



## Belmont Citizens Forum

# Clay Pit Pond Deforestation Damages Wetland

*By Judy Singler*

In September 2020, several Belmont residents removed more than 80 trees and shrubs from the south side of Clay Pit Pond. In an unauthorized action taken ostensibly to “enhance” the view of the pond, individuals visited the site on at least three occasions that month, cutting down 50-foot-tall trees, shrubs, vines, and other vegetation. The remaining trees at the edge of the pond were pruned of side branches to a height of 20 feet and more. Town officials eventually ordered a halt to the illegal tree cutting after calls from several concerned citizens.

### Environmental Laws Exist to Protect our Wetlands

Cutting vegetation within 100 feet of a protected body of water is subject to state wetlands laws and requires a permit from the town’s Conservation Commission (ConCom). In this case, no permit was requested or granted.

In October, when the ConCom became aware of this activity, members began discussing options for the town. The contractor originally hired for management of invasive species around the pond had been unable to perform the work due to the Covid-19 crisis. He will inspect the site to assess current needs.

Because many tree and shrub stumps remained near the pond, creating a hazard to visitors, the Department of Public Works arranged for a contractor to remove the larger stumps in December, even as citizens raised concerns about possible erosion and siltation at



JUDY SINGLER

Bare ground, erosion, and cut stumps after illegal tree removal at Clay Pit Pond.

the pond due to large areas without soil-stabilizing vegetation near the shoreline.

### The Conservation Commission’s Role

This activity at Clay Pit Pond reveals the need for greater understanding in the community of our wetland areas and the regulations that protect them. In 1964, Massachusetts passed its



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

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Wetland Protection Act, Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) Chapter 131, Section 40. This law provides specific protections to wetlands and the public interest, including flood and pollution control, as well as groundwater supplies and wildlife habitat. It requires a thorough review of all proposed work that may impact any wetlands.

At the local level, Belmont's ConCom administers the Wetlands Protection Act. This seven-member volunteer board is appointed by the Select Board and works with conservation agent Mary Trudeau to review and approve applications for work covered by the act.

At the state level, the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) provides technical training to local conservation commissions and oversees administration of the law and develops policies and regulations, including fines for violations. Violators of the Wetlands Protection Act may be ordered to restore the property to its original condition and take other actions to mitigate the effects of the violation. In addition, they may incur criminal fines up to \$25,000, imprisonment of up to two years, or both, or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000 for each violation. Each day a violation continues is considered a separate offense.

Anyone wanting to work in a wetland resource area or within 100 feet of a wetland (the buffer zone) must obtain prior approval from the ConCom. Wetlands protection regulations are quite specific about the extent and type of work allowed. Activities covered include vegetation removal, regrading, and home construction, including additions, decks, and driveways. Commercial and industrial areas are also covered by the regulations.

Obtaining a permit from the ConCom requires filing of a Notice of Intent which includes the details of the proposed project, location of wetland resource areas and buffer zones, and steps that will be taken to protect them. ConCom representatives might visit the site to verify the boundaries of the protected areas, and typically a public hearing is held to allow abutters and other community members to ask questions or voice concerns.

Following the hearing, the ConCom will issue a permit known as an Order of Conditions, that



JUDY SINGLER

Shoreline damage at Clay Pit Pond.

specifies any special requirements needed to protect the public interests. Permits are denied if the impacts to the resource areas cannot be avoided or mitigated. These decisions may be appealed to MassDEP.

### Surveying the Damage

Meanwhile, the land around Clay Pit Pond has suffered a considerable injury. Permits were never requested by citizens, who assumed their actions would be helpful to the town. Town officials must decide how to mitigate this damage and restore the soil around the pond before erosion and siltation affect water quality.

On March 8, the ConCom visited Clay Pit Pond to view the site and discuss planning for mitigation and restoration. Also in attendance were Patrice Garvin, town administrator; Roy Epstein, Select Board chair; and Jay Marcotte and

Michael Santoro from the Department of Public Works, as well as some concerned citizens.

The site showed a great deal of exposed land, with many small stumps from shrubs protruding from loose soil, with exposed roots lining the banks. Some siltation was evident as well as several locations with minor erosion. Concerns were voiced over coming spring rains and the need for actions to mitigate the extensive loss of trees and shrubs. Initial plans include hiring a consultant to survey the area and provide recommendations. The land between the path and the pond banks needs to be stabilized immediately.

### A Path Forward

The ongoing situation at Clay Pit Pond demonstrates the need for citizens to be aware of activity taking place in the town and to speak out when unusual actions are occurring. Meanwhile, advocating for appropriate follow-up to this unauthorized work at Clay Pit Pond could show how the town and community can work together to resolve a serious environmental problem.

The unlawful and ecologically damaging assault on the pond has created broader awareness of the need to stabilize the bank and manage the vegetation, especially the invasive plant species, around the entire pond. As a part of Belmont's stormwater system, Clay Pit Pond is a significant resource, though one which requires regular assessment and care.

At the March 30 ConCom meeting Trudeau indicated her intent to seek funding to support a study of the needs of the pond. Town administrator Garvin has said that she will look for federal and state grants and other funding to support this effort. In this, she will follow guidance from Trudeau and the ConCom.

A review of the broader ecological health of the pond and a plan for its sustainability is essential to an effective action plan to assure that Clay Pit Pond will continue to be a valuable asset to Belmont and its residents.

*Judy Singler is a member of the Council on Aging and the Housing Trust and a Town Meeting member for Precinct 6.*



# Belmont Has One Year to Clean up Waterways

By Anne-Marie Lambert

A 2017 consent order from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) gave Belmont five years to stop underground sewage from leaking into our waterways. We made a lot of progress in 2020, but there could be a long way to go before all our outlets run clean.

In 2020, the town undertook a \$550,000 sewer system rehabilitation construction project (SSRCP). More work is planned in 2021 under a sump pump removal and sewer rehabilitation contract. The SSRCP included significant work such as:

- Repairing and lining several sewer mains
- Lining many sewer service laterals
- Removing a few sewer service laterals from the drain system
- Replacing several sewer and drain segments that are beyond repair

## Good News

There are some encouraging examples of 2020 rehabilitation work improving water quality at downstream outlets. Up on Belmont Hill by

