

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 3, No. 5

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

September 2002

Revitalization of Trapelo Rd. Corridor To Begin

By Andrea Serra Masciari

For decades, residents of the neighborhoods surrounding Trapelo Road and Belmont Street have believed, with ample justification, that “no one cares about this side of town.” This year, they may finally be proven wrong.

Key town boards and committees, as well as community groups, have begun serious discussions on how the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor must be improved in order to make it more viable for small businesses, more attractive for neighborhood residents, and safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Just this month, the town was awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to study this street, a first step to its revitalization.

Planning Grant Awarded

Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney said that the Board of Selectmen is excited about the grant. “Similar communities have used this money to great advantage,” she said, “and we can at least start the process of revitalizing the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor.” Chairman Will Brownsberger said that the corridor is a “key personal priority” of his and that he is “enthusiastic about the Trapelo visioning effort.”

According to Selectman Paul Solomon, the Board has agreed to appoint a planning group to encourage business and economic development in specific areas of town, including the Trapelo

Road/Belmont Street corridor. “There will be a ‘planning group’ set up for each area,” said Solomon, “with the Vision Committee playing a coordinating and facilitating role, and with input and participation by residents and business owners.” Solomon said that the selectmen will recommend that these groups include members from several town committees as well as from citizen groups.

“In some ways, this structure is similar to the ‘Cluster Group,’ which had representatives from seven town committees,” said Solomon. “Like the Cluster Group [which undertook a study of Concord Avenue], there will be a mandate or charge from the selectmen, objectives, and a definite timeline for results. From this it ought to be clear that the

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Environmental Events Calendar

Autumn Tree Identification at Fresh Pond. Learn to use a Tree Finder guide to identify trees on the Reservation by studying their leaves, nuts, and seeds. The Friends of Fresh Pond organization has guides to lend or sell for \$3.50. The walk is free. Meet at the Neville Place parking lot, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge. **Sunday, October 6, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.** Children must be accompanied by adults. To register, please send name and phone number to Elizabeth Wylde at friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com

Star Gazing at Alewife. Evaluate the night sky from an urban wildlife sanctuary with Joshua Roth, Senior Editor of Sky and Telescope magazine. Participants will observe the first-quarter moon, study the effects of manmade lighting, learn the constellations of late summer/early autumn, and listen for sounds of wildlife. Meet at the westernmost parking lot of Arthur D. Little, off Acorn Park Drive, and bring a small flashlight, a penlight for

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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 on key subjects. Our newsletter is published six times a year (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.

reading star charts, binoculars, and a light jacket.

Friday, October 11, 7 p.m. This event will be postponed if the sky is overcast. Call 617-547-1944 or visit friendsofalewifereservation.org

Buckthorn Pulling at Habitat. Help Bruce Wenning yank out the alien buckthorn plants that have invaded the Belmont sanctuary's woods and fields, displaced native plants, and altered the local ecology. Luckily, buckthorn is easily hand-pulled. **Saturday, October 12 or Saturday, November 2, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.** Meet at Habitat, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. There is no fee, but please register in advance by calling (617) 489-5050.

Western Greenway Walk. Join Habitat Sanctuary Director Roger Wrubel for a three-mile hike through the connected natural habitats of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, McLean Hospital, Rock Meadow, Metropolitan State Hospital, and Olympus Hospital, ending at the historic Bow Road in Waltham. Return transportation will be provided. Meet at Habitat, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. **Sunday, October 20, 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.** \$20 for Audubon Society members, \$24 for non-members. For registration information, please call (617) 489-5050.

Family Bird Walk at Fresh Pond. Children (with adults) and adults (with or without children) will learn more about Fresh Pond waterfowl on this free walk. The group will start indoors with some basic information about birds and binoculars, then go out to see what's on the water. Meet at the Neville Place parking lot, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge. **Sunday, October 20, 1 to 3 p.m.** Please register by sending your name and phone number to Elizabeth Wylde at friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com or calling Chief Ranger Jean Rogers at (617) 349-4793.

Fall Tree Walk at Mount Auburn Cemetery. Join Elisha and Elizabeth Atkins for a look at native trees in this historic cemetery. The group will examine trunks and fruits, explore the role of these trees in our history, and enjoy the changing colors. Park and meet at the Mount Auburn Cemetery main entrance. **Saturday, October 26, 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.** \$12 for Audubon members, \$15 for non-members. For registration information, please call Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary at (617) 489-5050.

Belmont Garden Club Dedicates 9/11 Memorial

By Sharon Vanderslice

The Belmont Garden Club has beautified Belmont for decades, but on September 11, 2002, it dedicated a garden that its members hope will be more than just pleasing to the eye.

Planted in memory of the Belmont residents who died in New York on September 11, 2001, Paul Friedman, Edward R. Hennessy, Jr., and Carlos Montoya, it is located in front of the town's historic Wellington Station at the foot of Common Street, in the geographical center of the community.

The dedication ceremony was attended by the Board of Selectmen and other state and town officials. "Those of you today and those who will hear about this little space will see it almost daily," said the chairperson of the club's Community Planting Committee, Joella Baird. "As you meander or drive by, do not only enjoy the view but remember its purpose and reason for being. . . .Lest we forget the fragility of life, the sacredness of freedom, please

