



# Regionalization Could Save “Millions”

## Public Health, Safety Sharing Discussed

By Caroline Huang

With a \$3.5 million budget deficit looming over Belmont, local leaders are struggling to find ways to cut costs. “Regionalization” has been discussed as a way to save money while preserving services. What do we mean by regionalization? What services could be regionalized? What has Belmont already done, and what have been the cost savings? What about the future?

According to the April, 2010 *Report of the Regionalization Advisory Commission*, a state commission, “‘Regionalization’ is often applied to partnerships in a variety of forms that support local government service delivery.” Municipalities share resources and expenses to reduce costs and deliver services more efficiently through economies of scale.

These collaborations can range from informal agreements among municipalities to a legal entity serving multiple municipalities, i.e., a regional school system. Sometimes regionalization means regional planning for broader issues such as traffic or flood control.

## State Supports Regionalization

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides some support for regionalization. The Massachusetts Regional Advisory Commission, chaired by Lt. Governor Tim Murray, was established by Massachusetts statute in 2009 and is currently gathering feedback on its draft report and recommendations.

The authority to regionalize is governed by the General Laws of Massachusetts (MGL). For example, MGL Chapter 40 Section 4A allows the chief executive authority in a municipality to enter into collaborations to make available or procure services.

State departments offer funding for study and implementation of regional structures. For example, the State 911 Department disburses grants to help regionalize emergency response systems. In addition, there are several Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) throughout the state, whose role is to advise and assist in planning regionalization efforts. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is the RPA serving the Boston area.

## Town has Some Regional Programs

Belmont has already joined forces with nearby towns for some public projects. The LABBB Collaborative Programs ([www.labbb.com](http://www.labbb.com)), a special education program covering Lexington, Arlington, Burlington, Bedford, and Belmont, is an example of successful regionalization. Belmont also collaborates with other towns for specific tasks, such as bidding to purchase fuel oil. In addition, there are informal agreements between Belmont and other towns, such as sharing public works vehicles when the need arises.

## Public Health, Safety Could Be Shared

Belmont is considering major regionalization of two areas: public health and public safety. Certain public health services are already performed on a regional basis, such as mosquito control and hazardous waste collection. Many public health positions require specific expertise, but Belmont does not have full-time work for such employees. Title 5 (subsurface sewerage) inspectors, food inspectors, and housing inspectors could all work for multiple towns.

Two years ago, when the Lexington full-time nurse (35 hours) position became vacant, Belmont asked whether Lexington would be willing to share a nurse position. The shared

arrangement has the nurse two days in Belmont and three days in Lexington. The cost is about the same as Belmont's previous 10-hour/week part-time nurse position, but Belmont gains four hours of nursing time per week, and the nurse is on call for emergencies in either community whenever needed.

According to Donna Moultrup, Belmont Health Director, the primary objective of regionalization in this case should be to provide equitable public health services. Cost efficiencies are good, but the typical public health budget is relatively small to begin with. The proposed Belmont health department budget for fiscal year 2010-2011 is \$316,148 out of the entire Belmont budget of \$84 million, or 0.04%. "There's no

way we're going to save a lot of money," stated Moultrup, "but we will get more services."

Pooling resources with other towns has improved the cost/benefit ratio, but "each collaboration takes an enormous amount of my time to keep it going," says Moultrup. Belmont, Arlington, and Lexington's experience illustrates the difficulty of establishing a more formal, comprehensive regionalization of the health department.

Moultrup announced her plan to retire in 2010 and advocated that her retirement be taken as an opportunity to combine the towns' health departments. The boards of health and town administrators of Belmont, Arlington, and Lexington met in the fall of 2008 to explore the idea. The towns received a grant from MAPC to allow the MAPC to undertake a feasibility study of public health regionalization. The MAPC spent most of 2009 examining the towns' health department organizations, government structures, staffing, fees, regulations, and workload, and discovered conflicts:

- Fees and regulations are different in the three communities and would require standardization.
- The combined staffing and workload would have to be balanced.
- Health department structures would have to be integrated.
- Town administrators would have to facilitate cooperation while preserving self-rule.

The process stalled early this year. In May the three towns' health directors, town administrators, and the MAPC met to restart the process. The Belmont Board of Health was concerned that regionalization would reduce the Belmont and Lexington boards' authority in favor of Arlington's board. The groups agreed that more data were needed to further understand workload and the differences in regulations among towns. MAPC agreed to analyze the workloads; when that study is complete, the group will meet again.

Moultrup believes it is worth working through the difficulties to establish regionalized public health services among neighboring towns. "We need to concentrate on what's the same about us," she says.

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Meg Muckenhaupt, Editor, Production

**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](mailto:info@belmontcitizensforum.org).

## Public Safety Studies Regional Dispatch

Belmont already has mutual aid agreements with neighboring towns for fire and ambulance services. Each town will send an ambulance or fire truck if needed by another town in an emergency.

Thomas Younger, Belmont Town Administrator, and David Frizzell, Belmont Fire Chief, are participating in a feasibility study of a regional E911 dispatch program shared with other municipalities, including Somerville, Melrose, and Malden. Currently, Belmont has civilian dispatch for fire and police together in one location. The study, funded by an MAPC grant, is currently in the information-gathering stage and will explore topics such as call volume and staffing levels. The report is due in Fall, 2010.

Another collaboration, a shared ladder truck, has been discussed by Belmont and neighboring fire departments, but no agreement has been reached. The problem with sharing a fire truck includes how to apportion insurance costs; who holds title; physical location; and how costs are prorated. As often is the case in regionalization efforts, timing is key; Belmont and another town have to be planning to buy a new fire truck at the same time. Belmont's capital budget plan includes the purchase of a ladder truck in 2013 for \$875,000.

