



What is the Future of McLean's Open Land?

By Sue Bass

Piece by piece, the remaining open land in Belmont is being protected—or developed. The Belmont Uplands were bulldozed. The town's last farm has been saved, protected by Lydia Ogilby and her family with an agricultural restriction. A dozen houses are filling what used to be two six-acre estates off Concord Avenue on Belmont Hill. But nearby open space is covered by conservation restrictions, thanks to descendants of the Claflin-Atkins family that once farmed the land, particularly the late Anne Allen.

The fate of two major open areas remains undetermined. Officers of the Belmont Country Club insist that no sale or development is contemplated for their 133-acre property. And McLean Hospital owns 25 fallow acres whose

options-to-buy have expired. Much of the McLean land rezoned in 1999 and approved for redevelopment is already filled with townhouses, called The Woodlands at Belmont Hill. The two remaining parcels of open land, out of 238 acres total, consist of 13 acres rezoned for a large senior complex and 12 acres for a research and development building. Now that options to buy that land from McLean have expired, what is in their future?

So far, nothing. Jeffrey Wheeler, the town's senior planner, says people do ask him casually about them, but the most serious inquiry he knows is a proposal to expand the Woodlands, which would require a zoning change. Michele Gougeon, executive vice president and chief operating officer of McLean, noted that the two

parcels are zoned for very specific activities. "Our hope is that in the longer run we'll be able to do what we originally wanted," Gougeon said.

Here's how this situation came to be. About 20 years ago, McLean was short of money and looked around for ways to make up a shortfall then pegged at \$46 million.

Psychiatric care had changed a lot since McLean opened in 1818. Country air, healthful food, quiet pastimes, and walks were an important part of that care for more than 130 years. McLean even moved from Somerville to Belmont in 1895 because the "tranquil environment, deemed so important in the treatment of mentally ill patients," had been disrupted by development around the old site, according to the hospital's website.



McLean's Upham House (also known as the Upham Memorial Building), right, was turned into condos as part of the Woodlands development.

SUSAN JONES

By the middle of the 20th century, however, drugs and electric shock treatment began to revolutionize psychiatric treatment. Years of hospitalization in tranquil settings, at least for the rich, gave way to much shorter inpatient stays. McLean's cash crunch was amplified by insurance rules limiting payment for inpatient stays. Over several decades, Massachusetts closed 14 state hospitals that treated patients with mental illness, including the Metropolitan State Hospital on the Waltham/Lexington border, which closed in 1992.

By 1995, McLean proposed to do what it had done several times before—sell off land. McLean

had raised cash in 1968 by selling its former farm to the town for open space. Aided by federal and state funds, that became the Rock Meadow conservation land. This time, McLean wanted the land rezoned for sale to developers. The Belmont Selectmen appointed a committee to study the issue. Because Belmont itself had (and has) its own cash crunch, part of the McLean Hospital Land Use Task Force committee's purpose was to increase town tax revenue.

The rezoning that resulted shrunk the McLean Hospital campus to 55 acres. It protected the most striking feature of the historic landscape, the Upham Bowl, and some of the historic buildings. It reserved 14 acres for a second town cemetery, only a part of which is now in use. It allocated 26 acres for high-end residential development, now the Woodlands townhouses, buffered from Mill Street by another 11 acres of private open space. It gave the town 1.34 acres for affordable housing, on which the town's Housing Trust built 40 units in 2009, among the first affordable units built in Belmont in two decades. The rezoning also provided 105 acres of publicly accessible open space, though divided by a substantial road, Olmsted Drive, which cuts a wide swath through the woods overlooking the south end of Pleasant Street.

Two more developments allowed by the rezoning were particularly controversial. One is a senior housing complex of 480 units, with parking and a retail area of up to 60,000 square feet, or two-thirds the size of Belmont Center.

The other is a research and development/office building of 150,000 square feet, plus a parking garage. They would generate many thousands of vehicle trips a day travelling down Olmsted Drive onto Pleasant Street, and both developments would be visible over the woods from Waverley Square and Clark Hill. On the other hand, they were expected to yield a lot of revenue for both the town and McLean, in addition to \$800,000 in one-time benefits, including traffic signals at the intersection of Pleasant Street and Trapelo Road.

The controversy over this deal led to a town-wide referendum in July 1999 that attempted to repeal the zoning, and years of litigation. It was part of the impetus for founding the Belmont Citizens Forum in the fall of 1999:

Belmont Citizens Forum

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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.



