



Belmont Citizens Forum

First Goal is 50 New Electric Vehicles in Town Belmont Electric Vehicle Campaign Revs Up

By Jan Kruse

Experts predict that electric vehicles (EVs) are the wave of the future, but for Belmont, the future is now. Belmont Drives Electric (BDE) is a new community-driven program to promote the benefits of EVs, and is supported by the Belmont Energy Committee, Belmont Light, Sustainable Belmont, and other Belmont EV enthusiasts.

Why Promote Electric in Belmont Now?

In 2016, the Belmont Energy Committee updated the assessment of the town's aggregate carbon footprint. That analysis found that transportation is a top source of heat-trapping greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change (see chart on page 2).

According to energy committee member James Booth, "Vehicles currently account for more than one-third of Belmont's total emissions. Switching to EVs will result in greenhouse gas emissions that are less than half of those produced by driving an average, new, gasoline-powered midsize car."

NOTE: The next Belmont Drives Electric Ride & Drive event is Saturday, Nov. 12, 1:30–4:30 PM at the Belmont High School cafeteria and parking lot.



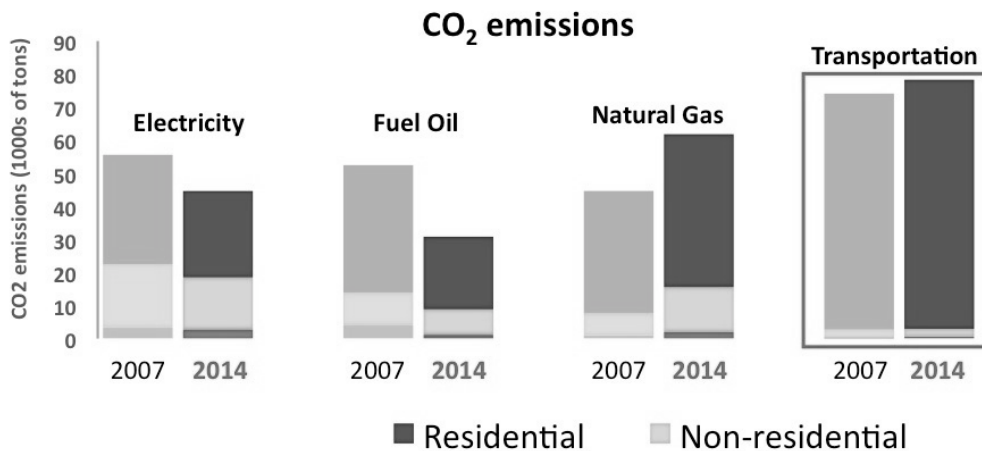
EMILY WOODS

BDE co-chair Marty Bittner (left) and volunteer Ade Baptista check out a Tesla Model X electric car.

Program Specifics

For a limited time, Belmont residents can get haggle-free, pre-negotiated deals when leasing all-electric vehicles or plug-in hybrid EVs through participating local car dealerships. Residents can receive additional money-saving incentives on charging equipment and overnight charging. Belmont Light will give a discount of up to \$250 off (about a 50% discount) of fast, level-2 chargers (customers can choose from two models) and rebates when EV owners charge their vehicles between 10 PM and 9 AM. The discount for overnight charging amounts to approximately 15% off of the town's standard retail rates.

"Electric vehicle programs that encourage customers to be cognizant of when they charge are a natural fit for all electric utilities that prioritize energy efficiency, rate stability, and



the interests of their customers,” says Belmont Light general manager Jim Palmer. “Belmont Light is truly excited to partner with a talented, passionate group of residents on this campaign.”

The BDE committee will also help find a certified electrician to install and connect a level 2 charger to a Belmont customer’s electric panel. A program-eligible level 1 charger that can connect into a regular

120-volt outlet is also available for free through Belmont Light.

“Belmont Light is truly excited to partner with a talented, passionate group of residents on this campaign.”

Additionally, Massachusetts residents and business owners are eligible for a state rebate (while funding lasts) to help offset the cost of an EV lease or purchase. The state MOR-EV rebate ranges from \$1,000 to \$2,500, depending on the EV’s battery size. And there is currently a federal tax credit of up to \$7,500 off the price of a car. (If leasing, the federal tax credit goes to the leasing company, but the savings are typically passed on to the customer as lower lease rates.) There’s also a federal EV charging

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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.

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EMILY WOODS

Almost 40 people test drove EVs over the two-day event.



