



'A Vision for Belmont' Looking Back, Looking Ahead

by Sue Bass

Nearly eight years ago, in the spring of 2010, the town completed two years of work on a comprehensive plan intended to guide the next decade of change in Belmont. Looking back, how are we doing?

The \$148,000 plan, called "A Vision for Belmont: Mapping a Sustainable Future," which was adopted by the Belmont Planning Board and is posted on its website, made nine primary recommendations:

- Enhance connections through open space, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure.
- Improve, support, and promote public transit.
- Expand housing choices for Belmont's various and changing demographic groups.

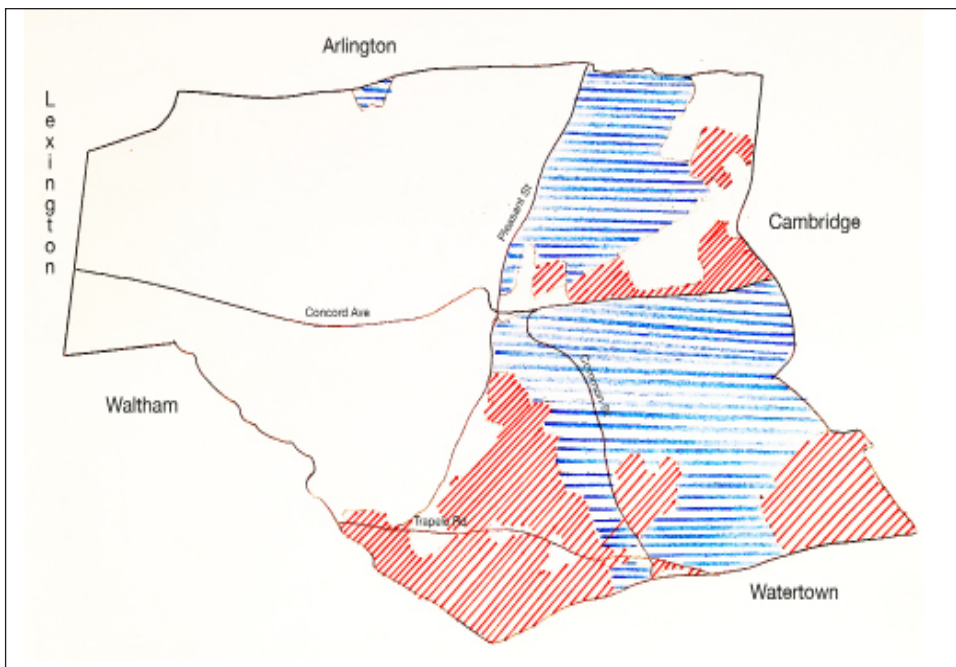
- Reinforce Belmont's neighborhoods and centers through historic and natural resource protection.
- Refocus control of future development on design guidelines and review process to supplement traditional zoning.
- Clarify the land use vision for each commercial area.
- Allow economically viable development which complements the town's existing character.
- Revitalize commercial centers through public and private improvements.
- Link public facilities and financial planning to land-use priorities.

Community Path Denotes Progress

Some of those things are happening. The Board of Selectmen last month unani-

mously endorsed the community path that will enable people to walk or bike quickly from Waverley Square through Belmont Center to the Alewife T stop. That path will also help protect our two commuter rail stops at Belmont Center and Waverley Square by making them accessible to people in wheelchairs and to anyone pushing a stroller or pulling a suitcase.

The town defeated efforts by the MBTA to replace the two existing commuter stops in Belmont Center



A simplified map of Belmont indicates the proportion of land zoned for General Residence (diagonal lines) and Single Residence C (horizontal lines). In both zones, very large homes out of character with those around them have been built.

and Waverley Square (to which people can walk) with a single Belmont stop on Pleasant Street to which almost everyone would have to drive.

Our most important bus routes might improve if Cambridge creates dedicated bus lanes, as is now being discussed. Dedicated bus lanes in Belmont were not included in the reconstruction of Trapelo Road and Belmont Street. However, that reconstruction, funded by the state, did improve the streets and sidewalks through Waverley Square and Cushing Square, and a town-funded reconstruction of Belmont Center has improved its streets and sidewalks.

