

Belmont Citizens Forum

Vol. 21, No. 1

A Newsletter for Belmont Residents

January 2020

20 Amazing Years of the Belmont Citizens Forum

By Jim Graves

As a founding board member of the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF), who has been inactive in recent years, I am honored to share these thoughts on why the BCF has been so valuable and to applaud the individuals and supporters who have sustained the BCF for 20 years.

Prior to starting the BCF, the founders worked to first improve, then oppose, and nearly defeat the development and zoning changes proposed for 238 acres of open space owned by Partners Healthcare and its subsidiary, McLean Hospital. Legal challenges by the BCF and supporters slowed implementation, and notably, the biggest component, 460 units of senior housing, is still unbuilt!

During this campaign, we learned about Belmont citizens' deep concern about open space, the environment, the town's quality of

life, and transparency in government. Those concerns are why the BCF was founded and (a loud hurra!) why the BCF is still so strong 20 years later.

Issues like traffic, water quality, historic buildings, affordable housing, and the town's character do not automatically get priority attention. Here's a great example: a proposal to replace the Homer municipal office building with a new (and very ordinary) structure enjoyed strong support in town government. Through the *BCF Newsletter*, expert research by private Belmont citizens led to the critical insight that restoring the historic building would be substantially less expensive than destruction and replacement.

While Belmont is very fortunate to have a town newspaper, the paper is not staffed to do in-depth research on subjects like the town's

Belmont Timeline

Featuring events significant to the Belmont's history and BCF issues.

1654

The John Chenery house, 52 Washington Street, is built. The Chenery house is the oldest surviving house in Belmont.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

1600

Belmont Citizens Forum

Officers

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

Directors

Sumner Brown
David Chase
Vincent Stanton, Jr.

Newsletter

Meg Muckenhoupt, Executive Editor
Mary Bradley, Managing Editor
Sue Bass, Newsletter Committee,
Director Emerita
Virginia Jordan, Evanthia Malliris,
Vincent Stanton, Jr

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

The *BCF Newsletter* is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum. Letters to the editor may be sent to P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478 or to bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com belmontcitizensforum.org

© 2020 Belmont Citizens Forum. All rights reserved.

water and sewer systems, or alternatives to improve a major town corridor such as Trapelo Road. Contributors to the BCF have researched and delivered information on topics like this since the start.

Join me in saluting the board members, directors, and active participants who have sustained the BCF, listed on page 15, and for all

the latest contributors who are providing fresh perspective to the organization. A special thanks for the contributions of Mark D'Andrea and the late Ann Coit Sifneos.

We owe a great debt to the talented editors, writers, photographers, proofreaders, and artists who have contributed to making the *BCF Newsletter* a credible, accurate, and vital source

Belmont Timeline



SUSAN B. JONES

1760

The Thomas Clark House is built on what is now Common Street. "Local tradition maintains that the Clark family witnessed the beginning of America's War for Independence from the hill behind this house, seeing smoke and hearing the sounds of war breaking out on April 19, 1775." —Joseph Cornish, *BCF Newsletter*, January 2011. It was moved in 2012, and finally demolished in 2014.

1700

of insight on our town. On a personal note, the first newsletter editions were generated using MS Word on my laptop. The *BCF Newsletter* has advanced so far since then! A salute to the newsletter editors, detailed on page 5.

Here are some BCF milestones:

- 1999 BCF is founded and fundraising immediately begins for a legal challenge to the McLean/Partners development agreement in the Massachusetts Land Court.
- 2002 BCF researches pedestrian safety and funds some highly visible and durable pedestrian crosswalk pavement markings at test locations to replace the town's faded and nearly invisible markings. The town decides to make the new thick and durable markings standard for all crosswalks.
- 2003-2004 BCF conducts forums to gather and publish ideas on how to improve the Trapelo Road corridor.
- 2004 A settlement is reached with Northland, developers of housing on the McLean property, based on inadequate mitigation of the development's impacts on the town's sewer infrastructure.
- 2008 BCF signs option to purchase land for community path along the commuter rail corridor.
- 2005 BCF starts publishing research on impacts of inflows into cracked sewer pipes and substantial additional assessments for regional water treatment. Belmont eventually initiates a long-term plan to fix the pipes and illegal connections.
- 2006 BCF hires a sewer engineer and

publicizes information on deficiencies in the Belmont Uplands development proposal. Citizen opposition delays the development for almost a decade and reduces some of its impacts.

- 2018 Years of research and articles about the benefits of building a community path along the commuter rail corridor eventually lead to the town's approval to build the path.

The BCF's Origin

By Sue Bass

This is the 20th anniversary of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*; the organization was founded a little over 20 years ago. How did that happen, and why?

In 1995, McLean Hospital began exploring publicly how to turn part of its 238-acre campus into cash. Psychiatric drugs had revolutionized mental health care; instead of long walks and fresh country air, medicine could prescribe quicker-acting treatment. McLean no longer needed a bucolic campus, and families relying on health insurance could no longer pay for it. The hospital was \$40 million or more in debt.

This was not the first time McLean had sold off land. In 1968, the town of Belmont bought 70 acres for \$555,800, with federal and state governments picking up three-quarters of the price. The former McLean Farm, where the hospital had milked cows and raised pigs to feed patients, became the Rock Meadow conservation



1805
"Ice King" Frederick Tudor starts cutting ice from Fresh Pond. By 1816, Tudor is regularly shipping ice to Havana; by 1833, India.



1834
China-trade merchant John Perkins Cushing purchases 117 acres in Watertown. He names his estate "Bellmont."

land. By the 1990s, however, federal and state funds for buying conservation land were scarce.

