



Globe Critique Spurs Town Sewerage Review

Belmont Makes Progress, But There's Still Work To Do

By Anne-Marie Lambert and Frank Frazier

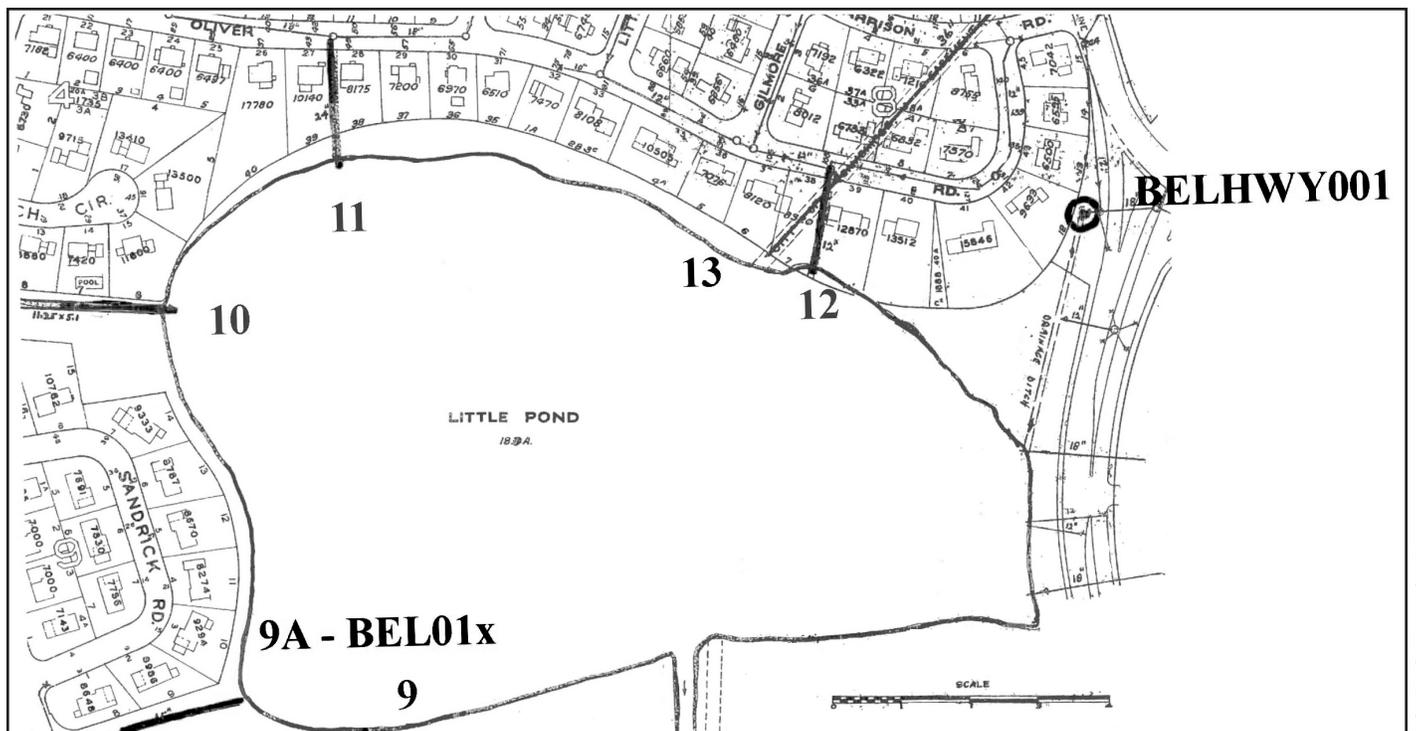
Have you seen the sewer today?

This past summer, a *Boston Globe* editorial (“Belmont Needs to Clean Up Its Act,” August 14, 2015) caused the Belmont selectmen to request a presentation on the town’s sewer and storm drain systems. Belmont’s director of community development Glenn Clancy welcomed the opportunity. He took issue with *Globe* author Alan Wirzbicki’s comparison of Belmont’s \$8 million in sewer expenditures dating from a 1998 Notice of Violation from the EPA. He cited the expenditures of Cambridge and Revere, both of which have much more significant pollution issues

than Belmont. Cambridge spent \$100 million addressing the requirements of a court order related to combined sewage overflow issues. Revere spent \$50 million under a federal consent decree to address their severely undersized storm water infrastructure.

Clancy also noted that while Belmont is the only town under a notice of violation, EPA has used more drastic tools with other towns in the Mystic River watershed.

At the January 11th Board of Selectmen’s meeting, Clancy presented positive news about repairs to the town’s sewer and stormwater infrastructure.



Little Pond and the outfalls (9-13) where data was collected. (An outfall is the discharge point of a stormwater pipe into a body of water.)

