



Belmont Citizens Forum

Habitat Wetlands at Risk Conservation Land and Development

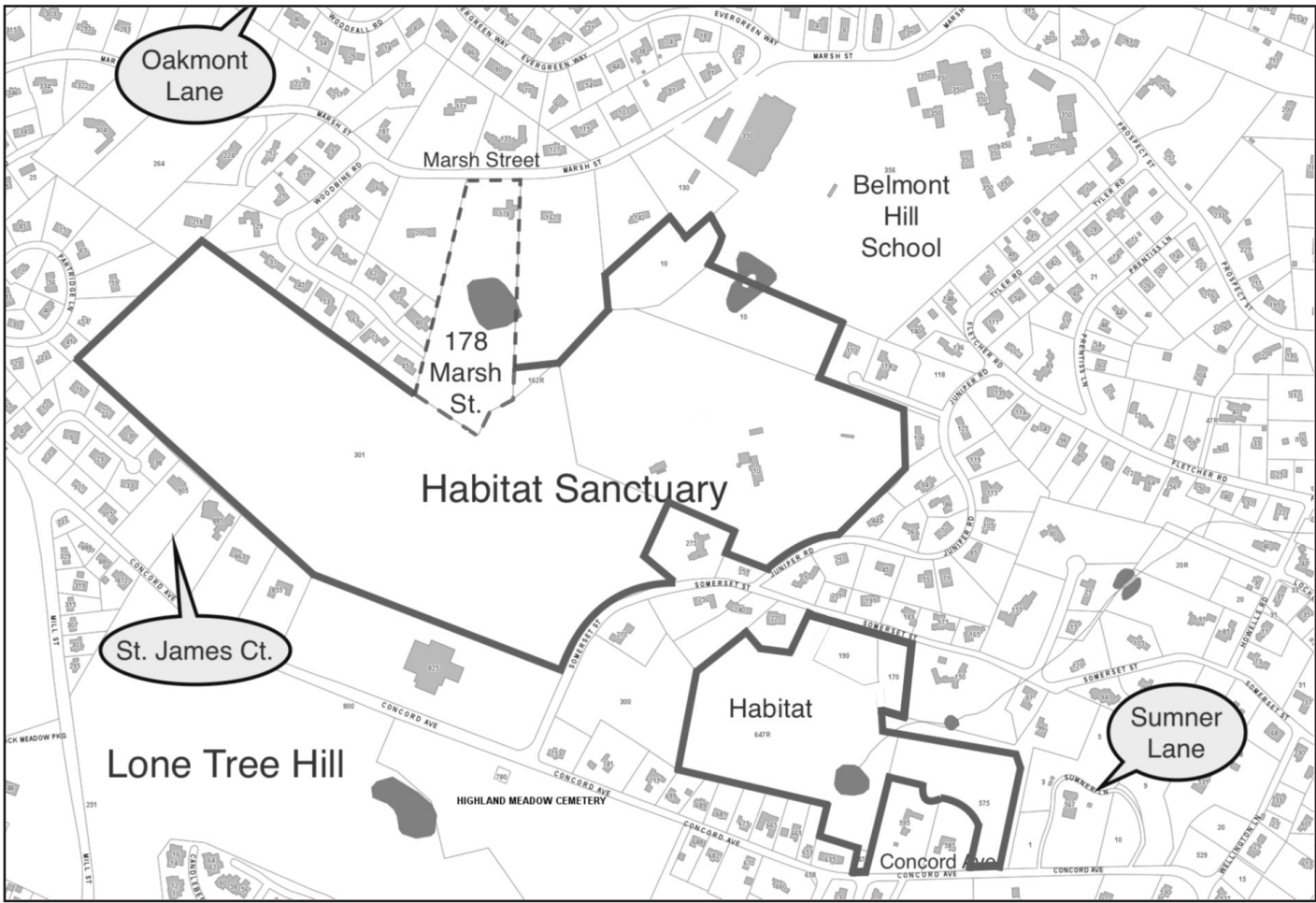
By Roger Wrubel and Vincent Stanton Jr.

In densely settled communities like Belmont, few real estate marketing pitches ring a louder bell than “abuts conservation land.” Indeed, what could be more salable than guaranteed backyard tranquility in perpetuity?

Unfortunately, as the perimeter of conservation land becomes densely settled, the value of the land for conservation purposes (animal habitat, a quiet walk, scenic views) is diminished.

The four biggest tracts of conservation land in Belmont are

- Mass Audubon’s Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary (90 acres on Belmont Hill);
- Belmont’s Lone Tree Hill reservation, secured via an agreement with McLean Hospital in 1999 (119 acres of open space across Concord Avenue from Habitat, partly town-owned and partly retained by McLean Hospital with conservation restrictions);



Map 1. The dotted line (left center) bordering on Habitat represents the property where the owner proposes building anew road. Oakmont Lane, St. James Court, and Sumner Lane are other recently built roads on Belmont Hill.

VINCENT STANTON AND ROGER WRUBEL

- Rock Meadow, Belmont’s western border, owned by the town (70 acres, purchased from McLean Hospital in 1968);
- Beaver Brook North reservation (254 acres, mostly in Lexington and Waltham, maintained by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation).

Each of these reservations has historical and natural features. They also have collective value as elements of the 1,000-acre ring of linked open space through Belmont, Lexington, and Waltham known as the Western Greenway (see May/June 2011 *BCF Newsletter*, page 9).