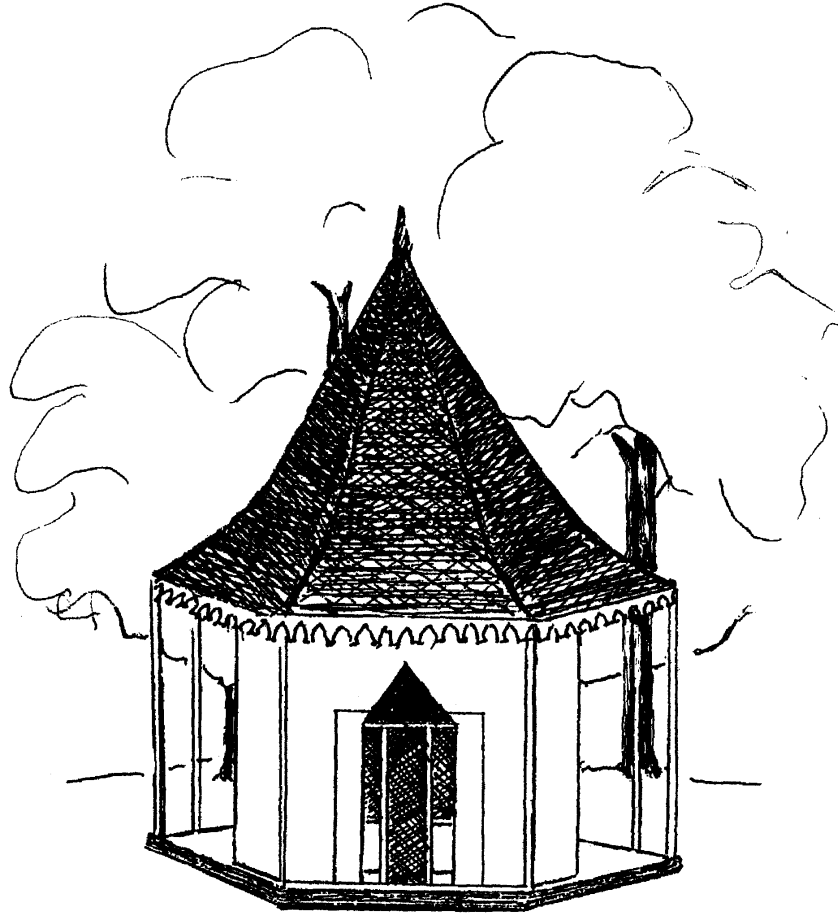
God let us never forget our beloved brethren."

The wife and sister of one of the victims are members of the Garden Club.

The evergreens and perennials installed on either side of the Wellington Station's brick walk were chosen for their all-white blooms. "Green and white are peaceful and calming," Baird said later when describing the plantings. The garden, which was designed by the local landscape designer Nancy Forbes, includes Bouledeneige rhododendron, Brouwer's Beauty andromeda, Delaware Valley white azalea, hosta, and astilbe. Two crabapple trees that are incorporated into the design were donated years ago by a Belmont Historical Society member, Madeline Marshall, in memory of her husband.

One of the Garden Club's more significant contributions to the Wellington Station site is an irrigation pipe, said Historical Society President Victoria Haase. This new water pipe, which connects with an existing one on the grounds of the Unitarian

continued



Garden Club, *continued from page 3*

Universalist church next door, will help keep the plantings green year round.

Most other areas in town that are maintained by the Garden Club are furnished with drought-resistant plants such as day lilies and black-eyed susans, noted Club President Evelyn Polli, because it is difficult to water them on a regular basis. The club designs and installs gardens at two town deltas every year, with the help of the Belmont Highway Department, headed by Peter Castanino, and its head gardener, Rick Bemis. The club pays for the plants and does the weeding. "It's a lot of work," said Polli, "but we love it. We wouldn't do it if we didn't love it."

The sites chosen for planting this past year were Palfrey Square on Trapelo Road and the intersection of Grove and Washington Streets at the Cambridge

border. Occasionally, a delta needs to be replanted. The rotary at the intersection of Prospect and Clifton Street had to be refurbished after being vandalized last year, said Joella Baird.

The club's active community planting program is financed through fundraising activities. These have included tours of Belmont homes and gardens, an annual sale of decorative holiday greens arranged by club members, and a plant sale at Town Day.

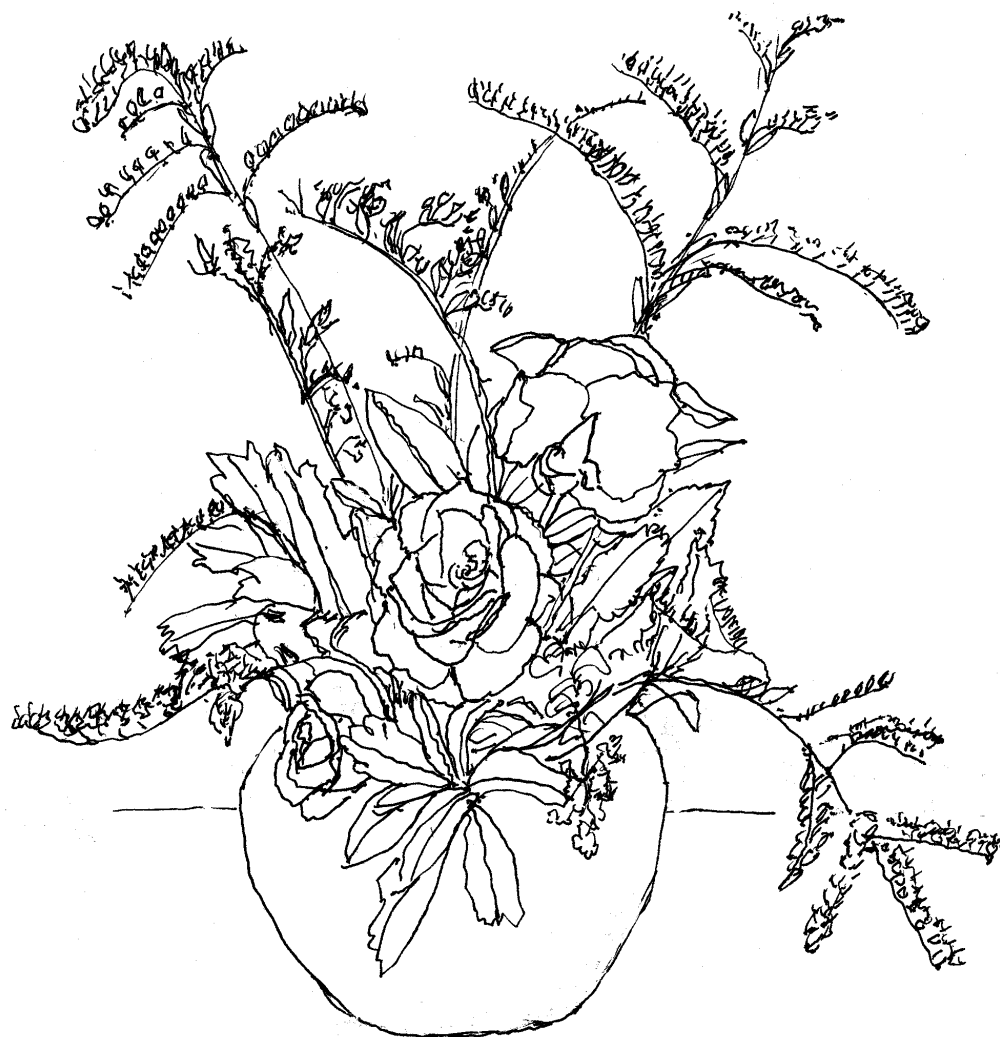
According to the club's recording secretary, Sherry Jones, the group also conducts monthly workshops in local nursing homes, funds two college scholarships for students in horticulture-related fields, maintains the wildflower garden at the Belmont Memorial Library, provides flowers for the town's senior center, and runs a junior gardening program for six- to ten-year-old children of members. In addition, the club maintains a greenhouse in town and

holds monthly meetings on botanical subjects.

