

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 5, No. 2

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

March 2004

Development Proposed for Waverley Square

By Sue Bass

Waverley Square has the potential to be the site of 170 or more apartments, at least 255 parking spaces and about 18,000 square feet of retail space in 60-foot-high buildings over the commuter rail tracks that run through the square according to a report by the Cecil Group presented to the Board of Selectmen on January 26. Belmont and the MBTA hired the Cecil Group to study possibilities for developing the air rights over the Waverley Square train tracks; the MBTA paid \$12,500 of the \$15,000 contract.

The new proposal developed by the Cecil Group would mean construction over the tracks in the center of the square, over the parking lot in the triangle formed by Trapelo Road, Lexington Street and Church Street, and also over the tracks east of the square. The building site would include either the abutting land owned by Belmont Car Wash or an undeveloped strip on the other side of the tracks, or both. Having some abutting land to work from is essential during construction over train tracks, explained Ken Buckland of the Cecil Group, because the trains need to keep running. Building over the tracks west of the square was considered but rejected because it would require taking houses along Thayer Road.

The town's return on the proposed project would come from property taxes on the new development. The developer selected for the job would give the MBTA cash for the use of its air rights and would also pay the private landowners.

The density of the project is a major issue. "It is the concern," Timothy Higgins, Belmont's senior

planner, agreed in an interview. Jennifer Page, a precinct 3 Town Meeting Member and chairwoman of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, said, "It seems overwhelming right now. I believe in the theory that it would be nice for the town to get some money out of this. But that looked like some big project."

A major reason for the large size of the proposed development is the cost of building over air rights. Dick Paik, a Bonz and Company economic analyst hired as part of the Cecil Group contract, noted in a report that building over air rights would add as much as \$4 million to the cost of construction, principally for columns every 30 feet to support the

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Environmental Events Calendar

Wednesday, March 10, 7 pm: **Concord Alewife Study Committee considers** transportation analysis and zoning for the "Cambridge Quadrangle" property. For more details, see "Cities on Belmont's Borders," p. 12, or contact Iram Farooq by phone at (617) 349-4606 or by email at ifarooq@cambridge-ma.gov for more information

Wednesday, March 10, 7:30 pm: **Public Hearing on Met State Hospital site.** Held by the Lexington Planning Board. Clarke Middle School, 17 Stedman Road, (off Waltham St.), Lexington. For more information call (781) 862-0500 X-245, or visit <http://ci.lexington.ma.us/> .

Saturday, March 20, 9-11 am: **Over the River & Through the Woods: Exploring the Mystic River Watershed.** Meet other watershed advocates and

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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
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or to editor@belmontcitizensforum.org

look for early signs of spring along the Mystic Lakes. Help us find any early spring migrants that may have flown in, or any winter birds that are hanging around. Meet at the Mystic Lakes Dam parking lot, off of Mystic Valley Parkway, West Medford. Wear warm clothes and boots appropriate to muddy surfaces. Co-sponsored by the Menotomy Bird Club and the Mystic River Watershed Association. For information or directions, please call Janet at (781) 316-3438, janet@mysticriver.org.

Sunday, March 28, 1:00 to 3:00 pm: **Phenology at Fresh Pond Reservation.** Phenology is the branch of science that studies how plants and animals respond to changes in the seasons. Join the Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation for an introduction that will include descriptions of how to collect information and how we store our data, and a walk in the Black's Nook area to observe the changes that are happening right now with the arrival of spring. Free. Maynard Ecology Center, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge. To register, call Chief Ranger Jean Rogers at (617) 349-4793.

Saturday, April 3: **Wildlife Tour With Dave Brown.** New England naturalist and wildlife specialist, Dave Brown, will be giving a walking tour parts of the Alewife Reservation that are important to wildlife, including the Uplands. Free. Sponsored by the Friends of Alewife Resrvation. For time, location and more information, contact Ellen Mass, (617) 290-4864.

Sunday, April 18, at 1:30-3 pm: **Vernal Pools For Grown-Ups.** If you like critters then this is just the thing for you! Study and catch creatures living in the pools and prepare to get wet. Meet at Habitat Education Center in Belmont. This event is free. For more information call (617)489-5050.

Saturday, April 24, at 7:30-10:30 am: **Winn's Brook Exploration with Roger Wrubel.** Have you ever wondered where a stream or brook leads or where it begins? Join Roger Wrubel on this venture tracing Winn's Brook from its headwaters at Habitat through Belmont, to its entry into Little Pond near

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Candidates for Selectman Answer 10 Questions

Every year, Belmont voters elect one member of the town's three-person Board of Selectmen. On April 5, they will choose between the incumbent, Will Brownsberger, and the challenger, Joe White. The Belmont Citizens Forum asked the two candidates to respond to the following questions on planning and zoning issues. Each candidate was limited to a total of one thousand words.

1. What are your budget priorities for the coming year? Will you recommend layoffs or an operating override? Is there enough money for equipment and supplies?

Brownsberger: My top budget priorities are the schools and the roads.

We have approved two overrides in the past three years. As a result, although state aid cuts have hit us hard, I do not expect either layoffs or an override this year, provided our town and school unions are willing to recognize the town's financial condition and accept limits on compensation increases.

I began my involvement in town politics ten years ago as a young parent concerned about traffic safety and the schools. Through my years of service, I have gained a broad appreciation for the many crit-

ical needs of the town's citizens and the dedication of the town's police, fire, public works, library and other staff.

While every town department is straining, I still believe that the school system is the operating area where additional resources are most needed – for staff, equipment and supplies.

