



Belmont Citizens Forum

Belmont Community Path Update, Part Two Feasibility Study Plan Offers Health and Safety Benefits

By Vincent Stanton, Jr.

Design and construction of a bicycle and pedestrian path through Belmont have been on the town's agenda intermittently since 1993, when the selectmen first appointed a temporary committee to study possible routes. The motivation for a path has always been to provide recreational opportunities for Belmont residents and to connect Belmont to surrounding towns and to transit, particularly Alewife Station. Waltham, Cambridge, Somerville, Weston, and Wayland have all made significant progress toward path construction over the last five years.

In the May/June issue of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, I highlighted three important aspects of the community path plan recommended by Pare Corp. and K3 Landscape Architecture (the Pare team):

1. It brings Belmont commuter rail stations (almost) into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which could save Waverley Square Station from closing when its ADA waiver expires in 2026.
2. It provides new, off-road pedestrian and bicycle connections to bus and rail transit for Belmont residents, which should increase use of mass transit and decrease traffic congestion.
3. It creates a new, $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre public space in Waverley Square by boxing over the train platform with a park.



SARA MCCABE



SARA MCCABE

On any given weekend during warm months, the Belmont section of the Fitchburg Cutoff path (the first 603 feet) is in heavy use by walkers, runners, and families with strollers and children on bikes.

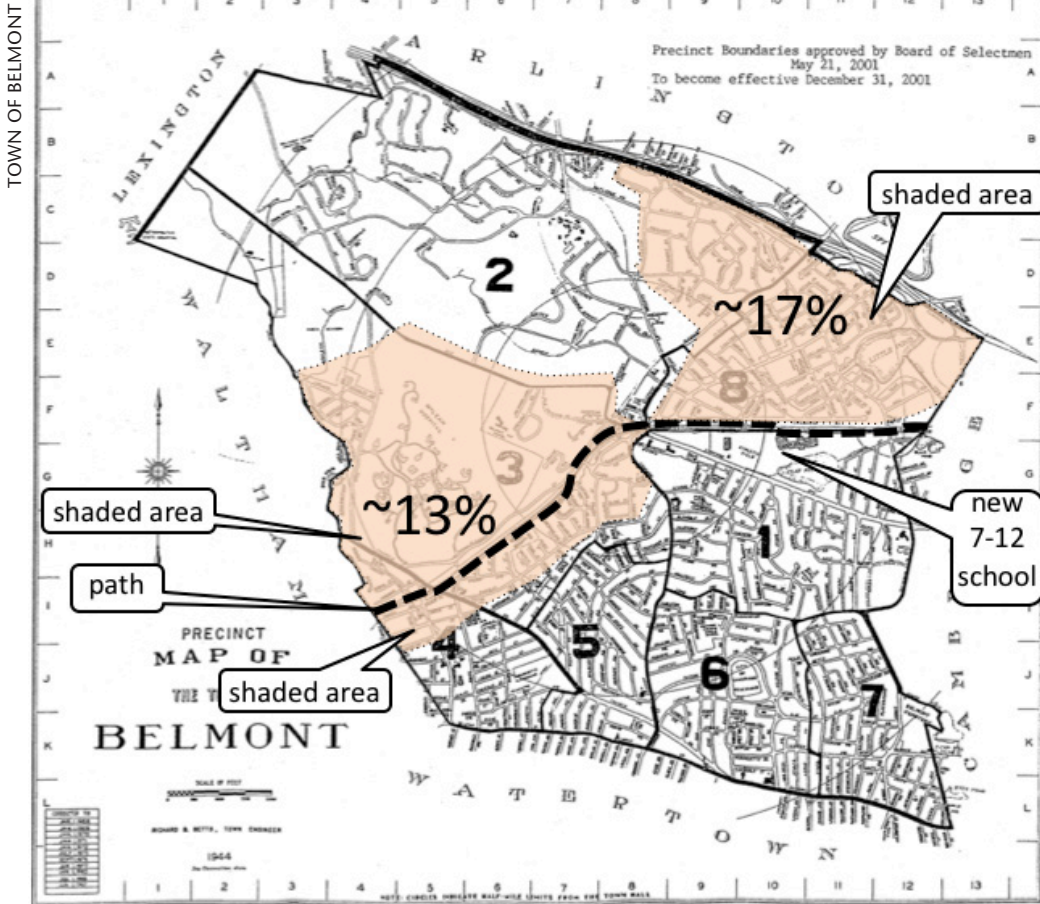


Figure 1: Belmont students whose commute would be shorter and/or safer on the path.

The two shaded areas mark the estimated school population that could reach the proposed new grade 7–12 school faster and more safely via the path (heavy dashed line), for at least part of their journey, than on existing roads and sidewalks.

This issue picks up where we left off, with three more benefits (#4, 5, 6) of the proposed path. (Please refer to the May-June issue for a map of the recommended route, including proposed neighborhood spurs.)

4. New off-road routes to school

The fortunate coincidence of designing a community path and a new middle/high school campus, which the community path will traverse, should allow the school transportation elements of a path to be fully exploited. The recent decision by the Belmont High School Building Committee to include middle school grades 7–8 will make the new school eligible for Safe Routes to School funding. (See “Safe Routes to Schools” sidebar on page 8.) Researchers at Columbia University have documented 20 to 40 percent reductions in pedestrian and cyclist injuries after implementation of Safe Routes to School infrastructure.¹

Altogether, about 30 percent of Belmont’s residents, and by extension its middle and high school students (about 680 students by 2025-26, a realistic date for path completion), live close enough to the proposed path to either shorten their journey to the proposed new school, or reduce the number of major road crossings, or both (see Figure 1 and supporting details online).

For example, a student living on A Street currently walks or bikes along Waverley, Thomas, and Clark Streets to Royal Road, then jaywalks across Common Street in front of the Lions Club and crosses Concord Avenue in front of the post office to reach the high school. By using the path, this student could avoid crossing 15 streets and reduce his or her commuting distance from about 8,020 feet to about 6,890 feet (estimated using Google Earth).

While the current number of students who walk or bike to school is not known, it may not reflect the future number. Recent research has shown that paths perceived as safe attract new users, who may have been unwilling to use previous on-street routes.²

“Bike racks all over campus are full on September mornings,” noted a traffic study by the Belmont High School Building Committee’s design consultant Perkins+Will Global.

Those who perceive on-street biking as unsafe (an off-road path was the top priority of 90 percent of Belmont residents polled by the Community Path Advisory Committee) are on to something: walking and biking is far more dangerous in the United States than in European countries with higher use of those modes of transport.³ In 1970 Denmark and the Netherlands had injury and fatality rates comparable to those in the U.S. today. Over the ensuing five decades, a gradual extension and improvement in design of their walking and bicycle infrastructure has brought down their injury and fatality rates substantially. Fatalities are less than 20 percent of U.S. rates, and injury rates less than 10 percent of U.S. rates.²

Improved safety is not limited to avoidance of roads and busy intersections. For decades students in the Winn Brook neighborhood have been crossing the Fitchburg Line to commute to Belmont High School and to a lesser extent Chenery Middle School. (See “Alexander Avenue Underpass” sidebar on page 4). Several students have died in train collisions, in some cases as suicides. The proposed Alexander Avenue Extension underpass would provide a safe, convenient route under the tracks, while a high fence or wall would be built parallel to the tracks, preventing casual track crossings.

