



Bike Path Networks are Gaining Ground

By John Dieckmann

Soon it will be even easier and safer to walk and ride bikes through Belmont, Arlington, and Boston's northwest suburbs. A group of local supporters called Friends of the Belmont Community Path is working steadily to establish a bike path from Brighton Street to Belmont Center (see map on p. 3). Three other local bike path projects are underway; two are due to be finished by fall.

Friends List Bike Path Benefits

The Friends of the Belmont Community Path are raising awareness and support for the Brighton-Belmont Center path. The group is circulating a petition in favor of the path (see page 3). Members summed up their reasons for support in a recent letter to the *Belmont Citizen-Herald*, which reads in part:

"Around the nation, hundreds of cities and towns are enjoying the benefits of off-road community paths . . . as the *Boston Globe* has recently reported and editorialized, Massachusetts has been unable to fully spend the federal dollars allotted to it for this purpose. The *Globe* noted that the trailbuilding process is unnecessarily more complex for local communities here than in other states. In addition, the lion's share of our federal dollars has been absorbed by the Big Dig for more than a decade...

"We in Belmont are ideally positioned to benefit from a valuable trail link connecting our town to extensive nearby trail and transit networks. Within the next few months, the state will complete a long-awaited path through Cambridge's Alewife Reservation from the T station to Brighton Street. This will provide Belmont residents quick, off-road access to the Red Line, as well as to the Minuteman Trail to

Bedford, the path to Davis Square, and points beyond. The Belmont Community Path is a proposed westward extension of this new link, slightly less than one mile in length, to Belmont Center. It would magnify the benefit of the project for many additional residents, and bring new vitality to our town center.

"By embracing practical, convenient alternatives to car-based transportation, we can promote healthier lifestyles for ourselves and our children, improve our local environment, and ease traffic on local roads. The Belmont Community Path will be a great legacy for Belmont's future. We believe it is time for town officials and the project's proponents to take on the design effort required to address the concerns that the Path's critics have raised. Let's figure out how it can be completed in a way that meets the legitimate interests and concerns of its neighbors and our community at large."

Those Friends of the Belmont Community Path who signed the letter are co-chairs John B. Howe and Teresa M. Howe, Roger and Martha Gallagher, John and Sally McAlpin, Mark Paolillo, Roger Wrubel, Jim and Jane Levitt, and Nora Huvelle and David Lubin.

For more information go to the green and white Town Day tent with the "Belmont Bikes" sign or e-mail belmontbikepath@gmail.com.

Link to Alewife Due This Summer

In Belmont, improvements to the existing path from Brighton Street to Alewife and a connecting segment from Alewife to Davis Square are scheduled to be built this summer. The project will be advertised for construction bids on May 16. This path is a critical segment of

shared use/bike path for Belmont, providing an off-road connection to the Alewife T station and to the Minuteman Bike Trail. Our current and former state representatives, Will Brownsberger and Anne Paulsen, deserve credit for their persistence in pushing for this project. The projected cost of the entire project—Davis Square to Alewife to Brighton street—is \$5.2 million, 80 percent from federal highway transportation enhancement funds and 20 percent from state matching funds.

Another local project connected to the Alewife T station area is a bike path along Alewife Brook, on the west side of Route 16, connecting with pathways along the Mystic River. Also known as the Alewife Greenway, it is being built by

the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR expects to fund construction of the path with \$3 million in federal stimulus funds.

This path was recently permitted by the Arlington Conservation Commission with design changes to address concerns expressed by some residents of the Sunnyside neighborhood. The path should go out to bid this summer.

Fifteen miles west of Belmont, tremendous progress is being made on building Phase I of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. That trail runs generally north and south. One end is at the Crosspoint development near the intersection of Route 3 and Interstate 495 in Lowell; the path runs across Chelmsford to Route 225 near its intersection with Route 27. Construction started late in 2007 and should be finished this summer.

Almost all the trail construction has been finished. The current work is on finishing touches—shrubbery and other landscaping, fencing, road crossings, and signage. The Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail maintain an excellent web site, www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org, which has a regularly updated page on the construction status. The Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail have been effective in advocating and continuing to advocate for Phase I. Subsequent phases of the Freeman Trail will extend it from Chelmsford through Acton, Concord, Sudbury, and Framingham, ending at Route 9.

Every new bike path makes it easier for more bicyclists to get where they need to go without riding in traffic—and there's plenty of money to build them. Massachusetts has used less money than any other state on such paths. Since 1991, Massachusetts has only spent \$51.1 million out of \$135 million, or 37 percent of its funding designated by Congress for bike paths and rail trails, according to a recent *Boston Globe* article. By comparison, Connecticut and Rhode Island have spent 99 percent of their funds. Massachusetts's permitting process and the requirement that cities and towns pay for planning and engineering studies were blamed for the lag.

John Dieckman is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Belmont Citizens Forum

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Newsletter

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Belmont Citizens Forum Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums. Our newsletter is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum. Letters to the editor may be sent to P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478 or to info@belmontcitizensforum.org

Bicycle Path Petition

We support the development of a plan to build a public community path for pedestrian and bicycle use on the strip of land located behind Channing Road and parallel to the commuter rail tracks between Belmont Center and Brighton Street.

