



Belmont Citizens Forum

New Plans for McLean Land

Density is key issue as town considers proposals for two McLean campus parcels

By Sue Bass

Twenty years ago, Belmont voted to allow development on McLean Hospital land on Belmont Hill. The town-wide referendum of July 1999 endorsed the previous Town Meeting vote to change zoning for 238 acres. The largest portion for new construction became the Woodlands, 121 luxury townhouses on twenty-six acres. Another portion became Waverley Woods, 40 units of affordable housing on an acre and a third. Some land was preserved from construction. One hundred and twenty acres were set aside for open space, and fourteen acres for a municipal cemetery. The land McLean kept for hospital use shrank to 49 acres.

The rest of the space involved more intensive uses, which have never been realized. The rezoning authorized a senior housing complex of 600,000 square feet on 13 acres, and non-hospital research and development (R&D) offices of 150,000 square feet on 12 acres, plus parking for each. The original senior housing developer was American Retirement Corp. They were acquired by Brookdale Senior Living, which a decade ago cancelled its plans to build the giant project. The developer of the R&D complex, ValueRealty, quietly dropped its option on that land about five years ago. Those two zones would have added an enormous amount of traffic to already-clogged Pleasant Street and were the most controversial of the planned changes. The prospect of all that traffic sparked the 1999

referendum campaign to overturn a Town Meeting vote in favor of McLean.

Now McLean is joining with the developer of the Woodlands townhouses in coming back to the town with less disruptive proposals for those two still undeveloped parcels. Instead of 482 housing units in a six-story senior complex that would have loomed over Waverley Square, Northland Residential Corp. proposes just 125 residential (not senior) housing units—34 spacious Woodland-style townhouses, and 91 two-bedroom garden-style flats in four-story buildings. Twenty units in the flats buildings would be affordable, where the eligibility criterion is an adjusted



Northland Residential Corp.'s rendering of the proposed 125 units in zone 3 of the McLean property.

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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.

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household income under about \$70,000. That's a substantial improvement over the previous American Retirement proposal, which offered more affordable units, 30 compared to 20 of Northland's, but with a higher income threshold—about \$100,000 a year at current calculations.

On the 12-acre parcel that was earmarked for R&D, McLean proposes to move some of its current hospital uses, particularly the two schools it now operates, to create a child and adolescent academic and residential campus. Arlington School is a grade 9-12 high school for 40 students; Pathways Academy was started in 2000 to serve people from age 6 through 22 on the autism spectrum. The institutional use would comprise about 75,000 square feet of building space.

One development could wipe out a decade's worth of town progress in cutting emissions.

The details are not much fleshed out, because McLean needs money from fundraising (and probably from selling the senior complex land to Northland Residential) to plan its campus expansion. McLean also hopes that about 75,000 square feet in that zone will be used for non-hospital research and development.

At a public hearing conducted by the Planning Board about these proposals on March 14, McLean's chief operating officer, Michele Gougeon, acknowledged that tax revenue for the town was a major goal of approval of the McLean developments and that the town has received no revenue from the two zones not yet developed. She said McLean would negotiate a payment in lieu of taxes for the land it wanted to reclaim for institutional

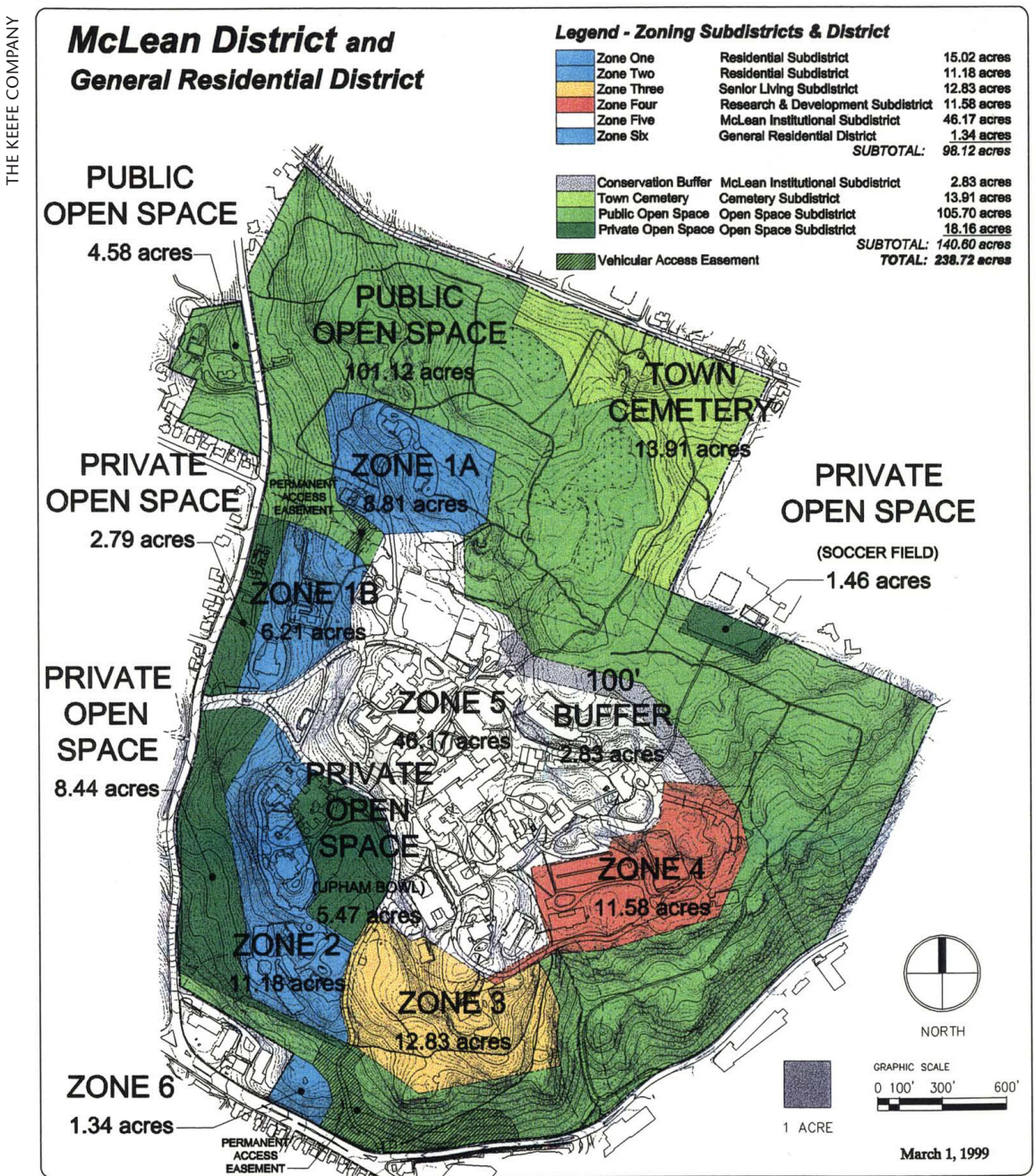
uses and noted that a private R&D complex would pay regular property taxes. Jack Dawley, president of Northland Residential, predicted that his development would yield about \$1.6 million a year in property taxes, in addition to one-time permitting fees paid to the town.