5. Recreation and health benefits

Researchers at Rutgers University have noted an inverse relationship between the fraction of a developed country’s population that regularly walks, bikes, or uses public transit (which requires some walking or biking) and the fraction that is obese (see Figure 2 on page 5).

A path would create attractive new opportunities for safe and efficient walking or cycling to frequently visited Belmont destinations. For example, for Winn Brook residents there are “lines of desire” to a variety of Concord Avenue destinations, including recreational facilities



PERKINS+WILL GLOBAL

Belmont Citizens Forum

Officers

Grant Monahon, President
John Dieckmann, Vice President
Evanthia Malliris, Secretary
Radha Iyengar, Treasurer

Directors

Sumner Brown David Chase
Anne-Marie Lambert Vincent Stanton, Jr.

Newsletter

Sara McCabe, Editor
Sue Bass, Newsletter Committee,
Director Emerita

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.

Letters to the editor may be sent to P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478 or to info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

© 2018 Belmont Citizens Forum. All rights reserved.

Alexander Avenue Underpass: The Time Has Come

Belmont students have been crossing the Fitchburg Line tracks at least since the current Belmont High School opened in 1971. Indeed, Selectman Mark Paolillo (BHS '72), who grew up in the Winn Brook neighborhood, admits to using the shortcut as a student.

A safe crossing of the Fitchburg Line at Alexander Avenue Extension has been designated a priority by at least half a dozen Belmont committees since 1971, and by four independent studies conducted by private firms or state agencies since 1997.

In 1983, Town Meeting voted to form the Underpass Study Committee following the 1982 death of a high school student on the Fitchburg line tracks. The committee determined that an estimated \$500,000 underpass would be too costly for the town, and state or federal funding was not considered likely. The committee ended up recommending a bicycle-pedestrian path over the tracks. But the MBTA was not consulted on the plan, and nothing came of it.

In 2008, the Capital Projects Overview Committee recommended construction of a tunnel beneath the MBTA railroad tracks. In 2010, the Belmont Planning Board completed its Comprehensive Plan for Belmont, which recommended an underpass at Alexander Avenue as a high-priority action item.

In 2012, the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council, a regional planning agency, published the Belmont/Waltham Trail Alignment Study, which strongly recommended an underpass at Alexander Avenue regardless of path location, stating, "A bicycle and pedestrian underpass at Alexander Avenue should be a high priority no matter which trail alignment option is chosen. Fences do not deter the desire to avoid a one-mile detour to provide direct and safe access between both sides of the tracks." In 2015, the Belmont Community Path Advisory Committee also endorsed an underpass at the Alexander Avenue Extension.

at the high school, the Underwood pool, the library, Powers Music School, the post office, and the 74 bus line.

For some residents living south of the Fitchburg Line and west of Belmont Center, including residents of Belmont Village (the town-owned housing development east of the Town Yard), the path would provide the same improved access to the cluster of recreational facilities around the high school, while also affording new, shorter routes to businesses and transit options in Belmont Center and Waverley Square.

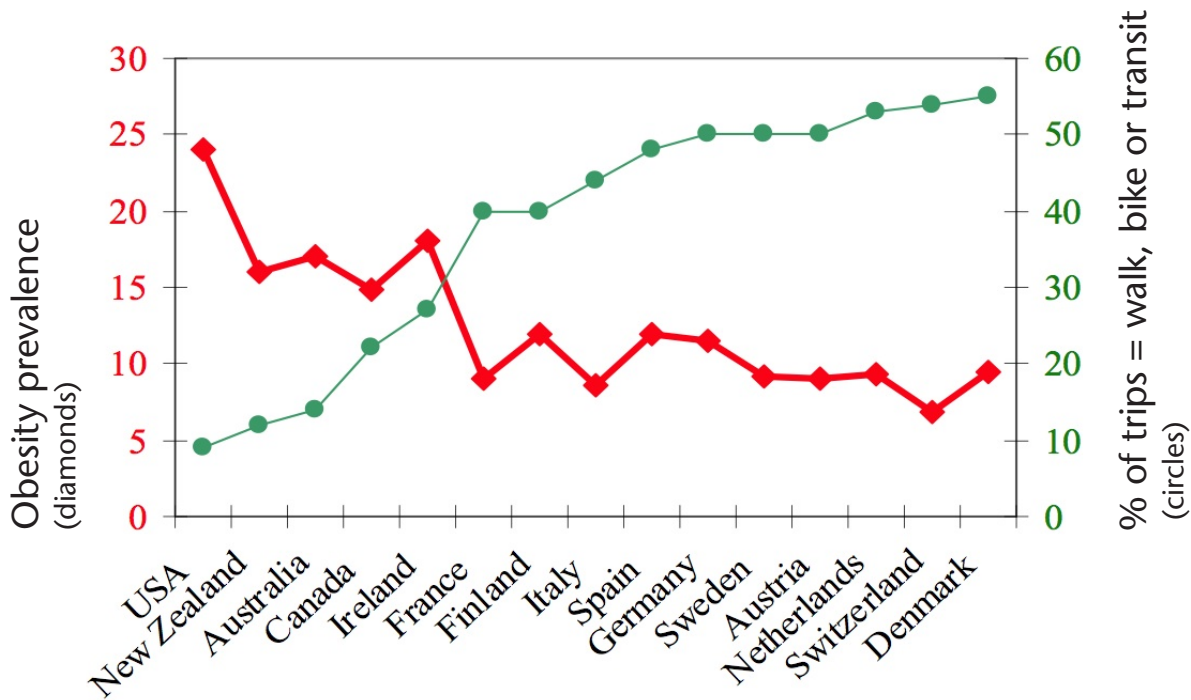
All residents living near the path would benefit from a shorter route to Alewife Station—indeed, the bicycle commuting time would probably be less than half the automotive commuting time at rush hour. Shorter, safer routes to the 73 and 74/75 bus lines and to Waverley and Belmont Center commuter rail stations would also be provided by the path.

The purely recreational aspects of a Belmont path—jogging, skating, bicycling—will depend on its design. The purpose of the Pare study was to evaluate the feasibility of different routes, not to design the



VINCENT STANTON, JR.

The community path extension in Somerville was designed with recreational enhancements such as the rest area seen here (near the Lowell Street bridge), as well as benches and exercise stations. In these areas, the asphalt path is bordered by a flexible, spongy surface.



SOURCE: PROF. J. PUCHER, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY: HTTP://BLOUSTEIN.RUTGERS.EDU/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2014/10/SANDIEGOAUG2010.PDF

Figure 2: Rutgers University study (Professor John Pucher)

The right axis indicates the fraction of all trips in each country accomplished on foot, bicycle, or using public transit, indicated by circles. The left axis indicates the prevalence of obesity in each country (percent of population with BMI > 30), indicated by diamonds. Although the graph illustrates an association, not necessarily causation, the US population is the most sedentary and obese of 15 developed nations in this comparison.

path. However, a sense of what is possible can be gleaned from the recently completed Somerville community path extension, which can fairly be described as a linear park, with exercise stations and benches along the path.