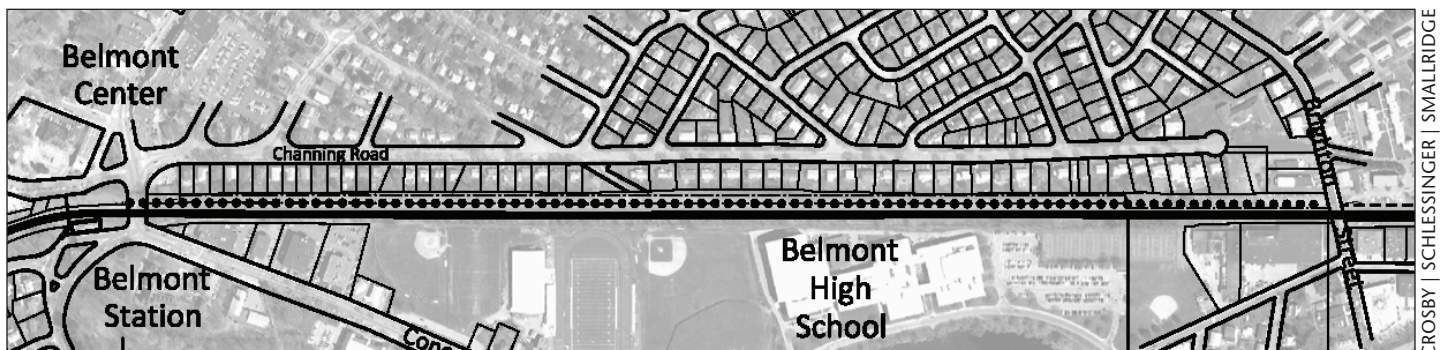
This plan should address the need for appropriate fencing, landscaping, and other design features reasonably required to meet concerns expressed by abutters.

This segment will complete an off-road link from Belmont Center to Alewife and will benefit current and future generations of Belmont residents by offering convenient access to public transportation, healthful recreation, and a reduction in traffic and air pollution on local roadways.

| Name | Address | E-mail/phone |
|------|---------|--------------|
|------|---------|--------------|

Please send signed copies of this petition to Friends of the Belmont Community Path c/o Belmont Citizens Forum, P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478.

For more information, e-mail belmontbikepath@gmail.com.



Map of the proposed bicycle path from Belmont Center to Brighton Street.



ANN COIT SIFNEOS

Letters to the Editor

Cushing Neighbors Oppose Monolith

Dear Editor,

Accurate reporting is hard to come by. Of all publications, we expect to find it in the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*.

Your article in the March/April 2009 issue continues to foster the misinformation, first published in your newsletter of a year ago, that there were "positive reactions to the idea of Cushing Village at public meetings last year." While the residents of the Cushing Square neighborhood are in favor of a properly scaled, village-like development for the Square, we have been and remain very concerned about and vigorously opposed to the monolithic design that the developer has presented. Our views have been disseminated far and wide, through our position statement and otherwise, in the Belmont Citizen-Herald and at public meetings last year; and we will continue to express these concerns.

We are heartened by [Board of] Selectmen Chairman [Angelo] Firenze's comment, also in your current *Newsletter*, that he is "absolutely opposed to monolithic four-story development," and by the sentiments expressed by Town Meeting Members and citizens all over town about the unacceptability of the developer's design. Please get the facts out accurately about what the developer has been trying to foist upon our neighborhood and our town so that our Selectmen, our Planning Board, and all Belmont citizens can make an accurate appraisal and informed judgment about what the Cushing Square development should look like, to make it consistent with the residential character of our town.

Steve Carlini, Devin Brown, Kathy Rushe,
Nancy Carlson, and Don Becker
Cushing Square Neighborhood Association

Comment on Climate Action Plan

Sustainable Belmont seeks feedback through June 30 from the Belmont community on the draft of Belmont's Climate Action Plan (CAP). A PDF of the Executive Summary and Key Recommendations, as well as the complete Plan, can be downloaded from the Town web site and at www.sustainablebelmont.net.

A revised draft will be presented to the Belmont Board of Selectmen for review and ultimately adoption. Several public information forums this spring will be cosponsored by the Belmont League of Women Voters and Sustainable Belmont. Print copies of the CAP will be available at the Belmont Memorial Library, Senior Center, and Belmont Public Schools Superintendent's Office.

Citizens can submit feedback via comment sheets located at locations with print copies or online. The Sustainable Belmont website contains a list of upcoming public forums and a list of ***10 Things You Can Do to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint***.

Wind Farms Kill Bats

Dear Editor,

Another excellent issue! Just a comment inspired by the article on energy.

