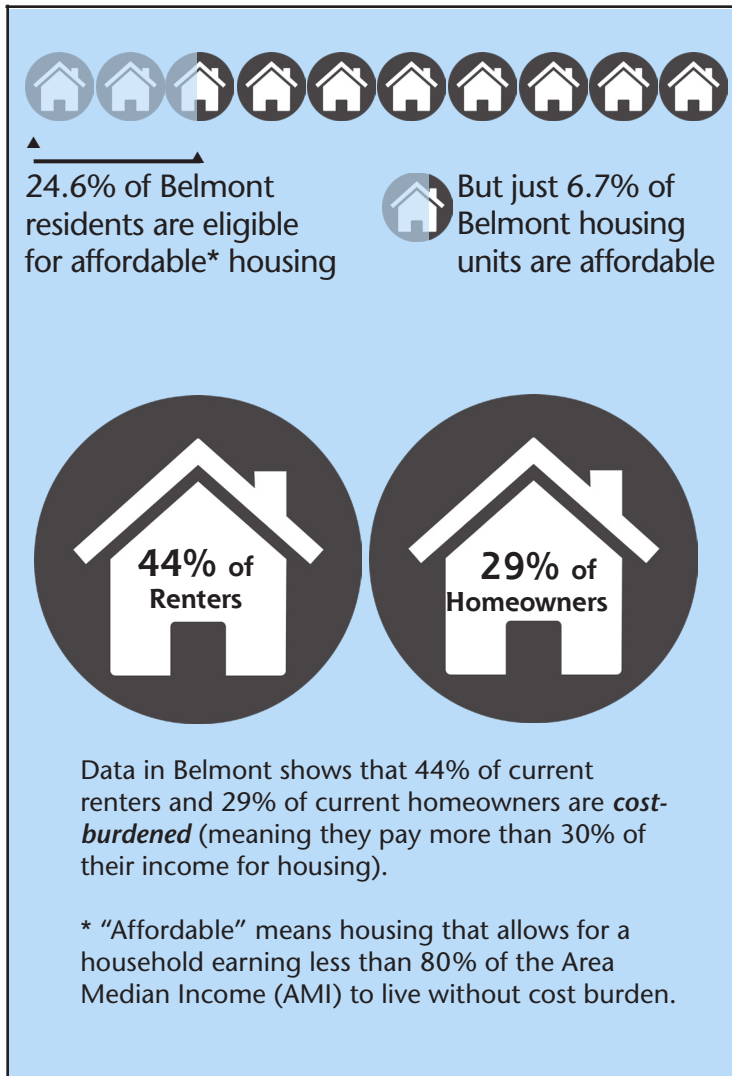




Belmont's Housing Future Providing More Affordable Options



creating that housing (also called “community housing”¹) would get the town out from under the threat of unwanted development—because Belmont would meet the state standard of having 10% of its housing affordable.

For the past two years, the Belmont Housing Trust has been working on a housing production plan (HPP) to encourage building housing that is affordable to groups such as town employees, seniors who wish to downsize, and families just starting out. To create the plan, the trust worked with two partners: Metro West Collaborative Development and the Belmont League of Women Voters. The HPP was funded in part by the contributions of Belmont residents under the state’s Community Investment Tax Credit. (From amounts received in 2015 and 2016, the contributing group authorized about \$15,000 to be used to pay Metro West for the research and create charts for the HPP.)²

Raising Public Awareness

Metro West provided statistical reviews of census and other data to demonstrate the need for—and lack of—affordable housing in Belmont. As part of developing the HPP, the trust held a series of meetings on “Imagining Belmont’s Housing Future,” to involve townspeople and make them aware of our need for increasing housing options and of the planning process being undertaken. The meetings also solicited the public’s ideas and opinions on transit-oriented development, opportunities on public land, redevelopment

by Julie Perkins

Belmont is a wealthy town by most standards, with a higher-than-state-average median income. But a quarter of Belmont’s population would be eligible for affordable housing if more were available, according to statistics gathered by Metro West Collaborative Development, a nonprofit based in Newton. And

of underutilized and industrial sites, and revitalization of existing community housing.

The resulting HPP is now on the town government website. (See the left-hand menu at belmont-ma.gov/housing-trust for links to the plan and its graphic summary.) Adoption of such a plan would be an important step in Belmont's efforts to meet the mandate for at least 10% permanently affordable housing stock. It would also remove or at least reduce the possibility of developers building unwanted, large-scale projects, such as the newly opened 298-apartment complex Royal Belmont

in a formerly wooded area by Route 2. (The March/April 2017 *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* article on Chapter 40B and safe harbor status explains the issue when a community has less than 10% of its year-round housing qualified as affordable.) The units in Royal Belmont and the Bradford will bring Belmont to the two-thirds mark, but the town will still fall 337 units short. (See box, page 4, "Belmont & Surrounding Towns.")