6. New community connections

In addition to trailheads (places to enter or exit the path), the Pare study proposes four future spurs. One spur would connect to Beaver Brook Reservation, a second to Town Field and the Beech Street Center, and two others to destinations north and south of the proposed Alexander Avenue underpass. These spurs are not in the Pare budget, though they are vital to a full realization of the Belmont path.

The first spur to Beaver Brook Reservation would make the park more accessible to many Belmont residents, including children. Currently the main access to the reservation is by car from a few parking spots along Trapelo Road, and

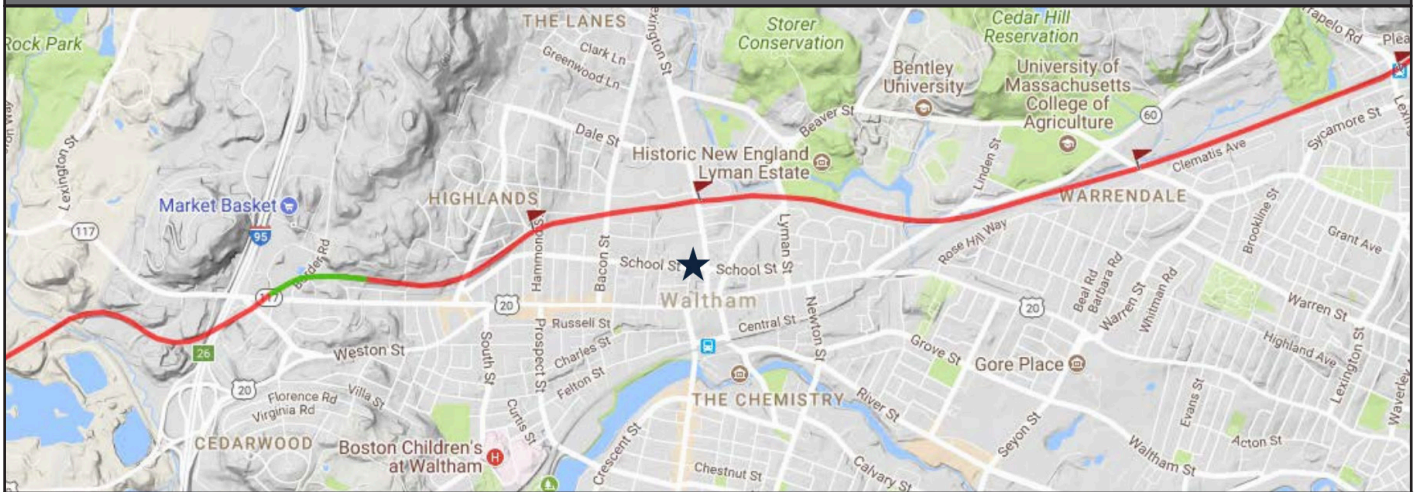
from a parking lot off of Waverley Oaks Road in Waltham.

The second spur would extend south along the eastern edge of the Town Yard, continue along the side of Midland (a dead-end street) to Waverley Street, where a new crosswalk would connect to Town Field and the Beech Street Center. This spur would allow families who participate in organized soccer and baseball games at Town Field to reach the field via foot or bike.

Safer, easier access to the Beech Street Center could also be useful to the approximately one-quarter of Belmont residents age 60 and above, and the path would offer them a new location for walking and other low-impact exercise. The 2016 report, *Envisioning an Age-Friendly Belmont*, prepared by researchers at the University of Massachusetts Boston for the Belmont Council on Aging, identified eight domains of community life that collectively

Continued on page 7

Waltham Trail Update



TOM KELLEHER; GOOGLE MAPS

By John Dieckmann

Design of the Waltham segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT), known in Waltham as the Wayside Trail, is moving ahead rapidly. In early June, the design engineers (Pare Corporation) presented the 25% design of the central section, which runs just under three miles between Beaver Street and 1265 Main Street. The central section design includes six road crossings with traffic controls and two bridges. The 75% design should be done by early fall, with 100% design by the end of 2018.

To expedite the work, the city of Waltham is planning a separate contract for removal of rails and ties. Bids for trail construction are expected in early 2019; the goal is to finish the trail by late fall 2020. Construction funding for the Waltham segment of the Wayside Trail has not yet been confirmed but may include partnerships between the city (including CPA funds) and state funds.

Design will continue at a less accelerated pace on the two remaining Waltham segments of the MCRT. East of Beaver Street, the original Central Massachusetts Railroad right-of-way has been compromised, so the trail must pass through MBTA

land, private property, and the Beaver Brook reservation to reach the Belmont town line. Details and permitting are yet to be worked out. West of 1265 Main Street, at the 128/I-95 crossing, the MBTA right-of-way exists, but Pare cannot complete the trail design without knowing how the state plans to modify the I-95/Rt 128 interchange. This interchange is a separate design contract in conjunction with MassDOT. Once the design of the central section is complete, attention will turn to the east and west sections.

Information about the Waltham section of the Wayside Trail can be found on the city's planning department pages at city.waltham.ma.us/planning-department/pages/healthy-transportation

John Dieckmann is a member of the Belmont Citizens Forum board and an avid cyclist.



LAUREL CARPENTER

Continued from page 5

constitute an age-friendly framework, and three of those (transportation, outdoor spaces, and social participation) intersect with use of the path.

The third and fourth spurs would connect the two sides of town via the proposed Alexander Avenue underpass: Channing Road and the Winn Brook School and playground north of the tracks, with Concord Avenue and the high school campus south of the tracks. The northern spur would improve access to the path and destinations south of the tracks for many Winn Brook area residents, while improving access to Joey's Park and the playing fields for residents living south of Concord Avenue. The southern spur, which would likely cross the high school campus just east of the football field, would provide access to the path for the nearly half of Belmont residents who live south of Concord Avenue and east of Belmont Center, as well as connections to Concord Avenue amenities for Winn Brook residents.

Multiple trailheads at Belmont Center and Waverley Square will connect path users to two of the main business districts in Belmont. Data from a variety of sources suggest that the path should benefit Belmont businesses (reviewed in the Community Path Advisory Committee final report, pages 41–42). For example, a 2012 study by Portland State University researchers found that patrons of restaurants, bars, and

convenience stores who arrived on foot or bike spent more per month (per person) than patrons arriving by car because they visited more frequently.⁴

Ultimately a more extensive network of spurs will make the path useful to more Belmont residents. As a precedent, spurs off the Minuteman Bikeway are still being constructed in Arlington, Lexington, and Bedford 25 years after the trunk route opened. In Belmont, Lone Tree Hill and the Grove Street and Pequosette

Of eight domains of community life that collectively constitute an age-friendly framework, three (transportation, outdoor spaces, and social participation) intersect with use of the path.

playgrounds are three examples of resources that could be more easily accessed by residents through spurs from the path. And Kendall Gardens and Royal Belmont are both prime examples of less accessible neighborhoods that could benefit from easy walking or biking connections.

