



Belmont Citizens Forum

What is the Future of the Royal Road Woods?

By Vincent Stanton, Jr.

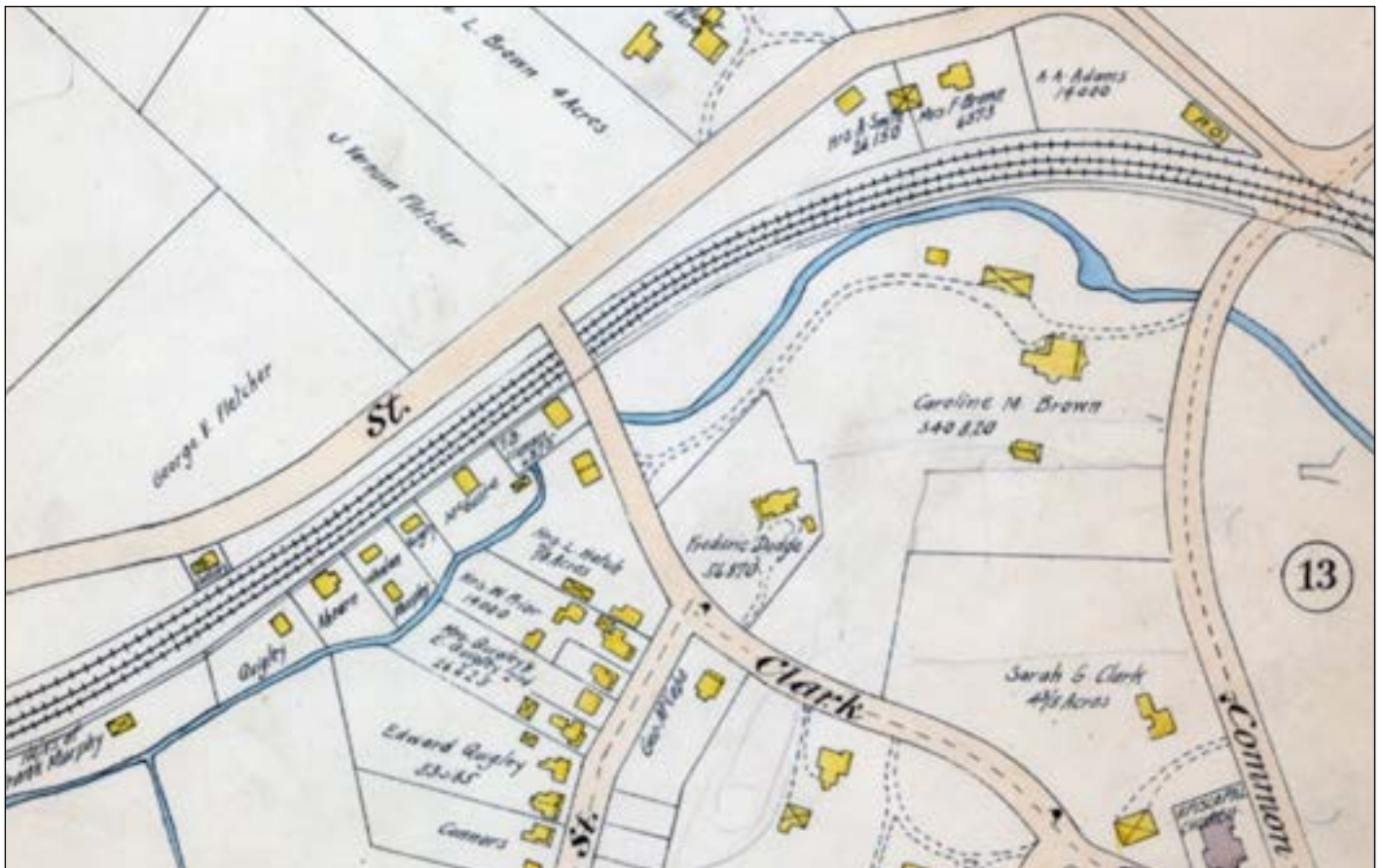
In 1844, when the Fitchburg Line was built, the Clark family owned a triangular lot bounded by the new train line, Common Street, and Clark Street. Wellington Brook ran along the north side of the triangle, just south of the Fitchburg Line. Royal Road and Dunbarton Street did not exist. After more than a century of Clark descendants the land was sold in 1931 to the Glendower Trust, a vehicle of real estate developers John Hubbard and Donald Kenyon.

Hubbard and Kenyon laid out plans for Dunbarton Street and Glendower Road (shortly after renamed Royal Road). The developers donated the land between Royal Road and the

Fitchburg Line to the town after the Selectmen, sitting as the Board of Survey, determined that houses should not be built over the town's emerging infrastructure along the railroad tracks. The Board of Survey voted that "if the petitioner deeds the land adjoining the railroad to the Town the subdivision will be approved."

In 1932, Belmont Town Meeting accepted the Royal Road land. The warrant article on which Town Meeting voted designated the Royal Road parcel "for park or playground purposes," but although the land is listed in Belmont's inventory of recreational land, the town has never devised a park or recreational use for it.

Instead, in November 1933, the town embarked on a massive federally supported



1898 map of Wellington Brook showing what is now the Royal Road Woods (upper right).

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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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Letters to the editor may be sent to
P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478 or to
bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com

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project to bury Wellington Brook from Pequotsette Park to Clay Pit Pond and beyond. This project was championed by J. Watson Flett, then chair of the Select Board, who made several trips to Washington, DC, at his own expense to successfully lobby Congress for funding. In 1936 the federal Work Projects Administration established an office in Belmont Town Hall which oversaw the Belmont project and others until 1942.

Thus, less than 18 months after being acquired by the town, the Royal Road parcel became the site of a major water infrastructure project. Some features of this project are still visible, including a short segment of the six-foot diameter Wellington Brook culvert. The parcel is also traversed from west to east by two sanitary sewer pipes built at the same time and dotted with 13 manholes.

In subsequent decades, the area became an informal dump. It is filled with construction debris, including large sections of granite curbing, mortared stone wall, and chunks of asphalt. On the north side of the property along the Fitchburg Line, used railroad ties are strewn about along with other railroad-associated trash including metal buckets and hardware used in the ongoing replacement of the Fitchburg Line tracks and ties.

Presumably most trees were cleared for construction of the Wellington Brook culvert and the two sewer lines. Over the ensuing 85 years, invasive species have asserted dominance over native species. The area around the pond is choked with Japanese knotweed, which also extends west over halfway to Clark Street. Other prominent invasives include Asian bittersweet, garlic mustard, burdock, and Norway maples. However, the land also contains older oak and elm trees, a few silver maples, mature sycamores, and attractive native plants such as Solomon's seal, and is host to pileated woodpeckers and red-tailed hawks, robins, and crows. Mallard ducks frequent the pond.

Features of the Royal Road Woods

The dirt jumps experiment (see "[Whither the Royal Road Woods?](#)" Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, January 2022) has created an opportunity to think more broadly about the potential

uses of the Royal Road Woods. Before discussing specific uses, however, it may be useful to review the central attributes of the parcel and the constraints on its use.

- It contains a pond, a bordering marshy area, and a buried stream, the makings of an ecologically rich and aesthetically pleasing site.
- It is contiguous with the Lone Tree Hill property across Pleasant Street, and deer and wild turkeys can be spotted there.
- It is a two-minute walk to Leonard Street. The area could be enjoyed by patrons of Belmont Center businesses, commuter rail users, and local residents. Pressure for transit-linked housing development may increase the number of residents in Belmont Center in the future.
- Royal Road is heavily traversed by bicyclists and pedestrians, including Belmont High School students. Many people walk on the unpaved northern side of the street. Better pedestrian and bicycle facilities could improve both their safety and user experience.

When the Belmont Community Path is built, it will attract even more pedestrians and bicyclists to the area as the community path will be accessible from Royal Road both via the existing Clark Street Bridge and the pedestrian underpass next to the Lions Club. A park would become a destination for community path users.

The trees lining both sides of Royal Road cool the street and create a welcome woodsy respite from the more urban Concord Avenue and Leonard Street. It was the secluded environment that made construction of the bike jumps possible.

Among the constraints on any use of the Royal Road land:

- The MBTA right of way extends between 29 and 54 feet south of the Fitchburg Line

eastbound track; the right of way is wider near the Clark Street Bridge and Belmont Center Station, narrower in the center. The MBTA property is littered with railroad ties and trash. The lack of any barrier between the tracks and the town-owned land creates a potential risk, and dirt jumpers have been observed on the tracks.