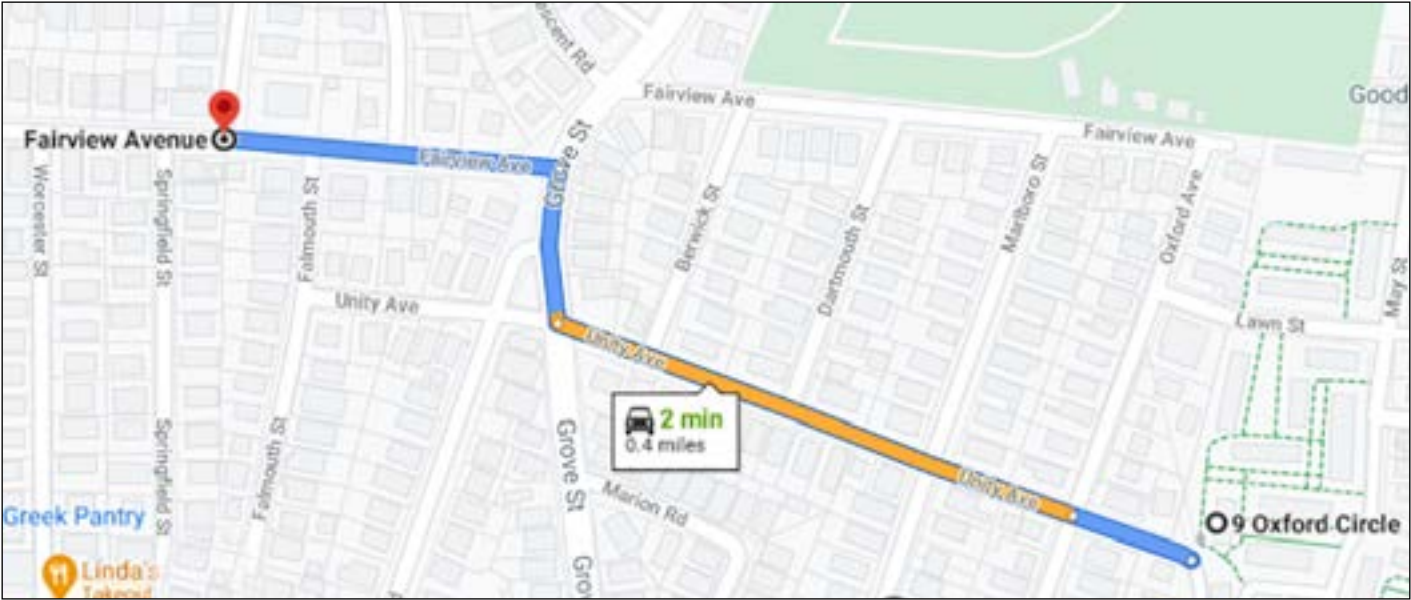
Route 2, for example, outlet 15A by Frontage Road near Radcliffe Road went from over 14,900 *E. coli* MPN/100 ml in 2017 to under 100 MPN after a 2020 project to reline and repair mains under Knox, Herman, and Bellington Streets. The EPA threshold is 235 *E. coli* MPN/100 ml. In other areas of town, water quality improved after significant rehabilitation, but still not enough to meet EPA requirements. Work in the Oliver Road neighborhood should address water quality issues at outlets 11, 11A, and 12. In other areas, there is no more construction or investigative work planned. The hope is that after recent repair work, the system will eventually run clean.

Rehabilitation work is planned on Hoitt and Westlund Roads in the lower part of catchment 10. More investigation is planned in 2021 to discover additional upstream sources of sewage infiltration. Techniques may include sending CCTV cameras down the drains, going door-to-door, and doing dye testing to find illegal connections of sewers to the drain system.

Sub-catchment	Location	Pollution ( <i>E.coli</i> MPN/100 ml)	
		Before (2017)	After (2020)
11	Oliver Road	13,800	1,200
11A	Oliver Road	>20,000	2,600
12	Oliver Road	1,600	200
11,11A,12	Upstream Project 6 (planned): Oliver Road point of service replacement, lateral liners		
15	Park Rd @ Grove St North	10,200	700
8-6	Outlet 8-6: Pearson and Gordon Terrace	14,400	1,300
8-6-6	Creeley @ Leslie from easement	>20,000	5,000
8-6-22	Trapelo from TD Bank pipe	N/A	4,300
8-6	Upstream Project 5: Relining of mains and laterals on Maple, Bartlett, Trapelo		

Table 1. Some areas showed significant improvement, but are still above EPA’s *E. coli* threshold of 235 MPN/100 ml. Source: Town of Belmont Order on Consent Docket No. CWA-AO-R01-FY17-11 Report On Compliance, January 31 2021.

Pollution upstream doesn’t always make it to the downstream outlet



Sub-catchment	Location	Pollution ( <i>E.coli</i> MPN/100 ml)	
		Before (2017)	After (2020)
1-4A	Fairview and Van Ness from easment	7,000	12,300
1	Outlet at 9 Oxford Circle, near Belmont Street and Mount Auburn Street	1,900	<100

Table 2. At our border with Cambridge near Belmont Street and Mt. Auburn Street and at the Winn’s Brook outlet into Little Pond, the main outlets seem to be acceptable despite evidence of pollution upstream. Some upstream areas still have disturbingly high levels of *E. coli*. Source: Town of Belmont Order on Consent Docket No. CWA-AO-R01-FY17-11 Report On Compliance, January 31 2021.

## Measuring Pollution, Managing Odds

The town’s consultants usually take samples from our drains and outlets in the early morning and also measure levels of *E. coli* during wet weather. The reason for this timing is that a single good measurement at a downstream outlet is not necessarily a reliable indicator that all is well upstream. Sewage enters the drain system sporadically, with each flush or laundry load, so any given measurement may miss *E. coli* leaking into the drain system. Standard practice is to take measurements in the early morning as residents are waking up so that there is a better chance of detecting waste leaking into the drain system.

Another reason for making several measurements is that the *E. coli* bacteria being measured in the drain or waterways decay over time. *E. coli* can survive on dry surfaces for about a day, in still or culverted water for up to two months

or more, and in the soil for up to three months (or longer if it becomes established in the soil). Survival rates vary based on temperature, availability of nutrients, pH, and solar radiation. Depending on the weather conditions, a single measurement at an outlet may not detect a problem far enough upstream for *E. coli* to have decayed or dissipated into the soil.

## MPN Measurements

The concentration of *E. coli* bacteria in water is measured in terms of MPN per 100 ml. MPN stands for “most probable number.” Several samples of the liquid are cultured and checked for signs of *E. coli* growth. The pattern of growth across samples is used to estimate the concentration of bacteria in the water source.

Sub-catchment	Location	Project
1-4, 1-4A	Fairview Ave @ Van Ness Road	IDDE investigation
2	Woods Road	Replace 2 service connections (plastic baseball bat), investigate suspicious services
8-6-1, 8-6-2, 8-6-3	Maple/Bartlett/Trapelo	Remeasure after lining main and laterals and capping on Maple
8-5 (?)	Pearson @ Garden	Investigate
8-6-5, 8-6-6	Creeley @ Leslie from Creeley, from easement	Take more samples
8-1	Upstream of Bow @ Lincoln	Inspect, dye water test, repair

Table 3: Belmont’s 2021 sewer rehabilitation projects.

