

# Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 4, No. 3

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

May 2003

## *Rezoning Advocated for Trapelo Road Corridor*

*By Sharon Vanderslice*

Many roads in Belmont are due for reconstruction. But what is planned for the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor is more like resurrection.

In the last century, this neighborhood street, which connects Waverley Square with Cambridge and Boston, has been transformed from a pastoral byway into a high-speed commuter thoroughfare. Eighty feet wide in places, with no clearly defined travel lanes, few pedestrian walklights, and no designated bike lanes, this street has been the scene of numerous accidents and near-misses over the years. Residents report that it is difficult to back out of their driveways without being struck by oncoming traffic. Pedestrians, particularly those with children, say they have narrowly avoided being run over by cars that were trying to pass illegally on the right. Business owners describe dramatic bike/car collisions in front of their storefronts.

Changes being discussed for this roadway could make the street safer for all who use it, and make the entire area more appealing for residents, shoppers, and business owners, who report that foot traffic has *not* been increasing in recent years. Too many drivers pass through without stopping, they say, and some major commercial properties have been vacant for years.

### **Pedestrians Are Good for Business**

Planners say that it is likely to be five or 10 years before any state or federal money is available to rebuild this road. But advocates are not waiting

until then to decide what they'd like the street to look like. Belmont's Planning Board has already hired a consultant, using state grant money, to study the corridor and make initial recommendations on how to reconfigure it to encourage economic development.

Citizen activists are taking the initiative too. On April 1, two hundred people showed up at a neighborhood meeting sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum at the Studio Cinema on Trapelo Road to discuss ways to make the road more pleasant for pedestrians and more profitable for businesses. Surprisingly, these two goals are related. According to Alan McClennen, Arlington Town

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## Environmental Events Calendar

**Spring Bird Walk.** Are you interested in learning about migrating birds? Then don't miss this great opportunity to observe such migrants as the warbler and many more. Early May is the best time for observing birds because the trees aren't quite in full leaf. Join in this bird walk from Sousa's Rock to Little Fresh Pond. Birders of all levels of experience are welcome. The Friends of Fresh Pond have binoculars to lend to those who need them. Afterward, everyone is invited indoors at Neville Place for a snack, informal discussion, and relevant printed information. **Sunday, May 18, 7 to 9 am.** Meet at Neville Place parking lot. Children are welcome in the company of an adult. This event is free, but you must register for it by calling Chief Ranger Jean Rogers at (617) 349-4793 and leaving your name and phone number. Or e-mail Elizabeth Wilde at [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com)

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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  
or to [editor@belmontcitizensforum.org](mailto:editor@belmontcitizensforum.org)  
You may read this newsletter on-line.

**Coyote Walk.** Join Mike Arnott and Mary White, trained AMC naturalists and Friends of Alewife Reservation members, on a stroll through the Alewife Reservation, where coyotes have been discovered. You may have heard that coyotes are the main cause for cat disappearances in wooded areas. Are you wondering if this is just a myth or really a fact? If you are, then come walk with these expert naturalists to learn about these useful predators on **Saturday, May 31, 10 am to Noon.** Families welcome. To register, call (617) 868-7591 or email [mikearnott@juno.com](mailto:mikearnott@juno.com)

**Forty Fathoms Deep.** Learn the history of Fresh Pond with Kit Rawlins from the Cambridge Historical Commission. She will lead you on a tour using historic maps from the seventeenth century through the twentieth century to uncover the many transformations of Fresh Pond over the years. Participants will be given photocopies of the maps to study and take home. **Saturday, May 31, from 1 to 3 pm.** Meet at Neville Place, 650 Cocncord Avenue, Cambridge. Go inside and follow the "Friends" signs. Please register in advance by calling Chief Ranger Jean Rogers at (617) 349-4793 and leaving your name and phone number. Or email Elizabeth Wylde at [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com). Children are welcome in the company of an adult.

**Biodiversity Days.** Biodiversity Days are state-wide events started in 2000 as part of the state's mission to reconnect people to the natural world and build public support for protecting biodiversity in our backyards, neighborhoods, communities, and water sheds. This offers citizens an opportunity to identify and record the variety of plants and animals in their local communities and contribute to a state-wide database. Survey options at Fresh Pond include birds, trees and shrubs, aquatic plants, wild-flowers, grasses, insects, fungi, macro invertebrates, fish, amphibians and reptiles, and mammals. Any other kinds of life forms that are visible may also be surveyed as long as the person volunteering to lead the program has the ability to help participants find, identify, and leave those organisms intact. If you would like to participate in one or more of the Friends group's Biodiversity Days programs, please

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# Non-Toxic Gardening Begins With Compost

By Henrietta Light

The Precautionary Principle is often cited as a guideline for environmental decision-making. In summary, it says: "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken, and alternative solutions should be sought."

The use of agricultural chemicals is definitely a threat to human health. It has been associated with cancers, asthma, birth defects, damage to the nervous system, reduced sperm counts, and learning disabilities. It also contributes to genetic mutations in animals, water pollution, depletion of soil nutrients, algae blooms in lakes, and destruction of birds and beneficial insects. Over time, it even encourages the development of chemically resistant strains of pests.

Fortunately, safe alternatives to these pesticides are available. Composting is key to all of them. Plants grown in compost-fortified soil, be they the grass or groundcover of your yard or the vegetables of your garden, are stronger and less likely to fall prey to disease in the first place. In addition, soil fortified with compost usually makes chemical fertilizers superfluous.

Compost is plant waste collected from the yard and garden and aged until it forms humus, a soil-like substance. It is created by a succession of microorganisms; each group breaks down or converts a biodegradable material into a simpler or more usable form that can be used by its successor.