Contamination Sources Hard To Find

It is a daunting job to find and fix underground problems that contribute to contamination of ponds and streams. However, with the right approach and effort, Belmont can ensure its ponds and streams contain clean water. Clancy's comprehensive presentation described the work accomplished so far, summarized overall costs and benefits, and listed the continuing effort needed to resolve remaining issues and maintain a clean water system. The selectmen listened to the presentation as well as questions and comments from the citizens and appeared deter-

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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 info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

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mined to assume responsibility for ensuring the town had clear goals for reducing pollution as well as strategic guidance for how to meet them.

Based on October 2015 measurements, water quality has improved at key stormwater outfalls into Little Pond, showing that recently completed repair work has reduced the amount of sewage that had previously contaminated it (see map on page 1).

Of the seven outfalls identified as exceeding the EPA's *e. coli* threshold in 1999, three were cleared before 2015, three showed dramatic improvement in October 2015 (from over 120,000/100 ml to under 3,000/100 ml), and one showed marginal improvement (from 4,000/100 ml to 3,600/100 ml). There were also improvements at outflows along Wellington Brook, Atkins Brook, and other locations. The town still has a long way to go to get all outflow measurements below the EPA's *e. coli* threshold of 235/100ml—there are 16 outflows draining into the Mystic River watershed. Belmont needs to take additional measures to ensure that inadequate stormwater management on public and private property does not compromise ambient water quality in brooks and streams.

Deteriorating Sewer Lines

Clancy explained that the two main causes of stormwater quality issues in Belmont are deterioration of the town's 76 miles of sanitary sewer mains (and 76 miles of connecting laterals—the pipes between homes and a sewer main), and illegal connections of sanitary sewer services directly into the storm drain system. Both are expensive to detect with the closed circuit TV (CCTV) and the sampling technologies currently used by the town's engineering consultants. The town spent a record \$300,000 on detection and sewer repair this year, completing a \$2.3 million multi-year repair project.

Although significant improvements have been made, more work is yet to be done. Clancy proposes spending about \$400,000 to put in place a systematic inspection and repair process for next year. Over the next five years, his plans will likely include two more major projects totaling \$4.5 million.

The town is considering a new bylaw to require inspection of stormwater connections

upon the sale of a residential property. According to town counsel, this requires a Home Rule Petition to the state government, an expense the selectmen need to authorize. However, this cost should be significantly lower than detecting and fixing problems after the fact.

Strategies for Funding

Clancy's presentation included detailed drainage maps and costs to date showing how the town's overall strategy uses three distinct programs to fund projects:

1. *Borrowing money at a low rate*

EPA/DEP Clean Water Projects to rehabilitate sanitary sewer and storm drains through the DEP's Clean Water State Revolving Fund, a program which provides loans at a borrowing rate of 2% over 20 years.

2. *Zero-interest loans and grants*

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority I/I Removal Projects to eliminate infiltration (groundwater and lateral stormwater connections) and inflow (e.g., illegal connection of roof drains and sump pumps to the sanitary sewer system). Detection starts, using CCTV, with flow monitoring in sewer pipes during storms, followed by an investigation to determine the upstream source of spikes in the flow. Funding under this program has taken place in phases that started out with a 45/55% mix of grants versus zero-interest loans through phase 8, followed by a 75/25% mix in phases 9 and 10.

3. *Coordinated road repairs*

Pavement Management Program Repairs to fund underground infrastructure repairs in coordination with planned pavement repairs.

Clancy's presentation included a detailed description of the 2011 Winn Brook stormwater infrastructure project, which appears to have prevented sewage-laden flooding during major storms. He did not discuss the potential for green infrastructure for stormwater management, nor the likely impact of climate change, as described in the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. He did make reference to the upcoming change in MS4 regulations, as well as the potential for a stormwater utility fee to provide additional funding for stormwater projects. Representatives of the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) at the

meeting expressed concerns about the way water quality measurements were explained at the meeting, and stating that outfall measurements were insufficient to assess ambient water quality resulting from all pollution sources. The selectmen, MyRWA, and the many residents in attendance expressed admiration for the thoroughness of the engineering information in Clancy's presentation.

Anne-Marie Lambert is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum and cofounder of the Belmont Stormwater Working Group. Frank Frazier is a Belmont resident and member of the Belmont Stormwater Working Group.

SEEKING CONTRIBUTORS

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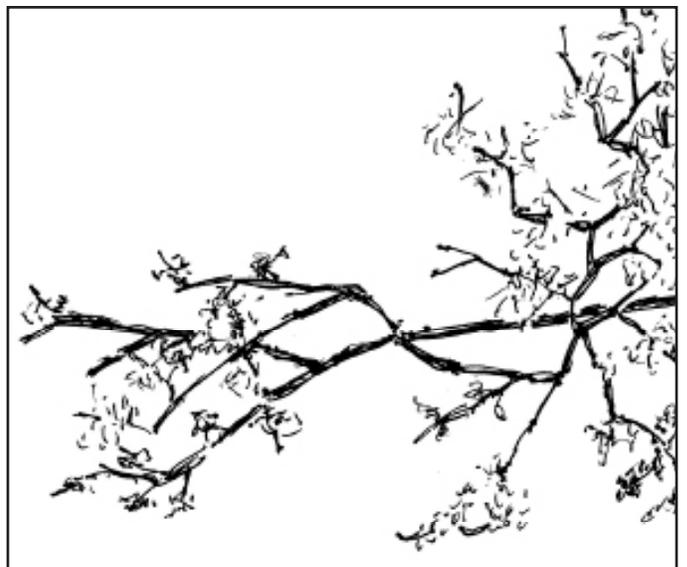
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Selectman Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Election Set for April 5

The Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* sent questionnaires and received responses via email from candidates for Belmont selectman. Below are the responses from incumbent Mark Paolillo, running for reelection to his third term on the board, and Alexandra Ruban, running for the first time. The election is scheduled for April 5.

Commuter Rail

Belmont Citizens Forum: The MBTA recently abandoned the idea of a new station on South Pleasant Street. However, the future of Waverley Station is still in question. While Belmont has no authority over how the MBTA addresses accessibility at Waverley and Belmont Center Stations, the town certainly has an interest. Will you try to engage the MBTA on this issue? Could a community path through Waverley Station connecting to an elevated boarding platform be part of the solution?

Mark Paolillo: The MBTA abandonment of the idea of a consolidated new train station on South Pleasant Street was a clear victory for the residents and commuters of Belmont. The Board of Selectmen held two public hearings with residents on this important matter. The last one, on November 16, 2015, included officials from both the MBTA and MassDOT. The purpose of that meeting was to provide updated information about the Waverley Station and potential options to bring the facility into Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Following those meetings the Board sent a letter to Trish Foley, legislative liaison for the MBTA Rail/Transit Division, expressing strong community support for keeping the Waverley Station open and making it ADA compliant. With the help of our state legislators, Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers, the Board will continue to engage directly with the MBTA on this critical issue for our town.

Yes, a community path that consists of elevated ramps and platforms at the Waverley Station could potentially be part of the solution to make it ADA compliant. That information, developed by members of the Community

Path Implementation Advisory Committee, has already been shared with the MBTA.

Alexandra Ruban: The fate of the Waverley and Belmont Center stations are two issues that underscore Belmont's urgent need of forward-looking and responsible leadership from the Board of Selectmen. Improvement to the Waverley Commuter Rail station in recent years caused the station to lose its grandfathered exemption from the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires that the station be wheelchair-accessible.

Paolillo: The MBTA abandonment of the idea of a consolidated new train station on South Pleasant Street was a clear victory for the residents and commuters of Belmont.

Like many residents, I was troubled by the MBTA's proposal to replace Waverley station with a mega-station on Pleasant Street, which would have increased traffic and deprived residents of easy walking access to a station. However, we should not equate getting the MBTA to walk back its plans with "victory." The MBTA faces serious budget challenges and indicated that it wants to reduce the number of stations on its Fitchburg line. Belmont, with two stations and relatively low ridership at each, is a prime target for consolidation.

One option before the town is to draw on planning work for Waverley Square already completed by our Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee and our Economic Development Committee. This work has yet to be used by the selectmen in advocating for Waverley Square station, but it offers a possible solution: a ramp from the street down to the railbed that is an element of both the community path and proposals for making Waverley Station ADA compliant. Drawing federal and state funding for construction of the path into the mix for the construction of a ramp

could substantially alter the MBTA's calculus in favor of renovation at Waverley.

As selectwoman, I would work with my fellow selectmen and our representatives in state government, Rep. Dave Rogers and Sen. Will Brownsberger to craft a solution that preserves resident access to public transportation.

Community Path Study

BCF: The Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC) is about to issue a request for proposal (RFP) for a feasibility study. What do you expect to learn from that study? How will it bring the town closer to agreement on a path route and design?

Paolillo: The Board of Selectmen will be reviewing and approving the Belmont community path RFP prepared by the CPIAC at one of our March meetings. The RFP, once approved, will be issued by the end of April, with a consultant selected and engaged by the end of May.

The purpose of the study will be to: (1) evaluate potential routes and design features; (2) prepare conceptual designs with cost estimates for path options; (3) propose a recommended solution for the path; and (4) advise on funding steps. The feasibility study is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The study will provide final engineering assessments of the route options evaluated and recommendations for routes and path designs. This will allow the board to make an informed decision and recommend a final route by early next year.

Ruban: The Belmont community path is the largest and most important new infrastructure project in Belmont in the last 50 years. I strongly support its construction—sooner rather than later.

