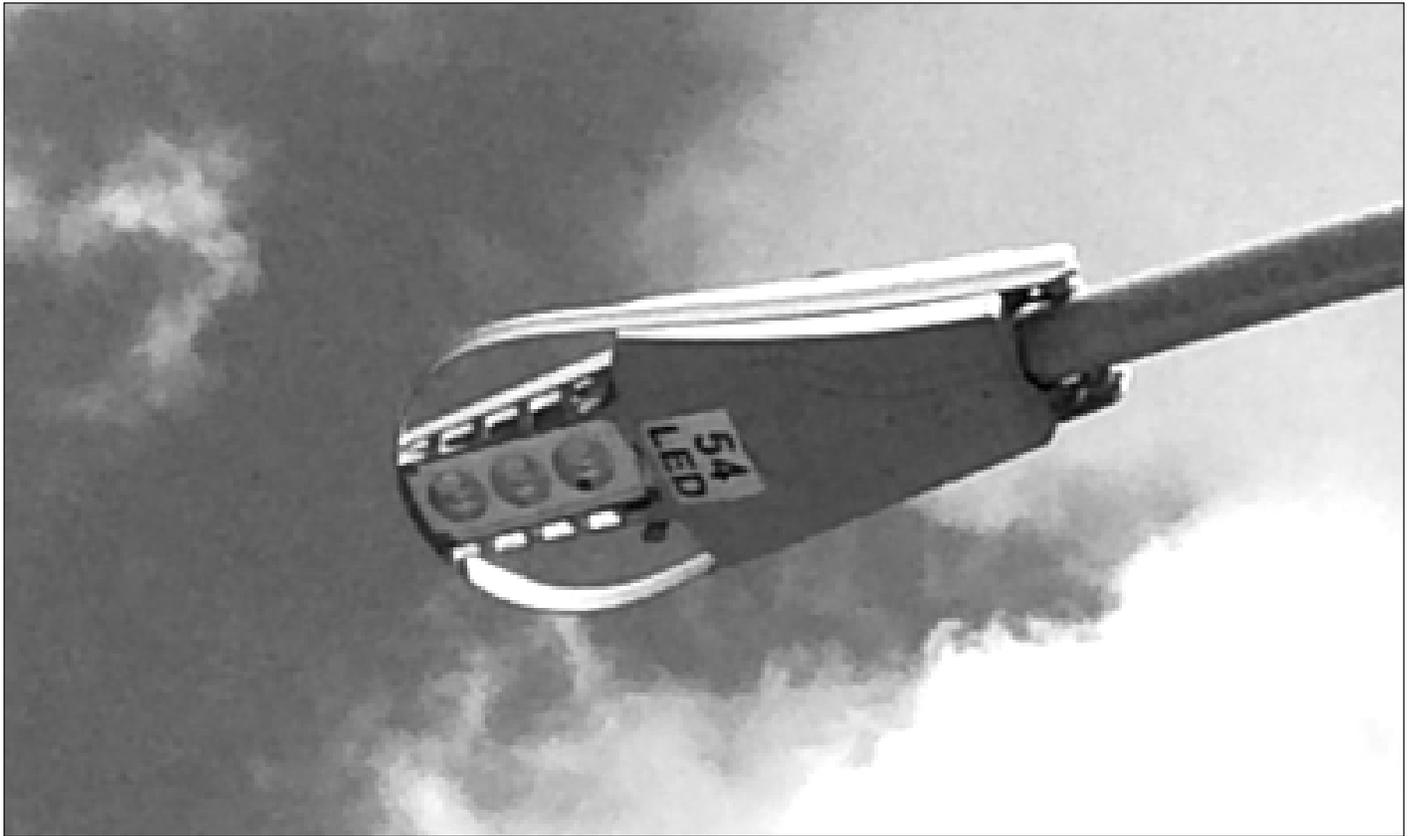
Jennifer Dolin of Osram Sylvania spoke about trends affecting today's lighting industry. As the company's manager of sustainability and environmental affairs, Dolin oversees issues including lamp and ballast recycling, greenhouse gas emissions reporting, and corporate responsibility initiatives.

