



Belmont Citizens Forum

Demolition Delay Could Save Historic Buildings

182 Structures Now Under Consideration for “Historic” Designation



IAN TODREAS, UPDOG GALLERY

Belmont Methodist Church on Common Street, an example of Gothic Revival architecture, is on the list of buildings designated for review by the Historic District Commission.

by Sharon Vanderslice

Belmont’s historic districts preserve many of the town’s historic buildings, which contribute dramatically to its sense of place. But many other important buildings are outside the districts. To protect them, Belmont Town Meeting has now required a one-year delay before anyone can get a permit to demolish 182 historically or architecturally significant buildings not otherwise protected.

The list of designated buildings was developed by the Historic District Commission (HDC) from information prepared by

a preservation consultant and funded by a 2013 Belmont Community Preservation Act grant. The list, approved by Town Meeting in May, replaced an expiring demolition delay bylaw that had protected 149 properties. The 2016 Historic Resources Survey by Lisa Mausolf updated a survey of significant Belmont properties done by Boston University between 1979 and 1982 when the primarily 19th-century Pleasant Street Historic District was established. The 1984 *Belmont: The Architecture and Development of the Town of Homes*, known locally as the Green Book, was based on the BU survey.

The new survey evaluated properties that had previously been ignored, including mid-20th-century buildings such as the Walter Gropius-designed home at 69 Pinehurst Road, post-war commercial buildings such as the 105-115 Trapelo Road block in Cushing Square, and Belmont Hill properties such as the magnificent Tudor Revival home at 191 Clifton Street, according to HDC co-chair Lauren Meier. Twenty-four buildings on the list are considered candidates for the National Register of Historic Places.

In the wake of neighborhood uproar over the demolition of both the Waverley

Square Congregational Church and the Arts & Crafts rectory of Our Lady of Mercy Church in 2010, eight Belmont churches are on the list of historic buildings subject to demolition review. They are the 1912 Gothic Revival Saint Joseph's Church and the 1922 Gothic Revival Belmont Methodist Church on Common Street, the 1890 Richardsonian Romanesque First Church at 404 Concord Avenue, the 1912 Mission-style Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church at 21 Marlboro Street, the Gothic Revival Saint Luke's Church at 132 Lexington Street, the 1904 English Revival First Baptist Church at 129 Lexington Street, the 1915 neo-Gothic Revival Payson Park Congregational at 351 Belmont Street, and the 1897 English Revival All Saints Church, rectory, and hall at 69 Common Street.

Belmont Citizens Forum

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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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Belmont's Distinctive Buildings

"The town of Belmont is a highly desirable place to live and work, largely due to the quality and quantity of distinctive historic properties like these," explains HDC co-chair and architectural conservator Lisa Harrington. "They give the community a character that is irreplaceable."

"What this bylaw provides is a small bit of protection for buildings not already protected by other means."

"What this bylaw provides is a small bit of protection for buildings not already protected by other means," says Meier, whose own home is on the list. If an owner wishes to demolish a building on the list, he or she must first apply for a permit from the Office of Community Development, as is required for any building project. The town then notifies the community of a pending demolition and the HDC holds a public hearing to determine whether the building is "preferably preserved." If it is so designated, the owner must wait up to 12 months before demolishing the building. This delay provides time to explore alternatives to demolition—including, for instance,



The First Church in Belmont Unitarian Universalist on Concord Avenue, a Richardsonian Romanesque design, is on the list for historic preservation review.

receives final approval from the Massachusetts attorney general. (As of this writing, the AG's office has not responded to the proposal, and might not until October, according to Spencer Gober, staff planner in the Belmont Community Development office.)

On appeal, the Board of Selectmen would make the final decision on applicability.

At a public hearing before the Town Meeting vote this past spring, homeowners raised questions about the impact of a demolition delay bylaw on their property values and the effect it would have on any desired renovations. "A lot of evidence exists that preservation

conversion to condominiums (as was done with the old Waverley Square fire station) or re-use of accessory buildings (as was done with the renovated barn at 5 Somerset Street). The delay allows the neighborhood to weigh in on viable options.

Owners who demolish their historically significant building without following the bylaw are fined \$300 per day for up to one year.

The HDC may waive or reduce the delay period. Owners who demolish their historically significant building without following the bylaw are fined \$300 per day for up to one year. Owners who believe that their property was mistakenly included on the review list may file an appeal with Belmont's Office of Community Development within 60 days after the bylaw

enhances property values," Meier says. The bylaw places no restrictions on renovations, she added. A homeowner could, for instance, rip out exterior architectural details, replace windows, or remove porches, dormers, and additions.

"You can't really replace these homes with new construction. These old homes were built to last."

In fact, says Meier, a more durable form of preservation would utilize other kinds of planning tools including designated neighborhood conservation districts or zoning rules that would protect neighborhoods from incompatible development. The bylaw is a balance between preserving the character of the town and preserving the rights of owners.

"You can't really replace these homes with new construction," Meier adds. "These old homes were built to last."

Preservation is a Sound Investment

HDC co-chair Harrington references a 2005 Brookings Institution paper by Randall Mason of the University of Pennsylvania that reviewed dozens of studies on the economics of preservation. "Historic preservation," it concluded, "is typically judged to be a sound investment. By most accounts, it is more efficient and profitable to preserve a historic building than to construct a new one." The relative cost savings of rehabilitation can range from 3 to 16%, according to real estate and preservation expert Donovan Rypkema.

Mason cited an exhaustive 2001 study of cities in Texas, which found that historic designation increased property values in the range of 5 to 20%. Another 2003 study of New York City buildings found that local historic district designation and regulation resulted in real estate price premiums ranging from 22.6 to 71.8%.

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Another HDC member, local realtor Terry McCarthy, said that so far, based on a small sample of eight homes that were on Belmont's demo delay list and sold since 2013, the effect of the bylaw on sales has been small. "Single-family homes listed for over \$700,000 and not on the demo delay list sold for 101 percent of their list price within an average of 30 days, while the single-family homes that were on the demo delay list and sold during the same time frame and were also listed for over \$700,000 sold for an average of 100 percent of their list price within an average of 34 days," she notes.

