



## Finding Sewer Leaks Means Detective Work

### Hidden Leaks in Pipes from Street to House Pollute Waterways

By Anne-Marie Lambert

Belmont has greatly accelerated investigating underground sources of water pollution in the last six months. This good news is tempered by the knowledge that we have 77 miles of sewer pipes and 56 miles of stormwater drains, all old. The average sewer pipe in Belmont is now 83 years old. The average storm drain is 64 years old. Our accountants assume a 60-year useful life for underground pipes.

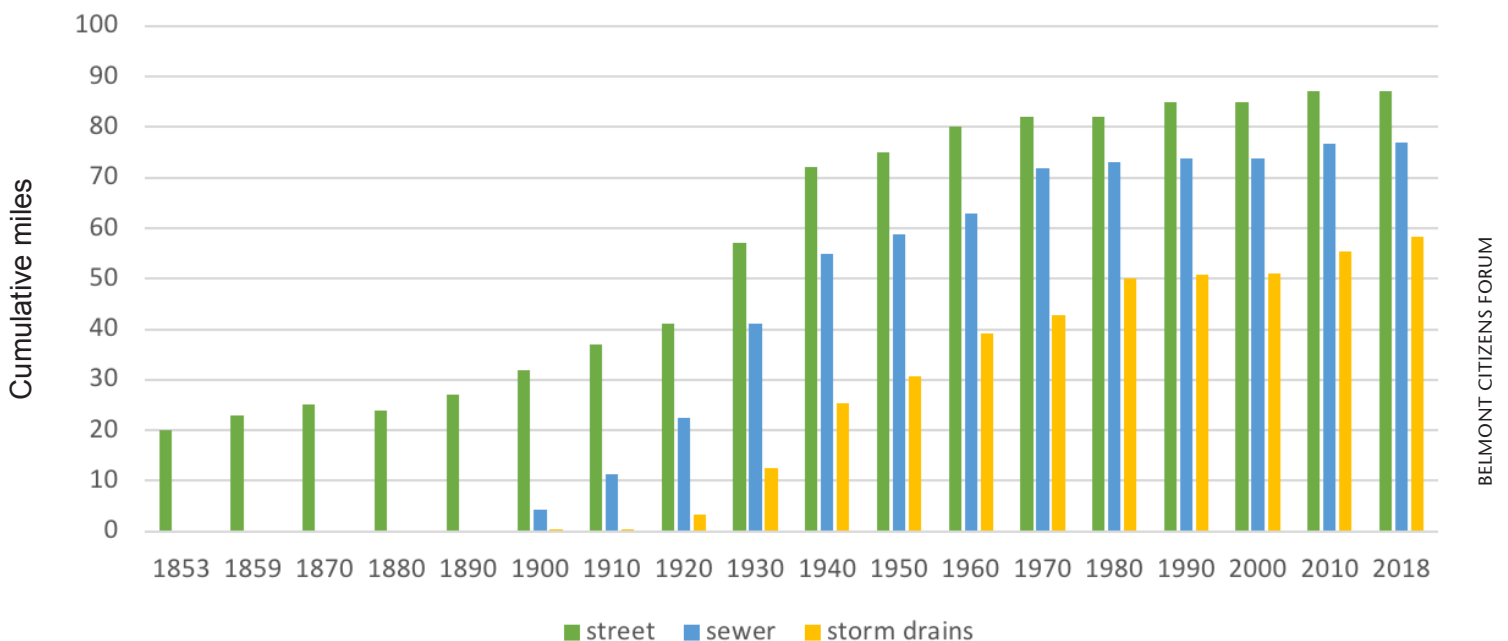
Figure 1 shows how we got here. Until 1900, Belmont was a farming community served by about 30 miles of roads without sewers or storm

drains. In 1907, we bought our first “tar road surfacer.” By 1940, we added 40 more miles of roads for a total of 70 miles. We also installed 55 miles of underground sewers and 25 miles of underground storm drains, including public works projects that buried much of Winn’s Brook and Wellington Brook in underground culverts.

Since 1940, farms have continued to turn into suburbs, but at a slower rate. We’ve added another 47 miles of roads, 22 miles of sewers, and 30 miles of storm drains.

According to Belmont’s December 2017 self-assessment report to the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), only 52% of the sewer

Figure 1: Belmont’s Cumulative Miles of Streets, Sewers, and Storm Drains <sup>1</sup>



system has been inspected, and only 25% has been rehabilitated or replaced. As of June 2016, the town's contractor estimated the cost of the backlog of sewer system repairs at \$16 million and the stormwater system repairs at an additional \$16 million. This estimate was made before the recent round of water quality testing, and it doesn't take into consideration the repair costs for sewer service laterals—the pipes which connect homes to the street system.

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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. The *BCF 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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Recent investigations indicate that the most common source of pollution may not be damaged sewer mains and drains under the street, but rather damaged sewer service laterals. Service laterals lie beneath our lawns, where they are sometimes broken by tree roots seeking water and nutrients. Tree roots have less interest in reaching the sewer mains and drains under streets because the soil there has less moisture, fewer nutrients, and is harder to reach.

Because citizens care more about what they can see than what is hidden underground, the town used to prioritize sewer and stormwater maintenance work under roads with poor surface conditions. About 1.5 miles of sewer and stormwater work continues to be identified per year by that measure. The town is now also prioritizing maintenance based on where the worst pollution has been measured within the drain system. Since July 2017, the town has been busy testing water quality throughout the system. They've been doing this in even more locations than required by the EPA's May 2017 Order on Consent.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2 shows the Wellington and Winn's Brook drainage areas divided into sections.<sup>3</sup> As of January 31, months of detective work in 13 miles of storm drains flowing into Winn's Brook and in 22 miles of drains flowing into the Wellington Brook resulted in the discovery of six suspicious sites in the Wellington or Winn's Brook drainage areas.

## How many bugs are in our waterways?

Researchers count bacteria in the water as "cfu/100 ml," or colony-forming units per 100 milliliters. It's an estimate of how many viable cells there are in 100 ml, which is a little more than four ounces or a half-cup of water.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has fresh water standards of 235 and 1,260 cfu of *E. coli* per 100 ml of water as acceptable levels for swimming and boating, respectively.

You never know where you will find a culprit. One location was in the low-lying Winn Brook neighborhood, another near the highest part of Common Street a few blocks from the Beech Street Center. In each location, there was a 1930s-era home with two lateral pipes to the street, one for sewage and one for rain, and indications that sewage was getting into the storm drain.

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You never know where you will find a culprit.

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By January 31, video inspection had been completed in 11 storm drains, 6 sanitary sewer mains, and 27 sewer service laterals in a total of 5 suspect neighborhoods. At press time for this article, the videos had not yet been analyzed. Because of the expense and delays associated with this approach, Glenn Clancy, director of Belmont's Office of Community Development, is now considering going ahead and lining the service laterals to all homes on a street once dye testing indicates a problem in one service lateral, without investing in video inspections of laterals to every home in a neighborhood.