After many public meetings, McLean and town leaders agreed in 1999 on a rezoning package to allow more than a million square feet of development, in return for preserving some open space and for land for affordable housing and a cemetery. The package initially lost in Town Meeting but was passed on a second vote a few months later.

A key selectmen's meeting was held in secret at McLean. It was ruled improper by state officials, but only after the referendum vote.

Opponents mounted a referendum to overturn the new zoning, but failed. Opposition focused on traffic, especially from the proposed 600,000-square-foot senior complex overlooking Waverley Square and a 150,000-square-foot

research and development building nearby—neither of which has yet been built.

After the referendum lost, some people who had been involved on both sides gathered to consider what to do next. The four-year struggle over the McLean had highlighted many concerns about Belmont, including its government. For example, a key selectmen's meeting was held in secret at McLean. It was ruled improper by state officials, but only after the referendum vote. We considered forming a Better Belmont Coalition to fix the future.

Then we learned that McLean Hospital was asking a court to declare that its new zoning was legal—that it was not “illegal contract zoning,” a new concept to us. According to the *Handbook of Massachusetts Land Use and Planning*, illegal contract zoning is when “a local government . . . extracts a performance or promise from the developer in exchange for its agreement to rezone the property.”

Our focus changed. Instead of merely preventing the next mistake, we'd need to continue the fight over McLean development. If we had to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for a legal battle, contributions would have to be tax deductible. We'd have to be a nonprofit, not a political group. We developed a mission statement, presented in full on page two of the January 2000 issue of the *BCF Newsletter*, (bit.ly/BCFJan2000). We'd focus on preserving Belmont's natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. Those four principles continue to guide us.

Belmont Timeline

1840

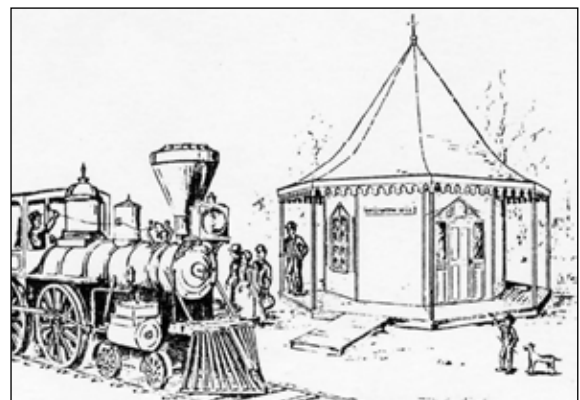
Samuel O. Mead builds a private school.

1849

The Fitchburg Railroad opens with service from North Station, Boston to Waltham via Belmont.

1852

The Fitchburg Railroad buys Mead's building for use as Wellington Station.



BELMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1840

Five Editors, 20 Years

By *Evanthia Malliris*

At the end of 1999, when the Belmont Citizens Forum was taking shape in response to the McLean land development, Sharon Vanderslice said to the board of directors, “What this group needs is a newsletter.” Those words launched 20 years of a bimonthly newsletter—121 issues to date—that examines in-depth topics critical to BCF’s mission. Transforming words into action, Sharon became newsletter editor, establishing the newsletter’s standards and substance that continue today.

Volume 1, number 1, published in January 2000, included an analysis of legal action seeking to overturn the McLean property rezoning; a review of plans to redevelop Belmont Center; and discussion of a building moratorium on Alewife land. Sharon worked with Ann Coit Sifneos, whose soulful illustrations of Belmont’s environs graced the newsletter’s pages for many years, and began the “People Are Asking” column and “Environmental Events” calendar.

Meg Muckenhoupt assumed the editorship in January 2004. With her breadth and depth of knowledge about all things environmental (and much more) and her dogged research and reporting skills, Meg wrangled authors and shaped articles to meet her and the newsletter’s exacting standards. During her 12-year tenure, the newsletter reported on Belmont’s continuously evolving stormwater, sewer, and water pollution problems and extensively covered the

Uplands development, the nascent Belmont community path, and the progress of pedestrian/bike paths in neighboring towns, with detailed maps and photographs to help tell the story.

When John DiCocco assumed the reins in 2016, he took Cushing Square development as his beat, from the demolition through environmental remediation issues and building redesign. Other key newsletter topics were Belmont’s push for electric vehicles, local and regional bike path news, and of course, stormwater and pollution.

Sara McCabe came on in 2018 and dove right in, embracing the newsletter’s mission to “preserve Belmont’s small-town atmosphere.” She expanded that mission, tracing Belmont’s extensive musical history, which has contributed to that small-town feeling, through to today’s Porchfest. And through Porchfest, Sara brought us Mary Bradley, whose knowledge of—and enthusiasm for—our community is truly extraordinary. Mary became co-editor, keeping us all on track with story ideas and becoming the ultimate “writer whisperer.” Meg returned with a new “Belmont Roots” column, sharing her good wisdom about the seasons.

When Sara decided to step down after two wonderful years, we were at a loss. But we also got lucky.

A new season of the newsletter has begun with familiar faces. Meg is now our executive editor, and Mary has taken the post of managing editor. We look forward to our next 20 years, working with these dedicated, creative, and knowledgeable women who make our newsletter possible.

1853: The William Flagg Homer House, now the Belmont Woman’s Club, is built.



1859

More than a thousand citizens move to create a new town on land taken from Watertown, Waltham, and West Cambridge (now Arlington). John Perkins Cushing agrees to finance the move on the condition that the new town be named after his estate, Bellmont.

The Community Path Through 20+ Years

By John Dieckmann

A detailed design of Belmont Community Path Phase 1, the segment from Brighton Street to Clark Street, including the pedestrian underpass, is currently underway. It has taken more than 20 years to get here. The following is a brief summary of the events that got this started and eventually, got us to this point.