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

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The town defeated efforts by the MBTA to replace the two existing commuter stops in Belmont Center and Waverley Square with a single one on Pleasant Street.

Parking Plan Aids Shoppers

The partial implementation last year of a 2012 parking plan for Belmont Center has at last made it possible for those with quick errands to park on Leonard Street. Private construction has brought new stores to Belmont Center, and Cushing Square should see better shopping whenever the construction there finishes. Meanwhile, Belmont developer Joe DeStefano plans to unveil a major proposal for Waverley Square this spring.

The completion of the Royal Belmont near Alewife and the Bradford in Cushing Square will provide more housing choices, both for the poor and those of moderate income, and the Belmont Housing Trust is working on a plan to increase the number of affordable units to 10% of the town's housing stock and thus fend off unfriendly developments, as reported in the November/December 2017 issue of this newsletter.

There have been no expansions of historic districts or open space.

However, it is not clear how much progress, if any, has been made in historic and natural resource protection of Belmont's neighborhoods and centers, in clarifying Belmont's land-use vision, in linking public facilities and financial planning to land-use priorities, and in refocusing control of future development on design guidelines.

Belmont adopted the Community Preservation Act in November 2010, and Town Meeting passed a demolition delay bylaw in 2013 and strengthened it last year (see story in the September/October 2017 issue of this newsletter). Both were among the comprehensive plan's recommendations. Yet



A developer has carved out a gully on a parcel on the northern end of Concord Avenue and named it St. James Court. Two more large homes are slated to be built here.

the town has only approved one new historic district (in 2013, the Richardson Farm historic district, which protects three properties). There have been no expansions of historic districts or open space, though both have been discussed by the Belmont Historic District Commission. No new open space has been protected either.

Will Mansionization Be Slowed?

The Planning Board's efforts have been concentrated on hearings under the General Residence rezoning passed in 2014, after residents demonstrated where oversized buildings had been crammed onto small lots. The Single Residence-C zoning changes were passed in 2016 for the same reason. Much of the board's time recently has been spent considering applications under these bylaws. Selectman Adam Dash teased that members might have spent a little too much time deciding whether a homeowner could add a dormer, as if the Planning Board



were a second Zoning Board of Appeals. The General Residence zoning expires this June and is likely to be kept, with some tweaks. "If you look at what's been built [in the general residence districts] since Town Meeting [2014], it's a dramatic change," said Chuck Clark, who has served several terms on the Planning Board and was elected chairman in October.

Over the past few years, the Planning Board's work has been disrupted by changes in leadership and in focus.

Meanwhile, mansionization and the carving up of open space have continued elsewhere in town. A much-discussed proposal was Don Chiofaro's plan to subdivide his land adjoining Habitat to add a number of new houses. That proposal has been withdrawn but could well resurface. Not far away, a developer scraped away a hillside off Concord Avenue to create a new *cul de sac* named St. James Court, removing stands of mature trees and creating a gully in the process. The new subdivision, approved by the Selectmen on January 11, 2016, will allow construction of two additional houses.

Planners to Look More Closely

Major zoning changes, both commercial and residential, have been prompted by citizen petitions. However, Clark said the Planning Board (PB) has begun to "lift up our heads a bit" to deal with the broader picture of town planning.

Belmont developer Joe DeStefano, who has developed commercial and residential property in various parts of town, said he's not going to ask for zoning changes to build his new project in Waverley Square. "I'm going to work with the zoning that's in place," he said. With a special permit, zoning in this Local Business I zone allows buildings up to three stories and 32 feet in height. "LBI works. You need to be creative and you need to think," DeStefano said. "The forefathers' vision for the town was a good one. Belmont will never be Cambridge."

DeStefano remarked that the overlay district for Cushing Square was not necessary. If that's the case, it should be reconsidered. The overlay district as currently defined applies to buildings in Cushing

Square that many would hate to see replaced, like the Winters complex and the stretch of Common Street that's set back from the street.

New PB Members in Place

Over the past few years, the Planning Board's work has been disrupted by changes in leadership and in focus. Jenny Fallon, who was chair when the comprehensive plan was adopted in 2010, was not reappointed.

