



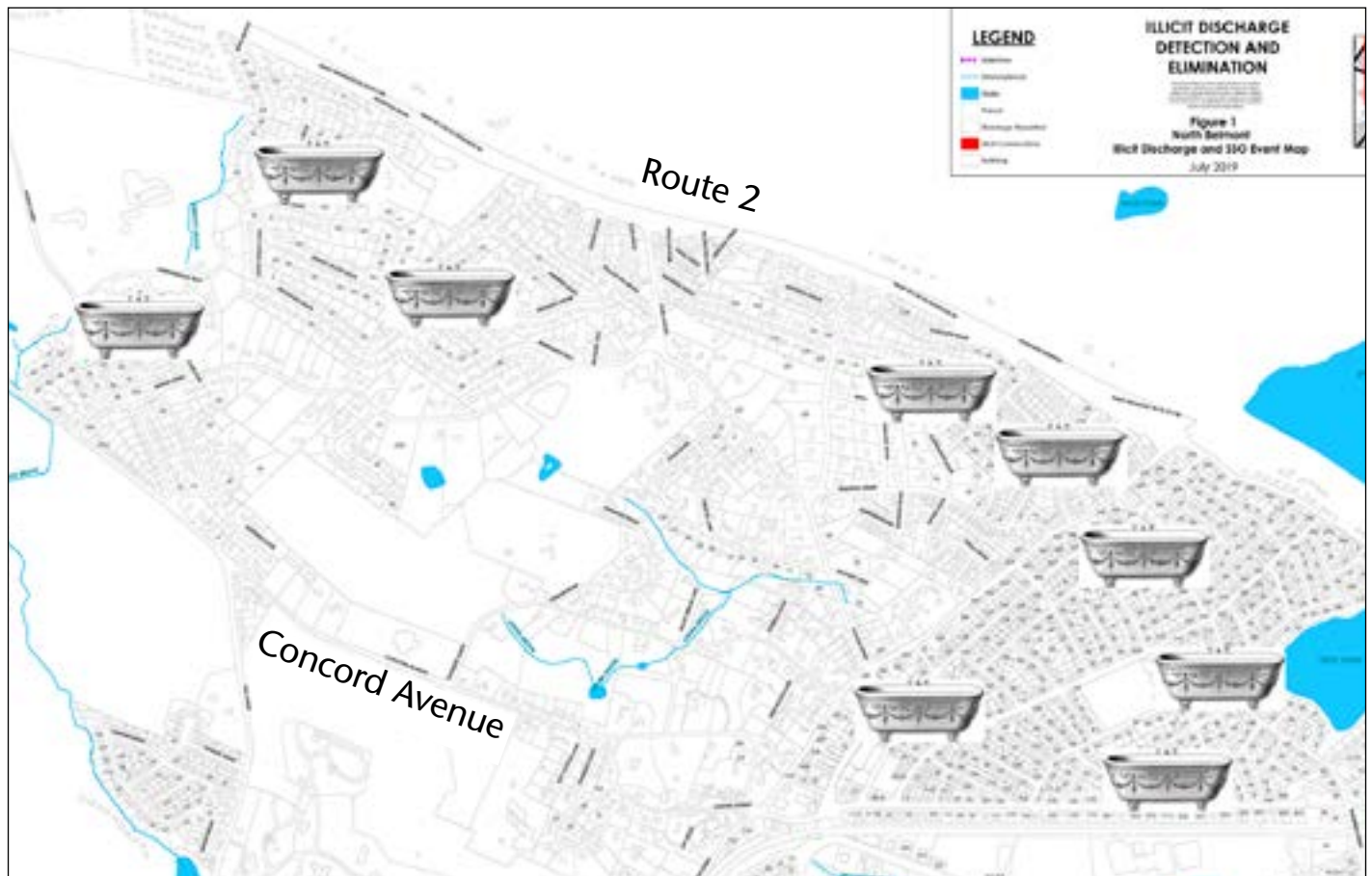
Belmont Citizens Forum

Belmont's Underground Pollution Problem

By Anne-Marie Lambert

If only the 504 gallons of household wastewater which had been pouring into Wellington Brook and Winn's Brook through underground culverts every day had been more visible, perhaps we as a town would have addressed the necessary repairs more urgently. That's what Belmont did when a student noticed an oil spill leaking into Clay Pit Pond during a freeze on December 12, 2003. A ruptured return line to the underground storage tank at Mary Lee

Burbank Elementary school travelled through the town's storm drain system carrying 1,000 gallons of oil to Clay Pit Pond. Alerted to the spill, the town immediately called in an oil removal crew that worked through the night, suctioning oil from the pond's surface and removing oil from the elementary school oil tank to allow for repairs. The town was fined \$8,000 by the EPA, which concluded that the town responded quickly and effectively to the



Detail of map titled "Illicit discharge detection and elimination" from Belmont's Report On Compliance for the six months ending July 31, 2019. Bathtubs indicate neighborhoods with two or more blockages or illicit sewer connections.

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Belmont Citizens Forum Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums.

The *BCF Newsletter* is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

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spill, minimizing the environmental impacts of the oil contamination.

With our leaking sewage, however, we have deliberately spaced out the painstaking detective work needed to find the sources of household wastewater silently polluting our brooks over several years, and waited to bundle repair work into consolidated contracts season by season.