All this makes me wonder how valuable the town’s sporadic measurements of the Winn Brook outlet are. Luckily, there is another group measuring this outlet monthly: the Mystic River Watershed Association.

Clearing the Upstream first

In some locations, the town’s 2020 upstream measurements showed improved water quality after major repairs and relining activities, but downstream measurements at the outlet were even worse than in 2017. For example, Catchment Area 2 results show improved water quality measurements upstream after rehabilitation, yet measurements at the downstream outlet for the entire area are worse. The results at the outlet may improve with time, or there may be yet another problem to find and fix.

This is consistent with the town’s “outside-in” approach, which involves fixing problems upstream first, on the periphery of the drainage system. The town plans to wait and see if the

outlet measurements improve before investing in significant investigations downstream.

More Work to Do

Table 3 lists a handful of additional projects planned for the 2021 sump pump and sewer rehabilitation contract as well as some sampling and investigation projects.

The goal of all this work is simple: all outlets should have *E. coli* measurements below the EPA threshold. Estimating how much work remains to get there is very difficult. Because of the intermittent nature of the leakage and the uncertainty of exactly what any given measurement signifies, we have no idea if we are halfway there, 10% of the way, or 90%. Until all the outlets run clear, we won’t know whether we will meet the 2022 target set by the EPA in 2017 of 235 *E. coli* MPN/100 ml of water. What we do know is that there are still quite a few places well above the EPA threshold.

Despite the pandemic, the town did an impressive amount of sewer rehabilitation work in 2020. The town will need to continue to show the grit and persistence it has pursued in 2020 to find and fix all leaky mains and laterals and illegal connections between the sewer and drain system.

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

**Human or Animal Waste?**

How does the EPA tell if the *E. coli* is from animal or human waste? In 2017, the EPA included measurements of pharmaceuticals unique to humans to verify the *E. coli* were coming from human waste and not from dogs, geese, or other animals.

Time to Fix the Town’s Historic Clock

*By Michael Flamang*

Since the invention of mechanical clocks in Renaissance Europe, town governments have installed clocks in prominent buildings in town centers to standardize time in support of commerce. In New England, many of the clocks that we see in historic churches on town greens were purchased and maintained by town select boards.

In Belmont, in 1889, Town Meeting voted “that the selectmen be authorized to place a clock in the new Unitarian Church to be erected this year and the sum of \$500 be appropriated for the same.”

When the church was dedicated in 1890, the clock was in its tower. Manufactured by the E. Howard Watch and Clock Company of Boston, the clock rang the bronze bell for decades.

The clock still sits in the tower of that church, overlooking the historic Wellington train depot, a magnificent copper beech tree, and the town green on Concord Avenue.

Unfortunately, the clock hasn’t functioned since 2006.

History Since Belmont Began

The clock rings a 1,200-pound bronze bell that was cast in 1857 in Boston by the Henry H. Hooper Company. Hooper was an apprentice of Paul Revere. On March 18, 1859, the bell rang out the news of the incorporation of the new town of Belmont from the original church, which was located on the site of the current post office until it was destroyed by fire on February 12, 1890.

The separation of church and state was observed differently in the mid-19th century. The original church building, the spire of which appears on the town seal, served as the location of town meetings until 1867. It also housed the town’s library and the Farmers Exchange. The church was originally called the Belmont Congregational Society. It was later renamed the First Church in Belmont Unitarian Universalist (FCBUU).

The clock ran dependably until the early 2000s, but years of accumulated dust on the



JEFFREY NORTH

gears began to interfere with the movement, and in 2006, the clock stopped.

The Jewel in the Town

Tower clocks need a source of power to turn the gears of the movement and to ring the bell. That power source is gravity, acting on weights, through cables and pulleys that descend slowly to do the work of turning the hands and ringing the bell. Once a week, the clock winder climbs a ladder inside the tower to the platform where the clock movement is located and winds the clock by raising the weights with a hand crank and lots of muscle effort.

Over the decades, the church sexton has been the clock winder. The town compensated the sexton for this effort with an annual stipend of \$36 per year in 1890, which grew to \$150 in





Gearage inside the Belmont Town Clock.

recent years. In 2006, the church administrator stopped requesting the stipend because the clock had stopped running.

Until December 2020, access to the clock movement meant a daunting climb up a long, wobbly ladder. The ladder was showing its age, and eventually, clock repair craftspeople refused to service the clock because of the condition of the ladder. In December 2020, the church replaced the rickety ladder with a new set of stairs that reached the upper level of the tower for access to the clock movement. Clock service people can now climb safely to the movement.

Since the clock was first installed, our world has created electric and electronic clocks. The Church Property Committee considered replacing the entire timekeeping mechanism with an electric movement. The cost and benefits of that approach are being considered. A hybrid solution is also being considered which involves restoring the historic weight-driven movement and electrifying the winding.

### Historic Preservation Funds Needed

In September 2018, FCBUU applied for a Community Preservation Act (CPA) grant for \$66,250 to repair the town's old tower clock. In January 2019, the Community Preservation Committee voted to advance the application with a recommendation that it be approved.

A substantial part of the project cost estimate in the first grant application, however, was to pay for the replacement of the decrepit ladder. As the grant application was reviewed by various town committees, the ladder portion of the project drew the most comments because it consisted of

work that would be done to the church building itself. The grant application received a negative recommendation from the Warrant Committee, and FCBUU withdrew the application.

There is precedent, however, for CPA funds granted to repair clocks in church buildings. The Community Preservation Coalition, a state clearinghouse of information, maintains a database of CPA-funded projects. The database includes many projects in other towns that funded the repair of tower clocks in church buildings, often with funds routed through an intermediary organization like a historical society.

Following the withdrawal of the grant application, the FCBUU Property Committee reviewed its options as stewards of this historic town artifact and decided that the church could pay for a new tower ladder using operating funds.

Today, thanks to the ladder replacement, all work remaining to restore the clock to operation can be performed by clock repair craftspeople. FCBUU has received proposals from three craft horologist workshops. The clock repair work will cost about \$30,000.

### Antique Timepiece is a Community Heirloom

Visitors and residents of Belmont should be able to see the correct time on this tower clock when they walk, bicycle, or drive into the center. An operating historic clock makes a proud statement about stewardship of the town's historic treasures.

*Michael Flamang is co-chair of the Property Care Committee of the First Church in Belmont Unitarian Universalist.*



## Four Projects Proposed for CPA Funds

*By Elizabeth Harmer Dionne*

Belmont's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has recommended the following projects to Town Meeting for Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding in FY2022.

### Phase I Consulting Services for Payson Park Renovation

Organization: Friends of Payson Park (Linda Oates, Susanne Croy, Jay Marcotte)

CPA Category: Recreation

Amount requested: \$35,000

This is the first step in renovating Payson Park, which suffers from inadequate access, crumbling infrastructure, and haphazard layout. Phase I involves an assessment of existing site conditions, neighborhood consultation and feedback, a conceptual design, and a proposed budget for construction costs. Due to changes implemented by the CPC in 2019, sponsors of town-approved projects involving public assets no longer need to raise private funds to cover part of the project's overall cost.