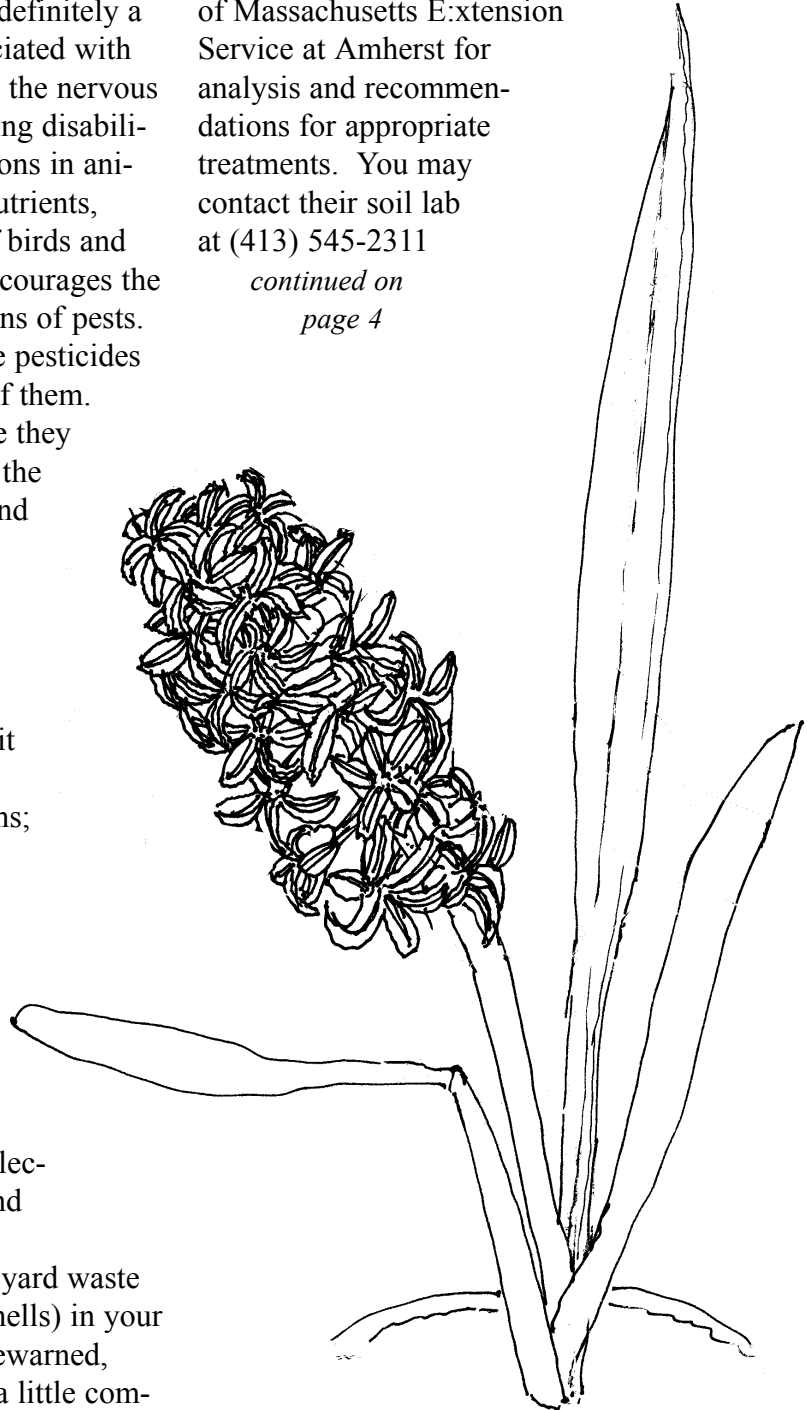
Unlike chemical fertilizer, which kills beneficial microorganisms and feeds the plant (wonderfully!) at the expense of the soil, compost actually regenerates the soil. And its molecular structure enables it to retain water and nutrients more efficiently.

If you have a place to compost your yard waste and leftover kitchen produce (plus egg-shells) in your yard, you have your own source. Be forewarned, however. It takes a *lot* of waste to form a little compost, so you may find that you need to purchase

reputable products such as Coast of Maine Compost (available at local garden centers) or products from Greenleaf Composting in Jamaica Plain or Nowak Brothers in Needham.

If you believe that your soil is deficient in a major nutrient or if it is very clayey, very sandy, or very heavy, send a soil sample to the University of Massachusetts Extension Service at Amherst for analysis and recommendations for appropriate treatments. You may contact their soil lab at (413) 545-2311

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**Non-Toxic Gardening**, *continued from page 3*

or [www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest](http://www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest)

Then, instead of spraying something like *Miracle-Gro* through the hose weekly, all you need is a half-inch top-dressing of compost once or twice a year. If you really *need* to feed your plants some-

thing more, fish emulsion or seaweed products are kindred to compost and are in keeping with an organic ecosystem.

“But what about my lawn?” you say. “I need to feed my lawn!” If indeed your lawn is wanting in nutrients, have the soil tested so you can efficiently correct the deficiency. Apply a half-inch of good compost yearly. There are landscaping companies



that can provide these services for you if you are unable to do it on your own. For a list of recommended firms, check the Northeast Organic Farm Association website at [www.nofamass.org](http://www.nofamass.org) or visit [www.ci.wellesley.ma.us/nrc/pesticide](http://www.ci.wellesley.ma.us/nrc/pesticide)

Sturdy plants grown in compost have an ability to resist pests and disease. In contrast, chemically fertilized plants (including grass plants) often contain excessive levels of nitrogen, which attracts insects.

Another benefit of compost is that it emits antibiotic substances that kill pathogens—insects, viruses, and fungi. Any such pathogens that do find their way into the compost are weakened by the oxygen shortage caused by the rapidly multiplying microorganisms in the humus.

If you do decide to change to a compost-based fertilizing system, you will have to find other ways of addressing nuisances that you are accustomed to poisoning. One thing to do is to modify your expectations and expect some damage. This won't be necessary, however, if you include in your garden

various plants that are repellent to pests as well as other plants that attract beneficial insects. (See lists below and on page 6.)

There are also mechanical ways to deter pests. The Japanese used to create crooked garden paths as a defense against evil spirits that travel in straight lines, as insects do. So wobble your rows a little!

Two popular forms of planting are not conducive to toxin-free gardening. One of these practices is Tidiness and Sterility in a garden, where there are few messy little habitats to encourage diversity and no random dry leaves that insect hunters like spiders and toads can hide under. The other pitfall is a monoculture, that is, only one variety of plant in a given space. This means that once established, pests or disease can run rampant. You can actually strengthen your lawn, for instance, by including white clover, which extracts nitrogen from the air and puts it into the soil. You can also allow such creeping plants as *Ajuga* (bugle) and *Lysamachia nummularia* (moneywort) to grow.