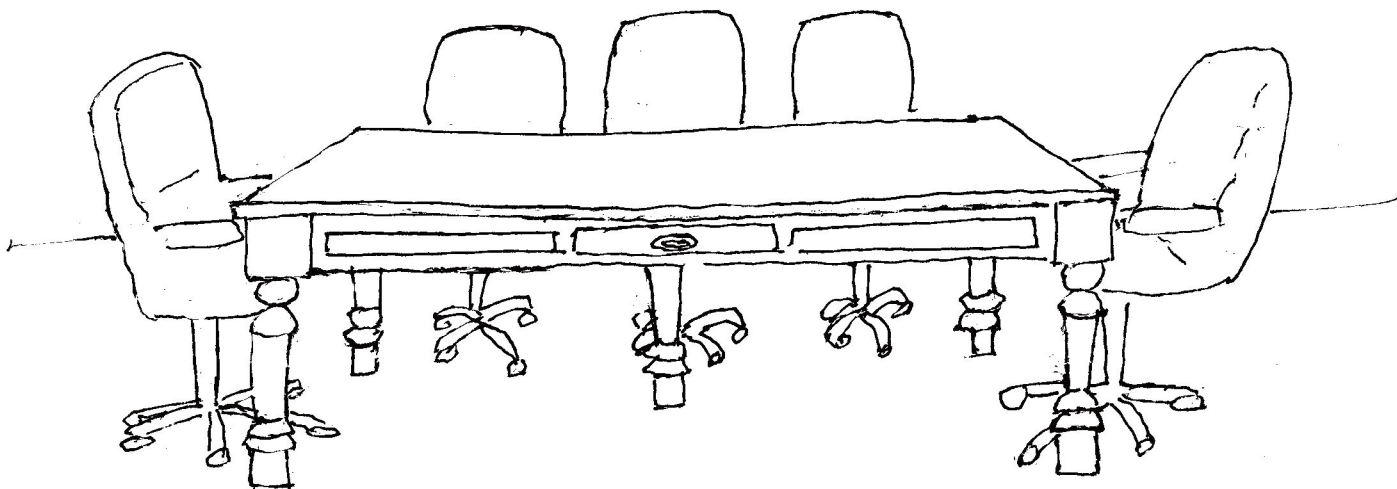
I also believe that we need to increase investment in our roads – to stop potholes, but also to make them safer for pedestrians. In the 80s and early 90s, Belmont under-invested in road maintenance. We are currently working to catch-up.

White: The current budget has been debated since last June by the present Board and other committees and has for the most part been set. Were I elected to the Board, my focus would be on the future budgets.

I would have to sit with the department heads and discuss my views as to how we could be more efficient with the present work force. Layoff would be my last resort.

As to equipment and supplies, I would have to go through the requests of all departments and judge each on their merits. There is room for improvement.

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2. Beyond the new fire stations, for which we understand the town expects to seek a debt-service override in April, when will Belmont begin construction on such long-discussed capital projects as a senior center, a rebuilt Wellington School, a new main library, renovation of the high school, etc.?

White: Given the present fiscal position I don't know how we will be able to do all the projects before us in the near future. We have to sensibly prioritize. In the past, the infrastructure has been overlooked for projects that, in my opinion, should not have been put before the foundation needs of this town. Our most valuable, and most expensive, resource is not being used to full potential. The management of this asset needs to be addressed.

Brownsberger: Over the past few years, we have invested long hours working with all town leaders to define a plan to address the neglected capital and infrastructure needs of the town. The fire stations and the senior center are the two projects we are committed to in the next five years.

With voter approval, senior center construction will begin in late 2005 or early 2006. Library and high school renovation will wait 5 years or more from now. Wellington is a high priority, but we have not set a target date because of uncertainty about state building funds.

3. Past underfunding of basic maintenance may actually have increased town expenses over the long haul. Are we still underfunding basic maintenance? By how much?

Brownsberger: We have substantially increased the roads, equipment and building maintenance budget to the \$2.2 million annual spending level, but ideally, it would be at the \$3,000,000 level -- our pavement management inventory of road conditions tells us we should increase our road spending by two to five hundred thousand per year; similarly, the consensus view is that reasonable spending on town equipment and building maintenance would also be several hundred thousand higher.

Our water pipes are currently on a reasonable maintenance and replacement schedule, but we lack a similar schedule for our storm and sewer pipes. We have recently reinvigorated a committee to develop a long-term plan for this critical component of our infrastructure.

White: We most definitely are. As I just suggested, we are not using our labor force to best advantage. Millions of dollars!

4. What, if anything, should be built in the Belmont Uplands?

White: I would prefer housing that would protect the environment and reap the most revenue to the town of Belmont.

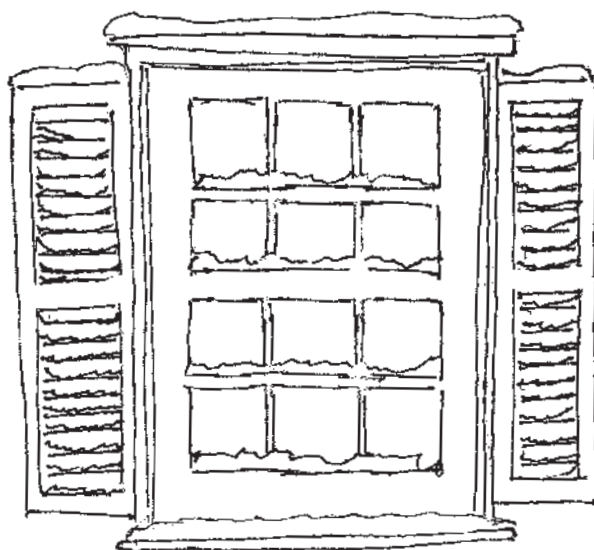
Brownsberger: If the state were successful in upgrading the Alewife reservation, the Uplands would make a valuable part of it. Unfortunately, however, funding to acquire the site for conservation has not been forthcoming either from private organizations or from the state.

When the town voted for a commercial development and my two colleagues on the Board of Selectmen also declared their support, I did my best to produce a plan that protected environmental values.

From an environmental standpoint, I believe that the currently proposed mixed income housing is similar to, and in some ways, more attractive than the commercial proposal that Town Meeting approved last year. It offers needed affordable housing for seniors.

We have referred the matter to the Planning Board and, at this writing (February 20), the Planning Board is approaching the end of its deliberation on the proposal. I will make a final assessment of the current proposal after hearing from the Planning Board.

5. Some residents feel that when new developments are proposed, environmental issues are considered only after major decisions are made. How can conservation and environmental and open space concerns get "a full seat at the table" in town planning?



Brownsberger: Environmental and open space concerns are now strongly represented on both the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen, although that may not have been true in the past. The current Uplands process is a good example. No decisions have been made, but the Conservation Commission has weighed in formally and environmental advocates have contributed actively in the Planning Board deliberations.

White: Once the town is aware of a proposed project it should take the initiative to bring all interested parties together on an equal plain to work together.