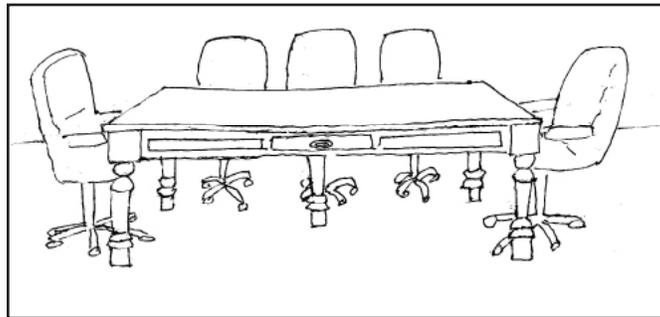
Since this question was written, the CPIAC has completed work on a draft request for proposal (RFP) and sent it to the selectmen to review

before putting it out to bid. It is crucial for the board to finish its review of the RFP so that work can begin choosing an engineering firm to study the path and make use of \$100,000 in state funds to defray the cost of the study.

I appreciate all the work of the CPIAC that went into creating the RFP. However, I worry that, as currently written, it isn't specific enough. Following the lead of the Board of Selectmen, the CPIAC refrained from articulating a vision for the community path in its request. Instead, the town is asking engineering firms to propose feasible route options before actually committing to the survey work. Most RFPs of this sort specify the route(s) to be studied.

Ruban: I appreciate all the work of the CPIAC that went into creating the RFP. However, I worry that, as currently written, it isn't specific enough.

Belmont's Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC), a separate committee, worked for close to two years and held more than three dozen public meetings to solicit public input. I support the work of the CPAC and think we should respect the conclusions of that committee. As Belmont's next selectwoman, I will work



with my colleagues to encourage completion of the necessary engineering study and to resolve what substantive issues remain regarding the community path route. With that complete, the town can access substantial state and federal funds to construct this critically important public infrastructure project.

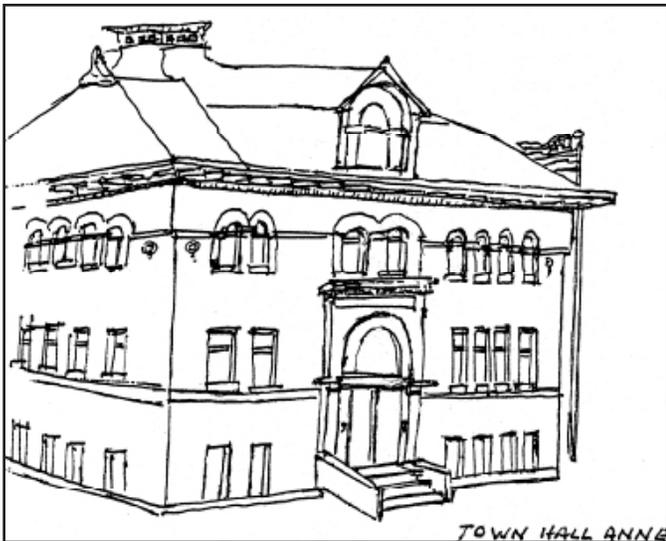
Capital Projects

BCF: The town will soon embark on the most expensive capital project in its history, the renovation/reconstruction of Belmont High School for an estimated \$100 million. A building committee of citizen volunteers selected by

the moderator and approved by Town Meeting will oversee the project. Is that the best process for a project of this scale? How will you work to ensure that the project is well planned and managed?

Paolillo: The renovation of the Belmont High School is a significant step forward in addressing the urgent needs of a school built in 1970. I do believe the appointment of a temporary building committee of citizen volunteers by the town moderator is the best process to oversee this project. The moderator will be certain to appoint individuals with the necessary construction and financial expertise required by a project of this size. In addition, the new MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) requirements for the composition of the building committee will assure that the educational objectives are fully represented.

The temporary building committee will oversee a feasibility study over several months to review and analyze the renovate-or-rebuild options. I, along with the other members of the Board of Selectmen, will direct the town administrator and all relevant town departments



to work closely with the Building Committee, School Committee, and School Department through the feasibility study period to make sure that the new high school design is the right size and addresses the educational needs of our students. issue.

Ruban: The current practice of managing capital projects via a building committee made up of

citizen volunteers has served Belmont well in the past and should continue. Most recently, the \$39 million construction of Wellington Elementary School was overseen by such a committee and was completed on time, on budget, and won last year's Harleston Parker Medal for the most beautiful piece of architecture in Greater Boston. The high school project is three times this size.

Therefore, I believe that we should combine putting our faith in building committees made up of citizen volunteers, and for the BHS committee to have a professional to consult and guide it to provide continuity and expertise for the duration of the project.

Stormwater

BCF: In January, the selectmen were briefed on the town's sewer and storm drain rehabilitation efforts, which have produced notable reductions in bacterial counts in several waterways. Can (and should) the town do more, and, if so, what should be the goal? (e.g., what have been the most cost-effective sewer rehabilitation interventions to date)?

Paolillo: On January 11, 2016, Glenn Clancy, director of community development, presented an overview of the town of Belmont sewer and storm drain system rehabilitation programs. He explained that Belmont currently has three types of programs guiding the rehabilitation of the sanitary sewer and storm drain system as part of its overall strategy targeting corrections to these systems: (1) EPA/DEP Clean Water Projects; (2) MWRA Infiltration/Inflow Removal Projects and; (3) Pavement Management Program Repairs.