Mansionization and the carving up of open space have continued elsewhere in town.

Most recently, the 2015–17 chair, Liz Allison, resigned after coming under fire from Clark, among others. Two new members, Thayer Donham and Ed Starzec, were appointed to the board by the selectmen in December. They were among 14 candidates for the volunteer jobs, giving the selectmen tough choices. Both are professional planners, bringing the number of planners on the PB to four of the six. In recent decades, Karl Haglund was the only professional planner on the board, and the McLean zoning of 1999 was produced by a Planning Board with no members who were professional planners.

Donham and Starzec join newly appointed associate member Edward Sanderson who replaced associate member Raffi Manjikian, who resigned in September.

Hopefully the newly reconstituted PB will take a closer look at any proposal for development that is not in line with what is best for Belmont as a whole, looking forward.

Sue Bass is cofounder and director emerita of the Belmont Citizens Forum, and a long-time Town Meeting member.

Plastic Bag Ban for Belmont?

Almost 60 Mass Cities and Towns Restrict Checkout Bags



Above, a disposable plastic bag is snagged in a tree at the Coal Road area of Lone Tree Hill, with more bags littering the ground. Each year, volunteers at Lone Tree Hill fill many bags like those shown below with plastic and trash that should have been recycled.



by Terese Hammerle

Our environment is swimming in plastic waste. The Sierra Club and others commonly assert that Americans use 100 billion plastic bags a year, or about 360 bags per year for every man, woman, and child in the United States. Massachusetts residents go through about 2 billion bags annually.

These are 2010 estimates, when

Washington, DC, became the first major US city to impose a fee on disposable paper and plastic bags. (“Disposable” indicates single-use; “reusable” means a heavier quality for multiple use.) Currently, about 60 Massachusetts cities and towns have bans in place on disposable bags, and more are considering or in the process of enacting such ordinances.

Mass Green Network (massgreen.org), a nonprofit founded in 2015 in Boston to aid local efforts to reduce plastic waste, provides a comparison of the rules that these municipalities have enacted.

The typical plastic shopping bag is made of polyethylene (LDPE, or low-density polyethylene), weighs 6–8 grams, and is sourced from fossil fuels, usually natural gas feedstock. Most municipalities’ rules ban “thin” bags, but merchants may provide a recycled paper bag or a “reusable” plastic bag. Defining “reusable” is the crux of the issue. Is the bag 3 mils (3 one thousandths of an inch) or 4 mils? Does it have to be washable?

Cities and towns intend that shoppers bring their own reusable bags, but in reality, disposable free plastic checkout bags are still flying out of stores, sometimes even thicker and nicer than they used to be.

Cambridge and Brookline Charge

Two municipalities have taken bigger steps. In 2014, Cambridge mandated a fee for bags. A recycled paper bag or a compostable plastic bag costs 10 cents at checkout and thin-film bags are excluded. In 2012, a Brookline bylaw prohibited plastic bags thinner than 2.25 mils.

According to Clint Richmond, Sierra Club volunteer, merchants like CVS merely began

distributing 2.25 mil bags that are still flimsy and disposable. Since then Brookline has taken thickness out of the equation by banning all polyethylene bags.

The number of Massachusetts towns so far that have passed bans on disposable plastics has been rising steadily each year: 2012 (1), 2013 (1), 2014 (4), 2015 (11), 2016 (19), 2017 (22), for a total of 58.

Cities and towns intend that shoppers bring their own reusable bags, but in reality, disposable free plastic checkout bags are still flying out of stores, sometimes even thicker and nicer than they used to be.

A New Initiative Starts in Belmont-

When any kind of plastic bag is tossed away, where does it go? In Belmont, plastic bags cannot be recycled curbside. According to Mary Beth Calnan, Belmont's recycling coordinator, the bags clog the recycling machinery, requiring work stoppage and risking injury to the staff who need to manually remove the bags. (Most grocery stores have a bin near the entrance where you can recycle them.)