Belmont Prices Up 40%

The Housing Production Plan notes that 24.6% of Belmont's current households are eligible for affordable housing. To be eligible, a household needs to have income below 80% of the Boston area median income, adjusted for family size. The data show that 44% of current renters and 29% of current homeowners are cost-burdened (meaning they pay more than 30% of their income for housing). The problem is not getting easier: Belmont housing prices have increased by more than 40% since 2009.

Creative design can make larger buildings fit into the fabric of our neighborhoods.

Two groups are especially experiencing housing stress. Elderly Belmont residents are disproportionately cost-burdened and have very few housing options. In addition, the number of young families in town has been growing, but they too are disproportionately cost-burdened, while the barrier to entry into the community is very high.

The plan provides data on the growth in Belmont's population, especially its elderly and school-age population, and on housing development, housing unit types, age of housing stock, housing tenure, and housing market characteristics. It includes an inventory of subsidized housing. It analyzes housing affordability and zoning and residential development trends. Development constraints noted include

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John DiCocco, Editor
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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
P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478
or info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

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environmental conditions, current zoning, local capacity, and limited availability of funds.

What Can Be Done

Based on discussions with the public and studies of Belmont's needs, the plan outlines housing production goals, including more community housing options for seniors, new families, and very low-income households, and it identifies several strategies to reach these goals:

- Maximizing transit-oriented development opportunities, such as near the Waverley and Belmont Center MBTA stations, along the Trapelo Road and Pleasant Street corridors, and on Moraine Street
- Leveraging any opportunities on public land in Belmont Center (municipal light building, police station), public land at Waverley Station, and the Department of Public Works site
- Supporting the redevelopment of blighted, industrial, and underutilized sites, which might include the vacant gas station on Blanchard Road and the Purecoat factory
 - Looking for future public or other land or buildings that become available
 - Working with existing community housing, notably Sherman Gardens and Belmont Village, which are in need of

revitalization and could be reconstructed to accommodate more units

- Studying creative uses of community preservation funds to support development of additional affordable units.

Residents' Involvement is Key

Next steps for the Belmont Housing Trust are to get the plan reviewed by the Planning Board and selectmen and to obtain town approval to apply for state certification. The trust hopes town officials and residents will read the plan on the town website. It also plans distribution of fact sheets, talks, mailings, and encouragement of feedback.

Two groups are disproportionately cost-burdened in Belmont: the elderly and young families. And the barrier to entry into town is very high.

Standard opposition to building more housing—whether or not affordable—often starts with the statement, “There is so little available undeveloped land in Belmont.” This assumes that additional units must be built on previously undeveloped land.

But with thoughtful rezoning, residential units could be permitted on upper floors of

stores along main streets (such as Trapelo Road) or on presently underutilized sites. People may imagine a many-storied building, which is seen by some Belmont residents as contrary to our image of a “Town of Homes.” But creative design can make larger buildings fit into the fabric of our



The Royal Belmont apartments on Acorn Drive, now open, have added affordable units to Belmont's overall count.

Belmont & Surrounding Towns—Far From Meeting The 10% Goal

Belmont Housing Stock	10% of Housing Stock	Affordable Housing Stock	Deficit
10,117	1,012	675	337

Belmont is not alone in this deficit. Of the 11 towns surrounding Belmont, just two have met the 10% goal. The region (Belmont and the other 11 towns) lacks a total of 5,516 units for all towns to reach the 10% goal. With rising home prices, population growth, and historically low issuance of building permits, the housing cost crisis affecting thousands of households will only worsen.

neighborhoods.

Increased enrollment in the schools already challenges the town, so some wish to restrict any new development to empty nesters or seniors. If Belmont made this a policy, the town would be in violation of federal fair housing laws forbidding discrimination based on family status. And when senior residents downsize to smaller units, their former homes become available to new families with children. That is the source of our current school enrollment increases.

Strategies include maximizing transit-oriented development opportunities, such as near Waverley and Belmont Center MBTA stations.

Recent thinking is now toward having affordable units dispersed throughout the community. This creates more diversity of income and ethnic backgrounds in the public schools and has been shown to enhance opportunities and reduce the need for future housing subsidies, welfare, or other supports.

As noted in a letter to the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* (September/October 2017), zoning changes to permit higher density in housing would reduce the town's carbon footprint through more efficient housing, shorter commutes, and more use of public

transportation.

Footnotes

1. "Community housing," as defined by the Community Preservation Act, is housing that is affordable to households earning less than 100% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The US Department of Housing and Urban Development updates the AMI by household size yearly. However, to count toward the 10% state mandate, housing must be permanently affordable at 80% of AMI.

2. The state's Community Investment Tax Credit program provides that with a contribution for affordable housing of at least \$1,000, one can get a \$500 tax credit on their state tax. The contribution has to go through a Community Development Corporation such as the Metro West Collaborative Development which receives an allocation from the state each year. In the Belmont case, contributors specified Belmont as the recipient.