She said the advent of solid-state lighting—programmable semiconductor devices that emit light—has brought dramatic changes such as "intelligent" LED displays in sports stadiums and on vehicles.

By embedding tiny LEDs, there's now also the potential to "print" lighting (or to weave lighting) into fabrics, carpets, and ceilings.

. . . light of any kind can suppress the secretion of melatonin and . . . blue light does this more powerfully.

Dolin also discussed the advent of dark skies regulations to reduce light pollution. According to the New England Light Pollution Advisory Group, more than 40 communities in Massachusetts have instituted lighting ordinances since 2000. These typically require municipal and commercial outdoor lighting to have full cutoff fixtures and shields that direct light toward the ground. Arlington Town Meeting passed such an ordinance in 2014. The Cambridge Outdoor Lighting Task Force in 2014 recently recommended an outdoor lighting ordinance. It references standards issued by the Illuminating Engineering Society, the



JOHN DICOCO

An LED streetlight in front of Belmont High.

International Dark Sky Association, and the US Green Building Council. According to a 2014 *Boston Globe* article, Winstanley Enterprises took Chelmsford's lighting rules a step further when building a mixed-use retail center. The Concord developer installed LED fixtures with a soft glow and lower color temperature that are easier on the eyes, cheaper, and more efficient than the rich blue lighting typically used.

. . . light of any kind can suppress the secretion of melatonin. . .

Dr. Eva Schernhammer of Harvard's School of Public Health spoke at the BASG meeting about why light exposure matters to our health. Dr. Schernhammer's major scientific contributions have addressed the effects of light at night on cancer risk through the melatonin pathway. Melatonin is a hormone that plays a key role in the control of our daily circadian rhythms.

Dr. Schernhammer's work led to the establishment of a new classification of shift work as a probable human carcinogen by the World Health Organization in 2007. While her studies did not

distinguish light exposure by color, light of any kind can suppress the secretion of melatonin, and it is known that blue light does this more powerfully, especially at night.

I was glad to learn that Belmont Light is trying different LED technologies, and that brightness is a consideration in their assessment. . .

A 2012 *Harvard Health Letter* on blue light states, "Light at night is bad for your health, and exposure to blue light emitted by electronics and energy-efficient lightbulbs may be especially so."

Updated in September 2015, the letter recommends avoiding looking at bright screens beginning two to three hours before bed, using dim red lights for night lights, and wearing blue-blocking glasses if working a night shift or using a lot of electronic devices at night.

Combined with exposing yourself to lots of bright light during the day, the letter said, avoiding blue light in the evening should "boost

your ability to sleep at night, as well as your mood and alertness during daylight.”

I was glad to learn that Belmont Light is trying different LED technologies, and that brightness is a consideration in their assessment of the pilot. I hope they will also look at the color spectrum emitted by each product.

While the remaining streetlights are only 70 watts, the potential for energy savings from LED lights is significant. The town has installed smart electric meters that can collect usage and performance information about all streetlights.

Unlike Cambridge, Belmont has not invested in technologies that would allow us to dim streetlights late at night. We do, however, have lighting regulations which require businesses to turn off illuminated signs between the hours of 10 PM and 6 AM unless the premises on which they are located are open for business. Belmont also forbids any moving, flashing, or animated lights, or any automatically changing written or pictorial matter or message. Enforcement of these regulations currently relies mainly on citizen reports. According to GR 5.2.3(b), signs may be illuminated only by the following means:

1. By a white, steady stationary light shielded and directed solely at the sign;
2. By interior non-exposed lights;
3. By exposed neon or similar tube illumination.

It turns out that LED manufacturing does have some environmental challenges.

The presentations and a conversation with Becca Keane, energy resources analyst of Belmont Light, made me curious about identifying Belmont’s brightest and darkest places, and how our local and migrating wildlife were affected at night by bright lights on streets, at sports fields, on billboards, by the train tracks, and near large buildings like the new Acorn Park development now known as the Royal Belmont.