EMILY WOODS

Belmont Light employees Aidan Leary (left) and Heather Fisk answer questions about the program at a Belmont Drives Electric ride-and-drive community event.

infrastructure tax credit for both residents and businesses.

And, as with the Belmont Goes Solar program, local resident EV enthusiasts are available to answer residents' and business owners' questions.

During the six-month pilot program, which ends in March 2017, BDE's goal is to help 50 Belmont drivers make the switch from gasoline cars to electric. If the program meets its goal, it will result in a reduction of more than 100 tons of CO₂ emissions and more than \$8,000 of dollar savings in fuel annually.

Lease or Buy?

Because EV technology and batteries are rapidly improving (a battery accounts for a third of the cost of building an electric car; last year the price of an EV battery fell 35%, according to Bloomberg), the BDE program focuses on leasing of vehicles. Currently, some EV models will run up to 100 or

more miles per charge, which is plenty for most households' daily needs.

In fact, recent studies conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Institute for Data found that 87% of current daily vehicle use could be provided by EVs already on the market. What's more, when operating and maintenance costs are included in a vehicle's price, autos emitting less carbon are the most cost-effective, on a per-mile basis.

Real-Life Experience

Expert opinions aside, does the EV hype match reality? Belmont residents Claus and Barbara Becker leased their first EV in 2013, and they now have two Chevy Volts. "We initially got an EV because we decided we needed to do our bit to combat climate change and the experience has been fantastic," says Claus.

The Beckers' biggest concern was battery degradation, but they say that hasn't been an issue. The hatchback Volt is roomy enough for their family of four, yet it is not a big car. They have used PlugShare.com to find charging stations but running out of electricity while driving was never a concern. Why? The Volt has a back-up system: a gas engine that generates electricity. (Chevrolet estimates a 420-mile range with a full charge and full tank of gas).

"EVs are winners, and not just because of their environmental benefits," he says. "They're inexpensive to maintain, fun to drive, and very quiet. There's instant torque and the one-pedal driving is addictive."

Meanwhile, town government is starting to awaken to the benefits of EVs. At press time, the town indicated it might be applying for an EV and a public charging station through the state grant program, according to town administrator David Kale. Belmont Light has also applied for a state grant for an EV and a public charging station that will be located at its headquarters on Prince Street.

Visit BDE's website to sign up for a no-obligation test-drive of an electric vehicle, find out about upcoming events, and check for updated incentives at: www.belmontdriveselectric.org

Jan Kruse is a member of Sustainable Belmont and the Belmont Drives Electric steering committee. She drives a 2016 Toyota Prius Eco.

See a related article, "Electric Vehicles: What You Need to Know" in the May/June 2016 issue of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.

THANK YOU to this issue's contributors.

The Citizens Forum expresses our sincere thanks to all those who volunteer and contribute to our newsletter and overall mission.

In this issue, we have:

Stories by **Julia Blatt, Jan Kruse, Kim Slack, and Vince Stanton.**

Photos by **David Chase and Emily Woods.**

Charts by **Kim Slack and Vince Stanton.**

Copyediting by **Sue Bass, Virginia Jordan, Evanthia Malliris, and Edward Sanderson.**

Mailing organized by **Ken Stahlberg.**

Frequently Asked Questions About Electric Vehicles

Aren't EV batteries harmful for the environment?

The manufacture of an EV battery increases greenhouse gas emissions by 15% but this is typically offset within the first 6–16 months of driving because of the car's reduced CO₂ emissions.

How much does it cost to charge an EV?

You can expect to pay the equivalent of \$1.43 per gallon of gas if charging overnight at home.

How long does it take to charge an EV?

It depends on the battery size and whether you use a smart (level 2) charger or the slower level 1. With a level 2 charger, a medium-sized battery can be fully charged in about 4–8 hours.

What's the cost to get a charger installed?

Installing a wall-mounted level 2 (240-volt) can cost from \$300 to \$2,500 (if adding a sub-panel or upgrading the electric service). The typical cost for the most common wall-mounted installation is \$450 to \$600. The slower level 1 charger can simply be plugged into a standard 120-volt outlet in your home.

Do EVs work in the cold weather?

Yes. All cars lose some fuel efficiency in cold weather but it's not an issue for most EV drivers. The Union of Concerned Scientists addresses the issue: <http://blog.ucsusa.org/dave-reichmuth/electric-cars-cold-weather-temperatures>.