Traffic will again be a concern, even if less in the new development than the 1999 version. All of the traffic from the senior living subdistrict (zone 3 in the McLean zoning on the town's website) and the R&D subdistrict (zone 4), including the added school campus, will come down Olmsted Drive onto Pleasant Street.

A vehicle heading west toward Trapelo Road will join 22,177 others now traveling there daily, according to a study of existing traffic conducted for the town last year. Heading east, it will join 17,588 daily en route to Arlington or 21,122 in Belmont Center. These streets are already overflowing.

Asked about traffic by Town Meeting members Fred Paulsen and Jeanne Mooney, Gougeon said the hospital believes the effects will be minimal. School traffic would move from Mill Street, which she notes is jammed, to Pleasant Street, but she said it is mostly

Zones 1A, 1B, and 2 comprise the Woodlands townhouse complex. Zone 3, currently zoned for a senior living subdistrict, would be rezoned for more townhouses and for garden-style units. Zone 4, the R&D subdistrict, would be the McLean schools plus a smaller R&D facility.



in off-peak hours. Rather than fill the vacated school buildings nearer Mill Street with new traffic-generating uses, Gougeon said the hospital hoped to repurpose a number of its buildings for more efficient use.

Roger Colton, as chair of the town’s Energy Committee, asked that the process be slowed down; the proponents had hoped it could be voted on at the spring Town Meeting, yet they had not yet discussed their plans for energy use. Colton said the two biggest generators of

The town needs 310 more affordable units to eliminate the threat of housing being imposed under Chapter 40B of state housing law, which requires 10 percent of a community’s housing to meet certain affordability standards.

carbon emissions in town are buildings and transportation. One development could wipe out a decade’s worth of town progress in cutting emissions, he noted. Colton and Town Meeting member Roger Wrubel both asked that all buildings be designed for zero net energy use, as the new high school will be. Colton pointed out that traffic and parking are also major factors in emissions.

Gary Simon, a resident of zone 2 in the Woodlands, said he thought the new zone 3 would be too dense. Northland Residential proposes about twice as many units as zone 2 (part of the present townhouse complex) has on about the same amount of land, and zone 2 is so tight that the community doesn’t have a good place to pile snow, he said.

Many additional speakers pointed out the need for more affordable housing in Belmont. Rachel Heller of the Affordable Housing Trust said the town needs 310 more affordable units to eliminate the threat of housing being imposed under Chapter 40B. That’s what happened with the Royal Belmont development near Alewife, which was approved by the state

over town opposition. (Chapter 40B of the state housing law requires that 10 percent of a community’s housing meet certain affordability standards; Belmont’s does not.)

Density is linked to transportation, several people pointed out. A denser development might produce more traffic, but it can also make public transportation more practical.

Several speakers said the proposal would require rewriting the zoning language and revising the town’s Memorandum of Agreement with McLean. The language proposed by McLean and Northland Residential would have added their desired uses but not erased 20-year-old wording that authorized, for example, 480 units and more than 600,000 square feet of construction in zone 3. Thayer Donham, a member of the Planning Board, said that the existing language allowed both zones 3 and 4 to have 350 outdoor parking spaces, in addition to garage spaces.

Steve Pinkerton, also a Planning Board member, noted, “This won’t pass (Town Meeting) by a two-thirds majority,” as zoning changes must. Action was put off, probably until fall. Expect many more meetings with many more committees in the next few months.

Sue Bass is cofounder and director emerita of the Belmont Citizens Forum and a longtime Town Meeting member. She chaired the unsuccessful 1999 referendum campaign on the rezoning of McLean Hospital land.



SUSAN JONES

Part of the Woodlands complex in zone 2 includes a McLean Hospital landmark, the historic Upham Memorial Building, redeveloped as condominiums.

Composting in Belmont: Breaking it Down

By Mary Bradley

A Virtuous Cycle

Composting is no longer just a backyard hobby for the ardent gardener. It has Facebook groups and a following from environmentalists, politicians, and scientists. Most praise compost as a means to keep food waste out of landfills and reduce release of methane. While consensus ends there, composting has evolved from a tale of worms, microbes, and bacteria to the realm of politics, emerging technologies, and scientific disputes.

For me, however, composting is about magic: Wave one hand over an orange peel clutched in your other hand, and reveal a fistful of dirt. If that’s too mundane a trick, the one-time application of as little as ¼ inch of compost to soil will sequester carbon in the soil for 30 to 100 years. Per acre, the net sequestration is upwards of 55 metric tons of CO₂ per year.^{1,2} Ta-da!

Policy without Passion and Passion without Policy

It is no secret that composting is a sustainable way to recycle organic material. In Massachusetts, a 2014 regulation bans commercial disposal of food waste in landfills by institutions and businesses that produce more than a ton of organic waste each week. Unfortunately, this regulation of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is not adequately enforced, with just four regulators charged with overseeing about 1,700 entities. Many schools and businesses have initiated recovery programs, but as much as 80 percent of potential compost is still not diverted from landfills, or about 1,120,000 tons each year.

If conscience or consequence are not enough motivation to divert food waste, eventually economics will be. Tipping fees are rising as space diminishes at landfills, despite the state’s nine anaerobic digesters (an industrial form of composting), operating at less than 75 percent capacity, with one more about to come online.³



SARA MCCABE

Belmont residents currently have a choice of four curbside composting services and can compare offerings at belmontcomposts.org.

Though some municipalities in the Commonwealth have adopted composting policies and programs, smaller institutions and businesses do not have the infrastructure or incentives to compost. In Belmont, attempts to introduce composting have been noble but have lacked the traction and the roadway to meet their goals:

- In Belmont, restaurants such as the Black Bear Café provide their customers with compostable ware and are working to have their landlords supply composting receptacles. Without the receptacles, customers need to dispose of anything compostable in the restaurant’s trash or take it home to put in curbside composting bins. Home composting systems do not generate enough heat to decompose compostable ware, and they will damage recycling systems.

- At the Chenery Middle School, a team of students, teachers, and parents, enthusiastically supported by Principal Mike McAllister, were excited to begin a cafeteria composting program this past summer. The school contracted with an unfinished-furniture company to construct three large refuse centers that would allow students to separate recyclables and compostable waste from trash. According to Principal McAllister, unfortunately the receptacles were not practical. Any change also requires school decisions on who would be in charge of the program, how much it would cost, and who would pay for it.

What Options Do We Have?

Fortunately for our intrepid and environmentally proactive populace, the household composting options range from simple to esoteric.

As individuals, we can compost inside our domiciles or outside in our backyards, in our laundry rooms, or via our front curbs, and while we're at it, throw in the kitchen sink.

Take It Outside

As home gardeners have long known, outdoor bins accommodate both yard waste and food waste. The complex of living organisms in an aerobic compost pile will break down the organic material, creating temperatures as high as 100–150°F, which destroy pathogens, weed seeds, and fly larvae.

The keys to a successful outdoor bin are oxygen and time. Keeping the compost damp-sponge

moist, aerating it often, and balancing two to four times as much carbon as nitrogen will expedite the process. An excess of carbon (pizza boxes, leaves, peanut shells) slows down the decomposition. An excess of nitrogen (food waste, grass clippings, coffee grounds) makes the compost smell bad. But turning it frequently—aeration—balances the carbon-nitrogen ratios; distributes moisture, heat, and oxygen; reduces particle size; and homogenizes the food and yard waste for optimal composting.