- Wetlands fall under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission.
- Lower Royal Road, particularly the north side, serves as a spillover parking zone for



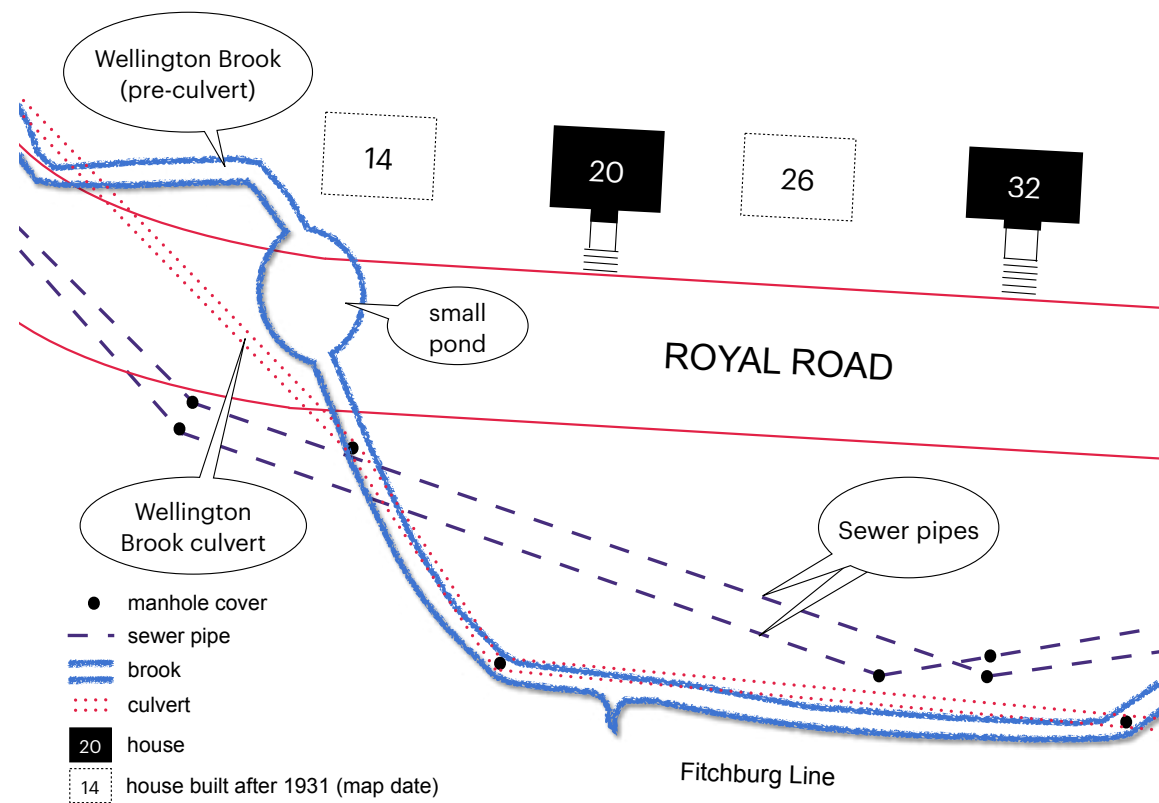
VINCENT STANTON, JR.

Ducks at the Royal Road Woods wetland.

events at the Lions Club, including the Christmas tree sale, and for Town Day in Belmont Center. That parking capacity needs to be preserved.

Possible uses of the Royal Road Woods

Though the parcel spans only 2.1 acres, it encompasses a variety of microenvironments from the open, wet east to the hilly middle to the flat, sunken west, and from the illuminated edge to the mostly shaded, secluded interior. What follows is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all possible uses of the land. A mixture of uses may achieve the most satisfactory outcome for the largest number of residents.



Drawing adapted from a 1931 Town Engineer's map showing course of Wellington Brook before and after construction of the buried culvert.

1. Dirt Jump Bike Park

There is a strong constituency for this use, and in particular for leaving it a kid-directed play area. However, the Select Board's concerns about liability are justified. The best course for dirt jumps proponents is almost certainly to try to persuade the town to go "all in," which is how similar bike facilities are being pursued by bike park proponents in Arlington and Waltham.

Such an undertaking might follow this sequence:

- Research by project advocates on similar parks, followed by
- Visioning process for the Belmont land and context, then seeking
- Endorsement of that vision by relevant committees (the Recreation Commission, the Conservation Commission),
- Approval by the Select Board,
- Appropriation of funds for park design by Town Meeting (probably Community Preservation Act funds),
- Park design,
- Approval of construction funding by Town Meeting (again likely CPA funds),

- Finally, construction

While it seems highly unlikely that the kids who built the dirt jumps would be around to enjoy the fruits of that drawn-out process, that doesn't mean it isn't worth pursuing for their younger siblings and future generations. The result of such a process would very likely be a fixed course, built to design specifications and not subject to substantive alterations. Ways in which kids could influence development of such a park are discussed below.

2. Daylighting Wellington Brook

The opening of old culverts to resurface streams is called "daylighting" (See "[Daylighting Streams Improves Water, Life](#)," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, May/June 2013). Daylighting requirements include adequate stream slope to ensure flow and space around the stream to rebuild banks, both of which appear to be in place along the Royal Road culvert.

It is well established that natural streams:

- improve water quality via exposure to air, sunlight, vegetation, and soil, all of which

help transform, bind up, or otherwise neutralize pollutants, and recycle nitrogen;

- foster complex riparian ecosystems in which insects, birds, aquatic animals, and water-loving trees, among other species, can thrive;
- slow water flow and reduce downstream flooding by providing a surface for water absorption (regenerating groundwater), thereby improving climate resilience;
- are pleasing to the senses and can be the focal point of parks and gardens.

Burying streams negates all those positive effects. In addition, the wetlands at the bottom of Royal Road, when flooded after heavy rain, currently drain into the street and flow into a sewer grate where the water feeds into the storm drain system, rather than the brook as it should. Daylighting would re-channel that water into Wellington Brook, reducing combined sewer overflow and ultimately the burden on sewer water pumping, treatment plants, and ratepayers.

Technical support for daylighting projects is provided by the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, which also has a small grant program that funds engineering and design for culvert replacement, dam removal, and daylighting projects. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and the US Environmental Protection Agency have also funded daylighting projects in the past. There are ongoing daylighting efforts across the Commonwealth, including projects in Boston, Lexington, Lincoln, Braintree, and Weymouth.

Important questions regarding the potential daylighting of Wellington Brook include:

- Some of it or all 1,000 feet of it?
- What course should the brook follow at the bottom of Royal Road?
- What is the condition of the 1930s culvert? Should daylighting be accompanied by partial culvert replacement?
- What degree of "naturalization" (landscaping, flood plain) of the surroundings should accompany the daylighting project?

From an ecological and aesthetic perspective, ideally all 700 feet of the culvert that passes through the Royal Road woods would be opened. However, from a cost perspective, and consid-

ering the broad support for a bike park—which would have to conform to wetlands laws—it may be more practical to consider opening the eastern 200 feet (approximately from 14 Royal Road to 26 Royal Road) as a first phase. About one quarter of that distance (50 feet) would traverse the existing wetlands, which are mostly located east of where the culvert turns under Royal Road at #14.

In one alternative, the daylighted brook would cross under Royal Road via the existing culvert across from 14 Royal Road. A more ambitious alternative would be to eliminate a segment of the westbound lane of Royal Road at the far east end of the woods, moving it south to join the eastbound lane on the south side of the War Memorial island (while keeping a stub road in front of the Lions Club to allow parking for commuter rail users). That would join the green space in front of the Lions Club to the Royal Road Woods, and permit Wellington Brook to traverse its original course, crossing in front of the Lions Club south of the war Memorial island before entering a short (about 45 foot) existing culvert beneath Common Street. (The war memorial was erected a decade before Wellington Brook was buried.)

Reinforced concrete pipe can last well over 100 years depending on the quality of construction and the environment it is exposed to. However, if inspection of the 1930s Belmont culvert shows it is nearing the end of its service life, the daylighting project could be combined with a culvert replacement beneath Common Street. In the event of culvert replacement, extending the daylighting project all the way to Common Street could be accomplished at a lower cost to Belmont taxpayers due to a higher likelihood of external funding.

Daylighting should be accompanied by an ambitious landscaping plan to realize the full aesthetic and ecological potential of a healthy Wellington Brook. It would be a transformative project, visible daily to hundreds of people.

3. Reforestation

In September 2021 a dense, diverse planned forest comprising about 50 native species was planted by a group of volunteers in a small patch of land (4,000 square feet), in Danehy

Park, Cambridge, using methods developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. The Miyawaki approach, widely implemented in Japan and several other Asian countries, starts with clearing all existing plants, often including invasive species, and is designed for rapid growth of forests up to 30 times denser than usual. The forests are expected to be maintenance-free after three years.

The mix of species, customized to the Cambridge site, included chokecherry, elderberry, maple, dogwood, sumac, aster, hazelnut, witch hazel, rose, and others. Species that attract pollinators and that produce food for birds and other animals are essential. Perhaps, in a nod to Belmont’s agricultural past, fruit-bearing plants could be incorporated into the mix.

The use of the western half for a bike park should not prevent planting more native species.

The survival and growth of each plant at the Danehy site will be tracked by volunteers. Such dense vegetation can enhance carbon capture, potentially providing a modest boost to Belmont’s climate goals, and can be visually striking.

Whether the Miyawaki approach is right for the Royal Road land is not clear. On a large scale it is not really compatible with walking paths. However, areas as small as 30 square feet have been planted. Regardless of the methods, the existing invasive species would need to be cleared to create space for a more diverse mix of native species.

4. Mixed Uses

The optimal use of the Royal Road land, at least for the present, may encompass a soft division of the Royal Road Woods, with a dirt bike park located west of 32 Royal Road (where the most widely used entrance to the dirt jumps is located), and a pocket park focused around Wellington Brook to the east, with native trees and a walking path. That division would give the bike jumps the widest and best-shielded territory where the vast majority of the jumps have been

built, while preserving for more contemplative visitors the smaller, but potentially more scenic area to the east, only steps from Belmont Center.

The use of the western half for a bike park should not prevent planting more native species—indeed, to the extent that the woodsy, secluded feel enhances the experience at the bike jumps, better landscaping should be viewed as an asset. The plan for the bike park should also include adequate earth for jump construction to halt the practice of excavating deep pits that undermine existing trees and create the potential for falls.