The Garden Club was established in 1930 and currently has 171 members.

According to the club's handbook, its mission is "to advance the art of gardening, the science of horticulture, the artistic use of plant material in both flower and garden design, the conservation of our natural resources, and the development of civic beauty."

Sharon Vanderslice is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 2.



Belmont's Neighbors Criticize Uplands Deal

By Sue Bass

Flooding, traffic, and loss of wildlife habitat were the concerns most frequently expressed to state officials this summer about the 245,000-square-foot R&D complex proposed for the Belmont Uplands at Alewife. Nearly 50 area residents, organizations, municipalities, and state agencies filed written comments with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to recommend topics that should be covered by the development's environmental impact reports. All but one letter (the one from the Belmont Selectmen) raised some concerns about the development.

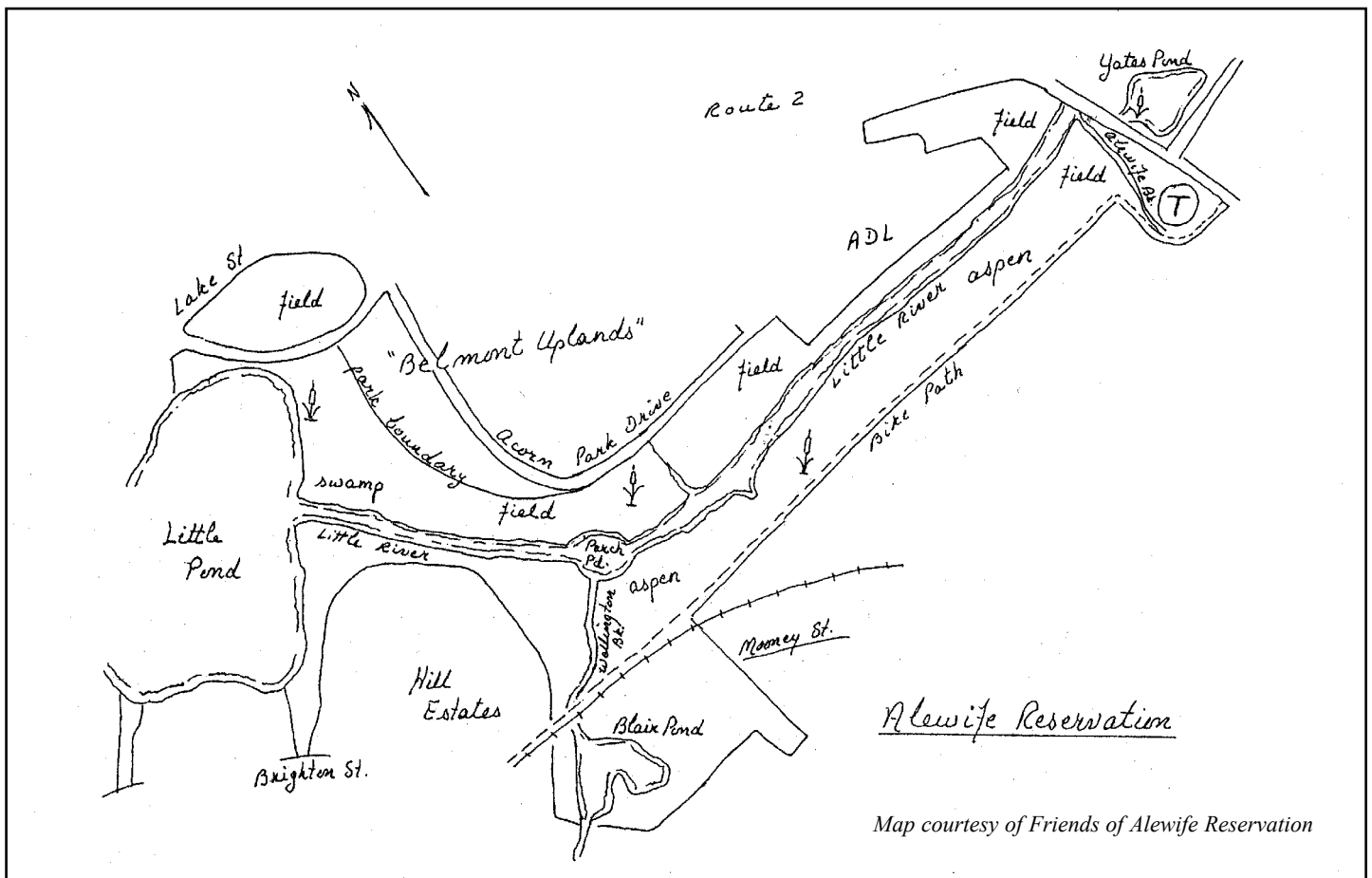
Many letters expressed the wish that the land owned by O'Neill Properties Group not be developed at all. "An even better outcome would be for the entire 15.6 acre property to be purchased in fee from the proponent and added in total to the Alewife Reservation," said Russell A. Cohen of the state's Riverways Programs, part of the Department of

Fisheries, Wildlife, and Environmental Law Enforcement.

The Metropolitan District Commission's 115-acre Alewife Brook Reservation, a linear park along Little River from Little Pond to the Alewife T station, abuts the O'Neill property. The reservation has been neglected for decades but is now likely to be restored. The MDC recently commissioned a master plan for the property, and agreement has been reached for the eventual return to the reservation of a parking lot on MDC land that was long rented to the Arthur D. Little consulting firm. A new study of the floodplain boundaries is also planned.

The O'Neill property is half upland and half wetland. O'Neill plans to put a conservation restriction on the wetlands, which, by law, cannot be built on. But many people said it was just as important to preserve the upland half. This is the portion that is available to soak up water in severe floods, letter writers pointed out; and this is land that many wildlife

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Map courtesy of Friends of Alewife Reservation

Uplands Deal, *continued from page 5*

species depend on. Roger Wrubel of the Massachusetts Audubon Society cited studies showing that three-quarters of wetlands species require adjacent upland habitat. David Brown, a naturalist hired by the Friends of Alewife Reservation with a state grant to survey the birds and mammals on the reservation and nearby property, said coyotes appeared to use the silver maple woods in the Belmont Uplands as a place to digest their prey, “as this is the most remote part of the park.” In extensive studies submitted to the EOE, Brown cited evidence of a surprising 16 species of wild mammals and 89 species of birds in and near the reservation.