First, by way of history, the right of way that is the basis for the Belmont Community Path and the overall Mass Central Rail Trail exists because beginning in 1870, a group of entrepreneurs built the Mass Central Railroad, later renamed the Central Mass Rail Road (CMRR). It was built in stages that eventually connected Boston to Northampton, a distance of 104 miles. From the start, the CMRR was unprofitable, but it still managed to operate in some fashion until 1980, when the last freight train ran. Passenger service ended for good in 1971.

The idea of creating the 26-mile Wayside Rail Trail, using the CMRR right of way from Belmont to Berlin, took shape during the 1990s, as did the larger idea of creating an 104-mile Mass Central Rail Trail using the entire CMRR right of way. Belmont appointed a bikeway planning committee in 1994. In 1997, the Central Transportation Planning Staff of the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization concluded that the rail trail was possible in

their “Rail Trail Feasibility Study.” Belmont also commissioned a study of the Belmont section at this time which concluded the route was feasible and identified similar route options.

By 1998, all seven of the Wayside Rail Trail towns had signed onto the project, and expectations for quick implementation were high, but trouble loomed.

By 1998, all seven of the Wayside Rail Trail towns had signed onto the project, and expectations for quick implementation were high, but trouble loomed. While five of the seven towns enthusiastically endorsed the rail trail, and have been on board ever since, in Weston shallow support switched to withdrawal from the rail trail, and strong abutter opposition quickly materialized in Belmont.

The death blow was delivered in 2001 by a change in funding. Initially the entire cost of the project was expected to be covered by state and federal highway funds. Partly due to the economic downturn, and partly to the reality that the state was on the hook for the huge cost of the “Big Dig,” the situation changed. Individual towns were now required by the state to absorb 10 percent of the project cost up front by funding the detailed design. No town had the budget to take on a new expensive project, so the Wayside Rail Trail languished.

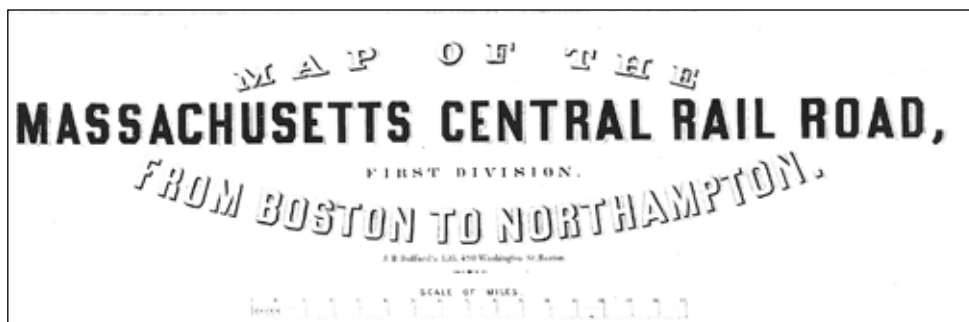
Belmont Timeline

1879

Wellington Station is moved to the Underwood estate.

1881

The Massachusetts Central Railroad opens with service from Cambridge to Hudson via Belmont.



1870

For several years, not much happened. Then, the Wayside Rail Trail towns adopted the Community Preservation Act, providing a funding source at the town level for detailed design work. In Belmont, the Belmont Citizens Forum purchased the 3,560 foot long by 30 foot wide strip of land on the north side of the MBTA commuter rail property to serve as a buffer between a community path and the back yards of Channing Road properties.

A sequence of studies and committees revived the path:

- A 2011-2012 Metropolitan Area Planning Council feasibility study, which led to
- The 2012 appointment of Belmont's Community Path Advisory Committee, which led to
- An engineering feasibility study supervised by the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC, 2014-18), which led to
- The appointment of the current Community Path Project Committee and a detailed design contract (supported by Community Preservation Act funds).

We can expect the detailed design to be completed within two years and construction funding and construction work to begin within a year or two after the design has been completed. If you'd like to gain an in-depth understanding of the community path's evolution, I'd encourage you to revisit past *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* articles, available at bit.ly/BCFComPath.

20 Years of Historic Preservation

By Sharon Vanderslice

In the late summer of 1999, a dozen or so Belmont residents met in Town Meeting member Sue Bass's dining room on Concord Avenue to discuss ways to increase transparency in our local government and protect the small-town atmosphere that had drawn us to Belmont in the first place.

We had just lost a battle to keep out a massive development proposed by Partners Healthcare on the campus of McLean Hospital. This forward-thinking psychiatric institution was originally designed to offer patients a calm, nature-based space in which to heal. With the advent of pharmaceutical treatments, McLean's board decided that these pristine grounds, chosen by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, were superfluous and could be sold at a profit. After intense lobbying of the town's elected officials, they entered into an agreement that altered the zoning of the entire property to allow for extensive commercial and residential development.

How would this impact Belmont? We wanted people to know.

This was the impetus for the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, first published in January 2000. We committed to writing in-depth articles on public hearings, zoning proposals, and other issues affecting the fabric of the community,

1888

John H. and Robert A. Parry open their brickyard at Concord Avenue and Underwood Street. Their excavations become what is now Clay Pit Pond.



MICHAEL CHESSON

1880



Demolition of Belmont Center's Olive Block in 1968.

especially the preservation of our character-defining historic buildings.

Belmont has a sad history of razing some of its architectural jewels, including the former Cushing Estate (for which the town was named) in 1929, and the half-timbered Tudor-style Olive Block in Belmont Center, on the site of what is now the People's United Bank, in 1968. It also has suffered the loss of a string of distinctive school buildings to fire. We wanted to do what we could to help preserve the town's remaining historic properties.