When managed correctly, rats are generally not a problem. One keeps rats away by burying food waste under a layer of leaves or other higher-carbon substances, and moistening the entire pile. Planting mint at the perimeter of the bins could be an additional deterrent. If there are pernicious pests in your neighborhood or you just want to be extra cautious, adding fermented food waste, known as bokashi processing, will render your compost pile too acidic for rodents and other animals.

Kitchen Disposal

A kitchen disposal system allows certain foods to be funneled down the drain all the way to the wastewater treatment plant on Deer Island, one of the more than 1,200 Water Resources Recovery Facilities in the United States that can treat shredded food waste with sewage. These use closed-system anaerobic digesters, creating a methane and carbon dioxide gas called biogas, which is captured for use as energy. The remaining wastewater is treated at the sewage plant to produce a nutrient-rich solid digestate, which is broken into fertilizer pellets. Several cities around the country, including Milwaukee and Philadelphia⁴, encourage residents to install disposals in their kitchen sinks for this purpose. Waste Management, Inc., “one of the two primary landfill companies in the United States,” is a significant proponent of this approach.

Vermicomposting

Vermicomposting, also known as worm composting, consists of an indoor boxed system in which specially ordered red wiggler worms consume limited kinds of food scraps and organic material and then cast off ready-to-use fertilizer. Notably, the nutrients are released at the optimal rate for growing plants. If their environment is kept moist and warm, the tiny red wiggler worms

will happily thrive and produce high-quality soil amendment.

Bokashi Composting

Bokashi (ぼかし) is Japanese for “shading off” or “gradation.” This two-step system starts with microbial anaerobic fermentation in a bucket indoors, followed by composting either in or outdoors. Bokashi produces neither CO₂ nor methane. The process originated in Japan centuries ago, and is gaining popularity

throughout the world due to its ease, rapidity, high-quality soil amendment, variety of permitted foods—including meat and dairy—and repelling of rats. Six weeks into my first experiment, it has me near-proselytizing in line at the grocery store and bank.

Curbing Your Compost

Curbside composting has been on the upswing in Belmont. For a nominal fee, any of four organizations will whisk away your waste

Composting, a Family Legacy, with Marc Wolman

Marc Wolman, a lifelong resident of Belmont, has been composting all his life and jovially confides that while no book learning is needed for home composting, *Let It Rot: The Gardener's Guide to Composting* is great.

Why do you compost?

Why throw away my yard, garden, and kitchen leavings when I can compost them and fertilize my garden?

How long have you been composting?

All my life (My parents did it when I was little).

How would you describe the system you use?

It's a two-bin system using New Age cylinders from the highway department, set up with each bin at its largest size, three feet in diameter. Once the bin is full, I water and aerate it for 6 to 10 weeks while starting another bin. When it's nicely aged (you can tell!), I sift it through a half-inch screen. The compost that is smaller than the screen, I apply directly in my yard or bag for future use. The compost that is larger than the screen, I mix back into the active bin.

How long does it take to turn your waste to compost you can use?

I sift the entire contents of a “finished” bin two or three times a year.

How do you use your compost?

For top-dressing and transplanting in my garden.

How concerned are you about achieving the optimum carbon-to-nitrogen ratio?

I mostly just experience its ebb and flow, since everything goes into the mix in season. I screen using half-inch, so lots of woody carbon-y material gets recycled into successive batches. Avocado pits make a great grinding medium.

Would you ever consider using a home composting service?

No.

How do you keep rats out?

Impossible, but best to make the area inhospitable and difficult to penetrate by frequently tending and visiting, keeping the bin covered, compacted, and moist. Mixing in and burying kitchen scraps, watching for tunnels under and holes in bin wall. Just accept it as war. No poisons please.

SHEA BRADLEY-HURLEY



The author's bokashi starter kit included two bins and bokashi bran to aid fermentation.



SARA MCCABE

Local commercial composting companies use industrial aerobic methods to break down waste.



weekly or biweekly. Information about them is available from Belmont Composts!, a recently formed project spearheaded by Julie Wu and operating under the aegis of the Belmont Food Collaborative (the not-for-profit volunteer organization that runs the Belmont Farmers Market), with the goal of increasing curbside composting town-wide.

The commercial composting companies serving Belmont use one or a combination of industrial aerobic methods. The three most common methods are:

- Aerated static ventilation: The pile of waste is ventilated using fans.
- Windrow: The pile of waste is laid out in long rows and turned.
- In-Vessel: The pile of waste is placed in an enclosed facility, ventilated by fans and turned for 3-7 days, after which the waste is typically transferred to windrows to complete the process.

Black Earth has operated their own aerated static ventilation composting site in Manchester-by-the-Sea since 2012. Bootstrap Compost transports your food waste to a Massachusetts farm which uses an in-vessel digester followed by windrows and screening. City Compost currently partners with a few organizations and uses a combination of aerated static piles and windrows. Garbage to Gardens takes Belmont compost to a sorting station in Charlestown, then transports the food waste to farms that use in-vessel digesters followed by windrows and screening.

Making a Choice

Do it yourself, or contract with a commercial company? Each composting option has trade-offs. Outdoor composting incorporates yard and

food waste, and provides the greatest environmental benefit. As a gardener you know exactly what has gone into your compost. However, the process requires some manual labor and limits the kinds of foods you can compost. Well-managed outdoor bins do not usually have issues with rats, and once the weather is above

freezing, expediting the process with bokashi further discourages vermin and increases the allowable food products.

Vermicomposting has scale and food variety limitations. And worms. In your house.

Bokashi requires an airless container that can be drained, food waste chopped into inch pieces, specially ordered or homemade bran containing effective microbes, and moderate temperature control. It can be ruined by moldy food, large bones, and liquid, but rapidly creates high-quality soil amendment, and the fermentation process provides "compost tea" and rat abatement.

Curbside composting nullifies the rat question; food waste is equally inaccessible in a trash can for landfill or for composting. However, the carbon footprint of trucks collecting food waste from each house and transporting it for processing and distribution may diminish the environmental benefit.

The kitchen disposal has a significantly lower carbon footprint than curbside collection, also creates usable biogas, and doesn't feed the neighborhood rats. However, the overall range of nonfood items, such as pharmaceuticals and toxins, discharged to the treatment plant can compromise biosolid quality and the long-term carbon sequestration of fertilizer pellets has not been studied. The United States is the only Western country that does not distinguish sludge-source compost from green compost.⁵

The Future of Waste

Recently Belmont returned to its decades-long flirtation with the idea of building a composting facility at the incinerator site, only to decide for the third time that the externalities would be too high and the benefit too risky. Meanwhile, the uptick in composting within the community

Living the Virtuous Cycle

By Mary Bradley

Fourteen years ago Bonnie Friedman and David Merfeld paid a leaf cleaning service \$900 to bag and remove leaves from their yard, and that was the last time. The couple promptly decided composting would be financially, as well as environmentally, beneficial. They designed and constructed three roughly 8x8x5-foot, attached compost bins on their hill and began to transform their waste into compost over a three-year cycle.