Flooding is a major issue, both in Belmont and Arlington. “Route 2 has flooded several times in the last few years, causing the Mass. Highway Department to close the corridor,” said Selectman Diane M. Mahon of Arlington. “In addition, nearby neighborhoods in Arlington and Belmont have suffered significant flooding impacts with increasing severity over the last several years.” The Mystic River Watershed Association and several other letter writers expressed doubt that the sanitary sewers serving the area have sufficient capacity.

Traffic Already Snarled

Both Arlington and Cambridge officials said that the additional traffic would be far too great, as did the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. “While the proponent certainly did not cause the existing traffic problems at the Alewife interchange, it is hard to imagine how the expected 2,642 new trips will not exacerbate an already intractable problem,” said Stephen McGoldrick, deputy director of the MAPC.

“The idea of introducing additional vehicular traffic to an already jammed area is ridiculous,” commented Kathleen Bolen of Belmont. “The Route 2 rotary and Fresh Pond rotaries are completely backed up every afternoon for a few hours.” Eugene B. Benson of Arlington noted that Pleasant and Lake streets are also jammed in evening rush hour. There are also cars that use “narrow residential streets, not designed for rush hour cut-through traffic, to avoid Lake and Pleasant streets,” he said.

Part of the problem is the lack of easy access to public transportation. “It is true that the MBTA sta-

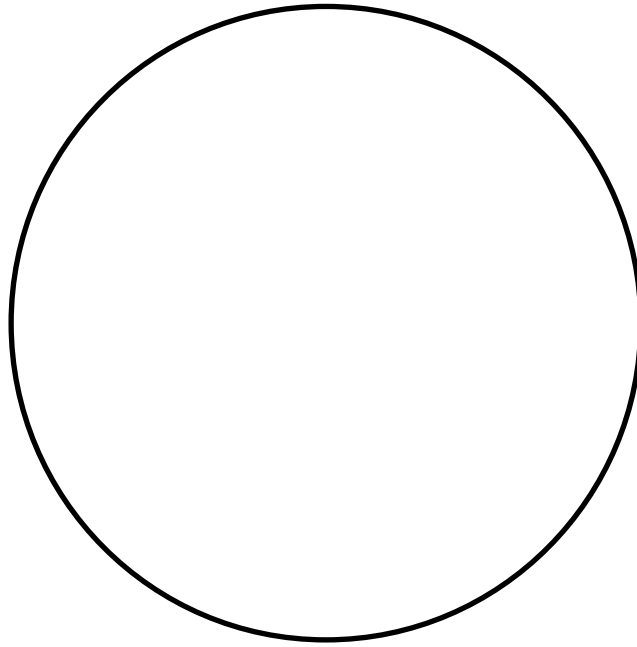
tion is near the planned development site,” noted Martha Moore of Belmont. “However, there is no existing or planned safe pedestrian walkway from the T station to the site. I believe very few commuters would choose to walk to and from the station under the current plan.” Christine Aquilino and Tom Pedulla of Arlington urged the state to require the developer to negotiate with its neighbors to obtain easy pedestrian and bicycle access to the bicycle path on the other side of the Little River. “The alternative is for pedestrians to walk in Acorn Park Drive, which has no sidewalks, and up a ramp to the T station,” they said.

Too Many Parking Spaces Allowed

The 796 parking spaces allowed by the zoning are believed to be the chief cause of the additional traffic. “The proposal to provide parking for 100 percent of the site’s employees and visitors seriously undermines the proponent’s credibility and commitment to a meaningful transportation mitigation program,” commented the city of Cambridge. Cambridge’s planners recommended that O’Neill should be allowed no more than 507 spaces, because at least 41 percent of its visitors and employees should be expected to use public transit, bicycles, or carpools.

The Belmont Citizens Forum, noting that Cambridge recently rezoned the land right next door, where the former Arthur D. Little buildings now stand, to permit only 1 1/6 parking spaces for each 1,000 square feet of development, recommended that the same standard be applied to the O’Neill property. This formula would allow O’Neill only 286 parking spaces.

In his instructions to the developers, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, Robert Durand, to whom the comment letters were addressed, required that the environmental impact report study a reduction in parking spaces that would be achievable under two scenarios: if 40 percent of its employees and visitors used public transportation, bicycles, or carpools, as the city of Cambridge recommended, or if 25 percent did. Durand’s letter also requires the environmental impact report to consider the effect on stormwater, sewer facilities, and wildlife habitat and to analyze the “no-build alternative to establish baseline conditions.”



What can Belmont do to slow global warming?

While global climate change may seem beyond the control of local government, Marc Breslow, Co-Chair of Massachusetts Climate Action Network, says this isn't so. On October 9, he will be in town to discuss ways that Belmont and other communities can help reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide.

Other Massachusetts towns have already taken steps to do so. Arlington has conducted an emissions inventory and established a "Climate Wise" task force to implement changes. Arlington Town Meeting has passed a "Fuel Efficient Vehicle Purchasing" proposal that requires the town to purchase the most fuel-efficient models it can.

Cambridge Climate Action convinced that city to set up a municipal task force to address greenhouse gas emissions. Fifteen municipalities

in Massachusetts, including Arlington, Boston, Cambridge, Medford, Somerville, and Watertown, have now joined the international Cities for Climate Protection Campaign, which seeks to slow global warming and reduce air pollution at the local level.

Breslow has a Ph.D. in economics and has worked on energy issues for two decades. He was previously the research director for Northeast Action and has worked on energy and utility policy for the city of Philadelphia.

Join the Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum for a thought-provoking discussion. Refreshments will be served.

For tips on what you can do as an individual to halt global climate change, visit www.massclimate-action.org

**Wednesday, October 9 at 7:30 p.m.
Brewster Hall at All Saints' Episcopal Church
Corner of Common & Clark Streets
Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum**

Trapelo Corridor Revitalization, from page 1

Selectmen are very much committed to revitalizing not just the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, but all the commercial areas in town. The very fact that we have unanimously supported Tim Higgins' efforts to get a state planning grant for the Trapelo Road corridor is a strong indication of our intent."

Other areas that will be studied are South Pleasant Street, the McLean Hospital property, and the Uplands, each of which could contribute to Belmont's economic health.