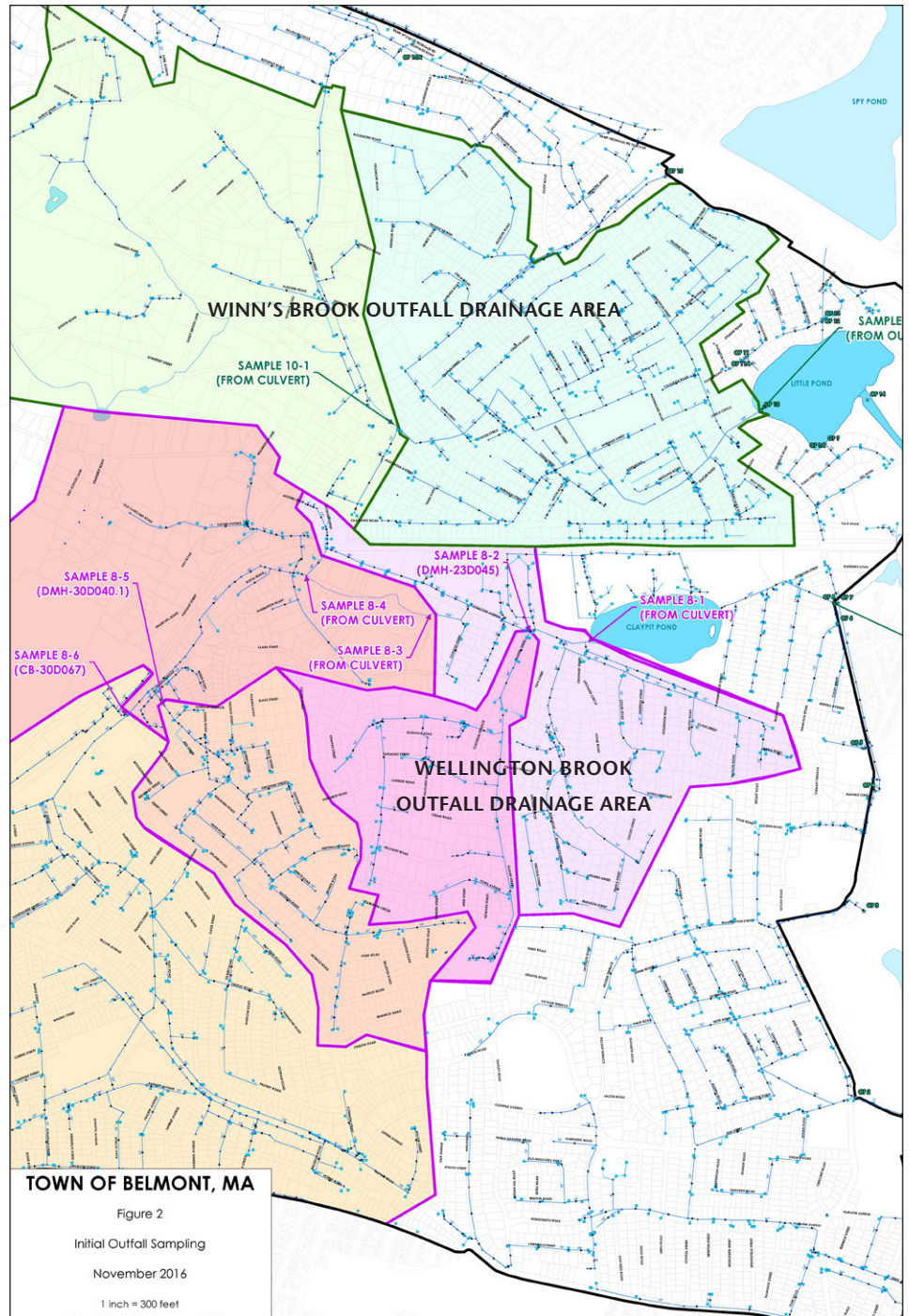


Figure 2: Wellington and Winn's Brook outfall drainage areas. Wellington Brook areas are purple; Winn's Brook areas are green.

Town reports to the EPA in November, December, and January reveal detective work still in progress. By April of this year, Clancy hopes to identify and commence a set of small construction projects to fix specific problems. Without exposing exact addresses, here's the story of what it took to get close to finding one problem in the Winn Brook neighborhood.

## Detective story: Where's the sewage in Winn's Brook coming from?

November 2016

*Divided Winn's Brook into area 10-1 and 10-2, sampled near the outside of each.*

- Identified a strategic point to divide the 13 miles of storm drains into two "catchment areas," one near Little Pond, and a smaller one farther away. The smaller catchment area (10-1) is upstream of the exposed part of Winn's Brook just before it goes under Claflin Street.

- Sampled to confirm that the big Winn's Brook culvert flowing into Little Pond at the end of area 10-2 still has more than 235 cfu/100 ml of *E. coli* in wet weather. The concentration of *E. coli* in the culvert was 7,200 cfu/100 ml *E. coli* in wet weather, remarkable given that the large volume of water in the culvert dilutes any pollution.

- Sampled at Claflin Street: 1,250 cfu/100 ml *E. coli* in dry weather and 2,700 cfu/100 ml in wet weather; not great.

July 2017

*Sampled near periphery of area 10-1, declared it "all clear" for now.*

- Sampled at manholes upstream of Claflin Street, e.g., Clifton Street at Pleasant Street, Claflin at Alexander Street: under 500 cfu/100 ml; not too bad.

Sampled at Claflin Street again. No *E. coli* detected this time. It's frustrating that sewage problems can be so intermittent and hard to detect consistently. This type of pollution does not happen when a household is on vacation, for example.

Consider all of area 10-1 OK for now; focus instead on the larger catchment area 10-2.

September 2017

*Sampled near periphery of area 10-2, identified one really polluted manhole.*

- Identified 12 primary manholes in the larger catchment area (10-2) in order to divide it into 12 neighborhoods.

- Sampled at the 12 primary manholes. One of them measured at >20,000 cfu/100 ml. Bingo! Of the others, four are OK (<1000 cfu/100 ml), six

## What are Belmont's waterways?

Rain falling on Belmont flows through the town's municipal system of underground drains into the following surface waters: Little Pond, Clay Pit Pond, Mill Pond, Duck Pond, Wellington Brook, Winn's Brook, Beaver Brook, and unnamed tributaries to Spy Pond, Blair Pond, and other locations.

Spy Pond drains to Little Pond. Wellington Brook, Winn's Brook, Little Pond, Clay Pit Pond, and Blair Pond are all tributaries to Little River, which is in turn a tributary to Alewife Brook.

Alewife Brook drains to the Mystic River, which drains to Boston Harbor and then into Massachusetts Bay.

The 1972 Clean Water Act gives the EPA authority to permit municipal systems and to take actions like the 2017 Order on Consent with Belmont in order to ensure the country's navigable waters are clean. The next level of action would be an Administrative Order.

are dry or could not be sampled, and one can't be opened.

- Sampled the Winn's Brook culvert again. It's OK this time (200 cfu/100 ml), but that won't stop us investigating upstream.

October 2017

*Sampled upstream of the polluted manhole, identified one really polluted block.*

Sampled in both directions at a manhole upstream of the bad one: one direction is 20,000 cfu/100 ml—bingo! The other direction is OK.

Sampled at the other 12 secondary and 7 tertiary manholes upstream of the primary manholes. Three are OK, 14 are dry or not sampleable, one can't be opened, one can't be accessed.

October 2017

*Dye tested in polluted block, found one home with sewage getting into storm drain.*

Sent a letter to each of nine homes in the neighborhood around the polluted manhole warning them that a contractor will be coming to do a 30-minute dye test.

Sent a contractor and a policeman to knock at the door of each of the nine homes. Three are not home on each of two visits. Six allow entry for a sewer stack inspection and dye test in a basement sink and/or first-floor toilet. One shows evidence of seepage into the downstream storm drain. Bingo!

November 2017–January 2018

*Video inspection of part of the Winn Brook neighborhood.*

CCTV video inspections of storm drain and five sewer services to five homes to locate exactly where the service laterals are damaged and to identify any illicit connections.

February–April 2018 (planned)

- Determine exact location and start the 60-day repair clock.
- Review CCTV video to identify specific locations or addresses where wastewater flows into the storm drain.