A regional fire department with one fire chief and shared fire stations would be much further in the future, if it were shown to be feasible and desirable. Frizzell supports the first steps toward regionalization: building support for the concept among a core group of communities and doing a feasibility study. Then, if regionalization were found to make sense, a strategic plan would be developed.

Frizzell expects that regionalizing fire department services would result in little savings in the beginning. The immediate benefit would be improved services. According to Frizzell, "The first thing residents would see is a much better response to emergencies. This response would meet nationally recognized standards, which few communities can offer its residents now, using only local resources." With time, there would be savings in capital costs and administrative costs, Frizzell says.

Mark Paolillo, newly elected selectman, former Warrant Committee member, and past chair of the Warrant Committee Public Safety Subcommittee for six years, agrees with Frizzell and adds that, with time, there would also be savings in personnel costs after attrition. However, Frizzell points out, "It would be naive to think that there are no drawbacks to regionalization. These drawbacks cannot be ignored and must weigh into the analysis. As I see it, the largest drawback is the loss of local control."

Now that municipalities are facing major budget deficits, they are motivated to look at regionalization seriously. Even so, progress is slow. According to Will Brownsberger, State Representative, who has worked extensively on regionalization issues, there seems to be a pattern of conversations that start and fail. It is difficult for each entity to change its own organization and operations in order to integrate into a regional structure. Communities fear losing local control. Perhaps it is necessary for the state to create a superstructure. Brownsberger says he



will continue to work on regionalization at the state legislative level.

Initially, the main benefit of regionalization is improved (or preserved) services rather than cost savings. It takes time to realize significant cost savings, especially since there is generally little appetite in the affected communities for eliminating salaried positions and it is preferred to rely instead on attrition.

Despite the challenges, we need to pursue regionalization, according to Paolillo. The Belmont Board of Selectmen supports regionalization efforts. “We need to have the political will and perseverance to address these challenges. It would take years; it’s huge,” he says. “But it would save us, over time, millions.”

Caroline Huang is a Precinct 2 Town Meeting member.

## Belmont Historical Society Presents Historic Preservation Awards



JOSEPH CORNISH

The Belmont Historical Society presented one of its three 2010 Historic Preservation Awards to Desco Associates, Robert Robillard and Addison VanNess for the preservation of 72 Cushing Avenue—The Cecelia Adams House (pictured above). The Cecelia Adams House was built in 1912 and designed by Charles Willard, architect. Joseph Cornish, the Society’s new Wellington Station Master, calls the house “a fine example of Bungalow house.”

Awards were also given to the Belmont Woman’s Club in recognition of their recent donation of a conservation restriction to the Belmont Land Trust and ongoing preservation of the William Flagg Homer House, and to the Town of Belmont and Burke Land Company for the preservation of the Belmont Center Fire Station. The Society’s new officers will include Phil Hughes as President, Dan LeClerc as Vice President, Susan Smart, Sheila Flewelling, Henry Ogilby, Ron Sacca, and Nelson Bolen as Directors, and Joseph Cornish as Wellington Station Master.



# Bike Path Building Underway

By Meg Muckenhoupt

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation is busy building bike paths near Belmont. Three paths that will link to Alewife Station and the Minuteman Bikeway will make it easier for more bicyclists to get to more places without dodging cars on roads like the Alewife Brook Parkway and Route 16.

## Brighton Street, Belmont-Davis Square

Construction started on the Brighton Street-Alewife-Davis Square path in early May. Contractors have put barriers in place near Alewife Station to begin sidewalk work, and started building the pedestrian bridge near Yates Pond at the east side of the Alewife Reservation.

Work on the Brighton Street end of the path has been delayed by the need to relocate 12 poles and signal cables. That relocation should begin by August, and will take several weeks; once that work is finished, the contractor will begin building the Brighton Street path segment. This project is scheduled to be completed in 2012.

## Minuteman Bike Path Connector (Arlington-Mystic Valley Parkway)

Constructing this 12,800 foot path will involve regrading, construction of a stabilized aggregate path, asphalt paving, elevated boardwalk, retaining walls, new wetlands with plantings, landscaping, and installing wood and steel guardrails. The contractor has begun work on both sides of Alewife Brook, and has crews working in Arlington, Cambridge and Somerville to clear brush, remove invasive



Construction begins at Alewife Station.

DAVID CHASE

plants, and build erosion control structures. This project should be completed by fall 2011.

## Charles River/Alewife Connector Phase 1

This path runs from School Street to Nichols Avenue in Watertown, and is the first phase of a path that will one day link the Charles River to Alewife Station. The path is being constructed on an abandoned rail corridor. In April, the contractor began clearing brush and removing rails and ties. Next steps include clearing of brush and undergrowth from the bikeway area, grading and paving of the trail, installing drainage, installing new fencing, and landscaping. The project is scheduled to be completed in spring 2011.

Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*.

# Bike Lanes Make Manhattan Cyclists Safer

By Sumner Brown

Bicycle injuries each year in New York City have decreased by a factor of two in the last eleven years while the number of bicycle trips into Manhattan has doubled. One chart below shows New York City bicycle accident data; the second chart shows the growth of commuter bicycling in New York City. How did this happen?