SUSAN JONES

Eliot Chapel, McLean campus, protected under the rezoning agreement.

to improve town planning processes, protect open space, and limit traffic.

Neither development has been built. McLean thought it had a buyer for the land for the senior complex when American Retirement Corp., later taken over by Brookdale Senior Living, proposed to build what was to be called Freedom Commons. The developers went through an extensive site plan review process and then litigation over their affordable housing plans and sewer connection permit.

Then Brookdale began marketing. An attractive card showing a wooded path on the public open space (mislabeling the “beautiful grounds of Freedom Commons”) invited residents to learn more about the proposed community. They collected many \$1,000 deposits—but in 2009 returned the money. The corporation had been hurt by “unfavorable conditions in the housing, credit and financial markets and by deteriorating conditions in the overall economy,” according to their report to the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

The expected buyer of the R&D parcel was less public. Belmont ValueRealty Partners LLC of Cambridge was formed in 2000 as an investment arm of Belmont businessman Joseph J. O'Donnell. The project received site plan approval in December 2001, but no development has appeared. O'Donnell has not replied to

phone messages, but an agent of his confirmed that all options had lapsed.

Estimates Hard to Verify

In 1999, a consultant for the town estimated that the development of the McLean property would yield Belmont an additional \$3 million a year in gross revenue—and, significantly, \$1.2 million in net revenue after expenses. Most of the net revenue was to come from the senior complex; it was thought that for the townhouses, expenses for public school children would offset most of their additional revenue.

Like many projections, those were optimistic. Prices also changed substantially in 16 years. The town houses now sell for about twice the \$625,000 estimated in 1999, and per-pupil school costs are about three times the estimate of \$3,900. Without the senior complex and the R&D development, the gross revenue to the town from the McLean campus in 2015 was just \$1.66 million, including \$28,000 as a payment in lieu of taxes for the affordable housing at Waverley Woods.

It is difficult to assess the town's cost of providing services to the property, including to McLean Hospital itself. Town Administrator David Kale declined even to try. Many speculated in 1999 that providing police and fire services

to McLean then cost the town about the same as the \$512,000 a year that the hospital paid in taxes. Now the hospital pays no taxes, and police and fire costs are presumably higher. The School Department has no easy way to determine public school enrollment from the Woodlands and Waverley Woods. So far, the hoped-for net revenue may be slim or nonexistent.

McLean's finances are reported publicly only as part of those of its parent, Partners Health Care System Inc. However, the sale of the Woodlands property in 2005 is public; the hospital received \$14.7 million, more than \$30 million short of what McLean hoped for in the 1990s. Much else has changed too. Gougeon, the executive vice president, declined to say that the hospital is out of the crisis that drove its rezoning. "In health care, you live month to month," she said. "Psychiatric services are not highly remunerated. I wouldn't say that there's ever a sense that the bad times are over."

Time to Revisit McLean Zoning?

What remains for the town is whether to revisit the zoning of the remaining 25 McLean

acres earmarked for development. The same questions arise as in the 1990s: How likely is development to yield net revenue? Is that worth the increased traffic? Will any surplus even repay the cost of required traffic management devices? And what about the commercial property across south Pleasant Street? Some property owners considered expanding in the past. Can Pleasant Street stand to be squeezed from both sides?

Sami Baghdady, chair of the Belmont Board of Selectmen and a former member of the Belmont Planning Board, said it is time for the community to discuss rezoning the McLean hill, in the context of the commercial property across Pleasant Street. "There seem to be no apparent takers under the current zoning," he said. None of the Pleasant Street property owners are now pressing the town to rezone their land, he said, but the Planning Board needs to look ahead.

Sue Bass was a cofounder of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



BELMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Belmont Historical Society awarded a 2015 David R. Johnson Preservation Award to the Northland Corporation for its adaptive re-use of three buildings on the McLean campus: the South Cottage (above), the McLean Hospital Stables, and Upham House.

Town Meeting Votes \$100K for Path Study

By Meg Muckenhoupt

On June 3, Belmont Town Meeting approved \$100,000 for a feasibility study for a Community Path, a shared-use path for walkers, joggers, bicyclists, in-line skaters, and other non-motorized travel. According to Russell Leino, chair of the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC), it will work on a request for proposals over the summer and expects to engage a design/engineering firm to carry out the study this fall. The results should be available in spring 2016.

"Once the feasibility study is in hand, the next step is to make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen based on that," said Leino.