6. What specific zoning changes do you advocate in the next few years? For example, should the zoning by-law discourage mansionization, that is, out-of-scale residential renovation or rebuilding? Why or why not? What other changes would you recommend?

White: I would look at all areas and propose changes that would offer opportunities for the owners of properties scattered about town to obtain the most with the least impact on the town.

As for your example of mansionization, I feel the owners of these properties have a right to pursue renovations as guided by the present zoning laws.

Brownsberger: The most important changes are those that will support the revitalization of our business areas along Belmont Street and Trapelo Road. With the support of the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board has been leading a broad public process to create a new vision, including road reconstruction and zoning changes for these areas. Possible zoning changes include greater flexibility in property use, modestly greater density and structures including residential over retail.

Regarding mansionization, I am concerned about some of the tear-down/rebuilds that have occurred and I believe we need to begin a discussion to determine the best response. I do not have personal view on this yet. It may be difficult to write zoning laws that do not inadvertently prohibit real improvements.

7. Do you advocate protecting such landmark buildings as the Winters block and the former S.S. Pierce building in Cushing Square? If so, how? If not, why not?

Brownsberger: I do not favor extending historical preservation restrictions to these commercial structures. It is hard enough to persuade business owners

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Selectman Q&A *continued from page 5*

to invest in our town centers. We should not add new regulatory hurdles.

White: Yes, I feel the preservation of landmark buildings and other structures is a good thought. When an object of affection comes light we must consider many things. The Town cannot continue to finance projects that break the bank. The town and its citizens will have to be creative in its pursuit of the preservation of these objects of affection.

8. How would you revitalize Waverley Square? How much density is appropriate for that area?

White: Much is needed here. I feel Waverley has been neglected for some time. I do not feel the dominating business should have been allowed. When this enterprise arrived there should have been some creative intervention. Waverly residents should have the same variety of establishments within walking distance as the other areas of Belmont.

Brownsberger: We need to hear from the neighborhoods to find out how much density is appropriate in Waverley Square. We are just at the beginning of a public discussion process on that issue. I do hope that a modest increase in density might make more vital residential and commercial buildings possible without compromising the character of Waverley Square.

Waverley Square will benefit greatly from the rebuilding of Trapelo Road. Creating a more pedestrian friendly Trapelo Road will be one of my highest personal priorities over the coming few years.

9. The Belmont recreational trail seems to be on a permanent back burner. Will you provide leadership to get the trail built for jogging, biking, walking, with connections to other regional trails? What steps should Belmont be taking?

Brownsberger: This project was put on the back burner as a result of state decisions. There has recently been increased state openness to this project. We

have already begun the process of applying for the leg of the trail from Brighton Street to the Alewife Station. That is the first step and I will actively support moving forward on it.

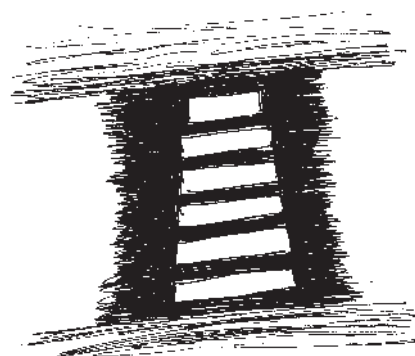
White: I am all for what it would take to move pedestrian and bicycle traffic off the streets of Belmont. This would take money we do not have. This is another area we will have to be creative.

10. Given Belmont's history of pedestrian deaths and injuries from automobiles, do you have a plan to make Belmont a safer place for pedestrians of all ages? Is making Belmont a more walkable community a priority for you?

White: There are many ways to impact traffic safety, some take money, some take common sense, and some would take strong traffic enforcement.

Yes, making Belmont a walking community is a priority for me. An example should be parents walking their children to school.

Brownsberger: Pedestrian safety and walkability have always has been one among my highest personal priorities. I have effectively advocated for the introduction of traffic calming designs in all of our road reconstruction projects. White Street, by the Butler School, is a good example of the kind of improvement I hope that we can continue to make. We have improved cross-walks all over town by introducing international visibility standards. The Pleasant Street and Trapelo Road projects will enormously improve pedestrian safety.





One Year Later:

What's Belmont's Vision for Trapelo Road?

A Public Forum

Belmont is redesigning Trapelo Road and Belmont Street to turn them from a commuter corridor into a safer town street where it is a pleasure to walk and shop. Town committees recommend narrowing the street in some areas by widening the sidewalks and planting trees. In other areas, the town would install turning lanes to improve traffic flow.

The Belmont Citizens Forum has been actively involved in this process. Our first informational forum on rethinking Trapelo Road and Belmont Street was held last April, with a panel of experts and a multimedia presentation. It attracted more than 200 people.

Speakers

Andrew McClurg, traffic planner and vice chairman of the Belmont Planning Board, will present the work that the Board has done to date.

Mary Jo Frisoli, chairman of the Belmont Traffic Advisory Committee, will explain the next steps in the process, including opportunities for public participation.

Multimedia Presentation

If you missed it at last year's forum, we will be rescreening the 17-minute presentation that helped kick-start this process by illustrating how Belmont's main street could be transformed.

Questionnaire Results

At last year's Trapelo Road Forum, we asked attendees to complete a questionnaire about their vision for Trapelo Road. We presented the results to the Belmont Planning Board last year. Copies of these results will be available at this month's forum.

Wednesday, March 24, 7 p.m.

Belmont Studio Cinema, 376 Trapelo Road

Sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum

Cities on Belmont's Borders

The Belmont Citizens Forum strives to report on issues that directly affect the quality of life in our town. Planned developments in neighboring municipalities would increase housing density, destroy open space, and bring more traffic to our roads, particularly Trapelo Road and Concord Avenue. Below are summaries of building plans in Arlington, Cambridge, and Waltham. Some are on the verge of construction; others are still being debated. All bear watching. - Meg Muckenhoupt

Waltham Fernald Hospital Site

By Marie Daly

The Fernald Center was established in 1848, and moved to Trapelo Road in Waltham in 1888. Under the leadership of Walter E. Fernald, the school's population increased to 2,000 by the 1920s. Although the original architect, William G. Preston, planned a campus that would respect the natural setting of tree-covered rolling hills, subsequent construction gouged out hillsides, filled in wetlands, and made a stream into a culvert.