First on the docket was the so-called Town Hall Annex. The name conjures up images of a temporary modular building, but it was in fact designed in the Queen Anne style in 1898 as the

town's second high school, named for its architect, Eleazar B. Homer, and served as the site for critical town offices from 1935 onward. Among its notable features are its intricate ornamental brickwork, its steeply pitched slate roof, and its iron, copper, limestone, and granite detailing which, according to Belmont historic landscape architect Arley A. Levee, the town could never afford to pay for today.

In 1995, the Annex became the basis of a lawsuit by a Belmont resident who argued that it did not comply with the Americans With

Disabilities Act and needed to be renovated. A town committee to study options initially recommended tearing down the entire edifice and replacing it with a three-story, flat-roofed modern office complex. Following heroic efforts by the Belmont Historic District Commission and two articles in the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, the town elders voted to preserve and restore the original building while providing universal access. As a bonus, the unused third-floor former assembly hall was opened as a community art gallery.

Next up were the town's three fire stations. After decades of neglect, they clearly needed to be replaced. In the November 2001 *Belmont*

Belmont Timeline

1895
McLean Hospital opens its new campus in Belmont, Massachusetts.



1890

Citizens Forum Newsletter, we advocated for the construction of new stations that would accommodate all necessary fire equipment in strategic locations, provide proper facilities for overnight stays by firefighters, and preserve the original three stations for other community uses. These three buildings were subsequently converted into:

- a private residence on Fairview Avenue,
- a six-unit condominium building that conserved and upgraded the historic exterior and cupola of the former 1873 Waverley schoolhouse, and
- a historically sensitive commercial building in Belmont Center that now houses a regionally famous restaurant, a Pilates studio, and smaller offices while faithfully maintaining the exterior and the original hose tower and fire pole.

In 2008, we ran an article advocating the adoption of Belmont’s so-called “barn bylaw,” which would permit homeowners to convert historically significant accessory buildings (barns, garages, carriage houses, and the like constructed before 1921) into accessory dwelling spaces and thereby stave off their destruction. This bylaw was approved by Town Meeting in 2009 and has been successfully applied several times since.

In 2010, we supported the passage of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which among other things would provide state and local revenue for historic preservation projects. After a close—but successful—town-wide vote, CPA funds have become a lifeline for properties

seriously in need of maintenance. Most recently, they have paid to restore the facade of our Georgian Revival police station, the 1889 tower clock in the First Church, the cupola atop the Belmont Woman’s Club, and the roof of the Wellington Station.

Despite our advocacy, the town lost a truly historic gem, the 1760 Thomas Clark House, in 2014. Local tradition maintains that the Clark family witnessed the beginning of America’s War for Independence from the hill behind the house, seeing smoke and hearing the sounds of war breaking out on April 19, 1775.

In 2015, the Belmont Citizens Forum helped pay for the cleaning and restoration of the former Boston and Maine granite railway bridge in Belmont Center, which had not been cleaned since it was built in 1907, when the existing at-grade crossing was determined to be too dangerous. This project was made possible in large part by private donations to BCF, along with professional support from town contractors.

In 2017, we advocated for the renewal of Belmont’s demolition delay bylaw, which applies to 181 historically significant buildings and, in 2018, the establishment of neighborhood conservation districts.

Other noteworthy projects are on the horizon: the restoration and re-use of the former McLean Barn on Mill Street, continuing advocacy for sidewalk-friendly commercial development in keeping with the old Belmont buildings in Cushing and Waverley Squares, and the refurbishing and reuse of the 1934 Colonial Revival Municipal Light Building on Concord Avenue.

1908

The Boston and Maine Railroad builds the Common Street bridge and the Belmont railroad station.



BELMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1900

20 Years of Belmont Traffic

By Sumner Brown

Belmont has turned a corner about how we think of traffic. Twenty years ago, our hope was to find ways to make it easier for cars and trucks to pass through Belmont. Now our objective is to protect residential streets from rush-hour traffic and make life easier for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Belmont Citizens Forum has played a part in our traffic turnaround.

In 2002, the Belmont Citizens Forum's Planning and Zoning Committee brainstormed about Trapelo Road. They thought about bike lanes and lots of trees. The committee engaged graduate student classes at MIT and the Boston Architectural Center to create designs for Trapelo Road, and held public forums on the road and the designs. The town took over Trapelo Road's redesign and incorporated many of the committee's ideas into the road rebuild.

One insight from the Trapelo Road redesign is that when a road has limited intersections, there is no benefit in having four travel lanes. Eliminating useless traffic lanes leaves room for bicycles, pedestrians, and trees. Belmont Center has also benefited from this approach.

In 2017, no one had estimated how much of Belmont's rush hour traffic was cut-through traffic, that is, taking shortcuts through residential neighborhoods. A high school student, Aryan Mehrotra, and I estimated

cut-through traffic in four ways. Primarily we counted traffic at intersections where cars entered and left Belmont. We estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of rush hour traffic is cut-through traffic.

For about two hours every afternoon, Belmont roads are at capacity.

For about two hours every afternoon, Belmont roads are at capacity. Cars cannot get through Belmont any faster. The next year the town had professional traffic engineers count traffic, and they reached the same conclusion (bit.ly/TACTrafStudy2018).

Another *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* article (bit.ly/BCF2017Traffic), about Concord Avenue traffic and the controversial Belmont Day School's proposal to build its barn, described the toxic effect of traffic, most of which is cut-through. This was learned from a bit of traffic counting.

These traffic counts demonstrated the irritation generated by traffic, and led to plans to mitigate commuter traffic overflowing into residential neighborhoods.