When compared with demolition delay bylaws in nearby towns, Belmont's is considered lenient. For one thing, it has a five-year sunset provision that would

require Town Meeting to vote to renew it in the near future. "The five-year sunset clause likely reflects the difficulty of getting historic preservation (or anything that limits property rights) through Town Meeting," according to Sue Bass (a longtime Precinct 3 TMM). The bylaw that it replaces also had a sunset clause, originally 2016, which received a one-year extension because the study took longer than expected.

When compared with demolition delay bylaws in nearby towns, Belmont's is considered lenient. For one thing, it has a five-year sunset provision that would require Town Meeting to vote to renew it in the near future.

The bylaw also applies to a narrowly defined list of buildings and excludes all municipal buildings. In contrast, Newton's bylaw covers any structure 50 years or older and Wellesley's bylaw applies to any dwelling built prior to 1950. Arlington also has a robust bylaw, in addition to many designated historic districts.

"What's on our updated list is not a *complete* list of historically or architecturally significant buildings in the town," says Meier, but is "representative of the most important unprotected historic buildings that illustrate the range of styles and periods in Belmont."

To view the entire survey of buildings subject to demolition delay, which date from 1700 to 1948, you may visit the town of Belmont website: <http://bit.ly/2xPjmx5>

Sharon Vanderslice is a former Town Meeting member, a former member of the Historic District Commission, and the founding editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

Belmont Reviews Trash and Recycling Options

Town Hearing Set for September 25



PIXABAY STOCK

As Belmont prepares to put its trash and recycling contract out for bid, the author analyzes four possible options.

by Kim Slack

This fall, Belmont will be negotiating a new contract for trash and recycling collection with interested haulers, to begin in July 2018. Now is an optimal time to consider other options for how Belmont deals with its trash. There are many urgent reasons that suggest that we change how we deal with our trash.

Along with fellow members of the Sustainable Belmont Advisory Group, I evaluated several options. P.

We encourage the public to voice their views at a meeting on September 25 at Town Hall.

The state has set a goal that calls on communities to reduce their trash by 30% by 2020. Belmont is just halfway there.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP), only 11% of Massachusetts towns use systems like Belmont's: unlimited trash collection paid entirely by property taxes. This makes Belmont's trash system

especially expensive at a time when the town's finances are becoming strained. According to the Warrant Committee, Belmont will face a \$4 million annual budget deficit in less than two years, not including the cost of a new high school. By law, Belmont must have a balanced budget.

Future disposal costs may bring increases. Casella, a waste management firm that operates many landfills and recycling facilities in New England, anticipates a 20% reduction in the region's disposal capacity over the next several years. MA DEP anticipates an 8.6% reduction of in-state disposal capacity

between 2016–2018.

There is urgency to the matter because, as part of its 2009 Climate Action Plan, Belmont established goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The town has made limited progress towards these goals despite the push by residents for many green initiatives: revised solar policies, advocating for the purchase of electric vehicles, becoming a certified Green Community, and supporting a community path. Waste reduction, which can have a significant impact on reducing emissions, would be a key element in meeting our goals.

Further, through the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act, the state has set a goal that calls on communities to reduce their trash by 30% by 2020. Belmont is just halfway there.

Recognizing that funds saved on trash disposal could be applied to mitigate taxes in other areas, Belmont's Town Meeting this year voted 62% in favor of seriously considering a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) approach, despite reminders that a 1990 town override vote was intended in part to continue "free" trash pickup paid entirely with property

taxes.

In reviewing Belmont’s trash and recycling contracts this fall, the selectmen have an opportunity to guide the town to consider better options that will address our overall needs and goals for both fiscally responsible and environmentally sound policy.

Here are two options on how Belmont could save money on trash and recycling:

1. Reducing Waste

We can achieve the greatest savings by simply reducing the amount of trash we generate. A lower volume reduces the disposal costs the town pays to the Wheelabrator incinerator in North Andover. We currently pay \$65/ton to burn trash and dispose of the ash. Waste can be reduced most efficiently by either limiting trash barrel size (e.g., one 35-gallon barrel per household) or by requiring residents to purchase trash bags at a higher price, the PAYT option. Each approach results in different amounts of waste saved (see Figure 1, page 7).

Because Belmont produces below-average amounts of household trash to start with, it can expect less-dramatic reductions than

towns that generate more trash.

Expanded recycling is often discussed as a way to reduce trash. While Belmont already mandates recycling, our recycling rate hasn’t changed over the past six years, since we signed our last contract.

Some communities try policing recycling efforts, either by not picking up curbside trash unless a recycle bin is also present, or by issuing tickets if there is no recycling put out.

Many residents have asked if recycling could be picked up weekly, but there’s evidence that it would only increase the amount of recycling modestly while doubling the cost. Some communities try policing recycling efforts, either by not picking up curbside trash unless a recycle bin is also present, or by issuing tickets if there is no recycling put out. This “stick” approach has seen small improvements in waste reduction, but is sometimes not well received by residents.



JOHN DICOCO

Many communities use the “automated” system of a collection truck that can pick up and dump a “toter” with a single operator never leaving the cab of the truck.

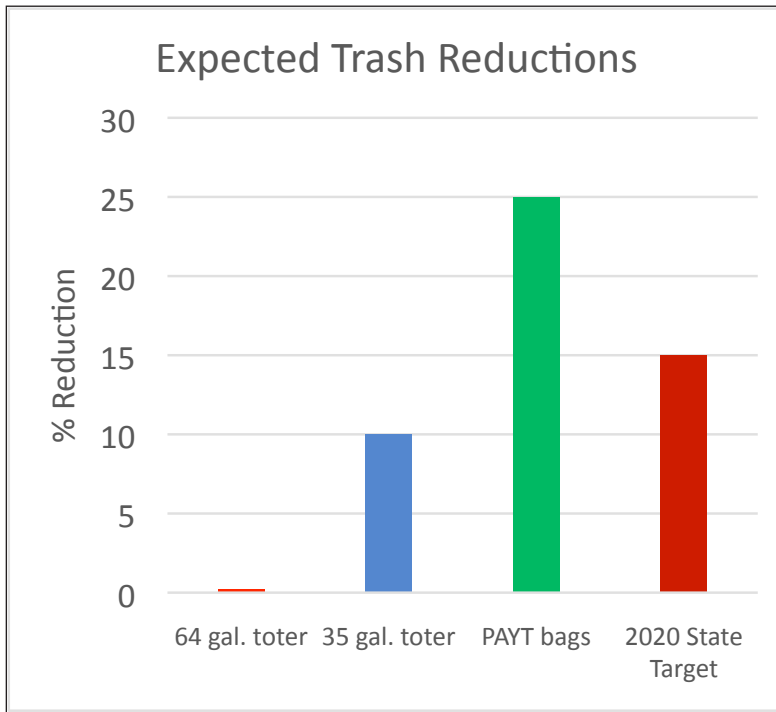


Figure 1. Of the options under consideration, only two show a reduction of waste. Only PAYT meets or exceeds the state goal. (Source: Mass. DEP estimates)

