Belmont Citizens Forum

Uplands Trees Cut Amid Protests, Disputes

By Anne-Marie Lambert

Almost all trees within the multi-acre buildable portion of the Uplands project have been cut down as of October 24. Most of those trees were silver maples, and many were substantial, over 12 inches in diameter and over 70 feet in height. (In the floodplain environment surrounding the property, silver maples grow about a foot a year.) Appeals are likely to continue about whether permission was required to cut down trees.

AP Cambridge Partners II began cutting down trees on the Belmont Uplands site in mid-October. Although a local building permit is still pending, the new officers of AP Cambridge Partners II were convinced they had sufficient permits to cut down almost all trees on the buildable portion of their property. The builders began preliminary work installing erosion control the week of October 6, putting in wooden stakes and a soil erosion border fence to mark the legal Limit of Work. Tree cutting was observed starting around October 17.

Building Permit Still Pending

As of October 23, Belmont building inspector Glenn Clancy reported that a building permit had not yet been issued, and that the town "continue[s] to receive information required for us to process the application." Clancy has also received many unsolicited submissions from Belmont and Cambridge residents regarding a wide range of public health and safety concerns about the Uplands, including flooding, soil stability, pollutants in the soil, pollution from traffic, and the ventilation and ramp height for the proposed underground garages.

Whether the owners' existing submissions are sufficient to allow either clear-cutting or issuance of a building permit is actively disputed by the Coalition to Preserve the Belmont Uplands. The Coalition claims that the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

DAVID MUSSINA

A clear-cut area of the Uplands, November 2, 2014.

(DCR) must issue an official drainage permit before clear-cutting can begin. The permit is necessary to allow stormwater from this private property to go into drainage ditches on the abutting Alewife Reservation owned by DCR.

The Coalition also makes two more arguments: that it is significant that the submitted Regulatory and Monitoring Agreement changes the requirement for an affordable housing restriction in perpetuity (it is now only for 30 years), and that the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals must formally approve both the Agreement and the tree-cutting plan submitted in July 2013 and not just "accept" them.

MEPA Will Not Review Runoff Impact Bruce Jacobs, a certified engineer with HydroAnalysis Corps, recently analyzed the runoff volume and peak discharge for the proposed Uplands development. He used recent 2011 precipitation data instead of the half-century-old data still referenced in DEP regulations. (See "Is Belmont Ignoring 50 Years of Rain Data?" Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, May 2014.)

Jacobs's report, which was funded by the Friends of Alewife Reservation, concludes that 150,000 gallons of stormwater are unaccounted for by the proposed drainage system during a 100-year storm, at a peak discharge rate of 6.6 cubic feet per second.

The developer does not dispute the engineering analysis. He does dispute whether he has any legal requirement to handle additional runoff that is due to climate change in the last 50 years, although clearly it will affect the property's tenants or buyers.

Jacobs' hydrology analysis indicates significant changes to site conditions due to climate change. His analysis was included in a Notification of Project Change (NPC) submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) public review process by the author of this article on September 17. In response, MEPA Director Deirdre Buckley denied the request for further MEPA review, citing the lack of any change to the project itself. She also noted that the ZBA and the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reviewed the proposed project prior to 2011, and she stated that DEP is the regulatory authority responsible for storm water, not MEPA. DEP has not responded to similar notifications by the author in July and October, leaving a gap of regulation among these agencies.

Meanwhile, federal and state policy have yet to affect the Uplands. As required by the Global Warming Act of 2008, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs continues to study climate adaptation needs for Massachusetts, including regulatory guidelines for state agencies. The US Environmental Protection Agency has issued draft stormwater guidelines under the National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES). These efforts have not altered any

regulations enforced by the DEP or DCR for projects like the Belmont Uplands.

NPDES guidelines drove Belmont to adopt a storm water bylaw last year, based on 2011 rain data. It was approved September 29, 2013. But since then Belmont Town Counsel George Hall has guided the town to consider its new storm water regulations superseded by the 2007 40B Comprehensive Permit, rather than as a federal requirement that would not be superseded by 40B regulations. Little Pond residents recently filed a complaint in Middlesex Superior Court to contest this interpretation.

ANNE-MARIE LAMBERT

The same area of the Uplands as shown on page 1 on January 26, 2014, before clear-cutting began.

Injunction Request and Protests Aplenty

With contractors on site, preparing for construction, the Coalition submitted a request for a temporary restraining order to halt work on October 10. The request was heard in court Wednesday, October 15. While the court deliberated, from Thursday through Saturday, October 16 to 18 most remaining trees were cut down. The court granted a restraining order on Monday afternoon, October 20, only to dismiss it 24 hours later based on the "low probability of success in court."

Public outcry has been loud and constant. Vigils and protests along Acorn Park Drive and Frontage Road have occurred almost daily. Civil disobedience has also started: 13 protestors consciously ignoring requests to move were deemed trespassers and arrested by police. Photos and videos are posted on friendsofalewife.org and silvermapleforest.org.

Even with the trees gone, activists continue efforts to prevent building and to preserve the land, and scientists continue to educate stakeholders about the value of preserving the forest. Lesley University biologists and other scientists presented their analysis of this site to the Belmont Board of Selectmen on October 14 and to the Cambridge City Council Committee on Public Health and the Environment on October 28.

Wildlife

Soon after the tree clearing began, two deer were reported killed on the nearby roads, as was a red fox traversing the Winn Brook neighborhood. Belmont Animal Control Officer John Maguranis has said that Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife guidelines do not authorize him to remove wildlife jeopardized by the clear-cutting to a safer location. It is difficult to be certain whether these wildlife sightings are associated with the recent clear-cutting, since roadkills are

more common this time of year even without major tree clearing, and wildlife regularly move between this site and other open space areas in Belmont and Waltham.