Paolillo: We need to develop a long-term plan to repair and rehabilitate the entire sanitary sewer system over a number of years.

Clancy explained to the board that the town of Belmont Alewife/Mystic outfalls (which should contain only rain from storm events) also contains pollutants from leaks in our sanitary sewer collection system. In addition, they contain contaminants such as animal

waste, chemicals from fertilizers, and pesticides from runoff from roads and yards. We have made progress in reducing these pollutants and contaminants, but more needs to be done to strengthen the integrity of our sanitary sewer system.

We need to develop a long-term plan to repair and rehabilitate the entire sanitary sewer system over a number of years. We also need to develop plans to reduce the amount of storm water runoff going into the drainage system. The Stormwater Working Group, led by Anne-Marie Lambert, has been working on a number of initiatives to address this. We should continue to work closely with this group on these initiatives. Finally, we need to establish a Stormwater Advisory Group, comprised of experts, to work with the town in the development of a strategic plan to deal with this issue.

Ruban: Unfortunately, the EPA's 1998 and 2013 violation notices (as well as new requirements coming out in 2016) leave Belmont with little choice but to do more to manage the town's sewer and stormwater outflows. At the current spending rate (\$4.5 million over the next five years) the town will not solve the problem fast enough to meet federal and state requirements.

I support the Belmont Stormwater Working Group's recommendations, for example, to incorporate green infrastructure in planning and to coordinate with Cambridge on their Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and with Arlington to manage outflow from Spy Pond.

Our town government can explore the feasibility of other measures to help identify and remove illegal sump pump and sewer pipe connections and do more to involve ordinary residents in solving this problem. The first step is informing Belmont residents about how they can help improve water quality and reduce flooding risk.

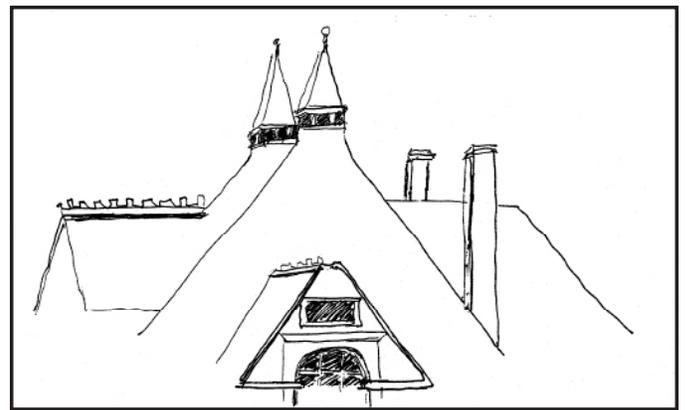
As Belmont's selectwoman, I will draw on the expertise of the Mystic River Watershed Association and surrounding towns in helping to formulate Belmont's long-term policy and strategy.

Sustainable Energy

BCF: The Town of Belmont received \$150,000 as a Green Communities award in 2014 for energy

conservation in town facilities. Would the town benefit from investing in more conservation and sustainable energy? Should Belmont Light retain its net metering policy to actively encourage residential rooftop solar power? Should the town or Belmont Light have its own renewable energy sources, like a photovoltaic array at the former incinerator site?

Paolillo: In December, 2014, Belmont joined 136 other Massachusetts cities and towns in receiving a Green Communities Designation from the State Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Department of Energy Resources. Today there are 155 communities that have achieved this designation. This designation



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was the result of the state approving Belmont's application to become a Green Community because we met the five criteria outlined by the state. Those criteria include establishing a municipal energy use baseline and a program to reduce our energy use by 20% within five years. The town will continue to invest in conservation and sustainable energy initiatives in accordance with our Green Communities designation.

The Board of Selectmen, acting as the Light Board, adopted the recommendations of the Temporary Net Metering Working Group last fall, which included an updated solar tariff. Current residential solar hosts are grandfathered in to continue to receive retail net metering for all electricity delivered to the Belmont Light distribution system for three years. I believe this was a fair and balanced solution to this longstanding issue.

The board also strongly endorsed and supported the Belmont Goes Solar Campaign

sponsored jointly by the Town of Belmont Energy Committee, Mothers Out Front, Sustainable Belmont, and the Belmont Light Department, with a goal of 100 new solar installation contracts signed by the end of April.

Finally, I have stated publicly that we should seriously consider the installation of a solar farm to be used for municipal energy at the former incinerator site if deemed economical.

Ruban: The town would certainly benefit from investing in more conservation and sustainable energy. For example, Selectman Paul Solomon's success more than a decade ago in getting Belmont to sign up with an energy services corporation (ESCO) has saved well over \$100,000 each year. (ESCOs recommend and implement energy-saving changes for which payback is guaranteed by the company over the life of the contract.) That was low-hanging fruit. Belmont could do more to increase its energy efficiency, saving taxpayer money and helping the environment.