Half of the Center's 71 buildings on the 180-acre site are vacant. Since the 1970s, more people with disabilities have been able to live in their own communities, and Fernald now has less than 300 residents. Last year, the Romney's administration announced plans to transfer the remaining residents to community-based facilities or other state institutions, and to close the Fernald Center.

Redevelopment of the campus brings an opportunity to preserve 60 acres of open space, much of which lies within the Western Greenway, a corridor of green space spanning the Belmont, Lexington and Waltham borders. Ideas include using "smart growth" principles to plan a community of mixed income housing, clustered to preserve open space, with small businesses providing goods and services to the residents (and reducing traffic). Some of the housing would include facilities and services for the current Fernald residents, should they remain.

Some groups representing the developmentally disabled are working to allow residents to remain on site. Many of the current residents are profoundly disabled and have medical and behavioral complications that

make their placement in community facilities challenging. While work has been proceeding to move the Fernald residents elsewhere, the original closure date of October 2004 may be delayed.

Redeveloping the Fernald site may not be easy. A central steam-generating power plant heats nearly all of the buildings on the campus. Some of the crumbling asbestos-covered steam pipes are situated above ground, making a cleanup potentially expensive. Other buildings were renovated in the 1980s and are nearly lead- and asbestos- free.

Traffic congestion along Trapelo Road and Waverley Oaks Road will be a potential problem, especially after development at Met State, Olympus Hospital and McLean Hospital. Public transportation on Trapelo Road, Concord Avenue and Mill Street must be included in reuse planning.

The Fernald Working Group began as a conversation between Waltham Land Trust board members and people from Watch, Inc., a community development corporation devoted to increasing affordable housing in Waltham. These two groups came together to achieve goals of both open space preservation and mixed income housing.

If and when the Fernald Center closes, the Fernald Working Group recognizes that planning the reuse of the campus will be complicated and, at times, controversial. But the group also has an opportunity to help shape the planning process by gathering ideas from community members, including Belmont residents, and communicating a clear vision to the state and community leaders.

Marie Daly is Vice President of the Waltham Land Trust

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Map of potential development sites in Waltham, and the Western Greenway. Used with permission of Roger Wrubel.

Waltham

Met State Hospital Site

By Karl Kastorf and Jeanne Krieger

The former Metropolitan State Hospital is a 340-acre site located between Concord Ave. in Belmont and Lexington and Trapelo Road in Waltham, directly behind the Beaver Brook wetlands. From Concord Ave., the old power plant chimney can be seen rising out of the woods. The last patients were moved out of the facility in the early 1980s, though some community services remained active on the site until the early 90s. Currently, public access to the site is prohibited, largely because of safety issues related to the abandoned buildings.

A reuse plan for the site has been developed and ratified by Belmont, Waltham, Lexington and the Commonwealth over the last fifteen years. Under this plan, 254 acres in Belmont, Lexington and Waltham have been deeded to the Metropolitan District Commission and its successors as open space with public access in perpetuity, and 55 acres have been deeded to Waltham along Trapelo Road for a municipal golf course. Much of the open space in Belmont is wetlands, with some mature upland woodland, while Lexington's land is mature woodlands on a steep slope, and the Waltham acreage is open meadow. The development site in Lexington is a flat upland; half of that area is covered by Met State Hospital's main campus buildings.

The reuse plan's criteria for development of the hospital campus in Lexington are:

- Multi-family housing: Provide a variety of housing types, primarily oriented toward senior citizens.
- Affordable housing: Make at least 25 percent of housing units affordable according to state definitions, including a 10 percent set-aside for clients of the Department of Mental Health.
- Site development: Preserve the campus quadrangle layout of the site, rehabilitate existing buildings, and use architectural details that reinforce the historic character of the buildings.
- Traffic: Generate peak hour traffic loads at or below those generated by the site in the late

1980s.

The state's Division of Capital Asset Management selected a residential proposal submitted by Avalon Bay Communities, Inc. Avalon Bay's plan was selected over five other proposals because it most closely met the reuse plan's criteria for development of the 23-acre main campus site in Lexington.

The Avalon Bay proposal includes:

- 430 apartments, 60 of which will be age-restricted to leaseholders ages 55 and older. Twenty-two additional units will be reserved for clients of the Department of Mental Health. Three hundred fifty-eight apartments will be in existing buildings, and 72 new town houses will be added.

- 108, or 25 percent, of the total units will be affordable.

- Almost 60 percent of the main campus's existing square footage will be preserved and the façades will be restored. The mature landscaping of the campus will be retained.

- The projected traffic is 217 vehicle trips to or from the proposed development during the peak hour on weekdays and 254 trips during the afternoon peak hour. All of these vehicles will exit onto Concord Ave. These projections compare with the 300 to 350 vehicle trips during the afternoon peak hour in the late 80s when the hospital housed 2,000 residents served by 500 employees.

According to Rizzo Associates, which conducted the traffic analysis, about half these vehicles will head east into Belmont, and half will go west. This initial traffic study focused on intersections in Lexington. The Lexington Planning Board and Avalon Bay agreed that the intersections of Concord with Winter and Mill Streets in Belmont would likely be affected, so the study area has been expanded to include those intersections. Data from that expanded study has been shared by Avalon Bay with the Belmont Planning Board. The Lexington Planning Board assumes that the developer will, with the permission of the Town of Belmont, engage in impact mitigation at those intersections. Copies of the initial report and an independent peer review of the analysis are available at the Lexington Planning Department and on the town's website (<http://ci.lexington.ma.us/>). The study of Belmont

intersections is available from Avalon Bay.

Concerns among Lexington residents about the traffic impact and density are likely to lead to some modification of the proposal prior to Town Meeting. The Lexington Planning Board will conduct a public hearing on this proposal at 7:30 p.m. on March 10 at the Clarke Middle School off Waltham Street. The Avalon Bay proposal will come before the Lexington Town Meeting this spring. If the Lexington Town Meeting agrees to the zoning changes, the plan would then go through the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review process and would require approval from various other town boards. The earliest time construction could begin is probably summer 2005, with occupancy beginning in 2007.

Karl Kastorf and Jeanne Krieger are members of the Met State Task Force. Roger Wrubel contributed to this article.