In conjunction with Sustainable Belmont, a new working group has formed in town to consider how to go about proposing a plastic bag ban. The group will be consulting with the local business community, reviewing how nearby municipalities have implemented such bans and their relative success, and considering how to educate the general public about this issue. If you'd like to get involved or learn more, please contact me at TereseHammerle@me.com, or Linda Levin-Scherz at llevinscherz@gmail.com.

Terese Hammerle is a member of Sustainable Belmont.

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Remaking The Hell Strip

Pavement and Policy in Belmont



Hell strips separate traffic from pedestrians. But in the winter, because of the snow, the strip expands, and the walkable area decreases. The photo above is from just a two-inch snowfall. After the January 4 blizzard, with four-foot drifts, there was almost nowhere to walk in some neighborhoods but in the streets.

by *Kate Bowen*

In 2015, I wrote a story for this newsletter on “hell strips,” those swaths of dirt between the sidewalk and the street, where water-thirsty plants die and well-suited natives thrive. To recall the benefits, these planted strips cool streets in the heat. They provide filtration of fine particulate matter making sidewalk areas healthier. They provide food for birds and insects, and hold snow in winter. And, they delineate the vehicle travel/parking lane from the sidewalk area. This last function has become most important to me.

In 2016, Bartlett Avenue, where I live, was scheduled to be reconstructed. It had a score of 33 out of 100 on the Pavement

Condition Index, as well as recurring gas leaks. This presented the moment to restore my own hell strip, which was merely a patchwork of various asphalt mixes and conditions. Restoring the strip would also necessitate adding a curb.

When a road is planned for reconstruction in Belmont, the abutting homeowner is informed by letter from the town’s contractor of the basic timeline and the option to pay for curbs. Per town policy, sidewalks and curbing are not part of routine road reconstruction. If you have the town do the curbing work, you have the option of granite curbing only. The town provides an estimated price per foot based on recent history, with a final price given after

construction. Other types of curbing can be arranged by the homeowner at their own cost. Curbs, even modest ones, help retain the soil and direct stormwater. They also indicate where cars can park much more effectively than paint.

When a road is planned for reconstruction in Belmont, the abutting homeowner is informed by letter from the town's contractor of the basic timeline and the option to pay for curbs.

Consequences of Sidewalk Policy

The sidewalk policy was created in 2007 by a vote of the Board of Selectmen. In a board meeting this fall, Selectman Mark Paolillo recalled, "[The vote] was a solution agreed on by that board following a failed override for the comprehensive road repair plan. The logic then was that by removing sidewalk repairs and curbing from the plan, the vehicle areas of the roads could be reconstructed faster." For a very poor road, the sidewalks could account for as much as 40% of the total road budget. The 2007 policy did not take into account pedestrian safety and the varied and different needs of transit by neighborhood.

The policy likewise did not place any restrictions on paving over grassy buffers.

A Matter of Safety

Over time, on roads like Bartlett, in the absence of guidelines to retain planted spaces, these grassy areas have been lost. In recent conversations with my neighbors, they recalled trees that were not replaced because the abutting homeowner (in residence or not) preferred asphalt to park their car. Remember, this is the sidewalk area, not a travel lane. In a Safe Routes to Schools walk assessment in 2015, the Department of Public Works expressed a preference for pavement over grassy buffers, which may account for the prevalence.

For the many streets without curbs, the grassy buffer is the only definition between the road and the sidewalk. Without it, sidewalk safety and accessibility is routinely compromised by vehicles parked partially or fully on the sidewalk. Likewise, speeds increase with road width. For short roads or dead ends with little daily traffic and slow speeds, sidewalks may not be necessary. Longfellow Road in Cambridge, about 300 feet long, is an example of this "shared street" design model.

Bartlett, for one, should not be a "shared street" in today's environment. It is longer and connects several shorter neighboring streets. It also serves as an elementary school walking route, has several school bus stops, leads to one of the highest boarded stops on the MBTA bus route #73 (a top 10 MBTA

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route), and welcomes users to Pequossette Park. It sees a lot of foot and vehicle traffic, so clear separation between roadway and sidewalk is necessary for safety.

For streets without curbs, the grassy buffer is the only definition between the road and the sidewalk.