The DEP has approved a Wildlife Habitat Replication Area Plan for the proposed project. According to the plan, a 15,896 square foot area will be used to replicate a 16,912 square-foot Wildlife Habitat Area altered by the project (11,472 in the lower floodplain and 5,440 square feet in the upper floodplain). However, this Replication Area is further away from Little River and Little Pond than the original habitat, and close enough to Acorn Park Drive and the proposed four-story buildings that it is unlikely to provide the type of dark, quiet habitat and unobstructed corridor previously available to wildlife. These concerns were raised by the Coalition in a 2013 appeal of DEP's approval of the project. The developers' environmental contractor, Epsilon Associates, has asserted that the proposed project will meet all legal requirements, and the DEP's approval, through its Superseding Order of Conditions, was allowed to stand. (For a map, see "Judge Questions Map in Uplands Hearing," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, March 2013.)

Regardless of state regulations, the science is clear: with or without a building, October's destruction of trees will wreak havoc on local wildlife in the coming seasons. Winter hiding places will be scarcer, and vertical habitat for migrating birds next spring substantially diminished. While the undeveloped portion of the land would be much improved by the proposed reductions in invasive plants such as phragmites and bittersweet, on the buildable portion the addition of lighted buildings and traffic, and lack of sufficient stormwater storage to accommodate the 100-year storm as currently understood, will have significant societal costs well into the future.

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

Belmont Citizens Forum board members tabled at Meet Belmont on August 26. From left to right: Sumner Brown prepares, Radha Iyengar talks with Sami Baghdady, David Chase prepares to talk about bikes.

Report Details Strategies for Alewife Floods

On October 1, the Urban Land Institute Boston/ New England released a report titled "The Urban Implications of Living With Water," which details future flooding problems and solutions for four sites in greater Boston, including the Alewife Quadrangle off Concord Avenue in Cambridge. Below are excerpts; the complete report is available at boston.uli.org.

The Quadrangle is contiguous to the Alewife Brook system, which is a tributary to the Mystic River. A coastal storm surge that breaches or flanks the Amelia Earhart Dam on the Mystic River would likely cause Alewife Brook to back up. As sea level rises, the probabilities will shift upwards. Depending on the degree to which the brook backs up and if it is accompanied by a storm with high runoff, the Alewife area could face major flooding . . .

Key Strategies

Redistribute land uses to accommodate flooding. Through zoning, the City of Cambridge could redistribute development density and uses to facilitate concentration of key land uses, allow taller building heights, and create more contiguous open areas as amenities and flood storage. More open space would also provide additional areas to plant trees to use as a flood mitigation measure and to accommodate stormwater management features such as canals, swales, and ponds. . .

Obstacles and Barriers

Lack of climate-informed standards and criteria . . .Today's regulations are not designed for climate change. Regulations such as those under federal and state wetlands and floodplain laws are based on historical flood occurrences and do not take into account the changing climate and the incremental increase in risks. . .

Multiplicity of stakeholders. In an area like the Alewife Quadrangle, there are many disparate property owners who must be guided toward individual decisions to pursue redevelopment with resilient designs for new construction and retrofit of existing buildings. There are also private and public infrastructure owners, such as utilities and transportation agencies, which the municipal government has virtually no control over. In addition, the professional design community is not trained to deal with long-term and dynamic changes such as those posed by climate change.

COURTESY OF URBAN LAND INSTITUTE

"This image is a representative view of the Quadrangle and shows Fawcett Street as it exists today. The projected flood elevation illustrates the potential impact of climate change on the current street realm and building vulnerability."—***The Urban Implications of Living With Wate***r.