Single-stream recycling is popular in some communities, but because prices for recycled paper are currently relatively high, there’s more benefit for Belmont to continue its dual-stream system that separates paper from other recyclables.

Food waste is a major portion of our trash, but it is not yet economical to separately collect this heavy, wet material and take it to a compost facility. In the future, special trucks may be available to pick up both food waste and recycling, thereby saving the cost of yet another collection round.

2. Automated Collection

Automated collection uses trucks equipped with an arm that picks up standard square-shaped bins with wheels (called toters). Because these automated trucks need only one worker rather than two, labor and benefits costs should go down. However, it is difficult to find cases in Massachusetts where communities have quantified and captured these savings from automation. Most of the reported savings from automation come from having barrel limits that help reduce trash, not lower labor costs. As

Kevin Douglas, a representative from Russell has explained: “If you only have that one 64-gallon [automated] barrel, you’re more apt to take that big piece of cardboard and throw it into the [recycling] barrel. . . That’s where the savings is.”

Savings from automation may be elusive for several reasons: 1) automated trucks can pick up from only one side of the street at a time, potentially increasing collection time, 2) automated trucks cost more and require additional maintenance, 3) toters would have to be supplied to each household, and 4) dense neighborhoods with on-street parking might slow down collection or require an additional person.

In 2011, Belmont received proposals for both automated and manual collection and the latter was less expensive.

However, conditions may have changed to make automated collection competitive.

State Grants Can Help

Massachusetts wants communities to reduce their trash, and provides one-time Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) grants to help the transition to either small (35 gallon) toters or PAYT bags. Belmont could receive \$300,000 if they limited household trash to a single 35-gallon automated toter, which could partially offset the toters’ cost (between \$400,000 and \$500,000 for Belmont’s households). The state also provides grant funding for PAYT bag programs that would amount to more than \$200,000 for Belmont.

How Can Belmont Reduce the Environmental Impact of Trash?

Trash has a significant impact on our environment—it requires energy to make, transport, and in Belmont’s case, to burn. While energy is produced from the incineration, additional processing is required to prevent toxins from getting into our air and water, which has proven difficult. By reducing trash volume, we help make

the communities near the incinerator a bit cleaner and safer.

Figure 2 shows an estimate from consulting firm Waste Zero 2016: If Belmont were able to cut its waste by 25%, it would reduce the emission of 4,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of 4.5% of Belmont's home energy use.

Assessing Options

Belmont's Department of Public Works has narrowed the many options for trash and recycling to four so that there are equivalent comparisons between vendors when it considers bids:

1. Maintain the status quo
2. 64-gallon toter limit, automated collection
3. 35-gallon toter limit, automated collection (SMART grant eligible)
4. PAYT bag system (SMART grant eligible)

Additionally, for all options, limits will be imposed on bulky items (furniture, mattresses, etc.).

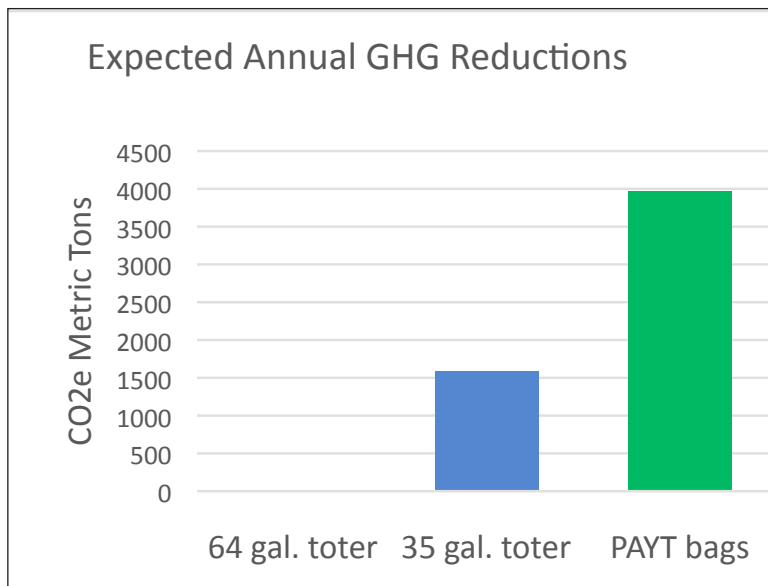


Figure 2. PAYT results in a greater reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). (Source: Waste Zero 2016)

What are the Tradeoffs?

As with most policy options, there are tradeoffs among various criteria. Table 1 on page 9 shows a comparison of four options across five criteria. While costs and savings are

important, they won't be completely known until the bids are received later this fall.

Across all options, bulky waste would also be collected, though the fee structure is unknown at this time. There will also need to be community outreach for each option. Vendors might be able to assist with outreach for automation or PAYT.

There are good data for Belmont's annual average for trash and recycling volumes, which are consistent from year to year, that might help to determine toter size. In 2016, adjusting for schools and bulky waste, the average household disposed of 21.1 pounds of trash a week, or about 28.4 gallons. Each household recycled an average of 15 pounds every other week. With a 35-gallon barrel limit or with PAYT, trash volume is expected to decrease, while recycling would increase.

• Status Quo

What we currently have, only with limits on bulky waste which will be in place for all options. The town will probably see a small reduction in trash if residents turn to organizations such as Household Goods or Goodwill to take their furniture and other large items. Our current system is very convenient, but it is costly, since it places few limits on trash, does not reduce our disposal expenses, and results in more pollution.