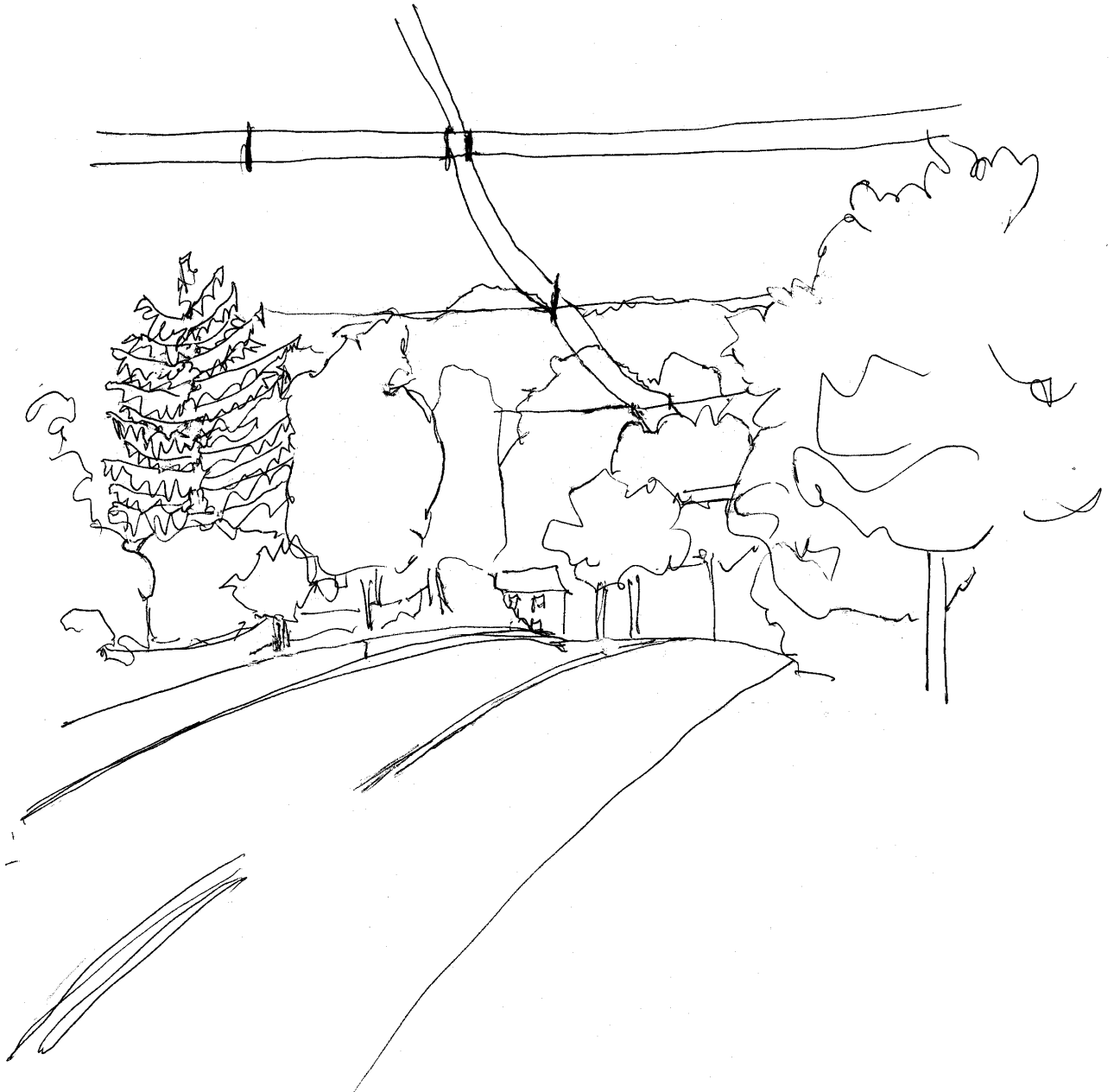
According to Tim Higgins, Belmont's Senior Planner, the Planning Board will "coordinate the policy direction of the Corridor study, which will be on every agenda of the board over the next twelve

months." Mr. Higgins asserted that members of the Planning Board "all seem to agree that the Corridor should be more aesthetically pleasing, more economically vibrant, and more user friendly."

The board has also informally discussed "problems with pedestrian crossings and what appears to be excessive pavement widths." According to Higgins, "the consensus is that we as a community can do better with planning for this important corridor."

Pedestrian Safety Initiatives

Already, town money is being devoted to pedestrian safety in this area. At the suggestion of Will Brownsberger, Belmont's previous Board of



Selectmen allocated \$150,000 of pavement management funds for safety enhancements town-wide. After much deliberation, Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) decided that the Butler School community needed to reap the benefit of much of the available money. Several Butler community parents had voiced concerns about the danger to young children who must cross Trapelo Road without a crossing guard. The TAC subsequently recommended that a neck-down be installed near Hawthorne Street, along with a new crosswalk and appropriate school-zone signage. (A neck-down is a narrowing of the travel lane and a widening of the sidewalk in order to make the crossing distance shorter for pedestrians.)

The Traffic Advisory Committee, under the leadership of Chairwoman Mary Jo Frisoli and Vice Chair Linda Nickens, intends to implement more safety measures, with the help of Town Engineer Tom Gatzunis, the Belmont Police, the Planning Board, and other like-minded citizens. Last spring, in a cooperative effort, the TAC was asked to determine the best places to install five international-style crosswalks, which were financed by the Belmont Citizens Forum as a demonstration project. These were installed in August on Concord Avenue and Lexington Street. More crosswalks of this type will be added in other parts of Belmont as part of the town's pavement management program.

Business Community Polled

Members of the Vision 21 Committee are taking a broad look at the business climate in Belmont. Although their current focus is not the Trapelo Road corridor, they are trying to determine whether Belmont is a "business-friendly" community overall. Through public forums as well as data gathered from the business community (see page 10), the committee may be able to produce some helpful recommendations for the corridor's future.

The Belmont Citizens Forum, through its Planning and Zoning Committee, is developing a program to help residents and business owners envision the full range of possibilities for the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor so that it can become a main street of which Belmont can be proud.

Participants in the committee discussions so far have envisioned a beautiful boulevard lined with

eateries and retail shops. Such a street might accommodate a grassy median strip graced with fragrant flowers and majestic trees, widened sidewalks with wooden benches and drinking fountains, lighting to encourage walking after the sun goes down, even bus shelters with displays of public art. Of course, the all-important matter of pedestrian safety is never far from anyone's mind.