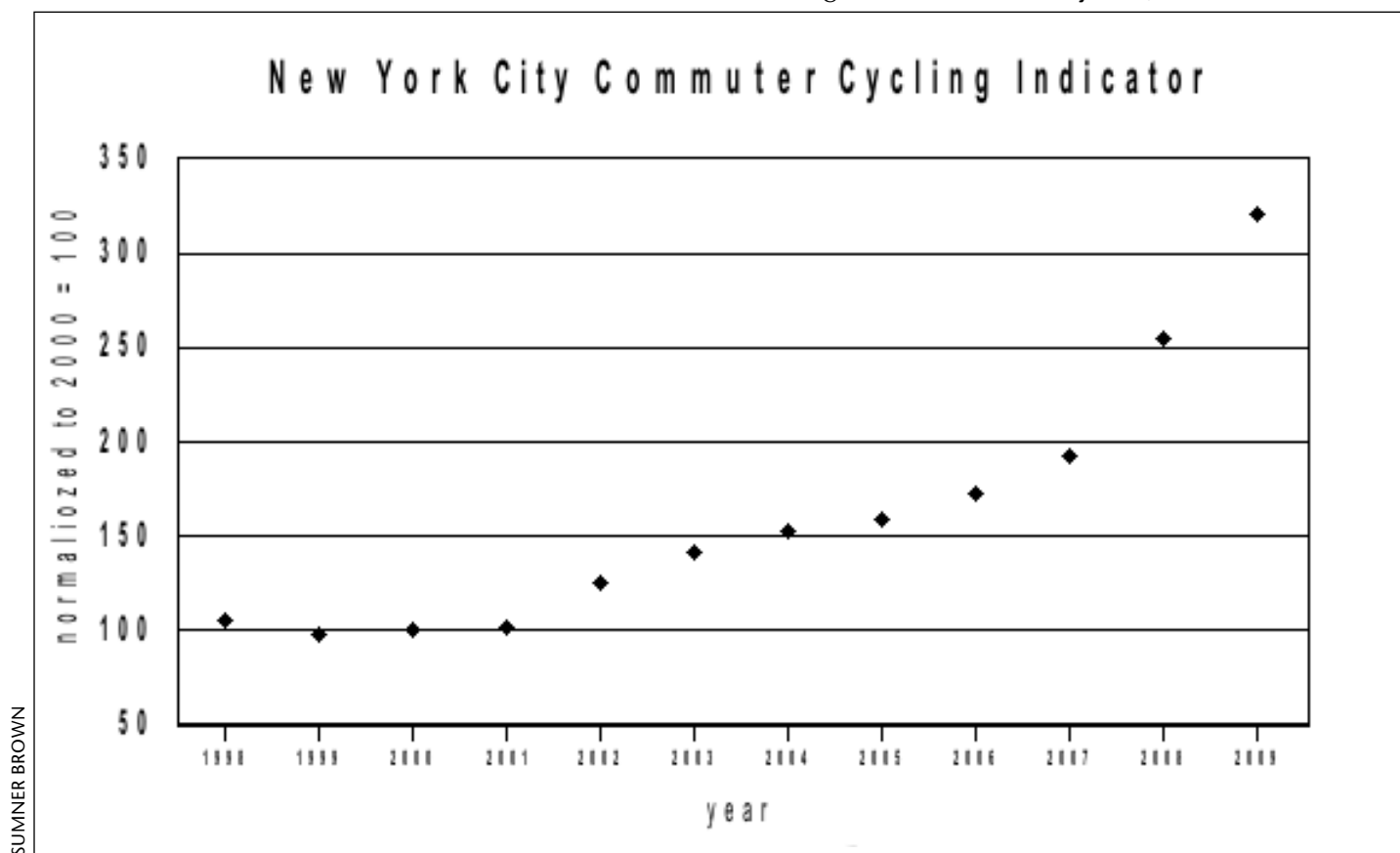
Sorting out what is happening in New York from two hundred miles away is difficult. I contacted Lucy Garnett, my lab partner from my freshman year at MIT in 1963. She is retired,

## BCF: How can people enjoy bicycling in Manhattan?

Lucy Garnett: Manhattan is a wonderful place to bicycle. Bicycling is the best way to get around. There are now wonderful bike paths, particularly the Hudson River Greenway. And the city is flat which helps bicycling. Riding a bicycle in Manhattan can be faster than driving a car, it depends on traffic.

## BCF: Do you bicycle to work?

LG: I'm retired. I was a professor at Baruch College. Sometimes I bicycled, but not in



Graph of the New York City Commuter Cycling Indicator over 1998-2009. The Cycling Indicator is derived from a mid-week 12-hour (7am-7pm) count of all bicycle traffic into central Manhattan over the four East River Bridges, the Staten Island Ferry, and at the Hudson River Greenway conducted by the New York City Department of Transportation.

but she spent her working years as a professor at Baruch College in lower Manhattan, and often commuted by bicycle. She still lives in Manhattan and still bicycles. I asked her what it's like to bike in Manhattan and what has changed over the years.

bad weather. I felt that bicycling to work was dangerous, particularly because of buses. So mostly I walked. Walking took about 40 minutes. The subway took half that time unless there were delays. If I had an extra 20 minutes, I preferred to walk, which freed me from possible subway delays. The trouble with walking is that you

need to stop at red lights. Bicycling was at least as fast as the subway.

**BCF: What percentage of the faculty and students bicycle to Baruch?**

LG: Close to zero percent. I knew two or three other faculty members that bicycled. Most people who work in Manhattan get to work by public transportation.