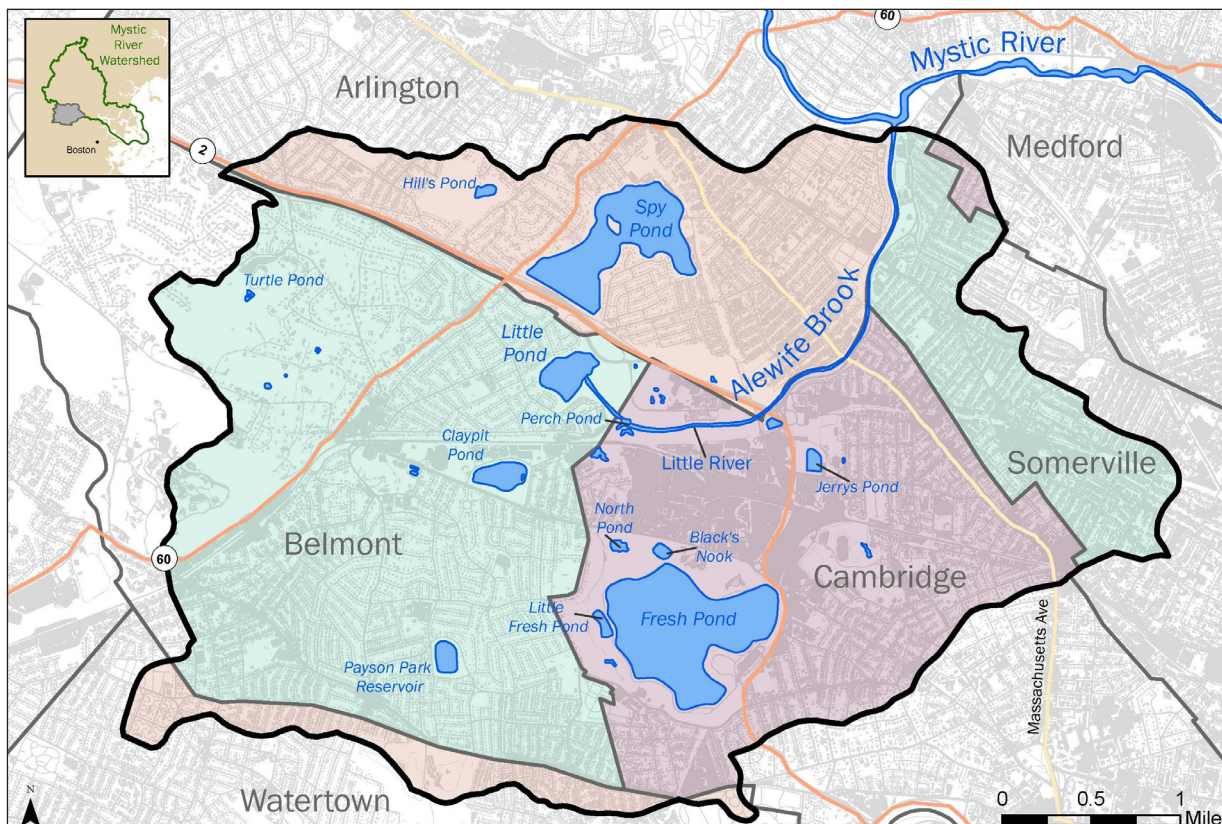
- Depending on the location, determine if town or homeowner is responsible.
- Town: reline or repair broken lateral drains and sewers within 60 days.
- Homeowner: notification sent within 30 days that they have 60 days to address any illicit connection. If not addressed within 90 days, EPA requires town to impose fines.

*Future steps*

- More sampling to see if these actions stopped the pollution.
- Repeat until sampling shows all is clear!

This detective work is a time-consuming and labor-intensive way to find one leaky drain and get it fixed. During the same months, the town undertook similar detective work in the Wellington Brook catchment area, which is bigger and was divided into five interconnected catchment areas, not just two. There are months of lag time between measurements, and between measurement, detection, and repair.

I was hoping that we could confidently sound the “all clear” one step at a time, starting with peripheral drainage areas with good measurements.



COURTESY OF MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION, SOURCE: OFFICE OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (MASSGIS), COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIVISION, 2013.

Belmont's drainage areas comprise about a third of the Alewife sub-watershed, which is a small part of the 80-square-mile Mystic River watershed.

Unfortunately, defining “peripheral” is not that straightforward when it comes to drains on a complex topography, and sampling only provides an indicator of where likely problems are, not guarantees. I think the breadth of this approach is impressive, but we need to recognize that any declarations are based on probabilities, not certainties. I am frustrated that it takes so long and that the results are not always definitive.

More recently, the town went beyond the EPA requirements and started similar sampling and detective work in all the other areas draining into the Mystic River watershed (outfall areas 1, 2, 9 & 9A, 11, 11A & 12, and 15 & 15A). The Oliver Road area highlighted in the July/August 2017 *BCF Newsletter* article, “Fix the Stormwater System: It’s the Law,” has now been sampled and inspected with videos; so has the part of the Winn Brook neighborhood pictured in our May/June 2017 *BCF Newsletter* article, “Cleaning Up Belmont’s Polluted Waterways.”

As the annual town budget planning gets underway, it feels hard to predict what budget we’ll need to fix the problems we find. The EPA order stipulates action within 60 days once a pollution source is discovered. I wonder if we should do even more investigations simultaneously, and build more room in the budget to recognize the uncertainty surrounding this work. I also continue to wonder whether the town should research and invest in radically different services that use modern sensor and analysis tools.

## Educating the Next Generation

Unlike the Belmont farmers and gardeners of yesterday, suburban residents of Belmont today are a lot more interested in what happens in classrooms than in the health of local waterways, which are no longer used for irrigation. When Belmont high school kids leave those classrooms and ask me about water pollution, I start by educating them about where our water bodies are, and about how our water quality is similar to regions without a proper sewage system.

I explain that they are growing up in a place where we don’t have water-borne disease only because we expend a lot of energy transporting water from far away and processing it so it’s fit to drink. I try to answer their questions about

rain barrels, and help them imagine a future when kids are learning and boating and swimming in our own ponds and brooks.<sup>4</sup> I help them envision future town engineers with their robot assistants responding promptly to electronic notifications on the rare occasions pollution is detected in the underground storm drains.

## Showing Citizen Interest

With the EPA’s help, our town is accelerating the search for pollution sources, a complicated challenge which doesn’t have a big constituency of engaged citizens. To learn more about next year’s plans for fixing the sewer system, check the town calendar and attend the annual meeting in late March or early April, when the Board of Selectmen sets the water and sewer rates. You’ll learn how Belmont plans to invest the next \$500,000 in annual capital expenditures to fix sewer and stormwater drains polluting our waterways. The EPA’s 2022 deadline for finding and addressing all the problems affecting Belmont’s water quality provides a great focus for elected officials. Local citizens demonstrating interest by showing up, or by writing letters of concern, can be equally powerful.

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

## Footnotes

1. Richard Betts, *Streets of Belmont and Town of Belmont Capacity, Management, Operations, and Maintenance (CMOM) Program Self-Assessment—CWA-AO-R01-FY17-11*, December 13, 2017.
2. For more about the EPA Order on Consent, see “Fix the Stormwater System: It’s the Law,” July/August 2017 *BCF Newsletter*, <http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org/2017/07/10/fix-the-stormwater-system-its-the-law/>
3. Figure 2, Initial Outfall Sampling, from Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Program Investigation of the Winn’s Brook and Wellington Brook Tributary Areas, November 1, 2017. Prepared for the Town of Belmont by Stantec Consulting Services Inc.
4. “Daylighting Streams Improves Water, Life,” May/June 2011 *BCF Newsletter*, <http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/BCF13MayJuneWEB.pdf>

# Selectman Candidate Answers BCF Questions

Belmont Annual Town Election to be Held Tuesday, April 3

*Compiled by Sara McCabe*

Each year the Belmont Citizens Forum asks candidates for selectman about issues the town will likely face in the next three years. This year Tom Caputo is running uncontested for the seat currently occupied by Jim Williams, who is retiring after one term. Below are Caputo's unedited replies to our questions about the environment, traffic, funding, and planning.