Habitat is the most vulnerable to envelopment by development because it abuts multiple private properties; the other three parcels are largely circumscribed by major roads.

Over the past decade, four new houses have been built on what was previously open space adjacent to the Habitat Sanctuary. Five more existing homes bordering the Sanctuary have been torn down and replaced with substantially larger structures. All of that development was allowed “by right” under Belmont’s zoning bylaws. Currently, Belmont resident Don Chiofaro is seeking permission from the Belmont Board of Survey to build a new road through his 6.86-acre property at 178 Marsh Street. The back of the 178 Marsh Street lot borders Habitat Sanctuary for approximately 635 linear feet (*See Map 1*).

Habitat is the most vulnerable to envelopment by development because it abuts multiple private properties. . .

The new road would enable a subdivision into six lots with construction of five new homes. (*See Map 2.*) The construction of new homes near that border would destroy essential wildlife habitat by removing a relatively rare wet forest that drains into the sanctuary and forms a headwater of the Mystic River. Besides the rare forest, the property contains two certified vernal pools and a large wetland that is likely also a vernal pool. It is a haven for the wildlife many of us observe and enjoy at Habitat. Here, great horned owls and hawks nest; and coyotes, fisher cats, fox, deer, mink, weasels, skunks, raccoons, and terrestrial box turtles roam, feed, and reproduce.

Moreover, because the private open space is adjacent to Habitat’s 90 acres, it has greater conservation value than similar land would as isolated parcels. Bigger is better when it comes to wildlife survival. As prominent conservation biologist Michael Soule is fond of saying, “There are three things you can do to preserve wildlife: habitat, habitat, and habitat.”

In addition to conservation value, the adjacent private land contributes to the peacefulness and beauty visitors enjoy at Habitat. As you walk the Border Trail from Highland Farm toward Turtle Pond or the Belmont Hill School, some of the land to your left belongs to Habitat, but most of it is private property owned by Marsh Street

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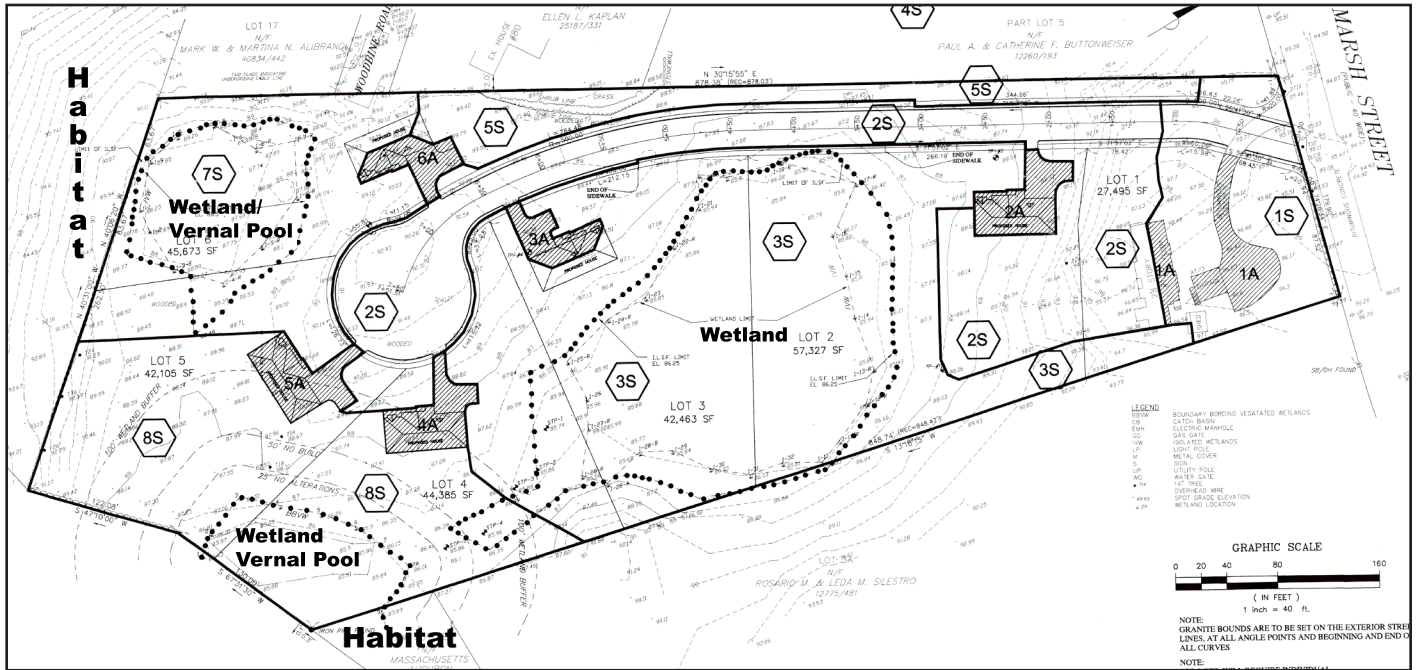
Newsletter

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

Letters to the editor may be sent to
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Map 2. The three areas within the property at 178 Marsh Street designated by dotted lines are wetlands (also known as isolated lands subject to flooding (ISLF)) bordering Habitat that face potential damage from the proposed road and homes on the property. ISLF is one of the resource areas in the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission.

residents. The border is not visible because the private forest looks and functions exactly like the adjacent Habitat land. New houses would destroy the isolation there—part of what makes Habitat a refuge for wildlife and people.