Belmont Light is on the right track with its current solar credit policy. The next step should be a comprehensive net metering policy that will encourage more residents and businesses to make the switch to solar power. With the state's SREC II allocation drying up, it is more important than ever to adopt better policies, such as full retail net metering and annual netting as is successfully practiced in most Massachusetts towns.

In the long term, the town and Belmont Light should develop renewable energy sources, including photovoltaic arrays, to get back on track with the town's Climate Action Plan.

Planning Board

Citizens Forum: None of Belmont's Planning Board members are trained planners, nor has the town replaced former Planning Manager Jay Szklut. Does this concern you? If so, what will you do? *[Editor's note: At the time we asked this question, we did not realize that Karl Haglund, a full member of the planning board is indeed a professional planner. We apologize for the error.]*

Paolillo: The Planning Board over the past few years has done very good work for Belmont on many of the issues that have come before it because of the skill and talent of its membership. We will need to determine what the role of

the Planning Board will be over the next three to five years and, based on that, determine what experience, orientation, and skills will be required to fulfill that role. The selectmen have also recently determined that there is now a need to have a full-time planner as part of our Community Development Department. We have included the addition of this position in our preliminary 2017 budget.

Ruban: The long-delayed mixed-use development in Cushing Square illustrates how Belmont is suffering from a lack of proactive planning for the town's future.

Ruban: The long-delayed mixed-use development in Cushing Square illustrates how Belmont is suffering from a lack of proactive planning for the town's future.

While the Vision 21 Implementation Committee is a commendable start, it lacks integration with the town's other committees and decision-making ability. The scope of the Vision 21 goals and the continued community support for those goals suggests an urgent need for comprehensive planning.

We need to draw on our local talent to address our most perplexing planning challenges. As Belmont's next selectwoman, I will work with my colleagues to institute the Vision Plan 2010 recommendations, and lobby hard for the installation of a permanent planning manager who

Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day

Lone Tree Hill is a parcel of Belmont's conservation land that spans close to 100 acres. The site is bounded by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street. This land is open to all and is stewarded through a public/private partnership by the Town, the Land Management Committee, and the Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund.

The Belmont Citizens Forum holds an annual cleanup and trail maintenance day on Lone Tree Hill, where you can work with fellow residents and learn more about the trails that run through it. Look for an announcement about a date soon.

Drought-Resistant Gardens Are Within Reach

By Irene Fairley

When I moved to Winn Street in the early 1970s, the property was mostly covered in lawn, especially the back yard. This neighborhood has a high water table as the Winn Brook goes underground here and weaves over to Little Pond. I think everyone on the street has at least one sump pump. It was not unusual to have water in basements with heavy rainfall or to see water standing above ground.



IRENE FAIRLEY

The Fairley backyard in early spring.

My goal was to replace a large portion of the lawn with plantings that would absorb more of the rainwater and enhance habitat for birds and butterflies. All of the existing trees and shrubs were deciduous. I planted evergreens and perennials, and over several years I tried a variety of flowers. While they were attractive, the perennial beds did need watering, even in the Winn Brook's high water table. Summers are getting hotter, and as I age, I find myself less willing to deal with hoses and watering. I decided to try a "tough love" approach to gardening: let's see which plants survive!

Of course, it's the drought-resistant plants that live. I gradually cut back, and I have not watered perennial beds and shrubs for the past two hot summers. I did give the white dogwood in my front yard a drink during a particularly long drought this past summer because it has to survive afternoon sun. I do not water the grass. Although it may turn brown during dry months,

it comes back eventually if you don't cut it too low. When you let grass grow tall, it grows deeper roots as well, which lets it absorb and retain more moisture during dry periods. If you have gardeners cutting the grass (as I do), you have to negotiate.

Many plants were lost over the years, including heather, thistle, scabiosa, monkshood, and clematis. More importantly, many survived.

The survivors include crocus, columbine, daylily, iris, violet, daisy, phlox, liatris, rudbeckia, mountain mint, geranium, *Cerastium tomentosum* (snow-in-summer), hosta, potentilla, lily of the valley, *Physostegia virginiana* (obedient plant), peony, perennial sweet pea, milkweed, Queen Anne's lace, sage, thyme, chives. The raspberries, blueberries, gooseberries, a Macoun apple tree, and a white peach tree have managed as well. Many shrubs have also thrived, including butterfly bush, mountain laurel, rhododendron, spirea, viburnum, forsythia, potentilla, red osier dogwood, holly, and royal privet. I should add that peat moss and mulch are essential for water retention.

Of course, every spring I wonder what will



IRENE FAIRLEY

Later that year, progress at the Fairley home. reappear and what battles will be waged among the plants over the summer.

The most successful plant by far has been echinacea (coneflower) which is now in five flower beds in three varieties. Purple, white, and yellow coneflowers add color to the garden, make

beautiful long-lived cut flowers, and provide food for butterflies and birds. Goldfinches will come to feed on coneflower seed heads in early spring if you leave them standing through the winter. The birds will also visit all summer once seeds form and well into fall as they prepare to migrate. They will sit on the seed cones, swinging back and forth, and are quite entertaining. Other small birds and animals eat the seeds that fall. And some of those seeds will become new plants.