Concerned they may attract pests or generate odor, they started with only yard waste but soon began experimenting with vegetable peels, fruits, and tissues. "I couldn't believe how quickly the tissues disappeared," Friedman recalls.

Over time the list of acceptable materials has grown, as have the locations from which they are harvested. Now almost every room in their house has a receptacle for compostables, and Friedman notes that as a result, their garbage can is nearly empty much of the time.

The family slides yard and food waste down the ramp into the pens or tosses it in from the side. Approximately once a month, Friedman slides down the ramp herself, jumps in the pens, and moves the waste around, then climbs out using one of the side ladders. It's clear she thoroughly enjoys this activity.

Once a year, Friedman and Merfeld spend a couple of weekends moving the compost. They remove the slats in the bottom wall, pull out approximately 144 cubic feet of compost for their plants and vegetable gardens, replace the slats, and repeat this process, moving the contents of each pen down to the next pen.



Asked about pests, Friedman reflects that although she does not know why, their compost system has never had problems with rats. On rare occasions she has seen raccoons in the top, most accessible, pen.

Rodent-free and carbon offset-rich, the compost system has provided the economic and environmental benefits Friedman and Merfeld first sought. "We used to pay to have our leaves taken away and to have mulch and dirt delivered," says Friedman, "Now we make our own dirt!"



Top: Bonnie Friedman demonstrates the removable slats that allow her to pull out compost, ready to spread on their garden, from her three-bin system (above).

speaks to the sea change all around us. More than 250 US cities have instituted curbside collection of yard and food waste, and other cities are encouraging backyard composting.⁶ All around the globe, communities are adopting composting as a fundamental component of their waste management strategy.

Zero Up

San Francisco set a two-step goal: to reduce waste sent to landfill by 75 percent in 2010, followed by a 90 percent reduction by 2020. The city instituted aggressive public policies, strong public-private sector partnerships, an efficient waste management system, economic incentives, and public education. Still, their efforts stalled around 70 percent between 2007 and 2008. To break through that barrier, they shifted from voluntary to mandatory recycling and composting, and instituted a single-use plastic bag ban, which met the goal with 77 percent reduction in waste by 2010.⁷

The same year that San Francisco mandated household composting, Seattle passed a resolution to reach 72 percent waste diversion by 2025. Seattle also began requiring food and yard composting for single-family homes. As a Seattle resident at that time, I was keenly aware that the cost to compost was set significantly lower than sending food and yard waste to landfill, which was commensurate with the environmental impact. The program was quickly embraced by the community.⁸

ANDREA SHIPPY



San Francisco residents have a bin for household compostables, which they're required by law to include in their weekly waste pickup.

Belmont considered a “Pay As You Throw” program in 2018, predicated on a similarly incentivized pricing model. Instead, on September 25, 2018, over objections from Selectman Adam Dash about the excessive size of the required 65-gallon bin, the Board of Selectmen opted for automated trash collection and a five-year contract with the largest residential recycler in North America, Houston-based Waste Management, Inc.

Since introduction of the new contract, Belmont Department of Public Works has seen a large reduction in trash and credits it to an increase in recycling. Possibly the abundance of composting bins on front curbs, and the Belmont Composts! drive initiated at the same time as the new Waste Management, Inc. contract, argue that diverted food waste may be the true cause of decreased waste, but there are no statistics on this.

In two years, the Board of Selectmen will revisit the question of incorporating a “Pay As You Throw” model to complement the automated trash system. Although Waste Management, Inc. does not offer composting, it is possible that compost will be a component of that process if the Commonwealth adopts and enforces composting regulation. At the very least, we may hope to downsize from our unwieldy and near empty cans.

Massachusetts Looks Ahead

In 2020, Massachusetts will adopt a new blueprint for how it disposes of its waste, namely the 2020–2030 Solid Waste Master Plan (SWMP) from MassDEP. (The current plan, from 2010, is available on the mass.gov website).⁹ We can hope that in time the Commonwealth’s policy catches up with our community’s passion.

For now, there may not be a best option, but the saying has never been more true: do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Take care of your trash!

Mary Bradley is co-editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, a veteran home composter, and a recent convert to the bokashi way.

REFERENCES

Please refer to the online version of this article at belmontcitizensforum.org for Mary Bradley’s complete list of footnotes.

WEEDS: Plants in the wrong place

By Lucia Gates
All photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Like gardeners everywhere, we Belmontians struggle with weeds. While it might be tempting to take the easy approach and eliminate them with herbicides and chemical weed killers, as gardeners we also know that we have to protect everything in our garden. There are ways to manage weeds safely.

This article focuses on flower beds and not lawns, although some of the information will be useful in grassy situations. Also, some weeds, such as wild grape vines and wild multiflora roses, are unlikely to be a problem in a flower bed, but they do love empty spaces, such as behind sheds and garages, over fences, and in empty corners—all the areas we put off working on, thus leaving time for the weeds to move in.

Of the hundreds of weeds in New England, 10 account for our biggest headaches. Some are dangerous, like poison ivy; some a nuisance to our neighbors, like Japanese knotweed; some are aggressive with other plants, like bittersweet; and some are fast spreaders who just don’t know their place, like garlic weed. All are plants in the wrong place, and that, by definition, is a weed.

First, a word about composting. Never throw “weed seeds” into your compost pile as the seeds can survive long periods of heat and drought. The bright orange seeds of bittersweet should especially be avoided. Be very careful to keep poison ivy leaves, stems, and roots out of your compost pile, lest you produce toxic soil.

Second, a word about tools. Mostly your own hands are the right tools for pulling up small seedlings. But for deeper rooted weeds such as dandelions or wild garlic, a special tool is needed. Any good garden center will carry “weeders”—a long-bore tool with a forked end.



Poison Ivy

You push the tool deep into the ground next to the weed and pull it up with a slight sidewise tilt.

The Nasty Ones

Poison Ivy, *Toxicodendron radicans*
This common but toxic plant is a major cause of contact dermatitis. Because so many people are allergic to it, it should always be treated with care and removed whenever possible. Even though the plant form varies from ground cover to bush to vine, it is easily recognizable, with three roughly oval pointed leaves. All parts of the plant contain urushiols—the compounds that cause reactions in humans. Because these urushiols can remain potent for up to a year on dead plants, the stems and dead leaves need to be avoided even in winter.

Young plants can be pulled by hand, if the hand is protected. An easy way is to put a large plastic trash bag over your entire hand and arm. Pull up the plant, then turn the bag inside out so that the plant is inside the bag. Throw it all out and do not compost it. Even in well-tended

gardens, poison ivy can hide in bushes and become quite invasive. If it vines up a tree or throughout a bush, it is best to call professionals.

Poison ivy is an exception where herbicides might be necessary. If you pull out a plant and it keeps coming back from well-established roots, you may need to consider a weed killer. But use it judiciously. First, remove as much of the plant as possible and dab the weed killer directly onto short stems so that it is absorbed down into the roots.

