



## PILOT Program Could Ease Tax Burden

By Max Colice

Belmont’s annual budget for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, approved by Town Meeting in May, is \$166.23 million. Of that, \$138.85 M (83.5%) comes from property taxes and debt exclusions. The rest comes from state aid (\$15.5 M), auto excise taxes, and a variety of lesser sources. Just over 95% of property taxes come from residents, the remainder from businesses. The 2022 Collins Center Report on municipal best practices recommends that Belmont should develop new sources of revenue to mitigate the burden of property taxes, including a program for payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT). How much revenue could a PILOT program generate for Belmont?

A PILOT is a payment by a tax-exempt entity in lieu of property tax. It is typically 25% of the full property tax, or roughly the percentage of the municipal budget devoted to police, fire, and public works together. PILOTs help to offset the burden placed on Belmont taxpayers to pay for services that

benefit every property owner, including tax-exempt property owners.

Belmont receives PILOT from several tax-exempt public or quasi-public entities, including Belmont Light, the Belmont Housing Authority, Waverley

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There are roughly 40 private tax-exempt entities that together own about \$425 million of real estate in Belmont.

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Woods, and the City of Cambridge, which owns the Payson Reservoir. Some of the payments are required under state law, while others are required by contracts or memoranda with Belmont.

There are roughly 40 private tax-exempt entities that together own about \$425 million of real estate in Belmont. If these entities paid property taxes at the full rate, they would provide roughly \$4.8 million in revenue to Belmont. At the PILOT rate,

<b>Belmont’s Top 10 Tax-Exempt Entities</b>	<b>Total Assessed Value</b>	<b>Nominal Property Tax</b>	<b>PILOT (25% of Property Tax)</b>
Mass Audubon Society Inc.	\$104,893,000	\$1,194,617	\$298,654
McLean Hospital Corp.	\$88,106,000	\$1,003,527	\$250,88
Belmont Hill School	\$58,434,000	\$665,563	\$166,391
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston	\$25,213,000	\$287,176	\$71,794
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	\$22,656,000	\$258,052	\$64,513
Belmont Day School	\$18,144,000	\$206,660	\$51,665
Belmont Methodist Church	\$9,725,000	\$110,768	\$27,692
Holy Cross Church	\$8,124,000	\$92,532	\$23,133
First Armenian Church	\$7,243,000	\$82,498	\$20,624
Jewish Community Center	\$6,875,000	\$78,306	\$19,577

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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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this would be about \$1.2 million. The top-10 private tax-exempt entities alone could provide almost \$1 million in PILOT.

To date, however, Belmont has not collected any significant PILOT from private tax-exempt property owners despite annual requests from the Belmont Assessor's Office. The former chair of the Belmont Board of Assessors likened collecting PILOT to "pushing on string," perhaps because PILOT is completely voluntary and most tax-exempt entities would rather devote their funds to other uses such as their primary missions.

This situation is not unusual. In 2003, when the state legislature considered eliminating property tax exemptions for some nonprofits, the Massachusetts Division of Local Services found that Massachusetts cities and towns received only about \$17.9 million in PILOT from tax-exempt charities and private schools, with Boston and Cambridge receiving more than \$13 million of that total. Had all of that property been fully taxable, it would have generated more than \$505 million total in property tax revenue.

To increase PILOT, the 2022 Collins Center Report suggests that Belmont should strengthen relationships with local private tax-exempt entities and establish a task force to develop a PILOT program. This PILOT program should provide a consistent, equitable process for determining payment amounts. It could follow the process set in 2009 and 2010 by the PILOT Task Force that reviewed and updated Boston's PILOT program.

One of the Boston PILOT Task Force's main recommendations was to recognize community benefits as PILOT credits. Today, many of these community benefits take the form of services in lieu of taxes (SILOT). For example, Mass General Hospital provides free health programs, Berklee College provides free access to its facilities for community organizations, and the Museum of Science provides free programming for Boston high school students. In 2024, Boston requested \$128 million in PILOT from tax-exempt charitable and educational institutions and received nearly \$35 million in cash and more than \$63 million in community benefits.

Belmont could do well to emulate Boston's approach to PILOT. Additional cash would always be welcome, but services could be useful, too. For example, local churches could provide free parking

for school buses during school days. The private schools could open their fields to community organizations such as the Belmont Soccer Association for free or at reduced prices on evenings and weekends. And McLean Hospital could provide free counseling or other mental health programming in the schools.

Belmont could also solicit cash to pay for capital projects or programs that align with the needs or missions of local tax-exempt entities. Belmont is already making strides in this direction, with the Select Board and town administrator arranging a contribution from the Belmont Hill School toward construction of the new ice rink in exchange for an option on ice time for some of its hockey teams.

Belmont could also solicit funds from local private schools to defray the expenses associated with providing publicly funded special education services to private schools students as required by 608 CMR 28.03(e). Asking the private schools in Belmont to cover the cost of these services for their students would be both reasonable and in line with the private schools' needs and missions. Other local organizations might be willing to contribute funds to senior tax relief.

Belmont should also look to convert tax-exempt property into taxable property by partnering with tax-exempt organizations to return tax-exempt property to the tax rolls. In 2000, Belmont worked with McLean Hospital to develop Lone Tree Hill, resulting in substantial new—and fully taxable—growth. By 2020, the value of this new growth was over \$159 million—nearly twice the assessed value of McLean—with more fully taxable development planned for the next few years.

Belmont could also look to converting tax-exempt land owned by the state or county to private ownership. For instance, consider the four-acre parcel at

## McLean's Taxes

Before 2000, McLean Hospital paid property taxes to Belmont per Massachusetts General Law Ch. 59, Section 5(c), which requires psychiatric hospitals to pay property tax, albeit at a reduced rate. In 2000, Belmont filed home rule legislation exempting McLean Hospital from these tax payments as part of the agreement that led to the development of Lone Tree Hill.

This was a good deal for Belmont. The new construction generates significantly more tax revenue than McLean would have ever paid in property tax.

the northeastern corner of Belmont that is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This parcel is bordered by Route 2 on one side and an exit ramp on the other side. It is assessed at nearly \$8 million and is already zoned for commercial use. Developing this land for private use could generate substantial income for both Belmont and the state with little to no disruption to the rest of Belmont.

*Max Colice is a Belmont resident.*



South Cottage, McLean Hospital.

BELMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Vision for a Better Belmont: Matt Taylor

*This article is the latest in a series of interviews with Belmont stakeholders about their vision for the future of Belmont. Jeffrey North conducted this interview. It has been edited for length and clarity. – Ed.*

## BCF

Congratulations on your recent rotation to the chair of the Select Board. Over the past year as a member of the Select Board, what are some positive steps or improvements in town governance you have seen? And what do you see as needing improvement?

## Taylor

We have an excellent town, and we are a welcoming community. I hope you see what I see. We can take pride in knowing that Belmont is well-run considering its history, size, and available resources. I do not judge anyone who might miss details or take for granted some portion of what makes Belmont great.

From the outside, it may seem as though local government and community work “just happens” despite lean staffing and constrained budgets. Please take a moment to thank our staff and volunteering neighbors who make Belmont a better place.

Belmont is modernizing to be a dynamic and responsive local government. We are setting goals and accomplishing many of them. The Select Board crafted new committee charges to be focused and goal-oriented, including important work on a new Town Plan and multiyear budgeting. Departments are collaborating more and more effectively. For example, having a dedicated town-wide facilities department and a unified finance department has helped us improve care for our buildings and move forward on tax relief for seniors.