Balancing Road Use

Once upon a time, most Belmont streets existed like “shared streets” by default; cars were fewer and slower. Trees were abundant, as were pedestrians and bikes. The desire to have that balance hasn’t left. In May 2017, Town Meeting adopted the 25 mph town-wide speed limit, a significant reflection of the safety risks presented by vehicular traffic.

With \$200,000 from the 2015 override annually allocated to sidewalk repair, the DPW had a sidewalk assessment to prioritize repairs. The assessment includes not only the pavement condition, but also accounts for curbs, grassy strips, accessibility, and circumstances that generate pedestrian use. People typically walk to places within a half mile of their home or work. Of the 97 miles of existing sidewalk in Belmont, 54 miles had curbing, and 47 had only grassy buffers.

This left seven miles of streets without any physical delineation or separation between cars and pedestrians. With the study in hand, the support of the selectmen, and residents requesting action for safer sidewalks, the Office of Community



JOHN DICOCCE

Hell strips can be further reduced by poorly cropped shrubs, cars not fully parked in a driveway, or the lack of a stone curb.

Development took the opportunity to review the 112 reconstructed roads of the past 10 years. Of those roads, several were in these seven miles lacking pedestrian protection and in the poorest condition. Six were part of safe walking routes to schools. Five of those six directly serve the Daniel Butler Elementary School; one serves Belmont High School.

Recognizing these factors anew, the selectmen voted to address the pedestrian safety on these six roads annually as funding allows, Bartlett among them. Their decision marks an important awareness of the need to accommodate all modes of travel and to revise the existing sidewalk policy.

While the Board of Selectmen works to redress the failings of the 2007 policy, they may also look to the Complete Streets program for guidance.

People typically walk to places within a half mile of their home or work. Of the 97 miles of existing sidewalk in Belmont, 54 miles had curbing, and 47 of those had only grassy buffers.

Towns that join the Complete Streets program are eligible for immediate technical assistance funds and improvement grants. Complete Streets seeks to address the needs of all users and balance them, as they vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. This is a return to our not-so-distant roots that balanced foot, train, car, bike, and streetcar uses.

When the dust has settled, I’ll be planting privet in my hell strip. And, no doubt, crabgrass, for which I have a new affection. Privet, trimmed low to comply with visibility needs, provides a great buffer, holds up to large amounts of snow, and is low maintenance. Like walking, this choice harkens back to earlier days of Belmont, in a way I can live with.

Kate Bowen is a Town Meeting and School Committee member, and a former chair of Sustainable Belmont.

Bike Trail Progress, East and West

Connections to the Belmont Community Path



PIXABAY STOCK

In the months to come, there will be an unbroken bike path from Boston all the way to Amherst.

by *John Dieckmann*

The community path in Belmont connects or will connect to several existing and future shared use paths in our immediate region. To the east, there is the Fitchburg Cutoff Path running from Brighton Street to Alewife Station, the Linear Park from Alewife Station to Davis Square, and the Somerville community path from Davis Square to North Point Park in Cambridge.

In Weston and Wayland . . . Eversource is constructing a maintenance access road along the right-of-way, which will double as the bike trail.

These three path segments are part of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT), as is the Belmont community path, and are complete from Brighton Street to Lowell Street in Somerville, about a mile and a quarter past Davis Square.

From Lowell Street to North Point Park, the community path will coincide with the Green Line Extension (GLX). A recent significant development is that the final bid to construct the GLX includes construction of this section of the community path.

Also radiating out from Alewife Station is the Alewife Greenway, headed generally north, parallel to Route 16, completed several years ago up to the Amelia Earhart Dam, and the Watertown Bike Path, also called the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, which runs southward toward the Charles River. One section of the Watertown Bike Path, from Arlington Street to School Street (roughly one mile long) has been open since 2010.

A second section, from Concord Avenue to Huron Avenue, parallel to Fresh Pond Parkway, has also been open for several years. The section connecting Huron Avenue to Arlington Street has been designed, is currently out to bid for construction, and is scheduled to begin this coming spring. The remaining section between Alewife Station and Concord Avenue will run behind the Fresh Pond Mall. The City of Cambridge acquired this right of way recently, but a timetable for design and construction has not been established so far.