Waltham Olympus Site

By Roger Wrubel

The main entrance to the Olympus campus is on the north side of Trapelo Road, across from the Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted Church. This 37-acre hospital campus is privately owned. Two separate development proposals have been submitted: one for the 26-acre parcel in Waltham and the other for the 11-acre parcel in Lexington.

Waltham Plan (26 acres): Jefferson at Waltham Limited Partnership and HCRI Holdings Trust were issued a special permit by the Waltham City Council on December 8, 2003, for a 268-unit condominium development. The developer can now apply for building permits and commence construction. It is likely construction will commence in spring or summer 2004.

The development consists of a 118-unit subdivision age-restricted to residents 55 and older on 13.51 acres and a 150-unit subdivision without age restrictions on 12.06 acres. The age-restricted subdivi-

vision consists of one three-story and two four-story buildings and town houses. The plan for the section without age restrictions has three four-story buildings with a clubhouse and pool. There will be 27 affordable units, 12 age restricted and 15 not.

Open space has been preserved by a development restriction placed on 6.2 acres of undeveloped land around the site. A 0.55-acre parcel, which includes the historic Wellington House on Trapelo Road, will be donated to the city.

There will be surface parking for 556 vehicles. A traffic study done for an earlier 300-unit proposal projected 1,700 trips per weekday: 127 in the morning peak hour and 159 in the afternoon peak hour. The developers are paying \$220,476 into a traffic fund because the floor area ratio of building size to lot size for the development is double that allowed by zoning.

Lexington Plan (11 acres): A 27-unit condominium, Lexington Hills, proposed by Walnut Roseland LLC and presented to the Lexington Planning Board in April 2003, has now been withdrawn. Lexington zoning requires that this development have a second entrance for emergency vehicles. This could be accomplished by extending a road from the Lexington Hills development to the drive in the abutting Waltham development, described above, exiting onto Trapelo Road in Waltham. It appears that Walnut Roseland had an agreement with the Waltham developers to provide for this. However, the Waltham City Council included a provision in the special permit specifically prohibiting any traffic to or from Lexington from using the Waltham development.

Roger Wrubel is a Belmont Town Meeting Member and the Director of the Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary.

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Cambridge

Quadrangle site, Fresh Pond

By Grant Monahan

The city of Cambridge is closely studying a new plan for redeveloping the Concord/Alewife Quadrangle, the area bounded by Concord Avenue, Blanchard Road, Fresh Pond Parkway, and the Cambridgepark Drive development behind the Alewife MBTA Station. This redevelopment could put a lot more people – and traffic – on Belmont's border.

Currently, the Quadrangle consists primarily of low-rise industrial buildings owned by many different parties. Proposed zoning changes would strongly encourage the consolidation of ownership in multi-storied office buildings and other structures with greater occupancy densities. Cambridge's Concord-Alewife Study Committee has already prepared draft recommendations for this site which will allow higher density. In response, owners of the Fresh Pond Mall are planning to redesign their property, perhaps with underground parking and multi-story shops above ground.

Redeveloping the Quadrangle will clearly affect Belmont residents and traffic near Concord Avenue. What can we do now to encourage reduced impacts upon Belmont and its residents? Will there be effec-

tive linkage to the Alewife Station? Will there be shuttles between Alewife and key locations in Belmont and the region? These and many other issues need to be heard early in the planning process.

Cambridge is not yet ready to host a public forum in Belmont for this project, although we have encouraged them to do so. Without such a forum in Belmont, it is even more critical that Belmont residents and Town officials take every opportunity to participate in the public meetings that are taking place in Cambridge. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 10 at 7 pm at the Cambridge Water Works Building on Fresh Pond Parkway. Final recommendations for the Cambridge City Manager and the City Council will be made by June 2004.

More information on the current planning can be found on the web at <http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CDD/commplan/zoning/concalew/> or contact Iram Farooq by phone at 617/349-4606 or by email at ifarooq@cambridgema.gov.

Grant Monahan is President of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Arlington

Mugar Property, Rte. 2

By David White

In the summer of 2000, the Finard Company proposed a large office complex for the Mugar site



Stewartia Seedpods

in East Arlington, a 17-acre mostly wooded area along Route 2 across from the deteriorating Faces building. Since then, the project has been delayed by questions about the site's floodplain boundaries. A court decision later this year may allow Finard to move forward with its plans.

The proposal was for two buildings with 300,000 square feet of office space, and 1,145 parking spots. The project also required a curb cut from Route 2 West. Drivers who wish to go east from this complex will need to circle and get off on Lake Street; drivers coming from the west will need to drive through the Fresh Pond rotary.

Since the area contains wetlands and much of it is also floodplain, the applicant requested that the Arlington Conservation Commission make a formal determination of these areas. The ConCom was able to decide the wetland areas, but was not able to support the proposed floodplain boundary, in part because conditions had changed significantly since the previous comprehensive FEMA study in 1982.

The Finard Company appealed the Commission's floodplain ruling. In 2002 the Arlington Conservation Commission received a favorable decision in one of the two appeals regarding the Mugar Parcel in East Arlington. A Superior Court judge upheld the ConCom's determination under the Arlington Wetlands Bylaw that the applicant's proposed floodplain boundary was inaccurate. The applicant appealed the decision to the Massachusetts Appeals Court. The second appeal, concerning whether the ConCom's decision on the floodplain satisfies the state Wetlands Protection Act, has been put on hold until the final outcome of the first appeal under the local bylaw. A court decision is expected later this year.

Little else appears to be happening with this project. At one time, a group of Town officials was meeting with the owners to explore alternatives, but that group is inactive. Given the current poor commercial real estate market, it seems unlikely that the office building proposal is still financially viable. The potential for development on this site remains.

David White is a member of the Arlington Conservation Commission.



Waverley Air Rights *continued from page 1*

buildings. Paik said most of the alternatives he was asked to consider were not economically feasible. None of the suggestions for office buildings would work in today's depressed office market. Two low-rise residential proposals "would generate negative land values even before allowing for construction cost premiums," his report said.