This has been so successful that you might not have noticed all the areas where we are leanly staffed. I could list nearly every department as examples. I’m particularly interested in staffing foundational departments and revenue growth, like IT, Engineering, and Planning and Building to name just a few.

The real risk of this success is taking it for granted and thinking everything is fine because the strain is less visible. Efficiencies will not solve our structural problems without significantly

diminishing services. With so much happening in parallel, the Select Board reinstated liaison roles to facilitate communication and coordination across numerous committees and projects.

We always pass balanced budgets. This year, we further reduced our reliance on one-time funds for recurring expenses. This makes our finances more sustainable but strains our leanly staffed departments just that much more. To maintain services as best we can and within our means, we are consolidating and reorganizing departments. These changes can be challenging, but they enable our staff to share expertise, enhance collaboration, and align responsibilities with the management structure. Our municipal and school departments worked together on the budget and several one-time projects. This partnership strengthens our community.

## BCF

What steps do you believe we need to take in the short, medium, and long term to enhance the quality of life in Belmont and achieve a sound fiscal future that includes vibrant neighborhoods, excellent municipal services, and world-class schools?

## Taylor

When I ran for Select Board, I talked a lot about wanting excellent schools AND an excellent town around those schools. A 95% residential tax base means taxes are high, AND budgets are constrained.

Our town’s long-entrenched structure of urban-adjacent, low-scale residential housing without a vibrant commercial base makes our revenue inadequate to support our desired quality of life. To reconcile revenue with services, we must bring effective proposals to Town Meeting that allow for commercial and mixed-use development, encourage people-first vibrancy, and help us advertise that we, Belmont, welcome our future opportunities.

In the short term, to maintain services for residents, we must continue to budget carefully and optimize our local government. We must also incentivize structure-changing new growth that helps revenue keep pace with expenses and would sustain more services. Every year of progress can reduce the frequency and size of override requests,

and I believe, buy enough time to keep most services while we also work toward the bigger goal of a 10% commercial tax base.

We are a land-constrained town. The town cannot redevelop private property, nor can we force property owners to build what fits into our larger plan, policy, or community preference. So, we must urgently untangle a long history of “no”-based policies and shift to be “opportunity ready.” Imagine: what if we had been welcoming to lab space before our neighboring communities seized those opportunities? We must welcome by-right development, especially for mixed-use projects, which combine commercial space with residential housing. Mixed-use brings amenities close to residents who want them and allows customers to live near the small and medium-sized businesses that thrive when people live nearby.

In the medium term, we must reform parking and traffic. Parking Benefit Districts are the perfect tool to unlock vibrant, people-focused centers and neighborhoods, while preserving historic and green spaces.

Benefit Districts take some or all the profit from parking revenues and invest it back into improving the neighborhood. Neighboring towns like Arlington reinvest hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to improve the streetscape and vibrancy in-and-around their businesses. These features benefit everyone.

In the long run, a 10% commercial tax base is a huge 10+ year goal. The past three Select Board elections have emphatically shown the broad base of voters insistent we follow through on what we have been discussing and studying for decades. You have been heard. Elizabeth Dionne’s highly successful year as Select Board chair has led to meaningful steps toward this goal. We are hiring expert staff, using modern tools, aligning departments to collaborate, and building a planning process that works. The benefits of this groundwork will compound and accelerate.



Matt Taylor.

Reaching our goal would be incredible for Belmont. Communities that achieve at least a 10% commercial tax base can start to shift some of the property tax burden from residential properties to commercial properties. We will have positioned Belmont for multigenerational success and sustainability.

## BCF

What inspired you to run for the Select Board, and how has your perspective on Belmont evolved since taking office?

## Taylor

I ran for Select Board because I love our community, our people, and being part of our team that is so much bigger than any one person or lifetime. Our community has made and will make some mistakes, but there is so much to be thankful for every day. I want every person to see

the positives that I see and feel the gratitude I feel. While running, I connected with many neighbors in a genuine way that filled my heart. So many people chip in to make our community special in ways that are big and small, formal and informal.

I ran for Select Board by asking voters to endorse a huge, shared goal: achieving a 10% commercial tax base and, specifically, using mixed-use development to incentivize growth that sustains services for residents. I intend to help us follow through.

Before serving on the Select Board, I had less visibility into the legal and personnel discussions that often happen in executive sessions. These discussions may not seem newsworthy, but they are so vital for preserving our town and keeping everything running smoothly.

I ran to help us make progress on these large, structural challenges in a data-driven way. This urgent focus has not changed, and I expect it will take several years of consistent, practical reforms to unlock significant momentum. Revenue growth may come in bursts as opportunities arise, and property owners choose to invest. Yet the costs of inaction are obvious: diminishing services and larger, more frequent override requests.

BCF

How is the Select Board working to balance Belmont's need for growth and development with the preservation of its historic and environmental character?

Taylor

As a land-constrained town, we must build up, not out. We must reform traffic and parking that constrict our business centers and bisect neighborhoods. Building up will balance growth with preservation, commercial development with housing, and services with affordability.

We love our historic character and green spaces. The Planning Board proposes zoning bylaws for Town Meeting to approve (or not). I doubt our Planning Board would propose rezoning historic sites or our natural, green spaces. And if they did, I believe Town Meeting would reject such a proposal.

BCF

What role do you believe community engagement and transparency should play in town governance, and how are you working to improve them?

Taylor

All our work happens in open meetings. Most often, there is too much information, and our challenge is explainability, not a lack of transparency. Your right to observe our work is important to me. This sometimes involves uncomfortable questions and discussions, and I view those moments as part of your right to representation and meaningful debate.

Through my campaign and the past year, I have learned that the broader base of our community wants officials, volunteers, and staff who listen and learn from public engagement without giving undue weight to how frequently or loudly someone makes their points. We all have standing in these town-wide goals and your perspective matters. Please continue to engage with the public process and help enrich our work. Please keep listening for the quiet, understated perspectives that might go unnoticed.

BCF

What's one project or decision during your time on the Board that you feel especially proud of, and why?

Taylor

I love helping our Town Meeting be informed in their decisions about the future of our community. A core value of mine is to work as a communicator rather than a pundit, and as an explainer, not a campaigner. The 288 elected Town Meeting members are chosen by their respective precincts, but each of us takes an oath to serve all of Belmont and not some narrower perspective or part of town.

I'm also proud to be a voice in the room who deeply understands data modeling and the importance of having models that inform policymaking, rather than models that encode implicit policies. We must balance data availability with the quality of data that supports well-informed decision-making.

I learn so much from people who speak to me for the first time, stop me on my run to chat, or see me out and about in our community and share their perspectives. Informal access is just as important as formal access. Please say "hi" and tell me what is on your mind. Thank you for being my neighbor.

*Matthew Taylor is chair of the Select Board, a Town Meeting member at-large, and a Belmont resident.*

## Follow Town's Electricity From Source to Socket

By Dave Beavers

The answer to the question "Where does my electricity come from?" can be elusive. There can be many answers to what appears to be a straightforward question. These answers can be abstract by necessity, requiring physics concepts and a plethora of obscure acronyms for precision.

Instead of a textbook approach, the goal of this article is to offer an intuitive understanding of Belmont's electricity. I will eschew dry facts, physics, and acronyms in favor of less abstract explanations and analogies. Along the way, I will explore key issues such as utility costs, rates, reliability, governance, and climate change.