One concern that needs to be addressed whenever wind is promoted as an energy source is the toll it takes on wildlife. Migratory birds are obvious victims but the surprising discovery is the impact on bats, especially migratory species. With dead bats found near every wind farm, University of Calgary professor Dr. Robert Barclay conducted extensive research. He discovered that the bats are dying of barotrauma; that is, the drop of atmospheric pressure caused by the movement of the wind turbine blades causes the bats' lungs to rupture. (Due to their echolocation ability it is rare for them to collide with the turbines.) This research is yet to be confirmed by government researchers, though they also report the bat mortality.

Wind power is seductive in seeming risk free, but the cost is vast in impact on wildlife. Better goals are to make photovoltaic solar more affordable, investigate wave generation and, most important, conserve energy! Our demand cannot continue to expand and assume that alternative energy resources can keep up.

Thanks for the good work.

Carolyn Bishop

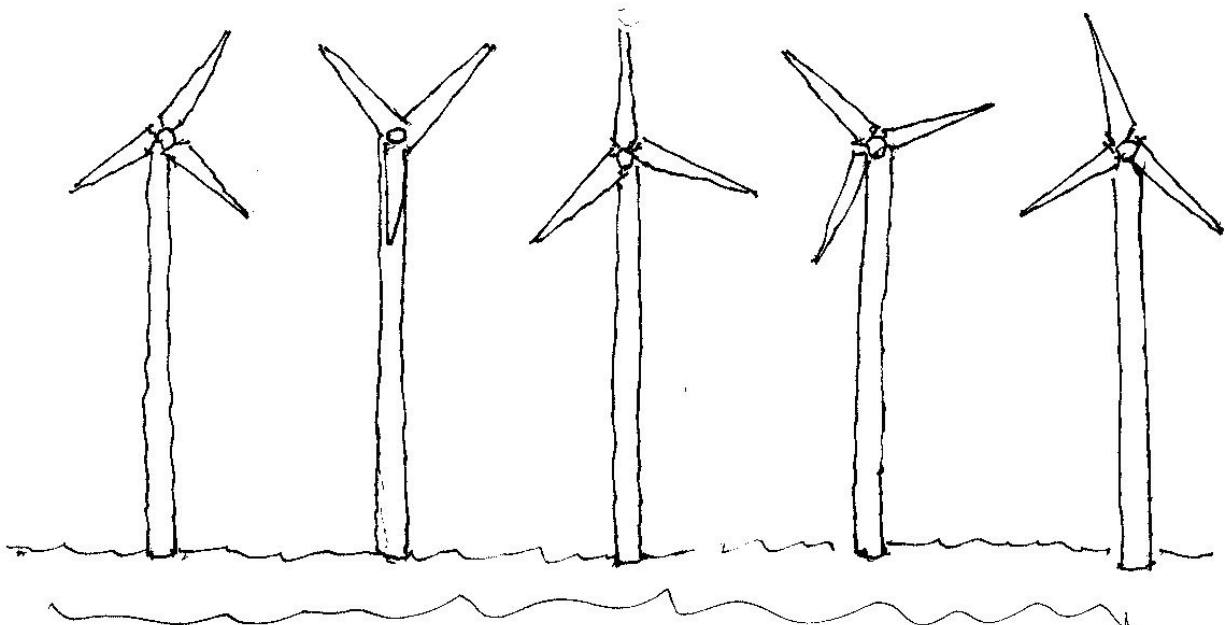
Editor's Response

I contacted a spokesperson at Mass Audubon about wind power's effect on bats. She forwarded a staff scientist's comment:

"The writer correctly summarizes Robert Barclay's work, but some of the statements in the letter are either puzzling or a bit overreaching given how little we know right now about migratory bat populations . . . And I think it is premature to say that the costs of wind energy on wildlife will be 'vast'.

"I would feel better if the writer used the 'cradle to the grave' accounting of the impacts of different energy sources, meaning that impacts such as direct habitat loss from the extraction processes and climate change impacts are tallied along with direct wildlife mortality. Under such an honest accounting, wind energy looks a bit better. It's also worth noting that methods to keep bats away from turbines are being researched, including in Tom Kunz's lab at BU [Boston University]."

- Editor



ANN COIT SIENIOS

Uplands Plans Challenged on Two Fronts

By Sue Bass

The proposed development at Belmont's silver maple forest is the subject of two administrative appeals currently before the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). One appeal is based on Massachusetts' Wetlands Protection Act; the other appeal concerns the Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act, which covers both tidelands and former tidelands that are now filled.

An issue in the Wetlands Protection case is how much rain runs off the property now, because the developer, O'Neill Properties, is responsible for seeing that the runoff is no worse after construction of the firm's proposed 299-unit apartment complex. Rooftop and asphalt will replace 4.5 acres of woodland, and nearly 3 acres more woodland will be replaced by lawn. The lawn, roof, and pavement will absorb less storm water than the "thick canopy cover to intercept rainfall; loose, non-compacted soil; [and] thick absorbent litter and humus layers" found there now, as described by witness David M. Webster. Webster is an environmental scientist employed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and a member of the Belmont Conservation Commission; the latter group is appealing a state decision to authorize the development.