Based on documents obtained from Belmont's Office of Community Development, the Cecil Group consultants concluded that the proposed buildings should be 60 feet high. In an e-mail to the consultants, Higgins remarked, "Sixty feet is intimidating in a community that is not business friendly to begin with." Higgins noted that the buildings would be more appealing if they were stepped back from the street as they got higher. "Most folks just envision a six-story building rising up from the edge of the sidewalk, and THAT will definitely not work here," the e-mail said.

In response, Margarita Iglesia, senior urban designer at the Cecil Group, said that the consultants

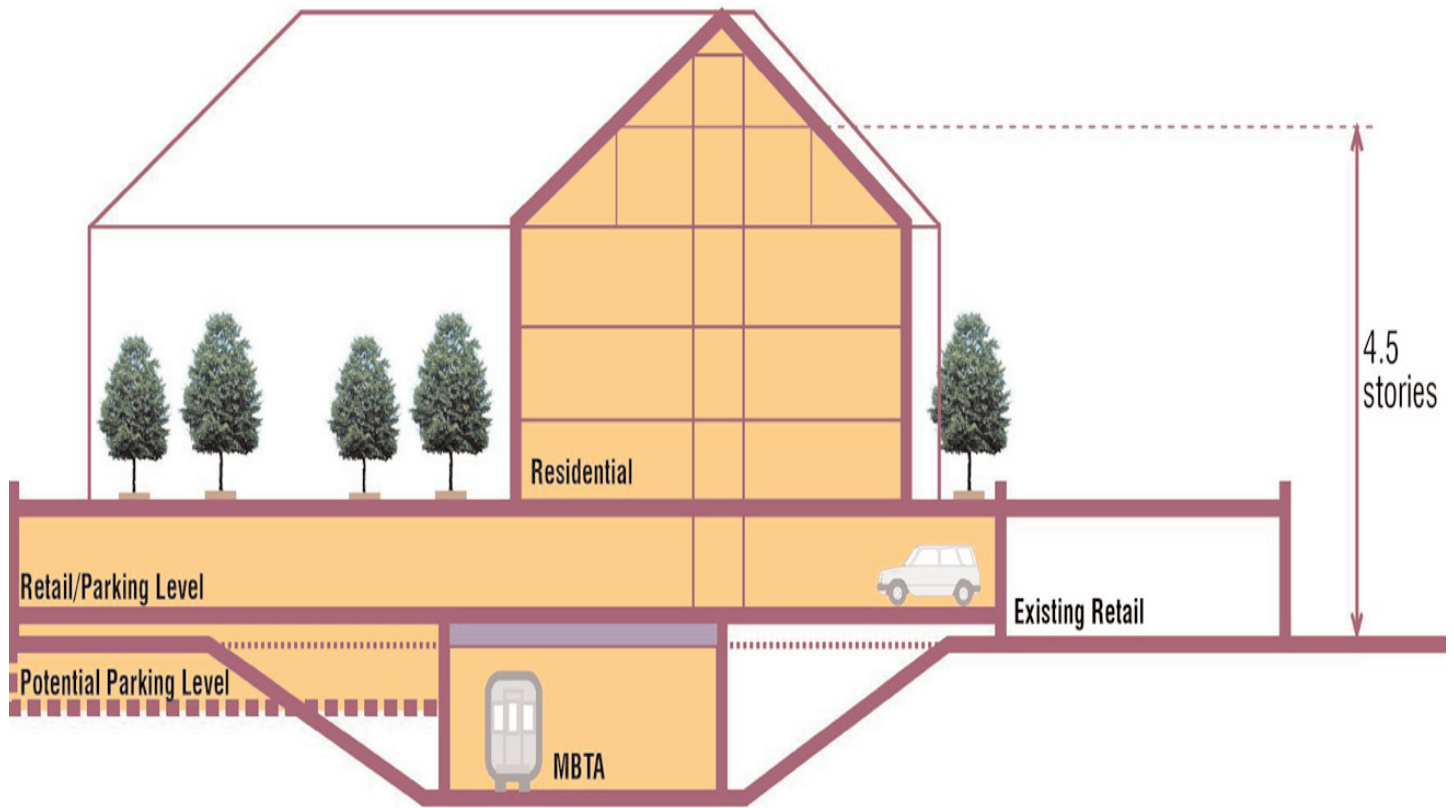
were not proposing six stories but only four stories of office space or four and a half stories of mixed-use residential space (that is, residential with ground-floor retail stores.) She explained that ground-floor retail would have to be 14 to 18 feet high, each residential floor would be at least ten feet high, and "at least one floor slab may require additional height in order to transfer structural loads towards the sides of the railway."

Paik's report recommended an alternative plan that the Cecil Group rejected: building over the tracks both east and west of Waverley Square but not over the triangle at the heart of the square. That development would provide 174 one- and two-bedroom apartments renting for from \$1,725 to \$2,360 a month (with 20 percent of the units at affordable rents for low- and middle-income occupants) and 342 parking spaces. It would also generate enough profit to pay the MBTA \$2.8 million for the air rights.

The preservation of Waverley Square's central triangle – preferably as a park, not a parking lot – is an



Artist's rendering of the initial Waverley Square proposal as presented to the Selectmen on January 26.



Artist's rendering of the Waverley Square proposal presented to the Selectmen January 26.

important issue for architect David Johnson, a precinct 6 Town Meeting Member. "It should be kept open," he said, comparing it to Copley Square in Boston.