Continued on page 10

Left: The planned route of the Waltham segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail, with a section of the rail looking east toward Belmont, close to Beaver Street.

Right: A Belmont family near the end of the Belmont Community Path at Brighton Street, which will ultimately connect to Boston via the Cambridge Linear Path, the Somerville Community Path, and the Green Line Extension path, and to Waltham, Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, Hudson and Berlin via the Mass Central Rail Trail.



SARA MCCABE

Safe Routes to Schools: What are Other

LARRY KIERNAN



Weston and Wayland

Eversource, the electric utility company, is cooperating with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to construct a path along the former Massachusetts Central Railroad right of way in Weston and Wayland by the end of this year. This sign was erected by Friends of the Wayland Trail.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federally funded program administered by MassDOT. Many Greater Boston towns, including Bedford, Arlington, Billerica, Somerville, and Watertown, have received substantial SRTS grants for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Here are a few examples. For the complete list, visit belmontcitizensforum.org.

Arlington

In 1998, Arlington was one of the first two towns in the country to start a Safe Routes to School program, funded initially by a \$50,000 pilot grant. Subsequently, in 2010 the Dallin Elementary School received a \$540,560 SRTS grant for improved pedestrian access. The Minuteman Bikeway, paid for by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), is used by a subset of elementary, middle, and high school students to commute; four Arlington schools are within 1,500 feet (roughly a five-minute walk) of the bikeway.

Billerica

In 2013, Billerica Town Meeting appropriated \$200,000 for 25% design of the Yankee Doodle Bike Path, which will connect Billerica Memorial High School to the existing Narrow Gauge Rail Trail, which connects (via Bedford) to the Minuteman Bikeway. Town Meeting appropriated another \$450,000 for 75% design in 2017. In February 2018, Billerica submitted 25% design documents to MassDOT for approval.

Northern Strand Community Trail

Also known as the Bike to the Sea Path (for its route from Everett to Nahant),* this partly constructed community path runs along live and abandoned rail lines while connecting to the campuses of eight schools in six towns, as well as nine playgrounds and parks. While path construction is being funded via the regional Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) through the federal-state MPO, connections from the path to school entrances have been funded by SRTS grants.

*<https://biketothesea.com/map/>

Nearby Communities Doing?



SARA MCCABE

Stoneham, Winchester, and Woburn

The Tri-Community Greenway connects schools, parks, business centers, commuter rail stations, and bus lines in Winchester, Stoneham, and Woburn. Construction of the path, expected to be completed in 2018, is funded by MassDOT through the TIP. The Greenway passes along the campus of the Stoneham Central Middle School in Stoneham, recipient of a \$479,910 SRTS grant in 2010, and within half a block of the Goodyear Elementary School. In Winchester, the path connects students to the high school, middle school, and four of the town's five elementary schools.



SARA MCCABE

Bedford

SRTS paid for 100 percent of design and construction on the \$1M path connecting the John Glenn Middle School to the Minuteman Bikeway Extension (top) via Railroad Avenue, completed last year. Because the middle school shares a campus with Bedford High School (above), the Bedford public library, and town hall, the path connects all of these destinations, as well as with Great Road on the other side.

Progress on funding possibilities

The first part of this article in the May/June issue outlined arguments for MassDOT and MBTA funding assistance for the Belmont path. Through meetings with town, state, and MassDOT officials in June, the project has been re-framed as a three-stage project:

- 1A. Alexander Avenue Extension underpass with connections to Concord Avenue and the Winn Brook neighborhood
- 1B. Brighton Street to Clark Street bridge
2. Clark Street bridge to Waltham line

On July 19, the MassDOT Project Review Committee is scheduled to vote on whether to accept segments 1A and 1B of the Belmont path as an official MassDOT project. For the results of that vote and a summary of next steps, please go to belmontcitizensforum.org.

Vincent Stanton, Jr. is a Belmont Citizens Forum board member. He served on the Community Path Advisory Committee (2012–2014) and is now a member of the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee. However, the views in this article (and sidebars) are entirely his own.

Footnotes

1. DiMaggio C., Frangos, S. and G. Li. National Safe Routes to School program and risk of school-age pedestrian and bicyclist injury. *Annals of Epidemiology* 2016 Jun; 26 (6): 412-7. [https://www.annalsofepidemiology.org/article/S1047-2797\(16\)30083-7/pdf](https://www.annalsofepidemiology.org/article/S1047-2797(16)30083-7/pdf)

2. Hull, A. and C. O'Holleran. Bicycle infrastructure: can good design encourage cycling? *Urban, Planning and Transport Research: An Open Access Journal*, 2014 Vol. 2, No. 1, 369–406. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/21650020.2014.955210?needAccess=true>

3. Pucher, J. and R. Buehler. Making Cycling Irresistible: Lessons from The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany. *Transport Reviews*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 495–528, July 2008.

4. Clifton, K.J. et al. Business Cycles—Catering to the Bicycling Market. *TR News* 280, May–June 2012, p. 26-34. http://kellyjclifton.com/Research/EconImpactsofBicycling/TRN_280_CliftonMorrissey&Ritter_pp26-32.pdf

Notable Belmont Path Proponents

While Belmont is still waiting for its community path, several residents have played important roles in advocating for improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities, regulations, and funding.

The first regional mixed-use path of note, an 11-mile circuit of the Charles River basin from the Eliot bridge to the Massachusetts Avenue bridge, was championed from the 1940s through its opening in 1960 by long-time Belmont resident Dr. Paul Dudley White (Marsh Street), after whom it is now named. Dr. White, a nationally prominent cardiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), was an early proponent of what is now called preventive medicine. When President Dwight Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in 1955, Dr. White was asked to help care for the President during his recovery and famously recommended bicycle riding to prevent a recurrence.

Former Belmont selectman and state Representative Anne Paulsen (School Street) was an effective advocate for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout her 15-year career in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. In 1996 she successfully sponsored legislation that required MassDOT to include accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians in all state-funded street projects. The law was controversial at the time, as it represented a new way of thinking about the mission of MassDOT. The MassDOT highway design manual (see links online) was rewritten to reflect



MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL, ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

In 1957 Dr. White cofounded the Committee for Safe Bicycling to encourage bicycle riding as a healthy form of exercise and to lobby for bicycle paths during a period when few assigned much value to such facilities. A 1973 *Belmont Citizen* obituary noted that White was still bicycling in his 80s.

the new approach. In 2004 Paulsen successfully sponsored legislation requiring the RMV (Registry of Motor Vehicles) to improve its bicycle and pedestrian safety training for driver's license applicants. Paulsen was also instrumental in recognizing the potential of the Fitchburg Cutoff path, then a dirt path, and later securing funds for design and construction of the present path. (See January/February 2014 *BCF Newsletter* for a profile on Paulsen.)