Public Forum Planned

The committee plans a major public presentation in November to discuss the key issues and encourage community-wide discussion of them. Other community activities will follow, possibly a design charette. Anyone who would like to join the committee is welcome. The next meeting is October 10 at 7:30 p.m. Please call Sue Bass at 489-4729 for more information.

Meanwhile, the MacPhail Architectural Collaborative at 109 Trapelo Road in Cushing Square is inviting interested individuals to contribute material on Trapelo Road and Belmont Street to an upcoming exhibit in its community gallery. To date, submissions include sketches, photographs, maps, and written material. For details, call Katharine MacPhail at 489-8535.

No one can predict the outcome of this colossal effort, but after meeting with many of the people and committees mentioned here, it's clear that Belmont isn't lacking in any of the essential ingredients for a successful redesign of this street. After decades of neglect and poor management, we are beginning to see a light at the end of the corridor.

If you live or work in Belmont, please attend meetings, voice your opinions, and post your wish lists. Together, we can make a difference.

Andrea Masciari is a resident of Flett Road, a Town Meeting Member representing Precinct 5, and a member of Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee.

Correction

In some copies of our July newsletter, Bob McLaughlin was mistakenly identified as the Chair of Belmont's Fire Station Consolidation Committee. He is, in fact, the liaison to that committee from the town's Permanent Building Committee.

Vision 21 Implementation Committee Seeks To

How can Belmont, which has always been known as the “Town of Homes,” become more friendly to businesses? This question was posed to Belmont business owners this past month in a series of public forums held by the Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee.

Given a broad mandate by the Board of Selectmen to implement the town’s vision statement, which was approved by Town Meeting last year, this 11-member committee is currently trying to identify ways for the town to encourage more businesses to locate in Belmont and make it easier for existing businesses to thrive.

Jennifer Page, chair of the committee, says she has heard many residents express their desire to see Belmont become a more vibrant town. “We need places to gather that promote a sense of community,” said Page. “People want more places to eat, shop, and be entertained,” agreed fellow committee member Joe Greene, owner of Greene Funeral Home in Waverley Square. But to get this, he maintains, “there needs to be compromise.”

The 25 business owners who attended the three forums, and others who contacted committee members by phone or mail, were not shy about voicing their opinions. They cited the surplus of vacant buildings and storefronts in town, the high-speed traffic on our major thoroughfares, the lack of suffi-

cient parking, the town’s difficult and confusing permitting process, inadequate roadway maintenance, incomplete snow removal, poor pedestrian access, restrictions on the sale of liquor, and the physical isolation of the town’s major business centers as reasons why Belmont is viewed as a tough town to do business in. Furthermore, they said, many Belmont residents and town employees seem ambivalent about having businesses in town at all. For instance, people say that they want nice restaurants to walk to but won’t put up with things like exhaust fans that food businesses require. One businesswoman on Trapelo Road said that the town had received multiple complaints about noise coming from a rooftop air conditioner on her building before it was even hooked up.

“What I’ve learned from this process,” said Page, “is that we have a long way to go to educate our citizenry about the importance of businesses in town.” But she felt confident that change could be achieved with “some good will and some hard work.”

Traffic. Business owners who attended the forums, especially those from the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, had serious complaints about cut-through traffic. One man described this stretch as “two lanes of Indy 500.” He said that in four years at his location he had seen 15 accidents



Improve Business Climate Throughout Town

and “heard hundreds of near-accidents.”

“I’ve seen cyclists end up on someone’s windshield,” he remarked, recommending that bicycle lanes be installed between the Star Market in Cambridge and the Shaw’s Market in Belmont.

Others said that in order to calm traffic there needs to be one clearly-defined travel lane in each direction. “If traffic moves more slowly, people are more likely to stop [to shop],” said one Waverley Square businessman. To further control driving behavior, some people suggested putting flower barrels on peninsulas at the end of each block; using a different roadway material, such as brick, at the intersections; and installing red-light triggers that would activate whenever they sensed a car exceeding the speed limit. Others recommended parking empty police cars along the route and installing unmanned radar guns to deter speeding. “Why aren’t speed limits posted?” asked one woman.

Parking. All the business owners agreed that there is not enough parking and that too many spaces in municipal lots are reserved for all-day use. They suggested creating satellite parking areas on South Pleasant Street, Concord Avenue, and Royal Road for Belmont employees and commuters and decking the municipal lots in Cushing, Waverley, and Belmont Center to provide more spaces for shoppers.

Many complained about the large mounds of snow left behind by winter plows. These mini-mountains take up parking spaces and make it difficult for pedestrians to navigate the sidewalks. In the warmer weather, others remarked, teenage skateboarders are a threat to elderly pedestrians.

One man wondered whether angle parking could be reinstated in the business centers to increase the number of spaces and narrow the travel lanes.

Zoning and Permitting. Getting a permit to do business in town is a hassle. One woman said she needed visits by six different inspectors to get a Certificate of Occupancy. This was not made clear at the beginning of the process, she said. Another business owner said that the attitude at Town Hall should be one of “partnering” rather than “stonewalling.” He recommended that the town

produce literature to explain the rules and enforce them consistently. Belmont needs a business development officer, a “go-to” person, who can help businesses get started and make needed renovations, others said.

Liquor Licenses. Members of the Vision Committee pointed out that most restaurants make their money from sales of liquor rather than food, because it has a higher markup and requires less labor than preparing meals. A large restaurant like Legal Seafoods would not consider moving to Belmont without a full liquor license. Several long-time business owners said that if Belmont wants a thriving restaurant scene, it will have to approve the sale of such licenses.

Beautification. Better walkway lighting, more frequent street cleaning and litter pickup, sidewalk planters, and restoration of shabby storefronts would make the business areas more inviting, several attendees agreed. Some suggested getting the Belmont Garden Club involved in a beautification effort.

Festivals and Publicity. Several Cushing Square business owners bemoaned the loss of the annual Fall Festival, which attracted as many as 3000 people to the square with artists, dancers, a children’s fun house, and open-air tables laden with wares from dozens of local businesses. It was discontinued because not enough people volunteered to organize it. Apathy among business owners is as much of a problem as ambivalence among residents.

One man pointed out that Belmont Town Day, which now takes place once a year in Belmont Center, used to be a town-wide event with a parade that started in Waverley Square. Arlington has a popular town day every year that culminates with fireworks, he said.