I also wondered about the lifecycle costs of LEDs and not just the operational efficiencies once they were manufactured. It turns out that LED manufacturing does have some environ-

mental challenges. LEDs contain heavy metals such as lead, nickel, arsenic, and copper. Unlike CFLs (compact fluorescent lightbulbs), which contain mercury, LEDs are not classified as toxic: they can be disposed of in conventional landfills. LED bulbs come with hard and rubberized coatings to help keep them from shattering and releasing their contents, and should pose no health risks during regular use. But disposal and possible breakage are a consideration.

From an energy conservation perspective, and from a public health point of view, less is more when it comes to lighting. The tradeoff seems to be with the public safety benefits of lighting up the night.

In addition, chemical plants involved in LED manufacturing in Massachusetts have suffered intense explosions when certain chemicals (e.g., trimethylaluminum) are exposed to water or air. In January a powerful explosion at a Dow chemical plant in North Andover critically injured four workers. Safety procedures are under review to reduce this risk.

From an energy conservation perspective, and from a public health point of view, less is more when it comes to lighting. The tradeoff seems to be with the public safety benefits of lighting up the night. The new streetlights in Belmont Center are shielded to ensure that all light faces down.

The City Dark included some wonderful images of clever lighting designs such as Manhattan’s High Line that uses downward-facing lights in the banisters. This leaves the night sky more visible for pedestrians to enjoy while still addressing public safety.

As Belmont Light evaluates the pilot, take a walk at night to find the darkest and lightest spots near your home. Let the Light Department know where you think we could get smarter with lighting—or not lighting—Belmont at night.

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

Fourth Annual Event Draws 30 Volunteers

Lone Tree Hill Cleanup

by Radha Iyengar

On a sunny, warm May 14, volunteers met at the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) green-and-white awning at the Mill Street Lone Tree Hill parking lot to conduct the following two projects:

Energetic volunteers collected 12 large bags of trash and two boxes of recyclables.

At the Pine Allee, a separate team hauled in wheelbarrows full of wood chips, raking them into place along the entire length of the trail to help prevent soil erosion, and making it more comfortable for walking.

David Ropes, Tree Specialist Inc., donated 30 cubic yards of wood chips.

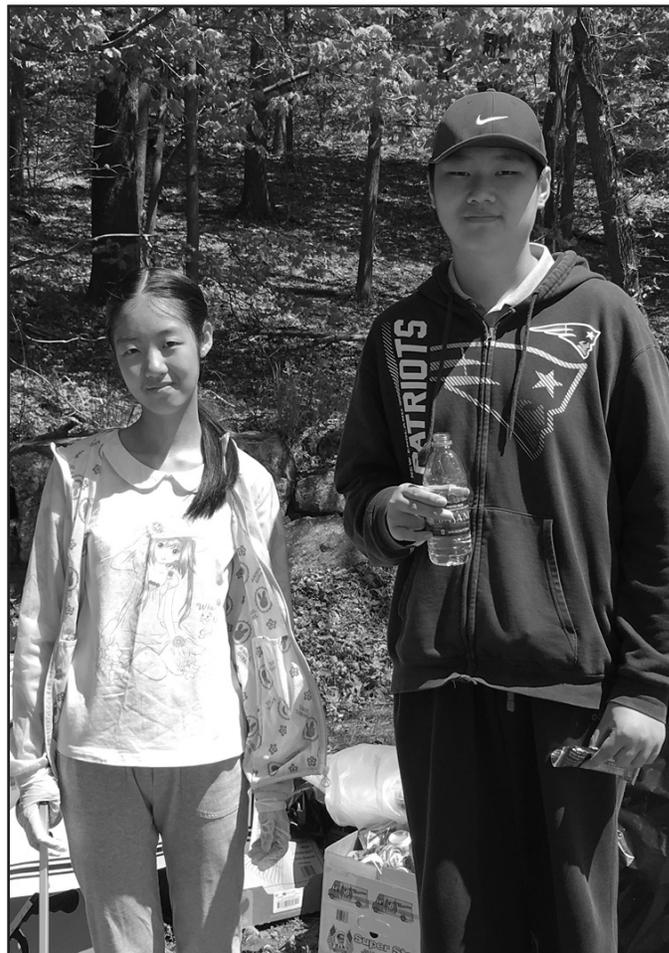
Roger Wrubel, director of Mass Audubon's Habitat Sanctuary, lent wheelbarrows, shovels, and rakes. Michael Santoro, manager of the Highway Division of Belmont's Department of Public Works, and his staff hauled away the trash. Star Market provided parking.