State Senator Will Brownsberger (Gilbert Road) has continued Paulsen's legacy as an engine of pedestrian and bicyclist-related legislation. Last year, for example, legislation he sponsored to penalize drivers for

venturing into bicycle lanes became law. Brownsberger is also well known locally for his bicycling exploits; in addition to completing several Ironman competitions (which include a 112-mile bicycle race), in 2011 he biked across the country (3,500 miles) in 41 days. Brownsberger also helped get the Fitchburg Cutoff path funded, and worked with Representative Dave Rogers to secure half of the funding for the feasibility study described in this article. Recently Brownsberger has helped move path planning ahead with MassDOT.

Paulsen used to—and Brownsberger still does—commute to the State House by bicycle. There are no accounts of White commuting to MGH on bike.

Tell Us How We're Doing!



Three ways to give input:

- 1) Online survey at bit.ly/BCFsurvey
- 2) Scan or take a picture of the completed page and email it to bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com
- 3) Mail to BCF, P.O. Box 609, Belmont, MA 02478



SARA MCCABE

Dear *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* readers, As the new editor of the newsletter, I'd like to get to know more about our readers and your interests to ensure that we are reporting on the issues you care about. Will you please take our five-minute reader survey?

This brief survey can be completed on paper or online and is entirely anonymous (unless you want to include your name in one of the responses). For the online survey, please go to bit.ly/BCFsurvey.

If you choose to complete the survey on paper, please take a picture or scan the page and email it to bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com or mail it to Belmont Citizens Forum, P.O. Box 609, Belmont, MA 02478. We also welcome your email if you have questions or ever want to make any suggestions.

Thank you for sharing your opinions with us.

Editor

Switch to digital delivery

Consider receiving the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* via email. You'll help us reduce our printing and mailing costs (among our biggest expenses), and also help save a few more trees.

Remember, you can always find printed copies at the Belmont Public Library and at the Beech Street Center. And if you are looking for previously published issues, you'll find them on our website, going back to 2000, at belmontcitizensforum.org.

To request electronic delivery only, email us at bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com. Please use "Electronic" in the subject line.

And thanks to everyone who has gone digital so far!

Belmont Citizens Forum Reader Survey

The Belmont Citizens Forum is a community organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety.

1. How did you first become aware of the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) Newsletter?
- Friend or family member
 - Library, senior center, or other public location
 - Online search
 - Other (please write in): _____

2. For about how many years have you been reading the BCF Newsletter? _____

3. How much time do you typically spend with an issue of the BCF Newsletter?
- 0-15 minutes
 - 15 minutes to 1 hour
 - More than 1 hour

4. Has the newsletter ever influenced you to take any action? If so, please tell us about the action you took.

5. What topics are most important to you? Please check all that apply.
- History and historic structures
 - Open space
 - Development, zoning, and planning
 - Climate change
 - Water quality and pollution
 - Biking, walking, community path
 - Questions & answers for selectman candidates
 - Traffic and parking

6. Are there any topics that you would particularly like to see in upcoming issues?

7. Which of the following factors would be most likely to increase your interest in the newsletter or make it more useful to you? Check all that apply.
- Different topics
 - Different design/format
 - Shorter articles
 - More photos/graphics
 - More variety
 - Other (please write in): _____
- _____

8. If you could improve one thing about the newsletter, what would it be?

9. In what format do you typically read the newsletter? Please check all formats that apply.
- Print
 - Website posts
 - Click-through from email to website
 - Click-through from Facebook to website

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Getting in Tune with Belmont's Music Community

Opportunities Abound for Making and Enjoying Music with Neighbors.

By Sara McCabe



"After moving from Germany to Belmont, music helped me find friends and a new home. Especially the music programs in the public school and Powers Music School created an environment that made me forget that I live in a new country." – Fiona Knor

Chenery Middle School student Fiona Knor is one of hundreds of Belmont residents, young and old, taking advantage of our town's vibrant music community. Fiona plays flute, piccolo, and piano and participates in multiple ensembles at Chenery and Powers Music School.

But you don't have to be a dedicated musician to make friends while making music. Got a couple of spare hours a week? That's all you need. Want to enjoy music with your whole family? There are year-round programs and concerts for you.

Whether you sing or play an instrument yourself, hope to do so someday, or just enjoy live performances, Belmont has community music opportunities for all ages and all ability levels. And with the Payson Park Music Festival in its 28th year this summer and the first annual Belmont Porchfest coming up in September, now is the time to jump on board.

Here is a brief roundup of current offerings, many of which are free, low-cost, or offer financial assistance. The list is by no means comprehensive, so we hope you will go online to delve further into all the possibilities that interest you. We hope to *hear* you soon!

The online version of this article includes clickable links to the listed programs: belmontcitizensforum.org

Concerts

In addition to frequent concerts at the library, local churches, schools, Powers Music School, and the Beech Street Center, Belmont has several annual concert programs:

- Belmont Porchfest (early September)
- Mildred Freiberg Piano Festival (spring)
- Payson Park Music Festival (Wednesday evenings in summer) including Kiddie Concerts (Friday mornings in summer)
- Stein Chamber Music Festival (winter)



"The Payson Park concerts have always been a safe and fun place where our whole family can meet up with friends. The music is the common denominator for the full cross-section of the town, with neighbors coming from Belmont Manor and group homes. We wouldn't otherwise have much reason to all be in the same place." – David Alper

Choruses

New voices are always encouraged at these local groups:

- Arlington-Belmont Chamber Chorus
- Arlington-Belmont Chorale
- Bel Aires Singing (Beech Street Center)
- Belmont Community Chorus (no audition)



KULBAKO PHOTO

Music-making begins early with infants and toddlers at Powers Music School (pictured) and the Belmont Public Library.

- Belmont Learning Choir (Beech Street Center with Powers Music School)
- Belmont Parent-Teacher Chorus (with BPS)
- Belmont Open Sings (Powers)
- Chinese Singing Group (Beech Street Center)



“Singing is a wonderful way to share our happiness, and we are grateful for Beech Street Center to offer us this unique opportunity to get together.” – Huifang Chen



“One of my fellow Porchfest organizers is a former neighbor whose home has always been a hub of music. Our first New Year’s Eve in Belmont took place at her house, and along with a dish to share, all the neighbors brought instruments. Any event—birthday, holiday, Friday night stopover—is sure to break into music.” – Mary Bradley

Belmont Public Library

Genres vary from fiddle to opera for the Friends of the Belmont Library “Music on Saturday Series.” The library also has music programs for kids:

- Music and Movement for ages 2-5
- Infant-Toddler Sing-Along
- Music with Emily
- Make Your Own Musical Instruments
- Musical Storytelling (with Powers)



“So many things in Belmont seem to be high stakes or have a high bar to entry, but the Parent/Teacher Band feels welcoming for parents of all ability levels. As an extra bonus, I love the fact that now when I go to a school musical or the Memorial Day parade, I actually recognize many of the students in the band!” – Clare Crawford

Belmont Public Schools

Musicologist Sandra Rosenblum, a cofounder of Powers Music School, recalls that in the past, citizens had to advocate actively for music education in the Belmont Public Schools



KULBAKO PHOTO

All are welcome at Belmont Open Sings concerts.