Echinacea are on the list of “low water-use plants” provided by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority on their web page “Garden and Landscaping Water Conservation Tips,” available at www.mwra.com/comsupport/conservation/gardeningtips.htm. It’s a valuable source of information for planting and maintaining lawns and gardens. I recommend it to all.

Irene Fairley retired from Northeastern University where she was a professor of English and linguistics. She now devotes more time to her art and her children and grandchildren; and, of course, to gardening.



Mountain mint with liatris.

Fernald Site Update

by George A. Darcy III

On October 26, 2015, the Waltham City Council approved a \$1.2 million appropriation for the demolition of 20 non-historic buildings in the northwest quadrant of the 196-acre recently acquired Fernald property. Waltham Mayor Jeannette McCarthy submitted the CPA application for demolition to the Community Preservation Committee.

The buildings that will come down include four Malone Park structures, 11 cottages, Site 5, Site 7, Activity Center, Woodside, and Brookside. The cottages were constructed as a result of Judge Joseph Tauro’s decree for the state to build residential-like structures for the residents of Fernald. Unfortunately, these homes were built on wetlands filled in by the state in the 1970s.

The funding for the demolition comes from a combination of both CPA open space and CPA undesignated reserve funds. The area where the demolition will occur is in the CPA-funded portion of the city’s Fernald acquisition. The demolition of these buildings is the first phase of an effort to daylight streams and restore formerly functioning wetlands. A subsequent RFP will address the detailed design and restoration of the wetlands.

The winning demolition bid of \$968,926 was awarded to the Costello Dismantling Company based in Wareham, MA. The appropriation included a 20% contingency fee. According to the RFP, the demolition work must be completed within 90 days from the date of the notice to proceed. The wetland restoration will provide critical downstream flood storage, and add additional wildlife habitat and passive recreational opportunities. There is a possibility to provide up to 1.8 million gallons of flood storage in these restored wetlands.

George A. Darcy III is a Waltham resident, a Waltham city councilor, and co-founder of the Waltham Land Trust.

Construction Continues on the Uplands

“The Royal” Divides Former Natural Wildlife Habitats



EPSILON ASSOCIATES

A view of the “wildlife habitat replication area” next to the building site of The Royal.

By *Anne-Marie Lambert*

The first red-winged blackbirds now returning to the fields by Little River may not think much of the “wildlife habitat replication area” alongside the newly constructed buildings at the Uplands.

This newly seeded replication area sits between the former Little River, now a large drainage ditch next to Frontage Road, and one of the four-story Tyvek-wrapped buildings that comprise The Royal, formerly named The Residences at Acorn Park. In a contested 2014 ruling, the Massachusetts Superior Court determined that this replication area (next to what amounts to a Route 2 drainage ditch running under Acorn Park Drive) will suit the birds and beasts of this area adequately and in accordance with the Wetlands Protection Act. The replication area is some distance from the remaining forest and wetlands habitat at the rear of the site. It’s doubtful a beaver that took up residence on today’s Little River would find it.

According to the affordable unit application for residence at The Royal, the first units are expected to be ready for occupancy in June/July/August 2016.

The habitat replication area is some distance from the remaining forest and wetlands at the rear of the site.

Approximately 220 applications were submitted for residence in one of the 60 affordable units before the February 25 deadline. A lottery scheduled for March 15 will select winners from among those qualified. Maximum annual household income limits for applying were \$34,500 (1 person), \$39,400 (2 people), \$44,350 (4 people), \$53,200 (5 people), and \$57,150 (6 people), with preference for Belmont residents, employees, and families with students



EPSILON ASSOCIATES

Apartments at The Royal under construction.

in the Belmont public schools. Expected annual household incomes and rents for the various size units are shown below:

	Rents (w/o utilities)	Expected annual household income
Studio	\$747	\$22,410
1 Bedroom	\$770	\$23,000
2 Bedroom	\$899	\$26,970
3 Bedroom	\$1024	\$30,720

In addition to many building construction tasks, an occupancy permit requires completion of underground stormwater and sewage storage tanks, utility work routed around Little Pond, traffic mitigation measures on intersections such as Brighton Street at Lake Street, arrangements to truck out sewage for two weeks in case of severe flooding, and environmental improvements such as invasive species removal.

Environmental monitoring reports by Epsilon Associates are submitted on a monthly basis to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), providing results and photographs from weekly inspections regarding compliance with regulations affecting construction. The Belmont Conservation Commission also receives a copy, though their authority was superseded by the DEP during legal disputes in 2014.