“There are three things you can do to preserve wildlife: habitat, habitat, and habitat.”

A decision on the current proposal has implications for other properties abutting conservation lands. Three other properties between 178 Marsh Street and the Belmont Hill School also have limited frontage and large back yards abutting the Audubon sanctuary. Those properties might be developable if new dead-end roads off Marsh Street are allowed.

The loss of open space in Belmont is not confined to properties bordering conservation land. In the last three years, nine multimillion dollar homes have been constructed on the north side of Concord Avenue as it ascends Belmont Hill. That space, facing Cambridge and Boston, used to be grassland surrounding two early 20th-century mansions. Five of the new houses required town approval of a new road

(Summer Lane) to gain sufficient frontage for buildable lots.

Further west on Concord Avenue, on the other side of Belmont Hill, another new road (St. James Court) was recently approved that allows two additional homes in the woods in front of two existing homes at 885 and 905 Concord Avenue. The recent Woodfall Road development of four homes required permitting of a new road (Oakmont Lane) by the Board of Survey.

Belmont residents . . . have repeatedly asserted that they highly value open space.

Belmont residents, in polls and through Belmont’s representative Town Meeting, have repeatedly asserted that they highly value open space. The Working Vision for Belmont adopted by Town Meeting in April 2001 vowed to “protect the beauty and character of our natural settings.” The town’s Comprehensive Plan praises “open spaces and vistas [that] provide connections to the beauty of the natural world.” Indeed, the 1968 Belmont Annual Report, remarking on the town’s purchase of Rock Meadow from McLean Hospital that year, noted, “the need for

preserving this last piece of available land in the congested and overbuilt town of Belmont.”

Chiofaro says “I have no immediate plans for the property. I’m going through the process of meeting the proper boards and hearings just to explore options.” He added, “I wouldn’t do anything that doesn’t fall within the rules and regulations of the conservation committee. I think smart development is good for the community but not all development is smart.”

Belmont’s selectmen, who sit as the Board of Survey, have to balance the town’s interest in

open space against the economic interests of property owners. While each decision about a new road is made in isolation, the collective impact over time is changing the face of Belmont.

The possibility of substantial changes in Belmont zoning as a result of state law also deserves consideration. (*See Sidebar 2*).

Vincent Stanton Jr. is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum. Roger Wrubel has served as director of Mass Audubon’s Habitat Sanctuary for over 16 years.

1: Who has authority to create new streets in Belmont, and how is the decision made?

A buildable lot requires both land and frontage (access from a street). The amount of each varies in Belmont’s five types of residential zoning district. Most of Belmont Hill is zoned Single Residence A (the required lot area is 25,000-square feet and 125 feet of frontage).

For deep lots not accessible from any road, the only way to produce the frontage required for a new buildable lot is to construct a new street. Permission must be obtained from the Belmont Board of Survey, a role filled by the Board of Selectmen. The process is described in a 22-page document titled Rules and Regulations of the Board of Survey.

The rules do not spell out the decision-making process. However, traditionally, applications that fulfill all of the required criteria have been approved. If a proposed new road does not (or cannot) meet all specifications, the petitioner may ask the board to waive certain rule(s). The board may do so “upon an express finding that such action is in the public interest, and is not inconsistent with the intent of these rules.”

The explicit instruction that the “public interest” should inform any board decision about granting a waiver opens up a broader set of considerations than the narrow technical requirements. A new street has implications for public safety (e.g., fire and police resources), schools and other town departments, and the town’s ongoing efforts to improve stormwater drainage systems and preserve open space.

The 2010 Belmont Comprehensive Plan notes, “There is currently limited recognition of private residential property as valuable and

integral open space,” and significantly, that conservation of remaining open space is “important for air quality, water quality, wildlife habitats, and natural beauty.” Belmont’s Conservation Commission, which enforces the Massachusetts wetlands laws, also gets to weigh in. 178 Marsh Street includes wetlands identified on town maps. In 2014, the ConCom rejected the categorization of some of the wetlands but was overruled last year by the state Department of Environmental Protection. If the Board of Survey approves the road, the ConCom would be able to regulate how work on some of the new lots is conducted to avoid damage to wetlands.

2: Future development in Belmont

The Massachusetts legislature is considering major changes to statewide zoning law that would compel cities and towns to allow more “by right” housing construction (see July/August 2016 *BCF Newsletter*). The incentives in the proposed legislation favor housing with an affordable component and located near mass transit, neither of which is achieved by construction of new mansions on Belmont Hill. If the proposed legislation were to become law—a bill passed the Senate but not the House—it might encourage a more vigorous discussion in Belmont about long-term planning issues:

- What types of housing does the town favor?
- Where should new housing be located?
- How can the town preserve the open spaces—both small and large—that contribute to its character, while permitting more housing?
- Is the gradual but continuous and irreversible loss of open space in small pieces compatible with the town’s planning vision?

Current and Former Town Officials Comment Can “Small-Town” Belmont Add Housing?

by John DiCocco

In our last issue, (BCF apage 1), we addressed the need for more housing in Greater Boston and the state legislature’s proposal of state-wide zoning requirements. If such a law passed, it would require more housing—and more affordable housing—in almost every community inside Route 495.

What would that mean for Belmont?

We asked several town residents who have served or are still currently serving on various committees and boards to share some brief thoughts on the following question:

“Can Belmont increase housing without altering our small town feeling?”