Webster told hearing officer Beverly Coles-Roby of several visits he made to the silver maple forest during rainstorms on November 15 and 16, 2007, and December 12, 2008.

"Within the flat, absorbent, forested, leaf litter-covered, non-compacted character of the undeveloped site, there is no observed site evidence of runoff during or after storm events," Webster said in written testimony filed before hearings in March and April. "Consequently, the existing site conditions contribute to flood control and storm damage prevention. . . On the other hand, the post-development runoff volumes and the peak discharge rates predicted by the Applicant are greater than zero and will contribute to flooding rather than contributing to flood control and storm damage prevention. This is particularly important because this is a watershed where the immediately downstream

water body, Alewife Brook, is already known to flood and create storm water damage, including flooding into downstream homes."

" . . . the post-development runoff volumes and the peak discharge rates predicted by the Applicant are greater than zero and will contribute to flooding . . . [T]he immediately downstream water body, Alewife Brook, is already known to flood and create storm water damage, including flooding into downstream homes."

David M. Albrecht of Tetra Tech Rizzo, engineering consultant for O'Neill Properties, testified that the storm water handling system approved by the DEP for this property will infiltrate runoff from roof tops and landscaped and paved surfaces into the ground and therefore will not increase flooding. Albrecht noted that the project was required to meet only storm water standards adopted by the state in 1996 and not later versions. Nevertheless, he said, O'Neill's system complies in many respects with the new state policy.

"It is important to understand that this system . . . is designed for both infiltration and detention of storm water runoff," Albrecht said. "The system will provide static infiltration in all storm events and in larger storm events the system will be inundated with storm water for detention. The system is designed with outlet controls that slowly release (throttle) storm water from the system to reduce (e.g. detain) post-development peak discharge rates to at-or-below pre-development peak discharge rates and not cause an increase in the 100-year flood impacts."

A decision in the wetlands case is likely several months away.

Is Uplands Filled Tideland?

The second case involves state tidelands law, specifically whether the land through which the developer, O'Neill Properties, plans to run its utility lines is filled tideland. If so, construction will require an additional license. The chief issue is whether morning and evening high tides were discernable in 1640, the date used as the start of human activity that would affect tidal flow.

The Coalition to Preserve the Belmont Uplands and a 10-citizens group working with it maintain that the original course of Little River, now a ditch paralleling Frontage Road, is protected tideland; O'Neill maintains that it was never tideland at all and, if it had been, it would now be exempt from regulation as landlocked tideland. Both sides use much of the same fascinating historical evidence—all more recent than 1640—and apply various formulas to calculate back in history.

"The geological history for this area identifies a topographically low-lying, broad upland bordered by the Fresh Pond Marshes that was connected to the Mystic River by a waterway named the Menotomy River (later called Alewife)," testified W. Sterling Wall of Tetra Tech Rizzo, an expert for O'Neill. "The three ponds present in the area, Fresh, Spy and Little Ponds,

are 'Kettle Hole' ponds, formed when ice blocks broke off of the retreating glacial ice front."

Wall said it is acknowledged that the Fresh Pond Marshes were inundated by storm water runoff and extreme storm tidal flooding but he distinguished that ephemeral flooding from "the predictable, semi-diurnal tidal flooding" required to establish jurisdiction under the Tidelands law. "The potential for and extent of any daily tidal flooding of the upper reaches of the low-lying Fresh Pond Marshes is in dispute in this matter," he noted.

Stephen H. Kaiser, expert witness for the citizens' group, cites a report prepared by John Freeman in 1904, before the 1908 Cradock Dam blocked tides from the Mystic River: "Freeman reported some tidal activity in the Fresh Pond marshes on an average day. He noted the ability of high tides to access the marsh area. . ." Kaiser testified. "He concluded that 'the water level is controlled largely by the height of the harbor tide.' . . .

"Freeman recognized that harbor tides have a small impact on the marsh area during average tides," Kaiser added, "but he did not provide a numerical figure: 'The influence of the ordinary harbor tides is said to be almost unnoticeable upstream from the Arlington Branch Railroad . . .'" Noting that Freeman used similar



A map of the proposed Uplands development (center); the area occupied by the development is currently a silver maple forest.

language in discussing the Mystic Lakes, where he identified a one-inch tidal change, Kaiser commented, "It is a reasonable conclusion that Freeman considered a one-inch tidal change to be 'almost unnoticeable' and to apply to the Fresh Pond marshes." A one-inch change, Kaiser noted, may be small but it is not no change.

Citing the same Freeman report and the calculations of Tide Curves included in it, Michael A. Leon of Nutter McClennen and Fish, attorney for O'Neill Properties, said that even during a full-moon high tide in spring, a tide higher than is used to establish jurisdiction under state Tidelands law, "the water level shown on the Tide Curve for Hill Road remained flat, meaning that there was no tidal variation or effect at all at

that location," the closest site on the Tide Curves table to the O'Neill property. It is reasonable to conclude, Leon argued, "that similarly there would have been no tidal variation, and therefore no daily tides observed, within the former course of Little River at the Property, farther upstream than Hill Road."