### Preparation for Community Path Right-of-Way Acquisition

Organization: Community Path Project Committee (Russ Leino, Patrice Garvin)

CPA Category: Recreation

Amount requested: \$200,000

This project will assess the right-of-way acquisitions necessary for the construction of Phases 1a and 1b of the Community Path project, including the Alexander Avenue underpass and Brighton Street to Clark Street Bridge, and calculate the associated costs for such rights of way. (Design work for Phases 1a and 1b is being funded with previously appropriated CPA funds.) The town needs to acquire temporary easements for the construction of the path. In some instances, the town may need to acquire permanent easements or make outright land purchases.

### Tennis Court Expansion—Winn Brook

Organization: Select Board, School Committee (Jon Marshall)

CPA Category: Recreation

Amount requested: \$190,000

Construction of the new high school and the addition of the 7-8 school on the high school site eliminated space for the high school's tennis courts. With the anticipated construction of the Alexander Avenue underpass, Winn Brook is the closest set of tennis courts to the high school. Varsity tennis teams need at least five courts



Map of the proposed Phase 1 Belmont Community Path.



to host home meets, and Winn Brook requires an additional court to meet this threshold. Some tennis community members wanted two additional courts to accommodate junior varsity matches while some neighbors wanted no additional courts. The Recreation Commission endorsed one additional court as a compromise solution.

money to qualify Belmont for affordable housing construction grants at the state and federal level (\$1 to \$2 million). The CPC can allocate up to 5% of its annual revenue for administrative costs including funding studies or design work related to CPA-eligible projects. I have reached out to both the Recreation Commission and Historic District Commission and invited them to submit



The proposed tennis court location.

Transfer to Belmont Housing Trust

Organization: Belmont Housing Trust (Betsy Lipson, Rachel Heller)  
CPA Category: Community Housing  
Amount requested: \$250,000

These funds would enable the Belmont Housing Trust to identify and move quickly on real estate opportunities to increase the town’s affordable housing stock. This project would replenish funds previously approved and appropriated by Town Meeting for FY2019. In June 2020, Town Meeting approved the use of the FY2019 funds for an emergency rental assistance program for Belmont residents.

Looking Ahead

As chair of the CPC, I am concerned about reserving sufficient funds to meet the costs of future, high-impact projects, such as funding the design of Phase 2 of the Community Path (up to \$2 million), or ensuring sufficient seed

applications for studies to create inventories of current and future CPA-eligible projects. A member of the CPC serves on Belmont’s Long-Term Capital Planning Committee (LTCPC) which is creating a master list of Belmont’s capital needs. Studies by the Recreation Commission and Historic District Commission could be a valuable addition to the LTCPC’s work. Careful stewardship of CPA funds can ensure the preservation of current assets, while simultaneously facilitating valuable aspects of Belmont’s future. For more information about the history and current operations of the Community Preservation Act in Belmont, see “[How the Community Preservation Act Works](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, May/June 2020.

*Elizabeth Harmer Dionne has served as chair of Belmont’s Community Preservation Committee since January 2020. Any opinions expressed in this article are personal and do not necessarily reflect the view of the entire committee.*

Mass Central Rail Trail Comes Closer

By John Dieckmann

When completed, the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) will run from North Point Park in Cambridge to downtown Northampton, a distance of 104 miles, following the abandoned right of way (ROW) of the former Mass Central Railroad. The MCRT has been a long-time work in progress, with some segments completed, others in the works, and others yet to be pursued seriously.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) recently completed a feasibility study of the western part of the MCRT ([bit.ly/BCF-MCRT-study](http://bit.ly/BCF-MCRT-study)) covering 68.5 miles from the Amherst-Belchertown border to Hudson. The area east of Hudson through to Waltham has been leased to the Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) by the MBTA. The former rail bed continues through Belmont, Cambridge, and Somerville to North Point Park in Cambridge. (See “Bikeway Building Booms Beyond Belmont,” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, January 2021.) The Belmont Community Path is part of the MCRT, comprising a bit more than two miles of the 104 miles.

The feasibility study entailed a detailed survey of the ROW, identifying ownership status and physical condition. Where the ROW is blocked, the study identified options to bypass the blockage and assessed how difficult it would be to complete the trail.

Overall, about 75% to 80% of the MCRT ROW is intact. The rest is compromised by issues ranging from private ownership to being completely blocked or obliterated. Below is the status of the MCRT segments from west to east.

Norwottuck Rail Trail

The Norwottuck Rail Trail is the westernmost section of the MCRT. It is owned and operated by the DCR and opened in 1992. It covers 11 miles from downtown Northampton to the Amherst-Belchertown line. The trail features a spectacular crossing of the Connecticut River about a mile east of downtown Northampton. In downtown Northampton, it connects directly

to the Manhan Rail Trail and the Northampton Trail and to a robust network of trails in this region, including partially completed trails running along the Connecticut River Valley into Connecticut.

Belchertown

The ROW next passes through Belchertown. Seven miles of the ROW are owned by the town, and two miles of the ROW are privately owned. About a half-mile of privately owned ROW separates the publicly owned corridor from the Norwottuck Trail.

While not developed as a path, the town-owned portion is open and passable on foot or mountain bike. The Belchertown Board of Selectmen and an active friends group are seeking funding and examining options to bypass the privately owned ROW.

Palmer

From Amherst to Palmer, the ROW runs southeast around the Quabbin Reservoir before turning northeast. The first one-and-a-half mile section of the corridor is intact, while the next three-mile stretch of the ROW is blocked by active railroad use.

Belmont Path Comments

The Belmont Community Path design team has responded to comments and questions submitted about the path last year. Read the entire 11-page document at [bit.ly/BCF-Bike-Comments](http://bit.ly/BCF-Bike-Comments).

Issues addressed include

- Widening the Alexander Avenue culvert
- Providing privacy for abutters
- Stormwater flow and winter freezes
- Connections to Leonard Street
- Emergency vehicle access

... and many more.



East Quabbin Land Trust Region

The East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) is advancing the MCRT as it passes through Ware, Hardwick, New Braintree, and Barre. About 10 years ago, the land trust acquired three miles of the MCRT ROW in Hardwick and New Braintree. With volunteer labor, the ROW was converted into a stone-dust surface shared-use path that has been open to the public since 2015. Two truss bridges across the Ware River were also reconditioned and decked by volunteers. The EQLT has gotten funding from the DCR’s MassTrails grant program to build another half-mile section in town, and the town of Ware has also constructed two miles of trail.