The town is under a 2017 federal consent order which requires the municipality to submit compliance reports to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) every six months. According to the town's July 31 report, Belmont stopped 504 gallons of sewage per day (GPD) from reaching our brooks and ponds by:

- 210 GPD redirected from Wellington Brook by correcting one illicit connection on Bow Road
- 84 GPD redirected from Wellington Brook by lining the aging sewer laterals to two homes on Randolph Street
- 210 GPD redirected from Winn's Brook by correcting one illicit connection on Brighton Street

This brings to 1,260 GPD the total wastewater stopped from entering the system since the 2017 federal consent order:

- 504 GPD removed between January and July 2019
- 126 GPD removed between June 2018 and January 2019 (see "Painstaking Progress," May/June 2019 *BCF Newsletter* bit.ly/BCF2019MayEPA)
- 603 GPD removed between January and June 2018 (see "Sewer Repairs In Progress" September/October 2018 *BCF Newsletter* bit.ly/BCF2018SeptEPA)

Between June 2017 and January 2018, the town did baseline sampling and some detective work to find problems, but no repair work to remove wastewater (see "Finding Sewer Leaks Means Detective Work" March/April 2018 *BCF Newsletter* bit.ly/BCF2018MarEPA).

The EPA requires any problems to be fixed within 60 days of obtaining definitive evidence. It's not clear whether this provides incentive to space out the official definitive detection of problems that are expensive to fix.

Regardless, here are some problems identified in the July 31 report as likely to get addressed this year:

- Reline about 1,776 linear feet of aging sewer laterals
- Replace 4,376 linear feet of aging sewer laterals
- Continue to investigate source of pollution detected under Maple Street
- Consider whether to reline sewers under



According to the town's July 31 report, this year the town has redirected 504 gallons—or more than six 80-gallon bathtubs—of sewage from Belmont's brooks and ponds to the Deer island treatment plant.

Bartlett Avenue to prevent contamination of the stormwater drains under heavy rain conditions

- Inspect basement plumbing at certain sites on Hoitt Road and Westlund Road as part of investigating remaining pollution coming from under Hoitt Road
- Dye-test drains under Hill Road/Brighton Road
- Rehabilitate sewer under Oliver Road and under Knox Street/Bellington Street neighborhood.

Some of these repairs are at sites where repair work was done last year, but subsequent pollution measurements in the downstream drains indicated there may be more work to do. The measurements may be picking up yet another illegal connection, or, in some cases, the measurement might just have picked up evidence of a dog owner making an illegal deposit in a stormwater drain upstream. Whatever the source, once the pollution is underground, out of sight, there can be a long wait before the *E. coli* and its source are detected.

Fifty years ago, the computing power in my pocket—and a lot of will power—got us to the moon. Today, we live in an age of remote sensors and automated models for making complicated decisions quickly. These innovative technologies have been very useful to address much more complex systems like autonomous automobiles and weather systems. I wish we were as impatient to address our water pollution as the space program was to get to the moon. Surely we could be using better and faster technology than our noses and laborious sampling and analysis of *E. coli* to detect pollution.

If we can install smart meters to monitor electricity use at every home, why can't we put remotely accessible "stink-meters" in the drain system and flowmeters in the sewer system? Is it so hard for an automated analysis of the drain system to aggregate sensor data and get to likely pollution sources faster and more systematically? What are the hidden barriers to addressing more than a handful of problems every six months?

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

Clay Pit Pond Progresses from Eyesore to Asset

By Michael Chesson

Clay Pit Pond on Concord Avenue was once the site of Belmont’s largest industrial enterprise, a brickyard run by John H. and Robert A. Parry. The brothers bought 20¾ acres of land in 1888 on Concord Avenue and Underwood Street, with its valuable blue clay that turned an attractive reddish color when fired, and their yard produced 200,000 bricks a week.

Just as the oil, steel, and railroad industries consolidated, the Parry brothers’ business in 1900 merged with the New England Brick Company, which owned three dozen other brickyards in the region. The firm installed new dryers, increasing output to 300,000 bricks a week, or 15 million bricks a year. At the west end of the Belmont operation, 75 men lived in a large

brick boarding house. The yard also featured an engine house, brick sheds, steam boiler, and a railroad siding. In 1902, the company bought six more acres to the west along Concord Avenue that reached as far as the Alexander Avenue extension.

When the seam of famous blue clay ran out, the brothers abandoned the site in 1926, along with its heavy equipment. The pit filled with rainwater, only partly submerging a one-and-a-quarter-cubic-yard power shovel made in Marion, Ohio. The selectmen asked Bill Tompson, street superintendent in 1927, how the machine could be destroyed. He replied that Ed Looney, head of the water department, would blow it up with his dynamite. Perhaps cooler heads prevailed. Thirty years later, a 1926 photo of the Clay Pit shovel, by then completely underwater, won the

prize in the Marion Power Shovel Company contest for the oldest of its shovels in existence. The machine was judged to date from the company’s beginnings as the Marion Steam Shovel Company in 1884.

In 1932, Belmont converted the pit to a pond by digging an outlet culvert at its east end through which water exited underground to Blair Pond and Little River in Cambridge. Wellington Brook, which for generations had flowed between the railroad tracks and the site of the current high school, was diverted into Clay Pit in 1933. The brook drains two-thirds of Belmont’s watershed, all the way from the Watertown line at the intersections of White and Lexington Streets with Belmont Street, through Pequossette Park, the Town Field and beyond, including parts of Waverley Square, Cushing Square, and most of Belmont Center. Nothing was done to protect the new pond, which became a receptacle for whatever washed off streets and gutters into storm sewers.