If the former course of Little River were ruled to be filled tideland, Leon added, the land would still be exempt from regulation as landlocked tideland, defined as "any filled tidelands which on January 1, 1984, were entirely separated by a public way or interconnected public ways from any flowed tidelands. . ." The parties agree that the nearest flowed tidelands are downstream of the Amelia Earhart dam, which crosses the Mystic River between Somerville and Everett.

Kaiser disagreed. "The filled tidelands on the project site are not entirely separated by any public way from the flowed tidelands below the Earhart Dam because all of the intervening ways are carried across the Mystic River and Alewife Brook on bridges elevated over the water that do not separate the water and tidelands on either side," he said. "Thus Chapter 91 jurisdiction continues upstream past every bridge, as long as the channel was historically tidal. For the Mystic watershed, this sequence of continuous tidelands would proceed upstream from the Mystic Basin to Alewife Brook and its historic split with Little River. This split occurs at approximately the location of the access ramp to the MBTA station at Alewife."

Even further upstream, Kaiser said, Acorn Park Road, Route 2, and its access ramps do not "prevent access from the project site to Alewife Brook." One can walk along the northern bank of new Little River, he said, to reach the development site with Alewife Brook without crossing any public or private way.

The parties in the Tidelands case filed post-hearing briefs at the end of April and are expecting a recommended ruling in the month or two.

Sue Bass is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



ANN COIT SIFNEOS

Belmont Farmers' Market to Extend Hours

By Evanthia Malliris

There will be more time for shopping at the Belmont Farmers' Market this season. The Market bell will ring one-half hour earlier, at 1:30 p.m., through the entire June-October season. To accommodate later-evening commuters during the summer months, the Market will stay open a half-hour longer, from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The Market is held every Thursday through the end of October and is located in the municipal parking lot in Belmont Center, at the intersection of Cross Street and Channing Road, behind the stores on Leonard Street.

Opening day will be on Thursday, June 11, at 1:30 pm. Expect over 20 vendors offering locally grown or produced fresh produce, meats, cheeses, potted plants, breads, eggs, jams, honey, sauces, and sweets. For the latest, check www.belmontfarmersmarket.org, and be sure to sign up for the weekly e-Newsletter. The **Roots & Sprouts** Newsletter, published four times a season, provides education and information about local foods, spotlights our vendors, and always includes a recipe using seasonal ingredients. It's available at the Market tent, the library, and is distributed to the elementary schools.

Volunteers make up the heart of the market, now in its fourth season. The Farmers' Market Committee needs market



managers and assistants are needed on market day to help vendors and shoppers, and set up and take down the market tent. The committee also requests continuing help from high school students performing community service and volunteers who can post lawn signs publicizing the market around town are vital for the success and growth of the Market. Performers of all stripes often play at the Market.

To join the market volunteer community, contact the market organizers by e-mail at belmontfarmer-smarket@gmail.com.

Evanthis Malliris is a member of the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee and a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



COURTESY BELMONT FARMERS MARKET

Developer Plans to Preserve Underwood House

By Sue Bass

The 1846 Lyman Underwood house at 50 Common Street will be preserved, and about three acres of the 5.28-acre land will be covered by a conservation restriction, according to the developer who plans to buy the historic property. Joseph de Stefano of Desco Associates of Belmont said he expects to subdivide the land to add three single-family houses.

De Stefano said the project will not be a condominium like the units built in 1980 by developer Mark Moore at 84 through 100 Common Street, in and next to the Henry O. Underwood estate. Instead, an acre or more would be reserved for the main house, and a

affect three other houses located between the Lyman Underwood house and the Commons condominium built on the Henry O. Underwood estate. One of those three houses was originally a gatehouse and another was a barn for property of the extended Underwood family, which once occupied most of the land where Common Street and Concord Avenue join.

Wellington Brook runs through the property that Desco has under agreement. De Stefano said that his company expects to go before the Belmont Conservation Commission with a specific proposal in May or June.



LANDVEST INC.

The Lyman Underwood house

subdivision would create three lots of less than half an acre each for the new units. The three new houses, each 4,000 to 5,000 square feet, would be built in a mid-19th-century style to complement the main house, he said.

Helen Baker, the Underwood descendent who is selling her house, said the sale would not

Underwoods Have Long Local History

Helen Baker said that Samuel O. Mead once owned much of the land that descended through the Underwood family. Mead built the 1836 house now largely hidden behind the Belmont Memorial Library and accessed through a driveway next to the First Armenian Church; the library land was taken by eminent domain. The house is still owned and occupied by descendants. Mead's wife, Minnie, was a Wellington, another founding family of Belmont. The Meads' daughter, Esther Crafts

Mead, married William James Underwood, the son of the William Underwood who introduced deviled ham and other canned meat to the United States. The word "can" was said to have been coined by Mr. Underwood's bookkeeper. According to Richard B. Betts's book *Footsteps through Belmont*, the tins in which deviled ham was preserved were called "canisters," but the

bookkeeper got tired of writing that in the ledger and shortened it to "can."