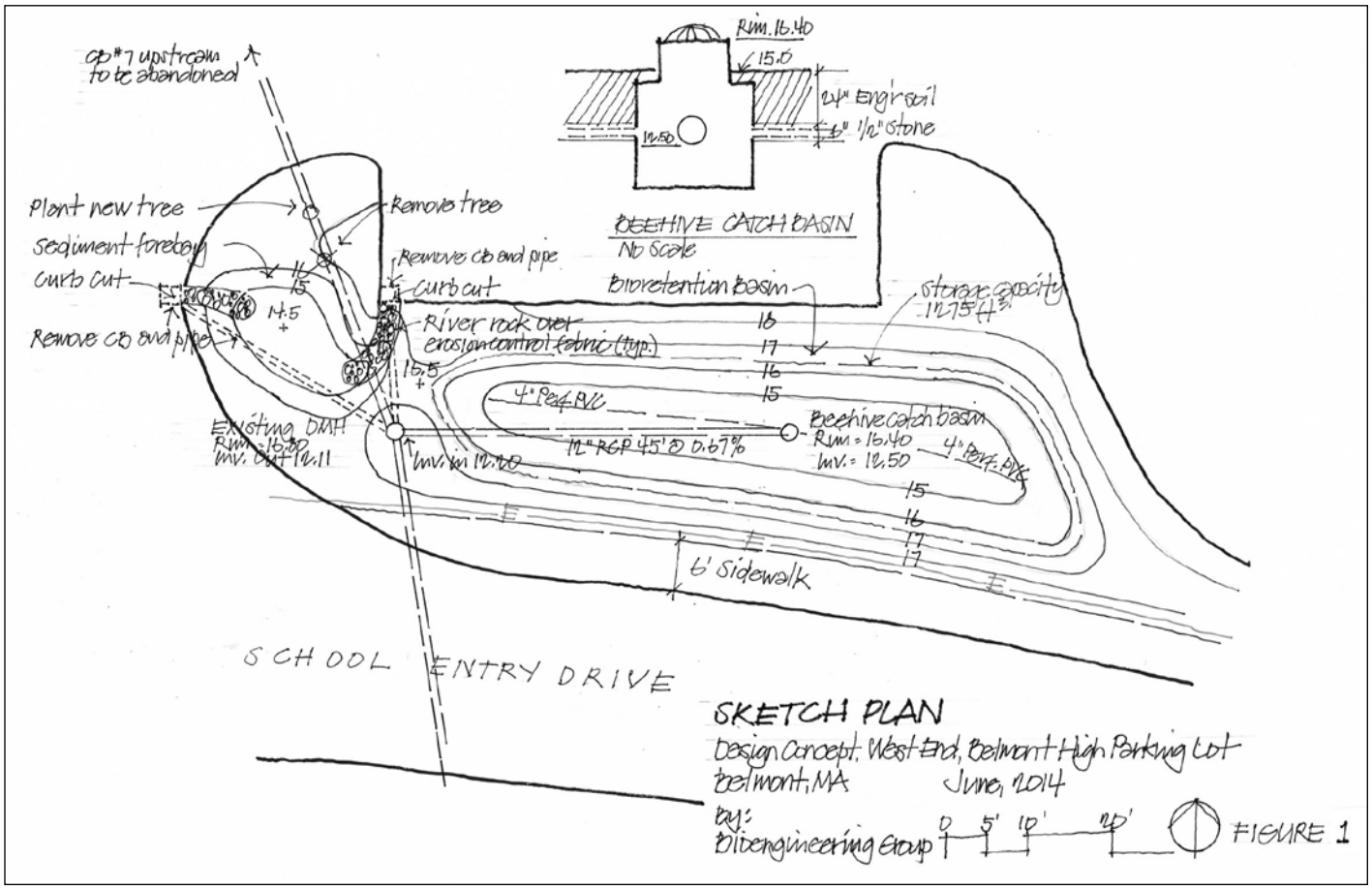
Green Infrastructure Planned for Three Belmont Sites

In 2013, Belmont, Arlington, and the Mystic River Watershed Association were jointly awarded a grant to create green infrastructure to improve local water quality. Such structures, which can include rain gardens, vegetated swales, and street trees, reduce the pollution entering local waterways. (See "Green Infrastructure Grant to Reduce Pollution," Belmont Citizens Forum ***Newsletter,*** September/October 2013.)

In October, consultants Chester Engineers completed concept plans for green infrastructure at six sites: the east and west ends of the Belmont High School Parking lot and the Belmont Memorial Library, and in Arlington, Broadway Plaza, Egerton Road, and Spring Valley Street. The sites were chosen for their "high pollutant loading, proximity to receiving water, lack of existing stormwater treatment, high visibility, educational potential, space availability, and easy access for construction and maintenance."

Below is the concept design for the west end of the Belmont High School parking lot, showing the locations of drains and swales. What the design doesn't show is the sheer amount of greenery planned for the Belmont High School: a new tree, 430 shrubs, and 2400 young plants. The space will become more aesthetically pleasing as well as holding and filtering water before it enters Clay Pit Pond.

For more information about these plans, contact the Mystic River Watershed Association, MyRWA.org.



CHESTER ENGINEERS

Concept plans for green infrastructure at Belmont High School to mitigate stormwater runoff pollution flowing into Clay Pit Pond.

Winn Brook Sewage Management Succeeds

By Sumner Brown

This summer, Belmont's Winn Brook sewage control system was activated on July 28 during an unusually intense and relatively short storm. This activation suggests something about the cause of sewer problems in Winn Brook. Inflow from illegal downspouts connected to sanitary sewers would respond quickly to a short, intense storm, while infiltration from groundwater leaking into sewer lines and lateral pipes, which go from individual houses to common sewer lines, would respond sluggishly.

Belmont's Winn Brook sewage control system, a network of buried storage tanks, pumps, and valves designed to protect the neighborhood from sewage backups, has worked as intended since it was installed in 2011. This system has been activated only four times since then, and there have been no Winn Brook sewer backups.

The sewage problem in the Winn Brook neighborhood comes from two directions. Most of Belmont's sewage exits at Flanders Road and flows into a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) interceptor, a pair of large pipes that carry sewage toward Deer Island. That interceptor can get overloaded by a combination of sewage from Belmont and Cambridge. A second source is inflow and infiltration in Belmont that can greatly increase our sewage flow during and after rainstorms.

The Winn Brook sewage management system helps with both problems. When the MWRA interceptor reaches capacity, the pumps in the Winn Brook system can force more sewage into the interceptor. To deal with Belmont's inflow and infiltration, the Winn Brook system can store enough water to avoid sewer backups for storms no worse than the 2006 Mother's Day storm, which produced 7.61 inches of rain in 72 hours at Logan Airport.

Further along on the way to Deer Island, Belmont's sanitary sewage goes through the MWRA's Alewife sewage pumping station, which can get overwhelmed during some rainstorms. Our Winn Brook system helps that somewhat because it smooths out the sewage flow, reducing peak flow. Cambridge is currently undertaking sewer separation work, scheduled for completion in December 2015, which will send stormwater to the constructed wetland at Alewife instead of to the Alewife sewage pump station and Deer Island. That diversion will reduce the load on the Alewife pumping station during rainstorms, and help to alleviate the Winn Brook problem.