To learn more, visit:

Bloomberg: <http://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-ev-oil-crisis/>

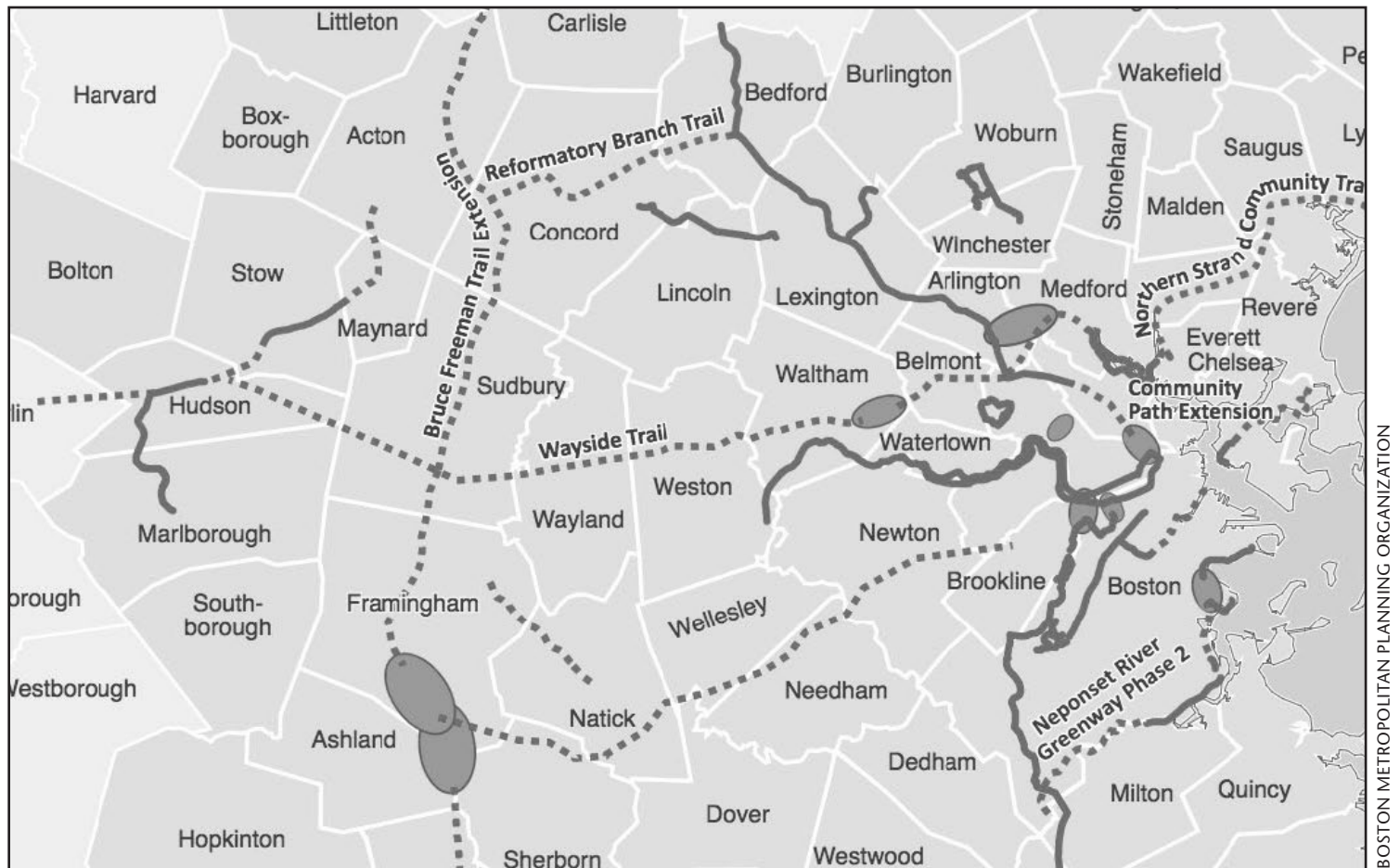
Wall Street Journal: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/why-electric-cars-will-be-here-sooner-than-you-think-1472402674>

MIT study: <http://news.mit.edu/2016/study-finds-low-emissions-vehicles-less-expensive-overall-0927>

Will Belmont Follow Suit?

Waltham Solicits Bids for Design of Rail Trail

by Vincent Stanton Jr.



The map shows the course of the Wayside Trail (center). Solid lines indicate completed paths, dotted lines indicate high priority segments of the state's long range Baystate Greenway plan, and **ovals indicate high priority gaps** in the path network. Note the oval at the Waltham/Belmont border.