## **1. How would you address the amount of cut-through traffic in Belmont?**

Cut-through traffic in Belmont has always been bad, but it has significantly worsened with the development of GPS apps like Waze and Google Maps. The Board of Selectmen asked the Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) to develop a set of proposals to address cut-through traffic on a town-wide basis—with strategies that could be employed quickly and cost-effectively. TAC has engaged a consultant to assist in the analysis. On February 8, 2017, the consultant outlined a plan which includes quantifying the traffic patterns through town and identifying where those cars come from (Belmont or beyond). Through the strategic deployment of turn restrictions, for example, we could influence the route guidance that GPS apps give to commuters, thereby making Belmont a less attractive commuting alternative. The study is expected to last several months, and I am eager to see the recommendations that come out of the process.

## **2. What do you see as the most important steps for constructing the Community Path, and how quickly can we complete it? Do you believe it should be integrated into the high school redesign/intergenerational path redesign?**

The Community Path has been a feature of every design plan created by the High School Building Committee architects, and it will significantly



TOM CAPUTO CAMPAIGN

Tom Caputo

enhance biking and walking options to school. Implementation of the path, however, is separate from the high school project. The Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC) developed a final route proposal that was approved by the Board of Selectmen last December. The Board asked CPIAC to take the next steps in the process—identify state/federal funding sources for the construction of the path and work with the MBTA and property owners to address outstanding route design questions. In addition, the town must identify a funding source for the design phase. It is likely that we will want to phase the design and construction given our concurrent building projects and the potential disruption of a town-wide construction project.

**3. How can we prepare for increasingly intense storms and climate-related sea-level rise, and specifically for flooding in the areas of Little River/Alewife Brook, Little Pond, and Clay Pit Pond? What opportunities do you see for Belmont to coordinate with Cambridge and Arlington to increase resiliency to the predicted flooding?**

Climate-related sea-level rise and growing storm intensity represent challenges for Belmont, but also the region, the state, and ultimately the world. Preserving floodplains and open space gives water a place to go. Minimizing the creation of new paved surfaces reduces runoff. We must use best management practices in our communities to recharge water, from installing rain gardens, vegetated buffers, pervious pavement, and swales, to more complex detention basins to meet stormwater permits in new developments. The design team for the High School Building Project has been closely examining predicted flood level data and has worked to situate the new proposed high school building on the site to minimize the likelihood of flooding. Belmont can learn from recent regional analysis such as the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and explore ways to coordinate such efforts across the region.

**Rock Meadow Poetry Nature Walk**

Saturday, April 7, 2–3:30 PM

Anne-Marie Lambert will be joined by Stephanie Burt, local poet, professor, and author of several books of poetry, including *Belmont* (2014) and *Advice from the Lights* (2017).

Through poetry, we will explore the landscape and history of this part of Belmont and Waltham. Meet at the small Rock Meadow parking lot on Mill Street. Bike racks are available, and there is a supplementary Lone Tree Hill parking lot across the street.

**4. Like Arlington, should Belmont consider joining the Metropolitan Mayors Climate Preparedness Task Force of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)?**

I strongly support collaboration with our neighboring communities to address the regional issue of climate preparedness. The Metropolitan Mayors Climate Preparedness Task Force was created in 2015 as a coalition of fourteen cities and towns (e.g., Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Newton, etc.) to exchange information and create regional solutions regarding the impacts of climate change. The communities have committed to regional goals by 2050 in addition to each community implementing three new projects by 2020. Belmont approved a Climate Action Plan in 2009, with a carbon emissions reduction goal of 80% by 2050, but we are currently lagging behind in progress toward our goals and could learn much from the experience of other cities and towns.

**5. What are your environmental priorities for Belmont?**

Belmont must continue our work toward achievement of the Climate Action Plan Resolution adopted by Town Meeting in November 2009. A critical component of meeting the plan’s targets is the reduction of Belmont’s carbon dioxide emissions through Belmont Light’s purchasing of power from renewable sources. Second, we must consider “total lifecycle costing” when designing the new Belmont High School project and make energy efficiency, including the consideration of zero net energy options, a high priority in building design and operation. Third, we should continue to promote the adoption of renewable energy technologies by the Belmont community through programs like Belmont Goes Solar and Belmont Drives Electric.

**6. What do you think is a reasonable goal and timetable for reducing pollution in Belmont’s streams and ponds so they can support recreation like boating or even swimming?**

In the last decade, Belmont has spent over \$8 million replacing deteriorating sanitary sewer



mains, but there are still service connections (links between houses and the sewer mains) that require lining or replacement to minimize leaks. In May 2017, the town of Belmont signed an agreement with the EPA to address the ongoing discharge through our stormwater drains of sewage that makes its way into the Mystic River watershed and ultimately Boston Harbor. The EPA agreement sets out a timetable stipulating that Belmont find and remediate the sources of sewage infiltration within five years. Consultants will soon issue a report based on their study of three major outfalls into Little Pond, which will guide our next steps. I am supportive of the town's commitment to the five-year timeline outlined in the EPA agreement.

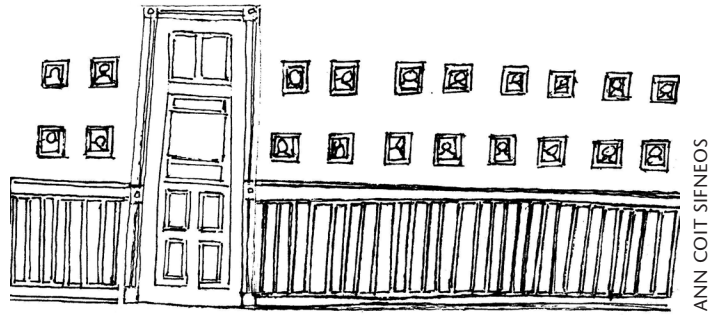
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**7. Do you support introducing a stormwater fee to ensure adequate funding of the major work remaining to detect and repair our aging underground infrastructure?**

Belmont has two ratepayer structures—one for clean drinking water coming into the home, and another for the disposal of sewage water coming from the home. Currently, the work Belmont is doing to clean up our stormwater is funded through the sewer enterprise fund either directly or through borrowing. Some communities have created independent stormwater utilities dedicated to funding stormwater management. Unlike sewer and water rates, which are based on metered usage, stormwater fees are often based on other factors, like the amount of impervious surface on the property (e.g., roofs, parking lots, driveways.) Belmont should explore the possibility of creating a stormwater utility, how



the rates would be determined, and whether it is a more effective source of funding than our current approach.

**8. Belmont has a reputation for putting town studies on a shelf and ignoring them. What do you believe town government should do to see that these plans are considered?**

Belmont is fortunate to have a community of volunteers willing to give their time and expertise to study important town issues. The analysis and recommendations from these groups should be actively considered, and where appropriate, implemented by Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen, and the town administration. We should have an inclination to action when thoughtful recommendations are made, but often the town is challenged by limited staff or financial resources. To that end, I believe the Board of Selectmen must be the drivers of action. The selectmen must work collaboratively with the community to decide the town's strategic priorities (often guided by these studies) and then must ensure town staff and resource are focused accordingly.

Sara McCabe is the editor of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*.



# Hello. Goodbye. And Thank You.

Welcome to Sara McCabe.