The Alewife constructed wetland is gorgeous, with the plantings and wildlife doing well a year after completion. However, it is not yet connected to the neighborhoods that are having their sanitary and storm sewers separated. Now, all their wastewater goes through one common low point that takes everything to the MWRA interceptor. The stormwater and sanitary sewer pipes feeding into this low point will be the last to be untangled. Only then, in December 2015, will these Cambridge neighborhoods' stormwater and sewage go to different places. This division should reduce the number of times the MWRA interceptor gets overloaded.

The Winn Brook problems also arise because of inflow and infiltration here in Belmont. Since almost all of Belmont's sewage flows through the Winn Brook neighborhood to Flanders Road, inflow and infiltration almost anywhere in Belmont contribute to the problem. Belmont continues to work on inflow and infiltration reduction. However, when sanitary sewer flow measurements were made about five years ago, unexpectedly intense flows came down Prospect Street from Belmont Hill during rainstorms. The town of Belmont promised to work on inflow and infiltration in order to get permission to build the Winn Brook sewage control system.

The MWRA will soon begin another round of grants for inflow and infiltration reduction. Belmont's Office of Community Development will continue inflow and infiltration removal work. They are searching for a strategy to deal with illegal sanitary sewer connections (inflow) that increase the sanitary sewage that comes down Prospect Street.

Sumner Brown is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

No Resolution to Solar Metering Question

By Meg Muckenhoupt

Sustainable Belmont and the Belmont Light Advisory Board have been trying to find a solution to Belmont's solar power dilemma since September, but no common ground is in sight. Belmont Light's new proposal uses a different method of calculating credits for customers who generate electricity via solar arrays, but it yields almost the same credit as the plan they presented in June.

On October 29, the Belmont Light Energy Resources Department released a memo with its revised plan for solar power net metering, after a series meetings involving members of Sustainable Belmont, Ashley Brown, chair of the Belmont Light Advisory Board, and board member Patricia DiOrio. The group sought to find some compromise between Belmont's current net metering policy, where solar array owners are paid the full retail rate for electricity they generate, and Belmont Light's proposed wholesale net metering policy, where solar owners would be paid the same wholesale rate for electricity as the operators of New England's coal and natural gas electricity plants.

June vs. October Plans

Under wholesale net metering, as outlined in Belmont Light's June 19 memo, solar array owners would be paid 35% of the retail value of the electricity they generate—about what Belmont Light pays to large generating plants for their electricity. That makes it difficult for solar array owners to calculate their rebates, because the price of electricity can vary widely from hour to hour, depending on how expensive fuel is and how many gas and coal plants have to run to meet demand—especially on hot summer afternoons when there's high demand for air conditioning.

Belmont Light's new calculations are detailed in the October 29 memo. After four months of hearings, meetings, and information gathering, Belmont Light has proposed an altered plan where the Belmont Light's solar customers would be paid for electricity they generate each month based on the town's monthly charge per kilowatt hour to other customers but would have to pay a distributed generator charge based on the size of their solar array.

In the memo's examples, for a solar owner with a 5.515 kilowatt array, that fee would be $5.13 per kilowatt installed capacity per month based on 2014 rates, or $28 per month. Once that distributed generator charge is taken out of the total, the credit for an average Belmont solar customers comes out to 38% of the retail value of the electricity they generate—just 10% higher than the rebate under the wholesale net metering plan proposed in June.

Belmont Light's October 29 memo refers to the distributed generation charge as a fee to "recover annual costs." That memo lists that fee as including distribution, generation, and conservation costs.

In total, that distributed generator charge comes to 51.5% of the total cost of electricity in Belmont, according to the memo. Belmont Light residents with solar arrays would thus be charged more than half the retail price for electricity they generate themselves.

Ashley Brown, chair of the Belmont Light Advisory Board, explained that this approach with fixed costs is better than the June proposal because it is "simple to administer. We know what's installed, and they [the solar array owners] know what's installed."

Belmont Light has many fixed costs that need to be recovered, Brown said. "If we don't cover these costs, we'll have to charge more fixed costs to everybody. That's hurting energy

Belmont Light costs per kilowatt hour of residential retail electricity, from October 29 memo

Type of Charge	$/kWH	% of total
Generation	0.09	48.44%
Distribution	0.06690	36.25%
Transmission	0.02583	14.00%
Conservation	0.00240	1.30%
Total	0.18452	100.00%

efficiency." According to Brown, if the fixed costs on Belmont Light customers' electrical bills rise, then their bills won't change as much if they conserve energy, and customers won't have as much motivation to cut their energy use. In short, Brown says that charging solar power customers higher fixed costs per month will enable Belmont Light to avoid raising fixed costs for other customers.

Brown also argued that solar power is not reliable, costs more per unit of carbon saved than Belmont Light's Green Choice energy option, and is not available during peak demand hours. Sustainable Belmont members have countered that the health and environmental benefits of solar energy are not factored into the distributed generator charge, and that Green Choice energy isn't reliable or available at Belmont's peak evening hours either. For more details on both Belmont Light and Sustainable Belmont's positions, see "Solar Electricity Pricing Plans Debated," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, September/October 2014.

Other Approaches

By contrast, Concord pays its solar customers the full retail price for electricity they generate as long as it does not exceed the amount of electricity that Concord's Municipal Light Department delivers to that household. The light department pays for excess electricity beyond that amount at the wholesale rate.

Concord also calculates a distribution charge as a much lower flat fee per month based on the size of the solar arrays. Residents with installations smaller than 2 kilowatts do not pay anything; households with 2 to 4 kilowatts pay $3.60 a month, while households with 4 to 7 kilowatt arrays pay $6.60 a month. Over the course of a year, Belmont would charge a hypothetical solar-power customer $339.09 in distribution charges, while Concord would charge the same customer $79.20.