Julie Perkins is chair of the Belmont League of Women Voters' Town Planning/Affordable Housing Action Committee.

Belmont Traffic: Driving In, Out, and Through

Everyone Is Someone Else's Cut-Through Traffic

by Aryan Mehrotra, with Sumner Brown

Watching drivers trying to get through the railroad underpass at Belmont Center is unnerving, especially when someone who apparently did not learn to take turns in kindergarten starts swearing.

Belmont's traffic seems to be getting worse. Where does it come from and where is it going? How much traffic cuts through Belmont? On weekday mornings, traffic backs up from Belmont Center to the top of Belmont Hill, snagged by the three places where cars cross or pass under the railroad tracks.

Cut-through = Congestion

Many people in Belmont blame cut-through traffic for our congestion. As a research project, we decided to investigate

the amount of cut-through, and we believe it accounts for about 70% of our traffic at rush hours.

Feel free to hate traffic congestion. But try to understand cut-through drivers.

Before describing how we estimated cut-through traffic, we have to acknowledge a fact. Our economic society depends on public roads. Unless you never drive outside Belmont, everyone is someone else's cut-through traffic. Also, the boundary of Belmont is an historic accident. If we lived in a larger town (perhaps a combination of Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge, and Watertown), our cut-through traffic would be much less, but traffic congestion would be exactly the same. Feel free to hate traffic congestion. But try to understand cut-through drivers.

Counting Method 1

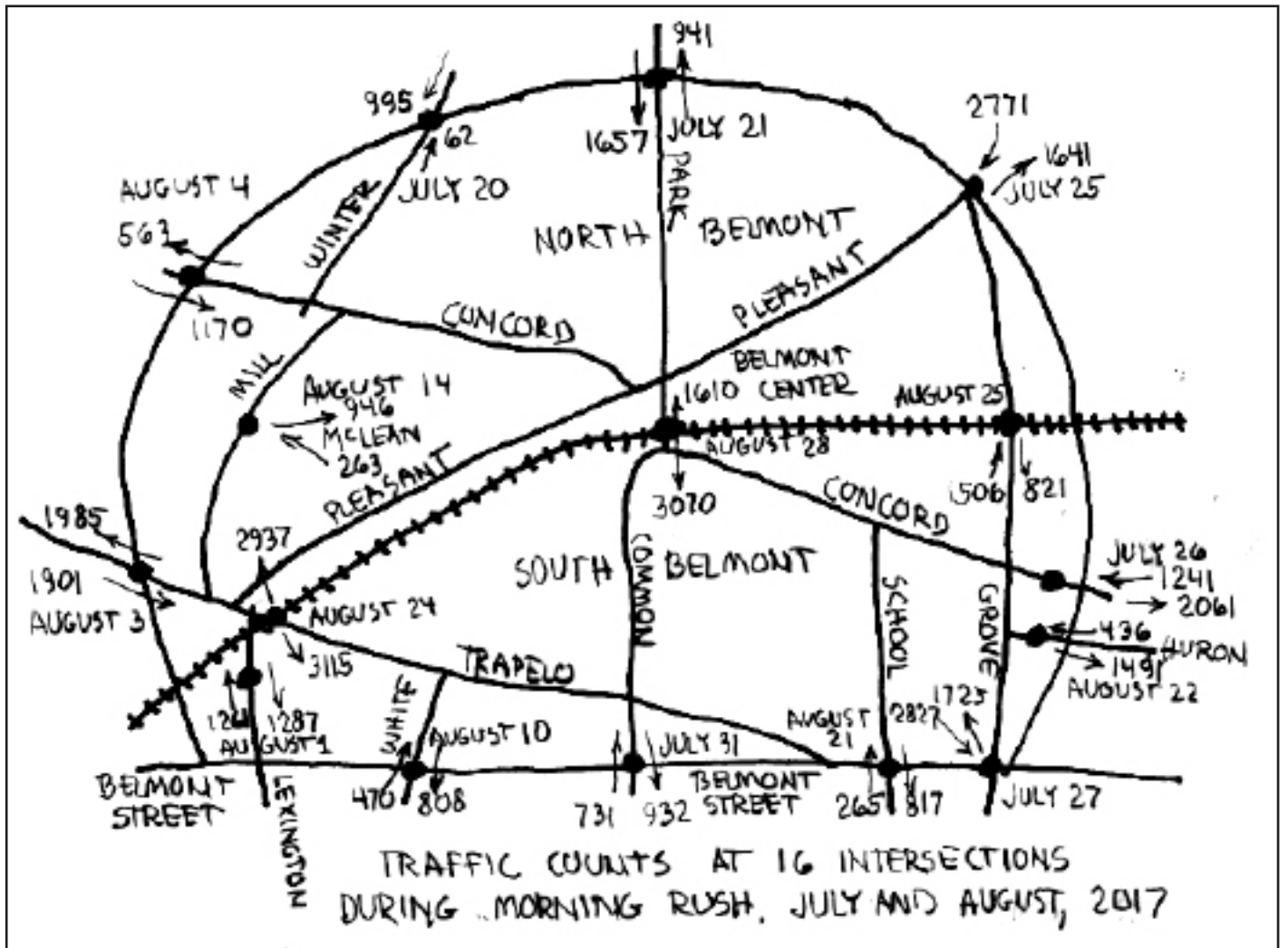
We counted traffic at 16 intersections on 16 different days. We did not count traffic at every boundary intersection. The boundary with Watertown has dozens of entry points since we share Belmont Street with Watertown. Also, we collected data during the summer when we were available and traffic was lighter than in the fall, winter, and spring.