The point of the feasibility study is to get answers to engineering and legal questions about routes identified by the former Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC), which submitted its final report to the Selectmen in June 2014. There are several "choke points" on these routes where it isn't clear exactly how to build a path.

Leino gave a proposed route crossing Clark Street Bridge as an example. Although the Clark Street Bridge is currently open for foot traffic, there may be different legal requirements for things like the amount of weight it can support or the minimum clearance for trains below if a new community path is constructed there. "I don't know if that's feasible from an engineering perspective," Leino said. "... A feasibility study would tell us if something CPAC recommended just can't be done." Leino also mentioned that there are engineering questions about a proposed underpass connecting the north and south sides of the railroad tracks near Brighton Street. "Is that a \$50 million feature?" Leino asked.

CPIAC will spend the summer prioritizing which of CPAC's path segments are

most important for the feasibility study. "We're not supposed to reinvent them here," Leino said. "We're supposed to look at what CPAC recommended and go from there."

The committee has not come up with a process for ranking them yet but will meet throughout the summer. The public is welcome to attend CPIAC meetings; for upcoming dates, search for CPIAC on the Belmont town web site, www.belmont-ma.gov. "We want to hear from people," Leino said.

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Leino said.

CPIAC is reaching out to other town committees with a stake in a community path to get their input, including the School Committee, the Historic District Commission, and the Conservation Commission.

Currently, Belmont hosts a short community path that connects the Alewife MBTA station in Cambridge to Brighton Street, Belmont. The



The Clark Street Bridge.

MEG MUCKENHOUP

Community Path under discussion is supposed to link that Brighton Street path to Waltham and beyond as a part of the Mass Central Rail Trail, a path which, when completed, will run from Cambridge to Northampton. As of 2015, more than 25 miles of the 104-mile Mass Central Rail Trail have been completed and are open for travel.

Leino was heartened by the Town Meeting vote. "I think we can get there," Leino said. "For me, it's a sign. . . This money wouldn't have been appropriated without the Selectmen putting their weight behind it and making it a priority. It's a big step."

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

MPO Seeks Comments on Plan

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization is seeking comments on its new Long Range Transportation Plan, "Charting Progress to 2040."

The Long Range Transportation Plan will guide investment in the Boston metropolitan region's transportation system for the next 25 years.

The full text of the plan is available at www.ctps.org/drupal/lrtp.

Comments are due by July 24, 2015.

Watertown Greenway to Link Minuteman, Charles River Paths

On June 9, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) held a public meeting to present plans for the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway.

The Greenway is a planned multi-use trail that will run on the former B&M Railroad right-of-way from Concord Avenue, Cambridge, through the Fresh Pond Reservation, under Huron Avenue and Mount Auburn Street, and into Watertown. When complete, it will link Belmont's Brighton Street Path, the Charles River

path system, the Minuteman Bikeway, the Alewife Greenway, and the Mystic River Reservation into a single interconnected off-road path network.

The path is a concept for now. The DCR expects to have a 25% design ready for public review this fall and to begin construction of the Greenway in summer 2016.

For more information, see the Cambridge city web site, www.cambridgema.gov.



School Street Segment 1 of the existing Watertown path as it appeared before construction (left) and after the path was built (right).

Heustis Farm Grew on Uplands Site

By Anne-Marie Lambert

This article is the second in a series of articles about the history of the Belmont Uplands. For Part 1, see "Uplands Area Transformed Over Centuries" in the September/October 2014 Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

We don't know how exactly how Warren Heustis of Putney, Vermont met Lucy Ann Hill of West Cambridge (now Belmont). We do know they married in 1845, and that Warren brought farming skills to Belmont that would turn "useless swamp land" into one of the best performing farms in Belmont, the Heustis Farm. This is their story.

Today it is hard to imagine the Hill Farm where Lucy grew up. It is hard to imagine Belmont, not yet incorporated, without a railroad, without any asphalt or suburban homes, without today's Route 2, and without Acorn Park Drive. A trip to Belmont's one remaining farm, Belmont Acres on Glenn Road, is the best way to visualize what is now Belmont in the mid-1800s.

Hill Family and Railroad Ties

Lucy and her two colorful brothers, Henry Y. Hill and Amos Hill Jr., were descendants of a land-owning family that had lived in Massachusetts since the 1600s.