In September, the city of Waltham issued a request for proposal (RFP) for 100% design of a community path extending approximately three miles from the Waltham-Belmont border (about 1,000 feet west of Waverley Square) to the Weston border (about 1,500 feet west of Route 128, just south of Main Street). ("100% design" refers to a fully specified set of construction drawings.) Proposals were due on October 20. At a bidder's conference on October 5, city officials expressed the hope that design work could be completed this winter, allowing construction to begin in 2017.

Design of the Waltham path would precisely define the western terminus of a future Belmont community path. More important, it would provide off-road connections to a variety of

recreational, work, and cultural destinations in Waltham, including (from east to west) Beaver Brook Reservation, Waverley Oaks Office Park, the UMass Waltham Field Station and farm, Bentley University, the Lyman Estate, and Prospect Hill Park.

The Waltham path will be one segment of a longer route called the Wayside Trail, running . . . from Berlin, MA, to the Waltham-Belmont border.

The Waltham path will be one segment of a longer route called the Wayside Trail, running about 23 miles from Berlin, MA, to the Waltham-Belmont border. In 2010, the Massachusetts Division of

Conservation and Recreation (DCR) signed a 99-year lease with the MBTA securing a 19-foot-wide easement along the abandoned former Massachusetts Central Railroad (MCRR) right-of-way from Beaver Street in Waltham to Berlin, facilitating design and construction of the Wayside Trail.

The Wayside Trail . . . is part of a still grander plan to construct a 107-mile path, the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail . . . from Boston to Northampton, MA.

The Wayside Trail, in turn, is part of a still grander plan to construct a 107-mile path, the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (MCRT), along the entire course of the former MCRR from Boston to Northampton, MA. About 28 miles of the MCRT have been completed, mostly in the central and western parts of the state. Design and construction of the MCRT, including the Wayside segment, has been identified as a priority in MassDOT and DCR planning documents.

In some respects, the news from Waltham is unsurprising.

- There is broad public support for a community path in Waltham.
- The route is set from Beaver Street to the Weston border along the DCR-leased right-of-way of the former MCRR.
- Mayor Jeanette McCarthy, who has been in office since 2004, has long supported a community path.

There is also support from the Waltham City Council, which will have to appropriate funds for path design and construction.

However, the city may have overlooked an important detail in its hurried issuance of the RFP, and the way Waltham's leaders have chosen to implement and fund the design process is in some respects unconventional.

The first paragraph of the RFP is unambiguous in calling for design of a Belmont-to-Weston path: "The City of Waltham requests Design Services Proposals from experienced and qualified design and engineering firms to design

and prepare construction documents for the Waltham component of the Wayside Trail which extends *from the Weston line to the Watertown/Belmont line.*" [Editor's note: author's emphasis added.]

This point was reaffirmed at the bidder's conference, and it is significant because the Beaver Street-to-Waverley Square segment could otherwise be orphaned. Indeed, that segment has been ranked as a high-priority "gap" in the regional trail network by the Boston Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (Boston MPO), the region's federally designated transportation planning agency. (See map on page 5.)

However, the city may have overlooked an important detail in its hurried issuance of the RFP . . . because the Beaver Street to Waverly Square segment could otherwise be orphaned. Indeed, that segment has been ranked a high priority "gap" in the regional trail network . . .

However, between Beaver Street and the Belmont border (about 3,820 feet), neither Waltham nor DCR owns or controls a right of way (other than Waverley Oaks Road). The two key property owners in that gap are the MBTA, which owns parcels of variable width flanking the Fitchburg rail line, and Duffy Properties, which owns virtually all of the land north of the Fitchburg line to Waverley Oaks Road.

The Duffy property is bordered to the west by Beaver Street and to the east by Beaver Brook Reservation South, which includes Beaver Brook, a stream that marks the Belmont/Waltham border in that area. Certainly before path construction—and, one would think, before definitive path design—Waltham would have to negotiate a purchase, easement, or other agreement with one or both of those property owners. A 2012 Metropolitan Area Planning Council feasibility study discussed the route options in the Beaver Street-to-Belmont segment.

Some sections of the RFP suggest that at one time the scope of design may have been

confined to the DCR-controlled Beaver Street-to-Weston segment. For example, a list of the street crossings requiring design does not include Beaver Street, and Exhibit C only shows the location of the path from Beaver Street to the Weston line. (Appendix D, on the other hand, is a map of Waltham annotated with a hand-drawn line showing the path hugging the north side of the Fitchburg line tracks from Beaver Street to the Belmont border.)

At the Weston end, the path will apparently follow the DCR-leased MCRR right of way, crossing Route 128 on the former MCRR railroad bridge just south of the Main Street (Route 117) vehicular bridge.