Figure 1 shows an overview of where and when we collected data and the gross vehicle counts for 16 intersections marked by 16 black dots. You can see that



JOHN DICOCO

Aryan Mehrotra, left, and Sumner Brown spent 16 summer mornings and evenings counting traffic that flowed into and out of Belmont.



SUMNER BROWN

Figure 1. The black dots signify the 16 locations where Mehrotra and Brown counted vehicles. The numbers indicate the volume of and direction of cars in and out of those locations.

morning traffic moves through Belmont predominantly from north and west to south and southeast. Also notice that traffic can cross the railroad tracks at only three places in Belmont. The tracks concentrate motor vehicles so congestion follows, not necessarily exactly at the tracks, but at roads that lead to and from the rail crossings.

Counting Method 2

Our second method was to use the Belmont police log of traffic problems, such as, “A Toyota driven by a Cambridge man hit a Ford driven by a Belmont woman which in turn damaged a Buick driven by a Watertown man.” We read 70 traffic incident reports from 2016 and 2017 that mentioned 194 Belmont drivers and 473 non-Belmont drivers. Superficially this

suggests that 71% of drivers are cutting through Belmont, but we have no idea how many out-of-town drivers were in Belmont to shop, visit, or work.

Counting Method 3

A third estimation involved taking license plate numbers from cars going south under the Belmont Center railroad bridge between 8:15 and 8:30 AM. To run the license plates, we approached the Belmont Police Department. They helped us because we only needed to know how many cars were registered in Belmont, and they could make further use of our study to examine traffic policies. Of 90 plates, 70 were from out of town and 20 were from Belmont. This suggests that 78% of cars are from out of

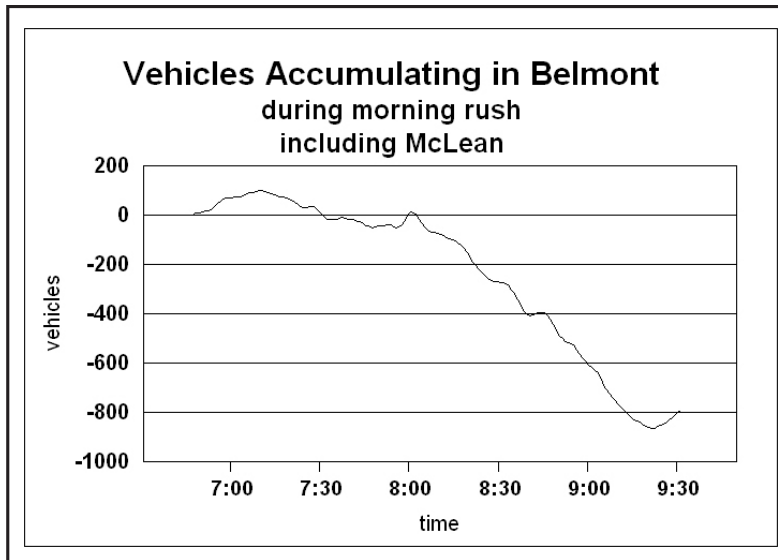


Figure 2. The total amount of cars traveling in town during morning rush hour.

town. However, this is a small sample, and we do not know how many of the out-of-town vehicles were coming to a Belmont destination.

Counting Method 4

Our fourth method was to follow cars that entered Belmont. If the cars left Belmont without parking, they were cut-through. We successfully followed 13 cars, nine of which were cut-through. We tried to follow more. Following cars through Belmont is unpleasant and dangerous. Our sample size is too small to give a credible estimate.

We chose the Clifton and Pleasant Street intersection to decide the length of morning rush hour. We defined morning rush (which emerged as 6:43–9:33 AM) as starting when a car has to wait for more than one light cycle to pass the signal and ending when a car can pass a signal in only one light cycle.

We measured traffic coming in and out of Belmont at 16 locations, including where traffic crosses the railroad tracks, and traffic coming into and out of town from the north and south. One can often learn a great deal about an area by studying what happens at the boundaries.