• 64-gallon Toter Limit, Automated Collection

With automated collection, many residents might appreciate the uniform look of the same-size barrel with a lid. Many communities that implemented this have seen reductions in trash. But because Belmont has below-average trash per household, state officials do not expect Belmont to see much if any reduction in trash with a 64-gallon size. There is a possibility that Belmont would see pollution increase, since automated trucks can only collect from one side of the street at time, potentially increasing the amount of emissions from diesel trucks.

Assessing RFP Options Against Key Criteria

| | Status Quo | 64 gal. Automated Toter (bin with wheels) | 35 gal. Automated Toter SMART (Save Money and Reduce Trash) | Pay-As-You-Throw Bags (Revenue neutral) |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Net Savings to Town | Some minimal savings through improved management of bulky wastes. | Potential labor savings from automation, negligible savings from reduced waste | Potential labor savings, \$44K/yr from 10% less trash, \$300K state grant | \$110K/yr from 25% less trash, \$300K state grant |
| Environmental Impact | No reduction in trash or Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions | Potential increase in GHG emissions from trucks that only do one side of street at a time | 10% reduction in trash, equivalent to 1.7% of GHG emissions of Belmont's home energy use | 25% reduction in trash, equivalent to 4.5% of GHG emissions of Belmont's home energy use |
| Convenience | No change | Toter may be difficult to move, store. Large size means fewer overflow bags may be purchased | Smaller toter easier to store and move. Smaller size means more overflow bags may be purchased | Bag use required. Different size bags purchased at local retailers, \$1-2 each, annual fees returned to residents |
| Administration | Scheduling of bulky pick ups | Scheduling of bulky pick ups. Bin maintenance scheduling | Scheduling of bulky pick ups. Bin maintenance scheduling | Scheduling of bulky pick ups. Third party vendor for bags, fees covered from bag sales |
| Transition | Outreach about scheduling of bulky pick ups | Outreach about bin placement on street, overflow bag sales, bin maintenance, bulky scheduling | Outreach about bin placement on street, overflow bag sales, bin maintenance, bulky scheduling, dumping | Outreach about bag sales, dumping, rebate of bag fees, bulky scheduling |

Table 1. The Pay-As-You-Throw option results in a greater overall reduction in trash and greenhouse gas emissions, without imposing limits on individual trash. (Data provided by Waste Zero 2016 and the Mass DEP.)

Some residents are concerned that a full 64-gallon toter would be difficult to maneuver, especially if they have a sloping driveway that gets slick in the winter.

• 35-gallon Toter Limit, Automated Collection

The state would provide about \$300,000 in a one-time grant as part of its SMART program for this option. State officials expect Belmont could reduce its trash by 10%. Some feel this size barrel limit is too small, but with the average household disposing of 28.4 gallons of trash a week, it might suffice. Residents who could not reduce waste enough would have to buy overflow bags for pickup.

In most cases, the hauler owns and maintains the square toters that usually come with a 10-year warranty. Some vendors may want to negotiate contracts to spread out the initial costs for the toters and special trucks over a longer time period. While this may reduce the town's annual costs, it locks them into one vendor for an extended time

between competitive bids.

• PAYT Bags

This option is expected to reduce our trash by 25%, and Belmont could receive a \$200,000 grant from the SMART program. Residents would buy bags that cost \$1 to \$2 each from local retailers, increasing local retail traffic. The cost of the bags would reduce the amount of trash by providing an incentive to recycle. No bag or barrel limit would be imposed. Some town officials and many residents want a PAYT program to be "revenue-neutral" so that bag fees would be returned to households, costing the average resident nothing. The process for returning fees might be to divide the total annual amount of bag fees collected (minus the non-PAYT consumer cost of the bags) by the number of households and either rebate the amount on tax bills or send checks. Seniors and low-income residents may receive free bags.

The town does not need to hire additional staff to administer PAYT, as there are third-party vendors that distribute bags to local

retailers and provide accounting to the town. Their revenue comes from the difference between the wholesale cost of the bags and the current retail cost of about 30 cents each (<http://bit.ly/2eHcNJe>).

With PAYT, residents aren't limited by barrel size, and can use their own barrels to keep animals away from their refuse. Bags would come in various sizes so residents can put out smaller bags if they can't fill a 33-gallon bag every week.

The town does not need to hire additional staff to administer PAYT, as there are third-party vendors that distribute bags to local retailers and provide accounting to the town.

Concerns about illegal dumping are not verified by PAYT towns. Having early communication and enforcement of dumping by-laws reduces the odds of problems.

Litter, however, continues to be a problem for Belmont, and some have suggested that part of the PAYT savings could be applied to anti-litter efforts.

Sustainable Belmont's Advisory Group has endorsed PAYT bags for their ability to reduce greenhouse gases and help meet the town's Climate Action goals.

Conclusion

Belmont needs to find savings in every corner of its budget. Trash and recycling costs can be trimmed without impacting service or adding costs to residents, but it requires some changes.

The environmental benefits of reducing trash supports many of the town's goals—and it won't cost more than our current system. The option with the most waste reduction is PAYT bags. Belmont's Town Meeting strongly approved having the selectmen consider PAYT in the next contract. If bag fees are returned to taxpayers, they would cost the average household nothing, while providing an incentive for recycling. Since most residents

currently bag their trash and buy bags at local retailers, it probably entails the least change for residents and likely provides the best environmental and financial outcome for the town.

Trash and recycling costs can be trimmed without impacting service or adding costs to residents, but it requires some changes.

If automating collection can bring significant financial savings after covering additional equipment costs, then the town would need to balance the environmental goals it has set with its financial needs and the convenience to residents.

As a public process, citizens should let selectmen know what they value by calling, emailing, or coming to a meeting at Town Hall on September 25. Please check the town website, <http://bit.ly/2eHcNJe>, to confirm the meeting date and time.

Kim Slack is chair of Sustainable Belmont.

To read this article appended with footnotes, please go to belmontcitizensforum.org and click on the September/October Newsletter.