### Is electricity intuitive?

Electricity consumption is intuitive. You don't need instructions to plug a phone charger into an outlet. But can we intuitively understand how electricity reaches the plug?

Consider tap water: hear the water running, feel the cool or warm sensation, and observe how it slides smoothly through your fingers, wet and refreshing. Imagine how it tastes. It's easy to imagine water molecules stored in the Quabbin Reservoir flowing through outlet pipes, pumps, and filters managed by the Metropolitan Water Resources Authority (MWRA) to Belmont and distributed to homes through underground pipes managed by the town's Water Division. It's also easy

to see the reservoir being filled by rainfall, streams, and rivers. Gravity, a force we intimately understand, does much of the work, and the hydrologic cycle is something we have direct experience with.

On the other hand, a personal experience with the AC electricity delivered by Belmont Light,

whether it's seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled, is not something to be celebrated. How do we accurately imagine electricity "flowing" to us? Electrons are not like water molecules. They don't flow through electric lines like water molecules do through pipes. In fact, they barely move at all.

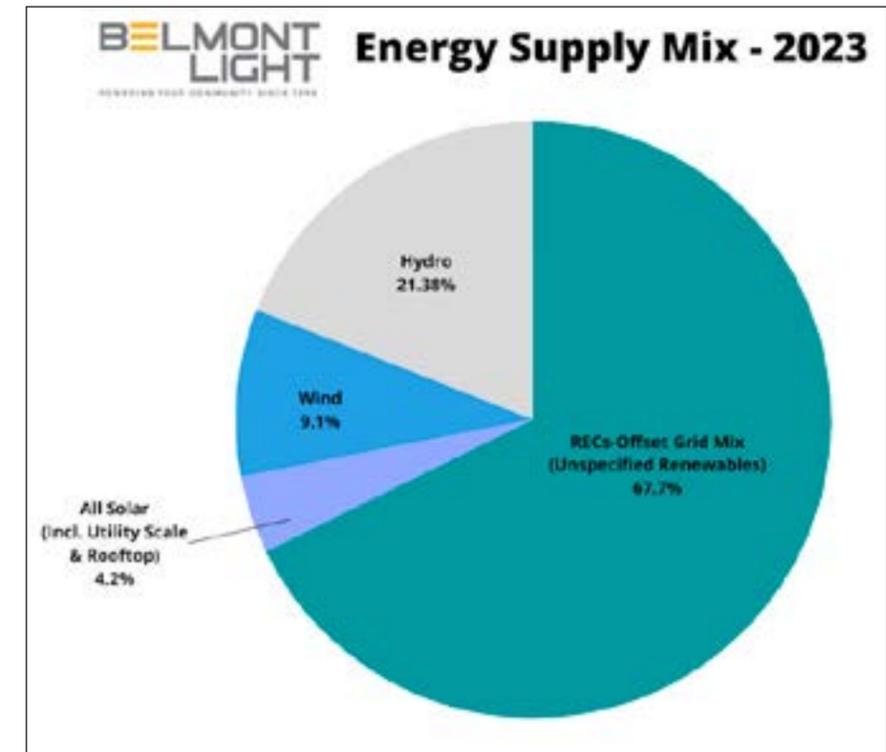
Perhaps even more confusing, when Belmont Light buys power from a generator, it does not necessarily mean the power from that

generator will be physically consumed in Belmont itself.

### Why does the question matter?

Consider the last apocalyptic movie you watched. What was the first thing to break and send our civilization on the road to ruin? There's a good chance it was the electric grid. No clean water, lights, or heat in the convenient forms we are used to, dead batteries in cell phones and other electronics, empty supermarket shelves, and plenty of other unpleasanties. One study suggested that after only two weeks without power, civilization, as we know it, would collapse.

If you are concerned about climate change, you may want to consider sources of electricity that don't contribute to the problem. You may ask if the



Belmont Light's finalized energy supply by fuel type for 2023, the most recent information available. Source: Belmont Light.

energy you use is ‘green’ or ‘clean’ or ‘non-emitting’ or one of many other standards. Also, if you believe we should electrify transportation and heating, you may wonder where all the additional electricity will come from and whether our grid can accommodate it.

If you get a monthly bill from Belmont Light, congratulations. You are a Belmont Light customer and pay 30% less for electricity than friends in neighboring communities for nonprofit, [award-winning service](#) (scroll down to the Belmont Light Department page). As a voter electing commissioners to oversee Belmont Light, you are part of the governance process and have a say in the utility’s policies.

### Where does my electricity come from?

You get a bill from Belmont Light, so the electricity must come from them, right? Yes, that is true. So, what does the organization do? An analogy to a grocery store that does home delivery may help explain.

#### Grocery sourcing (energy purchases)

A grocery store sources vegetables, dairy products, meat, and other goods either directly

from farms or through distributors and wholesale markets. Similarly, Belmont Light procures energy through either a direct contract with a specific generator, an energy company that aggregates multiple generators, or via the New England wholesale market. About 1.5% of the total is homegrown solar power that is pushed back on the grid when not consumed at a home or building.

#### Groceries brought to store (transmission)

Imagine trucks traveling down major highways carrying grocery products to a store. Analogously, transmission (e.g., the electrical lines supported by large towers that often run along major highways) carries energy to Belmont Light’s substation at Blair Pond. The grid operator, ISO-NE, ensures that energy is delivered smoothly. Traffic on the roads can delay deliveries, but there is generally no way to control it. Energy traffic on transmission lines, on the other hand, is continuously monitored and controlled, as any significant uncontrolled changes to the grid’s conditions (voltage, current, frequency) could cause damage to infrastructure and lead to blackouts.

The cost of transmission services is rapidly rising, putting upward pressure on electric rates.

#### Groceries delivered to homes (distribution)

The last leg of the groceries journey is delivery from the store to a home. This leg is equivalent, by analogy, to the distribution of electricity to our homes. The bulk of the work performed by Belmont Light is directed toward enhancing and maintaining our distribution system, which is the network of lines across Belmont that carry energy from the Blair Pond substation to homes and businesses. About half of the lines are underground, and the rest run on utility poles. Delivering around 130,000 MWh (megawatt-hours) of electricity per year, Belmont Light’s annual load is about nine times higher than [the electricity consumed by Fenway Park annually](#).

### Belmont Light’s organization

With 31 employees and a close connection to the community, Belmont Light feels like a small nonprofit business—one that has been operating for 125 years. The yellow trucks out and about in Belmont are the most noticeable features of Belmont Light. Most of the work performed by the staff is dedicated to maintaining the reliability of the system.

Electric bill payments are the primary source of Belmont Light’s \$30 million annual revenue. This value will increase as more customers adopt electric heating and transportation. For example, if our community had been fully electrified in 2024, revenues could have been as high as \$75 million, assuming 2024 Belmont Light rates and a growth factor of 2.5 for electrification. For a load growth scenario, see the state’s Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs webinar, [“Improving Interconnection to the Electric Grid Driving Meaningful Progress in 2025.”](#)

Supporting 100% electrification and its higher loads will require Belmont Light to upgrade our local grid. But electric rates do not necessarily have to increase to fund these upgrades. The much higher volume of sales under electrification, and resulting higher annual revenues, may be sufficient to pay for these upgrades.

### Belmont Light’s governance

Massachusetts Municipal Light Plants (MLPs) are governed by state law under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 164. Belmont has an elected five-person municipal light commission that hires

### Correction

On page 19 of [“Belmont Reduces Rodenticide on Town Land”](#) in the May/June Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, the last paragraph of the section **Municipal action: alternatives to poison on public property**, should read as follows: “According to Raymond Morales, district housing manager, the BHA is actively replacing SGARs with rodenticides containing Vitamin D3, which do not travel up the food chain and thus pose less risk to non-target species.”