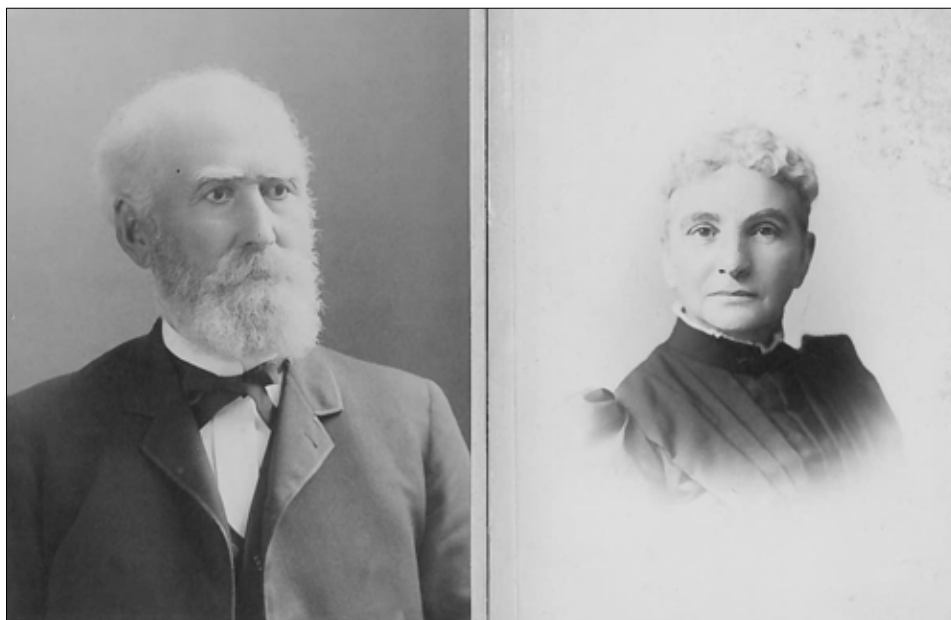
Hill Road ran entirely through Hill family property and led to what is now known as the Belmont Uplands. It started at the main road farmers used to bring goods to Brighton, on Brighton Street, the same place where a shorter Hill Road begins today. It then continued with the Hill Road bridge over Pickerel Brook (now Little River), and on to the future Heustis Farm (now the Belmont Uplands). The decaying bridge piers are still visible from Little River. The spring alewife herring run to Little Pond and Spy Pond

must have been dramatic, and it must have been interesting to watch the nascent ice industry must emerge at the Hittinger ice house next door on Little Pond. A major heron rookery still existed at the present-day Alewife T stop, with a marsh on three sides and two clay pits nearby (today's Yates Pond and Jerry's Pond.) A maple swamp still existed where the Fresh Pond shopping center is today.

As a young adult, Lucy witnessed the building of the "Ice Railroad" from Boston Harbor to Fresh Pond, Waverley, and other stops on the way to Fitchburg. The negotiation of a railroad flag stop at "Hill's Crossing" must have kept family conversations lively. When Amos Hill Sr., decided to give Lucy and her new husband 13 acres behind her brothers' properties, was he anticipating the key role the railroad would play in their future? Did he foresee the 1852 negotiation of a Heustis Farm railroad sub-spur off the Spy Pond Ice spur, which was itself a spur of the Lexington and West Cambridge Railroad ?

Soil and Water

Warren and Lucy Heustis did not have to worry much about irrigation; their land was surrounded by Little Pond, Pickerel Brook, and the Great Marsh. Through photographs and the 1880 tax record, we know there was a windmill



Warren and Lucy Heustis.

HEUSTIS FAMILY

drawing water to the fields, likely from Perch Pond along the Pickerel Brook. The ancient marsh would have ensured the soil was rich in nutrients. However, with all the clay pits nearby, they must have worried about drainage. In fact, we have learned from recent excavations for the foundations of the “Residences at Acorn Park” at the Belmont Uplands that under the first foot or so of soil their farm was sitting atop a giant mound of beach-quality sand, one of the best drainage spots in the area. The presence of this glacial kame was a surprise given the data from 2010 soil borings, but helps explain how Heustis Farm thrived for 100 years. For more information about the soil borings, see “Uplands Geology Makes Development Difficult,” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, November/December 2013.