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## Plants That Attract Beneficial Insects

<i>Alfalfa</i>	<i>Coreopsis</i>	<i>Scabiosa</i>
<i>Ammi Majus</i>	<i>Coriander</i>	<i>atropurpurea</i>
<i>Anise</i>	<i>Cosmos</i>	<i>Sedum</i>
<i>Anthemis</i>	<i>Fennel</i>	<i>Silphium perfoliatum</i>
<i>Beets</i>	<i>Goldenrod</i>	<i>Spirea</i>
<i>Buttercups</i>	<i>Iberis umbellata</i>	<i>Strawflower</i>
<i>Beebalm</i>	<i>Lavender</i>	<i>Sunflower</i>
<i>Buckwheat</i>	<i>Liatris</i>	<i>Sweet alyssum</i>
<i>Buddleia</i>	<i>Mint</i>	<i>Tansy</i>
<i>Butterfly Weed</i>	<i>Nemophila menziesii</i>	<i>Thyme</i>
<i>Caraway</i>	<i>Oats</i>	<i>Viburnum</i>
<i>Caryopteris</i>	<i>Onion family</i>	<i>Vitex</i>
<i>Carrot</i>	<i>Oakleaf hydrangea</i>	<i>Winter Rye</i>
<i>Cheloni lyonii</i>	<i>Queen Anne's lace</i>	<i>Yarrow</i>
<i>Coneflower</i>	<i>Radishes</i>	<i>Yellow clover</i>

These withstand mowing and produce little flowers. People sometimes complain about those little flowers in their lawns. My response is: Don't you want a Botticelli lawn?

Of course, one of the most effective ways to deter weeds is to pull them up before they flower and spread seeds. Over time, this can dramatically reduce their occurrence in your yard.

*Henrietta Light is a horticultural consultant and garden designer based in Watertown. She is also the former horticulturist at the Lyman Estate in Waltham, where she managed greenhouses and gardens without pesticides. This article is adapted from a speech she gave to the Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum in April.*

## Plants That Repel Pests

Some plants have their own chemical defense systems. Planting these species among desired flowers and vegetables helps keep unwanted insects away.

Here is a partial list of alternatives to pesticides from the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Soil Conservation Service.

Pests	Plant Repellent
Ants	Mint, Tansy, Pennyroyal
Aphids	Mint, Garlic, Chives, Coriander, Anise
Bean Leaf Beetle	Potato, Onion, Turnip
Codling Moth	Common Oleander
Colorado Potato Bug	Green Beans, Coriander, Nasturtium
Cucumber Beetle	Radish, Tansy
Flea Beetle	Garlic, Onion, Mint
Imported Cabbage Worm	Mint, Sage, Rosemary, Hyssop
Japanese Beetle	Garlic, Larkspur, Tansy, Rue, Geranium
Leaf Hopper	Geranium, Petunia
Mexican Bean Beetle	Potato, Onion, Garlic, Radish, Petunia, Marigold
Mice	Onion
Root Knot Nematodes	French Marigold
Slugs	Prostrate Rosemary, Wormwood
Spider Mites	Onion, Garlic, Cloves, Chives
Squash Bug	Radish, Marigold, Tansy, Nasturtium
Squash Vine Borer	Cloves, Onion, Garlic
Stink Bug	Radish
Thrips	Marigold
Tomato Hornworm	Marigold, Sage, Borage
Whitefly	Marigold, Nasturtium

# *Uplands Developer Now Wants Condominiums*

*By Jim Graves*

The owner of the Belmont Uplands at Alewife, O'Neill Properties Group, surprised Belmont officials on April 25 by declaring that it no longer wanted to build the office or R&D complex for which Town Meeting rezoned the property on May 28, 2002. Because of the "depressed state of the Massachusetts office and laboratory market," O'Neill explained, it would like the land rezoned again, this time for 200 one- and two-bedroom condominium units.

O'Neill asked the town to fast-track its new proposal so that it can be considered by Town Meeting in mid June. However, both the Selectmen and the Planning Board said that is unlikely, given the long list of other issues that the town is already wrestling with and the numerous concerns raised by the residential proposal. A public hearing on O'Neill's proposal is scheduled for the Planning Board's May 28 meeting at Belmont Town Hall.

The questions being raised about the new proposal concern mainly its net revenue and environmental impact on the wetlands and nearby Alewife Reservation. Traffic, a major concern for Arlington and Cambridge officials and many Belmont residents, would clearly be much less with condos than with an office or R&D complex. Vanasse & Associates, an

O'Neill consultant, estimates that a 200-unit condo complex would generate 55 percent less weekday traffic than an office complex. Parking spaces would be cut from 793 to 333.

However, a major concern of Belmont officials and Town Meeting was how much net revenue would be produced by development at Alewife, and on this issue skepticism was immediate. Connery Associates, another O'Neill consultant, estimated that the town's net tax revenue would be about \$610,000 a year, based on the assumption that 150 two-bedroom condos and 50 one-bedroom condos would mean only about 30 additional children in Belmont schools. But if the actual number of school children were 60 instead of 30, the town's net tax revenue would be nearly halved. Adjustments in other cost calculations could erase the net revenue entirely, making the development of the Uplands a money-loser for Belmont. Any residential building uses many more public services than an office building.

Tim Higgins, Belmont's Senior Planner, noted that a residential building might be bought by a nearby college as housing and therefore be tax-exempt. With Alewife station within walking distance, the property would be convenient for faculty or graduate student housing.

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O'Neill has proposed restricting 30 percent of the dwelling units to households with at least one person aged 55 or older and making 10 percent of the units affordable. To comply with the town's new inclusionary zoning law, which would require 25 percent of the units to be affordable, the developer proposed to negotiate a cash payment to Belmont's Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

## **Alewife Walks at the Belmont Uplands**

The Friends of Alewife Reservation and the Belmont Citizens Forum are sponsoring three walks of the Belmont Uplands.

If you would like to take a closer look, please register for one of these by calling (617) 484-1844. Meet at the west parking lot of the former Arthur D. Little Company on Acorn Park Drive.

**Friday, May 23  
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

Robert Petersen, president of the Brookline Bird Club, will point out migrant and other nesting birds of Alewife.

**Monday, May 26, Memorial Day  
12:30 to 2:30 p.m.**

Naturalist Ralph Yoder will guide visitors through the silver maple forest and adjacent wetlands, pointing out where the proposed development will be.

**Saturday, May 31  
10 a.m. to noon**

Naturalists Mary White and Mike Arnott will show the habitat of the Eastern coyote and teach their habits, functions, and interesting behavior.