Figure 2 (above) shows the vehicles accumulating in Belmont during morning rush. The most remarkable thing about these data is not obvious until compared

with the total vehicles that entered and left town, shown in Figure 3 (below). For the first hour, the vehicles entering and leaving are nearly the same and the accumulation in Belmont stays close to zero. Only when Belmont people start leaving for work at a faster rate than people who come to work in town does Belmont lose cars, but the cars lost are only about 5% of the total cars that leave.

Figure 2 hints at a remarkable characteristic of Belmont morning rush traffic. For most of the intersections we observed, the traffic was close to constant for most of the morning rush. That is, Belmont’s roads are close to capacity for the entire time. (See Figure 4 (page 9), the traffic under the center railroad bridge, as an example of an intersection at capacity for nearly two hours.)

Belmontians Go Elsewhere Too

During morning weekday traffic in July and August, a total of 14,623 cars entered Belmont through various roads and a total

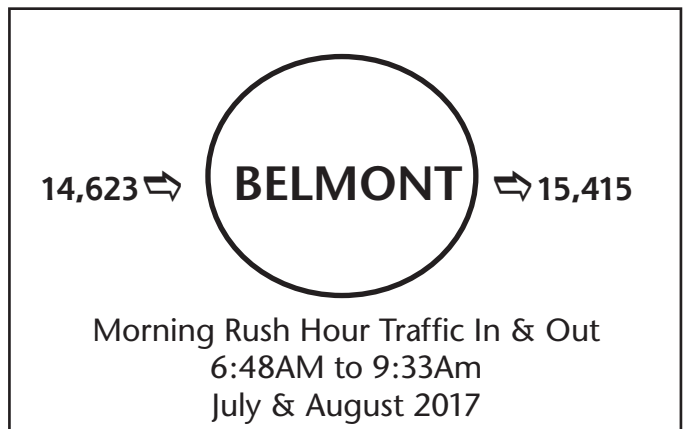


Figure 3. Despite all the cut-through traffic, more cars leave Belmont daily than enter. The difference is Belmont residents driving out.

of 15,415 cars exited Belmont. The difference is Belmont residents leaving, presumably for work. The majority of cars that enter Belmont from the north enter through Park Avenue. Cars enter from the east from Concord Avenue and Pleasant Street. From the west they enter through Concord Avenue, Trapelo Road, and Winter Street.

		Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
Data	Traffic into Belmont between 6:48 AM and 9:33 AM	14623	14623	14623	14623
	Traffic out of Belmont during morning rush	15415	15415	15415	15415
	Traffic into McLean Hospital during morning rush	946	946	946	946
	Traffic out of McLean Hospital during morning rush	263	263	263	263
Assumptions	Traffic coming in to work, other than at McLean	500	500	1000	1000
	Traffic in, Belmont people coming home	50	20	50	20
	Traffic, Belmont people driving within Belmont	300	150	500	300
	Traffic into Belmont for shopping, visiting, appointments, park and ride, etc.	300	150	500	300
	Traffic out from night shifts, excluding McLean	30	30	30	30
Unknowns	Traffic out, Belmont people going to work	2295	2115	2995	2765
	Cut-through traffic	12827	13007	12127	12357
	Total traffic	17511	17181	18411	17981
	Percentage of total traffic that is cut-through	73.25%	75.70%	65.87%	68.72%

Table 1. A summary of the data indicates that more than 70% of Belmont traffic during rush hour is created by non-residents cutting through our town.

From the south, most cars enter through Lexington Street and Grove Street. For many locations where we collected data, each street always had either more cars exiting or more cars entering.

Streets With The Biggest Difference

According to our data, the roads that have the greatest difference between cars entering and exiting are Winter Street, Concord Avenue (west), and Pleasant Street. More cars enter Belmont through these

streets than any of the other streets at which we collected data. Some streets had the opposite, with more cars exiting than entering: Common Street, Concord Avenue (east), School Street, and Huron Avenue.

The roads used for entering Belmont are connected to Arlington, Route 2, and Lexington. To get to places such as Cambridge or Watertown while avoiding traffic on Route 2, going through Belmont is the most sensible path. The roads used for exiting Belmont connect mostly to



Traffic at the railroad tunnel in Belmont Center is frequently slow because vehicles enter and exit to and from three directions.

Again, we must mention that since these data were taken during the summer vacation, fewer cars are on the road than on a school morning. When we collected data on Brighton Street, traffic was flowing relatively smoothly and had to stop only when a train was passing. On a school morning, however, the traffic moves significantly slower, often backed up from the signal on Concord Avenue to the gas

station on Pleasant Street.

Cambridge, Watertown, and Waltham.

We also collected data to examine the flow of traffic within Belmont at three places where the railroad goes through Belmont: at Brighton Street, the bridge at Belmont Center, and at Trapelo Road in Waverley Square. At all three crossings more cars were going south towards Watertown, Cambridge, and Waltham. The most popular spot is the bridge at Belmont Center with 3,373 cars passing through in about three hours. Trapelo Road was second with 1,954, and Brighton Street had 1,726.

