



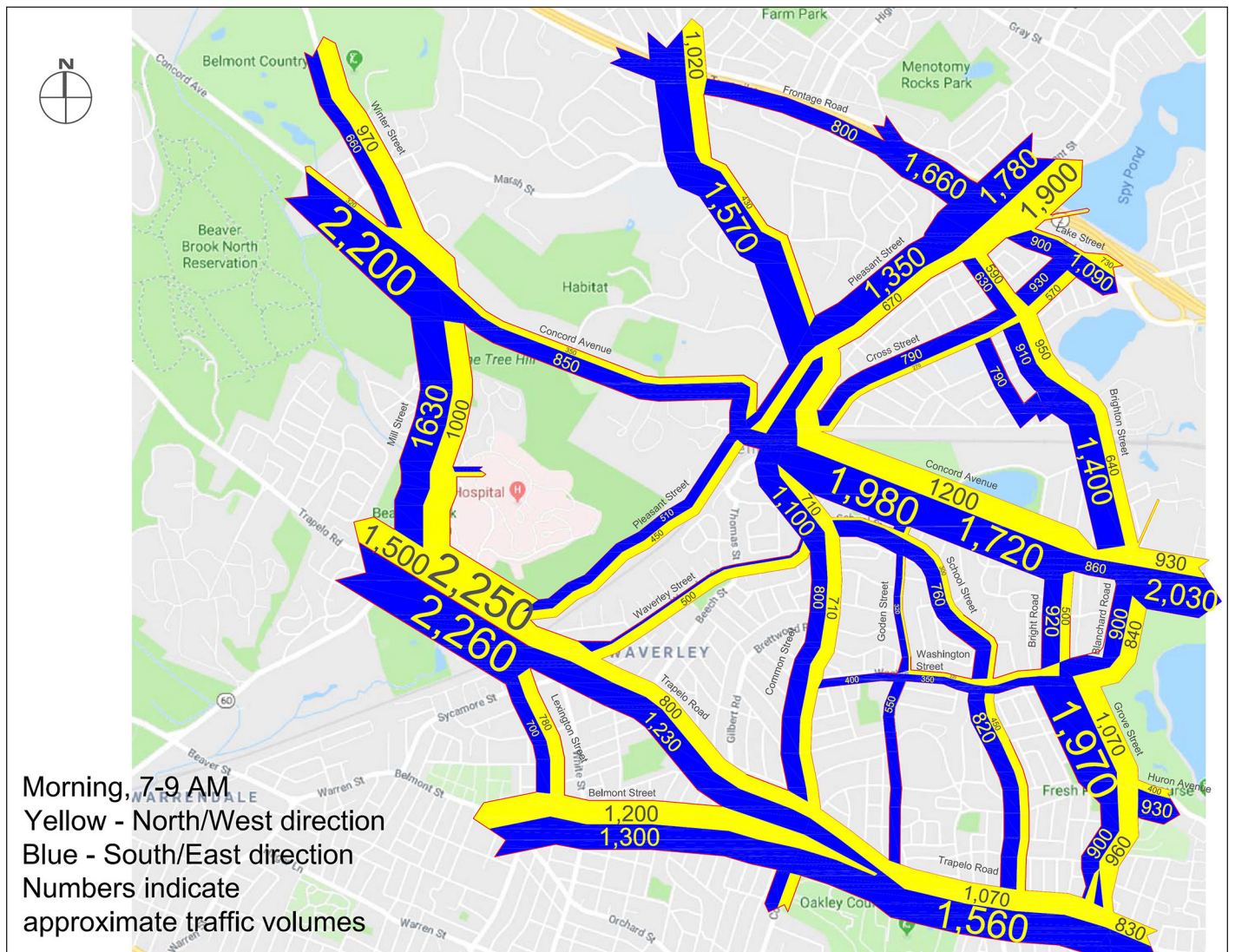
Belmont Citizens Forum

Belmont School Traffic Needs Attention

By Larry Link

The figures still catch my breath. A 2018–2019 pre-HS/MS construction study documented nearly 2,000 cars traveling down Concord Avenue from the snarl at the underpass (by most experienced hands, “unsolvable”) in Belmont Center to the High School-Middle School site opposite Goden Street, in just the morning 7 to 9 AM rush.

Of all vehicles clocked in that special Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) study using automated license plate reader information, 75% entered and left Belmont within 15 to 20 minutes but were registered/garaged in other towns! While we don’t have a new count yet, many Goden Street and Concord Avenue residents will attest that post-COVID traffic volumes are building back up.



Belmont’s morning traffic patterns, as shown in “[Town of Belmont Town Wide Traffic Study](#),” April 1, 2019. Lines with light text on a dark background indicate traffic traveling south and east; dark text on a light background indicates north and westbound traffic.

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

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

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That traffic may be the result of resumption of commuting as well as the heavy parent and student traffic to and from the new high school. This is not just twice a day, because many driving students make a third trip for lunches and free periods. This fall, the new middle school will open. The congestion and volumes will likely increase significantly on Hittinger, Baker, Trowbridge, Underwood, and yes, Concord Avenue, unless everyone makes the effort to carpool, bike, or walk as often as possible.

Concord Avenue's protected bike lane

Several years ago, Belmont's Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) worked closely with Community Development, the High School/Middle School Building Committee, and that committee's consultant, Nelson/Nygaard, to create a protected bike lane. That lane was a way to improve bicyclist safety on Concord Avenue and to encourage even more cycling along this major conduit between Belmont Center and what would become the campus for nearly 50% of our town students. Based on some resident concerns, TAC and the Select Board altered the protected bike lane beginning at the post office, leading into the confusing and dangerous intersection of Concord, Common, and Leonard Streets.

The protected bike lane will also link north/south access to the Chenery and Wellington/Burbank schools, and, one day, via the Community Path/Alexander Avenue bike and pedestrian underpass to the Winn Brook neighborhood. Parking was shifted from the curb, adjoining the moving lane, with a small "safety" buffer inserted between the lane and parked cars. While care is needed to exit a parked vehicle on either side, it better protects bicyclists from being doored than a narrower lane and moves them farther from automobile traffic. We now see signs on Concord Avenue which help drivers understand this important change.

Another major part of TAC's recent work has been evaluating hotspots such as crosswalks and cut-throughs where drivers speed or ignore "Do Not Enter" signs or other basic rules of the road. TAC has recommended several speed tables, some implemented, some not, as well as closure or turn restrictions for some cut-through streets, and TAC is working with the town on safety issues such as high-priority crosswalks, cracked

SEPARATED BIKE LANES

Separated bike lanes, also known as cycle tracks and protected bike lanes, physically separate bicycle traffic from vehicular traffic. Pay close attention at intersections where separated bike lanes cross roads and crosswalks. Some are one-way, some are two-way. **People biking** should ride in the correct direction. **People walking** should stay on the sidewalk — do not walk on the separated bike lane.

People biking should ride in the lane through the intersection. Watch for turning vehicles and pedestrians.

When turning right, **people driving** must yield to pedestrians and cyclists crossing.

People walking should watch for bicyclists when crossing the separated bike lane.

People driving must stop at the stop line to allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross the intersection safely.

People walking should cross with the pedestrian signal.

People biking must yield to pedestrians crossing. Watch for turning vehicles.

tight budget and inadequate staffing.

For example, the original HS Building Project Plan called for a 90-car student lot, but somewhere between Planning and Select Board approval, COVID-19 and supply chain costs, and scarce campus footprint, the lot (and tennis courts) fell off the drawing board. Students were allocated the northbound side of Concord Avenue, the “Ring Road,” and Underwood Pool parking areas, and eventually other parts of Concord Avenue. Students have always driven, and TAC appreciates this rite of passage and convenience for attending after-school sports and activities. However, this change imposes on residents and other users of Concord Avenue.

Roy Epstein, Select Board chair, also heads a special Neighborhood Traffic Working Group which has dealt with these high school/middle school issues since 2018. I also sit on this task force. There are few easy solutions which satisfy everyone, and we continue to

grapple with thorny issues that do not have clear and obvious solutions. One thing is certain: Our town has become much more urban in the last 20-plus years. It is not a reversible change.

Building on the recent “Slow Down/School Opens” sign campaign (a resident-led and funded effort), this coming year TAC will help to reenergize the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Safe Routes To School program and support principals and PTOs/PTAs to encourage biking and walking to all of our schools. TAC also will work with Safe Routes To School to organize a Bicycle Rodeo to teach biking safety skills to Belmont youth, and to renew efforts to win DOT grants for various traffic mitigation measures and equipment.

Rules for driving near separated bike lanes, as depicted by Cambridge’s Vision Zero program.

sidewalks (especially primary avenues to schools), striping, visibility issues concerning shrubbery and trees, and signage regarding parking, intersection setbacks, etc. Belmont police are unable to patrol everywhere and therefore enforcement is challenging.