To the west of Belmont, significant progress is being made on the MCRT in Waltham, Weston, and Wayland. In Waltham, a contract to prepare the detailed design has been awarded to Pare Engineering and is underway.

In Weston and Wayland, the MCRT coincides with an Eversource electric power line right-of-way. Eversource is constructing a maintenance access road along the right-of-way, which will double as the bike trail. The company is covering the cost of building a gravel roadway and DCR is funding the additional cost to add a layer of hard asphalt pavement. Construction of the gravel roadway is underway in Wayland and will begin in the spring in Weston, with the asphalt pavement to follow shortly behind.

John Dieckmann is a member of the Belmont Citizens Forum board and an avid cyclist.

The Bradford Keeps Moving Ahead

But Progress is Slow and Info Is Lacking

by John DiCocco

Would you buy a used car from Toll Brothers?

Trust is difficult when repeated questions go unanswered. Since our last story in September 2017, “What’s The Latest in Cushing Square?”, construction has been slow and information flow has been slower. It’s wise for the town to continually kick the tires and keep having its own mechanic inspect the goods.

Fencing, one lingering safety issue has finally been addressed, while another, contaminated soil, took a new turn. The project was shut down December 11 because of a permit problem. Ongoing redesign of building interiors still leaves doubt as to whether “dens” and “offices” are just euphemisms for third bedrooms, which are not permitted in the project. The town is still waiting for details on the change in exterior building materials Toll has proposed.

Clearly, the large hole in Cushing Square, accompanied by traffic congestion, decreased parking, pedestrian detours, and noise, will be there for months to come.

One Accident Makes the Case

Highlighting one of the concerns the Cushing Square Neighborhood Association (CSNA) has been raising for months, there was an auto accident on November 3 at the intersection of Common and Belmont Streets. The accident left one car only about eight feet from the construction pit edge. The driver of that vehicle was not at fault (he was hit by another vehicle that ran a red light while turning), and was visibly upset when he saw the 30-foot drop-off and how close his car was when it finally came to a stop.

For months, there was a thin chain-link fence as the only barrier between the street



Looking at the Bradford construction site from Common Street, the mound in the center is where the contaminated soil is piled.

JOHN DICOCO

and the construction pit, particularly on the Common Street side. The steep drop was mere inches from the roadway in some sections.

By mid-December, Nauset Construction, the general contractor, installed jersey barriers on Common Street following residents’ push for them since earlier in the summer. It was not the total solution CSNA was expecting, but it still greatly reduces the risk of a vehicular accident sending a car into the pit. According to CSNA, however, the barriers should be linked together with steel rods, and anchored into the roadbed (if they aren’t yet), in order to provide a stronger and more effective barrier.

Cushing Square merchants will be evaluating whether the barrier renders the parking spots problematic to use or if the installation is workable.

Permit Lacking

On December 11, the Office of Community Development (OCD) shut down construction on the site after being notified that Toll had put up new steel framing. Toll and Nauset had not submitted a construction mitigation plan to the town, and therefore a building permit had not been issued. Within a couple of days, Toll got the permit and resumed work.

Contaminated Soil Remains

In October, the toxic soil treatment was still going more slowly than planned. Remediation began in late spring and was projected by Toll to be completed in about six weeks. As we go to press in January, at least some of the contaminated soil is still there, in the section once occupied by Tops Cleaners. It was necessary to neutralize it onsite before it could be dug up (and thus exposed to the air) and carried away. From the report of John Thompson, the town-hired licensed site professional: ". . . Following an October meeting on egress routes, there was a reasonable chance that some of the soil would be exiting the site still classified as hazardous waste." According to Doug Koplow of CSNA, "Site neighbors have noted multiple occasions thus far where vehicles haven't been properly washed or dirt spilled onto roadways for other reasons. Ensuring proper procedures are followed when the soil is

hazardous will be critical."