Iyengar Joins Land Management Committee



JOHN DICOCO

Radha Iyengar, right, being sworn in as a member of the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill by Ellen O'Brien Cushman, town clerk, at Town Hall on August 23. She is the selectmen's appointee to this nine-member committee. Iyengar, who has long been a volunteer and advocate for Lone Tree Hill preservation, is a board member of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

WE'RE SEEKING CONTRIBUTORS

Would you like to write articles? Shoot photos?
Investigate? Research? Illustrate objects or ideas?

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,
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Keeping the Lights On and the Water Flowing

The Sources of Belmont Utilities

by Virginia Jordan

In the US, most of us take our water and other utilities for granted. But how are they delivered to Belmont residents, and who is responsible for keeping them flowing?

Utility companies supply our electricity, gas, water, telephone, cable, internet, and wireless. Some are supplied by corporations like National Grid or Eversource (formerly NStar.) These private electricity and gas providers, also known as investor-owned utilities, are regulated by various state and federal agencies. Other utilities are supplied by the Water Division of Belmont's Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Belmont Light Department. These are publicly owned utilities subject to local public control and regulation.

Water and Electric Power for Belmont

Belmont was incorporated in 1859 and began providing for a public water supply in 1885. Belmont's water today comes from the Quabbin Reservoir, about 65 miles west of Boston, and the Wachusett Reservoir, about 35 miles west of Boston. These reservoirs supply wholesale water to local water departments in 51 communities.

Each resident's Belmont water bill includes charges based on actual water usage, plus sewer charges for the sanitary sewer system. No one is billed directly for the stormwater drain system. All three systems (water mains, sewer lines, and stormwater drains) are maintained, repaired, and constructed by the town, although each by a different department.

Residents' electric bills include only electricity. Belmont Light, established in 1896, is legally organized as a municipal light plant and governed by a set of century-old state rules. Belmont Light owns distribution lines but not generation plants; it buys



PIXABAY STOCK

electric power from various sources and distributes it within the town.

Becca Keane, energy resources analyst for Belmont Light, explained the sources of Belmont's electric power. "For 2017, 20 percent of our power supply mix comes from direct, specified contracts with suppliers based in New England. This is the 20 percent that we can easily describe: 12 percent is hydro from Maine and New York, 7 percent is wind from Maine, and 1 percent is solar from western Massachusetts. . . . We are actively pursuing a plan to increase the amounts of renewables in Belmont's portfolio so that we can decisively match or exceed state-mandated renewables levels.

"A small but increasing percentage of our portfolio comes from rooftop solar generated by residents right here in Belmont. In

the recent past, this has amounted to less than 1 percent of our resource mix. For 2016, rooftop solar generated by residents and businesses in Belmont made up 0.41 percent of our portfolio (approximately 505 MWh)."

The other 79 to 80% of the portfolio corresponds to the average fuel mix for New England's grid.

Financially, Belmont's water and electric utilities are both enterprise funds, a way for the town to separate these business-type activities from regular tax-based revenue.

Enterprise Funds

Financially, Belmont's water and electric utilities are both enterprise funds, a way for the town to separate these business-type activities from regular tax-based revenue. User fees for water and electricity pay the utilities' operating costs. Last year the user fees received by the water, sewer, and electric light enterprise funds were \$6.2 million, \$8.4 million, and \$26.1 million, respectively. Town treasurer Floyd S. Carmen oversees the enterprise funds, as he does all other town investments, cash management, and revenue collection. A breakdown of income and expenses is available in the Belmont Annual Report on the town website.

Operations—Water

The Water Division handles the town's water distribution system. Division manager Michael R. Bishop and operations manager Mark Mancuso are in charge of 93 miles of water main pipes, 2,743 gate valves, 742 fire hydrants, and about 7,670 individual water service pipes to buildings. The latest water main improvements were just completed on Winter Street.

They also see to it that the quality of drinking water complies with the US Environmental Protection Agency Safe Drinking Water Act, and with regulations of the Massachusetts Department of

Environmental Protection.

Belmont is part of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). In the dry summer of 2016, when levels at the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs dropped below normal, the MWRA urged water conservation, while assuring us supplies were adequate.

The Water Division is overseen by the Water Advisory Board. The three-person policy committee is appointed by the Board of Selectmen to advise the town on water management and infrastructure investment.

Operations—Sewer and Stormwater

No town department name contains the word "sewer." Rather, the Highway Division of DPW is responsible for sewer maintenance, repair, and construction. Division manager Michael A. Santoro and operations manager Rick Bemis are in charge of the sanitary sewers, with 76 miles of main lines, 6,700 service lines to buildings on public and private ways, and three pumping stations. They also are in charge of the storm drain system, consisting of another 54 miles of main lines, 2,000 catch basins, and one pumping station.

Drinking water has to be safe for humans, and stormwater discharges aren't supposed to harm the environment. Belmont is designated as an urban area and is regulated by the EPA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System stormwater program. Town engineer Glenn Clancy implements the stormwater management program.

No equivalent to the Water Advisory Board exists for sewers. The town's Office of Community Development has authority over stormwater and sewers.

Operations—Electric

Why is the electric department organized differently? Historically, streetlights were the first major use for electricity. Since they were paid for by the municipality, it was in the town's interest to own and control the electric utility. Massachusetts enabled the formation of municipal light plants in 1891; Belmont

authorized its plant in 1896 and acquired the original distribution system in 1898.

It used to be that in quiet, sleepy Belmont, you could still go pay your electric bill in person at any hour. Even in the middle of the night, a person was awake at the substation to accept your check with a nod and return to his monitoring.

Infrastructure and Capital Projects

Responsibility for the capital projects for water and sewer also falls into different departments, but not in the same way as operations. While operations are divided between DPW Water and DPW Highway, long-term capital projects are divided between DPW Water and Community Development for sewer: capital expenditures for water mains are in the DPW budget; sewer capital projects and storm drain repairs are in the Community Development budget.

Requests that are to be funded by the

town's enterprise funds are submitted directly to the Capital Budget Committee for recommendation to Town Meeting.

Funding

Capital expenditures for water and sewers projects, equipment, and upkeep are funded by the enterprise funds generated from user fees, but also by appropriations from the town general fund.

To learn more about any of Belmont's town services, visit <http://bit.ly/2w32xNQ>

Virginia Jordan is a member of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter Committee.