The town’s dire funding situation hampers other traffic mitigation installations. It’s costly to install effective LED beacon crossing apparatus, erect pedestrian refuges in the middle of wide streets, hire more crossing guards for schools, paint “sharrows” on key streets to remind drivers to “share the row” (European origins), and accelerate sidewalk repairs and management. TAC tackles what issues it can, but whether most of its larger recommendations can be implemented is ultimately determined by our Select Board and the town’s very

Another development was the collaborative School Committee/TAC Parent/Driver Survey last fall. The survey response rate was quite strong, and we now have a much better sense of what motivates people to drive, including:

- Cost of the school bus. Most students must pay a bus fee because they do not meet the Massachusetts-mandated distance from school to justify free transit
- Limitations and timing of bus routes (a full hour ahead of HS class start)
- How the bus routes sync with class schedules and after-school activities
- Perceived safety for bikers and walkers

As a result, the school department reduced its bus fee by \$150. However, since the School Committee made it an all-encompassing charge, many half-day or half-year riders actually will experience a significant increase this year. Regardless, the bus is a great way to get students to schools and save a parent or caregiver unnecessary driving. More discussions will be needed to investigate better alignment of the route timing and school hours and maximize ridership and further cost reductions.

Still to be determined is where student drivers may park as the numbers balloon in the spring, and if the town should charge a parking fee. A fee could suppress unnecessary driving and subsidize the bus costs of other students. UCLA professor of urban planning Donald Shoup's extensive research makes this point (See parkade.com/post/donald-shoup-the-high-cost-of-free-parking-summarized and www.shoupdogg.com for more information.) Belmont charges commuters and long-term parkers for all-day use of town streets or lots near the railroad station or town center, so why not students?

Belmont resident and Warrant Committee member Matt Taylor recently introduced the concept of a parking benefit district. Much like a neighborhood or commercial zone, a parking benefit district is an area where parking revenues offset traffic mitigation and fund neighborhood transit safety improvements such as crosswalk upgrades, special striping, and improved lighting along with more parking clerks and crossing guards.

Belmont driving tips

We all need to drive more carefully and be patient even as we endure the inevitable traffic jams and backups. We should avoid idling our engines

as well (idling is illegal in Massachusetts; see "Idling Harms Your Car and Your Health," Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, January, 2017.) Sadly, all of this has become more or less normal. The quieter pace and volumes of 20 or 30 years ago have yielded to a far more dense urban cityscape. We cannot wall ourselves off, but we can all try to drive a little less. We all want to reduce congestion and pollution.

In closing, here's a challenge: How much more biking or walking can each of us work into our routines? It is a major sea-change for those who do not, and not everyone can. That said, a one-mile or less walk to your library or post office takes very little time or energy for those who are mobile. Factor in a bike, and most youth and middle-aged adults could accomplish a great deal without using a car. Can more students carpool, or bike on nice days?

Why not use September to try it out? Get on those walking shoes and find a small backpack — or pump up the tires and add a rack to your bike to support a briefcase, gym bag, or instrument. Then see if you can swap foot/bike for the car and make five to 10 trips to one of the town centers, the library, Town Hall, or school in the next few weeks. Bike to the local bakery or shop or drug store (or even work) just one to two times a week, and see how well it can work for you. I bet you will find it challenging at first, but rewarding and fun with practice. You will also notice some drivers are pretty bad and might benefit from retaking a driver ed course!

Certainly take advantage of these good weather days. And when you have to drive, see if you can organize carpools with others whenever possible. Combine errands to one trip, especially if you have to drive through a hotspot on your way in/out of Belmont.

You get the drill. Be creative. A lot of people making the extra effort can make a big impact over time. That's what we need to move the needle on our congestion issue. While those non-Belmont cars are troublesome, "we (also) are the traffic."

Larry Link is a member of the Transportation Advisory Committee, the Traffic Working Group–Middle and High School, and the Comprehensive Capital Budget Community, and is a Town Meeting Member for Precinct 1.

Belmont Embraces MBTA Zoning Challenge

By Rachel Heller and Thayer Donham

Belmont residents have yet another great opportunity to shape the future of our community. Under a new state law, Belmont will be creating districts where multifamily housing can be built. The multifamily zoning requirement for MBTA Communities, also known as Section 3A of the Massachusetts Zoning Act, requires municipalities with good access to transit to have zoning in place that allows for up to 15 apartments or condominiums per acre.

The Multifamily Zoning Districts must be approved by Town Meeting by December 31, 2024, and meet the following requirements:

- Comprise a minimum land area of 28 acres
- 50% of the minimum land area must be within .5 miles of a commuter rail station
- Any other multifamily zoning districts needed to meet the requirement must be areas of at least 5 acres
- Average 15 units per acre across the district and sub-districts
- Rezone to allow for 1,632 homes to be created.

Early in 2023, Belmont received a grant for technical assistance services from the Metropolitan

Area Planning Council (MAPC), the region's planning agency, to assist the town with developing and adopting new zoning districts by the deadline.

This law was adopted to provide more homes for people, sustain economic growth, and increase inclusivity. Here in Belmont, this new law can advance key goals for our community beyond increasing affordable housing, such as supporting local businesses, growing our commercial tax base, reducing our carbon footprint, relying less on cars, and fostering diversity.

With the involvement of many members of our community, the Housing Trust recently completed Belmont's new Housing Production Plan (HPP). The HPP, which has been approved by the Planning Board, Select Board, and the state's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, states that many Belmont residents need more affordable housing options.

Median housing costs in Belmont are far above what many current or prospective residents can afford, and most people who work in Belmont cannot afford to live in town. A household would need to earn \$94,000 to afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment and earn more than



Multifamily housing near Waverley Square.

JEFFREY NORTH

\$325,000 to buy a single-family home. Households with very low incomes and seniors living alone are most likely to pay more than 30% of their income for housing. Over the last five years, more than 300 mixed-income apartments have been built or permitted in Belmont, and those developments have a percentage of homes set aside for households earning less than 80% of the area median income and in some cases lower than 80% area median income. Despite the progress in providing affordable housing in Belmont, there is still less than one affordable home available for every four eligible households.

Belmont is taking a thoughtful approach to the MBTA zoning that brings various perspectives together and provides multiple opportunities for community input. In 2022, the Select Board appointed the Belmont MBTA Communities Advisory Committee. This committee brings together multiple town committees and boards to ensure that new multifamily zoning districts will help advance our town's goals for affordability, economic development, historic preservation, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The committee is co-chaired by Rachel Heller (Belmont Housing Trust) and Roy Epstein (Select Board). Other members include Drew Nealon (Historic District Commission), Paul Joy (Economic Development Committee), Julie Wu (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Implementation Committee), and Thayer Donham (Planning Board). Gabriel Distler, staff planner, is a member of the team.

Belmont has many options

There is a lot of flexibility in how we design these districts, and everyone in Belmont is invited to help.

- We can allow for more density over smaller areas, lower levels of density across larger areas, or allow for a mix of building types with varying levels of density.
- The law requires an average of 15 units per acre and defines multifamily housing as a building with three or more dwellings. Belmont could establish zoning that allows for larger or taller apartment buildings in areas around transit and commercial districts and triple deckers in other spots.
- We can allow for mixed-use development where we have homes above businesses in areas throughout town. By focusing new

housing near trains, buses, and businesses, residents can get around without always needing a car and we can grow our commercial tax base with more customers in and around our commercial areas.

Opportunities for input

Community input is vital to making these decisions since there are many ways to implement this law to meet the needs of the town. Belmont's MBTA Communities Advisory Committee and the MAPC project team have been meeting frequently and held a public forum in June at the Beech Street Center. More than 100 people attended in person and virtually, and provided comments, asked questions, and made suggestions regarding where various densities of housing should occur using maps of districts around town.

The MAPC team is now synthesizing the information and will present their findings for discussion at an upcoming meeting of the MBTA Advisory Committee. The MAPC website and the town of Belmont website will post the findings for review by all.

Another public forum is in the works for the fall, and the public is welcome at all the MBTA Advisory Committee's meetings.

The Planning Board will consider the committee's recommendations before a zoning bylaw change proposal is brought before Town Meeting. The committee aims to have this proposal ready for the annual Town Meeting next spring.

This is an important moment for Belmont. Working together, we can implement this new state law and put the town on the path to a healthy future by adding new housing options, providing more foot traffic for our local businesses, reducing the need for residents to drive by putting more homes near transit, and preserving our historic and small town character. Look for the the Belmont MBTA Communities Advisory Team meeting schedule at www.belmont-ma.gov/mbta-communities-advisory-committee.