Visually, the condominiums will have a lower maximum height of 59 feet versus 98 feet for the office building, according to O'Neill. Although both would be four stories high, the office building would have higher ceilings and ventilation pipes on the roof. In total size, the two are not much different: the condo complex would be 340,000 square feet, while the office building was planned to be 245,000 square feet with a 115,000-square-foot parking garage.

One way the condo complex would have a greater environmental impact is by more than doubling the amount of sewage. The wastewater produced per day would increase from 18,375 gallons per day for the office building to 38,300 gallons per day for condos. That's important because local sewer systems already exceed their capacity during major storm events. The excess sewage can flow into local streams and even back up into local basements.

Another concern is intrusion into the wetlands buffer zones. More than a quarter of the footprint of the proposed office building is in the buffer zone – something state environmental officials or Belmont's Conservation Commission may not permit – and the same would be true for the condos. O'Neill lists the office building's intrusion into the buffer zone as 84,277 square feet and the condo plan's intrusion as 83,319 square feet.

Finally, the condo proposal, like the office building, would require destruction of virtually all the remaining upland habitat and clear-cutting of the silver maple forest. In a letter last year to the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Massachusetts Audubon Society cited studies that found that "...more than three-quarters of wetland species in Massachusetts require adjacent upland habitat." The letter continued: "Many of these wetland species cannot complete their seasonal and life cycle requirements without the availability of adjoining upland habitat. In such instances, the local populations of those wetland wildlife species are likely to be eliminated by the development of all or most of the uplands around a wetland."

Two of the studies Audubon cited were conducted during 2002. With a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement, the Friends of Alewife Reservation commissioned professional



studies of the mammals and birds in and near the Alewife Reservation. The studies identified 90 migrant and breeding bird species, including woodcocks, great blue heron and red-tailed hawks, and found 16 species of wild mammal, including mink, red fox, eastern coyote, beaver, and muskrat.

A new committee called Save Our Forest, which has members from Belmont, Cambridge and Arlington, has suggested swapping the development rights for the Belmont Uplands to another develop-

ment site while ensuring tax revenue for Belmont. Perhaps such a switch could be negotiated.

To learn more about the environmental impact of development at the Uplands, attend the Conservation Commission meeting on June 3. See the public meeting calendar on the town's web site ([www.town.belmont.ma.us](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us)) for the exact time and location.

*Jim Graves is president of Belmont Citizens Forum.*

## ***Outdated Flood Map May Still Be Used***

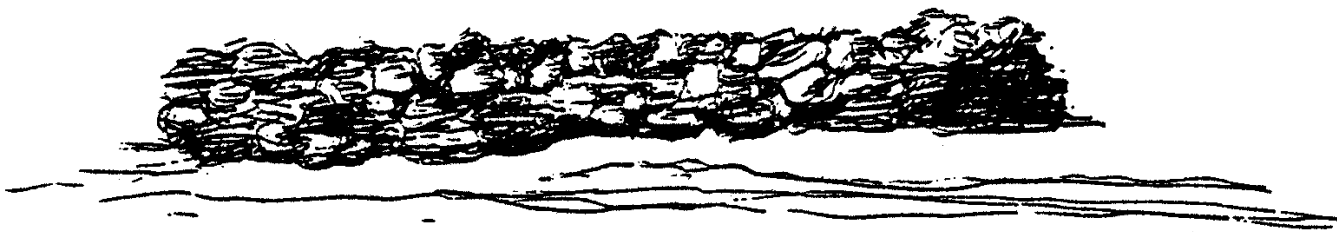
O'Neill Properties Group filed a Notice of Intent with the Belmont Conservation Commission last month to obtain final instructions for protecting the wetlands adjoining its proposed office complex – a project it does not intend to build. Apparently the notice was filed to prevent the developer's three-year-old wetlands and flood-plain delineation from expiring, which otherwise would have occurred on June 27.

If the old delineation expires, and the developer has to file for a new one, the Conservation Commission can take into account new information. Much new information has been developed in the past three years, particularly about the flood plain. The MDC has commissioned a

hydrology study, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency is conducting new flood-plain studies of the entire Alewife basin. The existing FEMA flood-plain maps, on which O'Neill and the Belmont Conservation Commission relied for the 2000 delineation, are more than 20 years old.

The ConCom opened a hearing on the Notice of Intent on May 6 and continued it, with the consent of O'Neill, until June 3. The commission was asked by several who attended to declare the Notice of Intent application incomplete because O'Neill had not procured other permits it should have obtained first. No final decision has been made on that request.

—*Sue Bass*



# Mixed-Use Buildings, Roadway Narrowing, and

*Continued from page one*

Planner and a panelist at the forum, the prime customers of commercial areas like those along Trapelo Road in Belmont and Massachusetts Avenue in East Arlington are people who live within half a mile—or walking distance—of the shops. “Don’t forget that,” he advised.

Wise redevelopment of this corridor’s commercial strips could have significant financial benefits for the town. In Arlington, McClennen said, 50 percent of non-residential tax revenue now comes from commercial sites that have been redeveloped in the past 15 years. Another panelist at the forum, Jennifer Page, chair of Belmont’s Vision 21 Implementation Committee, pointed out that a prosperous business community increases residential property values too. “If you have a business climate that is thriving, more people want to move there.”

Both of these panelists favored mixed-use zoning on commercial blocks, that is, a mixture of commercial and residential development in the same block or even in the same building. Such zoning, McClennen said, “produces communities that are walkable, bikeable, and livable.” As an example, he cited the new 132-unit Sunrise Assisted Living building in the Arlington Heights business district, which has brought \$10-12 million in purchasing power to the neighborhood—far more than an auto-

mobile dealership would have.

During a 20-minute slide show tour of the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, the Belmont Citizens Forum advocated rezoning the town’s main street to permit second-floor apartments above first-floor storefronts. The Tudor-style building in Cushing Square that houses Winters Hardware and a branch of the Belmont Savings Bank currently has living quarters upstairs. This kind of mixed use, grandfathered in that particular structure, is traditional in New England but began to be disallowed in the 1920s, when urban planners attempted to do just the reverse: make a firm distinction between commercial and residential areas. Thinking has changed since then.

Kim Allis, a resident of Cushing Square, pronounced mixed-use zoning “kind of cool.” She believes that, done right, this square could become almost Parisian in feeling.

Mixed-use zoning can also alleviate some traffic problems, according to McClennen, because people who live near shopping and public transportation tend to use their cars less often.