We apologize for the error.

the general manager and approves policies such as rates. The general manager oversees operations. Because the interests of commissioners and general managers are congruent with the interests of ratepayers, the state does not actively engage in establishing MLP policies. The state Department of Public Utilities (DPU) has a limited oversight role. As such, this governance model is light on bureaucracy, allowing MLPs to be nimble when enacting new policies.

In contrast, in the investor-owned utility (IOU) context, because the interests of investors seeking higher returns can be at odds with those of customers seeking lower rates, the state plays a significantly more prominent role through the DPU. In short, the DPU expends a considerable amount of effort balancing these interests, and decision-making can be lengthy and complex. For example, DPU major rate cases may exceed 1,000 pages of filings and testimony. These cases are heard about every three years for each of the four Massachusetts IOU territories.

While MLP governance is straightforward and nimble compared to IOU governance, what MLPs lack is scale. A lack of scale can limit progress toward goals, as an MLP typically has limited staff to tackle new projects. An IOU, on the other hand, may have whole departments dedicated to achieving specific goals.

*Dave Beavers is an elected member and the vice chair of the Belmont Light Board and a Belmont resident.*



The Blair Pond electrical substation.

WILCOX AND BARTON

# Belmont Recycling is Alive and Growing

By Terri Goldberg

Lately, there has been a slew of dramatic stories about the failures of recycling. They could leave readers with the impression that recycling collection programs, like the one supported by Belmont, are a lie or a waste of time (for example, see “[The Story You’ve Been Told About Recycling is a Lie](#)” in the *New York Times*).

Often, when I talk to friends and family about my work with [MassRecycle](#), the state recycling organization, they ask me whether recycling is a scam. No! The truth is that the recyclables in our recycling carts are being largely recycled, effectively reducing disposal tonnage and associated greenhouse gases.

The *New York Times* opinion piece and similar articles create the impression that our waste is being sent to large, open, poorly managed, and hazardous landfills in developing countries. They lack supporting documentation and leave readers with the impression that the materials we put in our recycling bins are not being recycled. While it is true that there are waste disposal sites in those countries that the author of the *NY Times* opinion piece has visited which pose local environmental and health risks, the materials contaminating those sites do not come from the recycling and trash bins of residents in Belmont or nearby communities in Massachusetts.

Belmont’s trash goes to a waste-to-energy facility in North Andover, operated by WIN/



The Billerica materials recovery facility.

Wheelabrator. The materials handled through our residential recycling program move from the carts we place out on the curb to a [materials recovery facility, or MRF](#) (pronounced “murph”) in Billerica ([recyclesmartma.org/where-does-it-go/](#)), which is managed by Waste Management, Belmont’s hauler.

From there, the materials are sent to a recycler, transforming them into new products. The MRFs sort the materials, eliminate contaminants (non-recyclable items), and bale them for shipping to a recycler (view the process at [www.mass.gov/recycling-reuse](#)). For questions about which items should go in your recycling cart, refer to the State’s [Smart Recycling Guide](#).

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) regulates activities at MRFs, and its enforcement staff conduct periodic inspections. MRFs must report annually to MassDEP the tons of material processed and, upon request, the destinations of the material sent for recycling. MassDEP states that the containers processed at one of the state’s nine MRFs, including the one that receives Belmont’s recyclables, are recycled at a rate of approximately 90% ([recyclesmartma.org/2022/11/the-truth-about-plastics-recycling/](#)). However, the hauler serving Belmont and many other communities does not report to local officials about the destinations of recyclables.

When state environmental inspectors visit the MRFs, they look at the outbound commodities (i.e., paper, plastic, metal, glass) and inspect the “residue” to ensure that it consists only of things that are not recyclable.

Residue piles contain things like plastic bags, garden hoses, small appliances, t-shirts, shoes, diapers, and other non-recyclable plastic, and other items that people hope are recycleable, often called “wishcycling.” To ensure that textiles such as t-shirts are reused or recycled, place them and other textiles including shoes in the blue bins in convenient [locations around town](#). Local grocery stores, including Star Market and the Watertown Stop and Shop collect stretchy plastic bags for recycling.

Massachusetts has [waste bans](#) that restrict the disposal of recyclables, because it is illegal and expensive. These bans target recyclables including cardboard, textiles, mattresses, and certain

hazardous products. State inspectors check to make sure that banned materials are not in the trash.

[Massachusetts is running out of waste disposal capacity](#). The amount of in-state landfill space is rapidly shrinking, and the capacity of waste-to-energy facilities is stagnant. As a result, Massachusetts’s trash is increasingly shipped out-of-state to places as far away as Alabama and Michigan. Shipping trash long distances places a growing cost burden on municipalities and is not sustainable. Long-haul transport also produces greenhouse gas emissions.

Reduction, reuse, and prevention are key to addressing the problems with the growing amount of waste (check out “[Think Twice About Single Use Plastics](#)” by Lindsay Levine and Dean Hickman, *BCF Newsletter*, November/December 2021). But as long as we continue to generate so much waste, everything that can be recycled should be recycled. For example, we need to do better at recycling all of the rigid plastic food, beverage, and household product containers that we can. The plastics recycling industry not only wants these containers and can recycle them, but some experts say a [shortage of recycled plastics](#) prevents major consumer brands from meeting their sustainable packaging goals. Many perfectly recyclable plastic bottles, jars, jugs, and tubs are put in the trash, which means they are being sent for disposal.

At the same time, we need to support efforts to [design packaging for reduction and recycling](#). There is still too much plastic packaging that is not reusable or recyclable. To help promote change, email the companies whose products you love and ask them to improve their packaging. [Consumer brands listen](#) to their customers’ demands for sustainable products and packaging.

Massachusetts is one of 10 states that has a [bottle bill program](#). We were one of the first states to enact such a law, but the program has not been updated for over 40 years. The bottle bill incentivizes the collection of plastic, glass, and metal containers for carbonated drinks. These materials are separated at the redemption sites and are very clean. Recyclers want these materials because they have value. Several groups are advocating that the legislature modernize the bottle bill, which is long overdue.



In addition, various Massachusetts organizations are advocating for producer responsibility programs for packaging that seven other states have now enacted. These programs have been operating in Canada and Europe for many years. Extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation includes, at a minimum, the requirement that a manufacturer’s responsibility for its product extends to its end-of-life ([bit.ly/BCF-Recycle](#)). EPR for packaging focuses on improving packaging design, increasing recycling, reducing consumption-based greenhouse gases, and reducing municipal costs. A bill ([S.571](#)) before the Massachusetts legislature would mandate EPR for packaging and paper products, and a separate bill ([S.570](#)) would mandate that the state conduct a needs assessment to develop the background information needed to effectively plan an EPR for packaging. Belmont and other towns would greatly benefit from the passage of this and other EPR legislation. It would reduce the expenses that Belmont taxpayers bear for waste services, increase access to recycling collection services, and provide clear and more consistent messaging about what is recyclable and what isn’t.

Belmontians are to be commended for doing a good job keeping contaminants out of our recycling bins, especially compared with other towns. It is equally important to keep all of the recyclables out of the trash and to put them in your recycling bin. Now that we have a town recycling coordinator, residents have someone to ask when they are confused about handling the complex and confusing array of stuff we all have in our homes.