Statewide, investor-owned utilities including NStar, NGrid, WMECO, and Unitil are required by law to provide net metering for the full retail rate of electricity to their solar customers. To pay for net metering, NStar adds a net metering surcharge to all customers' bills of $0.00009 per kilowatt hour. The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources is currently reviewing Massachusetts' net metering policy and will be releasing recommendations in March 2015.

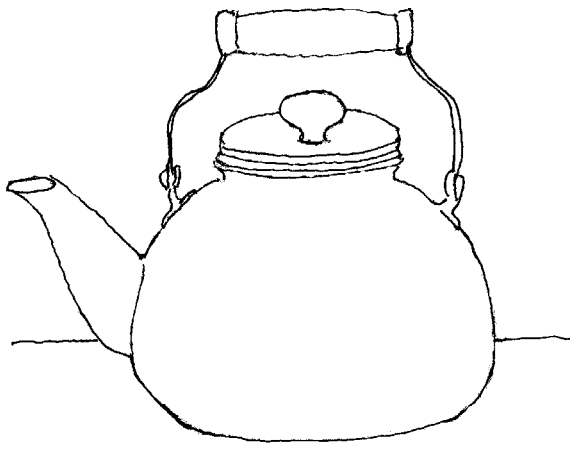
As of press time, the October 29 Belmont Light memo outlining the new proposal was not yet available on the Belmont Light web site, www.belmontlight.com.

Example Charges for Solar Power Customers

	Belmont 10/29	Belmont Phase 1, 6/19	Concord
Meter Charge	$127.20	$0	$96.60
Charge for Electricity	$777.37	$839.02	$603.59
Distributed Generator Charge	$339.50	$0	$79.20
Solar Generation Credit	$293.73	$641.37	$603.59
Net Bill	$950.35	$197.65	$175.80

Example of electricity charges for a hypothetical consumer derived from Belmont Light's October 29 memo, Belmont Light's June 19 memo "Solar PV Distributed Generation," and the Concord Municipal Light Department's Residential Solar PV Net Metering Policy Acknowledgement. This consumer has a 5.52 kilowatt solar installation; consumes a total of 7,290 kilowatt hours of electricity per year, gets 4213 kilowatt hours of electricity from the utility, and feeds 4213 kilowatt hours of excess electricity into the electrical grid. Belmont Phase 1 is the current net metering system; figures are taken from the 5kW installation described in The Concord column reflects the costs that Concord's Municipal Light Department would charge a similar resident under its retail net metering plan.

Meg Muckenhoupt is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.



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Many Sources of Funds for Community Paths

By John Dieckmann

Fully engineered, paved community paths, often called bike paths or rail trails, such as the Minuteman currently cost anywhere from $1 to $3 million per mile to design and construct.

This cost is usually beyond the capacity of local communities to fund, given the usual pressing priorities of schools, public safety, and other municipal services. Fortunately, communities that want to develop a community path do not have to cover the entire cost.

A recent example in our region illustrates the funding sources that are available. A few miles to our west, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) will run from Lowell to Framingham along a dormant railroad right of way. Phase 1, which opened five years ago, runs 6.8 miles from the Cross Point parking lot in Lowell, through Chelmsford, to the Westford-Carlisle town line. Phase 2 will extend the BFRT 9 miles south through Westford, Carlisle, Acton, and Concord. Construction on Phase 2A will begin in the spring of 2015. The funding for Phases 2A, 2B, and 2C was received in stages from the same sources that could be used to develop a community path in Belmont.

These four towns used Community Preservation Funds, a total of $500,000 among them, to reach the 25% design stage. The state legislature then appropriated the funds, close to $1 million, needed to complete the detailed design.

With the detailed design well underway, the four communities applied to the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for construction funding under the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). MPOs are the organizations that allocate federal highway trust funds and state matching funds among transportation priorities within their region. Funds are allocated to road and highway projects, mass transit, and alternative transportation projects, including community paths. Phases 2A, 2B, and 2C of the BFRT have turned out to be relatively costly because in addition to the basic paving of the path, eight major bridges need to be refurbished (including a large span over the Assabet River just south of the West Concord MBTA station), one tunnel needs to be enlarged, and between them, two overpasses over Routes 2A and 2 need to constructed. The total cost of $20 million was allocated in the 2014-2017 TIP, spread over those years. Overall, the towns only ended up covering about 3% of the total cost.

Overall, the towns only ended up covering about 3% of the total cost.

The 25% design of Phase 2D of the BFRT, which would extend the trail through Sudbury, was launched recently, with a combination of funds raised by the Friends of the BFRT (approximately $60,000) and Sudbury Community Preservation Funds (approximately $200,000). The same combination of sources that funded the completion of the design and construction of Phases 2A, 2B, and 2C is expected to fund the completion of Phase 2D.

The same funding plan could be applied in Belmont. Because of current questions about route alternatives, an engineering feasibility study to resolve these issues would be the first step with an estimated cost of $100,000. This must be funded by local sources. When the feasibility study is completed and a route is selected, the 25% design can begin. The estimated cost of this step is $200,000.

When this is completed, the project can apply for state and federal highway funding to complete the detailed design and for construction. To be sure, projects compete for these funds. The Belmont Community Path is a vital link in the Mass Central Rail Trail, a high priority in the state greenway plan (see the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Bay State Greenway page, www.massdot.state.ma.us/planning/bsg.pdf), so the chances are very good that funds would be allocated within a reasonable period of time.