In December, a large mound appeared in the middle of the site. Thanks to the work of resident Kathy Rushe, CSNA learned that:

- the mound was built by consolidating the hazardous soil into a smaller, though higher, footprint
- Toll was purposefully leaving the soil exposed to the air during the day to supposedly dry it out
- the consolidation of the soil was not discussed with the MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) ahead of time
- when the DEP inspected the site, they were not at all pleased with the approach.

They required the pile to be brought down to below the fence line and properly covered at all times, in order to reduce the risk of the wind spreading the contaminated soil.

According to Toll's project manager, Otto Weiss, the contaminated soil will go out in the same trucks as the regular soil, but the

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trucks will have a liner and a better cover to ensure no leakage. The trucks and tires will be decontaminated per DEP regulations, and the soil will be shipped to a disposal facility in Indiana. They will use police details through this process, which is expected to take about four weeks.

Town Oversight

The Planning Board (PB) has been in transition with the replacement of three of its members in recent months (see the story on page 1). Chuck Clark, the new chair, says the board's liaison to the project right now is Jeffrey Wheeler, in OCD.

In late December, Wheeler and Glenn Clancy, OCD director, met with the developer and the contractor to get a status update on the project. Clancy asked the contractor for a weekly forecast of the anticipated work. The contractor agreed to do so.

Wheeler also reviewed with the developer the documents (required in the original Special Permit for the overall project) prior to the issuance of a building permit. He indicated that he should expect those documents in the next several weeks with the hope that the Planning Board could sign off on them by the end of January.

Finally, the study/den/office issue has not yet been resolved. The architect e-mailed revisions that need to be reviewed. Wheeler expected to have this issue resolved within the next several weeks. Since there are four new members on the Planning Board who need to be quickly brought up to speed on the Bradford, he expects to spend a fair amount of time reviewing the project.

Meanwhile, the town extended the contract for John Thompson so he can oversee the final steps of remediation. Koplou of CSNA stated, "John's involvement has been extremely helpful thus far, and we are grateful to Glenn Clancy and the Board of Selectmen for authorizing this."

CSNA has highlighted the following five areas where they or the town have requested information, and Toll has not been forthcoming.

1. Construction timeline and permits. The schedule seems to be slipping, and there should be regular updates to understand how slippage will affect neighbors and whether the town will again be asked to extend the construction schedule with no financial penalties. Also, important permits have not been issued.

2. Noise. We want to ensure that noise requirements on the project preclude a repeat of the problems that arose at the Wellington. A set of questions was submitted to the acoustic engineer the town hired to review the noise data submitted by Toll nearly a year ago, but there has been no response.

3. Shadows. As Toll continued to redesign the shape of the upper floors, the discussion of the changes at the public meetings never addressed how they might impact abutters. Some of the immediate neighbors requested more information on this about four months ago; and CSNA requested updated shadow studies to ensure there are no pending problems two or three months ago. We have gotten no response.

4. Materials quality. A key focus of CSNA and the PB members at the time the original special permit was issued was that high-quality materials be mandated in the project, rather than "value-engineered" solutions that would not wear well. This was the focus of some debate by the PB once Toll started to substitute materials, though some of the materials were never discussed before the PB approved the new plans. The PB felt that since they had the ability to review actual mockups later, they could better evaluate quality at that time. We need visibility on this process to ensure that the structure's quality and aesthetic isn't sacrificed to save a few dollars now.

5. Room counts. Toll had redesigned apartments to include a slew of "offices" and "dens." Many of these are easily convertible into extra bedrooms, creating fiscal risks of having many more school-age children entering the schools from the development than had been planned for. The PB was in the process of critically evaluating floor plans, though the main person doing this was

among the three who resigned. CSNA needs more visibility on this process as well. [Toll is using a similar “dens and offices” strategy on a new project in Cambridge.]

Two other items remain. One is a detailed description of the town’s plan for when and how they will review construction mockups so they can better evaluate the quality of materials substitutions that Toll has made in order to simplify construction and save the firm money. The other is a summary of the completion and availability of the construction mitigation plan.

The reconstituted planning board needs to watch the project closely. With the steady vigilance of CSNA and town officials like Clancy and Wheeler, perhaps the town will eventually have something close to the project they envisioned when this process began back in 2010. Meanwhile, keep checking the oil.