*Terri Goldberg is a Belmont resident, a member of the MassRecycle Board of Directors, and a former member of the Belmont Solid Waste and Recycling Committee.*

# Meet Belmont's New Recycling Coordinator



COURTESY OF JOSEPH STEN

Joseph Sten

By Terri Goldberg

Joseph Sten started working for Belmont three months before we sat down for a meeting on April 9. He is still learning how Belmont's programs work and getting support and help from Jay Marcotte, Belmont's Department of Public Works director. Sten worked at Needham's transfer station and has a background in political science and urban studies. He's friendly and approachable. Here's a summary of what we talked about.

## Goldberg

What are you working on these days to help improve Belmont's recycling?

## Sten

Helping answer questions from residents about recycling and waste. Most of the questions are about how to handle electronics and appliances.

I am also working to help the town get some state funding to support its recycling efforts. Belmont has been without a recycling coordinator for the past three or so years and, as a result, has been delinquent in providing data that MassDEP is seeking about our recycling under their [Recycling Dividend Program \(RDP\)](#). The RDP provides grants to

municipalities that have implemented programs and policies proven to maximize reuse, recycling, and waste reduction. I am working on Belmont's application so the town can take advantage of these state funds. We hope to obtain funding to enable the town to offer more special recycling days.

## BCF

What are your priorities going forward?

## Sten

I'm planning to do much more education and outreach and develop information materials to help residents understand what they need to do to sort their waste correctly. I am working to improve the annual calendar and produce flyers and pamphlets that can be disseminated at prominent locations such as the schools and the new library. I want to make improvements to the town's waste web pages.

## Goldberg

What are the issues that you are hearing about?

## Sten

I am hearing from my generation (young people) that they are not very confident in the system we have established for recycling. They are not sure about what's going on with their recyclables and are suspicious that they are not hearing all of the story. They see the large and growing companies involved in hauling and processing waste and are not sure they are actually doing what they are supposed to do with the materials.

Similarly, all haulers are adding processing fees for recyclables that Belmont and other towns now have to pay as part of their contracts. The fees are supposedly based on the fluctuations in the markets for the recyclables, but when asked, the companies are unwilling to explain how those fees are set and the source of data that they use to set these fees. The fees keep increasing and now cost the town about \$300,000 per month. Belmont has little leverage with its hauler to obtain more complete and transparent information on this and other aspects of how its contract is implemented, which is frustrating.

## Goldberg

So, how do you respond to these concerns?

## Sten

We need more transparency regarding where our recyclables end up and the associated costs and market conditions.

## Goldberg

How does Belmont compare with other similar towns?

## Sten

Waste Management audits Belmont's recyclables twice yearly to assess the level of contamination, and consistently, they find the level to be around 5%. This is relatively good compared with other communities, which can have contamination levels as high as 40%. So overall, we believe Belmont is doing well.

Waste Management can assess which streets have higher contamination rates than others. This helps the town target its ticketing and education efforts to those areas and helps reduce contamination. The hauler has not audited the trash since around 2016-2017 to assess the level of improper recyclables and suggest ideas for improvement. That would be helpful. They do look for waste-ban materials in the trucks' loads as the state requires.

## Goldberg

What are the problem waste materials that you are seeing?

## Sten

The town collects many batteries and mercury-containing fluorescent lamps at its drop-off location in the Homer Municipal Building. Keeping these materials out of the waste and recycling streams is important. There is a pick-up fee of \$25 for [electronics and appliances](#), but residents are confused about which particular items are in these categories and which are not. Any residents who are confused about this should call me.

Belmont is the only municipality in the area that collects [mattresses](#) and [bulky waste](#)—defined as normal household trash that will not fit into the cart and includes tires, bikes, sports equipment, metal items, furniture, rugs/carpet, large plastic children's play items, and more—for free. This costs

the town a lot every year. Most of the neighboring towns charge a fee to pick up these items.

## Goldberg

What are you hoping to work on in the future?

## Sten

I am hoping to do more to expand food waste diversion in Belmont. We are trying to work with the schools on this. We are talking to [Belmont Composts!](#) about what we can do. They have successfully worked with Chenery to collect food waste for composting. They hope to help expand the program to the high school in the future.

*Terri Goldberg is a Belmont resident.*



TOWN OF BELMONT

Items you can't place in your recycling bin in Belmont. For a full list, see [www.belmont-ma.gov/263/Recycling-Trash-Information](http://www.belmont-ma.gov/263/Recycling-Trash-Information)

# Profiles in Belmont: Sue Bass

By Elissa Ely

Sometimes, one accomplished, involved person is actually two; the sum of their lives together exceeds traditional math. This sum was so with Sue and Henry Bass.

Sue has been a Town Meeting member since 1998 and cofounded the Belmont Citizens Forum in 1999, diving into local politics and policies after moving to town with Henry four years earlier. In their 57 years of marriage, they did a tremendous amount of diving together.

She was not a gregarious child.

She was a reader: Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys mysteries, and most of all, any book that featured a horse. She grew up near a barrier beach on the New Jersey shore and still remembers the monumental East Coast hurricanes of the 1950s.

Riding her bike to the ocean “in my major roaming years,” she once saw a Victorian mansion that had been uprooted by storm forces and carried hundreds of feet out to sea. Over the next few days, she watched it disintegrate from the bottom up.

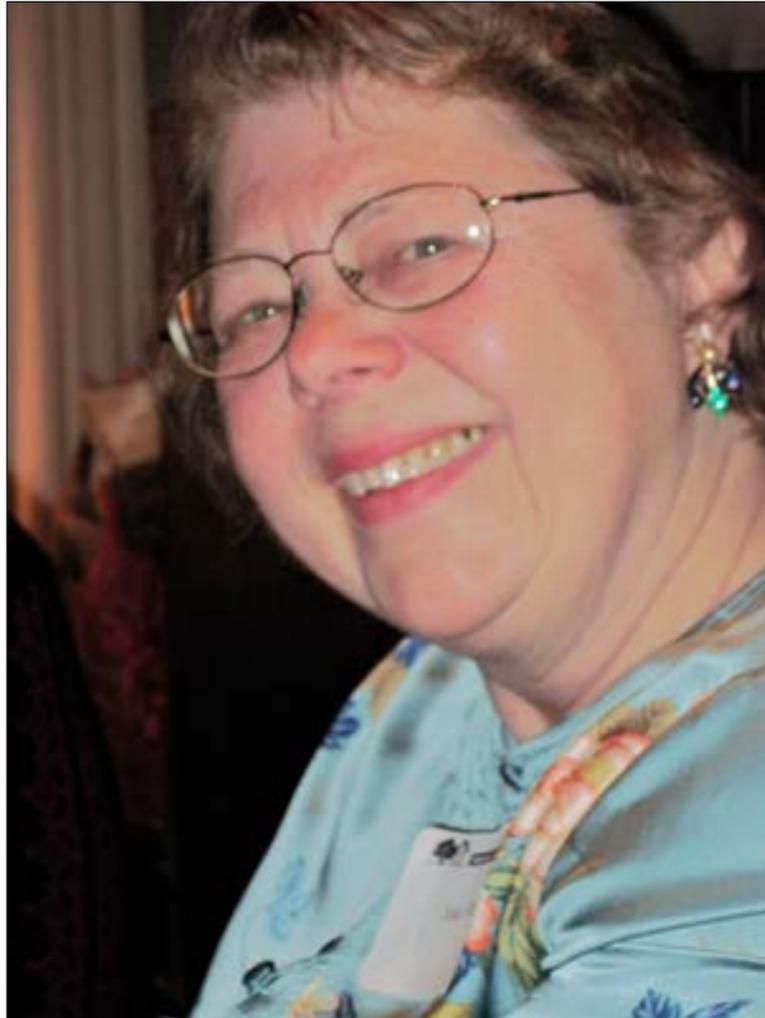
There are many memories from childhood, of course, including time in what she calls her “Mid-Victorian girls boarding school.” Young ladies there were taught the art of pouring tea correctly, and (maybe in response) Sue joined a group pushing for advanced math classes.