Tracking Traffic

Sumner Brown, right, a board member of Belmont Citizens Forum, and BCF intern Aryan Mehrotra, an 11th-grader at Belmont High School, spent several days in August counting vehicles at various intersections around Belmont, seeking to quantify areas of high congestion. At right they are recording morning rush hour traffic near the railroad crossing on Brighton Street. Their findings will result in a future article by Mehrotra in this *Newsletter*.



JOHN DICOCO

What's The Latest in Cushing Square?

The Project Moves Forward and Continues to Evolve



JOHN DICOCO

Excavation and construction at the Bradford residential and retail complex continues. Pictured above is excavation work where the Hyland building will be, at the corner of Common Street and Belmont Street. Several retaining walls are already in place. Entrance to the underground parking garage will be under the Hyland.

by *John DiCocco*

There's progress at the Bradford (formerly named Cushing Village), the three-building residential and retail complex in Cushing Square. Since our last article on the development in the May-June 2017 issue, construction is still moving ahead although several issues remain unresolved.

Toll Brothers Apartment Living is the developer (through a subsidiary named Belmont Residential LLC), and Nauset Construction is the general contractor. Toll Brothers employs Sage Environmental as their licensed site professional (LSP) and the town has independently contracted with

John Thompson, LSP, of Waypoint Environmental, who reports to town engineer Glenn Clancy on a regular basis.

As we go to press, the excavation has been enlarged, and some of the outer foundation walls have been poured. Importantly, however, the toxic soil at the former Tops Cleaners site (495 Common Street) has yet to be fully neutralized and removed.

In May, Otto Weiss, project manager for Toll Brothers, said, "The Winslow Building on Trapelo Road will open first in the summer of 2018. The Hyland, on Common Street, and the Pomona, on the corner of Common and Trapelo, will open in late 2018 and summer 2019, respectively." So far,



JOHN DICOCO

At the foundation work for the Winslow building, at the corner of Williston Road and Trapelo Road, the crew continues to remove stubborn ledge so they can lay down the cement floor of the parking garage.

this schedule is still in effect.

All sides would clearly like the project to be completed so that life in Cushing Square could return to normal. But the priorities of local residents and the developer don't always align.

Several issues cause concern for town residents: Changes to building materials. Changes to apartment configurations. Incomplete reports. Parking disputes. Traffic. Idling trucks. Shade issues. And rats.

Designs and Redesigns

Peter Quinn has been the architect for the project almost from the beginning, when Starr Development Partners initiated it. Toll Brothers has kept him on. The original design had a façade with several setbacks, adding visual interest. The most recent design has a flatter face, is more block-like, and there are now a greater number of materials proposed.

According to Toll project manager Otto Weiss, "The changes are a result of our wanting to bring the project up to Toll standards that we felt the previous developer's design did not meet."

One resident was particularly dismayed: "Aesthetically these buildings are a dog's breakfast, using every single possible architectural design element and material available. . . There is no cohesion to the design to please the eye and absolutely no visual or aesthetic connection to the square (except perhaps to the dreadful six-story apartment building across the street)."

The original design had significant brickwork and stucco on the exterior, but Toll is now substituting brick panels. Critics say the panels tend to suffer warping, delaminating, and water infiltration within a few years. Weiss responds, "These panels are done on many commercial buildings and we feel they are just as durable. We wanted to get

rid of the proposed stucco because it was exterior insulation and finish system grade. Real stucco, which we prefer, is fine for a home, but is not as desirable in this size project.”

Another resident was critical of the town’s response, saying, “The Planning Board seemed accepting of the fake brick panel in June, and spoke in praise of the other external design changes that many of us feel merely make the buildings more industrial and less appropriate for the setting.” Fairly large sections of the building might also be covered in fiberboard and batten, and apparently they were approved without discussion at the same meeting.

The Planning Board (PB) discussed external design changes on the Hyland Building only. When they were moving to vote approval of the design changes, senior planner Jeffrey Wheeler requested clarification as to whether the board needed to review the proposed design changes to the other buildings as well before voting. Chairperson Liz Allison said “No, this is an ongoing process, and subject to review once further mockups of the designs are provided to the board.” The PB then proceeded to approve design changes as presented for the entire Bradford project.

This may mean that the Planning Board effectively approved design changes to two of the three buildings with no public discussion.

This may mean that the PB effectively approved design changes to two of the three buildings with no public discussion. Allison added, however, that the board would soon take on a review of the special permit again in detail as an open item, so hopefully this issue will be resolved.

Belmont Citizens Forum made several attempts to reach Liz Allison by phone and email for comments but received no response.

Doug Koplow, of the Cushing Square

Neighborhood Association (CSNA) says, “We consider this materials issue very much open still, and hope the Planning Board will work to reconcile it.”

What Lies in the Shadows?

The height of the buildings and the shadows they cast are also in question. In the latest design iteration, Toll Brothers said the exterior profile has been reduced in several places, including the elevator coverings. A rooftop patio on the Winslow has been moved to the Hyland.

Several months ago, one of the immediate abutters to the project raised a concern with Belmont’s Office of Community Development (OCD). The person worried that the changes in the building envelope Toll adopted to boost rentable square footage (and that made the building more rectangular) could result in more shadowing than had been illustrated in an analysis of the shadow impacts done by Quinn two years ago.

Unfortunately, the resident inquiry went unanswered for weeks and required multiple follow-ups before OCD acknowledged they would look into it. After more time went by with no information, CSNA put a formal request in to OCD: “Please have the developer update the shadow study done two years ago with the current proposed massing.”

According to CSNA’s Koplow, “This is hardly a burdensome request: as with the floor layouts mentioned above, CAD [computer-aided design] software make shadow studies fairly routine to spit out. We requested the developer present the shadowing of the current design adjacent to their last shadow study. This would quickly and easily illustrate whether or not there is a significant change in terms of impacts on residents. There has been zero response from the Office of Community Development, despite a follow-up.”

Toll’s Weiss indicated he had never seen shadow studies for this project—past or

present—nor did he have any knowledge of the town requesting them, but would look into it.

Is a Den a Bedroom?