Inclusive Planning and Implementation

As noted above, one crucial element of the dirt jumps has been the kid-directed nature of its creation and operation. That won’t be possible in the same way with a planned park. For safety reasons, and to prevent the obliteration of all plants, there would be constraints on the scale and location of the jumps.

However there should be greater scope for kids to participate in the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan for the woods that includes not only the track layout and jumps but also landscape design, planting and maintaining trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses that enhance the bike park. The landscaping aspect may not appeal to all the kids that built the jumps, but it may draw in new participants with different interests. In short, the design and construction of the park should be managed to maximize youth participation. An article in the November 2021 *Newsletter* (“Urban Trees Improve Everyones’ Lives”) cited two local programs that engage teens in forestry projects.

The Select Board promised on May 5, 2021, to revisit the possibility of continuing the dirt jumps at the Royal Road Woods. As with all public land, an inclusive and deliberate planning process will be necessary to move any plan forward. The intent of this article is to expand the discussion of what is possible. See the online version at www.belmontcitizensforum.org for additional information and context.

Vincent Stanton, Jr. is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum. He has lived on Royal Road since 1992.

Royal Road Dirt Jumps Made Lives Better

By Erik Rosenmeier

My whole life I have walked, biked, and driven by a plot of land on Royal Road. I would see it on my way home from school, practice, or rehearsal, but, like most other people in the town, it never occurred to me that it could have any utility. That is, until the summer of 2020, when my friends and I brought our shovels, rakes, facemasks, and buckets down to that plot of land to build dirt jumps on which to ride our bikes. Most of us spent four to five hours a day there, meticulously crafting takeoffs and landings. It was our outlet, and the only one we had in a time when all other activities had been shut down.

The community surrounding what was becoming known as “the jumps” got bigger and bigger. In just a few months, regular visitors to the jumps had expanded beyond my circle of friends. Little kids were riding the smaller jumps on bikes. By the end of the summer, a forgotten place had been transformed into a space bursting with friendship, inventiveness, and joy.

In late April of 2021, concerns about people making noise at night, the jumps’ proximity to houses, and worries about the town’s liability for injuries started to grow. When a noise complaint was filed by a resident of Royal Road, the town sent people to destroy what we had built.

Though I think these concerns were valid, I feel there were better actions that could have been taken to address them. A curfew could have been imposed on the area could have put ended noise at night while letting people use the jumps during the day. As for liability, there are plenty of public spaces designed for people to do dangerous things that absolve the town’s liability



for injury, like skateparks. The jumps could become something akin to a skatepark, a place that isn’t the potential source of a lawsuit, where people go to exercise, spend time with each other, and have fun. Both parties can win in this situation. Destroying the jumps is not how.

My friends and I are still fighting to get the jumps back in all the ways we can, and through this fight I have begun to realize what we had actually created. We started an online petition that has been signed by 984 people. To organize ourselves and our resources, we held a Zoom meeting attended by all different types of people, from members of the New England Mountain Biking Association to a little boy, no older than seven, who unmuted his mic to tell us what the jumps meant to him, how happy he was to go there each day, and what a difference they made in his life. We weren’t just building dirt jumps, we were building a space where people could come to be happy, to be a part of something.

As with most things in local politics, things haven’t moved quickly.

No official decision has been made, and the jumps have been left to rot while we wait. What was once an epicenter for joy, creativity, and togetherness is now in ruins, the empty lot it was before any jumps were built. Still, I have hope. My friends and I believe the jumps could still one day be the beam of light they were to me and so many others, but this time with a set of rules that works for everyone in the Belmont community.

To those who have read this far, the fact you are listening means more than you know. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to email me: erikrosenmeier@gmail.com

Erik Rosenmeier is a senior at Belmont High School.

VINCENT STANTON, JR.

Select Board Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Each year, the Belmont Citizens Forum asks Select Board candidates questions about issues facing our town. This year, Roy Epstein and Jeffrey Lasseter provided answers. They were limited to 1,000 words.

What do you consider the top three concerns for the town after the challenges of the past two years?

Epstein:
The operating budget, including funding of essential capital projects, remains my chief concern. The changes last month that allow Belmont to make use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds do not address our structural deficit. We cannot ignore the fiscal cliff that will be there when the ARPA funds are exhausted, likely no later than FY2025. Second, I want to help achieve construction of both a new library and a new skating rink. Financing these projects are key challenges. My third issue is that we all set an example of civility and respect in our public discourse. Stress that seems to be due to Covid has led to distrust of local government and even accusations of elected officials and town employees acting in bad faith. My Select Board colleagues and I will always try our best to be models of probity and to live up to our oath of office, which requires us always to act in the best interest of the town.

- Lasseter:**
- Improve communication/transparency from town leadership to the citizenry in Belmont.
 - Make town leadership 100% accountable for financial expenditures and disclosures on budgetary issues to the public.
 - Improve town leadership's commitment to education, business, senior citizen's issues and infrastructure.

What changes to transportation infrastructure would help Belmont move better and more efficiently?

Lasseter:
Repair and pave the town roads.

Epstein:
Building the bike/pedestrian tunnel under the tracks at Alexander Avenue as called for in the Community Path would be the single biggest improvement by far. Reengineering some of the most dangerous street intersections is also important. The Mill St./Concord Ave./Winter St. junction will be addressed first. Design work to improve vehicle flow and increase bicycle safety should start in the next year. The Select Board and the Transportation Advisory Committee are working on a revised bike lane plan for Concord Avenue that should improve the current system. Belmont Light is also planning to install more electric vehicle chargers around town that will be valuable for renters, who often are not able to make these improvements where they



Roy Epstein

RYUJI SUZUKI, BEAUPIX STUDIO PHOTO

live. Belmont residents drive about 300 electric vehicles but we should make it easier for more to do so. Accessible platforms at the Waverley and Belmont Center MBTA stations would also make it easier for people with mobility challenges to ride the train.

What steps would you take to ensure that the design and construction of the Community Path proceed efficiently?

Epstein:
The 25% design plans were submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) last fall. MassDOT's feedback will largely determine what design changes are needed. My main concern is that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the regional funding agency, may not have the



Jeffrey Lasseter

COURTESY OF JEFFREY LASSETER

\$17 million now estimated as needed for Phase 1 construction (tunnel plus path from Clark St. to Brighton St.). The Community Path Project Committee (CPPC) has primary responsibility in Belmont for this project. I would urge the CPPC to have a contingency plan to accomplish at least the tunnel, if the MPO initially cannot fund all of Phase 1. Phase 2 (Clark St. to the Waltham line) will be a very significant challenge both in terms of engineering and acquiring the necessary right of way. The Select Board will consider appointing additional members to the CPPC to increase planning capacity for Phase 2.

Lasseter:
Clearly the subject of completing the community path has been initiated and received the necessary support. The key to the question posed is how to proceed efficiently, and the answer is that leadership in the town needs to make commitments, ensure the commitments are executed, and be accountable to the ensuing results that have been promised to the public.

What are your concerns related to climate change, and what steps should the town take to address those risks?

Lasseter:
Climate change should be a variable and focal point in all the decisions undertaken by town leadership. Clearly the town can incorporate various strategies to address climate change and make positive decisions that benefit the town and support initiatives that address climate change concerns.

Epstein:
See also my next answer. Belmont Light is on track to get credit for 100% renewable power in the near future. That will be a major success. The town can review energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission standards for new construction and remodeling. This relates particularly to home heating, which is one of our largest sources of these emissions. Belmont already has nearly the highest proportion of houses with solar panels in Massachusetts, which followed adoption of the Belmont Light solar tariff that I helped develop. As chair of

the Traffic Working Group—Middle and High School, I am concerned by both the number of students who drive/are driven to school, and how long parents idle their engines waiting to pick up students. I am hopeful that coordination with the school department and dialog with parents can change this behavior.

How would you guide the town toward needed improvements in infrastructure, such as building modernization, electrification, and green infrastructure solutions for stormwater management and water quality compliance?

Epstein:
In addition to reviewing local energy efficiency and GHG emission standards, new town buildings should meet zero net energy standards, assuming the cost is not prohibitive. Belmont Light is partnering with several public power associations to offer programs to encourage

further strategic electrification. Work should begin soon to correct the flooding problems on Trapelo Rd. at Mill St., which has been a long-standing issue. We have made great progress replacing century-old water mains. We are on track to meet the EPA and DEP deadlines for water quality compliance for storm sewers. However, completely relining the sanitary sewers to eliminate leakage into the stormwater system is a longer term project. The town is committed to doing that important work.

Lasseter:
All the aforementioned issues in the question are directly related to available funding and appropriations of resources. The town leadership needs to be hyperaware of the needs of the citizenry, and work with the community to create solutions and achieve measurable results that address those specific issues.



In 2021, Governor Baker signed into law a new measure that will require cities and towns with MBTA stations to permit apartment construction within 0.5 miles. How should Belmont be moving ahead with its housing production plan?

Lasseter:
Any type of new housing, especially apartment buildings, needs to be a collaborative effort between the town leadership and the immediate community in Belmont where the proposed construction will who begin to unfold.

Epstein:
This new mandate poses significant challenges, given how densely Belmont is already built up and how even denser development will increase demand for town and school services. We need to learn more about the specific requirements in the Baker plan in terms of timeline, development size, and the procedures that developers and property owners must follow. Regarding the affordable housing production plan, the McLean project currently before the Planning Board will give Belmont a two-year 40B safe harbor. We should examine possibilities to rebuild/expand existing properties like Belmont Village. Finding satisfactory strategies for meeting these mandates will require extensive input from the public.