The major roaming years continued afterward. She dropped out of Radcliffe—twice--and purchased a \$99 Greyhound bus ticket, good for 99 days. A Greyhound (sadly, not a horse) took her first to Key West and then to New Orleans, where she lived in a hotel room without a stovetop but with a radiator hot enough to heat a can of soup. Eventually, driven by economics, she wound up in New York, working for a publisher. “I was a girl,” she says, “they needed typing, and I could do 19 words a minute.”

She had already met Henry in Cambridge. He was introduced to her as someone who threw the best parties in town. He cooked marvelously, he thought deeply, and he pursued her actively. At one point, when they were both living in New York—she in a “residence hall for young ladies,” he in a less restrictive apartment a few blocks away—she was forced

to cancel a date. Her roommate had come down with something infectious, and Sue had it, too. “We were disgusting,” she remembers. “We hadn’t bathed, and we were living on ginger ale.” Henry brought over dinner for both of them: elegantly stuffed pork chops. When Sue felt well enough to reciprocate, she cooked what she knew: tuna noodle casserole. “I later learned that if there was anything he hated, it was things made out of cans, like tuna and cream of mushroom soup.”

Ultimate commitment took time. The pivotal turn came when Henry sent a postcard from North



Sue Bass.

## Farewell to Sue Bass from the Belmont Citizens Forum

A quarter century ago, the Belmont Citizens Forum was founded in Sue Bass’s dining room. Sue was determined to raise awareness about how the town’s planning and zoning matters could directly impact the quality of life for Belmont’s citizens. She was president of the organization and served on the board of directors, with her last stop serving on the Newsletter Committee that plans and oversees the publication that you are reading now.

Sue brought deep knowledge of town government along with her investigative skills honed as a newspaper reporter to her work with BCF. However, her unparalleled skill at recruiting volunteers to help realize BCF’s mission stands out as her superpower. Sue’s ability to gather a veritable army of experts of all stripes to help move BCF’s work forward remains unparal-

elled. These volunteers have truly been the lifeblood of the organization.

The Newsletter Committee will miss her incisive insights as well as her eagle eye in spotting that missing Oxford comma.

A word about the *Newsletter’s* beginnings: Sharon Vanderslice, one of Sue’s early recruits, suggested that an organization like BCF could benefit from a newsletter. Sue suggested that Sharon start such a publication—which Sharon proceeded to do, with Sue in the “godmother” role. Sharon was this publication’s founder and sole editor, publisher, designer, production manager, and on and on. Now, two editors and a Newsletter Committee carry on this work.

—Evanthia Malliris and Sharon Vanderslice

Carolina, where he was visiting family. “Greetings,” it said, “from the magnolia-versity.” “I read that postcard,” she recalls, “and my little heart flipped.” They married in 1966. She was 22, Henry a decade older. In their Belmont house, hung to the inch with meaningful art and travel photography, there is one wedding photo. This was not because of any newlywed reluctance but because the three friends who promised to take photographs had celebrated too heartily.

Henry was an economist by profession and a trained anti-Vietnam war advocate by passion. He had been raised in the South and was astutely aware that most protests were held on coasts, not elsewhere in the country. That’s when they rented a U-Haul and moved to Atlanta, where he wrote proposals for pacifist sponsorship (“Guess who typed them?”), organized monthly demonstrations (“we basically had to show people how you picket”), and counseled conscientious objectors. Sue demonstrated with him and worked in advertising, “paying the bills so some food could come into the house.”

Living in Atlanta filled nearly four years. What next? “You don’t get many chances in life to go anywhere you want,” she says. They mulled Colorado, New Mexico, or California but finally decided to return to the Boston cultural world

they loved. In Jamaica Plain, Henry wrote on non-violence and began making educational films, mostly about labor history and relations. Sue began a career in journalism (“I was typing 40 words a minute, now”). She started in the Statehouse News Service, informing private clients about relevant bills that had been filed, advanced to AP work, began an investigative news syndicate, and ended as an editor at The Lowell Sun. Along the way, there were more moves: Lowell, Chelmsford, and finally—lucky town—Belmont.

Propelled by McLean Hospital’s intention in 1995 to sell off-campus land for commercial development, “I turned in mid-life from a chronicler to an advocate,” Sue says. This led to years of successful litigation, and also to the formation of the Belmont Citizens Forum, whose mission remains increasing transparency in local government and protecting Belmont’s natural resources and small-town atmosphere. Reader, you already know about the in-depth articles on public hearings, zoning proposals, historical buildings, and environmental issues. Now and then, there are profiles, too.

Meanwhile, she and Henry traveled the world together, hiking, seeking, roaming, and reading. Their house groaned with bookshelves. He cooked

his marvelous meals, and they hosted marvelous parties.

In 2008, Henry announced that he would make no more films. “He knew his mind was failing,” Sue wrote in a piece for her 60th college reunion. Yet it took almost a decade to properly diagnose his form of dementia and longer to realize that, though surgical treatment was possible, this was the rare case that failed to respond. They continued to travel (“What’re you going to do, sit in the house?” she asks), attend concerts, watch ball games, and listen to every kind of music at home. Sue made sure of it. It’s what one person does for another when they have created such an entwined and vibrant life together. The customary vows about sickness and health are easy enough to say under a bower when no one imagines, in that moment, that they will become necessary to enact. Then, rarely and

awfully, they become necessary . . . and some rise to it. Many don’t, and Sue did. In her caretaking, she rose for years. “We were very lucky in one another,” she says. Henry died at home in March 2023.

Sue continues to travel by herself: Greenland, Iceland, England, and maybe Mackinaw Island in the fall. On what would have been Henry’s 89th birthday, she bought six tickets for a Renee Fleming concert he would have loved in Symphony Hall. The concert was canceled, so her guests adjourned to a French restaurant instead. On Henry’s 90th birthday, she commissioned a musical piece in his honor. Without him, she still throws parties and cooks with sophistication. For her next event, she is planning to make his scalloped potatoes.

*Elissa Ely is a community psychiatrist and a Belmont resident.*

## Belmont’s First Miyawaki Forest Comes to BHS

*By Jean Devine*

Picture this: It’s 2028, and on the Belmont High School campus, a small forest of native trees and shrubs is shooting toward the sky. The trunks sway gently and the leaves shimmer softly in the summer breeze. As you walk toward this grove, birds flit in and out, you hear a hum of bees, while other pollinators, insects, and worms, mostly invisible to you, thrive in deeper sections of this new habitat. Before you stands Belmont’s first Miyawaki Forest (aka mini forest). Now, three years after planting, this forest is self-sufficient. And, it’s replicable! Maybe it has inspired other mini forest projects in Belmont.

The BHS mini forest, an educational and ecological solution for the community, will be planted on October 4, 2025, by students, families, and volunteers of all ages. A total of 1,400 native tree and shrub seedlings will fill 3,000 square feet, comparable to a public swimming pool. Short to start, the BHS mini forest will achieve significant heights in a third of the time of traditional forests.