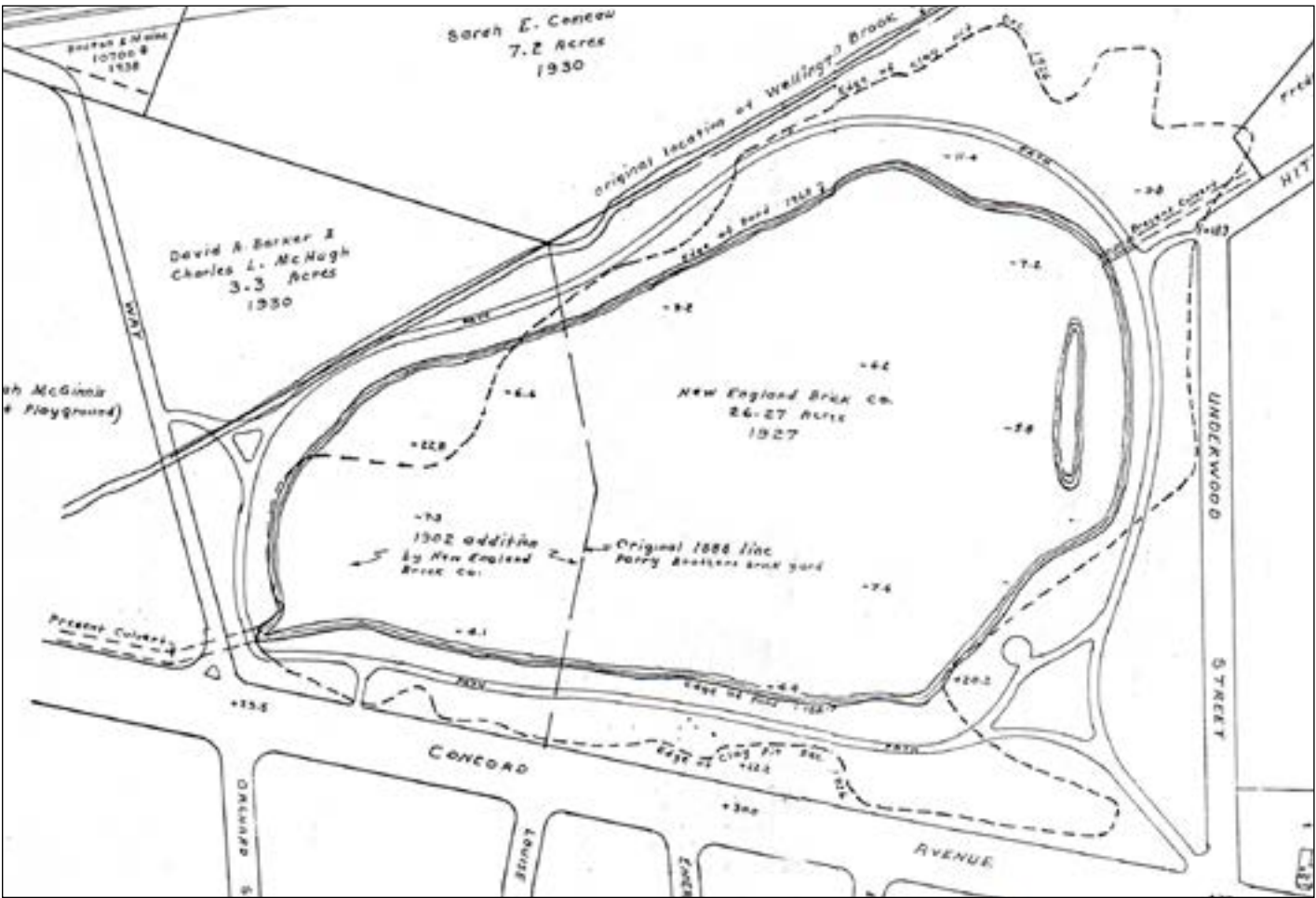
An 1884 Marion power shovel, said to have been taken in 1926 after Clay Pit closed. This photo won a prize from the Marion Company for being a picture of its oldest shovel.

pond was not polluted, it just had never been especially clean. Articles in the *Belmont Herald* in 1980 said botulism in the pond killed 30 ducks. In 2003, 1,000 gallons of fuel oil from the Burbank School leaked into Clay Pit Pond.

In 1995, the Belmont Conservation Commission asked the Massachusetts Health Department to test fish in Clay Pit. Results showed a high level of chlordane, a carcinogenic pesticide banned nationally in 1983, which decomposes slowly and builds up in wildlife. Further testing indicated the most polluted water was closest to the Wellington outlet, just past Concord Avenue. High *E. coli* levels washed into Clay Pit from raw sewage in our stormwater, and from dog waste left by owners on the path around the pond. *The Belmontonian* reported a similar story again in 2016.

Tom Walsh, the Belmont tree warden, has told the Shade Tree Committee about the time he was working in the pond near the Wellington Brook outlet, and his skin started to burn. He stayed in the water until he finished the job, then sought medical attention for the painful rash on his legs.

For decades our stormwater has been a health hazard for our neighbors in Cambridge, Arlington, and Medford. It contributes signifi-



Detail of Belmont map showing the pre-1932 route of Wellington Brook. The scan of an 1889 atlas shows the course of Wellington Brook flowing NE across McGinness and Patterson properties, and north of the Parry brothers brickyard and the clay pit that became Clay Pit Pond.