(BPS). Now Belmont is regularly ranked among the “Best Communities in America for Music Education” by the American Music Conference and the National Association of Music Merchants. And BPS programs aren’t just for kids. Music directors John McLellan (who just retired after 35 years) and Arto Asadoorian have introduced a host of creative intergenerational programs, including:

- Parent/Teacher Band
- Parent/Teacher Chorus
- Belmont Community Summer Band

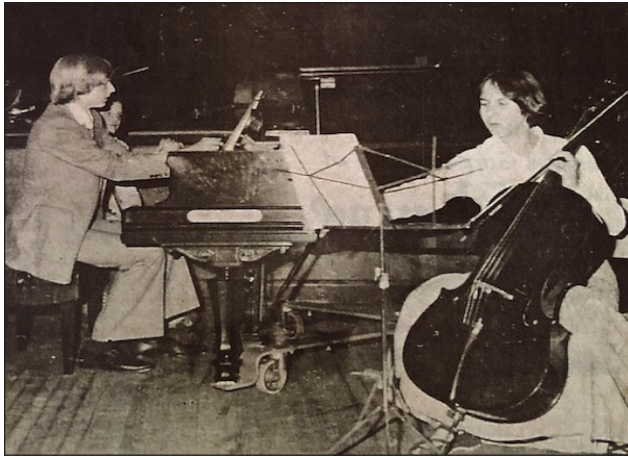


“I vividly remember telling my wife soon after we married that if a music teaching position ever became available in Belmont, that would be the ‘dream job.’ So a year later when an interim position opened up at Belmont High School, we moved back to Massachusetts from New York, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I have had the great fortune to teach in excellent schools and communities in other towns and states, but they can’t compare to teaching music in Belmont. The level of support we feel from our district administration and from the community is just incredible.”

– Arto Asadoorian

Powers Music School

The music school has brought harmony to Belmont for more than five decades, with ensembles and rock bands as well as community programs. New executive director Gavin Farrell says he is excited to be expanding the school’s



The Stein Chamber Music Festival honors the late Joe and Lise Stein, who frequently played chamber music with their three daughters and other families in the 1970s at their house on Goden Street. Performing at the 1976 festival is then-college freshman Sarah Freiberg Ellison, right, now chair of strings at Powers Music School (and daughter of school cofounder Mildred Freiberg).

community engagement through biannual Workshop Weeks, Belmont Scholars (a dedicated scholarship program for BPS students), and the new Belmont Learning Choir at the Beech Street Center. Here are just a few of their many other offerings:

- Faculty Concerts
- Musical Storytelling Series
- Open House & Instrument Petting Zoo
- Belmont Open Sings concerts
- Music Theory group classes
- Mildred Freiberg Piano Festival
- Massachusetts Youth Symphony Project



Making music is as meaningful and fun now as it was when I was a teenager. It stirs the soul. It keeps the fingers loose. It connects me to the school and community, which is extra wonderful when my daughter and I play together. – William Messenger

If you don't see an opportunity here that's right for you, why not start something yourself? The Belmont Cultural Council helped many of the above programs get started. For more information on applying for funds and a list of past recipients, go to www.mass-culture.org/belmont.

Community Music an Integral

Belmont Congregational Church.

First Sacred Concert

BY THE
BELMONT
Musical Association.

(Organized October, 1861.)

On Thursday Evening, April 17th, 1862.

PROGRAMME.

1. Voluntary on the Organ.
2. Chorus.—“How bright and fair.” . . . ROSSINI.
By the Association.
3. Quartette.—“The Lord is my Shepherd.” . . .
Miss H. FANNIE RICHARDSON. Miss ELLA A. FLETCHER.
Mr. GEORGE V. FLETCHER. Mr. CHAS. W. WINN.
4. Prayer.—“Bow down thine ear, O Lord.” ROSSINI.
Miss MARY B. GRANT. Miss MARY S. RICHARDSON.
Miss ANNIE RICHARDSON. Mr. JOHN G. SMITH. Mr. E. E. ADAMS.
5. Solo and Quartette.—“God of Evening.” A. MINE.
Miss JOSIE B. RICHARDSON. Miss ANNIE RICHARDSON.
Mr. ALFRED A. ADAMS. Mr. J. WILLARD HILL.
6. Solo.—“Entreat me not to leave thee,” from “Ruth
and Naomi.” TOPLIFF.
Mrs. FRANK E. YATES.
7. Chorus.—“O praise God in his Holiness.” . . .
By the Association.

INTERMISSION.

8. Solo and Quartette.—“Come unto him.” KALLSKE.
Mrs. FRANK E. YATES. Miss H. A. ADAMS.
Mr. EDW. E. ADAMS. Mr. JOHN G. SMITH.
9. Solo and invisible chorus.—“Tell me, ye winged
winds.” THOMPSON.
Miss MARY S. RICHARDSON. Miss JOSIE B. RICHARDSON.
“H. A. ADAMS. Mr. E. E. ADAMS. Mr. JOHN G. SMITH.
10. “Gloria Patri.”
By the Association.
11. Solo.—“The Elogy of Tears.” SCHUBERT.
Mrs. FRANK E. YATES.
12. America. (By request.)
By the Association.

FRANCIS E. YATES. ORGANIST.

Doors open at 7, P. M. Concert to commence
at 7 1/4 to 8 P. M.

Packages of 5 Tickets, \$1.00
Single Tickets,25

To be had at the Store of Mr. A. A. Adams, Belmont, and of the Mem-
bers of the Association.

Children's Tickets 15 cts.
To be had at the Door only.

W. F. Brown & Co., Steam Job Printers, 15 Cornhill, Boston.

A quarter was the price of admission at one of the first concerts by the Belmont Musical Association in 1862.

Part of Belmont History

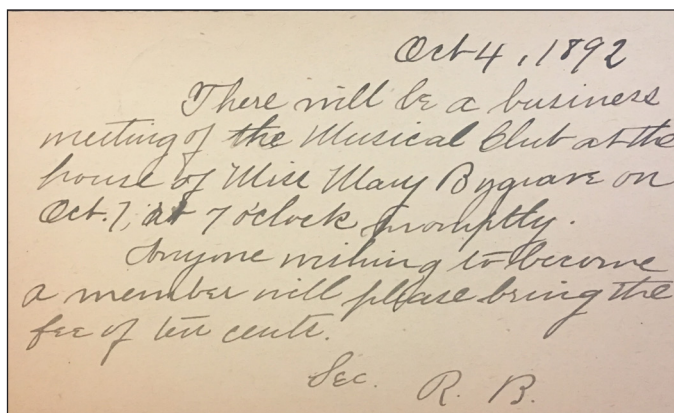
By Sara McCabe. All images courtesy of the Belmont Historical Society.

Music has played an essential role in Belmont life dating back almost to the original founding of the town. Thanks to the Belmont Historical Society archives, we have accounts of festive parties with collective music-making at the original "Bellmont" estate of Mr. and Mrs. John Perkins Cushing. In October 1861, the Belmont Community Music Association formed and began hosting concerts at local churches only a few months later.



Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow attended one of the "musicales" at the estate for which the town of Belmont was named.