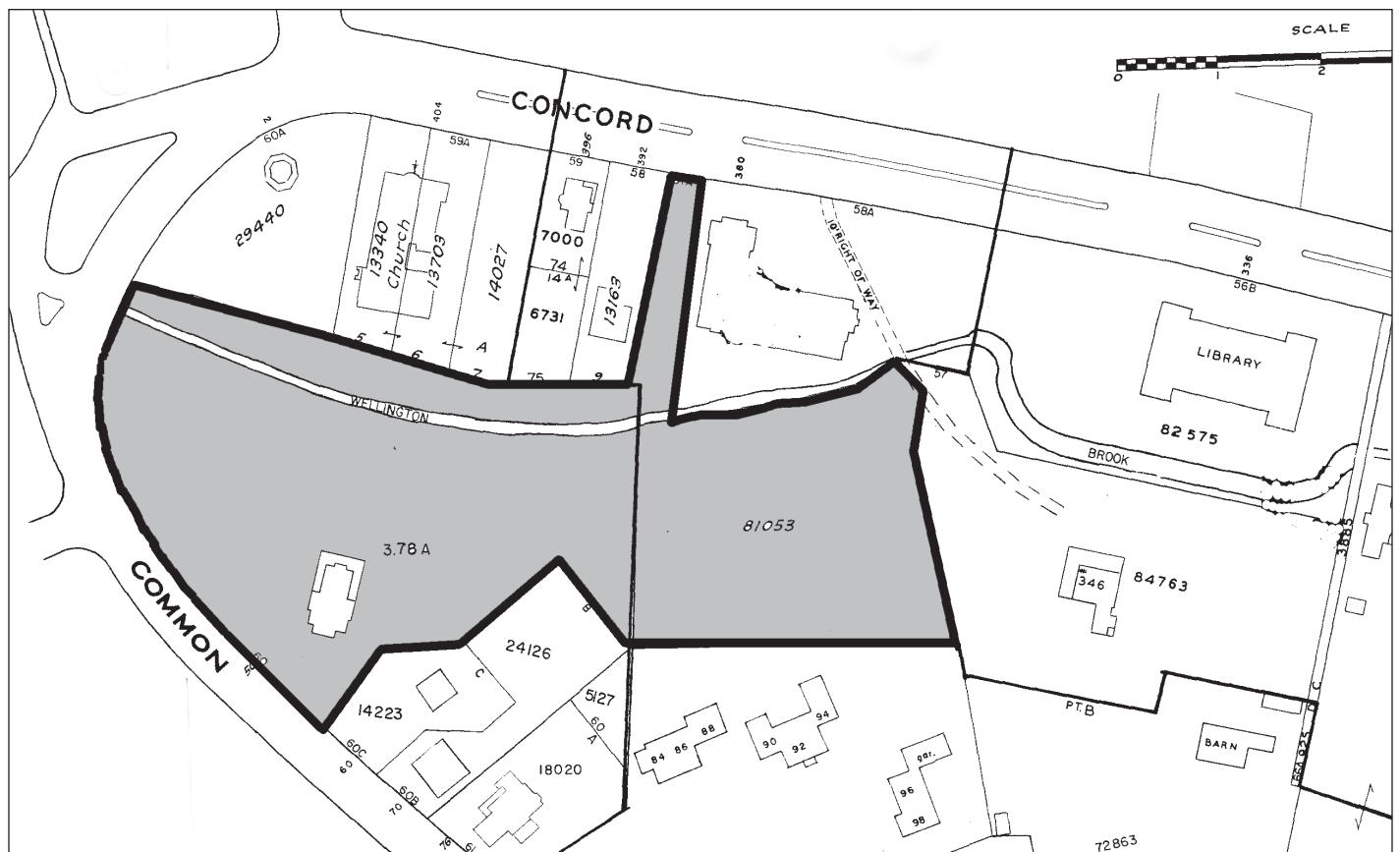
Esther Crafts Mead and William James Underwood had three sons who lived nearer to Common Street. The eldest, Henry Oliver Underwood, built the 1885 house at 100 Common Street that now holds six units of the condominiums created by Mark Moore. H.O. Underwood, who followed his father as head of the family canning business, was a major town benefactor. He donated the Underwood Memorial Library on Pleasant Street, now the School Administration Building, and traded the town the land for Underwood park and pool, which was fed by Wellington Brook. His daughter Helen married Oliver Wellington and moved into the house behind the library.

The second son, William Lyman Underwood, was a scientist noted for his research in bacteriology and also made a name for himself as a photographer. He moved into an existing house at 50 Common Street upon his marriage in 1887 and lived there until his death in 1929, according to *Belmont: The Architecture*

and *Development of the Town of Homes*, a book prepared for the Belmont Historic District Commission in 1984. The house was probably built by a son of Samuel O. Mead, according to the Historic District Commission book. Lyman Underwood was Helen Baker's grandfather. He and his older brother married sisters, she said: H.O. Underwood married Jennie Cushing and Lyman Underwood married Ida Cushing.