Japanese Knotweed, *Polygonum cuspidatum*

This is an attractive, ornamental plant introduced from Japan by landscapers for its easy cultivation in difficult spots. It can be seen along roadways, such as western Concord Avenue, and behind the main library in Belmont. However, knotweed has become a menace due to its aggressive, fast-moving rhizomes, which can spread 20 feet and pierce through hard-packed soil and asphalt. This is a very difficult plant to control. In small situations such as the average Belmont yard, it can be hand-pulled, but this takes constant vigilance over a large area (remember those 20-foot roots!).



In larger areas, herbicides could be necessary. In this case, all foliage and stems have to be removed, leaving eight-inch stems. Herbicides are then dabbed on the cut end of the stem so that the plant will pull the herbicide down into the root system, keeping it from the surrounding soil. But it also takes vigilance, as the roots will continue to push out new sprouts for years.



Bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculatus*

The bright yellow and red seeds of bittersweet are beautiful in the fall, but the plant is a fast-growing vine that can strangle even the largest of trees by twisting up and around the branches. Many people use the cut vines to form wreaths for front doors. But every falling seed leads to more vines, so it is best left in nature.

Young bittersweet plants have pale green leaves and can easily be identified by their neon orange roots. Older plants can be identified by their twisting, woody vines, creeping up through trees seeking the sun.

Pulling young plants out is easily done, and the more you pull, the easier it gets to recognize the leaves. Older plants are tougher to deal with. First, cut the trunk of the vine off at the base—do this before seeds are formed in the fall. Be very careful pulling the dead vines down; because of their twining growth habit, they attach themselves cunningly to bushes and trees. Rough pulling can lead to breakage in the tree you are trying to protect. Best to let the stems and leaves die off naturally. Using a garden fork, dig up bittersweet roots as deeply as you are able to. And then for years watch out for new plants in the area around the dead vine.

Black Swallowwort, *Cynanchum nigrum*

This is the really nasty one, so common in our area that it has been called the official weed of Belmont. The stems, smooth and unbranched, twist up through plants, fences, and bushes. The leaves are dark green, roughly ovate, and simple. Until you get used to the plant's look, the fastest way to identify the plant is by the long,

slender seed pods which look like green beans or milkweed pods. Unfortunately, by the time seed pods are produced in mid-summer, you have already lost the game and new plants will grow from the seeds.



So, what do you do? Pull, pull, and pull some more. Throw the weeds into the trash (not compost) and keep pulling. If you have the misfortune to find a well-established patch, you can try digging up the roots. And you will still have to pull the new shoots. But given time, diligence, and elbow grease, black swallowwort can be conquered.

The Vines

Virginia Creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Virginia creeper looks similar to grape vine, but has compound leaves, whereas grape leaves are single. It “creeps” in part by forming adhesive disks that allow it to grow up and over brick



walls. It can damage homes when it gets into window frames or chokes out gutters and eaves. While the look of an ivy-covered wall is iconic in New England, it needs to be kept under control.

If the vine is growing up a wall, you will need a ladder to reach up and pull off dead vines. Like other vines, it can be controlled by cutting off the base. Virginia creeper spreads quickly by lateral vines. These vines can creep through a yard growing low enough to escape even mower blades and must be pulled out by hand.

Wild Grape Vines, *Vitis spp.*

Easily identified by their grape leaves and woody vines, wild grape vines can be quite charming along an old stone wall or wooden fence and are native to New England. But they can be a problem when they creep into bushes or up trees, where they can block light from tree leaves. As with bittersweet, they are easily pulled when young. Once the woody vine has formed, it can be cut off at its base. And like bittersweet, you have to be careful pulling the vine off of your desirable plant. Given time, the vine will die off if you have clipped the vine at its base.



Multiflora Roses, *Rosa multiflora*

Multiflora roses were introduced from East Asia to be used as rootstock for more desirable roses, but they quickly escaped cultivation. This rose has white flowers, red fruits that last into winter, and fringed stipules (appendages) on leaf petioles. Beware this beauty, as it is a threat to your other plants. It spreads by both seeds and runners and forms long arching stems that combine into thickets to drive out other plants. The only plants



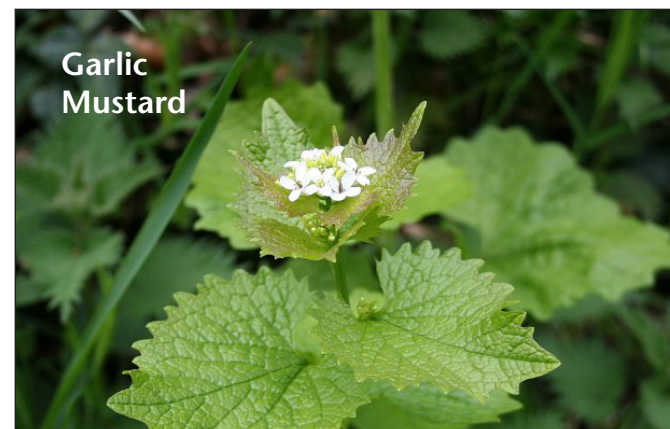
Wild
Onion

likely to survive such a thicket are the other wild vines. A thicket of rose, bittersweet, and grape vines is a nasty prospect indeed.

The Innocuous But Difficult

Wild Onion, *Allium stellatum*, or
Wild Garlic, *Allium vineale*

These plants are easy to spot, as they look like chives and smell of onion or garlic. They are not aggressive to other plants and even have a bright, natural look in the spring. But as they spread, they can give a weedy look to a well-tended garden. Use the “weeder” tool to weed these plants out, as you need to remove the underground bulb. Be aware that the bulb can last for many years and can propagate even five years later.



Garlic
Mustard

Garlic Mustard, *Alliaria officinalis*

This simple plant with heart shaped leaves and small white flowers is a true member of the mustard family and is not related to wild garlic. But it does have a strong garlic smell, hence its name. This plant is native to Canada, but over the last 20 years, it has become a problem in Boston suburbs. While not aggressive in its plant growth, its numerous seeds can spread throughout a neighborhood in only a few seasons. It needs to be pulled out and thrown away, hopefully before it forms seed heads.

Buttercups, *Ranunculus repens*

All buttercups are charming in the spring but become problems as they spread. *Ranunculus repens*’s long creepers are particularly hard to control. As you weed, feel along the spider-like runners for the central nodes and pull them out. By dint of careful pulling, these weeds can be controlled. An interesting note about buttercups is that they like damp soil and so indicate spots



Buttercups

A WEED BY ANY OTHER NAME

Many weeds have multiple common names. For example, garlic mustard is commonly called garlic weed, yet these are two very different plants. Weeds are notorious for adapting to different environments and even imitating other plants around them. Use botanical names to avoid confusion.

in your garden where you have too much water. A dense buttercup crop can even indicate a leaking water system.

Weeds If You So Choose

There are many wildflowers that elicit mixed opinions. To some they are delightful spring flowers; to others they are an annual spring chore to be weeded out. Violets—and the entire *Viola* family—top the list, and can easily be pulled out if you wish. This is also true for celadine, *Chelidonium majus*, with its bright yellow flowers. Dandelions, *Taraxacum officinale*, have a certain charm, but one seed head can spread the plant everywhere.