## Traffic Calming Techniques Discussed

Planners and many residents agree that traffic calming is key to revitalizing this corridor. Traffic planner Andrew McClurg, a member of the Belmont



# *Bicycle Lanes Discussed for Belmont Corridor*

Planning Board, believes that a single, clearly-defined travel lane in each direction is the right way to go. This could be accomplished by either installing a median strip or widening the sidewalks, both of which would turn some of the excess roadbed over to pedestrians.

Re-timing the traffic lights could also help control driving behavior. One commuter pointed out that, right now, the faster you go on this street, the more likely you are to cruise through the next stoplight.

Other traffic-calming features suggested at the forum were neckdowns (places where the curbing bumps out into the roadway), pedestrian-activated walk lights, speed tables (raised sections constructed of different materials), and landscaping. Mary Jo Frisoli, chair of the town's Traffic Advisory Committee, said that wide, international-style crosswalks would be part of any redesign. On-street parking and bike lanes can also have a traffic-calming affect. A resident of Lexington Street said planners should consider putting a bike lane to the right of parked cars, as is done in Montreal. This would "keep bikers from being taken out by driver's-side doors."

Jim Murphy, a Belmont Street resident whose extended family has lived on the street since the 1950s, said he thought that a center median strip would be a good place to install a bike lane. "I wouldn't ride a bike on Trapelo now. It's too dangerous," said Murphy. But he said he would look forward to doing so if the road became safer.

Some attendees at the April forum worried that narrowing the roadway might cause unacceptable traffic backups. McClurg responded that as long as turning lanes were installed at the major intersections, traffic should continue to flow smoothly. Panelist Gus Bailey, a Watertown town councilor who has masterminded several traffic-calming projects, said that a single travel lane can easily handle 15,000 cars a day at a steady pace, or "C" level of service, the recommended level for a neighborhood of this sort. McClurg and Frisoli admitted, however, that care would have to be taken to ensure that through traffic did not spill over onto residential side streets.

"We are not trying to change the amount of traffic the road will carry," said McClurg. "We want to preserve the traffic capacity we have now. I am confident that we don't need two lanes [in each direction], even in peak hours, between one intersection and the next."

## **How Much Traffic?**

Waltham resident Marie Daly and Lexington resident Gilbert Garber reminded Belmont planners that the volume of traffic on Trapelo Road is largely determined by development in surrounding communities. Daly mentioned 1,000 units of affordable housing now being considered for the Fernald Center property in Waltham. Garber cited new housing planned for the Met State Hospital land in Lexington, a new independent high school being constructed on Forest Street in Waltham, and development at the former Middlesex Hospital site as additional sources of traffic. "You need a regional approach to deal with these huge increases," Garber said. Barbara Brown of the Waverley Oaks Apartments just outside Waverley Square noted that the large commercial and residential developments on the McLean property would also contribute more cars to the corridor.

Although no traffic counts have been completed since 1998, Dr. Terry Miller, a resident of Trapelo Road, said that he believes that the current traffic volume exceeds 32,000 cars per day. He advocated narrowing of the road and installation of a median strip, which he said would prevent dangerous U-turns. This would not back up traffic, he maintained, as long as there were designated places for buses to pull over when picking up passengers and left-turn lanes at intersections.

Jim Murphy of Belmont Street said he had witnessed "an incredible increase in truck traffic in the past few years. I hear airbrakes at 2, 3, 4 a.m."

According to panelist Mary Jo Frisoli of the Traffic Advisory Committee, a nighttime truck ban on residential streets in Cambridge has shifted some of that traffic to surrounding towns. But she noted that the state attorney general is fighting this ban.

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# More Bus Commuters Could Mean Fewer Cars

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Belmont has considered but rejected proposals for truck bans on some streets because they would only shift traffic to other Belmont streets. By law, "you have to designate a road for trucks through your town," Frisoli said.

## Where to Park

Tension has existed for years between business owners, who want convenient customer parking, and homeowners, who claim that retail customers and employees are parking on side streets and blocking driveways. Bill Engstrom of Willow Street said at a recent Planning Board meeting that his wife and daughter were blocked in their driveway for 36 minutes one day while waiting for a tow truck to haul away an illegally parked car. Angie Kounelis of the East Watertown Betterment Association spoke up at the April 1 public forum, saying that too many Belmont merchants park on residential streets in her neighborhood. She also complained that motorists speed down these side streets in order to avoid the traffic lights on Grove Street. "Please take this into

consideration," she pleaded.

Some residents suspect that train and bus commuters are parking all day on their streets. Planning Board member Karl Haglund suggested that one possible solution would be install a commuter parking lot on a vacant commercial parcel on South Pleasant Street and allow train riders to board at that location. Arlington Planner Alan McClennen said that he doesn't believe the street needs a lot more parking, just "management of the resources you already have." The municipal lot next to the train station in Waverley Square is seldom full, for example.

## Public Transportation

One way to limit the volume of cars is to encourage more people to use public transportation.

Local architects Katharine and Michael MacPhail took a step in this direction when they decided to sponsor a bus shelter design competition, advertised through the Boston Society of Architects. The corridor currently has only two shelters, provided by the MBTA. The MacPhails reasoned that more people would choose to take the bus if waiting



for one, especially in foul weather, were a more pleasant experience. The submitted designs, which came from as far away as California and as close as Belmont High School, were exhibited in the MacPhail Architectural Collaborative Gallery in Cushing Square for three weeks in April. The winning entry, a thrifty design by two young Cambridge architects, Jeremy Munn and Andrew Watkins, featured wooden benches and awnings hung from existing utility poles. The MacPhails hope to raise private donations to fund a half-scale model of this bus shelter and, eventually, installation of shelters on the street. (Other designs that were submitted featured illuminated portals, lights that changed color when a passenger was waiting to board, even roofs constructed of SUVs sliced in half.)

Marie Daly of Waltham suggested extending the MBTA bus lines into Waltham to help keep more cars off Trapelo Road. These bus lines now terminate in Belmont's Waverley Square.

### **Preserving Neighborhood Character**

Some residents of the corridor appeared at a Planning Board meeting on April 15 to voice their concern that Belmont Street and Trapelo Road not become "urbanized" or commercial from end to end "like Harvard Street in Allston." Wendy McDonald, who has lived in Belmont for 25 years, said she came to this town because it was quiet, safe, relaxed, and lazy. "I'm afraid rezoning will change this," she said. She and another resident, Nancy MacIsaac, worried that new restaurants and storefronts could have an adverse impact on residential side streets and create "blight." James Diamond, who owns a jewelry and antiques store near the intersection of Trapelo Road and Belmont Street feared that economic development of the corridor would cause commercial rents to rise and put smaller shops out of business.