The *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* is pleased to welcome our new editor, Sara McCabe. Sara has more than 15 years of experience in publications management, and has produced magazines, books, web content, and other communications for a variety of clients nationwide, including Hilton Hotels and several state tourism departments.

Sara is also a successful grant writer and has served on many nonprofit boards and advisory and event committees. She holds a bachelor's in marketing from Santa Clara University and a master's in organizational leadership and ethics from St. Edward's University.



MARK ERICKSON

Sara McCabe

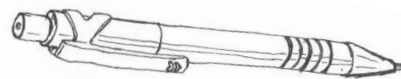
Sara lives in East Arlington but says her dog prefers walking in Belmont. She and her husband, Charlie, are avid cyclists and are particularly eager to help make the Belmont Community Path a reality.

Thank you, John.

Sara takes over from John DiCocco, who edited our newsletter for two years. John took it upon himself to make the development in Cushing Square and the building of the Bradford his beat, and kept us informed about environmental concerns, permitting issues, and town/neighborhood/builder relationships. Though now a resident of West Medford, John and his wife, Connie, lived in Belmont for more than 30 years. John hopes to finish a novel that he's been working on and to continue spending more time with his grandchildren.

And thank you, Meg.

And we would like to extend a very special thank you to Meg Muckenhoupt, who was the guest editor for this "transition" issue. Meg edited the *BCF Newsletter* from 2004 to 2016, and it has been a pleasure to work with her again. Meg is the author of *Boston's Gardens & Green Spaces*, a guide to the well-known and lesser known parks in Boston, and is working on a book about how food developed into what we think of as typical New England fare.



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# Historical Society Calls for Award Nominations

The Belmont Historical Society invites you to nominate projects that have furthered preservation efforts in Belmont for the David R. Johnson Preservation Award. Properties throughout the town, not just in the historic districts, are eligible. There are six categories of projects for nomination:

- Private residences;
- Commercial properties;
- Publicly owned properties;
- Properties owned by nonprofit institutions;
- Landscape projects; and
- Preservation of open space and land conservation.

Individuals, companies, or institutions that have made significant contributions to historic preservation in Belmont will also be considered. Awards will be presented at the society's annual meeting on May 16.

Congratulations to last year's awardees:

- The ad hoc group chaired by Angelo Firenze in recognition of its efforts to clean and rehabilitate the historic 1907 stone railroad bridge at the gateway to Belmont Center. (The Belmont Citizens Forum participated in this project by raising funds from many town residents and businesses.)

- The Belmont Veterans Memorial Committee, chaired by Brigadier General Kevin Ryan, Retired, in recognition of its restoration of Belmont's World War I Memorial on Common Street, in front of the Lions Club.

- Nichole and Alan Savenor in recognition of the restoration and preservation of their historically significant mid-century modern house on Snake Hill Road.

- Roger Webb in recognition of his efforts that led to the formation of the Wellington Historic District in the 1970s; the preservation of the 19th-century Morton House in Arlington slated for demolition by moving it to its present location at 30 School Street in the 1960s; and the preservation of a historic 1840 Greek Revival church building in West Thompson, Connecticut, by moving it to Belmont and reassembling it as Hamilton Chapel on the Belmont Hill School grounds in 1963.

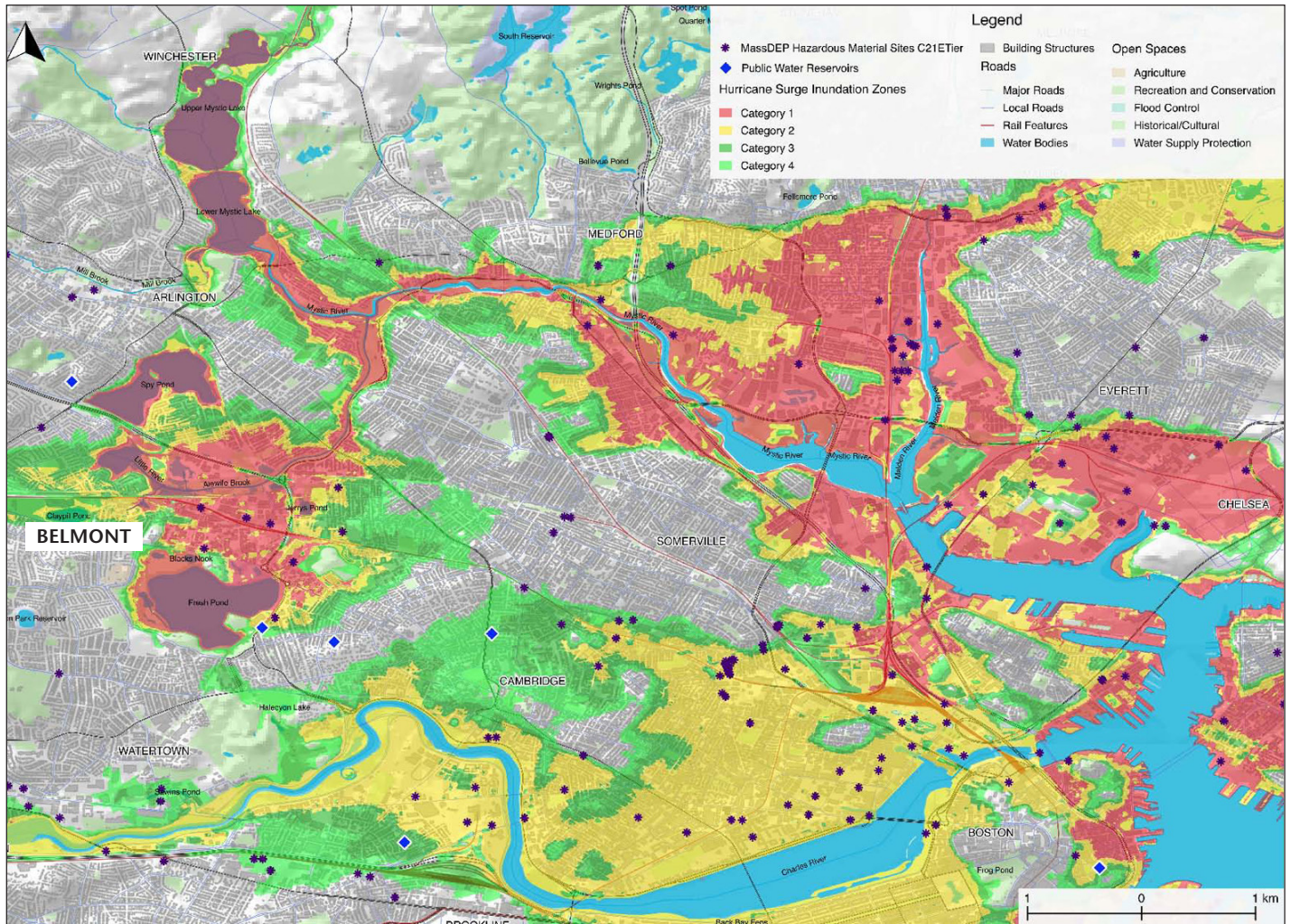
We encourage everyone to look around town for projects worthy of recognition this year. Nomination forms are available online at [www.belmonthistoricalsociety.org](http://www.belmonthistoricalsociety.org) or by calling 617-993-2878. Please submit your nominations by **April 20** to Belmont Historical Society, PO Box 125, Belmont, MA 02478.



BELMONT CITIZENS FORUM

Cleaning the Belmont Center railroad bridge.

# Symposium Explores Alewife Resilience



MAP PUBLISHED BY EARTHOS, AUTHORED BY MIARY RASOANAIVO WITH PHILIP LOHEED

Map of inundation zones for hurricane surges. Red areas are expected to flood during Category 1 hurricanes; yellow, in Category 2 hurricanes; green, in Category 3 hurricanes. The data sources for this analysis include FEMA-NFHL identified flood zones (National Floor Hazard Layer), Categories 1 to 4; NOAA data from Surging Seas system; Mass DEP Hazardous Material Sites, C21E Tier.