**BCF: Are bike lanes congested?**

LG: That depends on the time of day. On nice weekend days there can be many bicycles and pedestrians all day in Central Park and on the Hudson River Greenway. The bike lanes painted on inner streets never are crowded. Some bike

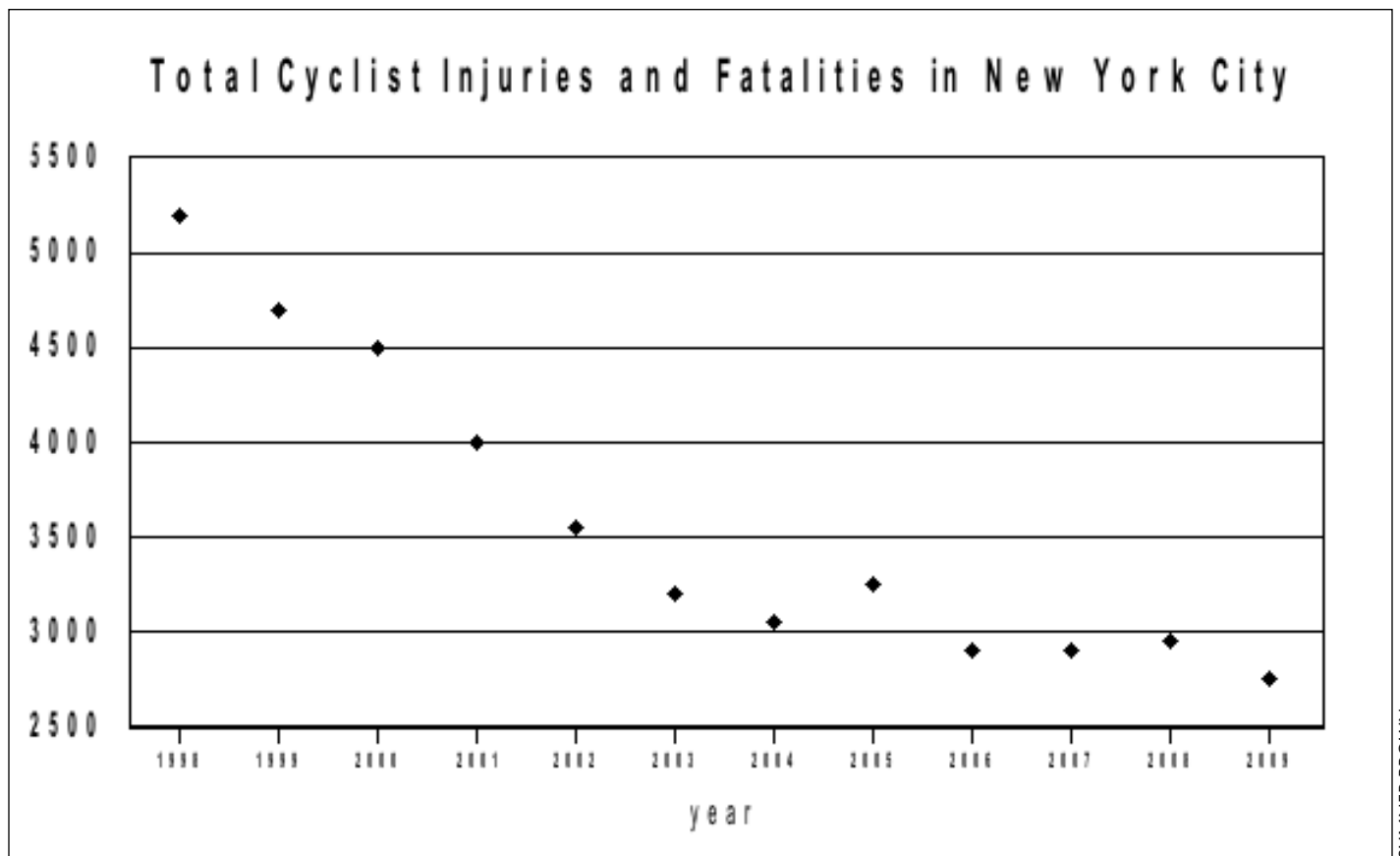
inconvenient and expensive. It is impossible to park. My son kept telling me that cars were not needed and they cause problems. In the city there are good alternatives. When my car died, I didn't get another. Now when we need a car, we use ZipCar.

**BCF: How do people in Manhattan get a 50-pound bag of flour home from Costco?**

LG: I never go to Costco. Manhattanites shop in small quantities. If we need something large, we have it delivered.

**BCF: Have you noticed changes in bicycle usage in the last ten years?**

LG: There are many more bicyclists. More people



Data source: Transportation Alternatives, [www.transalt.org](http://www.transalt.org)

lanes that are separated from traffic, such as in Times Square, can get congested from overflow-pedestrian traffic.

**BCF: Do you use your bicycle to shop?**

LG: I shop by bicycle and by walking... When I first came to Manhattan, I had a car. I thought I needed a car. Having a car in Manhattan is very

wear helmets. More riders obey traffic laws. [Riders] are more aware of cars. There are more bike racks. It used to be that finding a place to lock a bicycle was hard. Now there are beautiful bike racks provided by the city. There are more bicycle paths and bike lanes separated from cars and buses. The buses are terrible. They do not see bicycles. The bicycle

traffic in Central Park and the Hudson River Greenway is sometimes so heavy that it is dangerous.

**BCF: When did New York City start building bike lanes and bike paths?**

LG: In Manhattan, to my knowledge, the first major, heavily used bike path outside of Central Park was the Hudson River Greenway. This area was the elevated West Side Highway until a heavy truck broke through it in 1973.