Clay Pit Pond on Concord Avenue was once the site of Belmont’s largest industrial enterprise, a brickyard run by John H. and Robert A. Parry. Their yard produced 200,000 bricks a week.

Evidence of pollution in Clay Pit Pond piled up. A woman wrote to the *Belmont Herald* in 1970 about the oily slick she’d seen in the pond, along with a dead possum and a live rat. The editor joked that she must be new to town: The



Color print of some of the buildings of the Clay Pit brick company, possibly a water color by local artist Nelson Chase.

cantly to pollution of the Mystic River. Some progress has been made recently, after Belmont signed an Administrative Order for Compliance on Consent with the EPA on May 15, 2017. Town Engineer Glenn Clancy has worked for several years to locate illicit sewer hookups and leaking pipes. He believes Belmont will meet the minimum EPA water quality standards by a 2022 deadline set by the consent order. If Belmont fails to meet the standard, however, the town could face a huge fine.



Parry brick in the sidewalk, Lawndale Street.

Besides sewage, another major pollutant at Clay Pit is pesticide and fertilizer runoff from our lawns, parks, and playing fields. Roundup, other pesticides, and many harmful fertilizers inevitably end up in our stormwater, and then Clay Pit and beyond. Some of these are carcinogenic. Some contamination stays local: Clay Pit Pond water has been used to irrigate the fields near the high school.

Most states, including Massachusetts, forbid municipalities from setting their own pesticide policies for private property. Despite this, more than 140 municipalities nationwide have passed ordinances against

Belmont has the Quabbin Reservoir for drinking, and the new Underwood Pool for swimming three months each year. Could Clay Pit Pond somehow similarly contribute?

pesticide use, including Portland, Ogunquit, and other towns in Maine; Dover and Portsmouth, NH; major cities like Tucson, AZ, Boulder, CO, and Miami, FL; and dozens of locales in California. Most of these measures apply to public property like parks and playing fields. Locally, the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Harvard University, and Mount Auburn Cemetery all ban the use of pesticides. Our town could join them.

Additional cleanup measures are possible. Belmont could drain Clay Pit Pond, test and dredge any toxic muck that is found, and perhaps deepen the pond, to convert it into a stormwater retention area. Or, lowering its



The East Walk just after construction, June 1939.

water level before a big storm could prevent it from overflowing, as it did in August 1955 and March 2010. Building a dam at the outlet culvert beneath Underwood Street could alleviate flooding, by allowing a storm surge from downstream to back up into the pond, instead of toward Blanchard Road and Cambridge.

Belmont has the Quabbin Reservoir for drinking, and the new Underwood Pool for swimming three months each year. Could Clay Pit Pond somehow similarly contribute? Carp live in the polluted pond and stir up sediment. If the water were cleaned, native bass and trout might thrive and replace the carp. Imagine it: Clay Pit as the site of Belmont's annual spring fishing tournament and a good year-round fishing hole. A relic of our industrial past could help stormwater control and climate sustainability. It would also be a thing of beauty, as clean as it only now appears to be.

Thank you to Anne-Marie Lambert and Fred Paulsen for fostering my interest in Clay Pit Pond

and its pollution from our stormwater and lawn runoff, and to Viktoria Haase, president of the Belmont Historical Society. Haase was instrumental to this research, especially in navigating the resources in the Claflin Room of Belmont library.

Michael Chesson has lived in Belmont since June 1988. He is a Town Meeting Member and has served on the Historic District Commission for the past 4+ years. He is on the board and vice president of the Belmont Historical Society.



Buckback Herring

Belmont Highlights Natural, Historic Treasures

Wellington Station and Rock Meadow tours highlight Belmont History

By Mary Bradley

The Belmont Historical Society hosted two events in September and October celebrating Belmont’s rich cultural and environmental history.

Tracking the Wellington Hill Station through Time

The Belmont Historical Society hosted an open house on September 15, 2019, to celebrate the completion of a series of repairs and restorations to the many-purposed Wellington Hill Station building the previous month. The station received a new cedar shingle roof and repairs to the decking and gingerbread trim, the interior plaster walls, and the lower wood sections. The roof was funded with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding and donations from the Belmont Historical Society. Additional funds for maintenance, and care of the building were provided by the Historical Society.

“Station Master” David Flewelling regals visitors with tales of the Wellington Hill Station from its tenure as a railroad depot from 1851 through 1879.



Originally located in the delta where the Veterans Memorial now sits, the octagonal Wellington Hill Station was built in 1840. It served as a one-room private school for the Wellington, Mead, and Underwood children until 1851. The Wellington Hill Station was later moved to the Underwood Estate, where it served as an artist’s studio and summer house from 1879–1974.



Anne-Marie Lambert leads the tour up the hill toward the one-time piggery which supplied McLean Hospital with meat in the early 20th century.



A bumblebee nestled in a dahlia at the Victory Gardens. The Victory Gardens support the natural diversity at Rock Meadow, including butterflies, honeybees from eight nearby hives, and small mammals.

Rock Meadow

Thirty-eight visitors learned 10,000 years of Rock Meadow’s geological, environmental, and cultural history as well as the future envisioned in the 10-year Rock Meadow Master Plan on a walk led by Anne-Marie Lambert. On a one-mile loop through a small portion of Rock Meadow, Lambert described indigenous land management practices and McLean Hospital’s working farm. She also highlighted evidence of climate change and the shifting species composition in this ecologically rich setting that is frequented by cyclists, runners, birders, gardeners, hikers, dog walkers, bible study students, and many other visitors. Lambert is a former BCF director and has worked on stormwater issues in Belmont for many years.