The number of cars going north at Belmont Center was 1,768 cars, with 1,777 at Trapelo Road, and 889 at Brighton Street.

Even though the majority of the cars that enter Belmont are cut-through, some come to Belmont for work. McLean Hospital, one of the largest employers in town, accounts for a sizable portion of traffic. Close to 800 cars enter McLean during the morning rush. About 290 cars leave the hospital during the morning rush (most likely the night shift).

I hope that people will ask themselves before they select homes and sites for new offices about the commuting consequences. Google recently considered a site for a new campus in Waltham and asked potential employees what would make the site attractive. The answer was a site where they could commute by

bicycle. Google settled in Cambridge. This gives me hope.

Aryan Mehrotra, a junior at Belmont High School, is an intern at Belmont Citizens Forum working with Sumner Brown, a BCF board member.

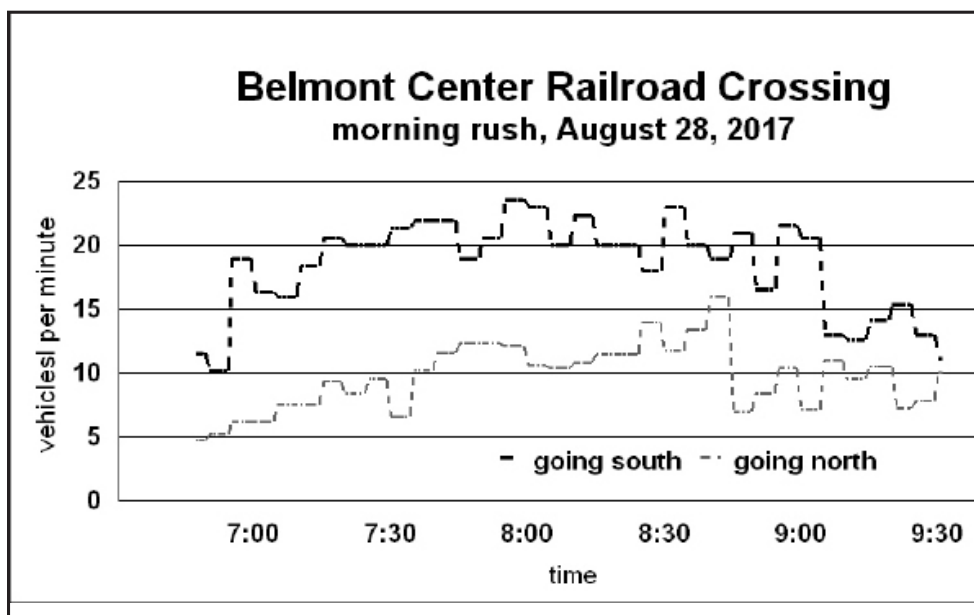


Figure 4. The number of vehicles crossing under the railroad bridge on Leonard Street in Belmont Center.

JKR Conservation Fund Charts a New Path

New Structure, New Name



JEANNE MOONEY

Roger Wrubel, Sanctuary Director at Mass Audubon, Habitat and now Executive Director of the Judy Record Conservation Fund, signs the new fund charter, with, from left, Kit Dreier, former President, now Board member JR Fund, and Gary Clayton, President, Mass Audubon, and Gene Record, former President and now Board member, JR Fund.

by Roger Wrubel

Since its inception in 2001, the Judith K. Record (JKR) Memorial Conservation Fund has been dedicated to protecting, rehabilitating, and maintaining open space in Belmont and neighboring communities through grant awards and direct funding of public and private projects.

To enhance the long-term sustainability of the fund and its mission, the JKR board of trustees has announced a new charter that embraces all the goals of the original mission but modifies the board of trustee structure and includes additional conservation objectives. Most immediately, they established a new position of executive director, with Roger Wrubel in the role. He

is also the director of Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary in Belmont. The Massachusetts Audubon Society will continue to administer the fund's finances, as it has done since the JKR's inception, with its name now simplified to the Judy Record Conservation Fund (the fund).

Beginning June 1, 2018, the board of trustees will consist of three members: the executive director who will be the director of Mass Audubon Habitat (Roger Wrubel), the president of Mass Audubon (Gary Clayton) or designee, and a current board member (Eugene Record). This change will give the fund continuity into the future and keep grant making active and visible with the leadership of Mass Audubon.

Thank You to Donors

"We wish to thank our many generous donors who helped us establish the fund and all those who have given to our annual appeals," said board member Kit Dreier. "We have immense gratitude for the Record Players for their essential role in helping us raise funds at our annual chamber music concerts. Flautist Andrea Nolin has created wonderful programs with her fellow musicians Sarah Freiberg, Colin Davis, Ray Jackendoff, Anne Black, Ken Stalberg, and others."