However, an alternative route has been proposed by 1265 Main, LLC, the developer of the former Polaroid site at the corner of Main Street and Route 128 (home to a recently opened Market Basket).

. . . an alternative route has been proposed by 1265 Main, LLC, the developer of the former Polaroid site.

The developer wants to construct new access ramps connecting his property to Route 128. That plan would apparently require demolition of the old railroad bridge and widening of the Main Street bridge from four lanes to seven, plus dedicated pedestrian and bicycle lanes. 1265 Main, LLC, has already constructed a segment of the Waltham path that traverses their property, just north of, and parallel to, Main Street.

At the bidder's conference on October 5, city officials made it clear that the design and construction of the path would be funded by Waltham, mostly via funds yet to be appropriated by the City Council. A 2013 DCR slide presentation estimated the cost of design and construction at \$5,371,000, not including rehabilitation of three historic truss bridges, estimated to cost an additional \$1.2–\$2 million for a total of \$6.6–\$7.4 million.

Self-funding would allow the city to control the design and construction process, but differs from the approach of other nearby communities that have sought federal and state funding for path design and construction.

The Boston MPO allocates federal Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) dollars, plus state matching funds, for a variety of infrastructure projects, including path design and construction, in 101 cities and towns roughly within Route 495. The Boston MPO expects to program \$2.85 billion in federal highway funds during the next 25 years.

. . . the typical funding formula for path design or construction is 80% federal dollars, 10% state, and 10% local (municipal).

Path projects have to reach the 25% design stage and meet MassDOT design guidelines to be eligible for MPO funds, and it usually takes several years for a high quality project to get to the front of the Boston MPO funding queue. However, the typical funding formula, whether for path design or construction, is 80% federal dollars, 10% state, and 10% local (municipal).

Boston MPO funding for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, which connects Framingham and Lowell, illustrates why many communities find TIP money attractive, despite the slow process. In 2013, the Boston MPO voted to allocate \$23 million to construct 7.5 miles of trail over three years, including a \$6.3 million bridge over Route 2 in Concord, dedicated for trail use. Arlington recently received \$1.6 million in TIP funds to design and construct an improved Massachusetts Avenue crossing for the Minuteman Bikeway. Closer to home, TIP money funded the \$17.1 million Trapelo Road reconstruction project.

The Waltham announcement is exciting news for residents of both Waltham and Belmont. It will be interesting to watch the project progress over the coming months.

Vincent Stanton Jr. is a Belmont Citizens Forum board member, and a member of the Belmont Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee.

See the online version of this story for links to cited documents at belmontcitizensforum.org

Interested Parties Walk the Route Belmont Community Path Orientation Walk

Photos and Captions by David Chase



On Saturday, October 15, members of the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee and consultants led a walk of about two dozen citizens to educate them about route possibilities for the western end of the community path in Belmont. Above, the group stops on Olmsted Drive, uphill from Pleasant Street.



The path could follow the Fitchburg commuter rail line at several locations. Above is near Cityside Subaru on Pleasant Street.



At Beaver Brook Reservation, near the end of Moraine Street, the path may follow a wooded stretch.



Behind the police station, the group examines grades and pinch points.



The path may continue north of the railroad tracks off Pleasant Street, near Snake Hill Road.

Pay As You Throw Program

How to Save Money and Reduce Trash

By Kim Slack

One hundred and forty-three Massachusetts communities meter trash the same way they meter water or electricity, creating an equitable system where those who generate more, pay more, and those who generate less, pay less. These programs are called Pay As You Throw (PAYT), or Save Money And Reduce Trash (SMART). As Belmont considers renewing its trash collection contract, it is worth exploring this approach to help the town financially and environmentally.

Massachusetts PAYT programs on average have reduced trash by 44% in their communities. When we are charged for the trash we produce, many of us will become more careful to recycle, and compost, and reduce the amount of packaging in the purchases we make. Belmont may not realize the same reductions that other communities have seen because, on average, we produce less trash. However, savings in the fees we pay for the weight of our trash are estimated to be over \$115,000 per year, assuming a 25% reduction in the weight of trash. Savings could be much more if we reduce more or if tipping fees rise in the future.

If Belmont were to choose to adopt a PAYT program, there is \$200,000 to \$300,000 in state grant funds to facilitate the transition . . .

When trash is recycled, composted, or reduced (like using your own bags for groceries) rather than incinerated, it results in fewer dangerous

greenhouse gas emissions that warm our planet. This is because there are fewer emissions from the incinerator, and there are fewer fossil fuels burned when new materials use recycled paper, metals, and plastics in their creation. Less trash also means less fuel in transporting waste, too.