Another pointed out that in West Concord, where he also has a store, a welcome brochure is distributed in public places to inform residents about local businesses. Why not in Belmont?

Isolation and Pedestrian Access. Several business owners said that they felt isolated, even from other businesses on the same street. More widely available public transportation could link various sections of town and encourage more visits

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McLean Update: Junction Brook's Fate May

For nearly two hours on September 23, Administrative Law Judge James P. Rooney of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection questioned lawyers for McLean Hospital, the Belmont Citizens Forum, and the DEP's Wetlands & Waterways Division about key issues that will help determine whether Junction Brook is perennial or intermittent and therefore how close to the brook developers may build.

The 600,000-square-foot senior complex planned by American Retirement Corporation on land to be purchased from McLean would come less than 200 feet from the brook. That's probably too close under the state's Rivers Protection Act – if the brook is determined to be perennial. A perennial brook is entitled to a 100-foot no-build zone and a second 100 feet in which construction is permitted only under certain conditions, conditions the developer has said he cannot meet. However, McLean maintains that the brook is intermittent and not entitled to that protection.

Martha Eakin of Trapelo Road challenged the brook's classification as intermittent before the Belmont Conservation Commission beginning in March 2001. The Belmont Citizens Forum subsequently hired experts to examine the evidence. Both Patrick Garner, a wetlands scientist, and Denis D'Amore, a hydrologist, have concluded that the brook is perennial in its natural state. It has dried up in recent years, D'Amore says, because thousands of gallons of groundwater are leaking into McLean's century-old sanitary sewer pipes. If that water had remained in the ground to feed the stream during dry months instead of running down the sewer, he says, the brook would flow year round.

McLean Hospital doesn't dispute that

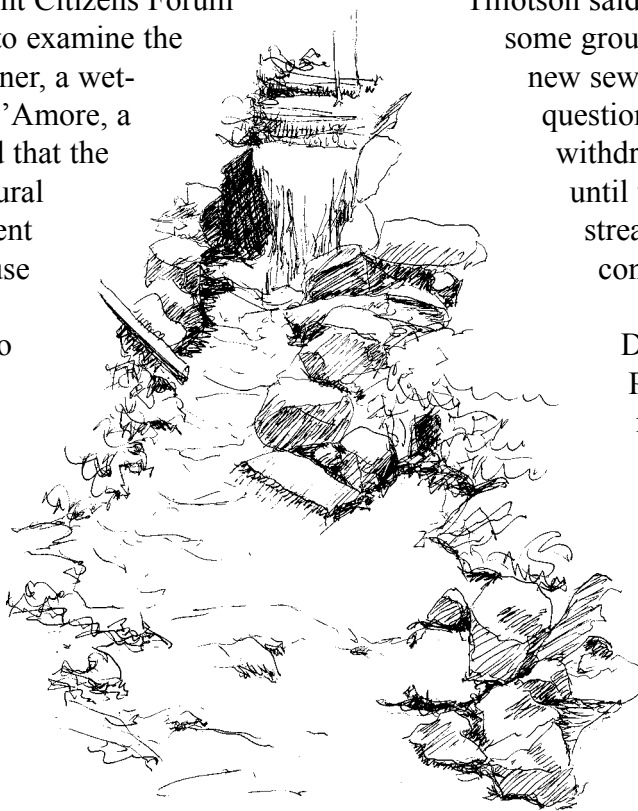
thousands of gallons of groundwater leak into its sewer pipes, although it indicated at the September 23 hearing that it disputed some of D'Amore's calculations. The crux of the discussion, however, was not evidence but law: Do the DEP regulations implementing the Rivers Protection Act treat such leaking pipes as a "direct withdrawal" from the water supplying the brook, or do they not? McLean asked Judge Rooney to make a summary judgment on the legal issue, without hearing factual evidence.

Regulations Open to Interpretation

The regulation states, "Rivers and streams which are perennial under natural conditions but affected by drawdown from withdrawals of water supply wells or direct withdrawals shall be considered perennial." McLean said it has not used wells for water supply since the 1930s, when the hospital joined the town water system. Thus, the legal issue before Judge Rooney is: What constitutes a "direct withdrawal"? Do those leaky old sewer pipes count?

Representing McLean, Boston attorney Diane Tillotson said that they do not. She noted that some groundwater leaks into even brand-new sewer pipes. And she said that the question of what constitutes "direct withdrawal" shouldn't even be asked until there is clear proof that the stream is perennial "under natural conditions."

An attorney from the Department of Environmental Protection, whose regional office ruled against Junction Brook last year, agreed with McLean and said that the department needed a clear rule to apply. But the DEP lawyer, Betsy Kimball, made an important concession when she said that a proposed change in the stream regulations is not an expansion but a clarification of the rules. As it was circulated last winter



Depend on Legal Status of Porous Sewer Pipes

for public comment, the proposed change would add the words “or other flow diversions.”

Arguing for the Belmont Citizens Forum, Adam Brodsky of Hingham, who regularly practices before the state Department of Environmental Protection, said his interpretation of the regulation does give the agency a “bright line” to discriminate between perennial and intermittent streams. “Any human activity that causes Junction Brook or any stream to run dry should be considered,” he said. “We shouldn’t sacrifice Junction Brook to make the department’s job easier.”

“If you look at ‘intent,’” Brodsky added, “McLean has an obligation to repair that sewer line. Was that failure intentional?”

Smoke Testing Debated

In addition to McLean’s motion for summary judgment on the “drawdown” issue, Judge Rooney also heard oral arguments on the Belmont Citizens Forum’s argument to conduct smoke tests of the old pipes, which McLean opposes on the grounds that

having smoke come out of a toilet bowl, and perhaps set off a fire alarm, could frighten patients.

Brodsky said that the Citizens Forum’s contractors would plug all the pipes leading to occupied buildings before the tests were conducted and implement any other reasonable measures to prevent patients from being disturbed. There is evidence of connections between sanitary sewer pipes and storm drain pipes, and the smoke tests are the only way to determine that for sure, he said. Brodsky is faced with a dilemma. “McLean says its maps of the underground piping are accurate,” he said, “but then it also says all the pipes that would need to be plugged might not be shown on the map. So which is it?”

Judge Rooney said he’d take several weeks to make his decision. McLean also still needs to provide some documents requested under discovery, including information about wells on the property. It now seems that the main hearing on the fate of Junction Brook, originally scheduled for November, will be put off until early next year.