After years of big highway proposals and community opposition, construction began in the mid-1990s for a modest road and a wonderful bike path. It officially opened in 2001, but just this year an expensive bridge was added to it at Riverside Park so the route stays flat . . . before bicyclists had to go up, up a hill away from the river and back down.

The bicycle route along the east side is not as good yet. When I first moved to New York City, bicycling here was horrible, dangerous, difficult . . . awful. The Giuliani administration put bike lanes on streets by painting white lines. These do not work well because cars and trucks park in them.

The Bloomberg administration has aggressively built bicycle infrastructure, including bike routes, on streets that separate bicycles from cars. They placed barriers on Grand Street, in the congested Soho-Chinatown neighborhood, to create a bike lane next to the sidewalk. Cars park outside the barriers so now bicyclists and pedestrians are safe from traffic. It is a big improvement. Businesses on the street were angry, saying that Mayor Bloomberg did not follow proper procedures to explore other options and get community approval. The city said they were just trying it out. The barriers are still there.

The city has also experimented with stopping motorized traffic on Broadway during the summer between Herald Square (34th Street) and Times Square (42nd Street) and putting plazas with chairs and tables in some streets to make New York City streets attractive for pedestrians. During the winter, Broadway was reopened to traffic but the bike lanes remained.

## Minuteman vs. Hudson Greenway

On Saturday, September 7, 2007, volunteers counted 1728 bicycle riders in 12 hours on the Minuteman Trail in Lexington Center. On Saturday, September 19, 2009, volunteers counted 3003 users. The most recent Lexington Center Saturday count logged 4,059 users on a sunny Saturday, May 1, 2010.

In 2007, the average of several 12-hour counts on weekdays of bicyclists on the Hudson River Greenway at 50th Street was 2586. In 2009 that number increased to 4289.

**BCF: If almost no one bicycles to work, why is the city investing in bicycle infrastructure?**

LG: Don't say almost no one bicycles to work. The numbers are small only when compared with the vast number of commuters who take public transportation. And many more people benefit from biking than just bicycle commuters. It's a great leisure activity. I now see many more people, from the young to the elderly, biking for pleasure, for exercise, and to explore the city. The Bloomberg administration is improving the city for the people who live here. Pedestrians and bicyclists benefit. The city has diminished the need for cars. Bicycle usage is growing because of this.

**BCF: I can see why bicycle riding is increasing. The drop in injuries is less clear. Do you think the large number of new riders, presumably riders who value safety more than riders who rode before bike lanes, have influenced the wilder riders to behave better?**

LG: I think the mindset is changing. More New Yorkers perceive biking as a viable and valuable activity. This changes everyone's behavior including drivers.

Sumner Brown is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



# Green Burials are Easier on the Earth

By Dan Lech

“Green” burials are becoming more popular in the United States. A conventional burial involves embalming the deceased with preservative chemicals, enclosing the body in a metal or hardwood casket, and lowering the casket into an underground concrete vault. Embalming chemicals slow the natural process of decomposition to allow for open-casket wakes and transportation of remains. Caskets are mainly used for aesthetic value. The vault is to keep the ground from sinking as decomposition progresses, insuring the integrity of the cemetery grounds.

In a natural or green burial the body is buried in a biodegradable coffin made of thin wood, cardboard, or recycled paper, or simply wrapped in a shroud. No embalming fluids are used, and no concrete liner surrounds the interred. The idea is to enable the body to return to the “cycle of life” by nourishing the soil as it decomposes. Similar practices have traditionally been part of Jewish burial traditions.

Why is a green burial more environmentally friendly than a traditional one? Embalming chemicals such as formaldehyde can be toxic—especially to funeral home workers—and may leach into the soil after burial. However, there is evidence that formaldehyde breaks down by the time a body is put in the ground. A metal casket can take hundreds of years to break down completely, and paints and polishes can contaminate soils. Hardwoods used in the creation of caskets are often harvested from rainforests. A concrete vault requires energy and resources to produce and install.

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Cremation may seem like an environmentally sound alternative, but the length and



Belmont's Highland Meadow Cemetery.

MEG MUCKENHOUT

## Green Funeral Resources

Green funeral planning  
[www.mourningdovestudio.com](http://www.mourningdovestudio.com)

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern MA  
[fcaemass.org](http://fcaemass.org)

How to prepare for a green funeral  
[fcamass.org/FHs/checkbook.pdf](http://fcamass.org/FHs/checkbook.pdf)

Belmont Cemetery Division  
[www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public\\_Documents/BelmontMA\\_Cemetery](http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_Cemetery)

Green Cemeteries in the US  
[www.greenburials.org/FAQ.htm](http://www.greenburials.org/FAQ.htm)

intensity of the heat required (one to two hours at 1400-2100 degrees Fahrenheit) uses a considerable amount of energy and produces polluting byproducts including mercury. Belmont cemeteries do not allow ashes to be scattered, so they must be buried. At Belmont's Highland Meadow Cemetery, cremation lots are the same size as internment lots so cremation saves little space—unless you share the lot. Belmont allows up to four burials of ashes on a Highland Meadow cremation plot, while internment plots are limited to just one or two caskets.

### Cemetery Management Matters

While there are no truly green cemeteries in Massachusetts, Belmont's Highland Meadow Cemetery does offer some aspects of environmentally friendly internment. A truly green

cemetery does not use chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and the grounds have a natural appearance without formal landscaping and provide better habitat for wildlife than lawns. A manicured lawn with upright headstones is considered to be a break in an otherwise natural-looking landscape.