Several other groups were active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well, such as the Belmont Musical Club and the Belmont Orchestral Club. There is little documentation of music groups from World War I through the Korean War. In the mid-1960s, however, five music teachers came together as the Belmont Music Committee, later named the Powers Music School in honor of founding director Ellen Powers. If anyone is aware of other community music organizations active in the early 1900s, we would love to hear from you. Please send a letter to the editor at bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com that we can share with our readers.



In the late 19th century, members of the Belmont Musical Club were notified of meetings by postcard. This note indicates that a fee of 10 cents was required for membership.

Historic Highlights

- 1859 Incorporation of the town of Belmont
- 1861 Founding of the Belmont Community Music Association
- 1954 Founding of the Belmont Community Chorus
- 1964 First piano festival (now named Mildred Freiberg Piano Festival), which inspired formation of the Belmont Music Committee, later the Powers Music School.
- 1969 Beginning of private lessons by the Powers Music School
- 1973 Arlington-Belmont Chorale formed with the merger of the Chorale of the Philharmonic Society of Arlington and the Belmont Chorus
- 1974 Inaugural Stein Chamber Music Festival
- 1975 Arlington-Belmont Chamber Chorus founded
- 1990 Payson Park Festival founded
- 2000 First Judith K. Record concert
- c. 2010 Chenery Middle School Parent/Teacher Band and Chorus formed
- 2012 Belmont Community Chorus founded
- 2018 Inaugural Belmont Porchfest

Sara McCabe is editor of the BCF Newsletter.

Cambridge Residents Support Climate Safety Petition

By Ann Stewart

In “Preparing for Climate Change,” *BCF Newsletter*, May-June 2018, state Senator Will Brownsberger focused on the potential flooding risk to Belmont, Arlington, and Cambridge neighborhoods surrounding Alewife Reservation. Another climate change threat besides flooding is rising temperatures. Last year the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment predicted, “By 2070, Cambridge may experience nearly three months [per year] over 90°F, compared with less than two weeks in present day.” Heat has been responsible for most US weather-related fatalities over the last 30 years, according to the National Weather Service.

Heat, flooding, and sea level rise are all concerns for the new Cambridge Climate Safety committee, a group of Cambridge residents organized this spring to guide new development. Members Doug Brown and Mike Nakagawa wrote a zoning petition requesting that the Cambridge City Council require new buildings in the floodplain to be climate-ready. The citizen-initiated Climate Safety Petition includes Green Factor scoring modelled after the city of Seattle and provisions for emergency evacuations.

The petition grew out of an earlier forum on how to create affordable housing while addressing climate challenges, prevent stormwater runoff from contaminating Alewife Brook, and protect residents and employees in the event of a storm surge. The Cambridge Climate Safety committee sponsored the educational forum in partnership with Green Cambridge, Cambridge Mothers Out Front, North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, Fresh Pond Residents Alliance, Mystic River Watershed Association, and other citizen groups.

Mike Nakagawa, co-author of the zoning petition, said, “Now that we have quantified the serious impacts of the changing area climate, we need to guide new developments that will exist for the coming decades.”

In April, the City Council referred the zoning petition to the council’s Ordinance Committee. On June 26, the Planning Board held a public hearing (the vote was 6 against, 1 for, and 1 abstention), and on June 27, the City Council’s Ordinance Committee asked for input from city staff and the petition filers. For updates and to read the zoning petition, go to cambridgeclimate-safety.info.

Ann Stewart is a volunteer with the Cambridge Climate Safety Committee.



Mike Nakagawa (left) and Doug Brown presented their zoning petition to the City Council’s Ordinance Committee in June.

MARC LEVY

Great Blue Heron Chicks a Welcome Addition to Alewife Reservation

By Sara McCabe



GEORGE MCLEAN

Photographer George McLean counted 10 chicks and two parents. The Alewife Brook Reservation area appears to have ample food for the great blue heron family.

Birders and conservationists have been overjoyed by the discovery this spring of a great blue heron rookery in the Alewife Brook Reservation. Many believe this to be the only great blue heron roost for at least 20 miles. The herons' selection of Jerry's Pond in North Cambridge as the site for their two nests is especial cause for excitement. This artificial pond was created in 1870 from an old clay pit, used as a public swimming hole from 1913 to 1961, then closed for suspected contamination. It has been fenced off for nearly 60 years despite its prime location along the Alewife Linear Park path next to the southern entrance of Alewife Station.

"I had to take these pictures through a chain-link fence from over 100 yards away, using a 400 mm lens," said wildlife photographer George McLean, who has observed the heron family's progress over several months. McLean

counted 10 chicks and two parents. The herons appear to have adequate resources and security amid the roughly nine-acre wooded habitat, despite the bustling cityscape that surrounds it. "They have all the fish, frogs, turtles, and other food they need right here," said McLean, adding, "From watching the herons, I've found out that they will eat anything—even chipmunks and other birds!"

This past February, the Cambridge City Council unanimously passed an order to apply for an EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) brownfields assessment for the site. It is still too early to predict the fate of the site, but the birth of the heron chicks is a good sign that at least the local wildlife understands the value of this urban oasis.

Sara McCabe is editor of the BCF Newsletter.

BCF Director Anne-Marie Lambert Celebrated as a Massachusetts “Unsung Heroine”

Congratulations to Belmont Citizens Forum board member Anne-Marie Lambert, who was chosen by state Representative Dave Rogers as the 2018 “Unsung Heroine” for his district and received the award in the Great Hall of Flags at the Massachusetts State House on June 20.

Each year the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women partners with state legislators to identify one woman from each of their constituencies who “doesn’t always make the news, but truly makes the difference.”

“Anne-Marie Lambert is an environmentalist with deep knowledge of the land and water of Belmont,” Rogers wrote in the biographical sketch he submitted. “The battle over the Uplands—one of the last true urban wilds in the Greater Boston area—was long and difficult, and in the end, environmentalists did not prevail. Anne-Marie transformed its lessons into creative pursuits like the Belmont Stormwater Working Group to advocate successfully to reduce pollution and flooding from new developments by using up-to-date precipitation data; the Belmont ‘Staycation’ campaign to reduce energy used by Belmont residents to fly around the globe; and Belmont nature walks she leads with local poets and actors to connect residents with the place where they live. Anne-Marie has been a Town Meeting member and director of the Belmont Citizens Forum for more than 10 years, organizing stormwater forums and volunteer cleanup days, and publishing articles to inform citizens about local history and environmental and stormwater issues.”



KIRA L. ARNOTT

Honoree Anne-Marie Lambert and state Representative Dave Rogers at the Massachusetts State House.

The Belmont Citizens Forum agrees with Rogers and the commission that Lambert is truly one of the “mentors, volunteers, and innovators who do what needs to be done, without expectations of recognition or gratitude . . . the glue that keeps a community together.”