Judy Feins, co-chair, Belmont Housing Trust:

I certainly think we can. We need to plan and act on rezoning judiciously to build new homes, especially for young people and older residents who want to stay in town.

Karl Haglund, member, Belmont Planning Board:

It’s too early to tell what the legislature will pass, so it’s difficult to predict what the town’s options might be. It will be helpful to see how well Cushing Square works out, and then we’ll know better how to update the bylaw.

Has the town’s character changed? It’s certainly true that many of us who bought homes in Belmont in the early 80s couldn’t do it again. According to the town planning office, Belmont has a significant percentage of affordable rental housing, but the town gets no credit for that affordable housing because it is not affordable under the requirements of Section 40B.

Belmont has very little commercial property, compared to the towns around us. And we don’t have much buildable land left for either commercial or affordable housing.

That’s a different situation from many towns inside 128 or 495. It would be helpful if the state zoning law could recognize the significant differences among the state’s cities and towns in writing statewide zoning.

Lauren G. Meier, chair, Historic District Commission:

Theoretically, Belmont should be able to build some additional housing and still retain its small-town character, but how that additional residential development is designed and where it is located in the town is critical to ensuring that the qualities we identify as a “small town” are retained.

That means ensuring a diversity of housing types and scales representing Belmont’s entire history—from Colonial period to the present—as well as retaining the smaller scale, modest dwellings that are important for young families or older adults who are downsizing. In addition, we need open space, outdoor recreation, tree-lined streets, and viable small, local businesses that also are important to the character of Belmont. In the end, it’s about how you design it, to ensure that the scale is compatible with our individual neighborhoods and the town as a whole.

It would be a disaster for Belmont.
-Angelo Firenze

Angelo Firenze, former Belmont selectman:

It would be a disaster for Belmont. I’m totally opposed. It’s another example of the state trying to impose a policy on every town as if we were all the same. Belmont is densely populated, as are most of the towns where mass transit goes. We should not be required by the state to add more density. It would be worse than the affordable housing law which is poorly written.

Belmont has about 4,000 rental units and 2,000 of them rent for rates which are below the affordable cutoff, but we don't get credit for them since there are no rent restrictions on them. Even so, landlords don't raise the rents out of proportion, because their tenants won't pay more than the market rate.

This state law proposal doesn't make sense in Belmont.

Roger Colton, former chair, Belmont Housing Trust:

Yes. Belmont needs to make a conscious choice to add housing in central commercial areas such as Belmont Center and Cushing Square, and that would not affect the small-town feeling. We need to look up, rather than out, meaning building vertically. With adequate setbacks in the right form and thoughtful design that fits into the surrounding buildings, we can add residences without affecting the look and feel of the town.

Yes. Belmont needs to make a conscious choice to add housing in central commercial areas such as Belmont Center. . .-Roger Colton

Sami Baghdady, selectman:

Belmont is so developed that it would be difficult to significantly increase our market rate and affordable housing stock without altering our small-town feel. Indeed, the only way to add any appreciable housing stock is by building dense, multi-family apartment buildings like the Royal Belmont (i.e., the Uplands development) and Cushing Village. However, more major multifamily development projects will inevitably make Belmont feel more dense and less like a small town.

Belmont can add more affordable housing and still maintain a small-town feel through programs that convert our existing housing stock to affordable status, such as the Housing Trust's First Time Homebuyers Program. Unfortunately, however, that program has not yielded appreciable results.

Mike Smith, member and former chair, Belmont Historic District Commission:

The small town feel of Belmont is lost each time a property is developed at a large size and scale that doesn't fit with neighboring properties. This can be the result of oversize additions or new housing. Generally, these oversize properties result in single family ownership at prices that are unaffordable for young and old homeowners.

With its close proximity to transit and large job markets in Cambridge and Boston, Belmont could provide expanded opportunities for small-scale housing by modifying its zoning bylaws and creating other useful measures that would:

1. Restrict out-of-scale, large single family homes in small-scale neighborhoods.
2. Enable homeowners to convert spaces in garages, barns, attics, and basements to accessory living units, e.g., in-law apartments.
3. Incentivize properties in commercial areas to permit expanded opportunities for small multi-family housing projects that can appeal to both young and old people.
4. Provide historic protections for properties with character-defining features of neighborhoods.

Small scale housing opportunities would help to add to the diversity of our population by providing opportunities for both young and old. Such measures could create additional tax revenue without adding substantially to the burden on our schools. In summary, such practices would be good socially, fiscally, and environmentally.

SEEKING CONTRIBUTORS

Would you like to write an article?

Shoot a photo?

Illustrate an object or idea?

BCF Newsletter is seeking talented high school, college, or adult writers, photographers, and illustrators.

We can't offer payment but we do provide exposure, credits/bylines, and sincere gratitude for your artistic support of the BCF mission.

Contact:

info@belmontcitizensforum.org

My Long, Long, Long, Short Journey Across Town Lower Speed Limits for Belmont?

By Sumner Brown

In a July 14, 2016, post on his website, state Senator Will Brownsberger alerted citizens to a proposed law, since passed, that makes it easier for local communities to lower speed limits. The motivation is improved safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Belmont seems to be a relatively safe place for pedestrians and bicyclists. Data available from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, for example, show that more serious bicycle accidents occur in Waltham. This is why the Waltham segment of the Central Massachusetts Rail Trail has a higher priority for implementation than the Belmont segment. Still, Belmont might be safer if speed limits were lowered.