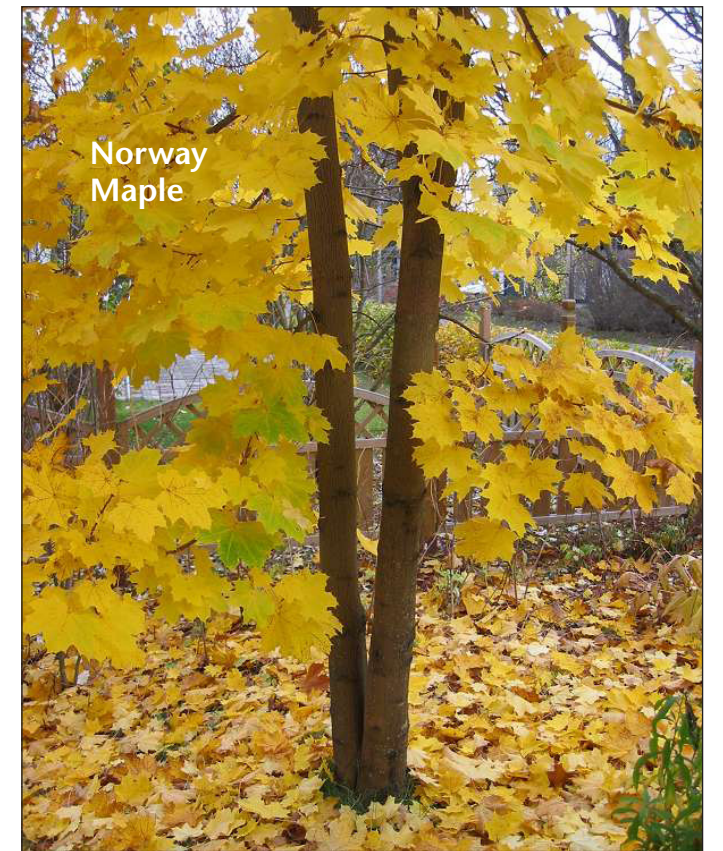
Milkweeds, *Asclepias syriaca*, are the only plants on which monarch butterflies will lay eggs. So although they are commonly classed as weeds in the garden, cultivating them is encouraged.

Norway maples are large, magnificent trees providing welcome shade but as seedlings are also a menace in the garden. Anyone who has a nearby Norway knows that they can produce thousands of tiny seedlings. They need to be pulled out early, as the larger the seedling gets, the stronger it grows. Also, watch your bushes and hedges carefully, as Norway maples tend to grow unnoticed up through hedges.

One Last Problem Plant

Common buckthorn, *Rhamnus carthatica*, forms a large woody bush that can grow to the size of a small tree. Like many invasive plants, buckthorn was originally introduced for landscaping uses. It is amazingly durable and can withstand a variety of climate conditions. It might be desirable, if only it didn’t spread so vigorously. The only solution is to cut down the bush and dispose of it. Then, over many seasons, watch for new shoots and saplings—cut these down as quickly as possible. Be vigilant!

Now that your gardens are weed-free, there’s room for the desirable plants. In Belmont we see lots of daffodils, day lilies, roses, and phlox in the sunny spots. In the shady spots—and we have a great deal of shade thanks to our wonderful trees—Belmont gardeners plant ferns and hostas. Without weeds to choke out



Norway
Maple

your favorite plants, there is a world of beauty to cultivate in your garden.

Lucia Gates is chair of the Belmont Shade Tree Committee and a member of the Belmont Garden Club.

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Painstaking Progress on Belmont's Multi-Decade Environmental Emergency

By Anne-Marie Lambert

Belmont is working under a federal consent order to reduce the pollution it sends into Boston Harbor from leaks and connections of underground sewer pipes into the storm drain system.

Cleanup

According to the town's January 30 Compliance Report to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Belmont redirected an additional 126 gallons per day (GPD) of sewage from our brooks and ponds to the Deer Island treatment plant in Boston Harbor. Sources included leaking sewer service laterals and sewer segments on Brettwood Road and Pierce Road (84 GPD) and three leaking sewer service laterals along Hoitt Road (42 GPD).

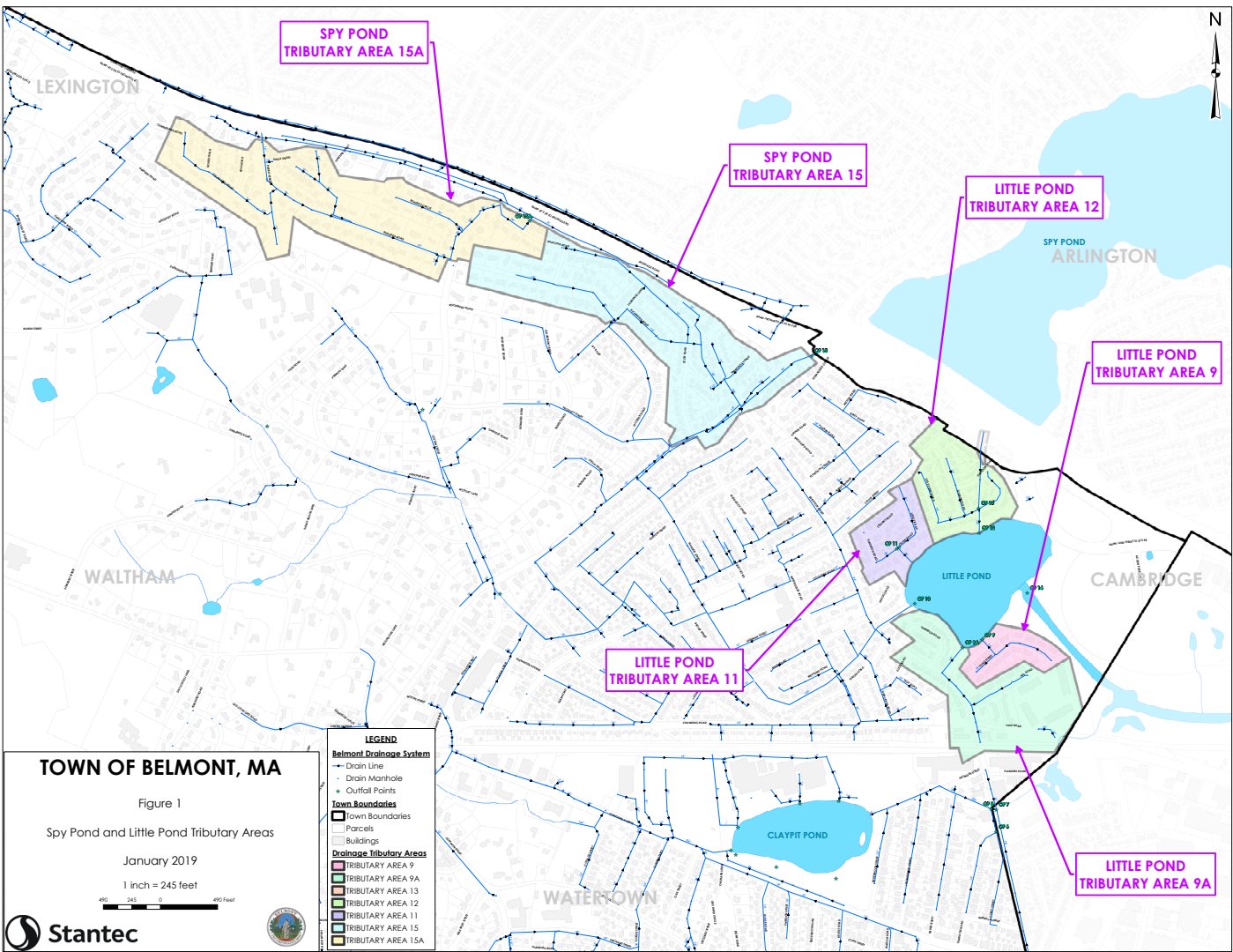
Opportunities

As a result of previous and ongoing investigations, including new testing in the Spy Pond/Little Pond tributaries of the drainage system, the next planned repairs will address illicit connections to the storm drain on Bow Road and Brighton Street, leaking sewer service laterals

on Randolph Street, a sewer main along Oliver Road "in fair to poor condition with moderate to severe cracking, sags and offset joints," and 20 service laterals along Oliver Road, also "in fair to poor condition with defects including offset/separated joints, cracks, root intrusion, and sags."