Similar questions were raised by some at the April 1 public forum. "Does dual-use zoning conflict with [Belmont's] small-town atmosphere?" asked Ray Comeau of Preble Gardens Road. Belmont Planning Board member Karl Haglund responded that the board is interested in blocks that have commercial zones already. "We do not intend to rezone residential blocks," he said.

*continued on page 14*

## **Architecture Students Redesign Streetscape**

The Gallery at MacPhail Architectural Collaborative in Cushing Square will open a new exhibit with a reception on June 4, 6 – 8 p.m., that features streetscape designs for various segments of the Trapelo Road corridor. The designs were created by students at the Boston Architectural Center's community design studio, under the direction of Herb Kronish, for the Belmont Citizens Forum. The students focused on sections of the corridor that are of particular concern to the public. One student worked on adaptive reuse of the Waverley fire station. Two developed different approaches to reorganizing the traffic at Waverley Square. A fourth concentrated on Cushing Square. And a fifth studied the area between these two squares, particularly Pequotsette Playground and the former VW dealership. The exhibition will also include other perspectives on Trapelo Road and Belmont Street, including those of the Cecil Group, consultants to the Town of Belmont. An interactive area will allow visitors to contribute their own opinions on redesigning the corridor. Call (617) 489-8535 for more information.

### **Perspectives on Trapelo Road An Interactive Exhibition at the MAC Gallery**

109 Trapelo Road  
June 4 to June 30  
9 a.m. – Noon Weekdays  
10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Saturdays  
or by appointment

Linn Hobbs of Belmont's Historic District Commission, noted that preserving the scale and character of the area is important in any redevelopment effort. Many commercial buildings on Trapelo Road, most of which pre-date 1930, feature high-quality construction. Hobbs identified the Tudor block (home of Winters Hardware) and the S. S. Pierce block in Cushing Square as particularly fine examples. The churches and the Waverley fire station are other buildings that contribute to the character of the neighborhood. He said that the scale and materials used in any new construction would be important in maintaining and enhancing the small-town atmosphere of the neighborhood centers.

Belmont Senior Planner Tim Higgins said at recent Planning Board meeting that current planning practice does not favor split blocks (having commercial and residential zones on the same block). "But this needs to be decided by the neighborhoods."

Based on the results of the state-funded consul-

tant's study and the information received from residents and business owners at public hearings, the Planning Board will draft a comprehensive rezoning plan for the entire corridor. It is likely that Town Meeting Members will be asked this fall to approve zoning changes that would alter the streetscape and remove certain split blocks.

The Planning Board will be meeting regularly this spring and summer to discuss the specifics of this plan: how much commercial activity the corridor can sustain, how much traffic it can handle, and how each segment of the roadway should look. Check the town's website ([www.town.belmont.ma.us](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us)) for an up-to-date meeting calendar. The board's list of goals and objectives for the corridor can also be found at that site. If you missed the Trapelo Road slide tour at the Studio Cinema, you may check out a videotape or DVD of this informative 20-minute show at the Belmont Memorial Library.

*Sharon Vanderslice is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 2.*

## "Dirty Water"

Monday June 9, 7:30 pm

Bramhall Room, All Saints Parish Hall

Common & Clark Streets, Belmont

Dirty water used to be the symbol of Boston, as the Standells sang in the 1960s. But times have changed. It's not so lovable when it's in brooks and ponds right here in Belmont – and even worse when it's in our basements.

Come hear Libby Larson of the Mystic River Watershed Association explain how dirty our waterways are and some of the reasons why; and Bill Pisano of Belmont's Sewer and Stormwater Committee describe possible remedies, both in Belmont and in the upper Alewife watershed.

Refreshments will be served.

**Friends of the Belmont Citizens Forum**

# Judge: Junction Brook May Be Part Perennial

By Sue Bass

An administrative law judge in the state Department of Environmental Protection may declare that the upper 600-foot section of Junction Brook is perennial while the lower portion is intermittent.

Judge James P. Rooney has scheduled a hearing for September 18 and 19 for evidence on the flow of the upper portion of the brook and on the boundary between two portions. The parties to the dispute have already stipulated, however, that while the lower 200 feet of the 800-foot stream have been observed dry, "[t]here are no recorded observations of the stream being dry" above that.

If the upper portion of Junction Brook is ruled perennial, development for 200 feet on each side of it is strictly limited by the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act. The developers of a 600,000-square-foot senior complex planned for the McLean Hospital land, American Retirement Corp., want to build just over 100 feet from the upper portion of the brook.