### Why mini forests are important

Mini forests are small, densely planted, biodiverse forests that help restore local ecosystems and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Following a method named after the Japanese botanist, Akira Miyawaki, these forests range in size from 1,000 square feet to more than 400 acres and include diverse native trees and shrubs that are planted into carefully amended soil. The species are chosen based on soil analysis and assessment of tree and plant species that would have been here long before urban development. Such native plant communities support local food webs—from plant to pollinator to predator—because these indigenous plants and insects evolved together.

Mini forests grow faster than traditional forests, because the trees compete for sunlight and communicate through their roots sooner than trees set farther apart. In addition to fostering biodiverse habitat, mini forests increase stormwater absorption, sequester carbon, improve air quality, and reduce heat island temperatures.



DAVE MESSINA

Future site of the BHS Miyawaki forest.

### Trash on Lone Tree Hill

Here’s some of the trash that volunteers collected during the Belmont Citizens Forum’s April cleanup day at Lone Tree Hill. Help keep this beautiful open space clean for all to enjoy. If you see trash, please email [lonetreehillbelmont@gmail.com](mailto:lonetreehillbelmont@gmail.com). Thank you for helping keep our precious open spaces pristine!



RADHA IYENGAR

### BHS is a perfect place for a forest

When a group of residents gathered in June 2024 to form the Mini Forest Action Belmont team (MFAB), top of mind were the educational and community-building benefits this project could offer Belmont. The group considered several schools and quickly selected BHS for three reasons: 1) prominent location, 2) the forest’s ability to absorb/manage stormwater (one of the campus landscape designs included a rain garden), and 3) a student club had already committed to building biodiverse habitats on campus. The BHS Climate Action Club (CAC) installed their first native plant garden in May 2023 and doubled its size in October 2024. Holly Kong, garden leader for 2024-25, was intrigued by the ecological and climate benefits of a miniforest. She joined MFAB immediately, and over the past year has served as a chief advocate and liaison to Principal Isaac Taylor, science teachers, CAC peers, and student volunteers.

The BHS Mini Forest is designed as a living lab. A cutout and benches will provide space for instruction, appreciation, and reflection for all.

### Forest project moved quickly

The MFAB team, composed of Sarah Wang, Kirsten Waersted, Michelle Oishi, Ranganath



COURTESY OF JEAN DEVINE

Students and adults form a human perimeter around the future forest.

Nayak, Anne-Marie Lambert, Holly Kong, Ralph Jones, Jess Hausman, and Jean Devine, worked on site selection, fundraising, and community support simultaneously. Early on, two MFAB members pledged funds for two-thirds of the projected cost, while others presented the concept and plans to school officials, town departments, and local environmental groups.

Sarah Wang, MFAB chair, marveled, “This project found traction quickly and has not let up. We are on schedule to plant October 4, primarily due to the tremendous community support we have received. Everyone from the town and school administrations, including Superintendent Jill

Geiser, Principal Taylor, the School and Shade Tree Committees, and the Department of Public Works, to environmental groups such as Mass Audubon Habitat and Belmont Citizens Forum, to the generous individuals donating to the project, have stepped up to help out. I find it so inspiring to see the community coming together like this.”

MFAB hired Biodiversity for a Livable Climate ([bio4climate.org](http://bio4climate.org)), to guide the team through the process. Bio4Climate is a Cambridge-based eco-restoration nonprofit that was instrumental in bringing the first Miyawaki Forest to the East Coast in 2021. Cambridge’s 4,000 square foot Danehy Park Miyawaki Forest has inspired the launch of over a dozen projects in eastern

Massachusetts alone. Bio4climate’s forest-making experience ranges from mini forests in public parks to de-paved parking lots to schools, including Somerville and Natick high schools.

### Species selection

Alexandra Ionescu, Bio4climate’s associate director of regenerative projects, and Walter Kittredge, ecology advisor, led the MFAB team through selecting trees. The process started with a soil test and exploring the history of the area as well as observing the nearby trees. Soil test results revealed that the site closely matches a “High



Kayleigh Yee, Terracorps fellow at Habitat, and Thatcher Simmons, a rising sophomore at BHS, are both fostering trees this summer for the BHS Miyawaki forest.

Terrace Floodplain Forest” (HTFF) according to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife classification for natural communities in the state.

In March, Ionescu, Kittredge, Wang, and Oishi travelled to Bolton Flats to view a relatively untouched example of an HTFF and identify tree and plant species. From there, they generated a list of roughly 40 species of trees and shrubs including: red, silver, and sugar maple; red, swamp, white, and pin oak; gray birch, shagbark hickory, American elm, American hornbeam, hackberry, silky and gray dogwood, black elderberry, black chokeberry, buttonbush, winterberry holly, and more.

Ionescu said, “I enjoy this part of the process— researching and experiencing the trees and shrubs that once flourished here. To each project that Bio4climate brings its expertise, we always find elements that are unique to that site.”



COURTESY OF JEAN DEVINE

### Help turn BHS into a biodiversity hotspot!

With the planting date just three months away, the MFAB needs your help! Please volunteer for our Community Planting Day at [tinyurl.com/BHSMiniforestvol](http://tinyurl.com/BHSMiniforestvol). Join a team that will maintain and monitor the forest over the next three growing seasons.

This summer, you can also foster a tree, then help plant it in the fall. Find out more at [bit.ly/BCF-Foster-Tree](http://bit.ly/BCF-Foster-Tree).

For more information, visit: [bio4climate.org/miyawaki-forest-program/Belmont-high-school-microforest](http://bio4climate.org/miyawaki-forest-program/Belmont-high-school-microforest).

*Jean Devine is a Belmont resident, cofounder of the Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways Group, and is executive director of the Biodiversity Builders youth environmental education program and Devine Native Plantings, LLC.*

# You Can Be a Naturalist Today

By Fred Bouchard

So there we were sitting on the side deck well after six of a June evening, sipping chablis with wine pals Jim and Debbie, grinning over Elon/Donny antics, when in an eye-blink along the driveway, I caught a form flitting through the long-past lilacs. I put down my glass and craned. “What th--?”

“What is it?”

“A female hummingbird...”

“Where!”

“No wayy.”

The gray mite amid grayish spent blooms was darting back and forth for—a sip of nectar? A late blossom? A leaf to doze under?

Everyone got a quick peek at her, and in 15 seconds she was long gone, past the rosy weigala. Refills all around. My first thought: “I’d finally set up the hummer feeder out back three days ago—nary a nibble. Hunh.”

In a heartbeat, a pair of sunset-lit Great Blue Herons leisurely flapped overhead, aimed for Little or Blair Pond.

Some of nature’s most memorable moments are neither the plotted ones, nor the dazzlers, but the out-of-the-blue serendipity, whether hither or yonder.

And setting up in your surroundings for quality observations at your leisure can be a key factor, especially as we age and become usually less inclined towards random mobilizing.

Our backyard garden proves a better perch than the porch, especially in the warmer months. Eating sandwiches while contemplating the still-unvisited hummingbird feeder and the local band of Rock Pigeons hanging out by our neighbor’s chimney, we remarked on a rash of dragonfly activity around the stand of veteran peonies, volunteer mint patch, annuals raised bed, and new-budded blue Joe Pye weed. In a moment, a 12-Spotted Skimmer, a brown female, zoomed onto a dried, last-year’s bloom of Buddleia and hung on for dear life, immobile and unflappable, for a full five minutes. A very close inspection showed she was not ovipositing. As usual, a camera was nowhere handy.