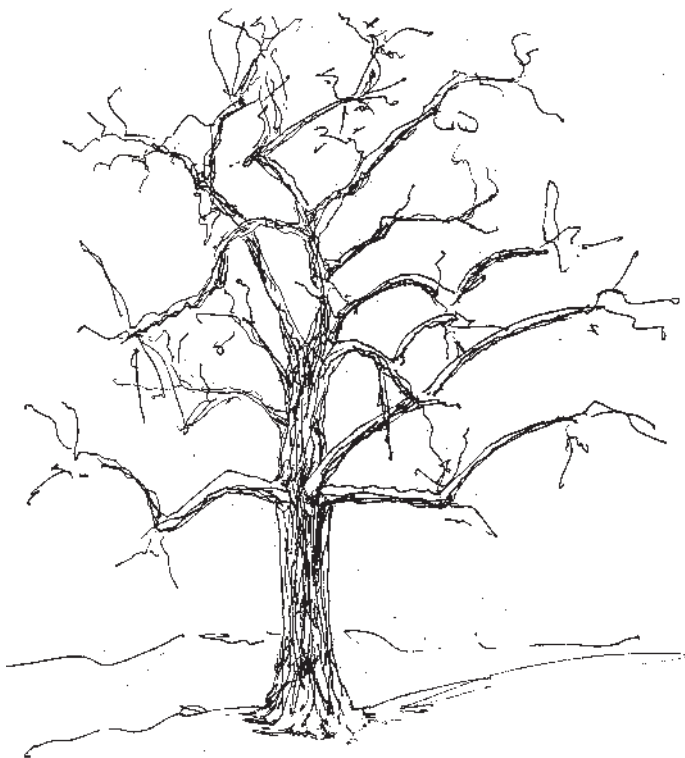
If a state grant can be obtained for further study in the next year, said Higgins, the 2005 Town Meeting could consider zoning changes necessary to build the development and design standards to control the development's appearance. Then a public-private partnership of the town, the MBTA and private landowners would issue a request for proposals from developers. The earliest construction could begin would be late 2006, he said, and more likely 2007 or later.

The air-rights proposal is at the very earliest stage. The two landowners who would be invited to participate – Ted King, of the Waverley Insurance Co., and Paul Tocci Jr., of Belmont Car Wash and an adjacent landscaping business – know very little about it. King said he had had a very brief meeting with Higgins. "I know it's in the early talking stages," said King. "I

don't know much about it." Adam Tocci, Paul's brother, expressed a similar sentiment. "It's all speculative at this time," he said. "We're open for anything, though."

Sue Bass is a board member of the Belmont Citizens Forum.





APPLE

Technical Experts Sought

The Belmont Citizens Forum is creating a Technical Advisory Committee to assist in developing comments for public agencies on such issues as development proposals and proposed regulation changes. We need volunteers with all sorts of expertise – engineers and scientists of many specialties, environmental and land-use lawyers and people with experience in environmental regulations.

The Citizens Forum regularly comments on reports filed under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act and other state and federal laws, and we have usually had the assistance of distinguished experts. This new committee is an attempt to make the process a bit clearer and to encourage more people to participate.

To discuss serving on the committee, please call Sue Bass at (617) 489-4729.

Events continued from page 2

Cambridge. Return transportation is provided. There is a fee of \$18.00 for members and \$22.00 for non-members. Meet at Habitat Education Center in Belmont. For more information call (617) 489-5050.

Saturday, April 24: **Earth Day River Cleanups.** Both the Mystic River Watershed Association and the Charles River Watershed Association are sponsoring river cleanups for Earth Day. For more information on the Mystic River Super Cleanup, contact Janet at 781-316-3438 or janet@mysticriver.org. For the Charles River Cleanup, Teresa D'Anna at Massachusetts Community Water Watch, (617) 287-3866 or teresa@waterwatchonline.org.

Sunday, May 2, 1-5 pm: **8th Annual Mystic Herring Run Festival.** Join the Alewife/Mystic River Advocates, The Boys and Girls Club of Middlesex County and the Mystic River Watershed Association for a festival along the Mystic River. The Mystic River Herring Run 5K race begins at 2:00 . There will also be boating, tours, music, food, and exhibits. Meet at the Blessing of the Bay Boathouse, 32 Shore Drive, Somerville (off Rte 28). For more information, call Janet at (781) 316-3438 or janet@mysticriver.org

- *Stacey Fabiano. Meg Muckenhoupt contributed to this article.*

Correction

An article in the November 2003 issue of this newsletter incorrectly described the route of some of the sewage from the Northland development. Sewage from townhouses in Zone 2 is to leave the McLean property via a pipe under Olmsted Drive, a new road to be built down to Pleasant Street, as the article said. But sewage from the first townhouses scheduled for construction, those in Zones 1A and 1B, is to exit via Mill Street and be carried under Trapelo Road before joining the Pleasant Street pipes.

Northland Challenges McLean Sewer Suit

By Sue Bass

Attorneys for Northland Residential Corp. and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have challenged the right of 16 Belmont citizens to appeal the DEP's issuance of sewer connection permits to Northland. Northland plans to build 121 condominiums on the McLean land.

Northland's attorney, Matthew Watsky, said that while groups of 10 or more citizens have a right to intervene in adjudicatory proceedings where environmental damage is at issue, this is not true if the alleged damage is "insignificant destruction, damage, or impairment to such natural resources." That is the case with the sewer permits, he asserted, since the amount of sewage to be added is a tiny proportion of the system's capacity.

Watsky also argued that the 16 appellants are not "substantially and specifically affected" by the sewer permits and will suffer no injury if the permits are granted. Elizabeth Kimball, DEP senior counsel, made a similar argument in defending the DEP's decision to issue the permits.

Watsky also claimed that historic preservation and all other non-sewer issues were beyond the scope of DEP regulation and therefore not subject to review by the administrative law judge hearing the appeal, James Rooney.

In rebuttal, Adam Brodsky, who represents both the 16 appellants and the Belmont Citizens Forum, which is supporting the appeal, noted that state sewer regulations prohibit any additional connections or extensions to a sewer system that will result in "any surcharging, overflowing or bypassing of the system." A sewer system "surcharges" when it takes in more material than it can hold. Sewage-contaminated water backs up into toilets and bathtubs. Surcharges are usually the result of rain-water infiltrating cracks in the sewer pipes. The appeal cites evidence that Belmont's sanitary sewers regularly surcharge and that sewage bypasses the system, pouring out of broken pipes and into storm drains that empty into area streams and ponds.

Brodsky's rebuttal also noted that appellant Audrey Lenk, a Winn Brook resident, has already had sewage in her basement and first floor from past surcharges and fears additional damage. Others will suffer economic

harm as ratepayers responsible for maintaining the sewer system and preventing water pollution. Brodsky said that "damage to the environment," a justification for a suit by 10 or more citizens, specifically includes "improper sewage disposal."

Brodsky argued that the historic preservation and traffic issues are legally linked to the sewer connection permits. The DEP requires "compliance with the Historic Preservation Regulations as a precondition to applying for a sewer extension permit" and incorporates special conditions concerning historic preservation in its permit decisions. Similarly, DEP's Section 61 findings, which the appellants argue should include traffic conditions, were made as part of "its agency action concerning the sewer extension permits," Brodsky's brief said.