There is no question that a bicyclist or pedestrian is likely to be injured more seriously if struck by a vehicle that is going faster.

An elderly man was killed trying to cross White Street in 2002, and an elderly woman was killed trying to cross Trapelo Road in 2003. The vehicles involved may have been speeding.

A serious bicycle accident occurred on Concord Avenue at Bright Street this year, where the bicyclist was riding in the designated striped bicycle lane. But my impression from reading the *Belmont Citizen-Herald* police log is that bicycle and pedestrian accidents are a smaller public safety issue for Belmont than domestic violence, drivers disobeying traffic regulations, and alcohol misuse.

A typical response to the idea of lower speed limits from car drivers (in my own limited survey) is, "Terrible!" As an engineer I was curious whether drivers had rational cause

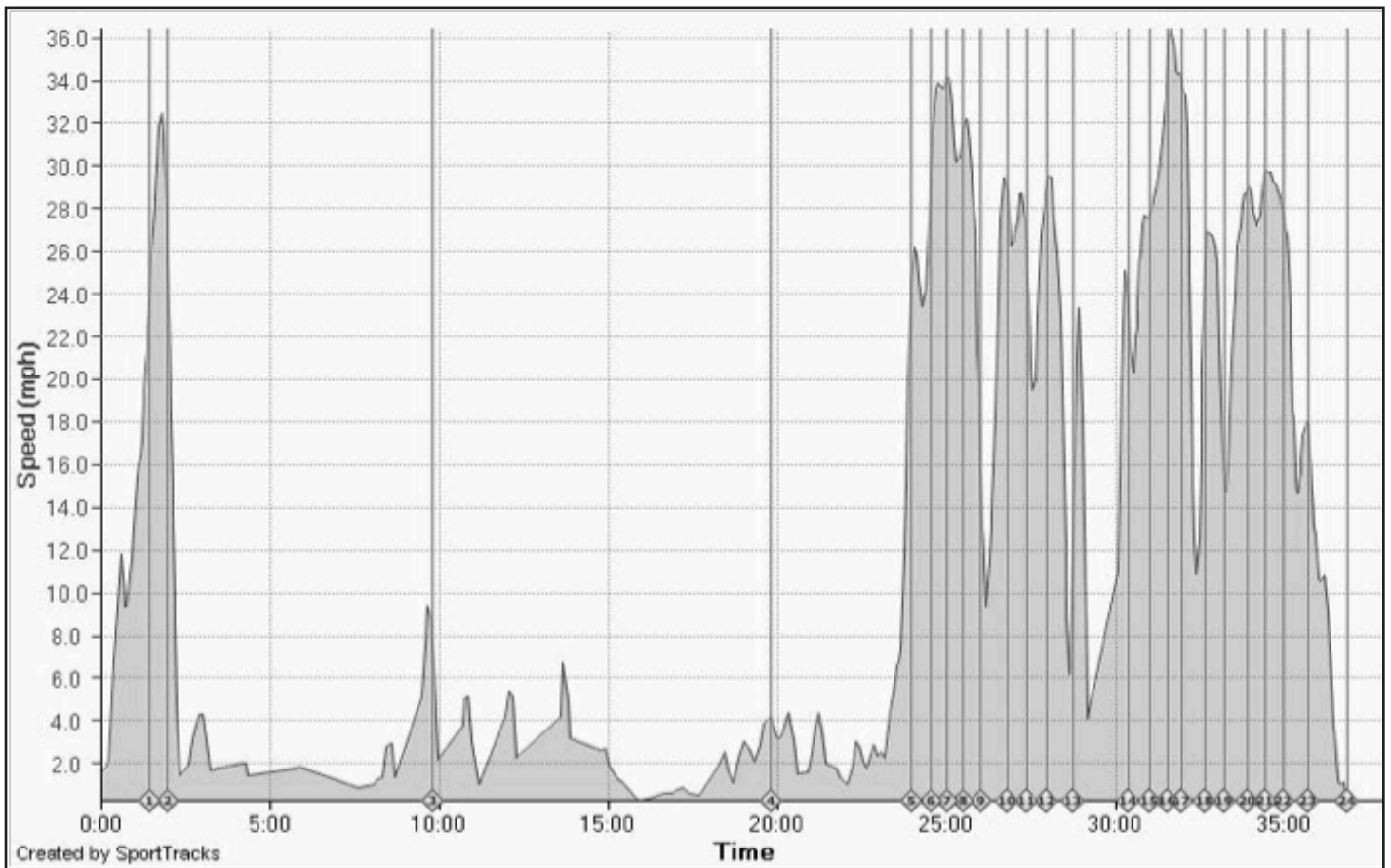
to oppose lower speed limits. So I became a simulated car commuter for a week and gathered data. My data show that displeased drivers in Belmont have a point. I'll explain that point, then I'll explain why, as a bicycle rider, I am indifferent to reduced speed limits.



My trip on Tuesday morning, August 9, at rush hour. The numbered diamonds correspond to specific points on the speed/time chart on page 8.

To collect traffic data, I took car trips on three routes through Belmont during the morning rush while wearing a GPS device. The device is useful for bicycling and running because it can continuously measure and record position (to about 20 feet accuracy) and time. Thus at the end of a trip I knew where I went, how far I went, and how fast I was going at each point.

SUMNER BROWN



SUMNER BROWN

For most of my trip (between points 2 and 5) around Belmont at “rush hour,” you can see I was traveling under five miles per hour. It made for a long, long, long, short ride.