The third son, Loring Underwood, was the landscape architect who designed the Underwood pool and laid out many of the subdivisions in Belmont. Loring was also a photographer, and the brothers were the subject of a 1987 book, *Gentlemen Photographers: The Work of Loring Underwood And Wm. Lyman Underwood*. Loring Underwood lived in a house at 90 Common Street known for its beautiful gardens, but it was demolished in the mid-1940s.

Sue Bass is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



A schematic map of the Underwood estate: the Lyman Underwood House is at the lower left.

Make your Yard a Sustainable Landscape

By Risa Edelstein

We can all have a positive impact on the planet by making good decisions about what we do right in our own yards. From organic lawns to native plants to edible gardens, people are changing how they use their outdoor space to preserve and sustain the planet for generations to come. Most conventional landscape practices actually do more harm than good. Becoming more sustainable involves making significant changes in what we do and encouraging landscape professionals to do the same.

Feed Your Soil

Soil is the cornerstone of a healthy and sustainable ecosystem. But what exactly is healthy soil? Healthy soil is alive; it contains microorganisms that break down organic material and release nutrients to feed plants. It retains moisture well. It can capture carbon from the air, helping to reduce global warming.

When we use chemicals in our yards, we disturb the soil balance, killing the microorganisms in the soil so they can't help feed the plants naturally.

To maintain healthy soil, avoid using chemical or synthetic fertilizers; instead, encourage the natural fertilizing properties of the soil. One of the best ways to nourish your soil and encourage beneficial microorganisms is to enrich your soil with compost. You can also leave

leaf clippings on the lawn when you mow or use them as mulch in your flowerbeds. Leaves contain nutrients and will feed the soil as they decompose.

Rein In Rainfall

If rain falls faster than it can be absorbed into the ground, it collects in storm drains along with any pollutants it encounters on its way, such as metals, chemical fertilizers, de-icing salts, and even bacteria from trash and animal waste. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, storm water runoff from impervious surfaces—namely asphalt driveways and roofs—is the number one source of water pollution in our lakes and rivers.

The best way to manage storm water is to keep it from getting into storm drains in the first place.



LUIS MIGUEL BUGALLO SÁNCHEZ/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Earthworms enjoy healthy soil.

By capturing rain at its source and allowing it to soak into the ground where it has landed, you not only reduce water pollution but you can reduce the need for supplemental watering and replenish local aquifers. To collect rainwater on your property, connect your downspouts to rain barrels and use the water to irrigate your garden.

Rain gardens, specialized gardens that are planted in a low area or ditch, are another way to catch runoff from driveways or roofs while also beautifying your yard. Always use permeable materials for driveways, patios, and walkways because this allows storm water to sink into the ground rather than run off into storm drains. Gravel, peastone, mulch, porous concrete, and permeable paving stones are all great choices.

Green Up Your Lawn

For many homeowners, a lush green lawn is a source of pride and beauty. But it can come at a price to our environment. Chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers used on lawns leach into our watershed via storm drains; lawns do not sustain local wildlife; and gas-powered lawnmowers and synthetic fossil fuel-based fertilizers increase a lawn's carbon footprint.

You can have a tremendous impact by reducing the size of your lawn and creating more wild and natural landscapes. Even expanding your existing garden beds with a mixed border can make a difference. Another popular trend is to convert lawns to edible gardens so that you can eat locally, or choose alternative ground-covers or a native seed mix with clover to replace the lawn. (Clover helps deliver nitrogen to soil.)

Manage the remaining lawn areas organically by feeding the soil with compost and mowing the grass to a height of three inches. That helps shade out weeds and encourages deep roots that better retain moisture.

Leave the grass clippings on the lawn, overseed bare spots in the fall when you aerate the lawn, and you're well on your way to a sustainable, low-maintenance yard.

Control Pests Naturally

Historically, we have tended to choose plants for our yards based on their immunity to pests. Unfortunately, these plants don't support local wildlife such as birds and insects that can actually help prevent pests. Native plants have developed relationships over thousands of years with local wildlife and are therefore better suited for sustainable landscapes.

To manage pests in the landscape, diversity is the secret. The more types of plants are in the garden, the more the landscape supports wildlife, and the more complex ecosystems can balance themselves. Best practices support planting a wide variety of plants including trees, shrubs, grasses, and perennials. It is important to select the right plants for the right environment. Plants will vary depending on light conditions, soil conditions, and moisture. Plants that are



JP HAMMON / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

matched to your conditions require less maintenance and use fewer resources.

Everything we do in our gardens and in our yards has a direct effect on the environment. By employing best practices or even making small changes in the right direction every year, we can all contribute to creating sustainable environments for future generations.

Risa Edelstein is a professional landscape designer. Her blog, www.gardenandthegoodlife.com, features stories and tips on gardening issues and lists her upcoming talks.