The loop comprised sites 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 highlighted in the September/October 2018 *BCF Newsletter* article at bit.ly/BCFSept2018RM. For the complete Master Plan, see bit.ly/RockMasterPlan.

Earlier this fall, the Select Board accepted a gift of \$330,000 from the Joan Campbell estate to fund prudent long-term management, stewardship, and conservation of Lone Tree Hill across Mill Street. The fund will be managed by the Land Management Committee.

Mary Bradley is managing editor of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*.

Belmont Can Support Local Business Better

By Katherine Venzke

Around town there is constant talk about the state of business in Belmont. How is Belmont Center faring with the new-ish parking meter system? What’s with all the new development in Waverley Square? And how will the Bradford development affect commerce in Cushing Square? These discussions happen on the sidewalks, in cafes, at Town Hall, and in the local media. They also happen, often, at my shop.

This “talk” found some direction and mission last year with the formation of the Belmont Business Study Committee (BBSC). The town pulled together business owners from each of the Belmont business districts to create a charter for a future Economic Development Committee. In short, the BBSC would identify pressing economic issues. I was the committee representative from Cushing Square.



Helena’s Belmont branch.

How I Came to Belmont

I own two locations of a women’s clothing store called Helena’s. My original location is on Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington. In the fall

of 2011, I pursued opening a second location. My shop in Arlington was successful, and I was ready to grow. There was only one location I was looking at to expand in suburban Boston: Belmont’s Cushing Square.

To me, Cushing was charming and tidy, a vestige of a classic New England merchant’s district. It was loaded with women-owned businesses and had a promise of a massive mixed-use development. A local real estate developer was poised to clean up an abandoned block and turn it into a bustling residential and commercial destination, and in the process boost Cushing Square to the status of Belmont Center.

I renovated a former yoga studio and opened Helena’s at 453½ Common Street in March 2012. At that time, Chris Starr was actively rallying the businesses to support him at town and community meetings to get his Cushing Village

development approved. We went, we rallied. The town approved the project and we all waited for the glory to ensue.

In the meantime, I built a loyal customer following. The adage, “Belmont residents shop Belmont,” turned out to be true. I connected actively with my neighbors and settled in. Almost eight years later, that development is not complete. It has changed ownership and is plagued with lawsuits and counter-lawsuits.

My business is successful in large part due to my philosophy on networking: get involved and connect. This means keeping my head up, supporting my

neighboring businesses, and paying attention to what is happening in the towns where my shops reside. It’s part compassion and part strategy, but entirely about mutual success.

Challenges in Belmont

Within about five years of opening my store in Belmont, the Watertown-Belmont Chamber of Commerce closed. This group had been acknowledged as a more “Watertown-focused” organization. Often in a multi-town chamber, unintentionally, one community dominates the others in terms of membership and focus. In any event, it was a business organization for merchants in Belmont, and it shut down.

Another Belmont challenge is the lack of an economic development coordinator position in the town government. An economic development coordinator or director usually works for/with the planning department and in collaboration with community development. This expert often undertakes active outreach to support business owners and help new businesses get off the ground. An economic development coordinator is crucial for generating change and progress in a community.

Earlier this year, I attended a dynamic economic development conference in Boston. It was a lively and informative event called Exile on Main Street.

The experts included economic development coordinators from urban and suburban municipalities, developers who envisioned vibrancy beyond their specific projects, and both permanent and pop-up/seasonal business owners.

This conference emphasized that a municipal economic development department is essential to the future success of a community’s business districts. Many of the panel speakers were staffers in this role, in communities such as Ashland, Arlington, and Lowell. Even developers nodded to this notion, with one Boston developer saying, “If the town you are looking to move into does not have an economic development department, that tells you something about that community, and you should reconsider bringing your business there.”

In Belmont, to make up for lack of an active chamber or economic development coordinator, some neighborhoods have organized. Belmont Center has a business association, and owners of a few anchor businesses in Cushing Square came together to form the Cushing Square Merchants’ Association (CSMA) in 2015. Mary Thomajan of

Westcott Mercantile led this group of retailers, cafes, and service businesses into a cohesive and productive unit. I served on the CSMA’s executive board.

Addressing the unusually large response to the town business survey, Adam Dash said, “I think there has been a pent-up demand for the town to hear their concerns.”

The town responded to the formation of the CSMA with support and enthusiasm, especially in the tenure of Patrice Garvin, town administrator. When our CSMA executive board asked to meet with town officials to discuss ongoing issues in Cushing Square, including safety, parking, and beautification, they showed up. We had the ear of Patrice, Glenn Clancy, Ben Mailhot, Jay Marcotte, Mike Santoro, Craig Spinelli, and other folks, who listened and made attempts to help. These sessions around the conference table in the Select Board’s Meeting Room were helpful to all parties.

The Success of the Belmont Business Study Committee

In the summer of 2018, the town announced the formation of a Belmont Business Study Committee (BBSC). They were soliciting applications from Belmont business owners to fill the committee positions.

I threw in my hat as the representative from Cushing Square. Business owners representing Belmont Center, Waverley Square, and the “other” district which falls under none of those areas, and a non-business-owning Belmont resident comprised the final committee. Our mission was to create a charter for a later, yet-to-be-formed economic development committee.