Wachusett Greenways Region

Wachusett Greenways has been slowly building out its section of the MCRT whose total length is 30 miles. To date, 20 miles of stone-dust surface trail have been constructed and opened to the public, including a 100-foot bridge across the Quinopoxet River and two road underpass tunnels. While the remaining parts of the ROW are compromised in places, Wachusett Greenways continues to chip away at it a mile at a time.

The eastern section along the north side of the Wachusett Reservoir has not been completed. A major bridge project over one of the reservoir

tributaries needs to be built before this section could be opened.

Clinton-Berlin

There is a gap between the Wachusett Greenways section and the Berlin-to-Waltham DCR lease. In Clinton, the Central Massachusetts Railroad crossed the Nashua River below the Wachusett Reservoir dam on a high trestle and then passed through a 1,300-foot tunnel before continuing east toward Berlin. Unfortunately, in 1979, the high trestle was demolished, leaving only the concrete piers.

The town of Clinton has acquired the tunnel and the one-and-a-half miles of ROW east of the tunnel and intends to develop it into a shared-use path and part of the MCRT. Massachusetts Representative Jake Auchincloss is attempting to get funding in the upcoming infrastructure bill to recreate the high trestle across the Nashua River, an exciting possibility with spectacular views.

Berlin to Waltham

About five and a half miles of the MCRT in Weston and Wayland have been open to the public for more than a year. The electric utility Eversource built an access road for their transmission line which shares the ROW with the MCRT. The access road was paved with funding provided by the DCR and doubles as the shared-use path.

To the west in Wayland, Sudbury, and Hudson, a similar arrangement with Eversource and DCR will result in nine miles of paved path. The plan is to place the transmission line in an underground concrete trench alongside an access road/shared-use path. The town of Sudbury and a local environmental group, Protect Sudbury, are seeking to stop that construction by pursuing litigation. As of press time, litigation is still ongoing. If the suits are

unsuccessful, construction of this section of the MCRT will probably take two years.

The ROW, which is leased by the DCR from the MBTA, continues into Berlin. Separate funding will be required to complete this short section.

In Waltham, the detailed design of the middle three-mile section is essentially complete. The city has stated it intends to fund path construction with Community Preservation Act funds. It is not clear when the city will issue a request for proposal for construction. The half-mile section connecting Waltham to Weston and the three-quarter mile section connecting the city to Belmont have not been designed.

Belmont to North Point Park

The detailed design of Phase I of the Belmont Community Path segment of the MCRT has been delayed for the past several months pending an MBTA permit to allow borings for soil samples in the area around the proposed pedestrian underpass. The 25% design is otherwise ready for approval by MassDOT. After that approval, work on the 75%-level design could get underway, and an application for construction funding could be submitted.



Summer 2020 MCRT construction in Wayland.

Letters Support Belmont Path

In March, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) received 232 comment letters. An MPO representative stated, “Collectively, these letters state high levels of support in the town and across the region for funding of the Belmont Community Path as soon as is feasible.”

Commenters cited benefits including increased safety for students, connections to Belmont Center, the library, and the regional path system, new commuting options, recreation, stormwater upgrades, and greenhouse gas emissions.

View the video where the MPO summarizes the comments at [bit.ly/BCF-MPO-Bike-Letters](https://bit.ly/BCF-MPO-Bike-Letters). The Belmont segment starts at 2:13:00.

The MCRT has been open for several years from Brighton Street in Belmont past Alewife Station to Davis Square and Lowell Street in Somerville. At Lowell Street, the MCRT joins the ROW of the Green Line Extension (GLX) ROW which runs to North Point Park. This MCRT section is expected to be completed this autumn. From North Point Park there is a connection over the Charles River lock to Boston.

Future Progress and Funding

According to Craig Della Penna, a long-time MCRT advocate, the MCRT is the signature shared-use trail project in the state, and Governor Charlie Baker wants to see significant progress. As a result, MCRT projects are likely to receive funding in a timely fashion. The proposed federal infrastructure bill also is likely to provide significant funding. The impetus for projects will still be local. Fortunately, there are active friends groups and town support for moving trail development forward all along the MCRT.

*John Dieckmann is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.*



# The Roadmap Climate and Clean Energy Law

By Representative Dave M. Rogers

While policy makers are confronted by a wide variety of pressing policy issues, few if any compare to the complexity and scale presented by our changing climate. Most of us are long since familiar with the worrisome data, but two recent comprehensive reports thoroughly define the challenge.

The most recent [National Climate Assessment](#), a quadrennial publication of the US Global Change Research Program, and the [October 2018 report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) presents a wide array of troubling findings. The IPCC report concluded that limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C (2.7°F) to prevent drastic impacts on global ecosystems was possible, but would require dramatic action to reduce emissions to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Confronted by this daunting landscape, the Massachusetts state legislature has passed [An Act Creating a Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy](#) (the Roadmap). The new law puts the Commonwealth on a path to net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 (the IPCC report standard) and specifies enforceable targets at five-year intervals.

While the actions of one state will never be adequate, and Massachusetts still needs to do more, the new law truly is a landmark breakthrough. Many of you wrote, called, submitted testimony, or just generally let it be known to me that addressing climate change is highly important to you. I appreciate and applaud your activism which helped drive this effort.

## Past Legislation on Climate and Energy

The legislature has taken several actions over the years to address climate and energy policy. In 2016, we passed [An Act to Promote Energy Diversity](#) which, among other policy innovations, addressed gas leaks and authorized 1,600 megawatts (Mw) of offshore wind.

In 2018, we passed [An Act to Advance Clean Energy](#) to change our state's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS). The RPS defines the amount of the Commonwealth's electrical power



Representative Dave M. Rogers

that must come from renewable energy sources; in 2018, the RPS was 13% of our electrical energy. The 2018 law doubled the annual required increase in the RPS from 1% to 2% from December 31, 2019, to December 31, 2029. When coupled with Connecticut's RPS increase in 2018, this action is likely to result in over 20,000 in-region jobs and nearly 2,000 Mw of additional [Class I renewable energy](#) by 2030.

The 2018 law also created a first-in-the-nation program known as the Clean Peak Standard to pair energy storage with renewable energy with the goal of making renewable energy available during our most expensive and highest-emitting hours of electricity consumption. According to the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources' (DOER) [2015 State of Charge report](#), peak hours only happen 10% of the year and yet result in 40% of electricity costs for Massachusetts.

As important as the 2016 and 2018 laws are, the action of the legislature most relevant to the new Roadmap law is the [Global Warming Solutions Act](#) (GWSA) passed in 2008. The GWSA required a reduction of GHG emissions in the state to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. However, given worsening data, activists,

experts, and legislators realized more consequential action was needed.