The fund's main priority has been to assist Belmont with the long-term needs of Lone Tree Hill, the 88 acres of meadows

and woodlands transferred from McLean Hospital to the town in 2005. In partnership with the Land Management Committee, the fund has supported numerous projects over the last 17 years, including restoring the Great Meadow, field mowing and removal of invasives, developing the Lone Tree Hill Comprehensive Trail Plan, creating maps and signage, and restoring both the historic stone wall and the Pine Allee along Concord Avenue.

The fund has also contributed to two important land purchases by Mass Audubon: a 1.25-acre parcel owned by the Belmont Hill Club and a 2.59-acre parcel owned by the Weeks family, which are both now part of Habitat, protected by conservation restrictions.

Continually Looking to Help

The fund will continue to look for opportunities to protect, maintain, restore, and acquire conservation lands in Belmont and the neighboring communities of Lexington, Cambridge, Waltham, Watertown, and Arlington. In addition, the fund will consider projects within conservation lands that further the development of multiuse paths, off-road hiking and biking trails, and universally accessible trails. The fund will provide support for internships with recognized conservation organizations, fostering the next generation of

conservation leaders.

“We hope the community will continue to support the Judy Record Conservation Fund as this new chapter of trusteeship with Mass Audubon brings long-term professional leadership to the granting of worthy local conservation initiatives here in Belmont and the surrounding communities,” said Martha Moore, a member of the board.

The fund will continue to look for opportunities to protect, maintain, restore, and acquire conservation lands in Belmont and the neighboring communities.

The other trustees are Eugene Record, Rosalie Kerr, Lauren Meier, Jeanne Mooney, Jeffrey North, Anne Paulsen, and Heli Tomford.

Contributions can be made to the Judy Record Conservation Fund and mailed to: Mass Audubon, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773. Information about the fund can still be found at jkrfund.org and will appear in the near future at massaudubon.org/habitat.

For information on applying for grants, contact Roger Wrubel (rwrubel@massaudubon.org).

Roger Wrubel is the director of Mass Audubon Habitat and a Belmont town meeting member.

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, and sincere gratitude.

Contact:

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An Update On The Bradford

Multiple Activities On- and Off-site



JOHN DICOCO

Work continues at the Bradford (seen from Common Street), though the pace may be delayed until the toxic waste in two sections (under the white tarps) is finally neutralized enough to be removed.

by John DiCocco

Excavation and foundation work continues at the Bradford, the apartment and retail complex in Cushing Square, previously known as Cushing Village.

However, the contaminated soil remaining from the demolished Tops Cleaners continues to be a problem and has not yet been treated to a level that allows it to be handled as non-hazardous waste. A new round of tests is pending.

A Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) site visit in early October found a new area of potential contamination. Since DEP visits infrequently, and Toll/Nauset Construction (the primary contractor) hadn't flagged this area on their own, it raises a question about whether more hazards remain uncovered.

Due to slower progress, the town's licensed site professional (LSP¹) John Thompson, also visits the site less often. The town still awaits

the results of pending environmental tests on soil contamination, unresolved since the last report in September.

Rats!

Despite claims by Toll that their construction is not responsible for a rash of rat sightings in the surrounding area, it is quite common for a large construction project to displace and disperse rodent populations. Water and sewer replacements do the same. Toll says that they have not had complaints from immediate neighbors.

The Cushing Square Neighborhood Association (CSNA) is exploring this further, and says rodent control measures in effect on the site would most likely benefit the immediate neighbors, but it would not be surprising to see the

most new rat activity a bit further away.

And there's off-site action as well.

CSNA continues to push for clarity on Toll's plans regarding the safety of the Common Street perimeter barrier. Vertical drops of 20 feet or more are protected only by a flimsy chain link fence, where small children regularly walk to pre-school. Toll has finally acknowledged the issue, though they have not provided either a clear plan on their planned actions or an explanation why they believe no action is necessary.

Planning Board Resignations

Changes underway at the Belmont Planning Board (PB) could affect future oversight of the Cushing Square development, as well as other Belmont projects. In October, three members, Raffi Manjikian, Barbara Fiacco, and chair Liz Allison, resigned. The board requires four affirmative votes to approve any special permits.

Manjikian and Allison were also questioning Toll's characterization of some spaces as "dens" or "studies," when they could easily be seen—and used—as bedrooms, thus getting around the town's prohibition of three-bedroom units in the development. With their resignation, it's unclear whether other PB members would continue the query.

"Hopefully," said CSNA's Doug Koplow, "the Board of Selectmen will step in quickly to identify strong replacement candidates. In the meantime, it's likely that CSNA will need to do more on its own to ensure that the project runs smoothly and that we don't see any erosion in permit conditions that lead to a larger, less durable, or cheapened building project."

Add to all this a lawsuit.

Starr Sues Toll Brothers

On September 9, Chris Starr, as Smith Legacy Partners, LLC (SLP), the previous developer of the site, filed suit against Toll Brothers for increasing the cleanup budget significantly without his agreement.

Changes underway at the Belmont Planning Board could affect future oversight of the Cushing Square development . . .