Two successful aspects of the BBSC were a dedicated membership with years of business experience and the commitment and support from the town. Patrice Garvin procured a grant to hire a consultant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to drive our endeavor. Raul Gonzales, a senior planner at MAPC, was our consultant. Another committee member was



The Belmont Business Study Committee the night of their Select Board presentation. Left to right: Kathleen Crowley, Belmont Books; Katherine Venzke, Helena's; Wendy Etkind, Oracle Retail; Raul Gonzales, MAPC; Emma Thurston, Damnation Alley Distillery; Suzanne Schalow, Craft Beer Cellar.

Jeffrey Wheeler, Belmont's senior planner, who provided insight and history into the town's Master Plan.

One of the committee's most significant actions was a town-wide survey that went out to business owners in February. The town actively promoted this survey. In the end, the BBSC received 120 responses.

The BBSC worked over nine months and presented our work to the Select Board on August 26 of this year. The presentation was thorough and brief. The Economic Development Plan, which includes 12 recommendations, and results from the survey can be found on the town website (bit.ly/BelmontEconDevPlan).

The recommendations include:

- Creating a position to serve as economic development coordinator in Belmont
- Reviewing zoning and permitting procedures to streamline business regulation and expedite permitting
- Creating information guidelines to assist businesses in locating and expanding in Belmont

The Select Board was receptive and responsive to the suggestions. Addressing the unusually large response to the town business survey, Adam Dash said, "I think there has been a pent-up demand for the town to hear their concerns. Because we get them in little dribs and drabs and when you actually go out there, I

think the floodgate of frustration was heard from some people."

Town residents care about the success of the business districts that abut and surround their schools, churches, and neighborhoods. In recent years, there is a clear message through action that town government cares as well.

Currently the Select Board is reviewing BBSC recommendations. Some of these recommendations are easier to implement than others. I recognize that creating an economic development coordinator role requires dollars that the town does not have in the budget. But hopefully, the town and the business community can work toward common goals.

Select Board chair Thomas Caputo wrapped up the BBSC presentation with these words, "It is now incumbent upon us to make sure their voices are heard and DO something about it, right? The worst thing we could do is go through this great work and then not move the ball." The three Select Board members enthusiastically agreed that they would not let that happen.

Katherine Venzke is the founder and owner of Helena's, and is on the executive board of directors for both the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and the Cushing Square Merchant's Association. She lives in Lexington with her husband and three children. In November 2019, Katherine relocated her Belmont boutique to Leonard Street from Cushing Square.

Libby Atkins Remembered

By Roger Wrubel

Many of us lost a dear friend, inspiration, and role model for aging gracefully when Elizabeth "Libby" Atkins, long-time Juniper Road resident, died at the age of 94 on August 19.

I first met Libby when I interviewed to become the next director of Mass Audubon's Habitat Sanctuary in 2000. She and her husband Elisha, who had grown up on the estate that became Habitat, let me know how much the sanctuary meant to them both, and I never forgot it.

Elizabeth Potter married Elisha Atkins when he returned from the Pacific theater of World War II in 1944. Elisha returned to school to become a medical doctor, eventually working as a medical researcher and teacher at Yale in New Haven. After raising a family, Libby, who had dropped out of Bryn Mawr College to marry, returned to the University of Bridgeport to finish her bachelor's degree. She was a teacher and tutor in the New Haven schools and volunteered with the Cornerstone Halfway House for people with mental illness.

In 1986, Libby and Elisha "retired" and returned to Belmont to lead Habitat. Elisha was co-director and teacher, and Libby was a teacher/naturalist, gardener, and art exhibit curator. Libby and Elisha taught a class called "Trees of Mt. Auburn Cemetery" from 1986 until Elisha died in 2005. Libby continued to teach this class until she was almost 90. She and Elisha also started Habitat's Natural History Reading Group, which Libby led until her death. The participants were so devoted that the classes were held at Libby's assisted living home in Lincoln for the last 10 months of her life.

But she did so much more. She was politically active for most of her life and was a long-time member of the Belmont League of Women Voters. There was never an election where you would not find a campaign sign or two outside her Juniper Road home. One friend who participated with Libby for many years in a reading group said Libby was the most well-read person there. She could not think of an author Libby did not know. Libby helped manage the Bryn Mawr Bookstore on Huron Avenue in Cambridge,



RICK ATKINS

Elizabeth "Libby" Atkins.

which sold used books to raise money for scholarships at the school, well into her nineties.

Most of all, Libby was an unrepentant optimist, devoted to finding the best in each person. I was always amazed at how easily she embraced change. When I proposed we demolish part of the original Habitat building and replace it with a new addition, Libby was on board as long as Habitat would benefit from the change. When it became apparent that Libby had to give up driving, she did not miss a beat, quickly finding other ways to get around. There are many other people from different parts of her life who knew Libby better than I did. But I know they all feel blessed to have known her, as I do.

For the past 19 years, Roger Wrubel has been director of Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary.

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

I read the article about traffic in the September/October *BCF Newsletter* (bit.ly/2ITQDqh) with interest. I frequently ride through Belmont on my bicycle and sometimes drive through. I strongly support the rail trail, the underpass at Alexander Avenue, and the connection to Concord Avenue. But also, I am hoping that Belmont will take more advantage of its dense network of residential streets to provide improved bicycling through routes.

An opening door's striking and flinging a bicyclist under a passing motor vehicle is a constant worry.