John Dieckmann is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum

Alewife's Paths Need More Attention

By Meg Muckenhoupt and Rachael Stark

The Minuteman Path is the first route that comes to mind when you want to bike or walk to the Alewife MBTA station. More than 2,000 pedestrians and cyclists a day use the Minuteman during morning and evening peak travel times.

But it's not the only way to access Alewife. Though surrounded by car traffic, the station is also approachable by walking and bicycling paths that aren't very well known. With little signage and varying levels of repair, these paths link Belmont, Cambridge, and Arlington.

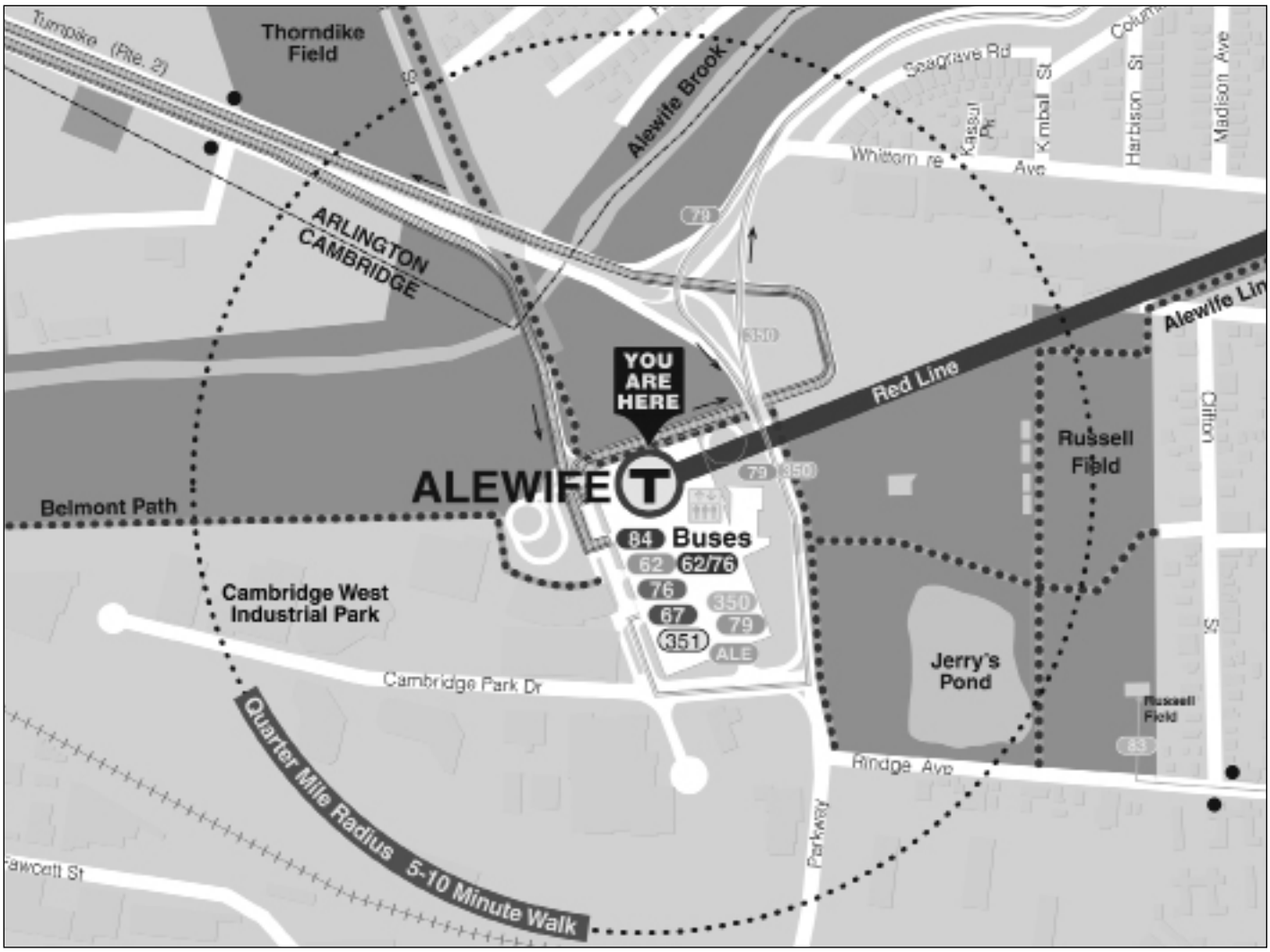
To attract regular users, the best pedestrian and bike paths share important features, such as:

- Good signage and lighting
- Clear sight lines
- Clear of overhanging branches, floodwater, snow, ice
- Regular repair and maintenance
- Easy-to-understand traffic signals and stop signs
- Protected from car traffic
- Safe environment

Some of the Alewife paths are defined by these features; others aren't.

There are six paths around Alewife station. Two paths run from Acorn Park Drive to Alewife Station: the Alewife Brook Greenway traverses the Alewife Reservation, and a sidewalk runs from Acorn Park Drive alongside the Alewife Station Access Road.

Two paths also connect Alewife Station to Cambridge: the Alewife Linear Path, which



COURTESY OF MBTA

A map of the area around Alewife Station. Walking and biking routes are shown by black dotted lines.

connects to the Linear Path to Davis Square, and a sidewalk which runs directly to Rindge Avenue.

The Route 3 bridge over the railroad tracks has sidewalks on both sides. The west side of the bridge has the shoulder space to accommodate a wider sidewalk suitable for mixed bicycle/pedestrian use.

As for the Minuteman Bikeway, it splits in two just before Alewife Station, giving pedestrians an overflow sidewalk during busy morning commuting hours.

MEG MUCKENHOUPT

The disappearing path to Acorn Park Drive.