On page 7 is a map of my trip on Tuesday morning, August 9, along with a graph of my speed during that trip (above) as a function of time.

... over half of my trip time was waiting to get through the [railroad] underpass.

The small diamonds on the map and the speed graph show quarter-mile marks. You can see that while waiting to get through the railroad underpass at the intersection of Leonard Street, Concord Avenue, and Common Street (see markers 2–5, beginning way back at Prospect Street), I drove about half a mile at a walking pace. The speed versus time graph shows that over half of my trip time was waiting to get through the underpass. After the underpass, I stopped at a few red lights, but I got through them in a single light cycle.

I expected to find that I would be waiting at multiple bottlenecks so my trip time would be dominated by the capacity of the bottlenecks to pass vehicles and the number of vehicles going through. What I found is that for each of my three simulated morning commute routes, there was just one terrible bottleneck: at the railroad bridge, at the end of Brighton Street at Concord Avenue, or at Winter Street and Mill Street going toward Route 60. Even though this was in August, when school is out and many are away on vacation, each trip had an awful bottleneck.

If speed limits were reduced, and if the new limits were obeyed, trip times would increase.

If speed limits were reduced, and if the new limits were obeyed, trip times would increase. For the trip shown on page 7, total time would increase from about 37 minutes to 41 minutes for a 20 mph speed limit everywhere in Belmont.

As a bicycle rider I have bicycle wisdom that has been keeping me safe for many years. This wisdom has come in part from moments of bad judgment. (Education is often expensive and unpleasant!) I make a point of staying out of the way of other vehicles, and I anticipate traffic problems before they become critical.

I wear bright clothing, and I use lights at night. My first priority while riding is to be safe, not to get exercise or to make good time. I do

not like traffic in Belmont, but I'm comfortable with what we have. However, I usually plan my trips to avoid peak traffic.

Another reason I'm indifferent to lower speed limits is that I live close to the Belmont Hill School where the speed limit near the school is already 20 mph. Maybe some of the cars slow down a bit, but most drivers seem to ignore this lower speed limit. The Belmont Police

Department had a community outreach program for people in my precinct a few years ago. The presenter admitted that the most the police hope for is that some drivers will slow at least slightly near the school.

Public roads serve a public purpose and lower speed limits would, if observed, decrease the public good of the roads.

Public roads serve a public purpose and lower speed limits would, if observed, decrease the public good of the roads. And, as I said, I am

comfortable bicycling in Belmont traffic. So I'm indifferent to lower speed limits in Belmont. Other bicyclists who ride in Belmont can also tolerate Belmont traffic. But perhaps if speed limits were lowered, more people would bicycle. This question is important, and it may soon be answered by some community's experiment.

Sumner Brown is a Belmont resident and a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



JOHN DICOCO

Belmont residents are familiar with the railroad underpass bottleneck at the junction of Concord Avenue, Common Street, and Leonard Street. Shown here, at midday, it's relatively easy to traverse. At rush hour, it takes considerable patience.

What is a "bottleneck?"

Fill a wine bottle with water. Turn it upside down, and water will come out, but it will not flow freely because the neck of the bottle restricts the outflow rate.

The railroad underpass at Belmont Center is a traffic bottleneck. The rate at which cars can pass through is limited because the underpass is only as big as it is, and the six traffic-flow patterns on the south side involve two left turns and three merges. The rate of vehicles passing through is controlled by what seems safe to the drivers, not by speed limits.

The accident rate at this underpass is wonderfully low considering how busy and aggravating it can be.

Now Up To 250 Installations Solar Shines Brightly in Belmont

By Jan Kruse

In our May/June 2016 issue, we covered the initial success of the Belmont Goes Solar campaign, at which time more than 170 Belmont residents added solar panels to their homes (“Belmont Goes Solar Sails Past Initial Goal”). This is an update.

The Town of Homes might be ready for a new name: the Town of Solar Homes. About 250 homeowners opted to purchase rooftop solar during the Belmont Goes Solar (BGS) six-month campaign that ended June 30.

More Belmontonians purchased solar for their homes than any other solarization campaign in the entire state. In total, including the 30 solar systems in town prior to the BGS campaign, there will be about 1.5 megawatts of residential solar, eliminating 2.5 million pounds of CO₂ emissions per year. Simply put, that’s equivalent to annually removing 370 cars or 4,000 barrels of oil, or planting 1,600 acres of trees (about half of Belmont’s land mass).

In addition to individual households saving money on personal electric bills and helping the environment by producing clean, renewable energy, the town will also benefit. Solar installations can save Belmont money by reducing the amount of conventional electricity purchased during summer peak demand when electricity

is most expensive. And the BGS steering committee, comprised of Belmont Light and members of the Belmont Energy Committee, Sustainable Belmont, and Mothers Out Front, negotiated with the campaign’s preferred installer, Direct Energy Solar, to install a solar system at no cost on a Belmont school or other town building.

According to Belmont Facilities Director Gerald Boyle, there are two options under consideration: Either a 50-panel rooftop solar array at the Wellington Elementary School, or a 25-panel system at the Wellington and a 25-panel system at the Chenery Middle School. First, an assessment must be completed to determine if the Chenery roof can bear the load of the solar array. (The Wellington roof was designed to hold up to 300 solar panels.) “Public input will be solicited prior to making a final decision,” notes Boyle.