Belmont Timeline

1926

The Parry Brothers' brickyard closes, leaving behind a "Mike Mulligan" steam shovel in what is now Clay Pit Pond.



1931

Architect Rachel Raymond builds what may have been the earliest modern house in New England on Park Avenue. The Belmont Hill School demolished it in 2006.



1920

20 Years of Belmont Water Trouble

By Sumner Brown

Belmont has two types of water trouble. One is flooding during heavy rains. The other trouble comes from leaking sewer pipes.

Flooding

Today, as I write this, there is no flooding in Belmont. Floods are rare enough that we do not make ourselves perpetually anxious about them, but parts of Belmont are vulnerable. In both Belmont and Arlington, people live in what were swamps, and there seem to be 100-year storms every 10 years. Climate change may have something to do with this. The Belmont Citizens Forum advocates for rain gardens and other measures to slow the flow of stormwater from paved surfaces and buildings.

We will have to wait and see if the new middle school and high school will be on high enough ground to avoid flooding. Our new electric substation also is close to a floodplain.

Belmont Uplands Development

This development, called the Royal Belmont, should never have been built. Not only was an urban wilderness lost, but we cannot predict how much of the development and surrounding areas will flood when the next 100-year storm comes.

The development of former swamps and flood plains in the 1920s was unfortunate, but it's



MWRA

Mystic Valley Parkway flooding, Arlington.

easier to forgive those builders as less was known then about flooding. That excuse does not fit the Uplands development.

Sewer Problems

We have leaking sewer pipes. Every town in greater Boston has similar troubles. These leaks go both ways: sewage leaks out and gets into streams, and groundwater leaks into the sewers, causing sewer overflows downstream and taxing the capacity of the Deer Island plant to treat sewage. Belmont has built a temporary fix in the Winn Brook neighborhood: underground storage tanks and pumps for sewage loads that occur during heavy rains to deal with overloaded sewer pipes. It has worked so far.

Belmont is now under a consent decree to stop discharging sewage into the waters of the Commonwealth, and the town is working on that problem. It's expensive. It has cost millions. People who say, "Just do it now!" apparently have no idea how difficult it is to get Proposition 2.5 overrides in Belmont.

1940

Carl Koch house built on Snake Hill Road.



TOWN OF BELMONT

1948

The Architect's Collaborative (Walter Gropius and Benjamin Thompson) builds the Howlett House on Pinehurst Road.



TOWN OF BELMONT

1940

Litigation Was Not in the 20-Year Plan

By Sue Bass

Litigation was not the plan when we considered forming what became the Belmont Citizens Forum. McLean Hospital blindsided us by filing for a Massachusetts Land Court declaratory judgment that the rezoning of its land was not “illegal contract zoning.” The initial BCF board members—none of whom were lawyers—had never heard of contract zoning, much less that it might be illegal. It turned out that Belmont’s deal met the textbook definition of contract zoning. The courts agreed but the Appeals Court ruled in November 2002 that Belmont’s contract was not illegal.



Headwaters of Junction Brook.

Meanwhile, in June 2001, 20 Belmont residents appealed a Belmont Conservation Commission decision that Junction Brook, which flows down from the McLean campus to Pleasant Street, was an intermittent stream deserving less protection under the state Wetlands Protection Act than a perennial one. With BCF support, the residents took the case to an administrative law judge, who ruled against them in 2005. BCF decided not to appeal.

Another batch of litigation was inspired by the late Walter McLaughlin, a McLean supporter, who complained about BCF at one Selectmen’s meeting: “What will they do next, challenge a sewer connection permit?” Who knew that you could challenge a sewer connection permit, which all major developments are required to get? Not us. We filed against the first project to get started at McLean, Northland Residential Corp.’s Woodlands. In June 2004, Northland settled, giving BCF \$300,000 for community improvements. We used some of it to buy the “Duddy parcel” land along the railroad tracks, behind Channing Road, for the future community path. The settlement language also may facilitate future shuttle bus service from the McLean land.

BCF also challenged the sewer connection permit for American Retirement Corp, the senior complex planned for McLean but since dropped, and challenged aspects of the Uplands development at Alewife. In general, we have been known for hiring technical experts and litigating when there’s a reasonable prospect of success.

Belmont Timeline

1979
Wellington Station is moved to its current site.



SHEA BRADLEY-HURLEY

1982

Following the 1981 train collision death of a high school student, the Belmont Board of Selectmen appoints the Underpass Study Committee to evaluate a tunnel beneath the railroad tracks at Alexander Avenue.

The committee finds underpass is too expensive, but recommends a gated pedestrian and bicycle crossing with gate, and speculates that the state might pay for a bicycle path.

1970

20 Years of Mailing the BCF Newsletter

By Kenneth Stalberg

How did the newsletter in your hand find its way to you? It's a long process involving many dedicated volunteers. As the BCF mailing coordinator, or "Mailing Maestro" as I'm listed in the *BCF Newsletter*, my job begins after all the articles have been written and edited and the newsletters have been printed.

The first step is finding a board member who's able to host a mailing party. The newsletters, about 2,200 of them in seven or eight heavy cartons, will be delivered to his or her home. On the evening of the mailing party (the date is chosen months in advance) somewhere between six and 10 people will gather to work and chat. We take thousands of mailing labels (expertly printed by David Chase) and affix them to the newsletters.

The newsletters are then bundled in bunches of about 50 with rubber bands and placed in large polypropylene sacks from the post office. We fill seven or eight sacks for each mailing, depending on the length of the issue. There are three categories of addresses, and we have to be careful not to mix them! The sacks go in the trunk of my car for a trip, usually the next day, to the USPS Bulk Mail facility in Waltham.