How would you support efforts for restoration and maintenance of town open spaces and parks, especially given their increased popularity and use in 2020/21?

Epstein:
I am proud to have led the Select Board effort to eliminate rats in Grove St. Park and to improve trash pickup on weekends in the parks and business districts. I hope the Community Preservation Act project for Payson Park Playground will pass Town Meeting this spring, which combined with the work on Town Field, will mean our principal parks will be renovated. The area around Clay Pit Pond needs some attention. We need a permanent funding solution for mowing in Rock Meadow. I want to make sure dog waste is properly removed by pet owners in all of our open spaces.

Lasseter:
Supporting the available amenities throughout Belmont is an imperative issue. Restoring, maintaining and monitoring the multiple parks for safety of operational usage is a responsibility of the town leadership. With funding available, more attention given to the open spaces and parks in Belmont is a good thing, and should be encouraged for residents of all ages

Briefly describe your vision for preserving and enhancing Belmont’s quality of living, learning, working, and connecting.

Lasseter:
My vision for preserving and improving the quality of life in Belmont is a recipe of getting community input from the different districts and using that input to make critical decisions for the town of Belmont.

The underlying common denominator in all these questions, issues and programs is that the people of Belmont need more information and accountability from their elected leaders. These leaders need to gather input from the affected persons in the areas of the services/projects that were tagged to lose funding to achieve desired results. Any and all expenditures on public spaces need to be available to the public for external review.

Epstein:
Looking ahead, I hope for the same things when you asked me this in my first campaign. Our schools must remain outstanding, and the roads and sidewalks should be repaved. I would like people to walk and bike more and to reduce their carbon footprint with heat pumps and electric vehicles. There would be less cut-through traffic if the Fitchburg line had more frequent service. Our town buildings and parks should be in excellent condition. Seniors should have attractive new housing options. Belmont has an incredibly wide range of viewpoints and priorities. The constant challenge for the Select Board is to find ways to bring the community together in a shared vision of the future.

CPC Recommends Funds for Seven Projects

By Juliet Jenkins

The Belmont Community Preservation Committee (CPC) voted to recommend funding seven projects totaling \$2,058,554 for FY 2023, to be voted on at the annual Town Meeting, through the Community Preservation Act (CPA) current funding round. Following the CPC’s public hearing and vote on December 8, 2021, the proposed projects were filed with the Belmont Town Clerk and set for voting by Town Meeting in May 2022.

Projects supported with CPA funding must create or preserve affordable housing, historic resources, open space, or recreational facilities.

All CPA proposals are developed and created by Belmontonians, and each project directly serves our community. Since residents voted to adopt the CPA in 2010, Belmont has awarded over \$10 million to support 56 projects (bit.ly/Belmont-CPC-Projects) across the town. There have been 25 recreation projects, one open space project, nine affordable housing projects, and 21 historic preservation projects.

The following projects are recommended for funding in FY 2023. They include four recreation, one affordable housing, and two historic preservation projects:

Affordable Housing

\$400,000 for pre-development funding for the revitalization of Sherman Gardens

Sponsor: Belmont Housing Authority (BHA)

This project will allow the BHA and the town to preserve and renovate the 80 existing affordable housing units that are obsolete because of a lack of accessibility features, under-sized units, and unmet capital needs. The BHA has contracted with the Cambridge Housing Authority to serve as a consultant for the redevelopment. The proposed redevelopment would ensure that all units are served by an elevator and would create opportunities for more adequate and varied community spaces, both indoor and outdoor, to encourage social activities and improve access to necessary services.

Historic Preservation

\$26,100 for the restoration of Belmont’s historic tower clock

Sponsor: Belmont Citizens Forum and the First Church of Belmont Unitarian Universalist

This project will restore the historic clock in the tower of the church so that it will tell the correct time and ring on the hour. The tower is a central feature in Belmont Center, standing adjacent to the town green with its magnificent copper beech tree and its historic Wellington train station. This application seeks to restore the clock’s function, which will require completely disassembling the movement of the clock and its gears, cleaning, and reassembly.

\$60,000 for a Belmont Cemetery Preservation Master Plan with treatment

Sponsor: Belmont’s Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Cemetery Commission



Fallen headstone in Belmont Cemetery.

BELMONT CEMETERY COMMISSION

The DPW and Cemetery Commission will hire a qualified consulting firm to prepare, and present a comprehensive preservation and restoration master plan with treatment recommendations consisting of both narrative and graphic elements for Belmont Cemetery. This would include hardscape items as well as landscape elements. Town staff manage and maintain the perpetual care obligation but do not have the skills to properly evaluate, preserve, and restore historically significant items and landscape elements.

Recreation Facilities

\$40,000 project for Grove Street baseball and basketball reconstruction

Sponsor: Town of Belmont, Friends of Grove Street Park, and Belmont Youth Baseball and Softball.

The project will reconstruct the three youth baseball fields, reconstruct the basketball court, and address drainage issues in those areas. The growing popularity of youth and adult sports in town makes Grove Street Park an important piece of infrastructure in Belmont. Rehabilitating these assets will enable the community to stay active safely.

\$200,000 for Belmont Community Path Phase 2

Sponsor: Community Path Project Committee

The Belmont Community Path will connect the Fitchburg Cut-Off Bike Path at Brighton Street, which provides a crucial link to the MBTA Alewife T Station and other multiuse paths beyond. The goal of this application is funding to start design work on Phase 2 of the path, which will connect the western terminus of Phase 1 at the Clark Street pedestrian bridge with the Mass Central Rail Trail in Waltham, just beyond the MBTA Waverley Station. This project is needed to provide convenient, safe, off-road connections to important commercial, educa-



Cracks in the Grove Street Playground pavement.

BELMONT CPC

tional, and recreational destinations in Belmont for walkers and bicyclists of all ages.

\$250,662 for Town Field playground and court restoration

Sponsor: Friends of Town Field Playground

In 2016, the Friends identified the need to replace the outdated playground equipment with modern and more accessible equipment suitable for a wider range of ages and to repair the basketball and pickleball courts. Phase 1 design and Phase 2 build funds were granted by CPC. Because of the pandemic, inflation, supply chain issues, and labor shortages, all bids for the construction came in higher than the appro-

priated funds. Both the playground and courts are intensively used recreation spaces for children and adults. The Friends of Town Field Playground, the DPW, and the community worked with Waterfield Design Group to come up with a new design.

\$1,031,792.72 for Phase II construction plans for the revitalization of Payson Park

Sponsor: Friends of Payson Park

This application is the second phase of a two-phase plan for improved safety and access at Payson Park. This phase includes final design and construction costs to implement the design created by the Activus, Inc. landscape architectural design firm. Payson Park is one of the last two Belmont parks to be updated. Currently, the steps on two entrances are hazardous due to deterioration. The field used for t-ball and soccer lessons for the youngest players is uneven and full of ruts and protruding rocks. The benches, picnic tables, and playground equipment are all past their useful lives, and they are broken or cracked in many places. Plans include a new multiuse accessible gathering area as well.

Final Review and Last Steps

Before Town Meeting in May, there will be multiple public meetings, including review of the projects by the sponsoring organizations, continuing refinements as necessary at upcoming Community Preservation meetings, and public meetings by the Warrant Committee, the Select Board, and the Capital Budget Committee to review the projects. Questions? Please contact Matthew Haskell, budget analyst in the Town Administrator's office, at mhaskell@belmont-ma.gov, or connect with this author or any CPC committee members.

To read the complete applications, see: bit.ly/BCF-CPC-23. For more information about the Community Preservation Act, visit bit.ly/CPC-Belmont. To learn more about the process



The First Church clock tower.

JEFFREY NORTH

of applying for Community Preservation Act funding, visit the CPC's CPA annual plan, especially the section titled Standard Application Process. at bit.ly/CPA-Funding

Juliet Jenkins is a new at-large appointed member of the Community Preservation Committee and a Precinct 3 Town Meeting member.

Historic Clock Project Seeks Donations

By Michael Flamang

The First Church in Belmont Unitarian Universalist is seeking funds and a qualified contractor to restore the historic clock in the church's tower on the town green to functioning condition. In December, the Community Preservation Committee approved a grant application for the repair funds and included it in the projects to be considered by Town Meeting. (See "CPC Recommends Funds for Seven Projects," p. 12 in this issue.)

There is a great deal of precedent in our area for cities and towns successfully using Commonwealth-designated Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to implement this type of project in religious buildings. Some examples are:

In Cambridge, the CPA funds are administered in part by the Cambridge Historical Commission. Annually, the Commission distributes about \$600,000 to nonprofit institutions and affordable housing projects in the city. The city's list of preservation grants to institutions numbers 157 projects to date, and 94 are religious structures. The Massachusetts Historical Commission (using National Park Service funds) has participated in some of these projects along with the city. Cambridge supports these projects which contribute to the public good.

In Newton, \$1.43 million in CPA funds have been combined with funds from the National Fund for Sacred Spaces and private fundraising to restore the bell tower structure and bell of the Grace Episcopal Church in Newton Center.

Concord granted \$75,000 from CPA funds in 2020 to the First Parish in Concord to restore the church's historic belfry and clock. The project included painting the belfry, repairing and gilding the dome, and restoring the four clock faces and the weathervane.