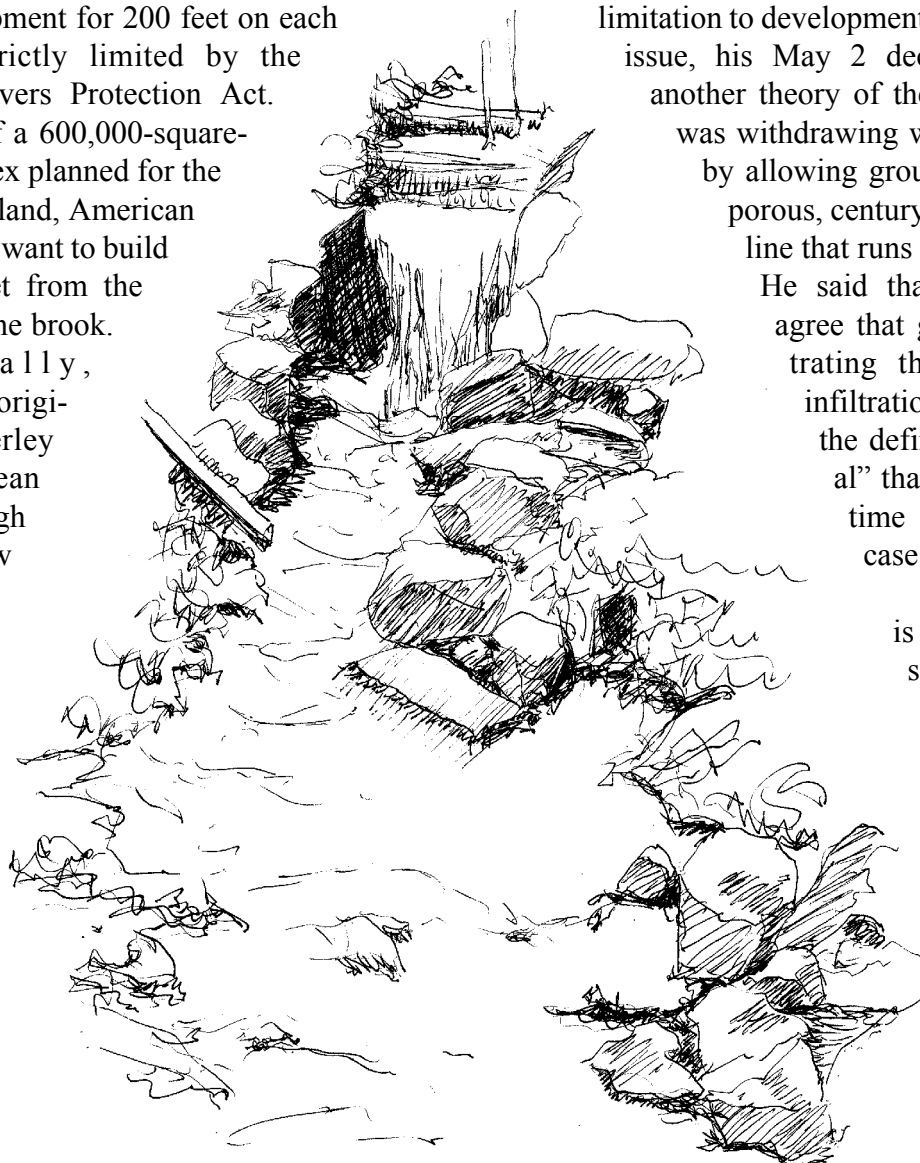
Historically, Junction Brook originated in Waverley Spring at McLean and flowed through a wetland now buried under a parking lot. What remains of it is in a culvert on the McLean campus; it then flows above ground down the wooded south side of the hospital property

to Pleasant Street. The brook flows beneath Pleasant Street and the railroad tracks and joins Wellington Brook underground. The combined streams reappear near the First Church, flow behind the Armenian church and the Belmont Memorial Library, and on into Clay Pit Pond.

Judge Rooney himself had proposed the segmentation theory in a telephone conference this spring with the parties to the case, which include McLean Hospital, the Department of Environmental Protection, and a group of Belmont citizens and abutters supported by the Belmont Citizens Forum. He asked them to file briefs on that issue while he continued to consider motions argued in September 2002.

Although Judge Rooney identified a potential limitation to development based upon this first issue, his May 2 decision ruled against another theory of the case, that McLean was withdrawing water from the brook by allowing groundwater to infiltrate porous, century-old pipes in a sewer line that runs near Junction Brook. He said that, while all parties agree that groundwater is infiltrating the sewer line, that infiltration is not covered by the definition of "withdrawal" that was in effect at the time the Junction Brook case was filed.

Because infiltration is not a factor, Rooney said, he would not allow further discovery intended to illuminate that issue, like the smoke tests proposed by the Citizens Forum to discover connections between the sewer pipes and storm drains.





"... Bright April  
Shakes out her rain-drenched hair."

E. St. Vincent Millay



email [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com). This takes place **Saturday, May 31 to Sunday, June 8**.

**Land Protection Strategy Session.** Every day when we go outside, we are greeted by nature's gifts. Little by little, however, the open land in our state is being destroyed. Learn how you can help the Massachusetts Audubon Society preserve what is left by attending a strategy session with Bob Wilber, Director of Land Protection. **Wednesday, June 4, 7:30 to 9 pm.** Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. Although this event is free, you must pre-register by calling Habitat at

**Edible Wild Plants of the Alewife Reservation.** Join expert forager Russ Cohen, author of the "Wild Edibles" section of the Alewife Area Ecology Guide, on a two-hour walk through the MDC Alewife Reservation to learn about at least eighteen species. Wear shoes that you don't mind getting wet or muddy. **Tuesday, June 24, 6 - 8 pm.** Meet by the "Passenger Pick-up" on the ground floor of the Alewife T station parking garage. This event is on, rain or shine. If you have any questions, contact (781) 316-3438. Sponsored by the Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR) and the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA).

## ***You Are Invited to Participate***

Much of the work of the Belmont Citizens Forum is done by our committees.

Three of those committees have scheduled meetings in June.

We particularly encourage new members to come.

### **Traffic and Transportation Committee**

Thursday, June 5, 7:30 to 9 p.m.

The agenda will include a review of our progress in promoting pedestrian safety in Belmont and setting new goals and initiatives. We will discuss the White Street upgrade, the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor upgrade, crosswalks, and chicanes.

Contact Mark D'Andrea at (617) 484-1844.

### **Environmental Committee**

Thursday, June 12, 7:30 to 9 p.m.

We'll discuss projects to protect Belmont's environment, improve water quality, reduce town energy consumption, promote reduced use of pesticides, and other environmental issues.

Contact Sue Bass at (617) 489-4729.

### **Planning/Zoning Committee**

Thursday, June 19, 7:30 to 9 p.m.

We'll continue to discuss additional ways to promote public discussion of the options for rezoning the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor. Belmont needs broad participation in decisions like how tall new buildings should be allowed to be and which landmark buildings should be preserved. Bring your ideas for speakers, exhibits, and other ways to get more residents and business owners involved in this issue. Contact Sue Bass at (617) 489-4729.

## Measuring Spending, *continued from page 20*

ment to interpreting data is that some departments are essentially independent of town taxes, but their costs are reported as part of town spending. For example, the water department appears as a cost item in the state reports, but because water expenses are paid directly by residents in their water bills, savings there will not reduce property taxes or free up funds for other departments. If benefits for water department employees are allocated to “fixed costs,” this further complicates comparisons between towns.

Instead of comparing spending, one can try to compare staffing levels. Belmont Warrant Committee members Robie White and Michael Widmer and School Committee member Ralph Jones combined U. S. Department of Justice data and state-reported census data for a presentation earlier this year on Belmont police staffing compared with that of other towns. These statistics, from 2000, are shown below.