The original September 2016 agreement between Starr and Toll assigned \$1.3 million to SLP for the cleanup, with any changes to be mutually approved by both parties. (Starr would pay this cleanup in exchange for the right to manage the leasing of the retail spaces in the complex.) Toll claims the cost has now risen to \$4.2 million. SLP seeks \$20 million in damages. Starr asserts there was little to no documentation of the change in procedure and no changes to the soil at the site that would precipitate the change.

Starr alleges Toll is "using these unjustified increases in environmental cleanup costs to eliminate our retail option and participation in the future of the Bradford," as quoted by the *Belmont Citizen-Herald*.

Starr was on the other side of a similar suit he brought against the Price family, which previously owned Tops Cleaners, alleged source of the original contamination. (The owner died in the midst of the litigation, and the case continued against his estate.) In that case, Starr sought compensation of \$8.3 million for cleanup, including \$4.8 million for future costs. The judgment, concluded in 2010, denied most of Starr's claims point by point, allowing only just over \$650,000 in what were deemed legitimate costs.

The judge, evaluating the reasonable costs for environmental cleanup, indicated that *in-situ* treatment (where chemicals are mixed onsite to reduce contamination to below-hazardous levels) was expensive and duplicative, and that soil removal was the most appropriate treatment as well as likely to be the most cost-efficient.

However, since Toll acquired the property from SLP, Toll says the DEP has required that the Tops Cleaners portion of the site be neutralized by Toll before removal. There have been multiple treatments, and the soil is still being mitigated as we go to press. Toll has not indicated whether this will affect the project timeline.

Town has Lost \$10 Million

The original expected date by which the SLP buildings were to have been fully leased was December 2008. The cost of this delay to Belmont in terms of property taxes forgone is now approaching \$10 million.

The planning board asked Toll about the impact of Starr's suit on project progression; Toll said there would be no impact.

Belmont Citizens Forum will continue to monitor this project.

Footnote

1. LSPs are scientists, engineers, and public health specialists with significant professional expertise in oil and hazardous material contamination. They are licensed to act as *de facto* regulators on the site.

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

Environmental Events

Big Woods Hike

Sunday, November 19, 11:30 AM–3 PM

There's a walk in the woods...and then there's a walk in the woods with a naturalist to discover what is happening in the world of nature as plants and animals prepare for winter.

Sanctuary naturalists will lead small groups as they venture out to the "Big Woods" on Averill's Island. Stop along the way to hear stories of the original settlers and learn about the fascinating cultural history of the sanctuary. Look

for animal signs as we hike through the woodlands and marshes.

Dress warmly and wear comfortable footwear. Warm up by the wood stove in the barn upon your return. Refreshments available for purchase beginning at 11 AM.

Advance registration required.

Members: \$8 adult, \$7 child; non-members: \$9 adult, \$8 child. Register online or call 978-887-9264. Please choose a hike time when you register. Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary, 87 Perkins Row, Topsfield

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Newsletter mailings

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The Environmental Solutions Initiative People & the Planet Lecture Series: Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Guest Speaker

Monday, November 20, 4–6 PM

The series presents individuals and organizations working to advance understanding and action toward a humane and sustainable future. For more information, contact: Hannah Loomis, esi@mit.edu MIT, Building E14, MPR-647, 75 Amherst Street, Cambridge

Giving Thanks for Nature

Friday, November 24, 10 AM–1 PM

Spend your Black Friday away from the malls and outside in nature. Take a walk through the sanctuary as local artists give trailside performances, then contribute your own expressions of thanks with family-friendly crafts and activities. Members & Lincoln residents, free; non-member adults \$9, children (ages 2–13) \$6, seniors \$6. *Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln*

Boston Green Drinks

Tuesday, November 28, 6–8 PM

Boston Green Drinks builds a community of sustainably minded Bostonians, 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, education. *New location: The Ginger Man (back room), 148 Main Street, Boston*

Sustainable Belmont Meetings

Wednesdays, 7–8:30 PM

December 6, January 3. *Assembly*

Room, Belmont Public Library, Concord Avenue, Belmont.

Belmont High School Building Project Community Engagement Forum

Tuesday, December 12, 7–9 PM

Discussion topics include general project updates, including project schedule, district school enrollment updates, and time for questions, comments, and feedback. *Belmont High School Auditorium*

Boston Environmental History Seminar

Tuesday, January 16, 5:15 PM

The Massachusetts Historical Society hosts Jeffrey Egan, University of Connecticut, who will discuss "The Fight Before the Flood: Rural Protest and the Debate Over Boston's Quabbin Reservoir, 1919-1927" with comment by Belmont resident Karl Haglund, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. *Massachusetts Historical Society, 1154 Boylston Street, Boston*

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It's a moment for celebration as the Judy Record Conservation Fund takes on a new name and board structure. From left, Gary Clayton, Roger Wrubel, Kit Dreir, and Gene Record. Story on page 10.

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