Rachel Heller and Thayer Donham are both members of the Belmont Housing Trust and the MBTA Communities Advisory Committee.

Why Belmont Needs the Specialized Energy Code

By Roger Wrubel

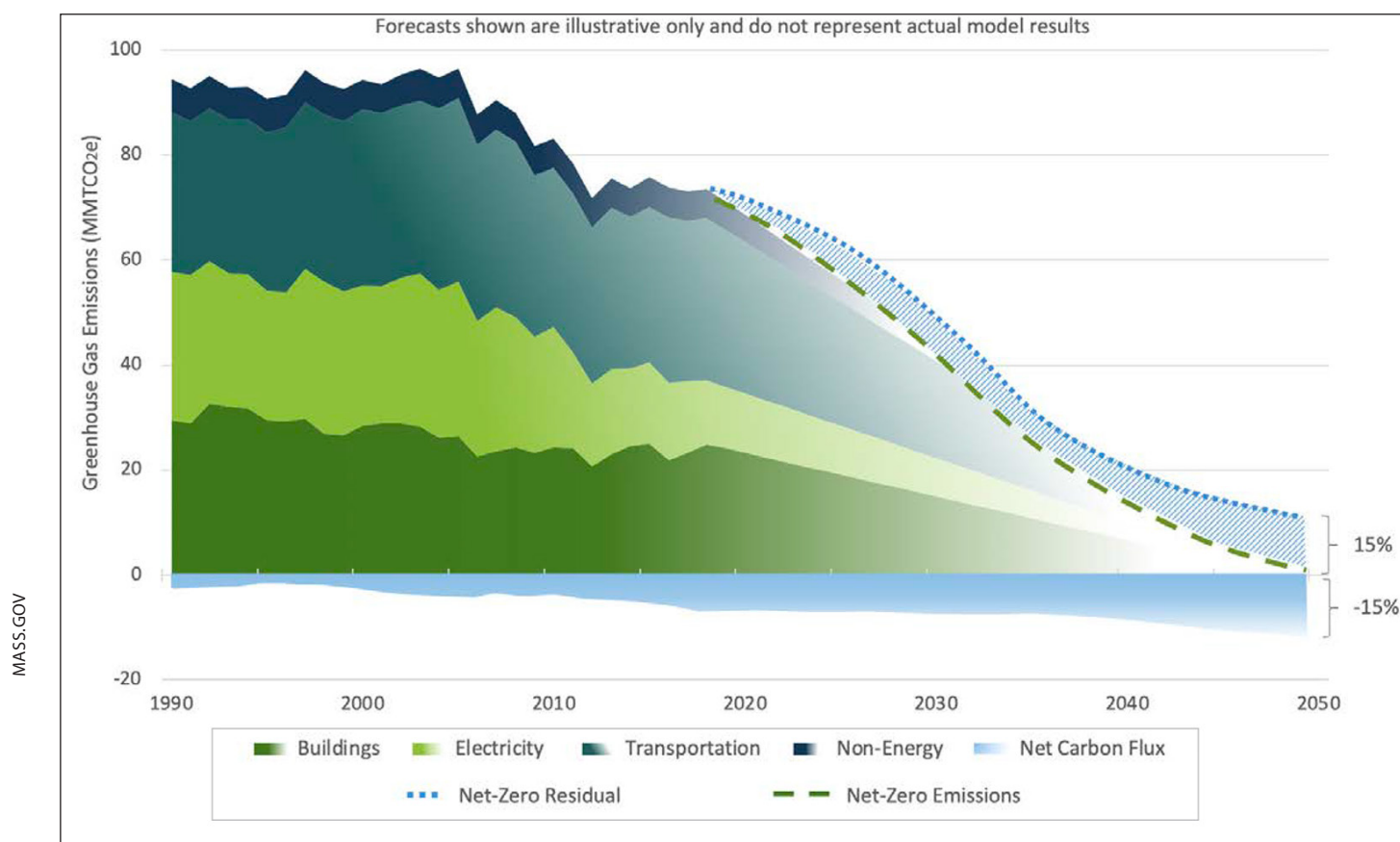
Massachusetts adopted [An Act Creating A Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy](#) (Roadmap) in 2021. The act directed the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to update the existing energy building codes and to create a new Opt-In Specialized Energy Code to encourage the construction of all-electric buildings.

The state needs to update energy building codes because the policy requires reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The policy set greenhouse gas emissions

Municipalities can adopt the Specialized Code by a vote of their town meeting or city council. To date, 18 Massachusetts cities and towns representing 18% of the state's population have recognized its benefits and have adopted the Specialized Code since it was made available in December 2022.

Policy requires nearly 100% electric power

To achieve the emission reduction goals set by the Roadmap, the Massachusetts energy economy must transition to close to 100% electric power. Electricity is the only energy source available that



Greenhouse gas emissions required for different sectors to meet net zero emissions by 2050. Graphic from the [Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap](#).

limits of at least 50% below the 1990 baseline by 2030, at least 75% below the baseline by 2040, and required net-zero emissions by 2050. By 2050, emissions will be limited to 85% below the baseline. To meet those limits, we need to reduce emissions from buildings, which means changing building codes.

can be produced without emitting carbon into the atmosphere and destabilizing the Earth's climate.

With the Specialized Code, the DOER put its thumb on the building-code scale to promote the electrification of all new construction. The rationale for all-electric new construction is that buildings reliant on fossil fuel combustion equipment for heating, hot water, cooking, or clothes drying have no clear path to zero-carbon emissions.

Buildings with electric appliances can potentially become zero-carbon homes. There has been a steady increase in clean energy sources (mandated by state law) on the New England electric grid, and opportunities for on-site distributed solar generation. Electric utilities are required to increase the proportion of renewable energy sources in their portfolios by 2% per year. The Roadmap increases that to 3% annually from 2025 until 2029.

What is the Opt-In Specialized Code?

Building codes set minimum standards for new construction, renovations, additions, and repairs of commercial and residential buildings. The Massachusetts Building Code consists of a series of international model codes and any state-specific amendments adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS).

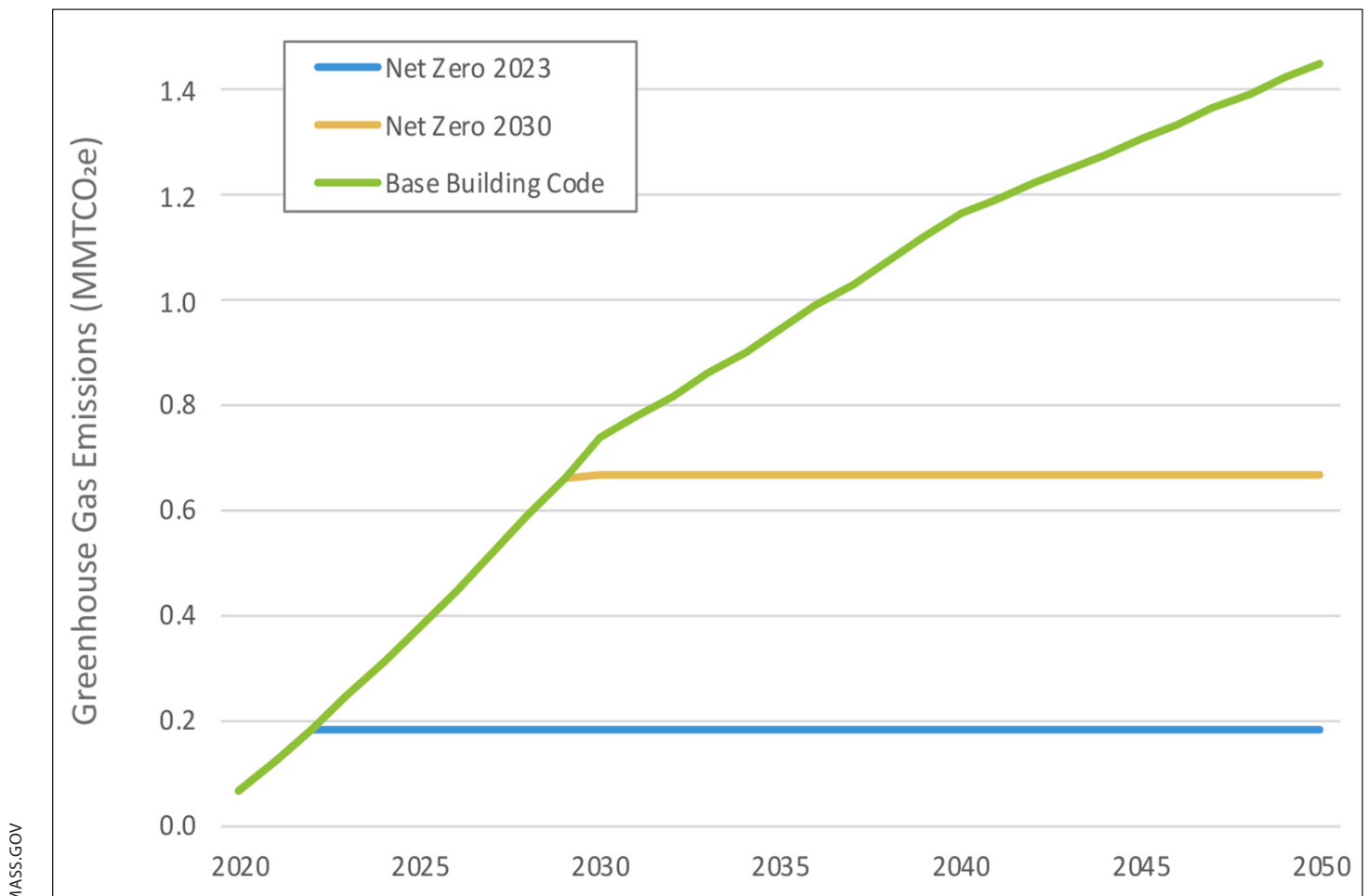
When I had a porch rebuilt, my contractor had the plans reviewed by Belmont's building inspector for code compliance. The building inspector then visited after construction to certify the work met