Each mailing requires paperwork, of course! I fill out a USPS form listing the number of items going to each of the three address categories,



Kenneth Stalberg

and then calculate the postage cost. At the Waltham Bulk Mail unit my helpful friend Dennis checks the BCF account to make sure there's enough money to cover the postage (around \$650—thanks Radha!), and weighs 10 newsletters to calculate the total weight of the shipment (usually about 250 pounds). I unload the sacks from my trunk at the loading dock and drive away, happy knowing that in a few days, thousands of people in Belmont and beyond will be receiving their copies of the newsletter.

You may be wondering why I'm called "Mailing Maestro." In my real life, I'm a professional violinist and violist. I play with five orchestras in Boston, including the Boston Pops, Boston Ballet, and Boston Lyric Opera, and I teach violin and viola privately at my home. Helping the Belmont Citizens Forum gives me another way to have a positive influence on our community.

1999

The Belmont Citizens Forum is organized.

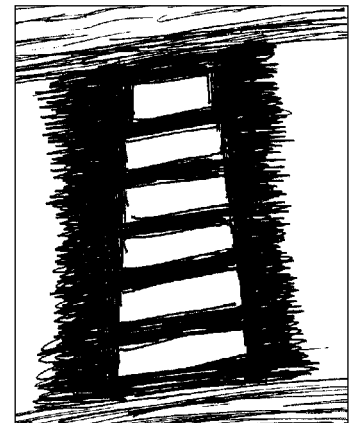


2000

The first issue of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* is published.

2002

Belmont Citizens Forum funds two demonstration "international style" crosswalks. Belmont adopted the design town wide in 2004.



ANN COIT SIFNEOS

1990

The Value of the BCF

By Anne Paulsen

Many Belmont citizens worked very hard in the 1990s to save as much McLean land as possible from development. The McLean Open Space Alliance led by Judy Record, and after her untimely death, by Martin Duffy, Martha Moore, and Fred Paulsen, worked for several years to forge an agreement with McLean to deed 72 acres to the town for public use. Lone Tree Hill and the surrounding private open space are a testimony to that effort, and the Judy Record Fund has made valuable contributions to the upkeep of that property.

But another valuable addition to the town's resources resulted from that effort to save open space: the Belmont Citizens Forum. Sue Bass, a vigorous supporter of the open space effort, initiated the effort surrounded by a small group of like-minded citizens. Realizing the need to educate people fully about their local environment, both natural and built, the founders have provided us with a treasure of information otherwise quite hidden from popular view.

Think of the important issues fully explored and researched by the editors and writers—the community path, other transportation concerns, the state of our brooks and streams, energy efficiency, stormwater issues among many others.

Each issue rewards the reader with insights into topics that affect life in Belmont today and

into the future. Nowhere else is this information readily available, and the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* is the most important publication available to Belmont residents.

Nowhere else is this information readily available, and the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* is the most important publication available to Belmont residents.

The Belmont Citizen Forum was founded after a sometimes bitter battle over zoning and the future of open space in our fully developed community. We owe a debt of gratitude to the founders and those continuing the effort to help us understand the importance of environmental concerns going forward.

The BCF's Next 20 Years

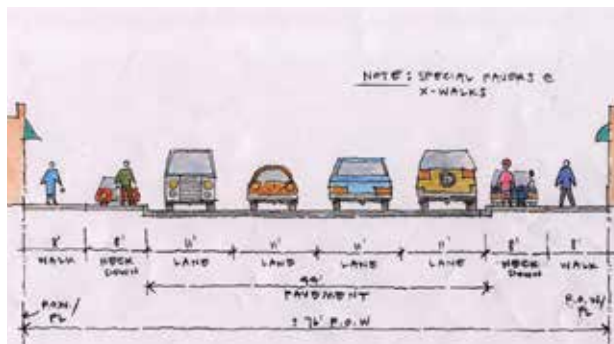
By Grant Monahon

The goal of protecting Belmont's small town environment has taken many forms for the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) during the last 20 years, and it will undoubtedly take many more directions over the next 20 years. Belmont's efforts to preserve its natural and historical resources, limit traffic growth, and enhance pedestrian safety will only become

Belmont Timeline

2003-2004

The BCF recruits students from the Boston Architectural Center and MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning to rethink designs for Belmont Street/Trapelo Road corridor.



2004

Northland settles the Belmont Citizens Forum's lawsuit over its sewer connection permit on the McLean land. The settlement allows the BCF later to buy a portion of the Fitchburg line right of way for a future bicycle path.

BELMONT CITIZENS FORUM

2003

more challenging, not less, and we will continue to pursue issues identified as important to our supporters.

As a board, we are mindful that we will need new and younger leadership. We are not going away, but new perspectives would add great value. If you enjoy the BCF Newsletter and support our purposes, we welcome your participation.

Our newsletter has become one of the primary sources of news and information on our targeted subjects. We receive regular feedback on the benefit of receiving a “hard copy” in this age of electronic communication. The labor and cost of printing, labeling, and mailing more than 2,000 copies of the newsletter six times a year, at an annual out-of-pocket cost of more than \$13,200 has its own challenges. Where do you draw the line between the benefits of a hard copy physically in hand and the substantial out of pocket costs plus volunteer time required to mail six newsletters annually?

We look forward to the day when we can deed the land we purchased 15 years ago to help establish a long-needed community path with direct access to Alewife. Who wouldn't want to make that path their daily commute to work rather than adding to our own pollution, congestion, and frustration en route? The town has picked up this baton and is running with it towards the finish line, but this project's complexity, scope, and political status are challenging. It will be a continued goal for BCF!