More than 30 volunteers came to help. Among them were members of the Beacon Community Church of Belmont, Chenery Middle School students, younger children, and four BCF board members.

Our corporate sponsors were: Alchemy 925, Anne Mahon Realty, Artefact Home and Garden, Belmont Savings Bank, Cambridge Savings Bank, Century 21 Adams Lawndale, Cityside Subaru, Coldwell Banker, East Boston Saving Bank, Middlesex Savings Bank, Renaissance Realty, Vintages and Watertown Savings Bank. Our community cosponsors were Belmont Land Trust, Belmont Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill, Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund, Mass Audubon Habitat Sanctuary, and Sustainable Belmont.

Many thanks to all who volunteered time, materials, or financial support for Lone Tree Hill, a community treasure.

Radha Iyengar is a Belmont resident, BCF treasurer, and volunteer day organizer.



ALL PHOTOS BY DAVID CHASE

Xiaoyu Chai and Hongyi Zhang, Chenery Middle Schoolers, who earned community service credits, were among the May 14 volunteers.

About Lone Tree Hill

Lone Tree Hill is a parcel of Belmont's conservation land that spans close to 100 acres. The site is bounded by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street. This land is open to all and is stewarded through a public/private partnership by the town, the Land Management Committee, and the Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund.

The Belmont Citizens Forum holds an annual cleanup and trail maintenance day on Lone Tree Hill, where residents work together and learn more about the trails that run through it.



Hauling and spreading chips along Pine Allee.



Collecting trash along Pleasant Street.



The DaRosa family strolled by and stayed to help.



David Ropes, Tree Specialists, Inc., donated 30 cubic yards of chips for the Pine Allee walking trail.

Ride More, See More

Bicycles on Public Transit

by Jeff Roth

Choosing public transit over driving makes ecological sense. When you combine bicycling and transit, you're helping the environment and getting a bonus of fun and healthy activity.

Bringing your bicycle on public transit opens many green options for getting around Boston and beyond. You can use transit to cover long distances and then have your bike at your destination to explore less traveled roads. In my experience, biking and transit excursions, either with your family or solo, are healthy, fun, and green, and won't get you stuck in car traffic.

Start here. Go anywhere.

Belmont offers several bike-and-transit options. Because many MBTA buses include racks for two bikes, you can get to and from Harvard Square with your bike. For longer trips, the Fitchburg commuter rail line, accessible from Belmont Center or Waverley Square, allows bikes in the vestibule area near the doorway on weekends and off-peak times. Heading west, I

have found Concord and West Concord to be nice stops to ride around. Walden Pond is a gem of a swimming spot. You can bike there from either the Lincoln or Concord stations. (Biking to Walden Pond also avoids the hassle of trying to park, and you can bike right down to the beach.)

Heading east into Boston on commuter rail allows you to visit city destinations like the Charles River paths, the Esplanade, or the Seaport. From North Station, you can take trains to other bike-and-train destinations discussed below.

By land or by water.

Other MBTA commuter rail options provide great bike-and-train excursions. The Rockport/Gloucester line provides access to North Shore towns and beaches. This line has a bike coach—a dedicated car for carrying bicycles (see photo). The Cape Flyer, which runs in the summer from South Station to Cape Cod, also has a bike coach for no extra charge. This is a relaxing and



JEFF ROTH

The bike coach on the Rockport/Gloucester line.



JOHN DICOCO

Jeff Roth at the Brighton Street trailhead near Hittinger Street. From here you can ride eastward to Alewife, Cambridge, or Somerville, or west through Lexington, Concord, and Bedford on the Minuteman Bikeway. Once the Belmont section of the trail is complete, it will link with the Mass Central Rail Trail.

scenic way to visit the Cape and avoid traffic congestion. You can get off either in Buzzards Bay or at the final stop in Hyannis.