A green cemetery typically eschews upright headstones in favor of flat, natural stone markers, small plantings or no markings whatsoever (GPS coordinates are provided instead). Highland Meadow cemetery on Concord Avenue follows this model to a certain extent. Only flat stone markers are permitted, and the grounds imitate nature with meadow and woodland burial areas. Landscaping equipment is used to keep the meadow from becoming overgrown, but chemical herbicides and fertilizers are not used.

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**The state of Massachusetts does not require embalming, and shrouds and biodegradable caskets are legally acceptable**

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The state of Massachusetts does not require embalming, and shrouds and biodegradable caskets are legally acceptable. The town of Belmont requires a concrete liner for all burials in town cemeteries to ensure that the grave sites don't sink over time, thus a truly green burial is not possible here. However, the Town does permit liners to be bottomless, which enables remains to come into contact with the earth.

While it may not be a favorite topic, what happens to our bodies after death is a deeply personal decision that deserves consideration. Weighing our options, green or otherwise, and communicating our preferences to those who will likely be charged with managing our burials helps to relieve stress and bring meaning to the ceremonies.

Dan Lech is an 11-year Belmont resident, wine professional, and musician who is attempting to think globally and act locally.



# To Save Birds, Grow Plants that Feed Insects

## Native Plants Support Native Wildlife

By Meg Muckenhoupt

All over the country, thousands of species of birds, frogs, salamanders, spiders, and butterflies are at risk but every landowner has the power to save them. “We can do conservation right in our own back yards,” said Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware professor of entomology. Tallamy spoke about his book, *Bringing Nature Home*, for Grow Native Cambridge in June.

Tallamy studies insects and the “food web,” the chain of nutrition from leaves to bugs to birds. Over the past three centuries, human development has largely replaced the native plants that support the food web with plants that bugs can’t eat, Tallamy said.

There are between 32 and 40 million acres—62,500 square miles—of lawn in the United States today, 4 million linear miles of roads, and 43,480 square miles of blacktop. Agriculture consumes 41 percent of American land, and urban and suburban development occupy another 54 percent.

Most of the remaining space is too “high or dry” to support much life; it’s in the mountains or desert. The natural areas that are preserved

generally encompass less than 50 acres, so small that wild species lose genetic diversity, and begin to die off. “Our natural areas are not large enough to sustain nature,” Tallamy declared. The result: more than 4,000 species in the U.S. are considered endangered, and the total number of birds in the U.S. has declined by more than 45% since 1965.

## Reweaving the Food Web

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” said Tallamy. The way to save species is to increase the carrying capacity of the suburban and urban areas that is, the ability to support life.

There are plenty of green plants in the “leafy suburbs” now, but most of them can’t support the insects that support birds. The problem is that plants are designed not to be eaten. They fill their leaves with various bitter toxins to keep insects away. Over the course of thousands of years, American caterpillars and insects have evolved to be able to digest the toxins of certain types of plants. Some of these plants are very popular with insects; oak tree leaves are eaten by caterpillars of 534 different types of moths and butterflies, cherries by 456 species.

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In general, native plants can support 20 times more species than non-native plants; more than 80 percent of non-native plant species don’t support any insects at all.

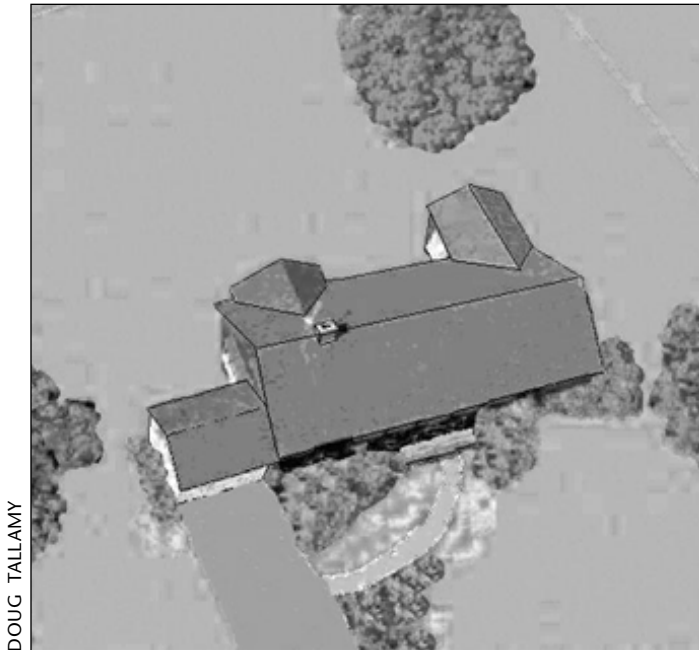
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Unfortunately, most suburban landscaping consists of a limited variety of “pest-free” plants that evolved in Europe or Asia. They produce different toxins than American plants, and the local bugs can’t eat them. In general, native plants can support 20 times more species than non-native plants; more than 80 percent of non-native plant species don’t support any insects at all. When we plant an Asian weigala shrub instead of a native blueberry bush, we’re functionally starving 95 percent of the local insects. Birds can’t find enough caterpillars to feed to their young. Large species such as bears



DOUG TALLAMY

Lepidoptera Trail, University of Delaware.



The first drawing (left) shows a typical suburban house surrounded by lawn. In the second drawing (middle), lawn is preserved for specific uses near the house; the rest is tree/shrubs. The third drawing (right) shows how neighboring yards can provide interconnected habitat.

can have problems too; insects make up 23 percent of their diet.

Even plants that seem butterfly-friendly can't help local insects if native plants aren't growing nearby. Buddleias, otherwise known as butterfly bush, provide nectar to dozens of types of butterflies, but not a single variety of North American caterpillar can eat its leaves.