The barrier across Claflin Street between Farnham Street and Alexander Avenue offers a good example of such a treatment, though it could be revised to be more bicycle friendly. Clearly its intent was to prevent motorists from using Claflin Street as an alternative to Leonard Street. This type of treatment is rare in the Boston area, but barriers and diverters (which require motor traffic to turn at an intersection, but let bicyclists through) are common in, for example, Berkeley, CA.

There are other opportunities to favor bicycling with low-cost spot improvements, connecting or reconnecting routes off the main streets. One that I frequently encounter is the 2–4 PM one-way rule on School Street past the Wellington School. School Street and Waverley Street offer a much less challenging alternative to Concord Avenue, and School Street seems to me to call out for a contraflow bike lane. I can say the same for Alexander Avenue west of Leonard Street, especially as Alexander Avenue will connect to the new underpass and rail trail.

I do not support bike lanes unless they are outside the door zone of parked vehicles. An opening door's striking and possibly flinging a bicyclist under a passing motor vehicle is a constant worry. Bicyclists who are aware of the hazard will not ride in these lanes, while motorists become annoyed that we will not stay

in "our place." The median on Concord Avenue is pretty, but with the parking and bike lanes, Concord Avenue is a gauntlet! — one more reason I prefer School Street.

Speed humps (not speed bumps, which can take down bicyclists) and short connector paths are other examples of such improvements that can go a long way to improve bicycling conditions.

John S. Allen
7 University Park, Waltham

Belmont Environment in the News

These *Belmont Journal* stories focusing on Belmont's environment appeared on the Belmont Media Center (BMC). See a complete list of programs at the Belmont Journal Environmental News YouTube channel, bit.ly/belmont-journal-youtube. —**Roger Colton**

Rock Meadow provides a diverse microclimate in Belmont. *The Belmont Journal* covers the master plan being developed by the town's Conservation Commission to ensure Rock Meadow's preservation. bit.ly/BJour-RockMeadow

After many years of fits and starts, progress is now being made on the remediation and preservation of the McLean barn. BMC explores the progress with *The Belmontonian* editor and publisher Franklin Tucker. bit.ly/BJour-McLeanBarn

Belmont's 2019 PorchFest provided a bike valet service. MassBikes, which provided the service, talks about bicycling to events. bit.ly/BJour-PorchFestBikeValet

The Select Board has decided that Belmont's old incinerator site should become a solar farm, but the town must cap the site. Glenn Clancy, director of Belmont's Office of Community Development, explains the process. bit.ly/BJour-incineratorSite
bit.ly/BJour-SolarFarms

Belmont Roots

Environmental News, Notes, and Events

By Meg Muckenhoupt



For everything, there is a season, and late fall is the season for cleaning up. Take down the tomato stakes, put away the lawn chairs, and move all the clutter away from your windows and doors so you can feel if there are any drafts coming in. Air leaks make your home colder, and make you waste money and pollute the air with more greenhouse gases in a Sisyphean attempt to heat the great outdoors. Areas around pipes, electrical outlets, baseboards, vents, and pull-down attic stairs are also common sources of air leaks, which can usually be solved with caulking or weather stripping.



Autumn leaves over solar panels, Slade Street.

The US Department of energy lists helpful techniques for detecting leaks large and small at energy.gov/energysaver/weatherize/air-sealing-your-home/detecting-air-leaks.

Replace your heating system's air or oil filters, seal any leaks in the ducts, and consider a programmable thermostat to automatically adjust the temperature when you're not home. Make sure your outdoor air vents aren't blocked by some kind of nest or crumpled leaves. The bald-faced hornets that make curious tree-colored paper balloons on the side of houses should have died with the first frost.

Speaking of insects, don't be in too much of a hurry to clean up all your garden's foliage. It may feel satisfying to cut down brown flower stalks and rake the garden down to bare dirt or mulch in the fall, but when you do that, you eliminate all the places that insects overwinter in your garden. Native bees burrow



Scarlet bee balm.

into bee balm and tall-grass stems or hunker down in the leaf litter. Swallowtail butterflies overwinter in chrysalises attached to stems and fallen leaves. Native ladybugs nestle down in leaf litter too (the ladybugs that swarm houses are Asian imports). The Xerces Society, which works to protect invertebrates, recommends that northern gardeners leave the last season's plants alone until after filing taxes in April, or until apple trees have finished their bloom.

If you feel compelled to bring more order to the natural world, Habitat has opportunities to clean up the outdoors in December and January.

Autumn Cleanup

Saturday, December 7, 10 AM–noon

Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont
Rake, cut firewood, haul brush, and get the sanctuary ready for winter. To register, see massaudubon.org or call 617-489-5050.

New Year Trail Tending

Sunday, January 5, 1–3 PM

Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife

Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont

Bundle up and come pack down trails, look for wildlife tracks, or do some winter pruning. Children under 9th grade must be accompanied by an adult. Tools and gloves provided. To register, see massaudubon.org or call 617-489-5050.

Even though your roses have given up the ghost, there's still plenty to see outside. It's easier to see the contours of the landscape when the plants have died back—the hollows that glaciers scooped and the drumlins they deposited, the ridgelines and slopes and fault buckles. The "Bloody Buff" fault lines in Lexington's Minuteman National Historic Park are easy to find in the early winter, and Bostongeology.com has a map of locations.