By reducing our trash by 25% in Belmont, it would cut greenhouse gas emissions over 10,000 tons of CO₂ equivalent per year, according to the EPA, which is about the same as the energy used annually by 966 homes. This would help the town achieve its Climate Action Plan goal of reducing greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050.

By reducing our trash by 25% in Belmont, it would cut greenhouse gas emissions over 10,000 tons of CO₂ equivalent per year. . .

There are incentives from the state to cut down on trash, too. When Massachusetts passed the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2008, it asked towns to reduce their trash by 30% by 2020. As of 2015, Belmont still needed to slash



PIXABAY STOCK IMAGES

Table 1. Revenue Neutral PAYT Example	Efficient Recycler One 15-gal. bag/week		Average Recycler One 33-gal. bag/week	
	Current	PAYT	Current	PAYT
PAYT bag (annual cost)		\$65 (\$1.25x52 wks)	\$0	\$104 (\$2x52 wks)
Generic bag (annual cost)	\$10.50	\$0	\$25.50	\$0
Annual PAYT Refund		\$92		\$92
Total cost	\$10.50	-\$27	\$25.50	\$12
PAYT savings		\$37.50		

its trash by 16% to achieve this goal. If Belmont were to choose to adopt a PAYT program, there is \$200,000 to \$300,000 in state grant funds to facilitate the transition, which would help to meet this goal. In addition, the Baker-Polito Community Compact, a program that encourages innovation in Massachusetts communities, considers PAYT a “best practice.”

Standard 33-gallon bags cost about \$2 each; smaller sizes cost less.

Most PAYT programs require citizens to buy and use trash bags printed with the town’s name (and they are more expensive than super-market bags). Local retailers who sell the bags would benefit from additional foot traffic but would have to sell them at the price the Board of Selectmen established, with all the sales proceeds returning to the town. Standard 33-gallon bags cost about \$2 each; smaller sizes cost less. The average Belmont household produces less than 28 pounds of trash per week, so one \$2 bag would do the job. *Under PAYT, recycling would still be a free service provided by the town.*

Revenue-neutral option would benefit citizens directly

The program could be “revenue-neutral” where all bag revenue (minus the wholesale cost of the bags) is returned annually to households,

perhaps by sending a debit card or some other method. Taxpayers would not only recoup their costs, but there would be a financial incentive for households to reduce their trash and increase their recycling when they beat the average number of bags used per household.

Table 1 illustrates an example of how efficient recyclers could be rewarded.

Another option would be for the town to apply the bag fee income to something that citizens care about, such as improved energy efficiency in town buildings (which would further reduce town expenses). If bag fees were to be assessed, they would be established by the Board of Selectmen, just as water and electric rates are set. Towns on a PAYT program have rarely changed their bag fees.

Some believed that because of a 1990 override, the Board of Selectmen do not have the authority to establish fees on trash. But in a 2010 opinion, Belmont’s legal counsel wrote that the board maintains its ability to set fees on waste collection if it so decides.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of PAYT is the implementation. Citizens need to understand its purpose and how it will work months before it starts.

Table 2. Massachusetts Municipality	No. of Households	Bag Cost	Reduction in Waste
Malden	18,000	\$2	49%
Hamilton	3,000	\$1.75	40%
Shrewsbury	12,400	\$1.50	33%

Source: Steve Lisaukas, Waste Zero

When asked about a previous consideration of the program, state senator and former Belmont selectman Will Brownsberger said, “It’s a difficult decision for the selectmen. We looked at it when I was on the board and did not adopt it. There are good economic and environmental arguments for it, but there are also practical difficulties.”

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of PAYT is the implementation. Citizens need to understand its purpose and how it will work months before it starts. There needs to be strong communications around how it works, where bags can be bought, and, if the revenue is to be returned to citizens, when that will happen. This is why the state provides significant grants (mentioned above) for helping communities make this transition, so they have the resources to implement a program smoothly and successfully.

Belmont would gain significant savings—more than \$115,000 per year—from a 25% reduction in trash. If a revenue-neutral approach were used, it would cost residents and the town almost nothing. But more importantly, we would be creating a cleaner, healthier environment for our kids.

Kim Slack is a member of Sustainable Belmont and is on the town’s recycling and waste committee.

Not Everyone Feels PAYT Is The Way To Go.

Three Belmont residents had comments about the Pay As You Throw program.