code. When a plumber or electrician does work in your home, they are required to follow the plumbing and electrical codes. Similarly, there is a Building Energy Code that sets minimum standards for energy efficiency, called the Base Energy Code.

In 2009, the BBRS created an "opt-in" enhanced energy code known as the Stretch Energy Code or simply the Stretch Code. Communities voluntarily adopt the Stretch Code through approval by town meeting or city council. To date, 300 of the 351 Massachusetts cities and towns have adopted the Stretch Code, including Belmont (2011).

An updated version of the Stretch Code went into effect on January 1, 2023, and applies to new commercial and residential buildings as well as major renovations and additions. Note that once a community adopts the Stretch Code, it automatically is subject to future stretch code changes. Thus, the updated Stretch Code automatically applies to Belmont.

The Massachusetts Energy Building Codes apply to both commercial and residential buildings.



Future greenhouse gas emissions from new buildings in Massachusetts with and without a Net Zero code, from the [Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap](#).

Measuring the Energy Efficiency of a Building

The Home Energy Rating System (HERS) Index is the industry standard to measure a home's energy efficiency. It is a points-based system, performed by a third-party verifier, used to quantify overall energy use. The lower the HERS rating, the more energy efficient a home is.

The 2009 Stretch Code required all newly constructed houses to have a HERS Index rating of 60 for all-electric homes (e) and 55 for homes with fossil fuel infrastructure (ff). The updated Stretch Code (2023) requires HERS Index ratings of 55e/52ff. On July 1, 2024, the Stretch Code will require HERS Index ratings of 45e/42ff. Remember that a lower HERS Index indicates higher energy-efficient buildings. Thus, DOER required homes using fossil fuel to have a slightly higher level of energy efficiency than all-electric homes.

Beginning in July 2024, the required HERS Index for low-rise residential buildings for the Stretch Code and the Specialized Code will be the same, except the Specialized Code requires a more stringent HERS Index for houses greater than 4,000 square feet that are not all-electric.

The new Specialized Code applies only to new residential and commercial buildings, not renovations and additions.

The Specialized Code

The Specialized Code provides three pathways for developers to construct new low-rise residences:

All-Electric Pathway

For a house to be all-electric it must use air-source or ground-source heat pumps for space heating and cooling, a heat pump or solar thermal system for water heating, and electric appliances for cooking and drying clothes. A HERS Index rating of 45 or below is required for Passive House certification. If an all-electric house does not have rooftop solar, it must be “solar ready.”

Building under the Specialized Code using the All Electric Pathway is almost identical to building under the Stretch Code.

Mixed Fuel Pathway

A house with fossil fuel combustion for space heating, water heating, cooking, or clothes drying is considered a mixed fuel home and requires a

HERS Index rating of 42 or below for passive house certification. A mixed-fuel home is also required to have a rooftop solar array, if feasible, to offset some of a home's carbon emissions. By “feasible” a roof must be largely unshaded, receiving 70% or more of available solar radiation, annually.

Mixed-fuel homes must be “pre-wired” for the eventual conversion of all fossil fuel-powered appliances to electric. For example, if all the appliances are electric except for a gas range, there must be an electric outlet for an electric-powered range, and the electric load calculation must account for this future electric appliance.

Zero-Energy Pathway

This pathway applies to mixed-fuel, low-rise residences greater than 4,000 square feet, although any home that is zero energy would comply with the Specialized Code. Mixed-fuel houses greater than 4,000 square feet are not permitted to use the Mixed Fuel Pathway.

They are required to have a HERS Index rating of 42 without consideration of onsite solar production and a HERS 0 with on-site generation. A HERS Index of 0 means a home is producing the same amount of energy, on an annual basis, as consumed. A house would be HERS positive if it produced more energy than consumed.

What about commercial buildings?

The Specialized Code for commercial buildings maintains the same energy efficiency requirements as the underlying Stretch Code for all building categories except multifamily buildings. Multifamily buildings (residences greater than 12,000 square feet) must be Passive House certified.

For all other commercial buildings, the same three pathways available for low-rise residences to meet the Specialized Code apply: All-Electric; Mixed Fuels; and Zero Energy. Note that as with the low-rise residential code, the all-electric commercial pathway is the simplest to comply with, having essentially the same requirements as the Stretch Code.

All-electric buildings reduce carbon emissions, cost less to build, and improve health compared to mixed-fuel buildings.

Construction Cost

Studies have shown that constructing an all-electric building is less expensive compared to



Exxon Mobil plant, Chicago.

new mixed-fuel buildings that have electric systems plus fossil fuel combustion appliances. This makes intuitive sense since all-electric buildings have a single energy system while mixed-fuel buildings need two.

Health

Burning a liquid or gas inside a building, especially if you have other options, seems unwise. A 2023 study by Stanford University researchers bore this out when it showed that relatively high levels of benzene, a known carcinogen, are emitted by all gas stoves. The researchers related their findings to higher rates of childhood asthma in homes with gas stoves compared to homes with electric stoves.

Spills, Leaks, and Methane Emissions

It's not just burning fossil fuels that is the problem. Transporting liquid petroleum by ship, rail, or pipeline carries risks of polluting spills, but it is now clear that the production and transport of all fossil fuels, including natural gas, result in significant leaks of methane gas into the atmosphere. Methane is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Atmospheric

levels today are about two and a half times preindustrial levels, are increasing steadily, and account for 30% of the observed temperature rise.

Time to stop building fossil fuel homes

Allowing new construction with fossil fuel infrastructure is ill-advised from a climate and economic perspective. Most fossil fuel appliances will have to be converted to electric within the next two decades or sooner, if we are serious about meeting our decarbonization goals. It is less expensive to build all-electric houses from the start, making new construction truly the low-hanging fruit for electrification. In contrast, transitioning our large inventory of fossil-fuel-powered homes to the future all-electric economy is slow and more expensive.

Compliance with the Specialized Code for all types of low-rise residential buildings is a small step above the underlying Stretch Code except for mixed-fuel homes greater than 4,000 square feet, which must have sufficient on-site electric generation to be zero energy (HERS 0).

The Specialized Code and Belmont

On behalf of the Belmont Energy Committee, I placed an article to adopt the Specialized Code on Belmont's Spring 2023 Town Meeting warrant. At the urging of the Select Board, I withdrew the article to give town staff more time to analyze and determine if adoption might result in any negative consequences for Belmont. The Select Board agreed to place the adoption of the Specialized Code on the Fall Town Meeting warrant in November 2023.

Massachusetts has allowed Belmont to move towards the electric economy of the future. It is now up to us to adopt the Specialized Code as we did when we opted in to the Stretch Code in 2011. Contact your Town Meeting members and let them know how you think they should vote.

Roger Wrubel is a member of the Belmont Energy Committee.

Belmont Community Path Route Takes Shape

By Vincent Stanton, Jr.

How should the Belmont Community Path get from the Clark Street Bridge to Waverley Square? How might it cross Waverley Square? How should it connect to residential neighborhoods? These and related questions have been under study for Phase 2 of the Belmont Community Path.