In theory, over time, local insects should be able to adapt and eat non-native lawn grass and shrubs, but they may become extinct first. The invasive *Phragmites* or common reed—the eight-foot-tall reed that dominates most fresh-water ditches by roadsides—has been found in North America for 300 years, but only five species of insects here can eat it. In its native Europe, it supports 170 species of insects.

### **“We can do conservation...in our yards!”**

“Planting natives is a ‘grass-roots’ approach to conservation,” said Tallamy. He titled his book *Bringing Nature Home* (Timber Press, 2009) because landowners can do just that; plant native species that support the food web.

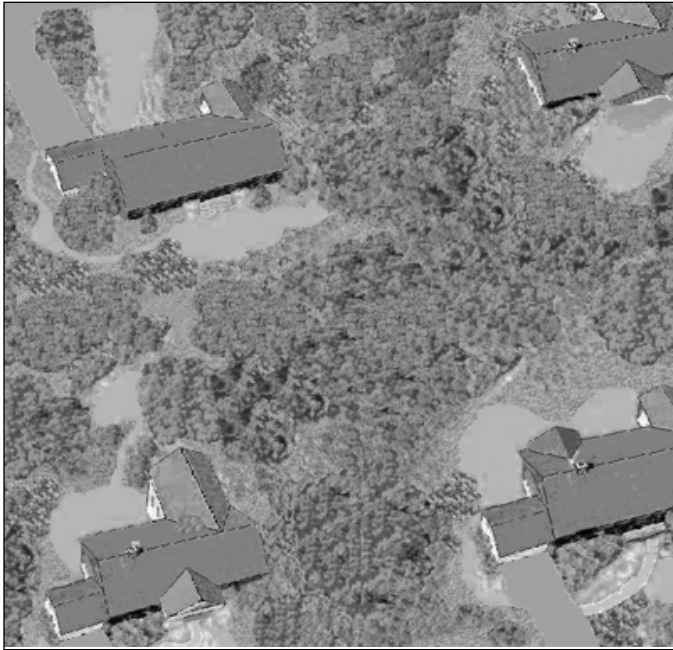
That doesn't mean having a forest in your yard, or a messy “wild” look. What it does mean is reducing the size of your lawn in favor of paths through denser plantings. “If we could replant half the lawn in this country, that would

be 20 million acres,” Tallamy said. Tallamy showed illustrations of how suburban back yards could share wild spaces, and photographs of the University of Delaware's “Lepidoptera Trail,” a wildflower meadow that took less than a year to grow.

But planting oaks, cherries, and bee balm flowers is just the beginning. Homeowners also need to start thinking about how to make their yards friendly to insects at all stages of life. For example, rake up all the leaves in your yard in the fall, and you rake up the entire habitat for a type of insect called arthropods. Those arthropods' hard exoskeletons give thrushes the calcium they need to make healthy eggs. Leave some of the leaves, and the birds will benefit, and your yard will, too. “People rake up their leaves, then go back to Home Depot for mulch, fertilizer, and hoses,” when the leaves can serve as water-conserving mulch and fertilizer all in one, Tallamy explained.

The idea is to “build a balanced community,” with both insect plant-eaters and their predators. Tallamy showed a picture of the dreaded tomato hornworm, a caterpillar that can devastate one of the most popular garden plants. Tallamy thought about killing that hornworm until he saw the tiny eggs on its back—eggs of a parasitic





moth that would kill the hornworm once they hatched.

A balanced community is not the same as “letting nature take its course,” Tallamy said. About 33 percent of plants in this country are non-native, and many of them are out-competing natives—partly because they are not kept in check by local insects. “We have got to fight back,” Tallamy stated. “It will take managing, [but] these are managed areas now.”

We can manage our remaining landscapes to species extinction, or we can create healthy refuges for our native ecosystem. It’s our choice.

Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*.

## Environmental Events

**Western Greenway Trail Building Dates**  
**Saturdays July 10, July 24, and August 21,**  
**8:30 am-4 pm.**

Build bridges and bike trails in construction sessions jointly sponsored by Waltham Land Trust, Friends of the Western Greenway, and the New England Mountain Biking Association. Information: 781-893-3355, [info@walthamlandtrust.org](mailto:info@walthamlandtrust.org), [www.walthamlandtrust.org/events](http://www.walthamlandtrust.org/events). *Register for location.*

**Jack Johnson Concert with CRWA**  
**Saturday, July 10, 5:30 pm.**

The Charles River Watershed Association is teaming up with Jack Johnson on his 2010 To The Sea Tour and All At Once, a social action network connecting nonprofits with people who want to become active in their local and world community. All At Once comes to life at every Jack Johnson concert in the Village Green, a collection of interactive booths where you can get educated, get inspired, and connect face-to-face with us and other local and national non-profits. Information: [www.crwa.org](http://www.crwa.org), [charles@crwa.org](mailto:charles@crwa.org), 781-788-0007. Comcast Center, 885 S. Main St., Mansfield, MA.