**Rather than achieving a target 80% below 1990 emissions level by 2050, the Roadmap legislation requires net-zero emissions by 2050.**

Rather than achieving a target 80% below 1990 emissions level by 2050 as required by the GWSA, the new standard established in the Roadmap legislation requires us to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

## The Roadmap

The Roadmap builds on our previous efforts. Following the 2018 law that substantially raised the rate of increase in the RPS standard, the Roadmap escalates the RPS yet again. Specifically, starting in 2025, the RPS will go from its current 2% annual increase to a 3% annual increase through December 31, 2029.

We also upped the authorization for offshore wind procurement by 2,400 Mw, bringing Massachusetts's total to 5,600 Mw. To put this number in perspective, 800 Mw is enough to power 400,000 homes; the total authorized offshore wind could power up to 3.2 million homes. The 800 Mw Vineyard Wind project is well on its way to becoming the first large-scale wind energy development off our shores, having received its final federal approval. After a difficult start, the offshore wind sector is poised for a boom in Massachusetts.

The Roadmap also enhances energy- and water-efficiency standards for many consumer goods and appliances via the Massachusetts Appliance Efficiency Act. Products subject to the act include commercial dishwashers, commercial fryers, and

commercial hot-food holding cabinets as well as sinks, faucets, showerheads, and handheld shower wands. The state will prohibit the sale, lease, or rental of these appliances unless they meet the new efficiency standards.

Buildings are one of the largest sources of GHG emissions. The Roadmap directs the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to develop a municipal opt-in specialized energy stretch code that includes a definition of a net-zero building. The new law also allows DOER to plan, develop, oversee, and operate the commercial sustainable energy program, along with the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency.

We also established key new standards for our state's 41 municipal light plants (munis), which serve 50 Massachusetts communities, including Belmont. The Roadmap requires the munis to achieve escalating targets for non-carbon-emitting energy: 50% by 2030, 75% by 2040, and 100% (net-zero) by 2050. Municipal light plants had previously been exempt from carbon emissions rules that apply to the larger investor-owned utilities. Now, plants must either demonstrate compliance or else pay to fund emissions reductions.

The natural gas explosions that rocked the Merrimack Valley in 2018 should never happen



Offshore wind turbine, Kent, UK.



again. The Roadmap sets out more stringent gas infrastructure safety requirements with increased penalties for violations. Penalties for violating gas safety regulations include fines of \$500,000 for each violation and up to \$10 million for a related series of violations. These limits can be doubled if the Department of Public Utilities determines that the violator has engaged in a similar violation during the previous three years.

The Roadmap also defines environmental justice communities based on income and other factors and requires the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs to provide these communities with advance notice and an opportunity to be heard regarding the environmental, health, and safety impact of proposed projects. Agencies acting under the authority of the secretary must consider environmental justice to reduce unfair or inequitable impacts. The Roadmap requires environmental impact reports for projects located within one mile of an environmental justice population or within five miles of an environmental justice population if the project is likely to damage air quality.

The Roadmap also requires the current SMART solar program to provide equitable access and



Home damaged by the 2018 Merrimack Valley gas explosions.

affordability to low-income households. We established a grant program to support solar adoption by nonprofits, and new solar incentive programs must address solar access and affordability for low-income communities.

To ensure more equality in our state’s environmental policy, our new law establishes a clean energy equity workforce and market development program within the Massachusetts Clean Energy Technology Center. This new program will maximize employment opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations in the clean energy industry.

The new policies and standards described above are only some of what our new climate and clean energy law will establish in the Commonwealth. The Roadmap includes smaller, less dramatic changes that will help grow and expand our green energy portfolio for years to come.

Building from the new sweeping law here in Massachusetts, we must make sure it is implemented effectively. Working with all of you, I will continue to advocate for new, innovative approaches to climate and energy policy and to urge my colleagues in the house to do the same.

*Dave Rogers represents the communities of Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge in the 24th Middlesex District of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.*

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We welcome contributions from Belmont and beyond on preserving natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety.

For more information, contact [bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com](mailto:bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com).

# Restoration Projects Approved for LTH

Belmont’s Lone Tree Hill projects planned for 2021

*By Jeffrey North*

The Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill approved plans and funding for three 2021 forest restoration and meadow management projects for Lone Tree Hill at a March 3 meeting. The Judy Record Conservation Fund is providing matching funds for the projects, for a total of \$22,000 for these initiatives.

## Area A1 Restoration Continues

In early spring, licensed field technicians trained in identifying invasive plant species will cut, mow, and apply plant-specific herbicide in the Area A1 woodland. They will combat Asian bittersweet, buckthorn, garlic mustard, black swallow-wort (*Cynanchum louiseae*), and lesser celandine, and at least one isolated patch of Japanese knotweed. This two-and-a-half-acre parcel was treated aggressively in early November 2020 (see “[Committee Battles Invasives at Lone Tree Hill](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, January 2021). Weed removal in Area A1 will be combined with two other programs: seeding an

annual cover crop of Canada wild rye (*Elymus canadensis*) to cover exposed soils for soil stability, and cut-and-dab herbicide application to remaining vines and invasive shrubs. The cut material will be left on site stacked in small piles to provide food, nesting, and shelter for wildlife.

Trained horticulturalists will return to Area A1 in mid-summer to continue the treatment of invasive plant species in the A1 woodland when they will again apply foliar herbicide to all invasive shrubs, resprouting vines, and black swallow-wort on the woodland edge. They will return in later summer to treat invasive species once again, specifically Japanese knotweed, black swallow-wort, and any resprouting plants that do not belong and which overrun native plant species. An autumn treatment of remaining and resprouting invasive plants should conclude activities for 2021 on this parcel.

## Invasive Plant Management in the Great Meadow

To maintain the ecological health of the Great Meadow at the heart of the Lone Tree Hill



Aerial view of Area A1.





Lone Tree hill priority areas.

property, field technicians will combat a host of invasive plants. Later in the season, when plants can be identified but have not yet produced mature seeds, field technicians will treat the meadow, optimizing for the control of black swallow-wort. In late spring, they will identify

the black swallow-wort and treat it in meadow areas, and midsummer will see follow-up treatment.

Black swallow-wort is particularly concerning as it can crowd out native vegetation including native milkweed, goldenrod, and other field grasses and wildflowers. Loss of native plant species reduces biodiversity and compromises the value of habitat to wildlife. Monarch butterflies lay eggs on swallow-wort, which their caterpillars cannot eat, leading to the caterpillars' death and threatening the species' survival.

### New Pollinator Meadow at Mill Street

A new pollinator meadow will be cultivated near the parking lot on Mill Street. The 6,400 square foot area near the bicycle rack just north of the parking lot will become a cafeteria for bees and birds.

After careful mowing, invasive plant species will be removed via hand-pulling and a foliar herbicide. Targeted species include Queen Anne's lace, garlic mustard, burdock, and mugwort. In the fall, the area will be seeded with a mix of pollinator-supporting native wildflower seeds, including anise hyssop, purple coneflower, blazing star, foxglove beardtongue, black-eyed Susan, smooth aster, and others.