Pigs, Strawberries, Celery, and More

Amos Hill Sr. soon extended his daughter and son-in-law’s 13 acres to 24. Warren used the land to grow award-winning strawberries, an orchard, and vegetables. He was a very active member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society from

1858 onwards, and other Belmont farmers joined as well, including Elisha Atkins (1854), brother-in-law Henry Y. Hill (1860), and Varnum Frost (1864). Heustis won strawberry prizes for his “Colonel Cheney” strawberries in 1875, and a special prize for “four quarts of the finest berries in form, color and quality” for his “Belmont” strawberries in 1873. He and his son also won awards for their celery, cabbages, spinach, lettuce, turnip-rooted beets, green-flesh melons, and other fruits and vegetables, and exhibited “forced specimens of cucumbers, lettuce, radishes, dandelions and tomatoes” downtown. Heustis later imported short-nosed Yorkshire pigs to establish what became known as the “largest fancy pig farm in this part of the country.”

Meanwhile, the Heustis family at 85 Hill Road in West Cambridge (now Arlington) slowly expanded. Their first child, Freddie, only lived to be three years old (1847-1849). Their daughter L. Malvina arrived in 1851, just as the 10-year debate over incorporating Belmont was getting started. A second daughter, Eveline, arrived around 1858.

The year 1859 must have been especially busy, with the birth of son W. Howard, and preparations for the first annual strawberry festival to mark Belmont’s founding year. Belmont’s first borders extended to include what is now Acorn Park Drive and Alewife Reservation as well as half of Fresh Pond. Soon afterwards, the town’s Underwood family played a key role in developing canning techniques to feed Union soldiers during the War Between the States (1861-1865). Were Heustis vegetables or pigs inside those cans?

In 1873, Heustis & Son went to Madison Square Garden in New York City with their pigs, coming home with awards for “Swine, small white breeds”; first place for the boars “Dandy” and “Hilton,” second and third place for the sows “Mary Belmont” and “Belle Bilton.”

Water Pollution Troubles

The farm may have been affected by a combination of actions which aggravated the barrier effect of railroad embankments that had been built for the spur line. These blockages created a stagnant swamp where there used to be a flowing wetlands. In 1873, Cambridge blocked tidal flow from Alewife Brook at Fresh Pond.



Ad for the Heustis’s Belmont Strawberries.



Sand excavated at the Belmont Uplands, site of the Heustis Farm.

In 1875, Cambridge built a brick aqueduct right next to the farm to carry water from Little Pond all the way to Fresh Pond without touching the swamp itself. In 1876, the Heustis family may have joined Arlington celery farmers in objecting to the change in irrigation flows from the installation of tidal gates on Alewife Brook at Broadway and to a dam where Wellington Brook then flowed into Alewife (near today's Minuteman Bikeway along the Alewife T station). The water traveling from Alewife Brook and Wellington Brook into hay field irrigation ditches made up some of the last cleansing flows of the Great Marsh. The annual expense of dredging the hay fields was justified by sales to the ice industry, which needed the hay for insulation.

Pollution concerns came to a head in 1880, with a successful Petition from the Mayor of Cambridge to Re-Annex Portions of Belmont. Pollution sources included horse manure and tanneries and slaughter houses and human sewage going into Alewife Brook, which passed through the swamp. The mayor's petition was triggered by a slaughterhouse near Fresh Pond, recently authorized by the Belmont board of selectmen. Being a loyal Belmont citizen, I suspect it was a pretext for a plan they had in mind anyway and were just looking for the next excuse to change the border. There was also a slaughterhouse near what is now the site of the Alewife T station in Cambridge dumping into Alewife Brook, which Cambridge's mayor didn't seem to regulate very tightly.

When the Heustis's son Howard married Belle Lancaster of Portland, Maine, in 1881,

the Heustis Farm was still in Belmont, barely. Thanks to the Petition from the Mayor, their hay-farming neighbors along today's Acorn Park Drive and Alewife Reservation had become residents of Cambridge. By then their daughter Malvina had married Jeff Skillings, a Winchester lumber dealer.

Heustis Farm Carries On

In June of 1884, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society took an excursion to visit the ground of W. Heustis & Son, with particular interest in their new breed of late-blooming strawberry, the "Belmont." "Belmont" berries were very large and ripened much later than other strawberries. It was one of the few varieties available in Boston markets in July. Agricultural issues of the day included the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, as well as canning technology to handle an over-supply of tomatoes.

When Warren Heustis Sr. died in 1890 at the age of 72, he had met his first two grandchildren, knew the farm was thriving under his son's care, and was eulogized as a "lover of the rose and an esteemed member of the vegetable committee" of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. Lucy died in 1896 at the age of 75, having met two more grandchildren. They were both buried at Mount Pleasant Street cemetery in Arlington beneath a Heustis family monument decorated with engravings of strawberries and roses.