John DiCocco is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

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Environmental Events

Alewife Corridor Resilience Symposium: Collaboratively Framing Scenarios **Friday January 19, 6-9 PM & Saturday, January 20, 8 AM–4:30 PM**

The symposium will convene the Alewife corridor communities of Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville, Medford, and Winchester to examine the Alewife floodplain in its entirety, and explore collaborative scenarios for tackling issues of resiliency and climate adaptation. Sponsored by Earthos Institute and Tufts. Free. Registration required. alewiferesilience.org. More info: sarah-earthos@LDParch.com. *Friday: Arlington Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Ave, Arlington Saturday: Tufts University, 40 Talbot Ave, Medford.*

Annual Duck Walk

January 20, 10–11:30 AM

From November to March, a variety of northern-dwelling ducks come south from Canada to winter on our unfrozen waterways. We’ll walk along the Charles River trail upstream to several viewing platforms and the DCR boardwalk along the Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation before turning back at Moody Street. Expert birders of the Waltham Land Trust will help us identify various species. Bring cameras and binoculars. Dress for the weather with footwear appropriate for icy conditions. Free. Postponed if heavy snow is falling. Call 782.893.3355 or check walthamlandtrust.org if snow is in the forecast. *Shaws back parking lot, 130 River Street, Waltham.*

Climate Resiliency Lecture

Tuesday, Jan 30, 6–7:30 PM

Charles River Watershed Association director of Blue Cities, Pallavi Kalia Mande, a leading authority on water-centric urban design and planning, will showcase the Blue Cities approach and strategies for building resilience to extreme storms, increased flooding, and the resulting water quality impacts to the Charles. Drinks and light refreshments will be served. crwa.org/events *American Meteorological Society, 45 Beacon St, Boston.*

Lunchtime Walks at Habitat

**January 31; February 7, 14, 28,
Noon–1:15 PM**

Come out, soak up some vitamin D, and breathe in the crisp winter air while we walk or snowshoe the sanctuary and beyond. Meet at the log circle near the Visitors Center. Free. Registration not required. habitat@massaudubon.org. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road Belmont.*

Tufts Energy Conference

**Friday, February 2, 12:30–7:30 PM &
Saturday, February 3, 9 AM–3:30 PM**

This year's theme is Transforming Outlooks Into Realities, and will explore what policy, technology, and financial disruptions must occur to transform the global energy paradigm to meet national and international goals in 2030, 2050, and beyond. Admissions ranges from \$15.00 to \$150.00 (depending on options selected) tuftsenergyconference.com. *The Fletcher School at Tufts University, 160 Packard Avenue, Medford.*

Boston Area Sustainability Group Tuesdays, 5–7:30 PM, February 6, March 6, April 10

BASG breaks down the silos of knowledge within sustainability, to assist the perpetual education of ourselves and our peers. basgdotorg.wordpress.com. *Cambridge Innovation Center, Venture Cafe, One Broadway, Cambridge.*

Mystic River Watershed Association Committee Meetings

Tuesday, February 6, 7–9 PM

The Outreach Committee and Policy Committee monthly meeting. The meeting will include to individual committee discussion, planning, and strategizing, and engaging in relevant discussion, including guest speakers. Free. More info: kim@mysticriver.org. *Tufts University, Tisch College of Citizenship & Public Service, Lincoln Filene Hall, Rabb Room, 10 Upper Campus Road, Medford.*

Sustainable Belmont Meetings

**Wednesdays, 7–8:30 PM, February 7,
March 7, April 4**

All are welcome. sustainablebelmont.net *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont*

Meet Belmont: Talk of the Town

Tuesday, March 20, 7-9 PM

Modeled on the TED talk format, notable Belmontians will share their passions through the power of community. Free. Tickets at belmonttalk.eventbrite.com or facebook.com/meetbelmont *Chenery Middle School, 95 Washington Street, Belmont.*

Belmont Citizens Forum
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January/February 2018



One example of flimsy, unsafe fencing at the Bradford: a piece of canvas held by a single strand of poorly wrapped wire. (See story on page 11.)

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this issue in color: belmontcitizensforum.org