Jan Kruse is a member of the steering committee and co-chair of the marketing and outreach for BGS. She is also the founder and member of Sustainable Belmont and vice chair of the Belmont Energy Committee from 2010–2016.



JOHN DICOCO

A typical solar panel installation on a Belmont home.

Next Green Initiative Starts in October: The Electric Vehicle Campaign

Riding on the success of the solar campaign, another green campaign is coming to Belmont this fall. Belmont Drives Electric will kick off with a special event during the week of October 3. The campaign will be run by the Belmont Energy Committee, Sustainable Belmont, Belmont residents, and Belmont Light. If you already own or lease an electric vehicle, or would like more information and want to be notified of the kick-off event, please email BelmontDrivesElectric@gmail.com.

(See also *BCF Newsletter*, May/June 2016, page 11, “Electric Vehicles: What You Need to Know” by Kim Slack.)

A Student's Citizens Forum Project

Staycation 2016: A Successful Experiment

by Shodai Inose

When I announced the concept of the Belmont Staycation, some people snickered at the name and doubted that we would have any success. Well, that didn't stop me.

When we first began this project in June, during my internship with Anne-Marie Lambert,



Superheroes Joyce, Lucas, and Maddie enjoying a staycation visit to the pet store. PHOTO BY MIRABEL CARVAJAL

we laid out a few major goals. We wanted to learn how to increase interest in local Belmont sights and businesses, and how to reduce energy use from vacation travel by substituting a family "staycation" in Belmont. We were also hoping for an increase in visits to the BCF website and

Facebook page, and to increase awareness of the *BCF Newsletter* among families with children.

For our first goal, we solicited ideas in July and published an article in the July/August *BCF Newsletter* about the program at the beginning of August. We tried a number of public outreach activities. We initiated a staycation competition. We distributed more than 200 "passports" so that people would check off various suggested activities, and started posting our own digital postcards on Facebook. I was surprised that not many people decided to return the passports or surveys (especially since we offered a raffle), but we did see a significant increase in traffic to the BCF website and Facebook page. The article announcing the staycation was the most viewed article on the BCF website, as measured by average views per day. We promoted many businesses through our program, and several viewers clicked through to those businesses and hopefully participated in a few of the activities.

We knew it was highly doubtful anyone would give up their August vacation plans for a last-minute staycation, but . . .

We knew it was highly doubtful anyone would give up their August vacation plans for a last-minute staycation, but we believe some people did take part in our "greener" activities. We know there was increased interest in the trail maps on the BCF website, and our kickoff picnic was a success.

Many people around town who had never before heard of the Belmont Citizens Forum participated in our project. One woman's response: "I am motivated by the program that you are promoting! I just decided to do this



BETH MILLER

Popsicles in a boat. What better way to survive a hot summer day? Rowan Camara, 2, and Milo Camara, 5, of Woburn, enjoyed the Staycation Picnic at the Wellington Station park.

today when I found your card at the library.” We had another survey respondent say “receiving the Belmont staycation requests for. . . suggestions actually inspired me to take some time off work and do a staycation.”

The Picnic

On August 13, our Staycation 2016 picnic was attended by more than 40 guests. Events ranged from croquet to meditation circles for teenagers. A popular activity was cooling down with popsicles from an antique ice chest, an historical artifact that interested many people. One of the greatest hits was the tours of the Wellington Station. Visitors were very surprised that the inside was much larger than expected.

What I Learned About Belmont

Did you know Belmont has a waterfall? It’s part of Beaver Brook Reservation, on Mill Street. Right now, the waterfall is just a trickle because of the statewide drought. Throughout this project, I got to learn so much about the local geography, culture, and businesses. I had no idea that Belmont had so many spas and massage parlors. I also was unaware that Belmont had

to give up Fresh Pond to Cambridge because of waste coming from a slaughterhouse (yuck!). It was interesting to talk with participants who didn’t know about things to do in neighborhoods other than their own. Even in a small town like Belmont, there’s still a lot to explore and learn. The best way to discover our town is by taking a few days to relax and maybe plan your staycation (or take ours).

More Lessons Learned

We learned the most from the survey and about what could influence them to plan a staycation. Many respondents wanted fun and compelling local activities, such as concerts, food, and festivals. Other reasons people cited for local vacations included staging a family reunion in Belmont, wanting to stay in town while their house is being renovated, or just saving money.

We learned a significant number of people plan their summer vacations in the winter or spring, long before we published the idea.

Not everyone seemed to enjoy the idea of substituting a staycation for their typical vacation. One survey respondent suggested that



KHALID HALSOBHI

Croquet enthusiasts Jack Corrigan (left) and Ibrahim Halsobhi celebrate a winning run through the wickets.

“maybe instead of trying to stop people from living their lives, [the Belmont Citizens Forum] should offer them ecofriendly alternatives. Staycations are not vacation alternatives any more than Hummers are smart car alternatives.”

On the survey, we asked how important it was to explore new places on a vacation. Our survey takers responded with an average of 7.4 out of 10. On the other hand, when we asked them to rate how important it was to be ecofriendly on vacation, the average was only a 4.86 out of 10. We also received a suggestion that perhaps we should leave the ecofriendliness out of staycation and just focus on the fun of each activity.

Although it was only a small survey sample, many people aren't willing to give up their vacation habits just to be more ecofriendly.

I had so much fun getting to work with the BCF this summer and learned so much. I learned how to write an engaging and informative survey with the help of an expert in the field, talked to local journalists about this project, and left my comfort zone and met so many new

people in Belmont by visiting the Payson Park Music Festival. I helped plan my first “big” event (the picnic), which went more successfully than I hoped. I experienced setting a budget and having to work within it.