BCF is one of many town organizations that help move us forward in the direction of our

identified purposes, along with the Belmont Land Trust, the Judy Record Fund, Sustainable Belmont, and others. As I look forward, I have to ask whether there is a role for BCF in helping to consolidate and communicate the overlapping messages of so many like-minded groups.

Our future is open to your input for the path ahead. We would be happy to hear from you.

20 Years of Volunteers

Thank you to the many people who have given so much of their time to the Belmont Citizens Forum. You have made 20 years of the BCF possible.

Pixie Apt • Michael Baram • Sue Bass • Nelson Bolen • Mary Bradley • Leah Brams • Sumner Brown • Kristen Buchanan • Rosemary Chase • David Chase • Ava Cheloff • Mark D'Andrea • John DiCocco • John Dieckmann • Bill Ellet • Stacey Fabiano • Jim Graves • Radha Iyengar • Susan Jones • Virginia Jordan • Anne-Marie Lambert • Dan Lech • Evanthia Malliris • Nick Manos • Andrea Masciari • Sara McCabe • Aryan Mehrotra • Tom Miller • Grant Monahan • Karen Parmett • Eva Patalas • Steve Pinkerton • Lynne Polcari • Peter Rand • Sally Rifkin • Daniel Selgrade • Tom Shapiro • Jane Sherwin • Shuntaro Shiota • Ann Coit Sifneos • Ken Stalberg • Nathaniel Stalberg • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • Michael Stratford • Ian Todreas • Heather Tuttle • Sharon Vanderslice • Gillian Webster • Emily Woods •

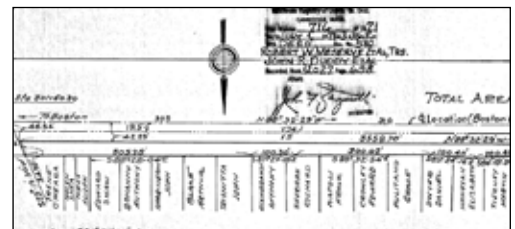
2008

The state transfers Lot 1, a 54-acre parcel of surplus land in Lexington and Waltham, to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, filling in the “missing link” and making the Western Greenway loop trail possible.



2008

BCF purchases “Duddy” parcel railway right-of-way north of the Fitchburg Line along Channing Road for a future bike path.



2008

About Our 20-Year Anniversary Writers

Sue Bass was the first president of the Belmont Citizens Forum and remained on the board for about a decade. She has continued to participate on the Newsletter Committee.

Sumner Brown is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

John Dieckmann is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Jim Graves was a founding board member of the BCF and board president for a year.

Evanthia Malliris is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum and former Town Meeting member.

Grant Monahon has had the pleasure to serve as president with so many thoughtful and dedicated board members and supporters for more than 15 years.

Anne Paulsen is a long-time resident of Belmont and served on the School Committee, the Board of Selectmen, and as the representative from the 24th Middlesex District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Kenneth Stalberg has missed only one mailing in his years as Mailing Maestro. On that occasion, he handed the reins to his son Nathaniel, who took over the supervisory and delivery duties.

Sharon Vanderslice is the founding editor of the *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*.

Letter to The Editor

To the Editor:

As a neighbor, fan, and defender of poor Clay Pit Pond, I especially enjoyed the recent article ("Clay Pit Pond Progresses from Eyesore to Asset," *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter*, November/December 2019). I would like to add a few more details on the recent history of the pond.

When we moved to Belmont in the fall of 1974 there was a shopping cart in the pond by the inlet and advertisements about the upcoming Kiwanis Fishing Derby. I found the cart and derby in great contrast. Apparently the pond was regularly stocked for the event. No one noticed the cart? Newcomer though I was, I called Town Hall to suggest it be removed before the derby. My concern for the pond hasn't waned.

Some years later, after observing many people of different nationalities taking fish (herring, carp, and American eels) from the pond for consumption, as a Conservation Commission member at the time, I wrote a grant for testing the fish. It turned out that among other contaminants, the eels contained chlordane, a common pesticide until it was banned in 1988. The Board of Health posted warning signs that are battered and worn, if still there. I don't recommend eating the fish even now.

We used to participate in the old GreenUp CleanUp Days of long ago. Interesting things were pulled from the pond: a concrete bench,

Belmont Timeline

2010

Belmont gets 8.5" of rain in three days, the third "100 year storm" in 15 years.



GLENN KOENIG

2010

2010

Construction begins on Belmont's first community path, the Fitchburg Cutoff Path from Brighton Street to Alewife Station.

2012

The Board of Selectmen forms the Community Path Advisory Committee to identify potential routes and solicit community input about a future path connecting the Brighton Street Path with the Mass Central Rail Trail to the west.

lunch trays, plates, books, bagged dog waste that had been stuffed down storm drains. No steam-shovel though!

Another time the commission was involved in restoring the bank after a massive oil spill from the Burbank School, placing coir rolls along the bank, and planting wetland plants to stabilize the bank after the oil-contaminated soil had been removed. My daughter's waders came in handy for that project. Those were "hands-on" days.

In 1995 the commission wrote an extensive report on the health of the pond. We found a layer of saline in the water column even before the current level of road salt use. The pond receives runoff from almost the entire town. Sand washing off the streets caused siltation, and the western end has become far more shallow. Now geese are commonly seen standing there instead of floating.

Currently there are real concerns about flooding. Years ago a storm event found the water flowing into the high school band room. After major storms, debris is regularly deposited on the walking path on the Concord Avenue side: evidence of the overflow. Naturally the pond is only a link in the chain of water bodies that eventually reach Boston Harbor.

After a major storm, the pond level does not begin to lower until the pumps at the Amelia Earhart Dam start working to lower the water level. It can be assumed that each receiving water body floods until the final release is accomplished.