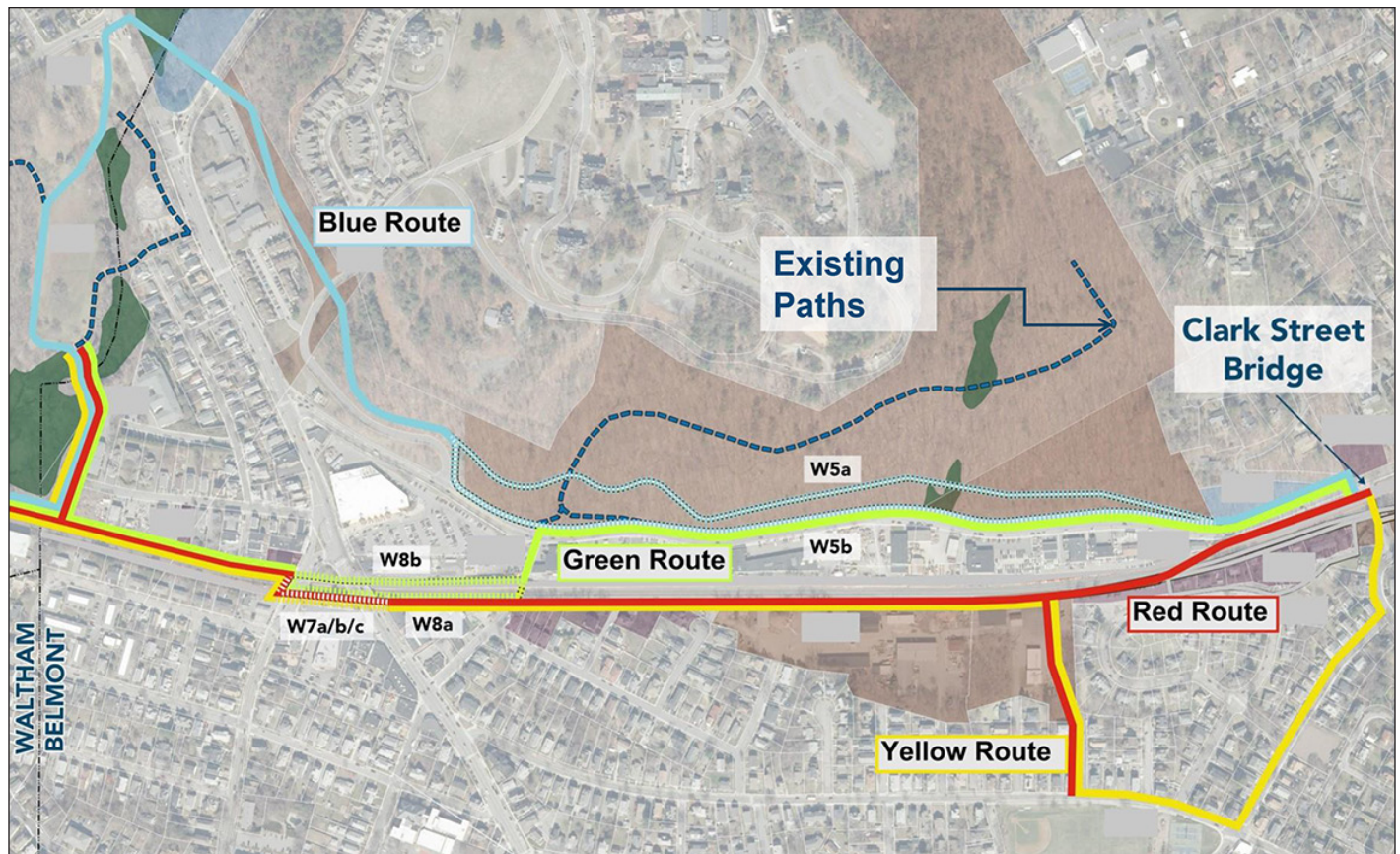
In December 2022, Belmont hired Pare Corporation and Toole Design Group to design Phase 2, which extends from the Clark Street Bridge to Waverley Square. Amy Archer and Kathleen Fasser, the project leaders of the Pare-Toole team, led the 2016–2017 Belmont Community Path feasibility study, and more recently designed the Waltham segment of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (MCRT). They are familiar with Belmont and with the larger network into which the Belmont path will fit.

However, in contrast to Phase I of the path, when the route was mostly locked in at the time Nitsch Engineering was engaged for path design, the optimal route for Phase 2 is still unsettled. Key data

relevant to path constructibility were not within the scope of the feasibility study, and recent changes to the Transportation Improvement Program's (TIP) project scoring criteria require a fresh look at how the route options will line up for construction funding. It also has not been clear what structures the MBTA would allow within the Fitchburg Line corridor. As a result, the design process for Phase 2 is proceeding in two stages: first, select a route; then, design the path.

The route selection process over the past seven months has encompassed:

- Soliciting input via focused meetings with public and private stakeholders including the MBTA, MassDOT, the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Belmont Housing Authority as custodians of Belmont Village, the Belmont Department of Public Works regarding the Town Yard, the Belmont police and fire departments regarding safety features, and private property owners;



Route alternatives prepared by the Pare Corporation. The Red Route is the recommended route.

- Working with the Community Path Project Committee (CPPC) to solicit input from Belmont residents on path location, design, and amenities, including an online survey which elicited 622 responses, 80% from Belmont residents;
- Collecting soil samples and geographical survey data for possible retaining walls or bridge abutments, right of way ownership, and likely business impacts of different path options;
- Updating the route evaluation criteria utilized in the 2017 feasibility study to reflect the 2020 TIP project scoring algorithm.

The new Belmont route evaluation matrix was prepared in consultation with TIP staff. The Pare/Toole team wrapped up these activities in mid-May and presented its recommended Phase 2 route at a hybrid (live/online) public forum on May 18 at Town Hall ([slides](#) available on the project website and recording of the presentation and subsequent Q&A viewable at the Belmont Media Center). On May 31, the nine-member CPPC unanimously endorsed the route recommended by the Pare/Toole team. The Select Board reviewed the route recom-

mendation at an August 30 meeting and had many questions about the route across the the Belmont Village property and the spur to Midland Street. They are likely to make a final decision on the Phase 2 route later this fall, after which 25% design will commence

The recommended Phase 2 route

The Pare team outlined four possible routes, two on the north side of Pleasant Street and two on the south side, each with a few variants. (See slides 35 to 37 of the May 18 presentation for details).

The routes on the north side have two main variants:

- Crossing Pleasant Street at the Clark Street Bridge and then either re-crossing Pleasant near the entrance to Star Market and traversing the south side of the Star Market parking lot to Trapelo Road, or
- Climbing Belmont Hill to reach Mill Street then crossing Mill Street and Trapelo Road to reach Beaver Brook Reservation and circling back down to Waverley Square.

These two routes not only require crossing more busy roads than the southern route options, but



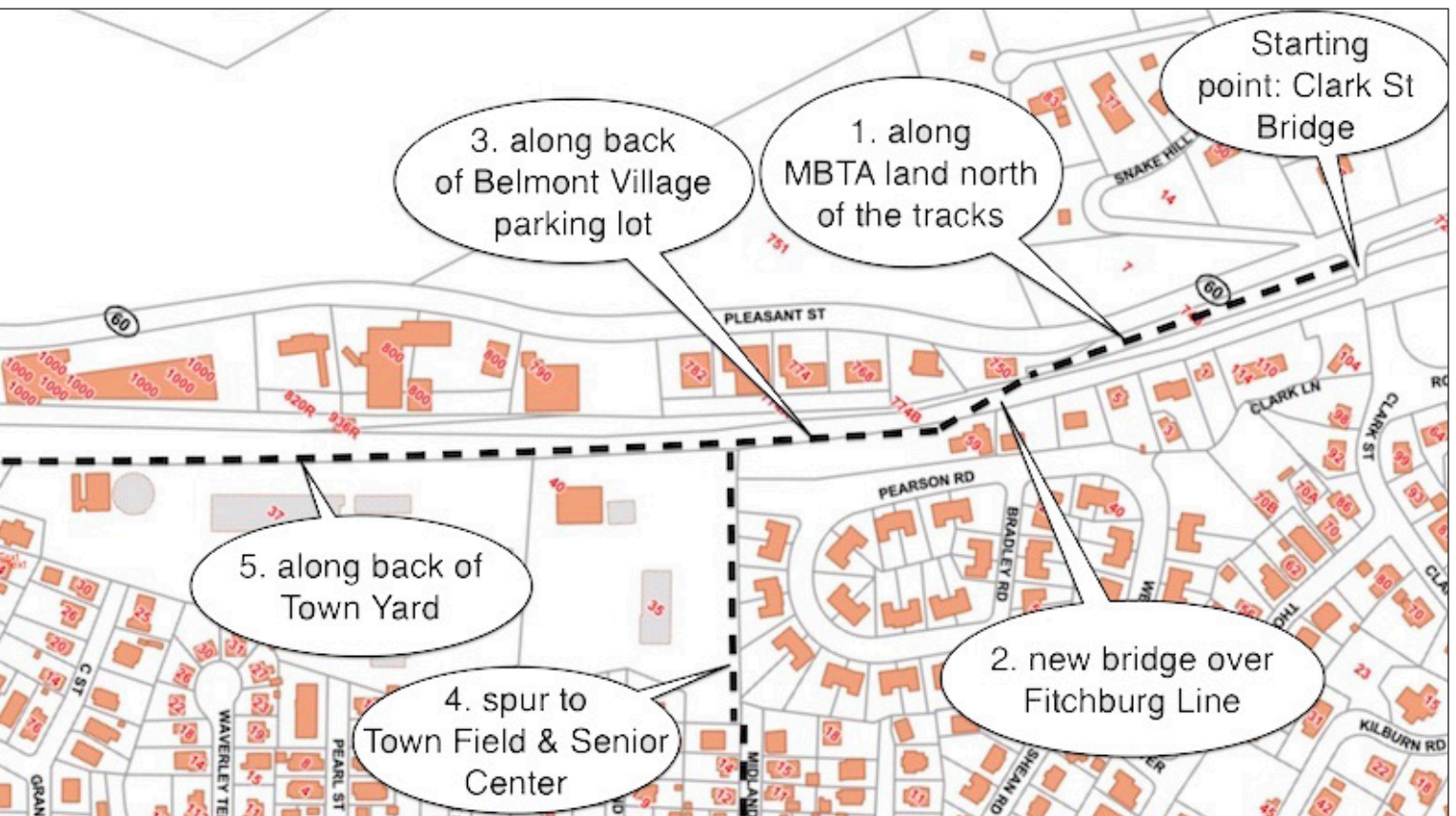
The recommended Phase 2 Route. Illustration by Vincent Stanton, Jr.