The design of the apartments is also evolving. In the current configuration, there are 111 units, including nine studios, 25 one-bedrooms, 30 one-bedrooms plus a “study” or “den”; two one-bedrooms plus a study and den; 35 two-bedrooms with small alcove; and 11 two-bedrooms plus a study or den.

When the project was first approved, the town would not allow three-bedroom units, reasoning they would be attractive to families with school-age children. The issue is primarily economic: towns visualize multifamily housing as increasing both their mix of housing stock and their net property taxes—a double-win. But if a building brings

in too many school-age children, the cost of schooling can erode property tax gains and eventually turn into a net loss.

Toll Brothers’ changes—while claiming that bedroom counts went down—included a considerable number of new rooms they called “dens” and “studies.”

Of course, there are many configurations of possible renters without children: single people; two or three roommates; a couple; or empty nesters. Any of these might prefer to have a spare bedroom and office space rather than a one-bedroom unit. But the PB and CSNA were both concerned that Toll Brothers’ changes—while claiming that bedroom counts went down—included a considerable number of new rooms they

An overhead view of the project with building footprints, pedestrian walkways, driving lanes, and parking spaces.



called “dens” and “studies.”

To ensure they weren’t bedrooms in all but name, the PB requested detailed drawings to review against a set of criteria they had developed. A report-out on their findings was on the PB meeting agenda in mid-July. The board developed a number of criteria to vet which of these extra rooms should be counted as *de facto* bedrooms based on size, number of walls, proximity to other bedrooms, and location in the unit. They ruled that the original parameters of the permit would continue to be held: no three-bedroom and no more than 60 two-bedroom units— including any den or study as a bedroom when their criteria indicated such use was likely.

In a pattern that critics say has become all too common on this project, the developer delivered to the OCD a paper copy of the drawings, and did so with little time before the meeting. That paper copy was not clear in how it delineated room divisions, and remained very challenging to read at all. As a result of all of these factors, the board kicked the item off their agenda (tentatively scheduled for mid-September, but it is not yet on the town website calendar).

Parking and Traffic Concerns

Most of the 240 proposed parking spaces for the project will be underground. They include 51 commercial spots for the retail businesses and their customers, 101 for Bradford residents, 50 municipal, plus 17 on the street, and 21 on an aboveground lot.

Street access to underground parking will be via Trapelo Road and Common Street. The underground parking entrance will be on the Horne Road extension, leading under the Hyland building. Those parking underground will have access to various elevators and stairs.

Since both Trapelo Road and Common Street are busy commuter routes in both directions, the potential addition of 100+ cars entering/traversing the Cushing Square five-way intersection and the Common

Street/Belmont Street intersection during morning and evening rush hours is a concern for local residents. The builders and the Planning Board hope that the proximity to the bus lines will attract a fair amount of residents who will commute using public transportation.

Trucks Idling, Parking Problems, and Rats

Another concern voiced by local residents is the often idling trucks pulled over on Trapelo awaiting their turn to enter the site. The town, CSNA, Toll Brothers, and the police had an agreement that trucks not entering the site immediately would be shut off. The people at Nauset Construction seemed to have forgotten, or ignored the request until police have come by and told them to shut down.

On July 17, the Belmont Department of Health sent out a letter noting an increase in rat activity in the vicinity of Oak Avenue.

There are two nursery and pre-K schools on Belmont Street, close by the construction site. A combination of jersey barriers and parking spaces taken up by construction workers means that parents dropping off toddlers must park farther away or across the street in Watertown, and often cross the street with one or more children between 8:30 and 9:30 AM. Both Kendall School and Christ Lutheran Nursery School have raised the issue and Kendall proposed having one-hour (or at most) two-hour parking limit signs on their section of the street. Glenn Clancy responded and expressed doubt that the town could single out the spaces immediately in front of the schools but he offered to have the Traffic Advisory Committee add the item to their next meeting agenda on September 14.

On July 17, the Belmont Department of Health sent out a letter noting an increase in rat activity in the vicinity of Oak Avenue.

Pine Street residents have also seen rats for the first time. This is not uncommon when projects of this size excavate a rodent habitat—the rats seek other places where food may be available. The Health Department had not heard complaints from immediate abutters or on the site itself, but did get reports from the Trapelo/Slade Road intersection. Rat activity is up this year in both Belmont and surrounding towns; and the largest reporting areas are around Clay Pit Pond and Trapelo Road towards Hull Street.

Communication is Lacking

While the town has repeatedly asked Toll for specific details about items such as configuration of parking spaces, number of actual bedrooms, exact building heights (and how they are measured), window specs, and shadow study, the architect has not directly responded to its request for a list of proposed material changes. Instead, architect Quinn characterized this issue as “a few upgrades should be noted.” He made no mention of areas of substitution and downgrades.

...why can't the Planning Board insist on the details in the special permit that was issued and sold with the property?

CSNA had developed a set of quantitative metrics on the approved and proposed designs that they provided to the board and requested they have Toll fill out. Neither Quinn nor Toll Brothers responded, and the OCD did not require them to do so.

It begs the question of why can't the Planning Board insist on the details in the special permit that was issued and sold with the property?

According to CSNA, getting the applicant to provide what he has been asked for, and in a timely manner such that the PB has adequate review time and the neighbors can actually see the proposal before it is voted

on, has been a recurring struggle.

Otto Weiss responds that all the plans requested have been presented and that the town should have copies of all of them for public viewing. “Some may be less detailed, because they are still being developed—still in flux as we go through reviews—but once the special permit is issued, fully detailed plans will be released.”

When asked how he would evaluate Toll's relationship with the town, Weiss said, “On our side we think we have a great relationship. When issues come up, we try to deal with them as quickly as possible. We hope the town sees it the same way.”

John DiCocco is editor of *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*.

Excavation Moving Along ... Except ...

The Mass Department of Environmental Protection continues to test excavated soils and approves them for removal from the Bradford site.

However, the section of ground below the former Tops Cleaners, 495 Common Street (designated on the site diagram as cells F1, F2, G1, G2), has yet to be approved for removal. The section has a significant amount of toxic waste produced by the dry cleaner, who occupied the space for decades. Toll Brothers has had to take time to first mitigate the pollution on site before it could be hauled away. The initial hope was to have the soil ready for removal in July. Because of complications, Toll is still working on the problem. Both Sage Environmental and Waypoint Environmental are monitoring the process.