— Sue Bass

Business Climate, *continued from page 11*

to local businesses. We could use shuttle buses between town centers, a bike path from Brighton Street to Waverley Square, and better sidewalks along roads like South Pleasant Street. “Once you get in the car,” said one man, “you might as well go to the mall.” One woman pointed out that Waverley Square has two bus lines and a commuter rail stop, which ought to make it more attractive to businesses than it currently seems to be. This is “potentially a very vibrant area,” she said.

A resident attending one of the forums remarked that in an area with abandoned buildings, “you tend not to notice the buildings that *are* open.” There is a sense of blight.

Vision Implementation Committee Chair Jennifer Page said that her committee expects to

hold forums for town residents to solicit their ideas. Afterward, a report will be prepared for the selectmen and work groups will be organized to address the issues raised in the forums. Throughout the process, she said, business owners or residents with other suggestions should call or write one of the committee members. They are Martin Greco, Joe Greene, Matt Hausman, Senior Planner Tim Higgins (representing the Community Development Office), Bill Hofmann (representing the Warrant Committee), Sara Oaklander, Meg O’Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon (representing the Board of Selectmen), and Barry Winston. A seat designated for a School Committee member is currently vacant.

Written by Sharon Vanderslice, with contributions from Sue Bass and Bill Engstrom.

Good Development, *continued from page 16*

making their communities so built up and clogged with traffic that they become less attractive. At the suggestion of Jeanne Van Orman, a planner who lives in Arlington, I searched the internet for “smart growth” and found the definitions used by a number of cities and regions.

Here are some common elements of smart growth plans:

- Developing more densely in some areas to preserve open space and reduce sprawl.
- Linking development to public transportation to reduce traffic.
- Mixing residential and commercial development so people can walk to stores and so no area is deserted and dangerous at night.
- Preserving historic and landmark buildings that determine the character of a neighborhood.
- Imposing design guidelines so that new buildings maintain that character.

Above all, we need thoughtful planning that reflects the community’s values instead of just reacting to developers’ proposals. The cost of failing to plan thoughtfully is easy to see in Belmont and in other towns a short drive away. So are the successes of good planning.

Think, for example, of the former Underwood estate on Common Street near Belmont Center. That clustered housing development saved the historic house and added a number of other units in an attractive way. It’s much nicer looking than a traditional subdivision would have been. And it’s unobtrusive. It’s almost as if the old estate were still undivided.

But our mistakes stand out. In Belmont, the selectmen frequently hear complaints about office buildings erected without enough parking. Visitors to those buildings park on neighborhood streets, even blocking driveways. Another frequent complaint is that commuters park near the train stations and fill spaces needed for shoppers. But solutions to these problems could have been designed into the



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commercial buildings.

Consider, for example, the three two-story office buildings on Concord Avenue just east of the Post Office. Now each one is an island surrounded by cars – cars in front, in back, and on both sides. But suppose all three had been built as longer, narrower buildings, closer to the sidewalk, in line with the Post Office, with all the parking out of sight behind the buildings? The same square footage of office space would have been more attractive and would have provided much more parking space. Space might even have been available near the railroad tracks for commuter parking.

Belmont's zoning bylaw restricts the size and placement of buildings, as well as how much parking is provided. The current bylaw, which was mostly written in 1988, is due for improvement. Let's make sure, however, that any new bylaw that Town Meeting considers really is an improvement.

Concord versus Acton

The town of Concord practiced smart growth before the term became a buzz word. Walk or drive around it and observe how it's been done. The town center and most of the business districts have a village atmosphere. Historic buildings have been pre-

served, and new buildings have been required to meet strict design standards. Parking is behind the stores, often in municipal lots. There are no strip malls; no seas of cars are visible from the street.

Adjoining Acton is full of strip malls. I counted nearly 20 on a recent drive along Route 2A. Office and condo complexes were built with no relation to the nearby retail buildings. It would be difficult for someone to walk from the office to lunch or from his condo to buy a newspaper or a few groceries. Those who live or work on that commercial strip need a car for every errand, no matter how close the destination. No wonder traffic is terrible.

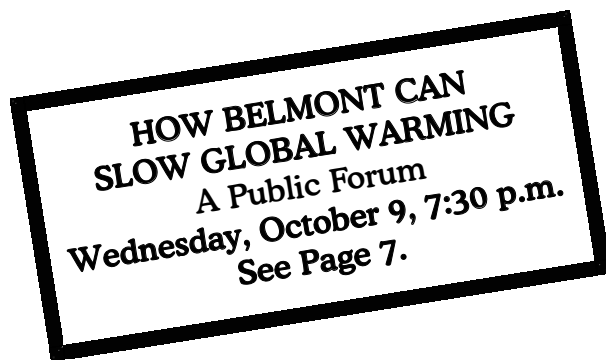
Yet Concord's commercial and industrial property is worth more than Acton's – \$383 million v. \$339 million. (Belmont's is worth \$195 million, according to state figures for 2002.) A newspaper reporter who used to cover Concord's planning committees said they were so tough on developers that he even began to feel a little sorry for the developers. But that tough stand has paid off for Concord, both in the beauty of the town and in the town treasury. Requiring smart growth isn't so dumb after all.

Sue Bass is a Town Meeting Member representing Precinct 3.

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People Are Asking

What Is Good Development?

By Sue Bass

A Town Meeting Member e-mailed me this summer to ask me to reconsider what he called my “campaign against development.” He added: “We’re not going to get another override, and I see all business development as critical to continuing the quality of education that my wife and I want for our children/grandchildren.”

Development does seem a magical way to bring in more money without raising taxes, and bringing in more money without huge tax increases is necessary. Even supporters of recent overrides were shocked by last spring’s property tax bills. Good town services, from schools to street repair, will require more money as well as better management.

Unfortunately, development is less miraculous

than it seems. Done well, it can bring a community many benefits, including a fiscal surplus – more revenue than it costs in services. Done badly, it can blight a community in many ways, even produce a fiscal deficit. That is why, though I don’t oppose new development in Belmont in principle, I have opposed specific development proposals.

The costs of development show up in many ways. Housing could increase school enrollment and put pressure on the town budget. Office buildings mean more traffic, which not only requires more traffic lights and road repairs but also devalues existing property. Belmont’s assessing formula rates houses on busy streets lower than houses on quiet streets, as anyone who’s shopped for a house knows. But if a whole community has much more traffic, the value of all the houses can decline.

The solution to these dilemmas, which afflict all communities, is usually called “smart growth.” Cities and towns all over the world have been working on formulas to bring in more revenue without

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