Plenty of living creatures become more visible in the early winter too. Some birds become more obvious when leaves no longer obscure the view of trees where they nest, and owls' midwinter mating calls carry farther in the cold, clear air. Tracks in snow and mud reveal the paths of rabbits, squirrels, foxes, weasels, coyotes, deer, and mice whose trailing tails leave tiny lines in the snow. Evergreen trees are continuing to photosynthesize, finding nourishment in the slightest sunlight. Several local groups will happily help you find the traces of life in the winter world.

Yoga and Mindfulness in Nature

Saturday, November 16, December 21, and January 11, 9:30–11 AM

Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont

After a 45-minute slow and gentle yoga class indoors, head outside to explore the trails of Habitat. The poses and flow will prepare the class for a mindful walk around the property, linking a simple seasonal theme during practice with what you might find as the class explores. Themes are November 16: "Being Grounded & Getting Ready for Winter"; December 21, "Inner Calm & Winter Solstice"; January 11, "Gratitude & Mid-Winter Quiet." \$16 Mass Audubon members, \$20 nonmembers. To register,

see massaudubon.org or call 617-489-5050.

Forest Explorations at the Fells

Saturday, November 16, 9:30 AM–noon

Flynn Rink Parking Lot, Medford

Join a biodiversity walk in the Fells and explore how seasons pass and affect and shape our plants and wildlife in this beautiful urban forest. Observe and record the flora and fauna in various locations of the woods, starting from the Flynn Rink parking lot. This walk is part of the Earthwise Aware effort to study biodiversity and collect data about the impact of climate change on the synchronicity of fauna and flora lifecycles. To register, see earthwiseaware.org, or contact Claire at citizenscience@earthwiseaware.org

Plant & Wildlife Monitoring at The Fells

Wednesday, November 20, 9:30 AM–12:30 PM

Gather science field information relating to plants, birds, and insects at the Fells with Earthwise Aware. In the course of 3+ hours, the group will survey four plant phenology sites and two arthropod monitoring sites, and monitor bird activity at two ponds and record information following nationally standardized phenology and biodiversity protocols to share with global platforms. To register, see earthwiseaware.org, or contact Claire at citizenscience@earthwiseaware.org

Giving Thanks for Nature and Our Senses

Friday, November 29, 10 AM–1 PM

Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln

Spend your Black Friday away from the malls and outside in nature! Take a walk through the sanctuary as local artists give trailside performances, then contribute your own expressions of thanks with family-friendly crafts and activities. Free with admission: \$9 adults, \$6 children ages 2–13, free for Mass Audubon members. For more information, see massaudubon.org or call 781-259-2255.

Evergreens and Tea

Wednesday, December 11, 10–11:30 AM



Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, 10 Juniper Road, Belmont

Pines, Firs, Hemlocks, and more—discover trees that offer year-round beauty on a tree walk around Habitat. The program will finish indoors with a cup of evergreen tea. \$6 Mass Audubon members, \$8 nonmembers. To register, see massaudubon.org or call 617-489-5050.

New Year's resolutions are coming up fast. How about learning more about the larger issues confronting our society now so you can plan your actions for next year? Learn about corporate sustainability, food policy, and transportation and communities, and decide what you will do with your 2020.

Impact Unplugged

Wednesdays November 13, November 20, and December 4, 6–7 PM

Markey Commons (ground floor), Olin Hall, Babson Park

Join the Lewis Institute at Babson College for a series of talks on how an entrepreneurial mindset and social design thinking can more effectively address the UN Global Goals, poverty, climate action, and inequality. Upcoming talk themes: November 13: Driving Sustainability with Mark Buckley, founder of One

Boat Collaborative and former VP of sustainability at Staples. November 20: Food Access, Food Waste: How can we redirect resources to feed our communities? December 4: Corporate Sustainability: How do companies integrate sustainability into their core strategy and directly impact their bottom line? For more information, see babson.edu, 781-235-1200.

9th Annual StreetTalk 10-in-1
Tuesday, December 10, 6–8:30 PM

Welcome and Thank You



Welcome Meg Muckenhoupt

The Belmont Citizens Forum is pleased to welcome Meg Muckenhoupt back as our executive editor. Meg edited the *BCF Newsletter* from 2004 to 2016 and has since graced our pages as a guest editor and the author of our “Belmont Roots” feature.

Meg is the author of several books, including *Cabbage: a Global History*, and the forthcoming *The Truth About Baked Beans*. She also writes gardening articles for sites, including reviewed.com, a branch of *USA Today*, and works as a research associate for Frances Moore Lappé’s Small Planet Institute. In her spare time, Meg

Old South Meeting House, 310 Washington Street, Boston
Join the LiveableStreets Alliance to see 10 innovative transportation and community thinkers from the Boston area, and across the country take the stage and share their big ideas. Attendees will enjoy 10 rapid-fire “TED”-style talks, with plenty of inspiration. For more information see livablestreets.info or contact info@livablestreets.info.



cofounded a community farm and earned a certificate in field botany. It is no surprise to learn that Meg’s idea of a fun day is “turning my compost pile and looking at all the worms.”

Thank you, Sara McCabe

Meg takes over from Sara McCabe, who edited our newsletter for 1 ¼ years. We would like to extend a very special thank you to Sara, who brought on a co-editor. Although she leaves a Sara McCabe-shaped hole in all our lives, her adroit touch can be seen on the Belmont Citizen Forum’s *Newsletter* and web site. We wish her well in all her endeavors.

Thank you to our contributors

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