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

Environmental Events

Community Water Chestnut Removal

**Saturday, July 18, and Saturday, August 8,
9 AM–1 PM**

Help remove an invasive plant from the Mystic River! Volunteers will head out in canoes to hand-pull water chestnuts from the river or stay on land to help put the chestnuts in the dumpster to be composted. All supplies are provided. Bring sunblock, shoes you don't mind getting wet and a water bottle. mysticriver.org/water-chestnut-removal-project. 32 Shore Drive, Somerville, MA.

Canoe Invasive Plant Pull

**Saturday, July 18, and Saturday, August 1,
9 AM-noon**

Join CRWA to canoe on the Charles River and remove aquatic invasive plants. Volunteers will go out on the river in canoes to pull the invasive water chestnut by hand. Have a great time exploring the Charles while helping the river's natural ecosystem. Volunteers will meet at the docks of Boating in Boston for a brief training before heading out to the river. All supplies provided. Registration is required and will open two weeks before the event. www.crwa.org. Boating in Boston. 2401 Commonwealth Avenue, Auburndale, MA.

Milk Weed Planting in Weir Meadow

Monday, July 20, 6-7:30 PM

To kick off Fresh Pond Monarch Watch this summer, plant some food for the butterflies: milkweed, a native plant essential for the growth

and development of monarch caterpillars. Fresh Pond will be receiving its caterpillars that week; help establish more butterfly-friendly habitat to welcome them! friendsoffreshpond.org, jcoffey@cambridgema.gov, (617) 349-7712. Volunteer trailer in the lower parking lot, Water Treatment Facility 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.

City Splash

Saturday, July 25, 10 AM-3 PM

Swim the Charles with the Charles River Conservancy. Dress up and jump in on Saturday for a day of costumed fun! Jump into the Charles with CitySplash, then stick around and compete in a swim-themed costume competition! All swimmers must be age 10 and up. A bag-check and bike lock-up area will be available to store personal items. This event is free and registration is required. Rain date is August 15. www.crwa.org. Fiedler Field, The Esplanade, Boston.

Sustainable Belmont Meeting

Wednesday, August 5, 7-8:30 PM

Join Sustainable Belmont to discuss sustainable initiatives in town. sustainablebelmont.net. Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

Summer Evening Mushroom Walk

Wednesday, August 12, 6-7:45 PM

Join Mass Audubon for a casual walk in the sanctuary to look for a variety of fungi from puffballs to stinkhorns and a few surprises along the way. Mass Audubon members \$12, nonmembers \$15. Children 8 and over welcome with adult. Register at www.massaudubon.org. Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.

Meet Belmont! Community Fair

Tuesday, August 25, 6-8:30 PM

Belmont community groups including the Belmont Citizens Forum, Sustainable Belmont, and the Vision 21 Implementation Committee will gather to introduce themselves. This fair is a great opportunity for newcomers to learn about the community and sustainable efforts. Chenery Middle School, 95 Washington Street, Belmont.

Save the Date: Water Trouble

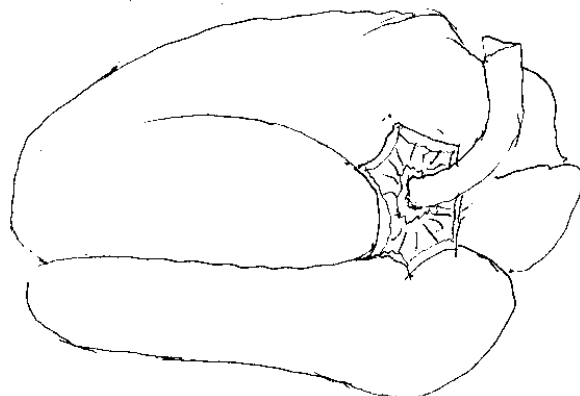
Water Trouble Forum
Thursday September 10
Winn Brook School

Save this date to attend our second public forum on storms, floods, and pollution in Belmont during this time of climate change. Contact bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com to volunteer.

We don't want to lose you!

If you're moving within Belmont or out of Belmont, please take a moment to let us know by emailing bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com or dropping a note to Belmont Citizens Forum, PO Box 609, Belmont.

Thanks for your help.



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- ☐ Community path work
- ☐ Newsletter mailings
- ☐ Event organizing

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