Brodsky concluded that the petitioners have legal standing to challenge the sewer extension permits, and the DEP has jurisdiction over the issues they raise.

- Sue Bass, a member of the board of directors of the Belmont Citizens Forum, is one of the 16 appellants in the appeal of Northland's sewer permits.



Business Climate *continued from page 20*

property owners and developers. BEDPG also established connections with the Watertown-Belmont Chamber of Commerce to encourage the Chamber to become more involved in Belmont. As a result, the Chamber will sponsor a forum in April for businesses to learn more about the results of the Belmont Street/ Trapelo Road Corridor Study. Another BEDPG work group explored full alcohol licensing for restaurants and made a presentation in support of the measure before Town Meeting. The measure was passed by a wide margin and will now go before Belmont voters in the April 5th election. A third work group designed creative financing options for parking in our business districts. A fourth developed a town-wide survey to determine the sorts of changes that would improve our business districts.

The survey grew out of a focus on “revitalization” of Belmont’s business districts as a central element in BEDPG’s mandate. It was clear that avoiding an arbitrary definition of “revitalization” and of “desirable” new businesses would be important for any future recommendations.

The survey was mailed in the fall of 2003 to a random sample of 1,000 residents and made available throughout town to anyone interested in participating. In the end, 525 completed surveys were submitted. The final report is available on the town’s website

(http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_BComm/bedpg/respers).

The survey asked about changes that might encourage people to come to our business districts more often, what kinds of new businesses residents would find most appealing, and the types of businesses residents would rather not see more of in Belmont. It also explored other types of activities that would be positive additions, and the benefits of improvements to our business districts.

The survey also asked residents if they would tolerate moderate increases in traffic and parking difficulty as a result of revitalization. With traffic and parking concerns hot topics around town, it was a surprise when a majority of respondents said they would tolerate moderate increases in traffic and parking difficulty if they occurred as a result of revitalization. At the same time, many respondents indi-

BEDPG Survey Results - top responses

Changes that would improve Belmont’s business districts:

- More stores of interest
- Sidewalks and streets cleared of trash, snow, ice
- More places to sit with friends
- More parking
- Better traffic management for greater pedestrian safety

Desirable new businesses:

- More restaurants
- Fresh breads and produce
- Prepared foods and meals

Desirable new restaurants:

- Italian
- American
- Seafood
- Deli

Other venues/activities:

- Arts center with classes and studio space
- Youth center
- Performing arts center

No more:

- Banks
- Pizza places
- Beauty salons
- Chain drug stores

Benefits:

- Improved quality of life – convenience
- Improved quality of life – social
- Increased commercial tax revenues

cated that more parking would bring them more often to our business districts. The town seems to have accepted that more parking is essential to the health and well being of Belmont Center, and is now considering recommendations made by the Belmont Center Parking Committee. BEDPG is studying how to finance parking facilities.

Now that BEDPG has explored residents’ views on improving our business districts, the key issue is how to accomplish these changes. While some of

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☐ Environmental Protection
☐ Planning & Zoning
☐ Traffic & Transportation
☐ Mailings
☐ Newsletter
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those changes are within the Town's power, cost is a serious consideration. Creating more parking and adding snow and trash removal services, for example, are primarily resource questions. Other changes are outside of the Town's control. A greater variety of stores is probably the best example; another is distressed or abandoned properties. Belmont residents have expressed dismay at the appearance of "yet another bank" and the loss of favorite local businesses such as Royal Bakery. Residents wonder why "that pink building" in Belmont Center has been empty for so long or why something hasn't been done about the South Pleasant Street property. It is not clear if or how the town can influence the decisions of local developers and owners when it comes to the disposition of their privately owned properties.

These central questions – how to garner the resources to improve our business districts, and how to work collaboratively with commercial property owners and developers to both meet their business objectives and address the Town's interests – are the core challenges facing the Business and Economic Development Planning Group.

- Sara Oaklander is the chair of BEDPG.

BCF Elects New Officers

The Belmont Citizens Forum Board has elected Grant Monahon as its next president. Monahon's goal is to make the Citizens Forum an even more effective and positive force in protecting the environment of Belmont and this region. He has been a BCF board member since 2002. Monahon recently retired as managing director of one of the country's leading real estate investment management firms.

Board member Sue Bass hailed outgoing president Jim Graves. "The Citizens Forum has been so lucky to have Jim's leadership as president for the past two and a half years and his energy and talent since this organization was first conceived of four and a half years ago. Without his devotion, hard work, and remarkable abilities the Citizens Forum would not exist today."

The BCF board also elected John Dieckmann, formerly the treasurer, as vice president; Mark D'Andrea, formerly a vice president, as treasurer; Evanthia Malliris as secretary and Andrea Masciari as a new board member. Past BCF presidents Sue Bass and Jim Graves stated, "As past presidents, the two of us are proud that this organization - now supported by 600 families - keeps growing stronger."

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People Are Asking

What is Belmont doing to improve the town's business climate?

By Sara Oaklander

A Working Vision for Belmont's Future, adopted by Town Meeting in April 2001, includes the statement: "Thriving business centers contribute economic stability while offering places for residents to dine, shop, and socialize." In response, the Vision Implementation Committee posed the question "Is Belmont business friendly?" launching an effort to find out just why the answer was almost always a resounding "no."

A series of forums was held expressly to solicit input from the business community on this question. Participating business owners identified ways they experience Belmont as unfriendly to business. Their list included the town's permitting process (slow and convoluted); the lack of parking spaces in the

town's business areas; the need for better traffic management to enhance pedestrian safety; the absence of town-sponsored snow and trash removal for businesses; the need for full liquor licenses for restaurants; and the perception that the town is generally indifferent to and unsupportive of the needs of local businesses.

These forums inspired the Vision Committee to create a new group. The Board of Selectmen mandated this new group – the Business and Economic Development Planning Group (BEDPG) -- to develop recommendations for "preserving and enhancing current businesses" and "attracting and facilitating the opening of desirable new businesses." BEDPG became the first town committee to officially welcome the participation of non-resident representatives of the town's business areas.

BEDPG tackled a number of challenges during its first year. Some members worked on developing effective working relationships with business and

continued on page 18