*By Sarah Howard with Patricia Loheed*

“When it comes to natural disasters, 2017 was one for the record books,” according to a recent Weather Channel video. With increasingly extreme weather, area residents have been expressing concerns about the Alewife Corridor. Many still remember when a section of Route 16 remained underwater for two weeks in 1997, becoming impassable to traffic and blocking an evacuation route. The recent “bombogenesis” storm in early January, which caused significant flooding and storm surges in the Boston

area, has only added to the commonly voiced concerns.

Most of us know the Alewife Corridor area as a transit corridor, with the MBTA Alewife Station as a visible landmark. Some know it as a walkable greenway, with occasional sightings of herons and otters. Not so visibly, it is a major utility corridor for gas, sewer, drinking water, and communications. But it is also a floodplain vulnerable to storm surges and flooding.

In January, the Earthos Institute and Tufts University hosted the Alewife Corridor



CHARLIE MCCABE

Alewife Brook, alongside Route 16, at banks-full stage after the March 2, 2018, storm. This area is a major utility corridor for gas, sewer, drinking water, and communications.

Collaborative Resilience Symposium to discuss the Corridor's future. The 250 attendees included local residents, municipal staff, university researchers, members of local citizen groups, state representatives, and officials from the six adjacent municipalities of Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville, Medford, and Winchester.

Questions ranged from elementary to complex. What is the Alewife Corridor? Why should we care about it? Why is resilience important? How do we build resilience in the corridor while recognizing our differences and geographic boundaries? What do we need to know; what do we need to do?

One speaker explained, "Resilience is ultimately about thriving for the long-term while being able to respond effectively to these types of challenges, and to catastrophic events." To understand resilience in the Alewife Corridor, we need to understand the corridor itself.

The Alewife Corridor is a geographic area that includes an urban river corridor, its floodplain and ponds, and six adjacent municipalities. It runs from the highlands of Belmont, Arlington, and Winchester to the Alewife Reservation in Cambridge, to the Alewife Brook and Alewife Parkway, to Medford, where it joins with the Aberjona and Mystic Rivers. In the past, the corridor has been protected from storm surges by

the Mystic River's Amelia Earhart Dam. Due to the corridor's hydrology, location, density, and transportation and utility infrastructure, it is one of the most complex and vulnerable areas of the Boston region.

Despite significant stewardship efforts, this corridor remains troubled. Symposium participants explored its many challenges, like poor water quality; hazardous sites such as Jerry's Pond located near water supplies like Fresh Pond; regular flooding and poor drainage; aged and threatened infrastructure, including utilities and dams; compromised biodiversity; and new development in the floodplain. These problems are becoming more complex as the ocean levels rise and as storms, storm surges, and flooding intensify.

During the two-day symposium, participants explored these problems. Many stated that one of the biggest challenges is governmental, not technical, since home rule leaves each municipality to follow its own preferences. The general sentiment was that solutions need to engage multiple communities and fulfill multiple purposes, such as improving housing, infrastructure, and open space, while increasing the corridor's capacity to absorb and manage more water and remain functional during emergencies.

The group offered several suggestions for future efforts:

- organize a group to look at the corridor as a whole, with representation from the adjacent towns;
- engage local universities and students to research the corridor and make their work available to towns and citizens;
- identify ways for towns and citizen groups to work together;
- look at funding for collaborative efforts and ways to include the state agencies;
- look at projects that would improve the corridor as a whole and would address utility issues; and
- find ways to model solutions to help adjacent towns (such as Belmont) work effectively with these uncertainties.

"It's no longer about if [flooding] is going to happen, it's about when and how. And no one knows precisely. So how do we make decisions

together about our public and private investments as municipalities, as homeowners, as business owners?" said Philip Loheed, local architect and president of Earthos Institute. "We need ways to assess our decisions, to understand the risks and benefits of how we decide to build our roads, our utilities, our schools, how we decide to work with the water. How can we build our communities, and yet reduce our risks? How can we optimize the positive things happening in the corridor, today and for our children? There is a lot of potential for good things here."

As for Belmont, as Jim Newman, resilience expert and Alewife Corridor resident, noted, "For the cities and towns in the Alewife watershed, there are huge benefits to working together. Belmont has the opportunity to build on the work by other towns to make life better for Belmont residents."

Sarah Howard, LEED AP, is executive director of Earthos. Patricia Loheed is a founding board member of Earthos and past head of the Boston Architectural College School of Landscape Architecture.

## Interns Wanted!

The Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) is accepting proposals and résumés for 2018 summer internships from college and high school students.

Project proposals should align with the BCF mission statement on our website. BCF internships are unpaid. Most summer interns are able to complete enough work to publish articles describing their research in the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*. BCF internships offer a great chance to gain experience with the legwork and research behind local community organizing.

If interested, please contact [bcfprogramdirector@belmontcitizensforum.org](mailto:bcfprogramdirector@belmontcitizensforum.org) with your résumé and a brief project proposal by May 30, 2018.

# Committee Recommends Six CPA Projects

*By Peg Velie*

This year the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is recommending six projects to Town Meeting for funding, totaling \$1,518,087. If approved, these projects will be funded via the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The CPA is a 2001 Massachusetts law that allows towns to establish a local fund dedicated solely to open space (including outdoor recreation), historic preservation, and affordable housing. Belmont adopted the CPA in November 2010.

May's Town Meeting will be Belmont's sixth for appropriating funds to CPA projects. In the last five years, Town Meeting has appropriated more than \$6 million for 33 projects, including the following improvements:

- the Underwood Pool rehabilitation;
- tennis court rehabilitations at Pequossette Park, Winn Brook, and Grove Street;
- interior and exterior electrical upgrades at Belmont Village; and
- the restoration of the Wellington Station roof.

This year we received six applications, and all six are being recommended to Town Meeting.

## Open Space/Outdoor Recreation

### *Music Bandstand at Payson Park*

The Payson Park Music Festival is requesting \$5,000 for architectural drawings for a bandstand at Payson Park. The Festival, which is in its 27th year, presents 15–16 outdoor concerts each summer. A bandstand would cover the existing concrete slab and protect musicians and their instruments from unanticipated inclement weather.

### *Town Field Playground Restoration*

The Friends of Town Field Playground are requesting \$180,000 to remove the existing 20-year-old playground equipment and replace it. Three sides of the fence surrounding the playground will be upgraded as well. The area to be rehabilitated is limited to the playground and

does not include the basketball court, the tennis/pickleball court, the soccer field, or the baseball field.

### *Construction of Grove Street Park Intergenerational Walking Path*

The Friends of Grove Street Park are requesting \$780,087 to build an intergenerational walking path at Grove Street Park, with landscaping and seating. The plan includes two 55-foot batting cages to be installed in a graded, recessed knoll. Last year, Town Meeting approved \$35,000 in CPA funds to design the path. Construction will follow the design plan developed under that grant.

The walking path is one element in the overall Master Plan for Grove Street Park. The Master Plan was commissioned by the town in 2015. The Friends of Grove Street Park was formed shortly afterward, to identify which improvements in the plan would serve the most residents. The neighborhood supported an ADA-compliant intergenerational walking path. This project will address deteriorated entrances to the park and the loss of trees and shrubs, will increase mobility inside the park, and add seating areas and benches.