Maryann Scali said, “I’m a senior; I don’t want to pay someone to take stuff away; we already get that as a free service. We don’t need another person on the town payroll who has to administer it, , etc. We don’t need that expense.”

Sue Bass added, “Among other things, I think it could lead to people from out of town dumping trash in Belmont. If only one percent of people do it, it’s a pain and it takes a lot of time. Promises made before an override do matter years later, even though town counsel says, and is no doubt correct, that they are not legally binding. ”

Virginia Jordan said, “Debit cards [for refunds] are a costly complication. If you ever received a debit card as a discount for a store purchase, you’ve noticed they are laden with fees, conditions, more paperwork, expiration dates. This is to the benefit of the financial institutions, and shouldn’t be part of a guaranteed government program.

“Also, pay-as-you-throw adds bureaucratic complexity to simple trash disposal. People start leaving trash elsewhere to avoid the nuisance payment and the special bags. There’s a risk the town department will control and take the fees, not the town as a whole.”

Belmont Citizens Forum invites further discussion and letters to the editor at belmontcitizensfoum.org

Interview with Environmental Change Agent Goodbye and Thank You to EK Khalsa

by Julia Blatt

EK (EkOngKar) Khalsa was executive director of Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) from 2008 until this September. His leadership has resulted in a dramatic improvement in the environment and water quality in a vital Greater Boston natural resource. We asked Belmont resident Julia Blatt, executive director of the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance and longtime colleague of Khalsa, to speak with him about his accomplishments in the region.

Julia Blatt: *What brought you to the Mystic River Watershed Association?*

EK Khalsa: I was introduced to MyRWA by an inspiring, very dynamic member of the board of directors, Alison Cohen. Alison and I had worked together for months on a project to restore a contaminated orchard to productive use.

JB: *Why did you decide to take on an environmental cause? What about this particular organization and cause appealed to you?*

EKK: It was the passion that its board of directors, its members, and its small staff brought to the mission. When I reviewed the work that was underway, I realized that MyRWA was accomplishing so much with little funding and paid staff. It was a quixotic effort in some ways, a determination to make a difference in the lives of a half million by improving the local environment in a 76-square-mile area. I also loved that MyRWA celebrated the beauty and value of the natural world in all its richness in a very urban environment.

JB: *What were you doing before joining MyRWA?*

EKK: Before 2008, I worked for seven years as director of project development for Hallmark Companies in Hopkinton MA, under the direction of a visionary developer, Ron Roux. He was reconfiguring traditional residential subdivisions into open space plans that protected and preserved conservation land.

JB: *What's special about the Mystic River? What do you think most people don't know about the Mystic that might surprise them?*

EKK: Few people realize how great it is to swim in the Mystic Lakes in the summer, how tranquil the river is to canoe in fall, and how exciting it is to take a dip at Constitution Beach in East Boston in February!

JB: *What have you seen change in your years at MyRWA, both within the organization, and for the river?*

EKK: The most important change is the narrative of a forgotten, forlorn, polluted, urban waterway to the recognition that it is a vibrant living system full of fish,



MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

birds, and lush park space. The story of the Mystic is continuing to evolve in very positive ways, despite the significant challenges the watershed faces—particularly in its most urban sections.

The association had been struggling quite a bit just before I arrived because of very limited resources. The board was ready for a change when it hired me and we were fortunate to make significant organizational improvements.

When I arrived, MyRWA employed 2.5 full-time staffers, including me. The annual budget was approximately \$150,000, including in-kind services. With that funding, they managed a very professional water-quality monitoring program, hosted sizable on-the-water events, wrote countless comment letters, and gave significant public testimony. This was done through sheer force of will and countless volunteer hours.

When I left office in September 2016, we had a staff of seven full-time professionals, a dozen paid consultants and interns, and more than 1,500 volunteers annually in various field and water quality improvement projects. The annual budget for 2016 will exceed \$830,000. In addition, we're helping to attract millions of dollars in private and public funding to improve environmental conditions in the watershed directly through our outreach and advocacy.

Much credit goes to John Reinhardt for bringing about such significant improvement. John guided the association as president throughout this period and helped to lay the groundwork for success before I arrived.

JB: *What have been the obstacles the organization has faced?*

EKK: One of the big challenges was overcoming the skepticism when I said that the Mystic was a beautiful river worth our investment. Few people had seen the river from the water's



Khalsa, MyRWA staff, and volunteers spent many hours removing water chestnut plants from the Mystic River.

MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

surface. That distance makes engagement challenging.