This new mini-meadow will improve the visual aesthetics of the entrance and the area opposite Rock Meadow as it supports pollen-spreading flower- and vegetable-friendly flying assistants for the area including the victory gardens across the street.

The Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill and visitors to the conservation land are once again grateful for the continued financial support and sage guidance from the board members of the Judy Record Conservation Fund: Roger Wrubel, executive director; Eugene Record, treasurer; and Gary Clayton, former president, Mass Audubon.

Jeffrey North is managing editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter and the ex-officio Belmont Conservation Commission representative on the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill.

## Belmont's Invasive Plants: Asian Bittersweet

By Carolyn Bishop

Asian bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), also known as Oriental bittersweet, is one of the most beautiful and problematic invasive plant species in our area. In the past, bittersweet was commonly sold in wreaths and floral arrangements, which were especially popular in the fall due to bittersweet's brilliant yellow-shelled orange berries. Little did we know we were helping to spread a very invasive, damaging, non-native plant.

Asian bittersweet was brought to the United States in the 1860s as an ornamental and for erosion control. Now it is found from Ontario and Quebec south through the Great Lakes states, from New England to Florida, Louisiana, and the southeastern edge of the Great Plains.

Asian bittersweet smothers plants with its dense foliage as it strangles stems and trunks. In some areas, it blankets entire stretches of woodlands. For years, it was planted along roadways and highways for erosion control. Now you can see thick banks of Asian bittersweet all along major highways: for example, Route 2 heading west from Belmont. Its yellow leaves are notable in the fall.

The glossy, rounded leaves with finely serrated edges alternate on a twining vine which is often ignored because it is so attractive. The pretty vine turns into a thick, twining plant that climbs large trees and flourishes in the tree canopy, cutting off the sunlight to the host tree. The female plant's beautiful berries are enjoyed and spread by birds and animals. This plant seems to thrive in any soil, in sun or shade, and spreads by roots and berries.

Undisturbed, Asian bittersweet can grow large enough to strangle

trees and break branches, especially when ice and snow add weight to the mass of suffocating vines. Asian bittersweet can change the composition and structure and appearance of forested areas as it gradually kills and brings down trees large and small. This change is occurring in Belmont, as evidenced by tree death at Lone Tree Hill, Rock Meadow, Beaver Brook Reservation, along roads, and in the area between the high school and the railroad tracks.

The American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is not as aggressive and has red berries clustered at the end of branches. It is rare, succumbing to the more aggressive Asian bittersweet that can have orange berries growing at the leaf axils anywhere along the stems. Unfortunately, these plants can hybridize, making American bittersweet even rarer.

Controlling Asian bittersweet is challenging. The vine can grow to six inches in diameter and as long as 50 feet. Cutting vines down to relieve the weight on trees does not control the plant. Complete control requires different treatments and continued vigilance to manage regrowth.

### Digging

Digging up the young plants requires care to get out the rootlets that can sprout all along the



Asian bittersweet berries.





Asian bittersweet choking trees at Lone Tree Hill.

vine and vigilance to catch regrowth. Established vines are probably beyond the stage where digging can achieve control, and care must be taken not to damage the roots of the host tree.

### Cutting with Herbicide Treatment

The best time for this method is after July 1 so that the Asiatic bittersweet will internalize the herbicide during a season of active growth. The challenge is not harming the host tree while sawing through the vine and treating the cut surface with herbicide. Trained field technicians usually cut Asian bittersweet vines about shoulder height for convenience and then cut them again lower to the ground to speed the chemical's progress to the roots. The herbicide can be dyed to mark the treated vine. While herbicides are not generally recommended if alternatives exist, this approach minimizes risk

to other plants compared to using a broadcast foliar spray. Glyphosate (commercially known as Roundup) with a water base is commonly used.

### Slash and Treat

Depending on the diameter of the vine, a single slash is made for every inch in diameter and then treated with the herbicide. A two-inch-diameter vine would get two cuts on the vertical vine which are then treated with herbicide. The cuts must not girdle or sever the vine. This treatment can be done year-round as sap and other liquids flow up and down the vine seasonally.

### Basal Bark

This is a treatment with an oil-based herbicide "painted" on the vine and probably best done by a professional. It is for vines up to 6 inches in diameter and is best applied in the fall in temperatures higher than 50F. It takes up to six months to take effect.

When disposing of bittersweet plant parts, do not compost them or put them in yard waste; you could spread viable seeds and stems. Instead, wrap or bag them and put them in the trash.

Controlling Asian bittersweet is a major project, but it is worthwhile to save the mature trees that are threatened by this sturdy invasive. There are several sites on Belmont properties, such as Lone Tree Hill, where Asian bittersweet is flourishing. Control programs would be challenging but rewarding projects (see "Restoration Projects Approved" in this issue of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* and "[Committee Battles Invasives at Lone Tree Hill](#)," January/February 2021 BCF *Newsletter*.)

*Caroline Bishop has served on multiple town committees, including the Conservation Commission, and on a State Advisory Committee on Pesticides.*

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Tanks...tanks...tanks. The Select Board voted unanimously on February 8, 2021, to grant a license to replace the current underground fuel tanks with two 6,000 gallon above-ground tanks to be located between two existing DPW garages approximately 75 feet from our neighboring residential properties.

At the time this vote was taken, no detailed cost-benefit analyses had been provided for either the proposed tank installation or for any alternate tank configurations or sites. Several alternatives had been suggested by concerned residents, including my suggestion of (1) installing one smaller dual-compartment underground tank at either the same site or another more remote location in the DPW Yard; (2) consolidating our fueling operations with one of Belmont's neighboring communities, for example, Watertown, which maintains a fueling station less than two miles away; and (3) contracting with a Belmont gas station to provide fuel for all town vehicles.

Besides possibly being more cost-effective for the town, such alternatives would likely be more environmentally friendly by reducing our carbon footprint and providing greater flexibility as we transition to the use of more electric vehicles. Nevertheless, such alternatives were rejected, seemingly out of hand.

When the suggestion came up prior to the vote at the February 8 meeting to consider a suitable alternate site on the DPW property further away from the neighborhood, Jay Marcotte, the DPW director, stated that the decision had already been made in July to install the two above-ground tanks at the selected location and that it would be cost-prohibitive to install them anywhere else. Given that the public had never been informed about this decision, at either the August 2020 or any subsequent hearing or discussions, it is difficult not to conclude that those public hearings and discussions were held merely to comply with existing legal requirements and were not actual opportunities to provide meaningful input to the fuel tank decision.

Fast forward two months: in early April it was revealed that the long-awaited written proposal for the fuel tank installation had been submitted and that the proposed cost had nearly doubled, from the \$540,000 approved by Town Meeting last spring, to \$1.033 million.