are also inaccessible to Belmont residents living on the south side of the tracks in Precincts 3, 4, and 5, except at Waverley Square and Clark Street. Indeed, they mostly cross the town's (unpopulated) conservation land.

The routes on the south side ranked higher on the Pare scoring matrix because they are accessible to a large number of residents, they allow a path connection to Town Field and the Senior Center, they avoid troublesome Pleasant Street crossings, and they provide a more direct route between Belmont Center and Waverley Square. It is important to keep in mind that the likely construction funding source, the TIP, is purposed for transportation projects, so short connections to potential path users and path directness are important funding considerations.

The specific route recommended by the Pare/Toole team and subsequently endorsed by CPPC starts at the Clark Street Bridge and proceeds west as follows:

1. Initially along the north side of the Fitchburg Line tracks, on MBTA owned land between the tracks and Pleasant Street, then
2. Crossing to the south side of the tracks just before reaching the first commercial building on south Pleasant Street (750 Pleasant Street) via a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the Fitchburg Line, terminating in the northeast corner of the Belmont Village parking lot, then
3. Proceeding west along the back edge of the Belmont Village parking lot along a descending ramp, reaching ground just before the Town Yard,
4. With a spur extending south from the path along the eastern border of the Town Yard and Midland Street to reach Town Field and the Senior Center, with the main route continuing
5. Along the north edge of the Town Yard, partially on MBTA land
6. Past the ends of A and White streets (both providing entry/exit points), along the edge of the new mixed use development at 495-505 Trapelo Road to the Trapelo Road bridge,
7. Across Trapelo Road at a still-to-be-determined crossing point (but without introducing a new traffic signal)





Two design options for Waverley Square from the Pare Group's May 18 presentation.

8. Through Waverley Station via a still-to-be-determined route, with options including the south side, the north side or a new platform constructed over the tracks and boarding area (a "box-over") covered by a small landscaped park, then
9. Across Lexington Street and
10. Continuing toward Waltham on the north side of the Fitchburg Line tracks, until reaching the Division of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR's) Beaver Brook South Reservation, where the path will connect with the existing trail network, and eventually (when complete), the Waltham segment of the MCRT.

During the Q&A session that followed the May 18 presentation, several residents asked for better maps illustrating the route options. The design team showed a few photographs captured by a drone flown over the area and subsequently annotated with possible path locations. Those images will likely appear on the project website in the coming weeks.

Once the Select Board weighs in on the final route, the design effort will start with the 25% design stage, which will be reviewed by MassDOT and the MBTA. MassDOT will hold a public hearing after accepting the 25% design and possibly after the 75% design is complete.

The public engagement process will be ongoing. Residents can submit comments and subscribe to updates via the project website. The design stage is expected to last for almost two years, culminating in all relevant regulatory permits and executable construction documents. Once TIP funding is

secured—probably after 25% design is complete—path construction will be managed by MassDOT, not Belmont.

Vincent Stanton, Jr. is a Belmont Citizens Forum board member and a member of the Belmont Community Path Project Committee. The opinions in this article reflect his views, not necessarily those of the BCF or CPPC.



VINCENT STANTON, JR.

The ascent to Waverley Square (#7 on map on preceding page).

Profiles in Belmont: Scott Ferson

By Elissa Ely

The start of the pandemic elongated time in lonely and frightening ways. People craved the consolation of community but were prohibited from human contact. Screens were a brilliant technology substitute, yet just as lonely in their way.

Sometime around then, Scott Ferson drew a hopscotch board on the sidewalk in front of his School Street house, and an inspirational message above it. Solitary pedestrians—who were all of us—found it hard to pass without noticing, and maybe without a small involuntary skip between squares. It was a bright bit of humor we could share without knowing one another.

It was also a beginning. Ferson had been hanging flags intermittently from his porch for years: the three stars of Tennessee when his in-laws visited, the Dutch national stripes when friends traveled from Holland. After a World Series he watched with his son, they considered hanging the Red Sox flag with a broom attached—a symbol that Boston had swept the games.

During the pandemic, these intermittent flags became constant, with handwritten block print descriptions of their histories and colors propped on a stone wall next to his driveway. As Scott saw it, the entire town was “isolated, but all in this together.” His own family was isolated in the midst of a home renovation, working in separate rooms and eating off hot plates. (We were all challenged, but some of us at least had working stoves.)

Flying the flags was like setting out a series of welcome mats; an invitation and a comfort from a safe distance. Since then, one or another flag has been waving continuously from the front porch.

Response has been largely appreciative. Human beings being human, passersby tend to notice the flags that have personal meaning to them (the Irish tricolour on St. Patrick’s day is always a hit.) Some make requests,

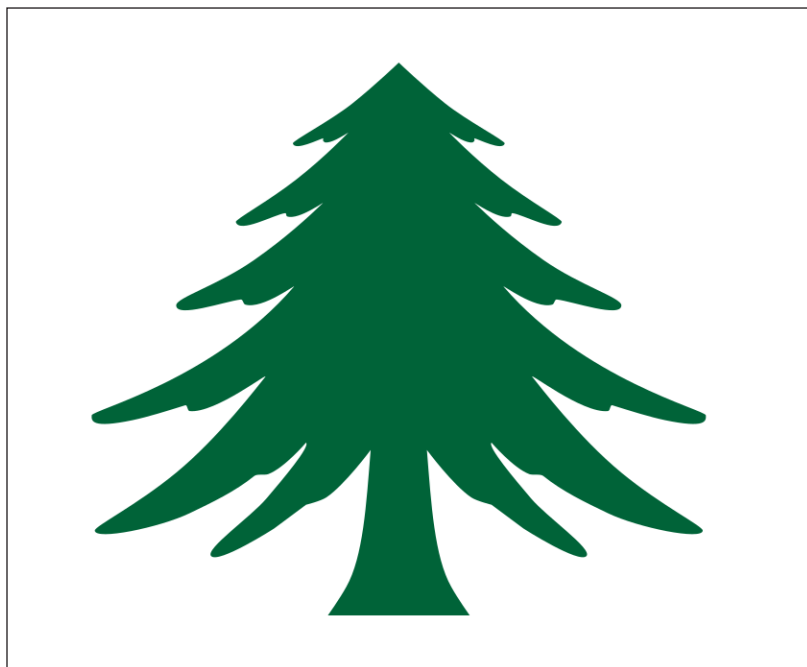
as if the neighborhood DJ were spinning tunes. Occasionally, clarification is needed. “Is that Confederate?” someone asked about the Tennessee flag. Another person left a gentle note about diversity, which caused Scott to rethink what he calls his “inherent biases” and fly the Indigenous Peoples’ flags of Australia and the First Nations flags of the United States. Education flows in two directions.

There has been much to learn. Bad designs produce “a seal on a bedsheet,” and the best-designed municipal flags include Topeka and Corpus Christi. Wikipedia is a good starting place for research, but Britannica is better on heraldry. The flags themselves come from Amazon (“four bucks”) or from “Flags for Good.” At first, they were



Scott Ferson

COURTESY OF SCOTT FERSON



"Pinetree" design of the Naval Ensign flag of Massachusetts.

piled into random plastic bins, but now they are stacked on shelving in his basement, respectfully alphabetized.