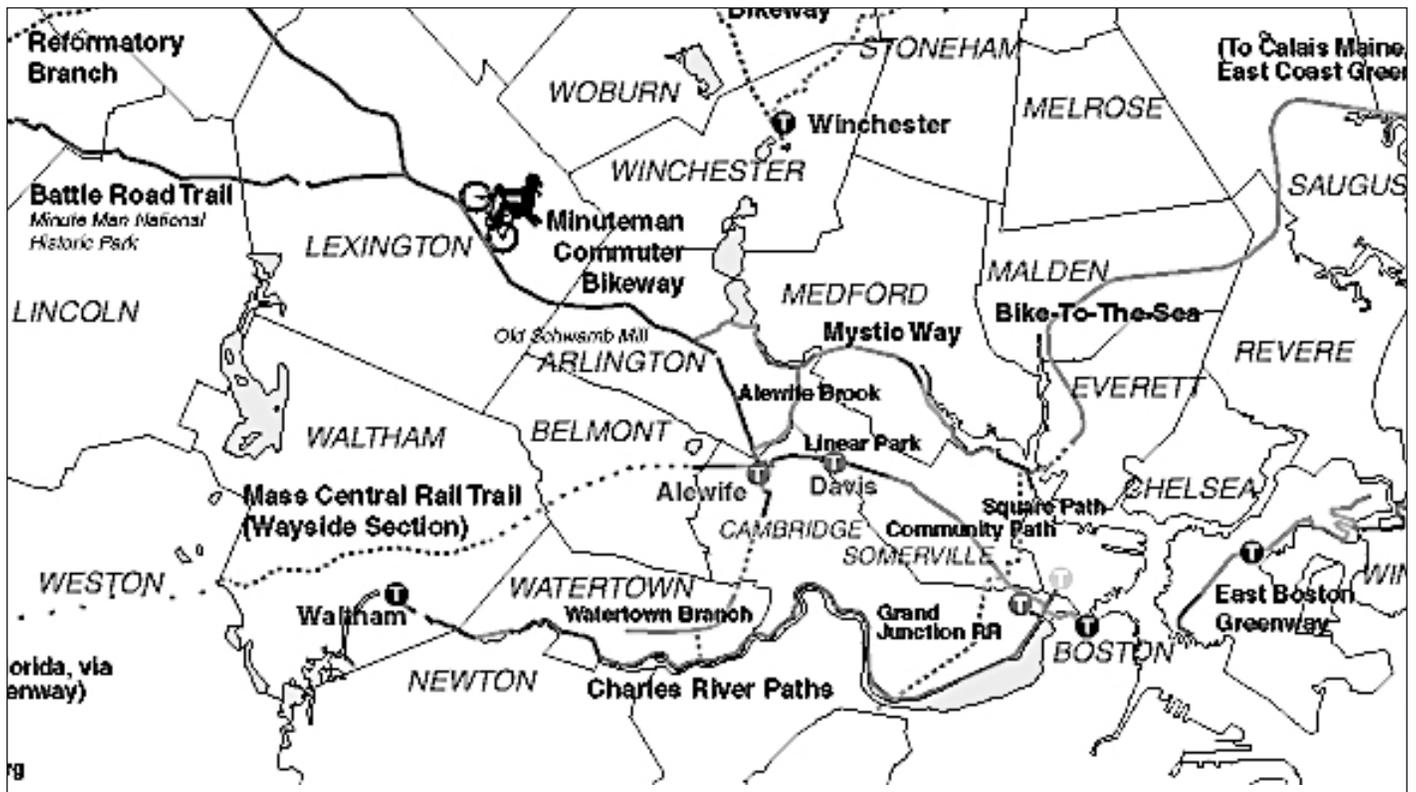
Amtrak's Downeaster trains, departing from North Station, offer service to one of the most bike-friendly cities in New England—Portland, Maine.