Letters to the Editor

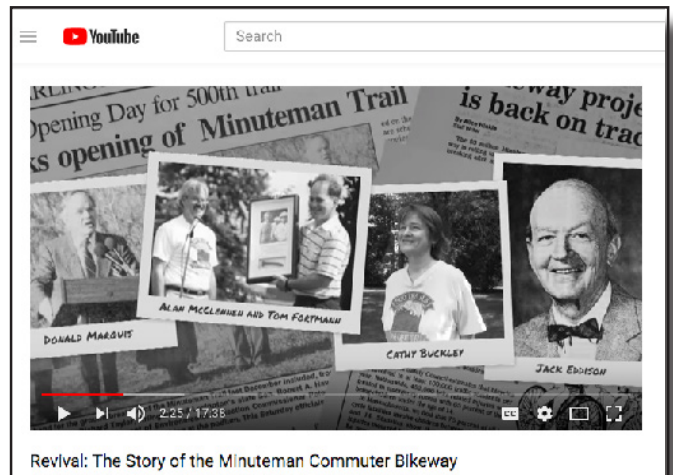
Readers respond to "Part One" of author Vincent Stanton, Jr.'s two-part article on the benefits of the proposed Belmont Community Path from the May-June issue.

To the Editor,

Nice article about the Belmont section of the Mass Central Rail Trail, and I'm happy to hear of progress on that project. Mini-platforms at commuter-rail stations, mentioned in the article, are not only useful for people with disabilities! People in wheelchairs, but also with bicycles, baby strollers, shopping carts, wheeled luggage, etc., use and appreciate mini-platforms.

One comment though: mini-platforms at the east end of Waverley station were mentioned, to avoid problems with curving track at the west end of the station. Mini-platforms are installed at the west end of stations on the Fitchburg line so they all meet the same car. A mini-platform at the proposed location would be inconsistent with that practice unless the entire platform is shifted to the east. Other options might be retractable platform extensions, or to shift the tracks so the curve is outside the station, though that would be expensive and involve service disruptions.

John Allen
Member, Waltham Bicycle Committee



YOUTUBE

To the Editor,

For anyone in Belmont concerned about safety, cost, or other issues related to the proposed community path, I recommend watching the YouTube video, *Revival: The Story of the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway* (<https://bit.ly/2tFZixq>).

You'll see how Arlington and Lexington faced similar concerns decades ago when the Minuteman path was first proposed, and how we now celebrate the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway's overwhelming success.

Mary Elizabeth Liggio, Arlington

Thank You to Our Contributors

WRITERS

John Dieckmann • Sara McCabe • Vincent Stanton, Jr.
• Ann Stewart

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS

Kira L. Arnott • Belmont Historical Society • Laurel Carpenter • Rona Carroll • Sandra Curro • Google Maps • Tom Kelleher • Larry Kiernan • Kulbako Photo • Marc Levy • Massachusetts General Hospital • Sara McCabe • George McLean • Ann Omohundro • Fred Paulsen • Perkins+Will Global • Rutgers University • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • Town of Belmont • YouTube

COPY EDITORS

Sue Bass • Virginia Jordan • Evanthia Malliris

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Sue Bass • Virginia Jordan • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

MAILING MAESTRO

Ken Stalberg

Environmental Events

Native Lawn Alternatives for Urban Spaces

Saturday, July 28, 10:30 AM–Noon

Did you know that lawns cover more surface area of the US than any other single irrigated crop, according to NASA? Lawns are resource-heavy, requiring irrigation, fertilizer, and pesticides to thrive in our climate. Instructor Mark Richardson will share some of the best, environmentally friendly lawn alternatives for urban gardens. *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge. Underground parking garage.*

A Night at the Pond

Tuesday, August 14, 6:15–8:15 PM

Explore the ponds to see what wildlife awaits us. We'll bring our ponding gear and nets to see what you can catch, and then take a closer look at our collection of strange and wonderful water creatures and learn a bit about them. Bring boots and bug spray. Ages 5 and up with an adult partner. Fee: \$8 member/\$10 nonmember. Register at massaudubon.org or call 617-489-5050. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

Native Plants for New England Gardens—Book Talk

Saturday, August 18, 10:30 AM–Noon

Dan Jaffe, coauthor of *Native Plants for New England Gardens*, wants to teach you how to create lovely, low-maintenance gardens that support biodiversity and thrive in New England. Join him for this informative discussion about native plants and all their garden uses—from plants to use instead of mulch to tough plants for urban gardens. *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge. Underground parking garage.*

Meet Belmont! Community Information Fair

Tuesday, August 28, 6:00–8:30 PM

The fair is a great opportunity to learn about the community, meet local government and nonprofit leaders, and discover interesting opportunities. Come talk to members of the Belmont Citizens Forum, Sustainable Belmont, and other local organizations about our initiatives and how you can get involved. *Chenery Middle School, 95 Washington Street, Belmont.*

13th Season of the Belmont Farmers' Market in Full Swing



RONA CARROLL

It's July, and the Belmont Farmers' Market is bursting with blueberries, raspberries, corn, arugula, beans, beets, broccoli, chard, cucumber, eggplant, lettuces, peas, peppers... and more! You'll also find fish, meat, poultry, cheese, baked goods, pasta, prepared foods, and plants. Besides the food vendors, the Belmont Public Library and the Belmont Light Department also participate in the market.

New vendors this year include:

- Dulce D Leche Cakes, Framingham: chocolates, savory pies, gelato
- Farmer Tim's Vegetables: Farmer Tim lives in Belmont and farms in Dudley

- herd nerd SPICE, Arlington: smoky spice for meat, fish, vegetables
- Koshari Mama, Winchester: Egyptian street food—lentils, rice, pasta, crunchy onions, chickpeas, sauce
- Mycoterra Farm, Bolton: small-batch mushrooms
- Tex Mex Eats, Cambridge: tamales
- Valcourt Sugar Shack, Petersham: high-quality maple syrup

For weekly updates on vendors, performers, and more, sign up for the e-newsletter at belmontfarmersmarket.org, or check the website.

The market operates on Thursdays, from 2–6:30 pm, and is located in the municipal parking lot behind Belmont Center. Please consider walking, cycling, or taking public transit. The market matches SNAP benefits up to \$20 per market day, and vendors match WIC and Senior FMNP coupons with reimbursement from the market. Produce vendors participate in the HIP match. For more information, write to belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com.



SANDRA CURRO

Some of the Farmers' Market vendors are Belmont residents, like Sandra Curro of Underwood Greenhouses (above) and Farmer Tim Carroll and Rona Carroll (opposite page).

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

- Check here if your employer has a matching gift program.
- Check here if you would like to learn more about volunteering.

Make checks payable to Belmont Citizens Forum and mail to:
PO Box 609, Belmont, MA 02478

Or give securely online:
www.belmontcitizensforum.org

Contact us:
info@belmontcitizensforum.org

The Belmont Citizens Forum is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your donation is deductible from federal taxes to the full extent provided by law.

Belmont Citizens Forum
P.O. Box 609
Belmont MA 02478
Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage PAID
Boston MA
Permit No. 56393

July/August 2018



Belmont Community Path Update, Part 2	1
Tell Us How We're Doing: BCF Reader Survey	12
Getting In Tune with Belmont's Music Community	14
Cambridge Climate Safety	18
Heron Chicks at Alewife Reservation	19
Anne-Marie Lambert, Unsung Heroine.....	20
Letters to the Editor	21
Environmental Events	22
Belmont Farmer's Market	22

Please visit our website for updates and to read this issue in color: belmontcitizensforum.org.