Letter to the Editor

In our July-August issue, author Sumner Brown proposed a congestion pricing scheme (a sort of toll for cutting through town) to cut down on traffic. A reader responds.

Dear Editor,

The recent article, "A Cure for Belmont Traffic Congestion," certainly highlights a problem that I see every day, since I live on Pleasant Street, right near Belmont Center. Out-of-town drivers turn the street into a veritable parking lot during rush hour.

But the problem isn't a market failure in commuter pricing, and a metered pricing solution would be expensive and politically unrealistic anyway. We need to be honest and open-minded about how this situation came about, and the answer is that it's us. The town of Belmont has enacted strict zoning that limits denser housing development.

As a result, we have a nice suburban community only minutes from Boston. But the flip side is that we have limited, expensive housing that forces many commuters to live outside our radius, and thus travel through town to get to work.

If we really want to reduce traffic congestion, we could start by making zoning less restrictive.

If we really want to reduce traffic congestion, we could start by making zoning less restrictive. According to Wikipedia, Belmont has a density of 5,300 people per square mile, which has been about constant for the last 80 years. In contrast, Arlington has 8,239 people/sq mi, and Cambridge has 15,000 people/sq mi. If we were to allow Belmont to grow through new, denser housing, then many of those cut-through commuters would move to Belmont. Instead of driving all the way through, they'd start within the town and drive on average halfway through.

But more importantly, a more densely populated Belmont would have a denser pool of participants for public transportation, and more political clout. We'd get more bus service, maybe more frequent commuter rail stops, or (can you imagine it?) an extension of the Red Line into our town.

There would also likely be more options for less expensive housing—such as apartments—thus

potentially increasing the economic diversity of the town. With other options besides single-family homes, there would be fewer "McMansion" houses. And the higher density would even reduce the carbon footprint of residents, through more efficient housing, shorter commutes for the residents, and more use of public transportation. Ironically, perhaps, a denser Belmont could substantially reduce per-person average CO₂ emissions.

The character of the town could certainly change substantially with this approach. Belmont could be far different from the town my father grew up in 80 years ago. Imagine the dynamic changes during those first decades of the 20th century, when Belmont transitioned from farmland to homes! Surely many must have thought the nature of the town was being lost. Yet now, in hindsight, we who have the benefit of living here are very happy about that transformation, knowing Belmont has changed, but is still a wonderful place.

What might Belmont become in coming decades if we allow it to evolve more naturally as a community? Of course it's impossible to know for sure. What does seem certain is that maintaining the status quo will inevitably perpetuate the issues we face with traffic.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Wolf, Belmont Resident

Thank You to our Valued September-October Contributors

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Environmental Events

Extreme Events and Climate Change

Thursday, September 14; 7–8 PM

What We Know and What We Can Do
Ellen Marie Douglas, Associate Professor of Hydrology, School for the Environment, University of Massachusetts Boston. Douglas will discuss observations of our changing climate, what changes may be in Boston's future, and some plans for how to adapt to these changes. *New England Aquarium, 1 Central Wharf, Boston.*

Belmont Drives Electric, Ride & Drive **Sunday, September 17, 1–4 PM**

Learn about electric vehicles and test drive Chevy Bolts, Volkswagen Golfs, Nissan Leafs, and other electric vehicles. Meet local owners to get their experience. Food truck, music, games, and more. belmontdriveselectric.org. *Chenery Middle School, 95 Washington St.*

Boston Sustainability Breakfasts **Wednesday, September 20, 7:30–8:30 AM**

Join us every month for Net Impact Boston's informal breakfast meetup of sustainability professionals for

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

Writing or editing for the Newsletter

Community path work

Newsletter mailings

Event organizing

networking, discussion, and moral support. <http://bit.ly/2w33Oo3> *Pret A Manger, 101 Arch Street, Boston.*

Environmental Studies School
Saturday and Sunday, September 23 and 24, 8:30 AM–4:30 PM

The Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, Inc. will offer Series 5, Course 2: The Living Earth—Land & Related Issues. Subjects to be covered are ecology, plants, environmental science, wildlife, Earth stewardship, source reduction of pollutants, coastal zone management, and field study of the land. Contact Leigh Cameron at leighb.cameron@gmail.com. *UTECH, Inc., 35 Warren Street, Lowell.*

Belmont's Trash Options—Public Meeting

Monday, September 25, 7–8:30 PM
Belmont Town Hall, 455 Concord Avenue.

Boston Area Sustainability Group
Tuesdays, October 3, November 7, 5–7:30 PM

Local and national experts discuss issues vital to the community. <https://basgdo-torg.wordpress.com>. *Cambridge Innovation Center, Venture Cafe, One Broadway, Cambridge.*

Junior League's Designer Show House,
October 7–November 5, Hours vary by day; see website.

The home is currently owned by the Belmont Woman's Club and was previously owned by William Flagg Homer, uncle of the painter Winslow Homer. The house has more than twenty soon-to-be renovated spaces by interior designers from all over the area. It will be a fantastic experience for anyone interested in interior design, architecture, and historic homes.

Individual tickets are \$35-40, with discounts to groups of 10 or more. All tours are self-guided and no reservations are needed. <http://bit.ly/2eZ4zJd> *William Flagg Homer House, 661 Pleasant Street, Belmont.*

Sustainable Belmont Meetings
Wednesdays, 7–8:30 PM

October 4: Sustainable Schools
Learn more about the 3Rs in the Belmont Public Schools—Reduce, Recycle and Reuse with members of the Belmont PTA/PTO Green Alliance. Learn what sustainability efforts are (and are not) happening from the elementary schools to the high school. sustainablebelmont.org/
Also: **November 1, December 6, January 3.** *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

DC, Massachusetts, and the Future of a Clean Energy Economy

Tuesday, October 17, 6:00–7:30 PM
Join the Alliance for Business Leadership and UMass Boston for a conversation about the effect the federal government's current policies will have on the Massachusetts clean energy economy. Moderated by Heather Goldstone, science correspondent for WCAI and WGBH Radio. <http://bit.ly/2eHaOEH>
Massachusetts Club, 1 Beacon Street, Boston.

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