## Historic Resources

### *McLean Barn Stabilization*

Three co-sponsors—the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill, the Historic District Commission, and the Office of Community Development—are jointly requesting \$200,000 to stabilize the deteriorating barn. The work will protect the barn from weather, animals, and vandals, and will arrest further deterioration. A conditions assessment and stabilization study is currently underway that will define the final scope of work. If the project is approved by Town Meeting, stabilization work can begin immediately.

The McLean Barn was constructed circa 1915. It was used as part of the McLean Farm, and sits on a 4.6-acre site directly south of Rock Meadow on Mill Street. It is one of the few remaining



The McLean Barn.

barns in Belmont in a semi-rural setting. The exterior is clad in brick with cast stone (concrete masonry) sills and lintels. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the McLean Hospital National Register District. (For further background on the McLean Farm, see the May 2001 issue of the *BCF Newsletter* at [belmontcitizensforum.org](http://belmontcitizensforum.org))

The barn was transferred to the town in 2005 with the condition that the town rehabilitate and reuse it and take reasonable steps to protect it from serious deterioration prior to reuse. The condition of the barn has deteriorated and it is in dire need of stabilization. This project is a first step toward a future plan for the building, ensuring that the barn is adequately preserved and protected while the long-term process is underway.

The barn is controlled by the Land Management Committee, some of whose members are appointed by the town. It is also

protected by a conservation restriction held by the nonprofit Trustees of Reservations, and by a preservation agreement that specifies that the Historic District Commission reviews proposed projects on historic resources in this district, the McLean Hospital National Register District.

With a successful CPA-funded stabilization, the Land Management Committee will begin to lead a community conversation to determine the best uses for the barn.

### *Belmont Veterans Memorial*

The Belmont Veterans Memorial Committee is requesting \$103,000 to restore the historic Belmont Veterans Memorial at Clay Pit Pond and its entrance and path. Additional enhancement work will be done with the total cost of the project estimated to be \$380,000. The memorial was dedicated in 1940 to all Belmont veterans from all the nation's wars and was a gift to the town from the American Legion.



## Community Housing

### *Funds Set Aside for Housing Trust*

The Belmont Housing Trust, a public nonprofit, was created by Belmont to help provide affordable housing for people with low, moderate, and middle-level incomes. The Housing Trust is requesting \$250,000 be set aside for its work. Possible uses include the following:

- housing pre-development due diligence (including site surveys, phase I environmental work, and title searches);
- buy-down programs to buy long-term deed restrictions;
- subsidizing the construction costs of new housing production;

- purchasing land for affordable housing; and
- working with developers to build deed-restricted affordable homes in developments proposed in Belmont.

In February and March, the selectmen, the Capital Budget Committee, and the Warrant Committee will review the projects. In April, just prior to Town Meeting, the project sponsors will answer questions from the public at the joint League of Women Voters/Warrant Committee meeting.

Peg Velie is chair of Belmont's Community Preservation Committee.

## Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day

Join us in stewarding Lone Tree Hill! The Belmont Citizens Forum, in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund, is holding its annual cleanup and trail maintenance day on **Saturday, April 28, from 9 AM to noon**. Last year, we helped plant 45 trees along Pine Allee and clean up the Coal Road area. Students can earn community service credits.



Bounded by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street, Lone Tree Hill spans 119 acres of permanently protected conservation land and is available to everyone. It is stewarded through a public/private partnership by the town and McLean Hospital, and is managed by the Land Management Committee. Meet at the Coal Road at S. Pleasant Street for trash pickup or at the Mill Street entrance for tree planting along the Pine Allee.

For more info, check [belmontcitizensforum.org](http://belmontcitizensforum.org) or email [bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com](mailto:bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com).

David Chase and David Merfeld at the 2017 Volunteer Day.

# Thaddeus Frost House Local Historic District Proposed

By Lauren G. Meier

This spring, Town Meeting will consider the opportunity to create a new local historic district to protect one of Belmont's most important historic resources, the Thaddeus Frost House on Brighton Street. In this case, the proposed district is a single property, which is allowed under M.G.L., Chapter 40C: Historic Districts.

The Thaddeus Frost House on Brighton Street predates Belmont's incorporation as a town in 1859. Colonial land grants established Watertown and Newtowne (now Cambridge) in 1630, including the land that is now Belmont. By the 19th century, large landowners, including

prosperous farmers, were dissatisfied with high taxes coupled with minimal town services. After several failed attempts to incorporate a new town, proponents finally succeeded in 1859. Belmont was created out of land that had been part of West Cambridge (now Arlington), Watertown, and Waltham. By then, the Frost family was already well established in the section of town that was originally part of West Cambridge.

Thaddeus Frost was born in Cambridge in 1796. Oral histories indicate that Thaddeus built the house at 291 Brighton Street for his bride in 1827, although some secondary sources suggest



ATLAS OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY, BOSTON: GEORGE W. STADLEY & CO., 1900

The "Land of Frost" along Brighton Street between Pleasant Street and the Fitchburg Railroad.

the house was built as early as 1807. Frost lived in the house until his death in 1884, when his 16-acre farm passed to his son, George A. Frost. The 1875 J. B. Beers Atlas of Middlesex County shows a dozen Frosts in this neighborhood on either side of both Pleasant and Brighton Streets. Historian Richard Betts recorded this constellation of Frost families in a map he called "Land of Frost," in *The Streets of Belmont*, derived from an 1898 atlas.

In 1899, the farmhouse at 291 Brighton Street was sold to Cornelius and Isabella Bresnan, who were regionally known for their Boston Market Celery. In the 1940s, the house was sold twice: Richard Loring Rablin and his wife Jessie purchased it in 1944, and in 1946, the Frost farm was subdivided, with Arthur Road added in 1947 on the northwest side. The Rablins owned the house until 1965, when it was sold to the current owner, Athena McInnis, who has cared for this historic treasure with her late husband, George, for more than half a century.

## What Are Local Historic Districts?

The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40C, established a local designation and review process to protect and preserve historic resources. Local historic districts are an effective form of preservation because they are created through local bylaws that ensure improvements will protect historic character. Historic districts can be created from a single property, like 291 Brighton Street, or multiple properties. While the Thaddeus Frost District would be Belmont's first single-property historic district, many other communities have used this method to preserve their most important historic assets.

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Historic districts can be created from a single property, like 291 Brighton Street, or multiple properties.

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By contrast, listing on the National Register of Historic Places is largely honorary, although it does afford limited protection from state



Thaddeus Frost House, c. 1900, showing ell and shed, from the *Belmont Citizen*, September 20, 1973, page 4.

or federal actions. National Register listing is determined by the National Park Service via the Massachusetts Historical Commission and does not require approval by the municipality. Belmont now has a handful of National Register listings, two of them National Register Districts with multiple properties (McLean Hospital and Pleasant Street). Thus, there is a difference between historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places and those that are created and approved by a municipality.

Belmont now has three locally designated historic districts. The Richardson Farm Historic District is the most recent, established in 2013. In all of Belmont's local historic districts, proposed changes to exterior elements visible from a public way may require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Belmont Historic District Commission (HDC) before a building permit can be issued. The HDC's goal is to work with landowners to help them care for and improve historic properties. Staff planner Spencer Gober in the Office of Community Development, who is assigned to the Historic District Commission, has greatly increased the efficiency of the process.

But local historic district designation is not for everyone. Although new districts normally require the support of the current owner, the designation passes to subsequent owners. Exterior changes that are visible from a public



SPENCER GOBER

The Thaddeus Frost house today.

way may require design review and approval, depending on the exact scope of work, which can take an extra step and some time before a project can proceed. However, general maintenance and interior changes do not require review and the HDC provides for emergency actions.

Critics argue that the restrictions associated with a local historic district can reduce property values, but several studies conducted by the National Trust have produced evidence to the contrary: historic preservation enhances property values. Some communities have alternative methods in place to protect historic resources such as local landmark designation. Some use conservation or preservation districts to retain neighborhood character without requiring a design review. In Belmont, the only tool now available is local historic district designation.