Beyond staffing and spending, results are important. The schools report good data because they are required to. Even before the MCAS, there

were widely accepted comparisons of school effectiveness (dropout rate, percentage of students going on to college, SAT and other standardized test scores). Other town departments measure their effectiveness, but this information is not reported at the state level. Here again we are hampered by a lack of standardized measures and no central collection of the data.

For some services, we can make a clear connection between money spent, what we get for that money, how often a service is used, and the quality of that service. The highway department knows which roads would benefit most from repaving, how heavily they are used, and what it would cost to repave those roads. The library knows how many books are checked out, from which branches, and at what times. The water department knows which pipes need replacing (either because of leaks or because of lead), what it would cost to do so, and what benefit we would receive. We may not know how we compare to other towns, but we do have an idea of what will happen if we increase or decrease spending.

In other cases, causes and effects are not so clear-cut. Some police and fire results are easy to

## Police Staffing Levels and Crime Rates: 12 Towns

		2000 POP	2000 POP per mile	2000 UCR CRIMES	Crimes per 1000	Full- Time Officers	Officers per 1000	Rank	Officers per Crime	Rank
1	Community									
2	Arlington	42389	8183	402	9.5	57	1.345	11	0.142	6
3	Belmont	24194	5192	249	10.3	53	2.191	3	0.213	2
4	Burlington	22876	1937	938	41	62	2.71	1	0.066	11
5	Dedham	23464	2245	465	19.8	60	2.557	2	0.129	8
6	Lexington	30355	1851	310	10.2	53	1.746	9	0.171	4
7	Melrose	27134	5786	375	13.8	54	1.99	6	0.144	5
8	Milton	26062	1999	181	6.9	57	2.187	4	0.315	1
9	Needham	28911	2293	285	9.9	49	1.695	8	0.172	3
10	Watertown	32986	8026	743	22.5	68	2.061	5	0.092	10
11	Wellesley	26613	2614	281	10.6	39	1.465	10	0.139	7
12	Winchester	20810	3445	313	15	37	1.778	7	0.118	9

These statistics were compiled by Ralph Jones, Robie White, and Michael Widmer for a presentation to the Warrant Committee. “UCR crimes” are crimes against persons or property.

# We need you.

*If you can volunteer even a few hours a month, you can make a difference. You do not need to be an expert—just a person who cares about our town.*

## **I can devote time to:**

☐ Archaeology & Historic Preservation  
☐ Environmental Protection  
☐ Planning & Zoning  
☐ Traffic & Transportation  
☐ Mailings  
☐ Newsletter  
☐ Website

## **I can help pay for this newsletter:**

*It costs about \$3500 to publish each issue of our newsletter. Please donate for this purpose:*

☐ \$25    ☐ \$50    ☐ \$100    ☐ \$250

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

*The Belmont Citizens Forum is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your donation is deductible from federal taxes to the full extent provided by law. If you have questions, please call (617) 484-1844.*

***Make checks payable to Belmont Citizens Forum and mail to Belmont Citizens Forum, P.O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478. Thank you!***

measure (crime rates, number of fires, response times), but others are not. How do you measure “feeling safe?” Do you feel comfortable going for a walk alone at night? In some cases, “good” numbers can either indicate good results or a lack of enforcement. This includes infractions like traffic tickets and citations for selling tobacco to minors. When crime rates fluctuate, we don’t know why; often there are multiple causes. In addition, we don’t know the effect of adding or subtracting one more police officer, or how that police officer could best be used. On foot? Directing traffic? Driving around looking for suspicious behavior?

According to Selectmen Will Brownsberger, the recent reduction in Belmont’s police staffing to 48 officers will not affect the level of safety in town, only the level of service. Yet how do we determine which services are most important and what is an acceptable level of safety? These are discussions we need to continue.

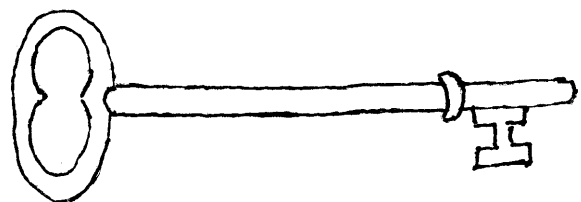
In looking at ways to cut the town’s budget, we can begin by examining the staffing patterns for different shifts in all town departments. We can also negotiate contracts that give the town more flexibility in allocating overtime and other resources. We

could consider regionalizing more services and sharing capital equipment.

We know that Belmont’s budget will be tight for some time, and we will be forced to either reduce services, raise taxes, or improve our efficiency for several years to come. Improving efficiency is the least painful alternative for residents, but it requires good comparable data and a clear discussion of the town’s goals.

Data gatherers may consult [www.massstats.com](http://www.massstats.com) (don’t trust the exact values in the legends), [www.dls.state.ma.us/allfiles.htm](http://www.dls.state.ma.us/allfiles.htm), or [www.state.ma.us/cc/](http://www.state.ma.us/cc/) for detailed information by municipality.

*David Chase is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 3 and a resident of Waverley Terrace.*



**Belmont Citizens Forum**  
**P. O. Box 609**  
**Belmont, MA 02478**

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**"Dirty Water --  
Our Brooks and Basements"  
Monday, June 9, 7:30 p.m.  
See Page 14.**

### **People Are Asking**

## **Can We Measure What We Get for Our Tax Dollars?**

*By David Chase*

In this age of budget restrictions and cutbacks, some people are asking: "Is Belmont spending enough, or too much, on its various departments and services?" Much has been written about school spending. This article examines ways of measuring other town spending.

Over the years, and especially earlier this year, I have played the role of a benevolent bean-counter. Rather than seizing on anecdotal stories of "waste and mismanagement," I have tried instead to look for places where spending is high relative to towns of similar size.

Unfortunately, good answers are elusive, though there is more information available now than a few

years ago. The state reports spending by department, on-line, for every municipality. We can compare school spending across the state with great confidence because the calculations for local aid require detailed and standardized accounting.

However, because each town's non-education accounting is not standardized, it is not possible to make an apples-to-apples comparison of other town expenses. For example, employee benefits may be charged to the individual departments, or they may be charged to "fixed costs." Belmont appears to have dramatically higher policing costs than comparable towns, but most of the difference may be the result of different accounting methods. Even within the town of Belmont, departments report spending with varying levels of detail.

Different towns also provide different levels of service. Some have only a volunteer fire department, for example, and some don't provide sewer service to all residents. The state information doesn't indicate when this is the case. Another impediment

*continued on page 18*