Portland has many off-road paths and trails, great restaurants and culture, and a bike-boardable ferry line to Nova Scotia. From Portland, it is approximately a 15-mile ride on a popular off-road path called the Eastern Trail to Old Orchard Beach, where you can visit the summer carnival and beaches. (Although the trains stop at Old Orchard Beach, you cannot board or exit with a bike because of the platform structure.) Brunswick, Maine, is also accessible by bicycle on the Downeaster. (<http://www.amtrakdowneaster.com>)

Ferries are another way to leverage transit for cycling trips. If you take the Cape Flyer to Hyannis, it is a 50-mile pedal to Provincetown, where you can catch a ferry back to Boston. Depending on your level of cycling, this could be a one- or two-day bike ride, and you can enjoy the Cape Cod Rail Trail and visit beautiful beaches and spend the night in a B&B. Bicycles are also allowed on all MBTA commuter ferries, including Boston to Hull, another popular beach destination.

Pahk yoah bike with a Chahlie cahd.

In case you cannot take your bike on the train or wish to leave it at a station, safe and covered bicycle-parking facilities exist at many MBTA stations. Bike cages are now at Alewife, South Station, Back Bay, and other locations. Get a Bike Charlie Card from an MBTA service center to access these secure cages. At Alewife Station,



The Mass Central Rail Trail, when completed, will stretch from Boston to Northampton. Currently it's possible to ride uninterrupted from Alewife to Bedford on the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway.

now accessible by bike from Brighton Street in Belmont via the new Fitchburg Cutoff Bikeway, the Red Line subway allows bicycles on weekends and off-peak times. Also, bus lines to Lexington and Bedford can give you a rapid boost to these suburbs, which have a lot of great cycling routes and destinations.

If you find your regular bicycle too unwieldy to take on transit, consider a folding bicycle.

Go bigger or smaller.

Longtail bikes (cargo bikes) and tandem bikes open up great family biking options, though they can be difficult to take on the train. We ran into issues on the Downeaster Amtrak line with this but eventually got them aboard. If you're planning to take one of these larger cycles on a train, check ahead of time. Most conductors want to help you, so be sure to ask for assistance.

If you find your regular bicycle too unwieldy to take on transit, consider a folding bicycle, giving you the flexibility to take your bike anywhere on any transit line with ease. You won't pay any fees for taking one along with you, and some models, because they fold tightly, even qualify as an airplane carry-on.

The Belmont path is coming.

The future expansion of the Belmont Community Path from Brighton Street west to Waltham and beyond will also expand biking-and-transit options. Belmont Center buses and commuter rail trains will be more accessible by bicycle once this off-road biking and walking trail is completed. The Belmont path will eventually connect Belmontians to the Mass Central Rail Trail, which will cross the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in Sudbury.

As the MBTA makes more stations ADA compliant, it will become easier to load and unload bicycles at commuter rail stations. While the conductors are usually eager to help with your bike, currently at Belmont Center and

Waverley it takes some effort to lift your bike up the stairs. Amtrak and the MBTA are also updating railcars and equipping them with specific bike-friendly accommodations.

The Belmont bike path will eventually connect Belmontians to the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Combining transit with biking makes for a fun and healthy excursion or commuting option. Having your bike at your destination provides flexibility to explore many unique places.

The train in particular offers unique and beautiful scenery, as well as fostering an appreciation for railroad engineering, architecture, and the railroad heritage of our nation.

As one final benefit, my own children enjoy all forms of transit, so there is an added level of joy when making bike-and-transit excursions with kids. Whether commuting or for recreation, I have found that the bike-and-transit journey is the destination.

Belmont resident Jeffrey Roth is a member of MassBIKE, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and the League of American Bicyclists, and is the former chairperson of the Belmont Community Path Advisory Committee. He enjoys cycling year-round for commuting and recreation.



Folding bicycles come in multiple sizes and configurations. Prices start at less than \$100.

Planning a Belmont "Staycation"

by Shodai Inose

In order to reduce our carbon footprint, the Belmont Citizens Forum is creating a Belmont "Staycation," a vacation in our own town which will be safer for the environment and better for your wallet.

As a summer intern at BCF, I've been collecting ideas to create family-friendly experiences via the Belmont Citizens Forum website. Do you know of any locations (preferably in Belmont) that you think people would enjoy? Are there any local businesses you would like to share with the rest of the community? How does your family spend time in town?