On any given day, choosing a flag might have to do with a holiday or event, or a request, "or sometimes I just key in on a continent," Ferson said. His personal favorites are American flags—especially the 44-star edition, which was in service during the late 1800s when his Belmont house was built. The 50-star flag of modern times, a gift from US Senator Ed Markey, has flown over the capitol.

Ferson keeps the notes that observers leave, and he tries not to interrupt anyone while watering the plants in the front yard. "Flags make powerful statements on their own," he says firmly. "The message is a private message, and if I'm standing there, someone's less likely to look."

The message is representational, too. Flags symbolize geography, weather, half-mast mourning, missing troops. Some also symbolize defiance and political division, and in his block print descriptions Scott adamantly refuses to editorialize. "Without exception, I stick to facts," he says. "If I want to put out a political sign, I'll put a sign on the lawn." There are a few personal rules, though: he won't fly the Russian flag, and he won't fly the original Massachusetts state flag—"I think it's racist," he said. Instead, he flies the pine tree variant.

None of this was genetic. No one in the Ferson family flew flags when he was growing up in Burlington. Back then, flags didn't interest him;

politics did. His mother remembers the 5 year old sitting raptly in front of the television, watching the funeral of Robert f. Kennedy. After serving in a number of presidential campaigns and as press secretary for Ted Kennedy, he began his own business: a public affairs and PR company, specializing in crisis communication. He represented one stricken family after the Boston Marathon bombing. He worked with nonprofits, State House lobbying, and—of course—political campaigns. "I seek challenges, and I like an underdog," his LinkedIn profile declares.

Belmont was midway between his job and his wife Lucy's when they moved here in 1990; first to an apartment, then one floor of a two-story house, then School Street. Over the years, the town grew into the family and the family grew into the town. Scott served as president of the Unitarian Universalist

Church and the Belmont Library Foundation. Lucy was involved with the rebuilding of Wellington School. His daughter returned home during the pandemic. His son's wedding across the country included 25 friends from Belmont.

Classes he teaches now at Stonehill College on elections and American government have left Ferson hopeful in a time when many are angry or despairing. His faith is based in history. "We're grounded in foundational documents," he says, and quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Things refuse to be mismanaged for long." As someone who has always been of an analytic bent, he's planning a year-long trip, traveling across the country not to consult, but simply to listen. "If we listened more, we might understand behavior," he says. It's hard to argue with that in these times. When two fervent opinions are politically deaf to each other, an attentive third ear is invaluable.

COVID-19 has entered a less lonely, less frightening phase, but the flags on School Street are still rotated every three days. Their study has a formal name: he has become a vexillologist—"and even worse," he adds, "an amateur vexillologist." More than three years after the pandemic began, the vexillologist and his wife sometimes sit on the front porch with a glass of wine, looking at whatever flag is in front of them. Wandering past (without the wine), so do we.

Elissa Ely is a community psychiatrist.

Lone Tree Hill Goes Native with Plantings

By Jeffrey North

On Earth Day 2023 (April 22), the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF), in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund, held its ninth annual Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day. (See [“Volunteers Plant, Clean Up Lone Tree Hill,”](#) BCF Newsletter, May/June 2023, for more information).

Several dozen volunteers rolled up their sleeves, and gardening trowels in hand, planted 350 plugs of young native plants in the Great Meadow and reclaimed meadow areas of Belmont’s Lone Tree Hill Conservation Land in addition to planting 40 white pine saplings to replace the mature pines gradually lost to age and weather. The volunteers planted slender leaf mountain mint, short-toothed mountain mint, wild bergamot (bee balm), white wood aster, blue wood aster, New England aster, and butterfly weed—50 plant plugs of each species.

Joe Hibbard, landscape architect, nearby resident, and organizer of the event gave a planting primer



JOE HIBBARD

One hundred plants of two species of mountain mint are doing very well. Unpalatable to browsers, the mountain mints should flower and spread next summer if not late this summer.

to the volunteers before setting them loose in the meadow. Joe had also selected the plants from a specialist nursery in Pennsylvania, and he flagged the locations by species prior to the volunteer day.

Just where to plant, and which species to plant where, were carefully planned to give the young plants the best chance of taking root, avoiding browsers, and prospering in suitable soil, sunlight, and surrounding plants.

Butterfly weed, wild bergamot, and the asters were chosen to attract and nourish Ruby-throated hummingbirds and a host of other bird species, monarchs and other butterflies, bees and other pollinators.

Following Hibbard’s planting plan, the volunteers planted the butterfly weed just below the Pine Allee where the soil is poor and thin, and where rabbits should be wary of raptors that hunt from the open sky above. Newly minted native plant volunteers placed the New England asters in wet areas in the middle of the Great Meadow. Blue and white asters are now spread around the northwest edge of the newly reclaimed meadow area. (See [“Lone Tree Hill Restoration Shows Strong Start,”](#) BCF Newsletter, January/February 2022.)

An important consideration is to avoid predation, so the initiative this year included plant species



JOE HIBBARD

White wood aster at Lone Tree Hill. Fifty white wood aster and 50 blue wood aster planted close to existing Pennsylvania sedge have survived and put on substantial growth, indicating future success for these fall-blooming perennials. The asters were planted among sedge to discourage browsing by herbivores.

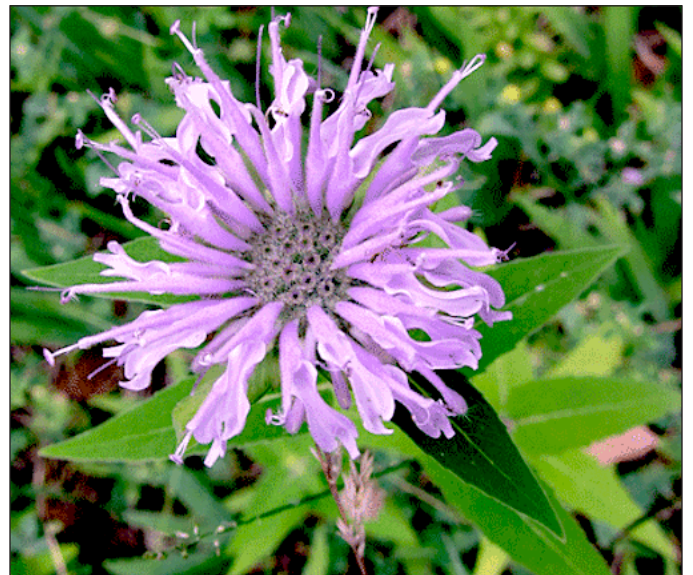


Fifty butterfly weed seedlings were planted in Lone Tree Hill's area A1 and the Great Meadow. These have suffered about 50% losses. They were perhaps a bit underdeveloped when planted, but these are tough plants and should survive and flower in two to three years.

that rabbits and deer are unlikely to eat, like wild bergamot and mountain mint. The asters that might be appetizing to browsers were spread out to avoid wholesale discovery and consumption by animals, and these were planted in open areas where creatures should fear that they are vulnerable to becoming a meal themselves. Planting among existing Pennsylvania sedge, which is not typically browsed, is another tactic of trickery employed this year, hiding the new plants among the established, unpalatable ones.

These photos, courtesy of Hibbard except where noted, were taken two months after the April 22 Volunteer Day planting event. All 350 plants were installed as 5" plugs: 50 butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), 50 blue wood aster (*Aster cordifolius*), 50 white wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*), 50 New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*), 50 mountain mint (*Monarda fistulosa*), 50 short-toothed mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), and 50 slender mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*).

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



Bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*).

Stewards Keep Ogilby Farm Traditions

By Judith Feinleib

Henry Ogilby thinks of himself, his siblings, and Mike and Hermik Chase as stewards of the last remaining farmland in Belmont, part of the Richardson Farm Historical District. They are stewards in the classical sense of the term—people whose code of ethics requires them to engage in responsible planning and management of resources.

In this case, these resources are the land and houses that have been in the Ogilby family since the 17th century. For the last 11 years, the Chases have cultivated the land of Belmont Acres Farm where they grow and sell vegetables and keep sheep, goats, chickens, and ducks.

Both the Ogilby land and the structures on it are protected from development. That is due to the efforts of the late Lydia Phippen Ogilby, Henry's mother, who many think of as Belmont's last grande dame. Lydia Ogilby lived adjacent to the farmland in the yellow Thomas Richardson house on the

corner of Washington, Blanchard, and Grove Streets. She was concerned that the future might see developers take over the land and use it for something other than farming. Accordingly, she sought ways to protect it. She found a way in the form of an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Creating the APR required the approval of the Select Board, Town Meeting, and the state legislature.

An APR sequesters land for agricultural use in perpetuity. In 2003, this 10-acre parcel of land was placed in an APR held by both the Belmont Land Trust, a local group, and the American Farmland Trust, a national organization. Though the Ogilbys own the land, its use is overseen by the two trust organizations.