The clock in the tower of the First Church in Belmont was purchased by Town Meeting in 1889. Since that date, the church has housed the town clock. The clock must be wound manually every seven days. Every year, the town paid a stipend to the winder of the clock, usually the sexton of the church. In 1890, the annual

stipend was \$36. The amount was raised over the years. By the 1990s, it had been raised to \$160 per year.

Since its installation, the clock has required only minor repairs. Around 1990, the clock movement needed service. Town resident Martin Cohen, a long-time Town Meeting member, activist, and amateur horologist, as a volunteer disassembled the movement and carried all the parts outside to the town green. He spread a cloth on the grass and laid out every part on the cloth. He cleaned and lubricated the parts. Then he carried the parts back up into the tower, reassembled them, and started the clock. Cohen also served as the clock winder for many years. [Cohen, now 94 and living in assisted living in Cambridge, is still puttering with watches and repairing mechanical items for his fellow residents - *Ed.*]

Another notable clock winder was David Reid, who was also sexton of the church in the early 1950s. At that time, the annual stipend from the town was \$50. Gerald Johnson followed Reid. Gerald's son Jerry now cares for the historic church and the clocks in the steeple on the Billerica town green. Billerica used CPA funds to restore that historic steeple following a fire.

In December 2020, First Church spent \$6,000 to have a carpenter construct a new ladder with handrails and an intermediate landing to access the movement in the tower.

The FY2023 project cost for renovating the clock is estimated to be \$29,000. A successful application from a nongovernment applicant involves having the private applicant raising at least 10% of the project cost or \$2,900.

Neighbors and friends who wish to support the effort to fix this historic clock can send donations to the administrator of the First Church in Belmont UU, 404 Concord Ave, Belmont 02478. Checks can be made out to the First Church in Belmont UU with a note on the memo line to direct the funds to the "Friends of the Historic Clock."

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

Healthy Lawns Works to Limit Leaf Blowers

Select Board agrees to consider a bylaw

By Barry Kaye, Dean Hickman, Ruth Smullin, and Thomas Nehrkorn

Gasoline-powered leaf blowers are not only a nuisance to anyone trying to enjoy a peaceful time in their backyard or a neighborhood walk, but they also present real risks to human health, most significantly to the operators. These are detailed in previous BCF articles published on this subject (See “[Leaf Blowers Damage Belmont’s Environment](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, September/October 2021.) The town is trying to address this issue.

Healthy Lawns Initiative

Sustainable Belmont recently started hosting a Healthy Lawns Initiative to promote more environmentally sustainable lawn care practices. Currently, we are focused on developing a new town bylaw to restrict the use of gas-powered leaf blowers, with 15 volunteers working to advance four interrelated goals:

- Reduce or eliminate gas-powered leaf blowers
- Promote cleaner, quieter, and safer alternatives and practices
- Codify and harmonize Belmont’s policies with those of neighboring towns through a new bylaw
- Upgrade Belmont Department of Public Works’ (DPW) equipment and practices to best-in-class in terms of noise, environmental impact, and operator safety

We are working to achieve these near-term goals through multiple initiatives:

- Residential action to raise awareness, identify alternatives, create demand, and build a fact-based case to support action by the Select Board
- Elected official action to help craft meaningful bylaws or other actions
- Municipal action to help DPW identify alternatives and transition to quieter, cleaner, safer equipment
- Community action to coordinate with neighboring towns

Sustainable Belmont supports the Select Board’s initial efforts to create a bylaw and recommends movement on a bylaw similar to the one Lexington’s Town Meeting has already approved and which they will put to a town-wide vote in March.

- No use of leaf blowers from June through September
- No use of leaf blowers on Sundays
- Limited hours of use, for example, 8 AM to 5 PM
- Phase-out of gas-powered leaf blowers by 2025
- Request landscapers to provide OSHA-required safety equipment to crews

Leaf Blower Bylaw History

The Select Board met in spring 2021 to discuss a draft bylaw proposed by Select Board member Roy Epstein. This bylaw was subsequently modified by Select Board member Adam Dash after a discussion in which two landscapers strongly opposed any meaningful regulation. The motion was tabled. At residents’ request for another public forum on the topic, the Select Board voted 2 to 1 in favor of having another public forum on January 25.

Sustainable Belmont publicized the meeting by reaching out to sympathetic residents, neighboring communities, and landscapers. The committee also put together an informational flier and distributed it to several Belmont-based landscaping companies and supportive organizations’ email lists.

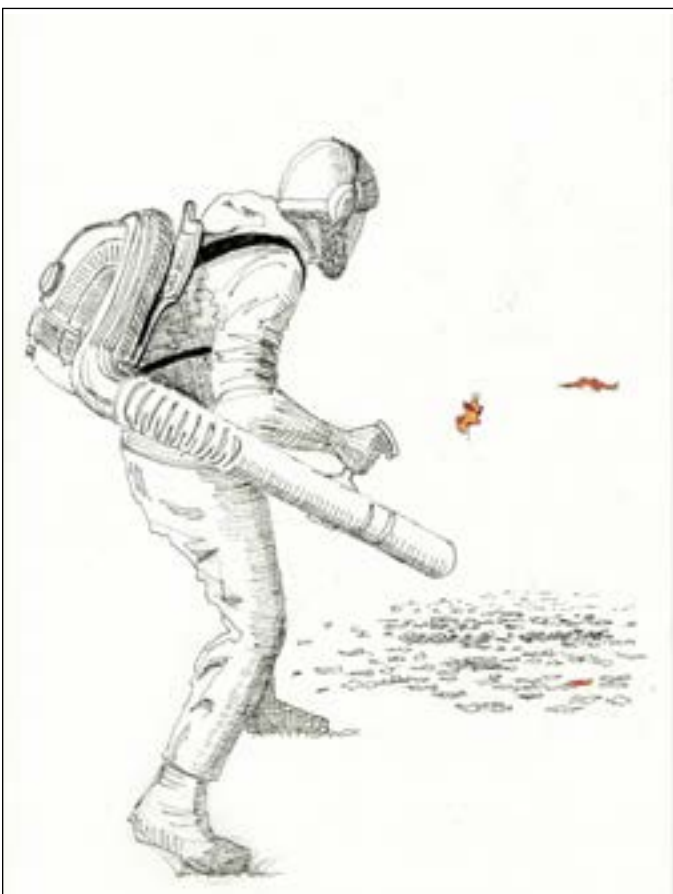
More than 100 people attended the forum, and 52 attendees spoke. Thirty-four residents supported a bylaw that limits the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. Their concerns were the painfully loud and constant noise in their neighborhood, the resulting inability to enjoy their yards, the pollution from the gasoline, the toxic elements in the dust blown up by the machines, and the effects of those noxious elements on the workers who are often using them without protection for their ears, eyes, and lungs. One homeowner’s landscaper was willing

to switch to rakes instead of leaf blowers at no extra cost.

Opposing arguments included issues raised by landscapers concerned about the efficacy of electric blowers and the slowness of hand raking. They were also concerned about increased costs associated with buying new electric equipment and extra time needed to use rakes. However, several landscapers stated that they are willing to compromise.

Some homeowners didn’t want anyone telling them what kind of tools they should or should not use, and they were concerned that this was the beginning of a “slippery slope” toward banning other gas-powered outdoor tools. Some requested that the town DPW abide by whatever rules the landscapers will have to follow. At the end of the meeting, the Select Board indicated they would consider all the input and deliberate at an upcoming meeting.

The Select Board made clear that they are looking for consensus—a general town-wide agreement that this important issue needs to be addressed. There was also some concern that their agenda was already full. We at Healthy Lawns Belmont have shared the compelling facts



with them. Without public support, however, the Select Board is less likely to take this issue on and draft a bylaw that would then go to Town Meeting.

Asked if they would provide rake and/or electric blower services now for customers who request it, some local landscapers said they already offer such service as standard, others are transitioning, more indicated they would offer such service if residents request such service, and many have yet to respond.

Sustainable Belmont would like to address landscaping businesses’ concerns by opening a dialogue. There are opportunities available to ease the transition to cleaner, quieter, and safer alternatives for homeowners and landscapers. The Belmont Light Department offers rebates for homeowners for conversion to electric yard equipment, and a bill pending in the legislature ([H.868](#)) would subsidize conversion for small businesses. Some landscapers have anticipated the future, and have successfully converted or are converting to electric and rake service. We would seek to facilitate this trend in the interest of all residents and businesses.

How to Help

You can send a brief email to the Select Board telling why you favor limits on gas-powered leaf blowers. Their email address is selectboard@belmont-ma.gov.

For more information on the Healthy Lawns Initiative, see www.sustainablebelmont.net/healthy-lawns-belmont.

If you use a landscaping service, ask if they offer electric leaf blower or rake service, and let them know you are interested in such service. We plan to list the growing number of such services on our Healthy Lawns web page.

If you wish to upgrade to electric equipment, check Belmont Light Department’s web page for available rebates when you convert.

To volunteer with Sustainable Belmont, please email sustainablebelmont@gmail.com

Barry Kaye is a Belmont resident and primary care physician at Mass General Brigham in Everett. Dean Hickman is chair of Sustainable Belmont, and Ruth Smullin and Thomas Nehrkorn are members of Sustainable Belmont.

A Tribute to a Conservationist

By Anne Paulsen, Martha Moore, and Heli Tomford with contributions from neighbors Nanny Almquist, Jacquie Dow, and other Belmont friends and committee colleagues who knew and worked with Joan Campbell.