What could have made this experience even better? Having more people participate. However, we learned for next year and we got people to try a few new activities in Belmont. I believe that the staycation does have potential to work in future years. It would be nice to find a way for residents to share the “hidden gems” of Belmont.

It's not too late to check out our postcards or send suggestions for next year to belmontstaycation@gmail.com. If anyone might be planning an event in the summer of 2017, please contact us.

Shodai Inose is a junior at Belmont High School.

**Prize winners were not finalized at the publication time for this article. Check our website for more details regarding the winners.*

Thank You for Supporting Staycation 2016

Our August Belmont Staycation 2016 would have never been possible without the help of many. Our sincere thanks to the *Belmontonian* and *Belmont Citizens Herald* for publishing our articles and covering our project. We also thank the Belmont Historical Society and the Belmont Woman's Club for their donations to the picnic, the Wellington Station tours and the croquet set, respectively. We are grateful to Champions Sporting Goods and Groundwork Yoga + Wellness for donating prizes for our Staycation raffle.* We also thank the Payson Park Music Festival, who let us promote the Staycation on stage. Thank you to the Belmont Media Center's volunteers who helped us get footage of our Staycation picnic. Thanks to Stephanie Woerner for her advice about designing the survey. Finally, thanks to everyone who took our surveys, sent a passport, and/or posted a postcard.

Environmental Events

Board of Surveyors Hearing **Monday, September 19, 7:05 PM**

The Board of Surveyors will hold their hearing of the proposed road adjacent to Habitat at 178 Marsh Street. *This meeting has been postponed indefinitely. Check the BCF website for any updates.*

350 Mass Cambridge Node Meeting **Tuesday, September 20, 6:30–8:30 PM**

Join discussions with a grassroots climate network in Massachusetts. Newcomers welcome. *First Church Cambridge, 11 Garden Street, Cambridge.*

Community Preservation Committee Public Information Meeting **Tuesday, September 20, 7:30–9 PM**

The Arlington Community Preservation Committee will hold a Public Information Meeting for those who want to learn more about projects eligible for Community Preservation Act funds and the application process. A draft of the Community Preservation Plan will be presented. The deadline for preliminary applications is October 7th. See the Committee web page for more information *Town Hall, Charles Lyons Hearing Room, 2nd Floor, 730 Mass. Avenue, Arlington.*

Boston Green Drinks Happy Hour **Tuesday, September 27, 2016, 6–8 PM**

Join the conversation with sustainability professionals and hobbyists. Build your connection with our green community of sustainably-minded Bostonians. Green Drinks provides a forum for exchange of sustainability career resources, and serves as a central point of information about emerging green issues. We support the exchange of ideas and resources about

sustainable energy, environment, food, health, and education. *Scholars Pub, 25 School St., Boston.*

8th Massachusetts Green Careers Conference **Thursday, September 29, 8 AM–4 PM**

Meet employers, green-career-ready candidates, experts, and learners dedicated to clean energy and sustainability all in one place. Enjoy presenters, exhibitors, coaches, and an industry summit. The venue is a walkable two blocks from the commuter rail station. Register: masscec.com/events Contact JenBoudrie@gmail.com

DCU Center, 50 Foster St, Worcester.

Cycle to the Source 2016

Saturday, October 1, 8 AM–4 PM

Join Cambridge Water Department staff and Urban Adventours for Cycle to the Source, a guided bike tour of the Cambridge watershed. It starts at the purification facility at 250 Fresh Pond Parkway and visits the watershed lands and reservoirs in Lincoln, Lexington, Weston, and Waltham. Please note, this is for adults only. Advanced registration is required: <http://bit.do/cycletothesource2016>.

For more information, visit <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Water/Programs/watershedbiketour/cycletothesource2016>.

Walter J. Sullivan Water Treatment Facility 250 Fresh Pond Pkwy, Cambridge

Sustainable Belmont Meeting **Wednesday, October 5 and November 2, 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.*

**Green Cambridge Monthly Meeting
Thursday, October 6, 6:30–8:30 PM**

Eastern Bank Community Room, Harvard Square, 1 Brattle Square, Cambridge.

**Sustainable Water Management
Initiative Mitigation Workshop**

Wednesday, October 26, 8:30 AM–2PM

The new SWMI Water Management Act permits are starting to trickle out, and we want you to be ready to work with your communities and state regulators to make

sure rivers are protected. Sue Beede and a team of experts will help you navigate the new permit process and provide guidance on how and when you should engage with this permitting program. Learn more at massriversalliance.org.

Westborough Fish and Wildlife HQ. 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough.

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.

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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

September/October 2016

CONTENTS



At the Belmont Staycation Picnic on August 13, young adults gathered for a meditation circle led by Groundwork Wellness + Yoga. Story on page 11.

Conservation Land and Development.....1
Habitat Wetlands at Risk

Can “Small-Town” Belmont Add Housing..5
Current and Former Town Officials Comment

Lower Speed Limits For Belmont?.....7
My Long, Long, Long, Short Journey Across Town

Solar Shines Brightly in Belmont.....10
Now Up To 250 Installations; Belmont Drives
Electric Coming in October

Staycation 2016: A Successful Experiment....11
A Student’s Citizen Forum Project

Environmental Events.....14
Important Public Events in Our Region