The more people walk or ride their bikes on the riverfront, or spend time in a cleanup, or become a citizen scientists, however, the more voices call for support for the river's health and well-being.

JB: *What do you see as the greatest achievements of the group so far?*

EKK: MyRWA made it clear that the river's environmental condition was not solely the result of some bad people who made evil decisions in the distant past. We emphasized that the condition of the river is the direct result of the lives we are living now. That message has gotten out.

Today's Mystic River residents are the beneficiaries of very successful urban development and extraordinary prosperity created by the folks who lived here before us. We are also the inheritors of the problems and inequities we collectively created.

We helped to create a balanced perspective based on the facts and articulated that it is possible to achieve clean water, a healthy river, and vibrant, inclusive communities. We have also made clear that there's a price to pay for that.

JB: *Of what are you most proud?*

EKK: That we persuaded US Environmental Protection Agency to change the Mystic River Watershed water-quality grading system to better reflect the actual conditions in the river. That really helped develop a better understanding of where the treasures and challenges lie.

I'm most proud that I helped guide my staff and many young interns and volunteers to accomplish work of which they are proud and which, I believe for them, is deeply meaningful.

JB: *What are the challenges still ahead?*

EKK: To maintain current capacity, to secure steady funding for professional staff on whom so much of this work depends, and to continue to build strong coalitions and collaborative efforts among a diverse group of stakeholders.

The challenge for the watershed will be to embrace and guide the explosive growth and development that will be initiated by the Wynn Resort Casino in Everett. Few people realize, I suspect, the profound and immediate impact this facility will have on local real estate and riverfront sites.

Few people realize the profound and immediate impact [the Wynn Resort Casino] will have on local real estate and riverfront sites.

It is important for the association and many other Boston regional advocates promote healthy land use and generous consideration of the Mystic and its parklands as this growth unfolds.

There's an opportunity to get it right this time but there will be a need for many voices in the chorus.

JB: *What takes you to California now? And what will you be doing there?*

EKK: My wife Savitri and I have moved to be closer to our only child. I will also serve as the first executive director of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, founded by the native people of the lands around Santa Cruz and Monterey, California.

Julia Blatt is a Belmont resident and executive director of the Massachusetts River Alliance.

Environmental Events

Belmont Drives Electric Ride & Drive Day **Saturday, November 12, 1:30-4:30 PM**

Come test drive and learn about several models of electric vehicles, as well as incentives by local dealers and tax benefits. Learn more at: belmont-driveselectric.org or email info@bostoncommittee.org for more information. *Belmont High School parking lot and cafeteria.*

MIT Water Summit 2016

Thursday & Friday, November 17, 8 AM to November 18, 3:30 PM

The MIT Water Club and its sponsors are thrilled to announce the fifth edition of the MIT Water Summit, a gathering of not only students and faculty from MIT and the greater Boston area, but also leaders from industry, finance, government, and academia to explore current problems and potential solutions surrounding water resources. See specific times, agenda, and registration fees: www.mitwatersummit.com. *MIT Wong Auditorium, 2 Amherst St., Cambridge*

Autumn Clean Up at Habitat

Saturday, December 3, 1-3 M

For hearty folks who like to rake, cut firewood, haul brush, or are skilled with hand tools. See www.massaudubon.org/habitat. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Talking About Climate Change Through Video with Alex Griswold

Wednesday, December 6, 4-5 PM

Climate change has become extremely polarized and politicized when it doesn't have to be. Part of the reason is the way climate change information is communicated. Examples of videos that push the wrong buttons abound. Presenting solutions, being aware of audience preconceptions, and understanding the values the audience brings to the discussion are alternative ways to move the needle toward a solution. Alex Griswold is the research associate and multimedia producer at the Harvard University Center for the Environment. Learn more at <http://burecseminars.blogspot.com/> Free. *Boston University, 685 Commonwealth Avenue, Room 132.*

Sustainable Belmont Regular Meeting

Wednesday, December 7, 7-8:30 PM

Wednesday, January 4, 7-8:30 PM

Wednesday, February 1, 7-8:30 PM

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

New Year Trail Tending at Habitat

Sunday, January 8, 1-3 PM

The weather will decide whether we are pruning, repairing trails, and clearing brush, or shoveling and packing trails. See www.massaudubon.org/habitat. Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.

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- ☐ Newsletter mailings
- ☐ Event organizing

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November/December 2016



Belmont’s solar panel campaign is a great success with more than 150 homes. Next up: Belmont Drives Electric hopes to persuade 50 residents to switch to electric vehicles by March.

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