A drive to this edge of Belmont reveals that the three buildings under construction now dominate the landscape at the intersection of Frontage Road and Acorn Park Drive. Foundations for the remaining two buildings have recently been poured next to the muddy fire path behind the building site. The former ice rink site across the street from Frontage Road continues to be used by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for the storage of soil and construction vehicles associated with DCR projects in the area, as it has been for about 10 years. The long-term plan is for the rink site to be returned to a natural forested state. Other construction nearby includes new Bulfinch buildings at the Cambridge end of Acorn Park Drive, and Route 2 stormwater mitigation measures underway by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Plants, birds, and animals already experienced a major habitat change in October 2014 with the removal of six acres of private forest from the building site. If all goes according to plan, by October 2016 new residents in the 298 units, as well as Route 2 commuters, downstream neighbors, and Belmont service providers such



MICHELE TANNER

Anne-Marie Lambert (second from left) reads poetry at the Pine Allee, with John Perkins Cushing (as impersonated by Bob Tanner) and 25 local enthusiasts, participating in a February 21 nature poetry walk on Lone Tree Hill conservation land in Belmont. Lambert is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

as the School Department, Fire Department, and Department of Public Works will all notice habitat changes of a different kind. While the unexpected discovery of a glacial kame of fine sand under much of the construction site will provide better drainage than originally anticipated, it remains unclear whether stormwater management plans based on 1958 precipitation data will be sufficient to handle increasingly intense storms and minimize downstream flooding.

It is also unclear whether the new residents will rely more on the MBTA rather than cars,

whether new traffic lights will have an appreciable effect on the already congested streets nearby, and whether Belmont's emergency vehicles will need a boat to reach the site during rush-hour congestion.

Anne-Marie Lambert is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Environmental Events

World Water Day Connector 2016

Tuesday, March 22, 5-7:30PM

Water is a hot topic and Greater Boston is home to some of the world's leading water organizations. Join BeCause Water at the World Water Day Connector to find job and volunteer opportunities within the field of water. Since the United Nations enacted World Water Day in 1993, the event has been recognized as an opportunity to celebrate Earth's most precious resource that is often taken for granted.

Impact Hub Boston, 50 Milk Street, 17th Floor, Boston.

Fresh Pond Owl Prowl

Monday, March 28, 6:30-7:30PM

Though they are seldom seen or heard, the Reservation has owls. By day, most are likely to be hiding or sleeping somewhere secure. Join staff on an evening stroll to Weir Meadow to listen and hoot for owls. Following our walk, we will return indoors to explore the adaptations owls have that make them such impressive hunters. RSVP to mwong@cambridgema.gov. *Fresh Pond Reservation.*

COP21 Paris Climate Talks Unconference

Tuesday, March 29, 8:30-11:30AM

This unconference will gather a community of experts from a variety of organizations and firms. Panelists who attended the Paris climate talks will be present, with break-out groups led by local issue experts. Panel and breakout sessions will focus on critical topics and will provide perspectives from various professional backgrounds. *Climate Action Business Association, "Milky Way" Conference Room, 50 Milk St. 17th Floor, Boston.*

Boston Green Drinks

Tuesday, March 29, 6-8PM

Join the conversation with sustainability professionals and hobbyists. Boston Green Drinks builds a community of sustainably minded Bostonians, provides a friendly forum for exchange of sustainability career resources, and serves as a central point of information about emerging green issues. We support the exchange of ideas and resources about sustainable energy, environment, food, health, education. *Scholars Pub, 25 School St. Boston.*

The Dynamic City: Futures for the Past

Friday & Saturday, April 1-2, 8AM-4PM

This two-day conference explores the unique role of historic preservation in 21st-century cities and how it contributes to economic vitality. Co-hosted by the BU Initiative on Cities, the BU American and New England Studies Program, and Historic New England, the event brings together public, private, and academic leaders to examine these issues and more, featuring keynote addresses from Mayor Joe Anderson of Liverpool, UK, and Maurice Cox, former mayor of Charlottesville, VA, and current planning director for the City of Detroit.

Info: bit.ly/1TzpodN. *Boston University Photonics Center, 8 Saint Mary's Street, 9th Floor, Boston.*

Sustainable Belmont Meeting

Wednesday, April 6, 7-8:30 PM

Come to Sustainable Belmont's regular monthly meeting to learn about their work. Info: www.sustainablebelmont.net. *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Panel Discussion on Carbon Pricing

Wednesday, April 13, 7PM-9PM

The Newton Chapter of 350 Mass presents an informative program moderated by Quinton Zondervan and featuring State Senator Mike Barrett, MAICCA leaders Reverend Fred Small and Minister Mariama White-Hammond, Emily Norton, and Bonni Widdoes. Contact Mark Leicester, mleicester1@gmail.com. The Eliot Church of Newton, UCC, 474 Centre St., Newton.

Sustainable Belmont Regular Meeting

Wednesday, May 25, 7-8:30PM

Sustainable Belmont's regular monthly meeting. Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

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Join us in helping to maintain Belmont's small-town atmosphere.

- Writing or editing for the Newsletter
- Community path work
- Newsletter mailings
- Event organizing

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March/April 2016



IRENE FAIRLEY

Purple cone flowers and daisies--coming soon.

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