When Joan Louise Campbell died on December 15, 2016, Belmont lost a citizen whose life exemplified devotion to her community, especially its open spaces. Joan moved to Belmont with her parents in the late 1930s, and except for some years working as a librarian in Seattle, she lived in the same Prospect Street home for most of her 92 years. We are honoring Joan Campbell because of her involvement in town affairs and for her philanthropy. Joan left a bequest of \$330,000 to Belmont to benefit Lone Tree Hill, the town-owned conservation land on historic Wellington Hill, adjacent to McLean Hospital and Highland Cemetery.

Almost to the end of her long life, Joan was an involved community activist in Belmont. She was a longtime member of the local League of Women Voters (LWV), acting as its liaison to the state LWV, and used that position to inform our community of state actions for fair housing. Joan was a regular contributor to the Fair Practices Newsletter, a publication on fair housing issues in Belmont and statewide. Between 1966 and 1968, she was president of the Belmont League of Women Voters and continued as an active member for decades. She also served in leadership in the Belmont Garden Club, as a Town Meeting member, and as a patron and advocate for the Belmont Public Library.

When the town was informed in 1996 by McLean Hospital that it wished to develop much of its property, Joan stepped to the forefront of the McLean Open Space Alliance, a citizens' group organized to preserve as much of the extensive open space on the property as possible. With her characteristically indefatigable spirit, she expressed her concerns about excessive development on land that many local citizens, with



Pine Allee, Lone Tree Hill

hospital permission, had become accustomed to using for walking, birding, and cross-country skiing in winter. Joan understood the value of the forested areas, open meadows, and areas of water in providing habitats for wildlife as part of the Western Greenway, and for their importance to current and future residents.

Already in her seventies then, Joan's proactive stance, along with deep knowledge of her local community and the natural world in general, was invaluable to the conservation effort. She diligently gathered information from many different sources, attended meetings with developers, and spoke up when the opportunities

arose. One McLean Open Space Alliance member recalls Joan "as a diminutive person with strong opinions which she was not reticent to express."

Those of us who knew Joan remember her as an independent and determined woman. When her car succumbed to old age, she declared she would walk instead or use public transportation. Wearing her signature black raincoat and hiking boots, with a pack on her back, Joan walked long distances to shop or to the various meetings she attended day or evening (only occasionally accepting a ride home if one went late). Among many other interests, Joan was an ardent birder. While walking, she often sported a pair of binoculars around her neck to seize any opportunity to spot a resident or visiting bird.

A smart and capable person, Joan recognized the importance not only of the acquisition of open space for future generations but also of the critical need to maintain land for wildlife habitat and for residents to enjoy through passive recreation. With the town's acquisition of Lone Tree Hill came ownership responsibilities and the necessity to find funding for annual maintenance requirements such as mowing to preserve meadow areas and dead-tree removal along with ongoing site care to eliminate invasive species, refresh the Pine Allee, and provide safe trails.

Today, the town's Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill oversees the site. This committee of nine includes representatives

from the town and McLean Hospital and a representative from the Trustees of the Reservations. Upkeep of the property is supported by rent payments from the cable tower on site and both funding and volunteering by local groups.

Joan Campbell's generous gift helps ensure good stewardship for Lone Tree Hill. More than just a contribution, her bequest serves as inspiration for citizen participation in protecting and maintaining a community's natural resources.

Joan's vision played out on a cold day at Lone Tree Hill this past January. Cross-country skiers were sailing along, people were walking their pets, other walkers were enjoying the landscape, and lots of children were tumbling down slopes on their saucers. What better ways to cope with the difficulties of our times? We are grateful to Joan and thank her for leading the way in preserving and maintaining Lone Tree Hill, reminding all of us of our responsibilities to our town and its historic properties.

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. Martha Moore is a Town Meeting member, former member of the Conservation Committee, and an advocate for open space. Heli Tomford is a Town Meeting member and advocate for open space.

Lone Tree Hill Cleanup Saturday, April 30

Join us in stewarding Lone Tree Hill! After a two-year hiatus, the Belmont Citizens Forum, in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund, is holding its eighth annual tree planting, cleanup, and trail maintenance day on Saturday, April 30, from 9 AM to noon. For more information, email bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com.

Help complete the planting of saplings along the Pine Allee, cleaning up at the Mill Street parking lot and the Coal Road area, and removing invasive species on the property. Students can earn community service credits. Bounded by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street, Lone Tree Hill spans 119 acres of permanently protected conservation land and is available to everyone. It is stewarded through a public/private partnership by the town and McLean Hospital, and is managed by the Land Management Committee.

The Judy Record Conservation Fund was established in 2001 for the protection, rehabilitation, maintenance and acquisition of open space in Belmont and the neighboring communities of Lexington, Cambridge, Waltham, Watertown, and Arlington.

Mystic Collaborative Plans For Climate Change

By Julie Wormser

Once upon a time, images of climate change featured skinny polar bears on melting ice floes, and hot, dusty desertscapes. Tragic for sure, but also very far away in time and space.

Not any more.

Last summer’s alarming weather—from 120 temperatures in the Pacific Northwest to record flooding rains here in the Northeast—has brought the immediate effects of climate change into sharper focus and more local concern.

In Greater Boston, the most likely risks we need to prepare for are:

- flooding from intense rainfall and coastal storms/sea level rise,
- hotter, drier summers,
- less predictable winter weather, and
- bigger storms with higher winds.

We are learning more all the time about the cascading challenges that come with these changes, such as crop failures, overtaxed storm-water systems, and increases in heat-related illnesses such as asthma and heart attacks.

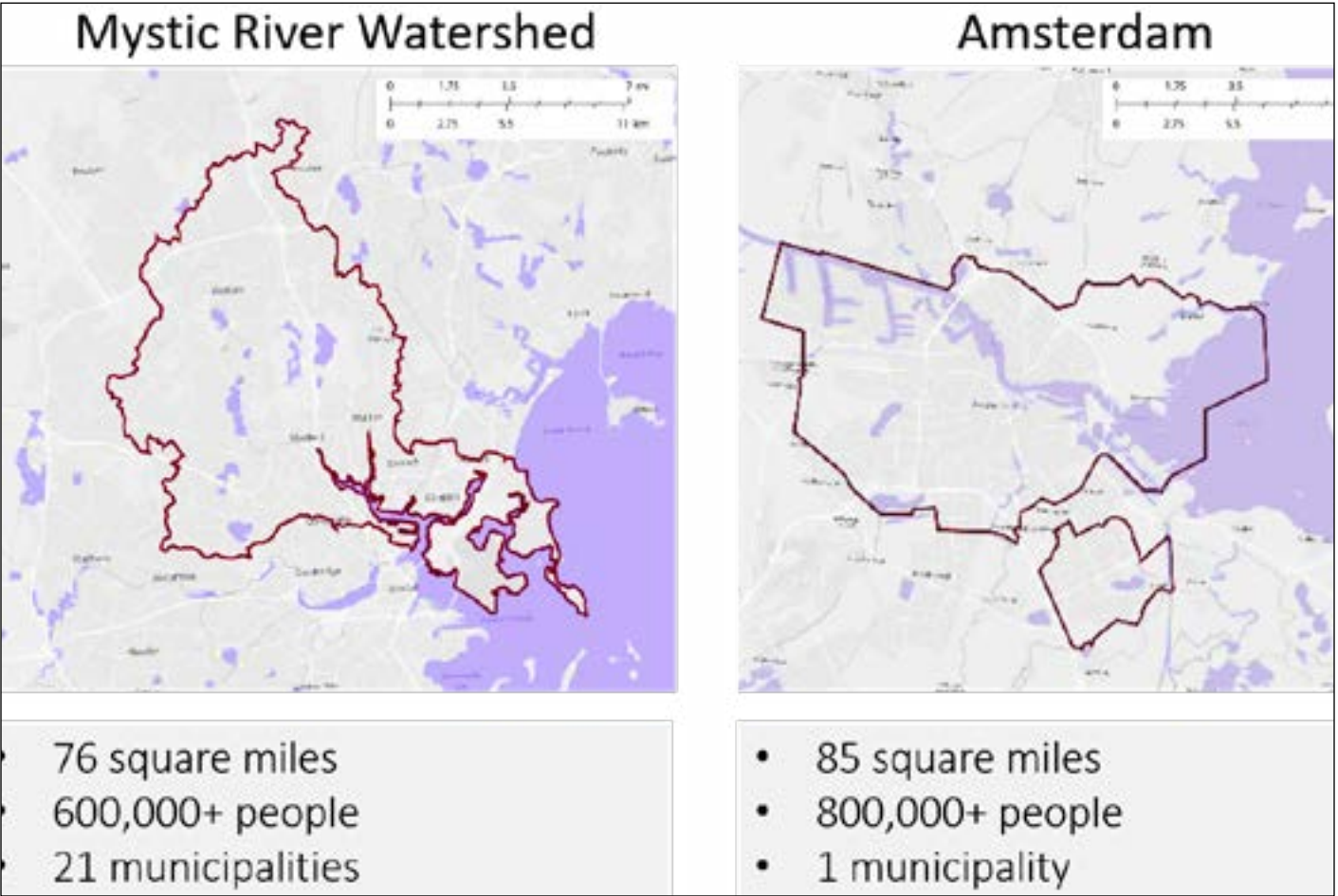
Luckily, both Belmont and the Commonwealth are being proactive in helping to prepare people and places for the worsening weather associated with a warming planet. In 2020, Belmont completed its joint hazard mitigation/climate vulnerability plan (bit.ly/BCF-MVP) that identifies the most pressing needs over the coming decades. (See “[How to Help Belmont Survive Climate Change](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, March/April 2021.) Led by Glenn Clancy, town engineer, both the process and the plan were among the region’s best. Next time you see one of Belmont’s hard-working town employees, please thank him or her for their great work.