## Establishing the Historic District

In the summer of 2017, Athena McInnis approached the HDC asking to create a local historic district to protect the Thaddeus Frost house. The house was already on a Town Meeting-approved List of Significant Buildings subject to the Demolition Delay Bylaw, but that bylaw does not prevent demolition, nor does it protect the property's significant features against changes short of demolition.

The house had been identified as significant as early as the 1960s, when the Historic American Building Survey studied colonial and federal period resources west of Boston. In 1993, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) prepared a written opinion that the house was significant for its association with the Frost family and its role in the market gardening industry in the Winn Brook section of Belmont and for being one of the few surviving federal-style residences in Belmont. Lisa Mausolf, author

of the update to the Belmont Historic Resources Survey, prepared a new inventory form for the property, completed in 2016 following MHC standards. With this foundation in place, the Historic District Commission could help the owner protect one of Belmont's most important historic resources.

In summer and early fall 2017, historian and HDC member Michael Chesson, PhD, conducted historical research, working closely with the Belmont Historical Society. Chesson's report reviews the property's history, significance, and preservation need. The draft report was submitted to the MHC in October 2017 for the required 60-day review, and the MHC recommended the town proceed with establishing the district. In January 2018, the HDC held a public hearing to present the study's findings and solicit public input. The proposed district will be on the warrant for the 2018 spring Town Meeting. If approved, it will be incorporated into the town's General Bylaws and added to the Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places.

Lauren G. Meier, ASLA, is co-chair of the Belmont Historic District Commission, member of the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill, and a trustee of the Judy Record Conservation Fund.

## CORRECTIONS

In the last issue of the *BCF Newsletter* (Jan/Feb 2018), a pull-quote stated, "There have been no expansions of historic districts or open space." That's misleading out of context; the complete paragraph in the text mentioned the 2013 approval of the Richardson Farm historic district. We apologize for the oversight.

In the article "Remaking The Hell Strip," a sentence read "When a road is planned for reconstruction in Belmont, the homeowner receives a letter informing of the basic timeline and the option to pay for curbs via the town's contractor." This statement is incorrect. All communications come from the town, not contractors. We regret the error.

## Environmental Events

### Woolapalooza at Drumlin Farm

**Saturday, March 24, 10 AM–4 PM**

Celebrate the coming of spring at this annual festival featuring fiber, food, and fun! Highlights include new spring babies, a sheep shearing demonstration, hands-on activities for all ages, lunch made fresh from Drumlin Farm vegetables and meat (for purchase), and local fiber artisans who will offer demonstrations. Mass Audubon members: \$15/person, nonmembers: \$17, children under age 2: free. *Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, 208 S Great Road, Lincoln.*

### Arlington Ecofest 2018: Greenward

**Saturday, March 24, 10 AM–2 PM**

Activities for all ages will center around land and water management, plants and pollinators, and people and healthy ecosystems. Inside and outside of Town Hall, there will be vendors, exhibits, musical performances, a mini-farmer's market, and more. Free. [arlingtonma.gov/ecofest](http://arlingtonma.gov/ecofest). *Arlington Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington.*

### Single-Use Plastic Check-Out Bag Reduction Forum

**Tuesday, March 27, 7–9 PM &**

**Friday, March 30, 1:15–2:15 PM**

To date, 61 Massachusetts cities and towns, representing nearly 30% of the state's population, have passed a ban on single-use plastic shopping bags. A group of Belmont citizens have successfully petitioned the Board of Selectman to include a single-use plastic check-out bag reduction bylaw at the May Town meeting. Come to one of the upcoming forums to learn more about this initiative.

*March 27 at Belmont Public Library, Assembly Room, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

*March 30 at Senior Center, 266 Beech Street, Belmont.*

### Sustainable Belmont Meetings

**Wednesdays, April 4, May 2, 7–8:30 PM**

Sustainable Belmont's regular monthly meeting. [sustainablebelmont.net](http://sustainablebelmont.net). *Belmont Public Library, Assembly Room, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

## Grow Native Massachusetts—Evenings with Experts

**Wednesday, April 4, 7–8:30 PM**

Revealing a Sense of Place. Matthew Cunningham of Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design will show a variety of residential landscapes that embrace regional flora, utilize ecologically sustainable principles, and build connections between interior and exterior spaces to strengthen relationships with nature. For more information about the Evenings with Experts series, including the final May 2 evening, go to [grownativemass.org/programs/eveningswithexperts](http://grownativemass.org/programs/eveningswithexperts). *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge.*

## 6th Belmont Citizens Forum Annual Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day

**Saturday, April 28, 9 AM–12 PM**

Please join the Belmont Citizens Forum in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund for this annual cleanup and trail maintenance day. Students and families welcome; community service credit for students. [belmontcitizensforum.org](http://belmontcitizensforum.org). *Meet at the Coal Road at S. Pleasant St. for trash pickup or at the Mill Street entrance for tree planting along the Pine Allee.*

## Charles River Watershed Association

**Saturday, April 28, 9 AM–12 PM**

The Annual Earth Day Charles River Cleanup brings together over 3,000 volunteers each year to pick up litter, remove invasive species, and assist with park maintenance. [crwa.org](http://crwa.org). *Various locations along the Charles River.*

## Life Friendly (Chemical Free) Garden Tour

**Sunday, May 6, 1–5 PM**

Owners of sites on the tour will share their growing spaces, large and small, where plants of all kinds thrive best without the use of synthetic chemicals. Free. Sponsored by Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice and the Environment. Tour maps available at [watertowncitizens.org/gardentour](http://watertowncitizens.org/gardentour). *Various locations in Watertown.*

## Thank You to Our Contributors

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## Belmont's Big Recycling Day

**Saturday, May 12, 9 AM–1 PM**

The semiannual Big Recycling Day includes paper shredding, electronics, textiles, eyeglasses, books, CDs, DVDs, propane tanks, and bicycles (no cardboard or styrofoam). Belmont residents only. No rigid bulky plastics as in previous years. Please check details as the date approaches: [belmont-ma.gov/dpw-highway-division](http://belmont-ma.gov/dpw-highway-division). *Town Yard, 37 C Street, Belmont.*

## 22nd Annual Mystic River Herring Run and Paddle

**Saturday, May 19, 8 AM–1 PM**

Join the 5K run/walk race and/or three paddling races (3, 9, and 12 miles) and enjoy educational booths, children's activities, and more. All events are held at the DCR Blessing of the Bay Boathouse in Somerville. The 5K course continues along the Mystic River bike path and through DCR Torbert MacDonald Park. Must register prior to the race. Free shuttle bus provided to parking. [mysticriver.org](http://mysticriver.org). *DCR Blessing of the Bay Boathouse, 32 Shore Drive, Somerville.*

The Birds and the Bees: How We Love Them and Why We Need Them

**Tuesday, May 22, 7-9 PM**

This multimedia presentation by Carole Smith Berney, wildlife photographer and amateur naturalist, will include species identification, behavior, and threats to natural habitat, with a focus on dangers of population decline due to habitat loss, use of harmful chemicals, and other

factors like climate change. Free. Supported in part by a grant from the Belmont Cultural Council, in collaboration with Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, the Belmont Public Library, Friends of Bees, and the Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice, and the Environment. *Belmont Public Library, Assembly Room, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

## Thank you for your continued support.

Your contribution makes a difference!

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

\$50  \$100  \$150  \$250

**Thank you!**

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

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- Community path work
- Newsletter mailings
- Event organizing

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*Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day is Saturday, April 28! See page 17.*

**March/April 2018**



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