Mystery Pipe Solved

In our last report ("Sewer Repairs In Progress to Clean Up Wellington Brook and Winn's Brook", September/October 2018 *BCF Newsletter*), the town had discovered mystery pipes connected to stormwater drains, coming from an unidentified source. Director of Community Development Glenn Clancy now believes they are likely coming from 1911-era underdrains. These were installed to facilitate the initial construction of sewer mains by draining ground water, but were then left in place underground. If this theory is confirmed, his team plans to plug and cap these drains. (See chart showing history of sewer and storm drain construction in "Finding Sewer Leaks Means Detective Work," in the March/April 2018 *BCF Newsletter*.)



This map of the Spy Pond and Little Pond Tributary Areas shows the portions of Belmont's stormwater system that drain into those two ponds at outfalls 9, 9A, 11, 12, 15, and 15A. The largest tributary area, draining into Little Pond at outfall 10, is the Winn's Brook Tributary Area. This large tributary area, however, is not labeled explicitly on this map, which focuses on the smaller areas recently investigated.

Testing, Testing, Testing

The amount of testing required to find a handful of pollution sources continues to be impressive. The bulk of the Report on Compliance describes meticulous and systematic testing from the periphery of each tributary in the drainage system to each outfall. This includes sampling and testing for *E.coli* at certified labs, dye testing mains and laterals to individual homes, and sending CCTV cameras down drains.

On Track for May 2022

Clancy believes the town is on track to meet the five-year cleanup goal in the town's consent order with the EPA. "We are peeling back the onion and still finding problems—the repair of one direct connection could be the source we have been looking for." The EPA date is posted prominently by Clancy's desk.

Anne-Marie Lambert is co-director of the Belmont Stormwater Working Group and a former director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

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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!

Another Successful Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day

By Radha Iyengar

On Saturday, April 27, the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF), in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund, held its seventh annual Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day. The volunteers braved the cold and windy weather, and the rain held off.

At the Pine Allee, the efficient volunteers planted 63 white pine saplings, some of which were transplants from Mass Audubon’s Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary. The new plants replaced some of the Allee’s missing trees as well as some of the dead saplings from volunteer day plantings over the last two years. At the other end of the property, the volunteers collected five bags of trash and two boxes of recyclables, as well as digging up numerous knotweed mud-lubricated rhizomes, including a giant knotweed taproot.

BCF is grateful to Habitat Director Roger Wrubel for sharing Mass Audubon volunteers and instructing them on how to dig up saplings. We also thank David Ropes and Eric DePalo of Tree Specialists, Inc. for supervising the planting, and the Judy Record Conservation Fund for funding their ongoing work and purchasing the trees. And a big shout-out goes to Jeff North for his help in coordinating the Pine Allee work, to Leonard Katz for supervising the removal of the knotweed shoots, to Michael Santoro, DPW Highway Division manager, and his staff, for picking up the trash, and to the Belmont Day School parents and staff for volunteering.

Radha Iyengar is the treasurer of Belmont Citizens Forum and organizer of BCF Volunteer Day.



RADHA IYENGAR



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JEANNE MOONEY

Lone Tree Hill: What to do if you see a problem

Your help is vital to keep Lone Tree Hill safe and enjoyable for everyone. If you see any problems—such as downed trees, broken limbs, or dangerous or excessive trash—please report it to the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill by sending an email to grimble.lmc@gmail.com.

Emails are checked regularly, but not daily, so you can expect an answer in a few days. If this is a time-critical issue of safety, please dial 911. Your email should be as specific as possible about location, what you observed, when you observed it, and any suggestion you may have for resolving the issue. A member of the committee will address the problem and get back to you. For more information, visit the Lone Tree Hill page on the town website at belmont-ma.gov/land-management-committee-for-lone-tree-hill.

And while you’re walking on Lone Tree Hill, why not carry along a bag to collect and dispose of any trash you may see along the way? Thank you for your assistance!

Belmont Roots

Environmental News, Notes, and Events

By Meg Muckenhoupt



Well, it's spring, sort of. The average last frost date in Belmont is somewhere between May 1 and May 11, depending on which website you believe—the Old Farmer's Almanac?

Plantmaps.com? But my grandmother in Newton never planted her tomatoes before Memorial Day. Warmth-loving plants such as tomatoes and peppers are sensitive to soil temperature as well as air temperature. They can suffer "transplant shock" and become stunted and grim if roots are a bit too chilled. Seeds are more secure in their identity, and will simply sit and shiver in the soil until they're warm enough to sprout. Your best bet for growing summer vegetables is to wait until the local garden club plant sales to get your green on. Those plants are generally dug from club members' gardens, which means they're far more likely to thrive in your garden than Home Depot weaklings trucked in from a thousand miles away—and far less likely to carry contagious plant diseases like the deadly tomato late blight, aka *Phytophthora infestans*, the same microbe that produced the Irish Potato Famine. In 2009, *Phytophthora infestans* was spread throughout New England by tomato plants from Lowe's, Walmart, Home Depot, and Kmart, destroying plants on thousands of farms and garden plots. Those stores all got their tomato plants from a single mega-grower, Bonnie Plants of Alabama. When plant production is centralized, it's easy for diseases to spread far and wide. Buying local cuts your risks—and the garden club members who run these sales are very happy to share helpful advice.

If you find your plants are still puzzling after a week or two in the ground, you can also ask garden club aficionados how they grow their most charming plants during the Belmont Garden Club's June 9 garden tour.

Annual Waltham Garden Club Plant Sale
Saturday, May 11
215 Waverley Oaks Road, Waltham
walthamgardenclub.com

Annual Arlington Garden Club Plant Sale
Saturday, May 18, 9 AM–1 PM
7 Jason Street, Arlington
arlingtongarden.org/programs-events

Gore Place Plant Sale
Friday & Saturday, May 17 & 18, 8 AM-4 PM
Sunday, May 19, 8 AM–12 PM
Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham
Offerings feature vegetable garden transplants, including hard-to-find hybrid and heirloom tomatoes, heirloom annuals, herbs, and beautiful perennials! See a list of the 32 types of tomatoes on offer at goreplace.org/event/gp-plant-sale/2019-05-17/ or call 781-894-2798.