Sources for Rain Barrels

Hillside Garden & True Value
280 Blanchard Rd, Belmont
617-489-0250

The New England Rain Barrel Company
www.nerainbarrel.com

New England Rain Barrel and Composter
www.thebarrelbarron.com

Great American Rain Barrel Company
www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com

Aaron's Rain Barrels
www.ne-design.net

Environmental Events

Rock Meadow Work Days

Saturday, May 9, and Saturday, May 30, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Volunteer for an hour or a morning to clean up and improve Belmont conservation land at Rock Meadow. Wear long pants and bring gloves, sunscreen, bug spray, and water. Lunch and snacks provided. Rain or shine. Sponsored by Friends of Rock Meadow, Friends of the Western Greenway, and the New England Mountain Bike Association. Debbie Hartman, 617-869-9668, debbie_hartman@comcast.net. *Rock Meadow parking lot off Mill Street, Belmont.*

WCES Birthday Party

Saturday, May 9, 1-10:30 p.m. Watertown Citizens for Environmental Safety celebrates its 30th anniversary with a mini-conference, annual meeting, and contra dance. The conference, "Economic Recovery and Beyond: Redirecting Military and Energy Resources," runs 1-4 p.m.; potluck dinner and annual meeting, 6-8 p.m.; contra dance, 8-10:30 p.m. 617-926-8560 mailbox 2, 617-924-5723, mail@watertowncitizens.org. *Conference: Watertown Free Public Library, 123 Main Street, Watertown; potluck and dance: St. John's Church, 80 Mt Auburn Street, Watertown.*

Lincoln Park Improvements

Saturday, May 9, 1-3 p.m. Lexington's Lincoln Park Committee hired Wirth Associates last year to plan for installation of native plants, and the New England Wildflower Society began work to control invasive species in the woodlands and meadows. Join a Citizens for Lexington Conservation tour to see how these efforts are progressing. Nell Walker, nelwalk@earthlink.net, 781-862-6943. *55 Lincoln Street, Lexington (across from Temple Isaiah).*

Bay State Bike Week

Monday, May 11-Sunday, May 17. Check for bicycle promotions and activities in

Cambridge, Boston, and Somerville at www.massbike.org/news/bikeweek.htm.

Mystic Brown Bag Lunch

Tuesday, May 12, 12:30-1:30 p.m. Urban Restoration Specialist Pallavi Mande will describe the Charles River Watershed Association's work as a part of the Mystic Collaborative, undertaking an assessment of the Mill Creek sub-watershed in Chelsea, Everett, Revere, and East Boston. 781-788-0007, charles@crwa.org. *CRWA office, 190 Park Road (at Leo J. Martin Golf Course), Weston.*

Identify Invasive Plants

Tuesday, May 12 and Wednesday, June 17, 6 p.m. Two training sessions by New England Wild Flower Society staff to help gardeners and others interested in plants and conservation recognize plants that crowd out native species and destroy the habitat of native animals. Sponsored by Fresh Pond Reservation Stewardship Program. Registration required. 617-349-6489, fpr@cambridgema.gov. *Cambridge Water Department, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

Introduction to Bicycling Skills

Thursday, May 14, 6:30-8:30 p.m. This classroom session (off-bike) covers bike safety principles, bicycling laws, guidelines for riding in traffic, and more. Sponsored by MassBike. Registration required: shane@massbike.org. 617-542-BIKE, www.massbike.org. *Jefferson Cutter House, corner of Massachusetts and Mystic Avenues (Routes 3 and 60), Arlington.*

8th Annual Habitat Herb Sale

Saturday, May 16, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The annual herb sale offers Massachusetts-grown, organic herbs from J. Gilson Greenhouses in Groton. Sponsored by Habitat Intergenerational Program's (HIP) Herb Study Group. 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Mystic Herring Run & Paddle

Sunday, May 17, 8 a.m. Run, walk, or paddle for the fish! Run along a flat and fast 5K course on the Mystic River bike path past thousands of herring returning from the ocean up the Mystic River. Or paddle your canoe or kayak on a 3-mile or 12-mile course upriver toward the Mystic Lakes. Compete in both races and be eligible for the Iron Herring award. Run registration opens at 8 a.m., race starts at 9 a.m.; paddle registration opens at 8:30 a.m., race starts at 10:30 a.m. Pre-register at www.active.com. All proceeds benefit the Mystic River Watershed Association. 617-893-0209, HerringRun@gmail.com. *Boys and Girls Clubs, Blessing of the Bay Boathouse, 32 Shore Drive, Somerville.*

Ladyslippers and Other Wildflowers

Friday, May 29, 6:15–8:15 p.m. Learn about the beautiful native orchid, the ladyslipper, also known as "moccasin flowers" and "squirrel shoes." The program will focus on wildflower identification as well as fun and interesting natural history. \$12 for MassAudubon members, \$15 nonmembers. Registration required. 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Rock Meadow Walk

Wednesday, June 10, 8–9:15 a.m. A free walk led by a Habitat naturalist will explore Belmont's Rock Meadow conservation land. No registration required. 617-489-5050, habitat@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org. *Meet at the Rock Meadow parking area of Mill St., Belmont.*

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