Belmont’s plan was accomplished with a grant from the state Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program and unlocked additional funding for the town to take actions to prepare for worsening weather. (See “[Belmont Awarded Climate Change Grant](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, January/February 2022.) Last year, Belmont received nearly \$200,000 to develop

a sophisticated computer model to understand current and future storm-water flood risks and was needed in order to create an effective infrastructure improvement plan.

Belmont is not the only community experiencing more intense rainstorms, and most actions needed to alleviate the impacts cross municipal boundaries. At the same time, Massachusetts lacks the formal regional government structures needed to plan, finance, and implement regional climate resilience measures.

The Mystic River watershed is approximately the size of Amsterdam, or the borough of Brooklyn, New York. Instead of



being a single city (or part of a city), the Mystic watershed comprises at least part of 21 cities and towns, each with its own government, budget, culture, and regulations. A sense of urgency and commitment around climate resilience drove senior municipal staff from 10 communities to form the Resilient Mystic Collaborative (RMC), in order to pursue hands-on regional projects that no community could tackle alone.

One driving goal is closing the gap in climate resilience between those people and businesses able to manage extreme weather without harm, and those who can’t. As with the pandemic, vulnerable residents are often historically under-represented minorities experiencing economic hardship, who may also have challenges such as language barriers, outdoor jobs, and/or fragile health.

In its first three years, the RMC grew to include 20 communities—including Belmont—covering 98% of the Mystic watershed. RMC communities have raised more than \$10 million for climate resilience; half for regional projects, and half for local projects. Staff from the Mystic

River Watershed Association (MyRWA) and CH Consulting are funded by the Barr Foundation to provide additional capacity for municipalities to work regionally. Here are some of our early successes.

Wetlands Identification

Together, Belmont and other communities in the Upper Mystic watershed identified and ranked over 460 possible stormwater wetlands to help manage local and regional flooding while increasing both habitat and outdoor recreational opportunities. The first five restoration projects are pursuing design and permitting funding this year. These projects take as inspiration Cambridge’s Alewife Stormwater Wetland, a three-acre constructed wetland that provides tremendous recreational and habitat values while improving stormwater quality.

Storm Planning

The Lower Mystic watershed, stretching from Assembly Row in Somerville through Winthrop and Revere, is home to both the highest concen-



Nor’easter flooding New England Produce Center in Chelsea, in 2018.



Wicked Hot Mystic monitors Melanie Carte (left) and Sarah Benson (right).

tration of critical regional infrastructure between New York and the North Pole, and to the highest population of environmental justice residents in New England. After a two-year vulnerability assessment to understand how infrastructure and vulnerable residents would be harmed by a major coastal storm, communities are seeking over \$100 million from the federal Infrastructure Act to protect New England’s produce distribution center and inland businesses and residences from saltwater flooding. One of these projects is the Island End River in Chelsea and Everett, which

is experiencing increasing coastal flooding.

Summer Risks

We’re working together to get ready for hotter summers. Greater Boston is a blizzard culture. Our houses have steep roofs to shed snow, and our regulations require landlords to keep heat on in the winter. We know to shelter in place during winter storms, and to remember to help shovel out elderly neighbors afterward.

Not being used to dangerously hot summers, however, our architecture, regulations, and culture are not prepared for multiple days over 90°F. Pavement makes things worse. Temperatures in big, treeless parking lots can top 100°F while a nearby wooded area is a safer 85°F. Last summer, more than 80 volunteers measured relative heat, humidity, and air quality during an August heatwave in a joint project of the RMC and the Boston Museum of Science called Wicked Hot Mystic. These heat maps will be used to identify dangerously hot neighborhoods and to work with interested residents and businesses to come up with solutions to keep people safe.

We’ve all been through a rough several years. Many of our challenges predate COVID. Working together for our common good is not only hopeful, it can be joyful. Never forget that we’re in this together.

Julie Wormser is senior policy advisor for the Mystic River Watershed Association

Correction

In the January/February 2022 *Newsletter*, a photo captioned “Clean Green Belmont Cleans Up” was mistakenly attributed to Jeffrey North. The photo was taken by Lindsay Levine. We apologize for the error.

Belmont Was a Town of Market Gardens

By Jane Sherwin

For about a century, areas around Boston that are now suburban housing were in many cases devoted to market gardening. Arlington, Lexington, Belmont, Watertown, Brighton—all grew produce very profitably.

A market garden, sometimes known as a truck farm, produces on a small scale a variety of fruits and vegetables for local markets. Around Boston, this intensive form of farming was supported by heated greenhouses. The market gardens were so close to Boston that they had no need to pay railroad charges, using their own trucks and wagons instead. The gardens were profitable, and families could afford the education needed for the engineering and science of market gardening, including the complexities of greenhouse management. They could also afford the growing real estate taxes: suburban land was, as one market gardener said, “taxed highly and costs us very dear.”

In Belmont, the Wellington Farm Company held 36 acres of greenhouses and open farm land. Imagine standing in front of the Town Hall annex looking east toward what is now the Winn Brook School. One hundred years ago, you would have seen fields full of greenery, the sun sparkling and reflecting off the Wellington Market Gardeners’ greenhouses. They grew celery and onions outdoors, and the air was full of the smell of celery. They also grew carrots and beets, squash, tomatoes, and had two acres of Williams apple trees. There were three acres of heated cold frames for lettuce and dandelion greens, and they grew lettuce, watercress, and mint in the greenhouses in the winter, and cucumbers in summer. But in 1925, the entire Wellington Farm apparatus, from mowing machines to celery paper, was auctioned off.



Wellington Farm auction notice.

Market Gardening Technology

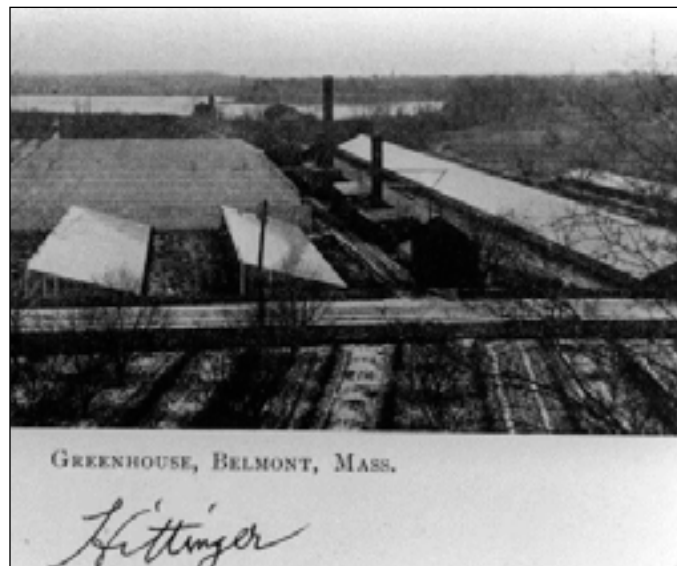
Greenhouses made market gardening profitable as a year-round enterprise, although 100 years ago this meant using coal for heating. Brick smokestacks dotted Belmont’s skyline. Oxalic acid from coal smoke is corrosive and can cause severe irritation and burns to skin, eyes, and the respiratory tract. When the Boston Chamber of Commerce visited the Hittinger Fruit Company in 1915, they reported that “from 850 to 900 tons of coal are burned during the year to keep these glass houses at the necessary even temperature.”

Belmont’s Farming Families

Many of Belmont’s market gardens began with colonial settlers whose descendants adapted to the changing economy. Consider the Frost Farms, located on the east side of Belmont along Pleasant Street and down Brighton Street. There was Jonathan Frost, who entered the market garden business and built the beautiful yellow house on Brighton Street, and the 1827 Thaddeus Frost house a little to the north. After Jonathan Frost’s death in 1873, his son Artemus became a “well-known specialty grower of fruits for the Boston Market.” These gardeners were Sylvester Charles Frost, born in 1842, a market gardener; Frank C. Frost, born in 1854, in the “business of farming”; and Harold Locke Frost, president of the Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association, president of the Frost Insecticide Company, and a trustee of the Massachusetts Agriculture College.

The Hittinger Fruit Company

The Hittingers were another leading Belmont market gardening family. In the mid-19th century, the firm of Gage, Hittinger & Co. was a major ice harvester and shipper with markets worldwide. Fresh Pond was one of their major



The Hittinger greenhouses.

sources of ice. In 1847, Jacob Hittinger purchased 40 acres of land on the west side of Fresh Pond and turned to “experimental agriculture.” For more than a century, until 1956 when the land was sold for housing, the Hittinger family gained a wide reputation for excellence in farming and market gardening.

The Hittinger Fruit Company offered an extraordinary range of produce. In 1915, the Boston Chamber of Commerce undertook “Industrial Excursion No. 10,” a visit to the “Belmont Farm of the Hittinger Fruit Co.” You notice the language, of course: the farm is considered an industry, a part of the commercial life in which the Chamber of Commerce had a real interest. The excursion reports:

“More than three acres are under greenhouses, and the rest of the farm is largely devoted to the culture of fruits. In the outside may be seen “three-story farming,” the first-story crop being radishes, parsley, and strawberries growing next to the two-story bushes of currants and gooseberries, these being in turn next to the upper-story crop of cherries, apples, pears and peaches.”