Grow Native Plant Sale 2019
Saturday, June 1, 9 AM–2:30 PM
UMass Waltham Field Station, 240 Beaver Street, Waltham
A complete list of available species will be posted on May 15 at grownativemass.com. Help support birds, pollinators, and other beneficial insects by adding more natives to your landscape! Pre-order available for Grow Native Massachusetts members. For more information, call 781-790-8921.

Belmont Garden Club Cultivating Community: A Tour of Gardens
Sunday, June 9, 11 AM–4 PM
Locations around Belmont
See how local gardeners create beautiful spaces and encourage local pollinators. Tickets on sale at Westcott Mercantile in Belmont Center and Cushing Square. For more information, see belmontgardenclub.org or call 617-484-4889.

If you don't have your own gardening or landscaping projects, Habitat could always use a few more hands to pull up bittersweet and buckthorn. These plants are selfish European and Asian imports that crowd out the American plants that have lived here since the glaciers melted and the forest grew anew. Resist botanical gentrification! Pull them, and make room for the little guys.

Citizen Science: Survey of Insects at Habitat Sessions 1-4
Tuesdays, May 14, May 28, June 11, June 25, 9:30–11:30 AM
Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont
Connect with nature, and gather data on the insects and other arthropods (spiders, mites, etc.) visiting plants at Habitat. The data will be used to develop a virtual guide and to discover trends in pollinator and wildlife populations. Free. Register separately for each date at massaudubon.org, call 617-489-5050, or write to habitat@massaudubon.org.

Phenology Citizen Science Project
Wednesday, May 15, 8–9:15 AM
Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont
Phenology is the study of timing in nature. Join Wayne Daly for a walk to observe trees and other species that are emerging, blooming, and singing, and record measurements to compare with past and future years. Register at massaudubon.org, call 617-489-5050, or write to habitat@massaudubon.org.

Plants and Pollinators at Lyman Estate
Saturday, May 18, 10 AM–12 PM
Lyman Estate Greenhouses, 185 Lyman Street, Waltham
Join Habitat and Historic New England for guided walks at the Lyman Estate. Tour the estate and greenhouses and join in activities for all ages on relationships between plants and their pollinators! Mass Audubon members \$10, nonmembers \$15. Register at massaudubon.org, call 617-489-5050, or write to habitat@massaudubon.org.

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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.

Invasive Plant Removal
Sundays, May 19, June 8, 8:30–10:30 AM
Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont
Come help remove plants including buckthorn and bittersweet that have invaded Habitat and are making it difficult for native plants to thrive. Tools and gloves provided. Children under ninth grade must be accompanied by an adult. Free. Register at massaudubon.org, call 617-489-5050, or write to habitat@massaudubon.org.

Fell’s Biobliss: Phenology & Botany at Long Pond
Sunday, May 26, 9:30–11:30 AM
Middlesex Fells, Long Pond Parking Lot, S. Border Road, Winchester
Join Earth Aware for a botany walk in the Fells. Help collect data about the impact of climate change on the synchronicity of fauna and flora phenophases. Participants may record information from study sites to be shared on global platforms. Registration required. Contact tinyurl.com/ewa-citizen-science or citizenscience@earthwiseaware.org

Maybe you’d just like to get away from it all . . . perhaps by bike or kayak?

Bay State Bike Week
Saturday, May 11–Sunday, May 19
Sites around Boston
Enjoy bike commuter breakfasts, recreational rides, bike repair workshops, and more! A full list of events is available at baystatebikeweek.org, or email bikeinfo@massbike.org

1st Annual Waltham Charles In-River Cleanup
Saturday, May 18, 9:30 AM–2 PM
Woerd Avenue boat launch / Moody St. Dam, Waltham
Have a kayak, canoe, dinghy, dory, skiff, scow, yacht, or ship? Then mark the date and get ready to clean up the Charles River in Waltham. Don’t have a watercraft? Paddle Boston will be supplying canoes & rowboats to help with the effort. Volunteers with their

own boats will meet at the Woerd Ave. boat launch and folks who need boats should meet at Paddle Boston’s location at the Moody Street Dam, on the Waltham Riverwalk. Volunteers will be provided with garbage bags, nitrile gloves, and grabbers to reach far objects. Free, but registration is recommended. Register at crwa.org/events or contact 781-788-0007 or charles@crwa.org.

Mystic Herring Run and Paddle
Saturday, May 18, 8:30–11:30 AM
DCR Blessing of the Bay Boathouse, 32 Shore Drive, Somerville.
Join over 400 runners and paddlers at the 23rd annual Mystic Herring Run and Paddle—a race for everyone! Select from the 5K road race and/or the three-mile, nine-mile, or twelve-mile paddling races. Compete in both the paddling race and running race and be eligible for the Iron Herring Award! Canoe, kayak, and paddleboard rentals available. Race registration costs \$25–\$35 depending on event. Register

Thank You to Our Contributors

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at mysticriver.org/herring-run-paddle, or contact 781-316-3438 or contact@mysticriver.org.

No matter how far we travel, most of us end up back at home. Your home could probably use some spring cleaning. Perhaps, after you’ve trucked all your scrap metal, textiles, and extra building materials to the DPW on May 11, you will see that your house might be a good candidate for historic restoration and next year’s Belmont Historical Society preservation awards. Or perhaps you’ll decide to get off the grid altogether with a new energy source. It may even be the same energy source your tomatoes are using. Enjoy the sunshine, everyone.

Belmont Recycling Day
Saturday, May 11, 9 AM–1 PM
37 C Street, Belmont
Drop off items that you can’t put in your recycling pick-up, including scrap metal, textiles, eyeglasses, books, DVDs, and building materials. Secure mobile paper shredding available. Belmont residents only—bring your ID. For more information, see belmont-ma.gov/dpw-highwaydivision/pages/recycle-events or call 617-993-2689.

Annual Meeting and Historical Plaque Awards
Wednesday, May 15, 7 PM
Assembly Room, Belmont Memorial Library, 336 Concord Ave., Belmont
The Belmont Historical Society’s annual meeting will include presentation of the 2019 historical house plaques. Free. For more information, call 617-993-2878 or write to belmonthistory1859@gmail.com.



A volunteer removes a buckthorn plant at Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary. Habitat is currently seeking volunteers for invasive removal efforts on Sunday, May 19 and Saturday, June 8.

Sustainable Belmont Meeting
Wednesday, May 29, 7–8:30 PM
Check sustainablebelmont.net for location. This meeting date is held as an alternative to the first Wednesday in June, due to Town Meeting conflict.

Stepping Up: Business In The Era Of Climate Change Part 5—Energy Transitions
Tuesday, June 4, 6:30 PM
WBUR CitySpace, 890 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston
This panel is part of a WBUR series, in collaboration with Harvard Business School and Boston University Questrom School of Business. What companies are leading the transition to fossil-fuel-free energy, what barriers are they facing, and how are they tackling those barriers? How are traditional electric utilities shifting their business strategies to accommodate or even promote new, cleaner sources of energy? And how are new entrants to this old sector disrupting the electricity industry with clean energy innovations? Tickets \$15. Buy tickets at crwa.org/events. For more information, contact 781-788-0007 or charles@crwa.org.

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