Hidden Paths, Lost Opportunities

Of the six developed off-road paths and sidewalks that converge at Alewife, only one, the Alewife Brook Greenway, is marked with signage indicating its route: "Pedestrian access to Cambridge Discovery Park." Tacked onto the bottom of that sign is a smaller one for "VOX on Two Luxury Apartments," new housing along Route 2. The other paths have no signs indicating their destination—just an occasional mysterious, tiny bicycle icon. If these paths are to live up to their potential for becoming major transportation arteries, they need clear, consistent signage.

While the sign for the Alewife Brook Greenway path is useful, the path itself isn't particularly pedestrian-friendly. Like the path to Brighton Street in Belmont, it begins with a blind curve that slides into a wall of trees and bushes that block sightlines. From May through the fall, many users would not feel safe stepping onto a path next to a busy T station where they cannot see more than 20 feet ahead.

Although both paths quickly emerge into clearings with long sight lines, the first 100 feet might discourage many users. There are four blue-lit police emergency call boxes on poles spaced along the Alewife Brook Greenway path, which is less than 900 feet long. It feels more like a country lane than a sidewalk. The best use for it might be cyclists, with a better-lit sidewalk for pedestrians.

The hidden path to Rindge Avenue (mysteriously labeled "Fresh Pond") is barely as wide as a sidewalk. It's squeezed between a wall and a chain-link fence that barely holds back a bulging mass of tree limbs, vines, and shrubs. Although signs by the path indicate that it's a bikeway, taller cyclists risk bumping their heads on overhanging tree limbs.

Lighting

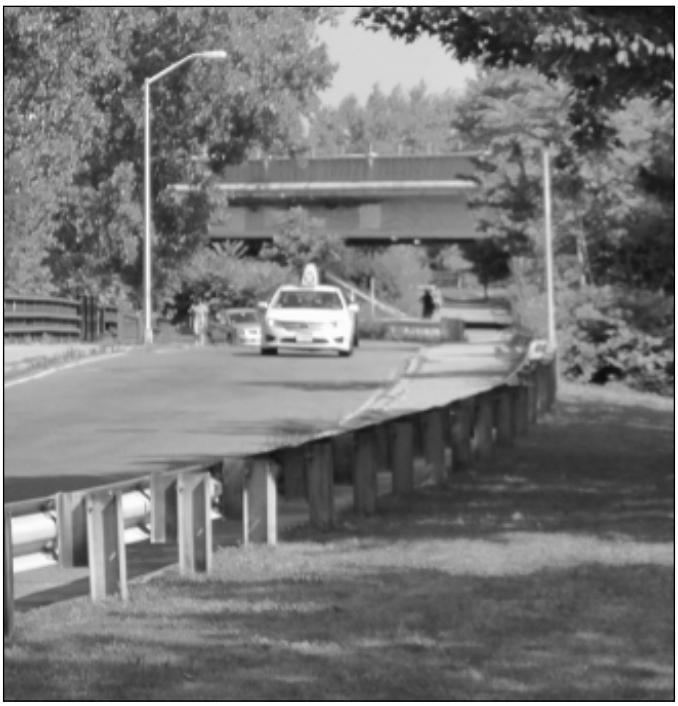
Lighting is inconsistent on paths around Alewife. Some are well lit by streetlights, the Alewife Brook Greenway has odd waist-high lights, and some paths have no lights at all. The annual switch to Standard Time in late October ensures that many T-commuters will travel to and from their jobs in the dark. Unlit paths are much less useful from November through February.

Snow also makes foot travel difficult on neglected paths. While the Minuteman Bikeway is plowed from Cambridge to Bedford, the MAPC's 2009 Alewife Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Study described a situation that persists today: "[there is] Sometimes poor coordination between MBTA, Cambridge, Arlington, and DCR on snow removal. The Minuteman is rarely

plowed south of the Route 2 underpass. The parallel sidewalk is usually plowed, though there have been some inconsistencies."

Space for Everyone

When a path is too narrow, it's hard for bicyclists and pedestrians to share space safely.



MEG MUCKENHOUPT

MEG MUCKENHOUPT

Two examples of walkway fencing near Alewife. At top, a fence keeps pedestrians off the grass, but offers no protection from cars. The fence in the bottom picture separates the path from the roadway yet does not block sight lines.

Fortunately, every too-narrow path around Alewife has a twin. For example, the Alewife Brook Greenway parallels the Alewife Access Road sidewalk. If the Alewife Brook Greenway starts to be heavily used by residents of the VOX on Two apartments, or the planned housing on the Belmont Uplands, one of those paths could be designated as a bike lane.

The paths behind Alewife to Rindge Avenue are also doubled. The Alewife-to-Brighton Street path doesn't have a twin, but it is substantially wider than other paths.

Separation from Cars

The Alewife paths illustrate excellent and not-so-great ways to keep pedestrians and cyclists away from cars. The recently completed path along the north side of Alewife Station and Yates Pond takes up little room and allows excellent sight lines. The sturdy see-though fence could serve as a model for other paths.

Some nearby sidewalks alongside roads have no fencing at all, or curbing that cuts far into the path. The sidewalk alongside the Alewife Access Road and the Minuteman Bikeway manages to combine the worst features of all alternatives. There is no barrier between the walking path and the road, but a fence juts into the sidewalk to protect pedestrians from . . . grass.

Fences and barriers that protect path users from cars without narrowing paths are just common sense. However, the fence along the pond was upgraded as part of a project to re-route the bike path. There are no current plans to upgrade these sidewalks.