**Fresh Pond’s Woodland Garden**  
**Tuesday, July 13, 6-7:30 pm**

The Woodland Garden has been planted primarily with species that historically (prior to the arrival of European settlers) were native to what is now Middlesex County. The plants will be labeled, and the garden stewards will be there to talk with you. No dogs, please. Registration required. Free. Information: [www.friendsoffreshpond.org](http://www.friendsoffreshpond.org), [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com), 617-349-6489. *Woodland Garden entrance, ¼ mile counterclockwise from Water Department parking lot.*

**Fireflies are Fun**

**Tuesday, July 13, 8:15-9:45 pm.**

Learn about fireflies indoors at the Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, then search for fireflies outside around the sanctuary. Suitable for families. Massachusetts Audubon members \$6, non-members \$8. Registration required. Information: [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org). 617-489-5050. *Habitat, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

**Somerville ArtBeat 2010: Water Festival**  
**Friday, July 16 – Saturday, July 17**

The 2010 ArtBeat theme is “Water.” Expect exhibits on the Mystic River and other area waterways. Information: [www.somervilleartscouncil.org/programs/artbeat/](http://www.somervilleartscouncil.org/programs/artbeat/). *Davis Square, Somerville.*



## Volunteer Water Chestnut Removal

**Saturday, July 17, 10 am-2 pm.**

Come canoe and volunteer to help remove invasive plants from the Charles River! Water chestnuts were spotted in the Lakes District of the Charles in late May. Space is limited; registration is required.

Information: [www.crwa.org](http://www.crwa.org), [charles@crwa.org](mailto:charles@crwa.org), 781-788-0007. *Charles River Canoe and Kayak, 2401 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton.*

## Creating Backyard Biodiversity Workshop

**Sunday, July 18, 1-4:30 pm.**

This lecture and field tour is an opportunity to share the experiences of a homeowner who has spent 20 years creating and sustaining a variety of microhabitats in a suburban backyard. His three-quarter acre "sanctuary" that began as an empty building lot now has a meadow, shrubland thicket, woodland, and a small pond and marsh. \$28 New England Wild Flower Society members, \$32 non-members. Information: [www.newfs.org](http://www.newfs.org), 508-877-7630. *Location given with registration.*

## Beekeeping and the Landscape: A Delicate Balance

**Wednesday, July 21, 5:30 pm.**

Take a "bee's-eye" view of the world and learn about the annual cycle of honey bee colonies, both in the wild and in a maintained hive. View Grow Native Cambridge's demonstration hive (without bees) and discuss these amazing and beneficial insects. Information: [grownativecambridge.org](http://grownativecambridge.org), 617-354-0502. *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge.*

## An Evening Walk in the Upper Cambridge Watershed

**Monday, July 26, 6-7:30 pm.**

Chip Norton, Cambridge Watershed Manager, will give a tour of Cambridge-owned land that is part of the upper Cambridge Watershed. The carpool leaves from the Water Department parking lot promptly at 6 pm. Long pants and shoes or boots are recommended. Registration required. Free. Information: [www.friendsoffreshpond.org](http://www.friendsoffreshpond.org), [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com), 617-349-6489. *Water Purification Facility front door, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

## Insects and Ice Cream

**Wednesday, August 4, 6-7:30 pm.**

Enjoy ice cream, then use sweep nets in Habitat's meadow to see what wonderful creatures you can find! Listen for cicadas and crickets, look for grasshoppers and spiders, and see how many different kinds of beetles you can find. Massachusetts Audubon members \$7, non-members \$9. Registration required. Information: [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org), 617-489-5050. *Habitat, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

## Fresh Pond Reservation Walkabout

**Monday, August 9, 6-7:30 pm.**

Chip Norton, Watershed Manager for the Cambridge Water Department, will give tours of Fresh Pond Reservation's conservation areas that have been or are scheduled to be restored. Registration required. Free. Information: [www.friendsoffreshpond.org](http://www.friendsoffreshpond.org), [friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com](mailto:friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com), 617-349-6489. *Walter J Sullivan Water Purification Facility Front Door, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

## Summer Evening Mushroom Walk

**Wednesday, August 11, 6-7:45 pm.**

Join a Habitat naturalist for a casual walk on the sanctuary to find a variety of fungi from puffballs to stinkhorns and a few surprises along the way. Massachusetts Audubon members \$12, non-members \$15. Registration required. Information: [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org), 617-489-5050. *Habitat, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

## Nighthawk Watch

**Wednesday, August 25, 6:15 pm-8 pm.**

The fall migration of the common nighthawk occurs each year over a relatively short period of time. These interesting birds move south while hunting insects at twilight. Massachusetts Audubon members \$12, non-members \$15. Registration required. Information: [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org), [habitat@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitat@massaudubon.org), 617-489-5050. *Highland Farm entrance to Habitat, Somerset Street, Belmont.*

## Edible Landscape Design & Maintenance: A Walking Tour

**Saturday, August 28, 10am-12:30pm**

Join tour guide, Benjamin Crouch, for a walking tour of EarthWorks urban orchards in Jamaica Plain. The tour will begin at the Curley School and will highlight five different sites (covering approximately 1 ½ miles). Participants will look at the ecological functions of the sites, design and planting choices, innovations in and challenges to maintenance, and get to sample some of the fruit, including both antique and modern cultivars of apples, pears, plums, and peaches. Registration is limited. \$20 Ecological Landscaping Association members, \$25 non-members. Information: [www.ecolandscaping.org](http://www.ecolandscaping.org), [ELA.info@comcast.net](mailto:ELA.info@comcast.net), 617-436-5838. Curley School, 493 Centre Street, Jamaica Plain.

Bill McKibben talks about his book *Eaarth*  
**Sunday, August 29, 7:30 pm.**  
 The Lexington Global Warming Action Coalition is

proud to sponsor a talk by Lexington native and climate activist Bill McKibben about his new book, *Eaarth*. Books will be available for sale and signing. Free. Information: [lexgwac.org](http://lexgwac.org), [info@lexgwac.org](mailto:info@lexgwac.org). Cary Memorial Hall, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue, Lexington.



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