A new dam at the outlet culvert under Underwood Street has been mentioned, but since the pond's capacity is already limited, a dam would not relieve the pressure. The pond's drainage goes through two small old corrugated pipes that run under Hittinger Street at the eastern end of the pond. Not only are they undersized but their corrugated surfaces slow the drainage, and siltation in front of the pipes impedes the function as well. Claypit is already serving as water storage. However, until it begins to drain, some neighboring properties flood since the drains can only function when there is space in the pond. The map of culverts leading to the pond shows several storm drains leading to the same culvert and several culverts leading to a single one. Obviously those extra "drains" don't drain. It's as if to get your sink to drain more quickly you added an extra drain to the same drainpipe. Futile!

I support dredging the pond, but the many chemicals in the sediment from decades of street runoff and unapproved drainage probably mean it would be a hazardous waste project, which would be costly. Instead, for a start, the ancient drainage pipes under Hittinger Street must be reconfigured.

All of the local water bodies are vital in dealing with the impacts of climate change. Claypit Pond is key. Do we care about the health of this asset?

Carolyn Bishop
Orchard Street, Belmont

2013

Renovation of the Trapelo Road/ Belmont Street Corridor begins.



JOHN DICOCO

2013

2019

After years of citizen opposition, Belmont issues a building permit for the Belmont Uplands; the Silver Maple Forest is promptly razed.



ANNE-MARIE LAMBERT

Belmont Roots

Environmental News, Notes, and Events

By Meg Muckenhoupt



As you recover from a month of pies, plum puddings, sufganiyot jelly doughnuts, fruitcake, fudge, hot cocoa, panettone, egg-nog, and every other cold-season excuse to eat sugar,

pause to remember that neither sugar cane nor honeybees are native to New England. Sugar cane is a tropical plant, and there were no honeybees north of Florida before 1630—and those bees which did arrive spent more than a month trapped in a hive in the hold of a wooden ship that creaked and lurched its way across the open ocean. Sugar maples did yield syrup, and that syrup was enjoyed in northern New York and Canada, but there weren't many sugar maple trees in relatively-temperate eastern Massachusetts before European colonization, and there's scant mention of maple syrup or sugar in southern New England before the 1650's.

If you wish to have an assured supply of sweeteners as our climate and ecology changes, consider learning to tend bees and trees yourself. You may have considerable success. In 2009, Belmont resident Ot-

tavio Forte was keeping roughly 240,000 bees in his back yard, and harvesting pounds of honey, as you can read in the July/August 2009 Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter at bit.ly/BCFhoney

The bees will also help your flowers, vegetables, and trees and shrubs thrive; habitat destruction and carelessly-applied pesticides have killed many of the native, non-honey-producing bees and butterflies that used to do the job. Always read the labels before you spray any substance outdoors, and avoid spraying in the daytime during the growing season when bees are out and about. Sugar maples also need care, but they're a bit more patient.

Backyard Sugaring

Saturday, February 1, 1-3 PM

Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln

Learn how to make syrup. Drumlin Farm staff will cover everything that you need to know—tree identification, equipment, tapping, boiling, finishing, and storing. Open to youth 12 and older with adult. Mass Audubon members \$28, nonmembers \$34. Register at www.massaudubon.org or call 781-259-2255.

Beekeeping for Beginners

Weekly, Tuesdays March 3-March 31, 7-9 PM

Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln

Belmont Timeline

2017

The BSC Group wins award from American Council of Engineering Companies of Massachusetts for Trapelo Road/ Belmont Street redesign—inspired by students' plans presented by the Belmont Citizens Forum in 2004.

2017

2018

The Belmont Board of Selectmen appoints the Community Path Project Committee.



SARAH MCCABE

This five-session class includes a brief history of bee-keeping, bee biology, basics of beekeeping, locating hives, acquiring bees, and beekeeping resources. Open to youth 12 or older with an adult. Mass Audubon members \$110, nonmembers \$132. Register at www.massaudubon.org or call 781-259-2255.

Correction

In "Belmont's Underground Pollution Problem," *Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter* November/December 2019, the caption on page 2 in the article should read as follows:

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

We regret any confusion this error may have caused.

Thank you to our contributors

WRITERS

Sue Bass • Sumner Brown • John Dieckmann • Jim Graves • Evanthia Malliris • Grant Monahon • Meg Muckenhoupt • Anne Paulsen • Ken Stalberg • Sharon Vanderslice

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS

Mary Bradley • Shea Bradley-Hurley • John DiCocco • Candace Jones • Glenn Koenig • Anne-Marie Lambert • Ann Coit Sifneos

COPY EDITORS

Sue Bass • Virginia Jordan • Evanthia Malliris

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

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

MAILING MAESTRO

Ken Stalberg

Thank you for your continued support.

Your contribution makes a difference!

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

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

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

Or give securely online:
belmontcitizensforum.org

Contact us:
info@belmontcitizensforum.org

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

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

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

20th Anniversary Issue • January/February 2020



Waltham Land Trust vice president Diana Young (left) and Belmont Citizens Forum board member Sue Bass cut a joint 10th anniversary cake, September 2009.

20 Amazing Years of the BCF	1
The BCF's Origin	3
Five Editors, 20 Years	5
Community Path Through 20+ years..	6
20 Years of Historic Preservation	7
20 Years of Belmont Traffic.....	10
20 Years of Water Trouble	11
Litigation Was Not in the Plan	12
20 Years of Mailing the Newsletter	13
The Value of the BCF.....	14
The Next 20 Years.....	14
20 Years of Volunteers	15
Letter to the Editor: Clay Pit Pond	16
Roots and Shoots.....	18

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