We're looking for anything enjoyable to do here without breaking your wallet or harming the environment. Any suggestions would be helpful, and we hope you will be a part of this adventure. Traditional vacations can cost thousands of dollars, with air travel using massive amounts of fuel. For example, a Boeing 747 plane burns about one gallon of fuel every second, meaning a 10-hour flight will use 36,000 gallons of fuel.*

Help us reduce the carbon footprint of Belmont residents for years to come.

Send your "Staycation" ideas to belmontstaycation@gmail.com by July 20.

For more information, see <http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org>.

*<http://science.howstuffworks.com/transport/flight/modern/question192.htm>

Environmental Events

Fresh Pond Monarch Butterfly Project **July & August**

The beautiful and ecologically significant monarch butterfly has been in decline worldwide in recent years and its annual migration down the eastern seaboard is believed to be under threat. This raise-and-release project is a combination of volunteer stewardship, invasive plant management, native re-vegetation, and public education all aimed at encouraging a monarch population at Fresh Pond.

July 30, August 6, August 13: Caterpillar checkups-Come see how they are growing!

Aug. 17: Pod Patrol for black swallowwort

Aug. 22: Butterfly release!

To learn more: <http://bit.ly/29EIT3Y>

Fresh Pond Reservation, Cambridge.

July Boston Sustainability Breakfast

Tuesday, July 20, 8:30-11:30 AM

Net Impact Boston's informal breakfast meetup of sustainability professionals together for networking, discussion, and moral support. It's important to remind ourselves that we are not the only ones out there in the business world trying to do good. Feel free to drop by any time between 7:30 and 8:30 AM. Information at: <http://bit.ly/29IWiaK>

Pret A Manger, 101 Arch Street, Boston

A Walk on the Wild Side Pond Tour

Saturday, July 23, 1 PM

The three ponds that Fredrick Law Olmsted designed into the Arnold Arboretum teem with aquatic and terrestrial life in late summer. Join Bob Mayer at the Forest Hills Gate for a walk and a discussion of the invertebrates and other fauna in and around the ponds. Bring

binoculars if you have them for closer look at nature.

In case of inclement weather, contact 617-384-5209. Free, but registration requested at 617-384-5251, or email adulted@arnarb.harvard.edu. *Arnold Arboretum, Arborway, Jamaica Plain*

Belmont Staycation Picnic

Saturday, August 13, noon-3 PM

Come join us for a fun community picnic at Wellington Station, the historic yellow school house and train station. This is part of the Belmont Staycation project of our summer intern, Shodai Inose. He is encouraging families to avoid travel by enjoying fun activities in town. Free. Bring your own picnic. For any ideas or questions:

belmontstaycation2016@gmail.com.

www.belmontcitizensforum.org

Belmont Town Green by Wellington Station on Concord Avenue

9th Annual Boston GreenFest

Friday-Sunday, August 19-21

GreenFest is the region's largest multicultural environmental music festival. It draws crowds of all ages and backgrounds. This year's event will bring eco-innovation into the spotlight from across New England as a means to finding durable solutions. We invite innovation in every form and from everybody.

bostongreenfest.org. *Boston City Hall Plaza, Faneuil Hall, and Sam Adams Park.*

9th Annual Boston GreenFest International Youth Summit

Saturday, August 20, 10 AM

Registration deadline for the International Youth Summit 2016 The Foundation for a Green Future, Inc. in collaboration with the Green School Movement of India

invites students 14 years old+ to participate. The summit will focus on five themes: water, energy, urban agriculture, waste management/composting, and CO₂ emissions. Student groups will make presentations about these topics. There will be a keynote speaker, discussions, lunch and other activities. Students from India, US, and other countries across the globe will have an opportunity to connect, learn from each other, and make a difference.

Sustainable Belmont Meeting
Wednesday, August 3, 7-8:30 PM
Come to Sustainable Belmont's regular monthly meeting to learn about their work. Info: www.sustainablebelmont.net.
Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library
Concord Avenue, Belmont.

All listings are subject to change without notice.

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!

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Mail to: PO Box 609, Belmont, MA 02478

Give securely online:
www.belmontcitizensforum.org

Contact us: 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 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

July/August 2016



JOHN DICOCO

Jeff Roth takes his bike everywhere—and vice versa. Story, page 14.

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