Moreover, at the Capital Budget Committee (CBC) meeting on Thursday, April 8, two days after the \$6.4 million property tax override, described by officials as critical for maintaining even a minimal level of town and school services, had failed, Marcotte and assistant town administrator Jon Marshall suggested that there might be a way to fund this additional half-million dollars by using Enterprise Funds. (Imagine my surprise that the Select Board would not need to hold a bake sale to raise the needed half-million-dollar funding.)

Once again, we residents have asked for additional detail. As of this writing, we are waiting for Marcotte to obtain written proposals for both two underground tanks and one dual compartment underground tank.

Assuming the CBC approves the additional funding, Town Meeting will again be voting on this project at the June Town Meeting. Last year, Town Meeting members were mistakenly told that underground tanks were no longer permitted; in fact, that is not the case. This year's vote should provide an opportunity for a more thorough and fact-based discussion of the issue.

This is not over.  
Judith Ananian Sarno,  
Town Meeting Member, Precinct 3

To the Editor:

I just read the article in Belmont Citizen Forum about replacing the underground tanks "[Local Residents Challenge Tank Location, Planning](#)," BCF *Newsletter*, March/April 2021.)

As an alternative can we consider switching all Belmont vehicles to electric types and eliminate the need for storage tanks. I am sure this would be a lot more expensive in the short run but could save the town money over time. If feasible the best alternative would be for Belmont to issue a long-term municipal bond at today's very favorable rates to fund such activity.

Shashi Rajpal  
Oak Avenue, Belmont



# Belmont Roots

## Environmental News, Notes, and Events

By Meg Muckenhoupt



Now that the weather is at least occasionally balmy, local organizations are contriving new events that bear some resemblance to past years' experiences.

You may not get the thrill of the crowd cheering as you finish a race, or the warm glow of watching other concerned citizens clearing garbage from your favorite outdoor spaces, but you will get out of your home.

The Charles River Watershed Association's Annual Run of the Charles ([crwa.org/run-of-the-charles.html](http://crwa.org/run-of-the-charles.html)) has "a virtual twist" this year. Register for the fundraising 5K or one of five different paddling races any time before Sunday, May 23. You and your paddling team (if you have one) will track your own times and submit them to have a chance to win. The Mystic River Watershed is sponsoring a similar Virtual Herring Run and Paddle ([Mysticriver.org/calendar/2021/5/9/virtual-herring-run-and-paddle](http://Mysticriver.org/calendar/2021/5/9/virtual-herring-run-and-paddle)) any time between Sunday, May 9, and Sunday, May 23, but with a single 9-mile paddle route and a 5K run.



CRWA

If you're more of a slow-but-steady paddler, or not even a paddler at all, you can enter the 3 Rivers Challenge on the same site. Track every hour you spend on the Charles, Mystic, or Ipswich Rivers "paddling, walking, biking, fishing, or simply skipping rocks," and you could win any of a variety of prizes. Enjoying all three rivers wins you 30 bonus points.

You can even experience the wonders of spring fish migrations from the comfort of your own screen. The Mystic River Watershed Association is sponsoring a Herring Day of Counting ([Mysticriver.org/calendar/2021/6/11/herring-day-of-counting](http://Mysticriver.org/calendar/2021/6/11/herring-day-of-counting)) on Friday, June 11, 8AM-9PM. You can join legions of volunteers counting fish in recordings from the underwater "fish cam" at the Mystic Lakes dam. Count as many or as few videos as you wish. Videos only last somewhere between 20 seconds and

one minute, so you don't have to worry about missing something if you need to take a break to marvel at the awesome natural processes that drive thousands of herring to swim away from their ocean homes to the Mystic Lakes every year to spawn and die.



NATIONAL AQUARIUM

Alewife herring.

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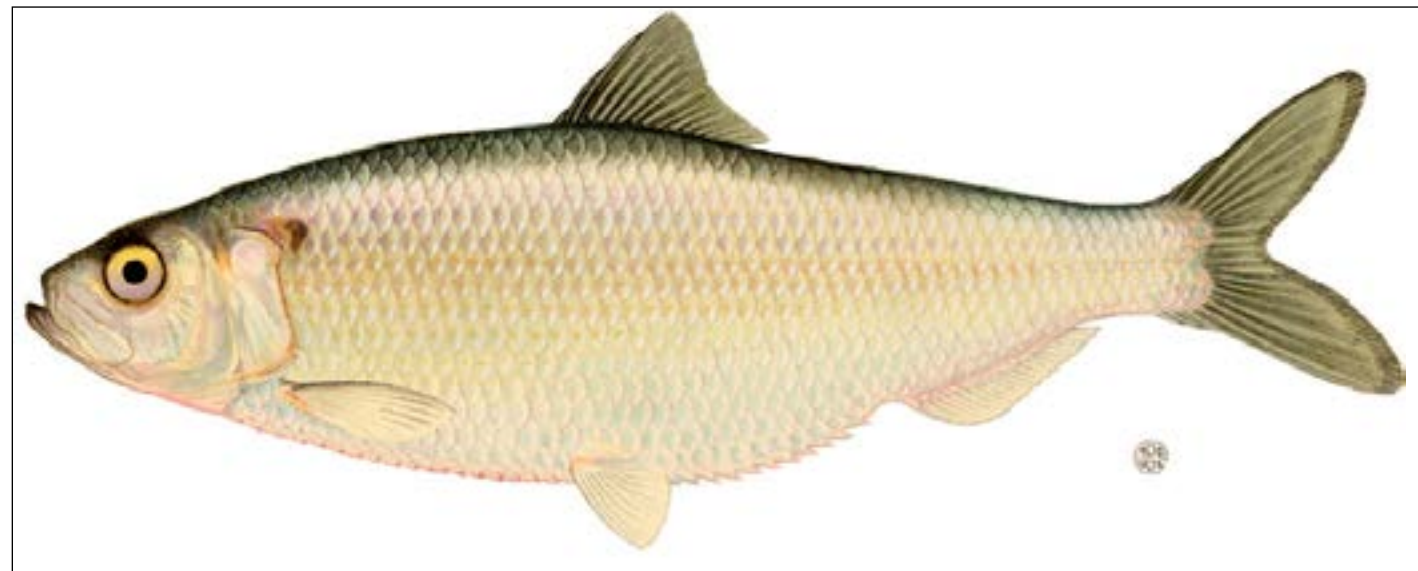
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Clay Pit Pond Deforestation . . . . . 1  
Belmont: One Year to Clean Waterways . . . 4  
Time to Fix the Town Clock . . . . . 7  
Four CPA Projects Proposed. . . . . 9  
Mass Central Rail Trail Comes Closer . . . . 11  
Climate and Clean Energy Law . . . . . 14  
LTH Restoration Projects Approved . . . . 17  
Belmont Invasives: Bittersweet . . . . . 19  
Letters to the Editor . . . . . 21  
Belmont Roots . . . . . 22

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