The 40 acres which Jacob Hittinger purchased include parcels that abut School Street and Fresh Pond today. In your mind’s eye, start at the intersection of Belmont and School Streets, and take yourself down School Street, past Fairview and Elm and Bacon, to number 450. A small granite post marks what was once the entrance to the Hittinger company produce store.

Picture 20 soccer fields stretching away along School Street and extending all the way down to Fresh Pond. There were cherry trees, quince bushes, apple trees, peach trees, currant bushes, and if it were spring, they would all be in bloom.

Jacob Hittinger’s grandson, also Richard, continued farming the land right into the 1950s. In 1976, Town Meeting passed a resolution honoring him for his contributions “to the Belmont community during its years of transition from a farming town to an attractive suburban community.” Richard died in 1982.

Immigrant labor was essential for harvesting. On the Hittinger farm, according to a Chamber of Commerce report, “from 25 to 75 helpers are employed in taking care of the farm, the larger number being employed during the fruit season when pickers are needed.” Some seasonal laborers in Belmont probably came up from the North End, and some lived in Waverley Square or in the neighborhoods east of Clay Pit Pond.

Belmont’s 20th-century Farms

Clearly we can think of Belmont before 1950 as a community in which farming and housing development were of similar weight and significance. In 1916, when Joe Errico was beginning to harvest onions at the Shaw Estate, William Poole was selling to developers the 21 acres, no doubt orchards, he had bought in 1904 and 1910 on the corner of Common and Washington. In 1925, when the Wellington Market Gardeners land was sold for housing, Walter Lenk was just beginning his Belmont Gardens company and the patenting of his famous Belmont gardenia.

Ralph Stevens’s memory of scything hay in town is a picture of this overlapping of old and new. He recalls Farmer Thomas and his team cutting the long grasses that must have grown along the streets around town every year. “I can distinctly remember—oh this is marvelous—to see them stop every half hour [and] take out a whetstone and I can still hear the noise as they whetted and sharpened their scythes, the long bladed scythes for cutting hay.”

Jane Sherwin is a Belmont resident with an interest in Belmont’s agricultural history.

State Considers New Strategy for Invasives

By Bruce Aguilar

Invasive species are organisms that severely damage local ecosystems. One example is the gypsy moth caterpillar, introduced in 1869 by one Professor E. L. Trouvelot in an attempt to breed a hardy silkworm. Some insects escaped and were soon established in a vacant lot next to his home in Medford, Mass. These caterpillars have defoliated millions of acres of northeast woodlands.

Another is the Asian bittersweet vine, introduced as an ornamental plant in 1879. It smothers the understory of forests and climbs mature trees to outcompete them for light, eventually strangling them or becoming heavy enough to topple them. (See “[Belmont’s Invasive Plants: Asian Bittersweet](#),” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, May/June 2021.) Invasive species have been introduced that are able to monopolize local habitat, destroying the biological diversity that evolved over thousands of years into a stable, healthy ecosystem.

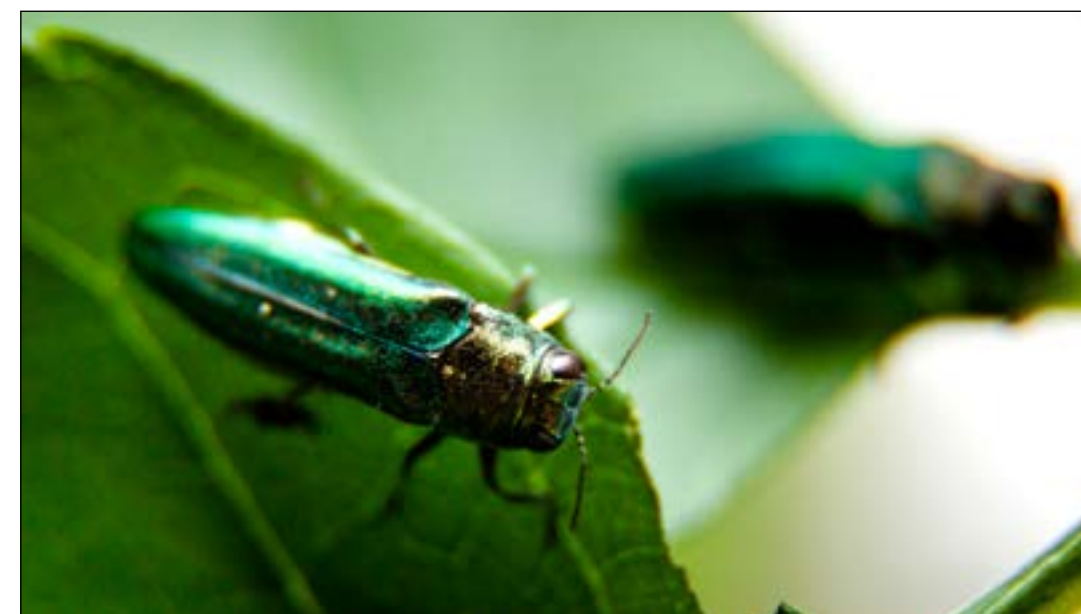
Of the 2,300 native and naturalized plant species in Massachusetts, the [Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group](#) estimates that 69 are either invasive, likely invasive, or potentially invasive. The state [prohibits](#) importing, propagating, and selling invasive plants. Unfortunately, the existing populations are well-established and continue to spread vigorously in the absence of natural predators or human management to keep them in check.

[An Act Responding To The Threat Of Invasive Species](#) (House 999/ Senate 563) is a Massachusetts state bill sponsored by Senator Patricia Jehlen and Representative David Rogers. The bill

aims to create an office staffed by a state coordinator to be a central resource for municipalities, nonprofits, and state agencies to coordinate research and supply human and financial resources to wage campaigns against invasive species.

A key feature of this bill will be to identify funding for remediation efforts. The Groton Conservation Commission told the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, “Educational resources, coordination with the state and other town bodies, and access to training would be helpful from an invasive species state coordinator. Anything that could help [a town] do their job more easily without billing the town.” Otherwise, “without sound educational resources, landowners may pursue invasive species eradication methods that are unnecessarily expensive, laborious, and toxic, or delay action that allows infestations to get worse,” said Katharine Lange, policy expert for the nonprofit Mass Rivers Alliance.

The Mass Rivers Alliance worked with the office of Representative Rogers to co-sponsor this bill in the House, alongside Senator Jehlen’s sponsorship. Kira Arnott, Representative Rogers’ chief of staff, said that Rogers had been approached by the town of Belmont regarding the danger posed by weakened ash trees



Emerald ash borer.

currently being attacked by an unstoppable beetle from Asia, the emerald ash borer. Ash trees are very popular street trees across Belmont, and removal is becoming increasingly expensive. Rogers was able to secure \$80,000 in the FY2020 budget for Belmont to use for ash tree removal.

The current proposed invasive species bill has had a public hearing before the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture in December 2021. More good news came on February 3, when the committee reported favorably on the bill.

We will find out by the end of July 2022, when the legislative session ends, whether the bill passes through the Ways and Means Committee and goes up for a vote in both the House and Senate. It competes with hundreds of other bills for attention, as Ways and Means also works on producing the state budget. Otherwise, the bill

dies and will need to be reintroduced in the next legislative session that begins in January 2023.

Will Massachusetts get a dedicated state office and coordinator to coordinate information and help groups get the money they need to effectively fight invasive plants, insects, and animals which are impoverishing our native ecosystem? Katharine Lange told me that public support in the next few months is the key to passage of the “Act Responding to the Threat of Invasive Species” and urges anyone interested in protecting the biodiversity of our healthy ecosystems to contact their own legislators as well as members of the Ways and Means Committee.

Bruce Aguilar is a Belmont resident, an inter-faith chaplain, and the spiritual care director for Spaulding Rehabilitation Network.

Letter to the Editor

To the editor,
With increased mowing in Rock Meadow, does that mean that all that lovely milkweed which

grew so wild, lovely, and plentiful will be lost to the mowers? We need that milkweed for the butterflies! That would be so sad. Where is the mowing to take place?

Carlee Blamphin



Asclepias syriaca, aka common milkweed.

Dear Carlee,
Mowing at Rock Meadow has not increased, except for the trails. Meadow mowing occurred just once, on October 21. This was intentionally late in the growing season so as to leave the milkweed intact for the monarch butterfly migration, which is mid-August through late September and early October, according to the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

The Conservation Commission had received a number of queries about milkweed plant preservation and delaying the mowing.

The trails at Rock Meadow are mowed more frequently. Wider trails, mowed more often, have allowed for use of the conservation land with greater social distancing on the trails during the COVID-19 pandemic. This mowing should have no effect on milkweed plants in the meadow.

Thank you for your very good question and for your concern for Belmont conservation land.

Jeffrey North
Managing Editor, BCF Newsletter

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WRITERS
Bruce Aguilar • Nanny Almquist • Jacquie Dow • Michael Flamang • Dean Hickman Juliet Jenkins • Barry Kaye • Martha Moore • Thomas Nehrkorn • Anne Paulsen • Erik Rosenmeier • Jane Sherwin • Ruth Smullin • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • Heli Tomford • Julie Wormser

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS
Jeffrey North • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • Tim Todreas

COPY EDITORS
Sue Bass • Fred Bouchard • Virginia Jordan • Evanthia Malliris

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE
Sue Bass • Fred Bouchard • Virginia Jordan • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

MAILING MAESTRO
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