Close to 2,000 bicycle and pedestrian trips were reported during morning and evening rush hours at the Alewife end of the Minuteman Bikeway on Tuesday, May 14, 2013, the most recent counting date recorded by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization. Clearly, many people want to commute via the T. Better signs and maintenance would help more people take advantage of these paths and to stay off our already crowded and clogged roads.

Meg Muckenhoupt is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum ***Newsletter***. Rachael Stark is the founder of Walking in Arlington.

Environmental Events

Sustainable Belmont Meeting

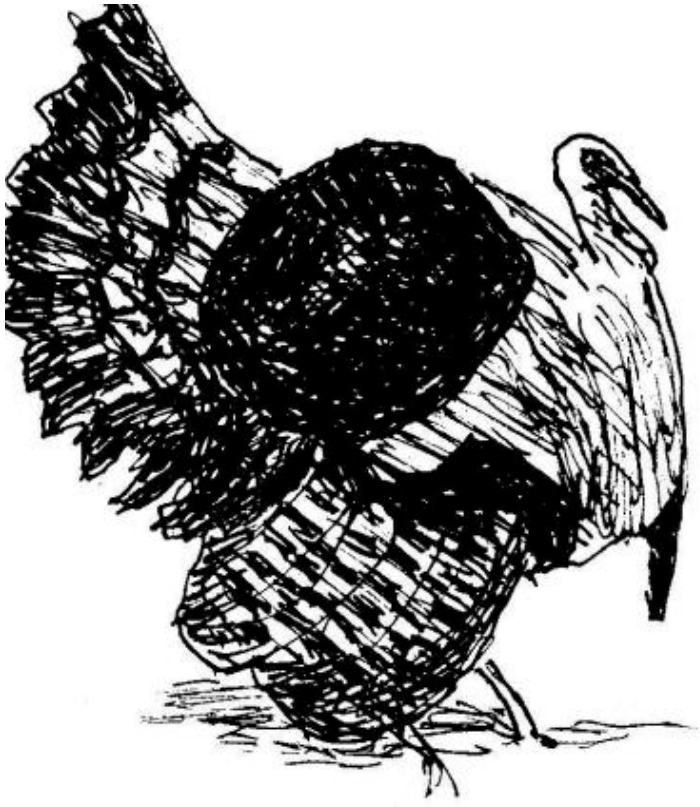
Wednesday, November 5, 7–9 PM

All Sustainable Belmont meetings are open to the public. Members will share progress on various initiatives. Discussion and planning will ensue. Attend, share your expertise, volunteer your time, relay your experience around sustainable activities in Belmont. www.sustainablebelmont.net. *Flett Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Owl Prowl and Sunrise Birding

Saturday, November 15, 5:30-8:30 AM

Take advantage of the late sunrise and get up "late" at 5:30 AM when it's quiet and much easier to listen for night sounds. This is a great time for calling great horned and eastern screech owls. With first light the group will continue birding and hope for some unusual stray or lingering migrants at Rock Meadow. It's an early start, but please be prompt! Members $14, nonmembers $20. Registration required. www.massaudubon.org, habitat@massaudubon.org (617) 489-5050. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*



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Hidden Habitat

Sunday, November 16, 1-2 PM

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of Habitat's Visitor Center, join Habitat director Roger Wrubel for a look "behind the scenes" at some of the places not often seen by visitors. Take a stroll through the wildflower garden and visit Turtle Pond, Highland Farm, and a surprise location to discover Habitat's hidden past. Members free, nonmembers $5. Registration required. www.massaudubon.org, habitat@massaudubon.org (617) 489-5050. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Fresh Pond Great Gobble Give-Back

Saturday, November 22, 1-3:30 PM

Join the Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation and lend a hand. Volunteer activities will include trail maintenance and invasive species removal to protect important habitat and prevent soil erosion. All tools are provided, and no experience is necessary. Appropriate for ages 10 and up. If you are volunteering as a group, please register; otherwise, no advance registration is necessary. friendsoffreshpond.org, fpr@cambridgema.gov, (617) 349-6489. *Fresh Pond Ranger Station, 250 Fresh Pond Parkway, Cambridge.*

Second Annual Turkey Trot Walk

Sunday, November 30, 1-3 PM

Join the Citizens for Lexington Conservation to walk off those turkey leftovers as we explore the Cranberry Hill Conservation property and the adjacent watershed lands of the Cambridge Watershed Authority. Along the way we will enjoy some of the best vistas as well as one of the largest and best-preserved fieldstone foundations to be found in Lexington. www.clclex.org. *Meet at the end of parking lot C in the Cranberry Hill Office Complex on Massachusetts Avenue just south of Marrett Road, Lexington.*

Autumn Cleanup at Habitat

Saturday, December 6, 10 AM-noon

Help out at Habitat by planting, pulling, cutting, hauling, and more. Children under 9th grade must be accompanied by an adult. Tools and gloves will be provided. Registration is required. www.

massaudubon.org, habitat@massaudubon.org (617) 489-5050. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Annual Record Players Concert

Saturday, January 31, 7:30 PM

February 1, 2015 marks the 14th year of collaboration between the chamber music group The Record Players and the Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund in bringing together people who find inspiration and beauty through music and nature. The concert, which is open to the public free of charge, serves as the Record Fund's annual appeal and is supported by pre-concert private and corporate sponsorships. Contributions are also accepted at the door. All proceeds from the concert go to the Fund's endowment managed by Mass Audubon. jkrfund.org. *The First Church in Belmont, 404 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Thank you for your continued support.

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Each Newsletter issue costs about $4,000 to publish. Thank you for your support.

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

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____ Event organizing

Contact us: info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

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November/December 2014