Some years later, perhaps motivated by the possibility that the historic Thomas Clark House might be destroyed, Lydia Ogilby became concerned about the preservation of the Joseph Bright and the Thomas Richardson houses which were built



JEFFREY NORTH

Mike Chase on Ogilby Farm.

by brothers-in-law who were Ogilby ancestors. The houses, located at 306 and 336 Washington Street, were not a part of the 10-acre APR.

In 2012, working with the Belmont Historic District Commission (HDC), Ogilby began the process needed to have the entire area—the 10 acres of farmland plus the two houses—become the Richardson Farm Historic District. The Select Board and Town Meeting approved this historic district in 2013. The effort was fortuitous; another comparable historic home, the Thomas Clark House, was demolished in 2014.

While the Ogilbys still own the land and houses, the American Farmland Trust and the Belmont Trust guarantee that the 10 acres of farmland will be permanently devoted to agriculture, and the HDC makes sure that all the structures in the Richardson Historic District will forever retain their character. The family pays agricultural property taxes on the farmland and residential property taxes on the Bright and Richardson

houses. To Henry Ogilby, responsible stewardship includes responsibilities to the town.

Mike and Hermik Chase, Belmont residents, have worked Belmont Acres Farm since 2012. Their daughter Narineh, a senior at Belmont High School, has assisted them since they began to run the farm and oversees the weekly farmstand sales.

Mike Chase sees his interest in farming as part of his heritage. His family—great grandparents, grandparents, and parents—have all done serious gardening. He began helping when what is now Belmont Acres Farms was still Sergi Farms, and in 2011, he and Hermik began to farm a small portion of the land. When Henry Ogilby needed farming help because the Sergi brothers wanted to retire, the two began serious talks about having Mike and Hermik take over the entire farm.

Belmont Acres Farm at 34 Glenn Road, (www.belmontacresfarm.com), is a small operation with a large variety of produce. Seedling growth begins during the winter. New crops are tested every year.



Harvest bounty at the Ogilby farm.



The farm opens in late spring and can stay open until there is a hard frost; some years, crops have been available until Christmastime.

The farm also has sheep, goats, ducks and chickens, and a border collie named Mei, who Mike Chase says, “... moves the sheep from the barn to the pasture, puts the chickens into the coop in the evening, and keeps deer, Canada geese, coyotes, and turkeys out of the farm.” While Belmont’s school children visit to learn about the animals, the primary purpose of the animals is fertilizing the land. Fields are fertilized on a rotating schedule; fields where the animals graze lie fallow that year.

Because Belmont Acres Farm is a small, typically rocky-soil New England farm, profitability is problematic. The Chases have jobs that supplement their farming. Mike Chase has a PhD in environmental biology and has a second job as a bioinformatician at Harvard’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health. Hermik Chase has a master’s in public health and works for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Most staffers have worked at the farm for years and have second jobs. Still, they consider Belmont Acres to be their primary focus.

Mike Chase’s years of working on the farm have honed his views on farming and demonstrate how committed he is to preserving the land. Despite all the complexities involved in running Belmont Acres Farm, he believes that small farms are the key to healthy eating because the produce does not have to be transported. That means that it is as

fresh as it can possibly be. At the same time small local farms provide much-needed green space in increasingly built-up areas. And while overcoming the challenges of working a classic New England farm is an ongoing effort, small farms can become profitable as improvements are made.

Through their maintenance of the Richardson Farm Historic District and their work on Belmont Acres Farm, the Ogilbys and the Chases demonstrate what it means to protect green space and historic buildings, and they are committed to doing so on a continuing basis. Their approach is diametrically opposed to those organizations—most notably wealthy private schools and some religious institutions—which decline to contribute to (and even undermine) Belmont’s welfare. In an age where so many seek to evade their obligations, the Ogilbys and the Chases are sterling examples of civic, fiscal, and environmental responsibility, and a credit to the town of Belmont.

Judith Feinleib writes If I May, (www.jfeinleibifimay.com), a blog on issues affecting Belmont. A Precinct 6 Town Meeting member, she has a doctorate in political science and, as an independent consultant, helps people with social media posting, writing, and in-house and external corporate communications.



Letter to the Editor

My home is in Waltham, and my dentist's office is in Arlington. I have occasion to ride my bicycle through Belmont on the way there and back.

Today (May 22, 2023) I was waiting for the red light at Cross and Brighton Streets when a car approaching in the opposite direction got a green light, but the light remained red for me.

I had to run the red light to get through the intersection and I had no way to know when the red light for the cross traffic would turn green.

The same thing happened a second time on Sycamore Street at Lexington Street, only a block away from the Belmont Wheelworks bicycle shop.

Why? Many traffic lights are triggered by metal detector wires buried in the surface of the roadway, and their sensitivity is set too low to respond to a bicycle.

Most bicyclists aren't aware why, and are being covertly trained to run red lights. Motorists find nothing wrong with those lights! It's those scofflaw bicyclists, right?

Fixing the problem requires only laying wires in a different pattern to create a more directional antenna, as has been known and put into practice for nearly 40 years, see john-s-allen.com/blog/2018/08/the-definitive-paper-about-loop-detectors-published-ca-1986/.

Then the detector can respond to a smaller vehicle without triggering falsely on a vehicle in another lane.

This issue among others reveals what I regard as a deficit of imagination in planning for bicycling in Belmont, despite the high level of environmental and civic consciousness which the Belmont Citizens Forum displays.

Belmont has now created a separated bikeway supposedly appropriate for child cyclists on Concord Avenue, which has numerous crossing and turning conflicts at connecting streets and driveways. These conflicts account for most car-bike crashes, and the separation worsens the problem by hiding bicyclists and motorists from each other. The westbound separated bike lane leads bicyclists into the intersection at the Leonard Street bridge, already challenging, at the absolutely worst lane position to cross onto Royal Road or Common Street.

In a previous letter (See "[Letter to the Editor: Belmont Cycling Safety](#)," BCF Newsletter, September 2021) I proposed, instead, striped bike lanes adjacent to the median, much better for motorists and adult bicyclists, and safer when crossing Concord Avenue on foot or on a bicycle.

School Street, as I suggested in my article, offers a calmer alternative to Concord Avenue for east-west bicycle traffic, with its traffic signal at Common Street, except that Belmont has made the block past the Wellington School one way when students are arriving and leaving. In my previous article, I suggested a contraflow bike lane as an easy solution.

I support Belmont's planned segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail, which will avoid all the intersection issues in Belmont Center.



Concord Avenue at Common Street.

May I suggest, in summary, that Belmont needs a traffic plan which takes advantage of each street according to the opportunities which it reasonably offers?

May I also suggest that with the advent of electrically assisted bicycles, these issues are becoming more acute? Belmont will need to promote orderly traffic operation with signals that work, and dissuade e-bike riders capable of sustained speeds of 20 or 28 miles per hour from riding on a rail trail shared with pedestrians and child cyclists. That will require a plan which looks forward and addresses real problems with real solutions. As of now, the rail trail does; the installations on Concord Avenue and School Street do not.

John S. Allen

John indicates that he has scheduled a CyclingSavvy course with a Zoom session on Friday, September 22, and on-bike sessions in Waltham on Saturday, September 23. This course, for teens and adults, covers everything your mother didn't teach you about riding a bicycle and is about skill, not speed—we won't leave anyone behind! Registration is at <https://bit.ly/cswaltham>. - Editor

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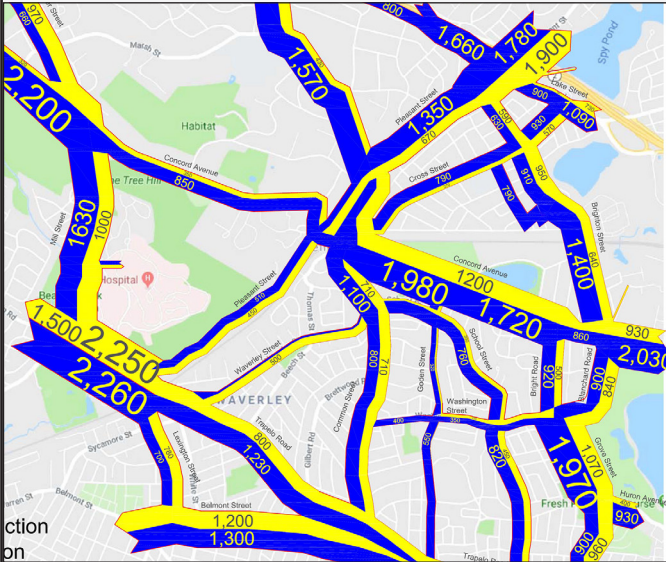
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