SHARP PHOTOGRAPHY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A female Ruby Throated Hummingbird.

My bird bud Drew Wheelan writes from Block Island: “Watching the kiddos on Mother’s Day 5/11, [we saw] a lot of migrant activity in the backyard of The Darius [Hotel] and added Wilson’s, Bay-breasted, and Tennessee Warblers to the yard list just drinking coffee. Incredibly, as friends and I were chatting about how cool birding is, a Mississippi Kite flew over! Four new yard birds in one morning!”

Coolness points for birding include: flexibility, portability, and universality...

E-bird, the universal database and tracking tool for birdwatchers worldwide, asks members to label sightings submitted in one of four categories: Traveling, Stationary, Historical, and Incidental. The last is explained thus: Birding is not your primary purpose: you notice some birds while doing something else and want to record them quickly.

That “something else” covers a wide range of commonplace (usually outdoor) activities.

Driving: Highway driving can become a bit of a bore failing a quality soundtrack, but having an alert birder on board, preferably riding shotgun, not behind the wheel, can up the game substantially beyond playing games with license plates.

Mallard mothers leading a parade of chicks, blithely oblivious Canada Geese, vest-busting tom Wild Turkeys—all offer amusing diversions (or enraging obstructions) to the urban commuter. Driving on Route 2, say, especially when backlit or in crisp, sunny weather, affords long-shot chances at spotting majestic fly-overs. Eagles, Red-tails, and Ravens soar wonderfully, of course. But there’s an extra adrenaline zip in seeing a Pileated Woodpecker zoom across the road, rather than having to hunt one down in deep forests by pursuing its hatchet-blow hammering.

Other really neat observations spied from the car west of Worcester include a cavorting pair of Tiger Swallowtails, a bee-lining Great Horned Owl at dusk, a proudly perched Northern Shrike.

Oh yeah, don’t forget the roadkills. Sometimes hard to untangle visually are the dead squirrel, opossum, raccoon, Red Fox, and that olfactory favorite: Striped Skunk.

Fishing: An enduring childhood memory was fishing with my dad, Larry, and Uncle Armand for scup and tautog off the rocky shore of Anawan Cliffs near Jamestown, Rhode Island. I dimly recall being impressed by the animated aura of gulls and cormorants, whales and dolphins.

Gardening: Butterflies are stars in the mix, seasonally. Not to mention curious insects – and the dreaded Pr[a/e]ying Mantis. Yard rabbits, now reluctantly considered neighbors, or ADU tenants, may leave half-concealed den holes, or in our case, leap repeatedly four feet into a raised annuals box. The nerve!

Having a nearby neighbor as a beekeeper ups the ante on buzzing activity, and assures a general increase in apian aeronautics.

Whale Watching/Deep Sea Fishing: Since seabirds and whales both follow the fishing schools, the three pursuits are marvelously complementary.

Rugby: it’s become a new craze among Belmont High students, and we attend a few matches. Backlit by the afternoon sun, the home stands face the new school complex and a bit of Claypit Pond to the right. Watching the boys’ squad get pummeled by BC High in May was made a tad more tolerable after sighting a juvenile Bald Eagle chased by a couple of irate (or mischievous) crows.

Baseball: Fenway Park in season provides a famed and frequented public stage for devotees of The National Pastime and Naturalists’ Passing Time gawking at all manner of wildlife. Homo

sapiens subspecies rule the roost (bleacher blowhards, popcorn hawkers, serial wavers) but avifauna make their cameos: Mourning Doves exploring the bullpens, Rock Pigeons ransacking the Bud Patio for fries, Eurasian Starlings teetering on Pesky’s Pole, grackles mobbing an intrusive Red-tailed Hawk. Night games’ floodlights still attract bugs and the Common Nighthawks that hunt them. Here’s my E-bird report from a June sojourn: [ebird.org/checklist/S246816446](http://ebird.org/checklist/S246816446)

Natural encounters may also encroach indoors, whereby they’re largely considered unpleasant, if not outright rude and invasive: the squirrel down the chimney, a misadventurous starling, bathroom arachnids, kitchenette cockroaches, the gutter-drilling flicker, filthy flies, or any manner of buzzing, winged insects, perhaps armed and dangerous.

Shawn Carey, my birdwatching pal and active shooter of photos for this column, looked out his office window and “simply noticed” a pair of Peregrine Falcons raising their young. So he created this brief video: [bit.ly/Carey-Falcon](http://bit.ly/Carey-Falcon)

My point is, wherever you go, keep your eye peeled. You never know what might come your way, even earn you an Instagram following. As the late poet Mary Oliver succinctly put it in her mandatory directive “Instructions for living a life:”

- Pay attention.
- Be astonished.
- Tell about it.

*Fred Bouchard is a Belmont resident.*



SHAWN CAREY

Still from Shawn Carey’s Peregrine Falcon video.

## Calendar of Events

Belmont Farmers' Market, celebrating 20 years!

**Weekly, Thursdays | 2-6:30 PM**

Belmont Center parking lot, behind Belmont Center  
For more information on vendors, special events, and more, see [www.belmontfarmersmarket.org](http://www.belmontfarmersmarket.org)

Belmont Conservation Volunteers

**Monthly, Saturdays | 9:30 AM-noon**

Pleasant Street area of Lone Tree Hill

Help remove the invasive *Akebia* (chocolate vine) that smothers young trees on Lone Tree Hill. Meet at the kiosk where the trail turns, right up Coal Road from South Pleasant Street. Bring work gloves and small diggers and pruners.

Visit [www.sustainablebelmont.net/belmont-conservation-volunteers/](http://www.sustainablebelmont.net/belmont-conservation-volunteers/) to join the google group for information and notices of events.

Meet Your Watershed: Edible Plant ID Walk

**Thursday, July 17 | 5-7 PM**

Location to be announced.

Charles River Watershed Association



Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellatus*).

Join naturalist and wild food enthusiast Russ Cohen and CRWA staff on a walk to learn about at least 18 species of edible wild plants. Keys to the identification of each of these interesting edible, medicinal, and pollinator species will be provided, along with info on edible portion(s), season(s) of availability, and preparation methods, as well as guidelines for safe, ethical and environmentally responsible foraging.

Attendees should be prepared to walk one mile. Event will occur rain/shine. For more information and to register, see [/www.crwa.org/events/edible-plant-id-walk](http://www.crwa.org/events/edible-plant-id-walk)

Protect Animals from Rodenticide Lobby Day  
**Thursday, July 24 | 10 AM-3:30 PM**

Massachusetts State House, Beacon Hill, Boston.

Sponsors: Mass Audubon, MSPCA, other partners  
Support An Act Restricting the Use of Rodenticides in the Environment (H965/S644), a bill before the Massachusetts State Legislature, which would phase out the use of dangerous poisons, such as second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides in the state. Meet special guest Red-tailed Hawk "Falco" from the New England Wildlife Center; visit the Meet & Greet Exhibition and get to know community groups from across the state; and participate in small meetings with legislators and staff.

Everyone is welcome and we will offer training sessions prior to the day to help you feel confident.

For more information and to register, visit [www.massaudubon.org/news/latest/rodenticide-lobby-day](http://www.massaudubon.org/news/latest/rodenticide-lobby-day).  
Questions? Contact [hpackard@massaudubon.org](mailto:hpackard@massaudubon.org).

Work Day

**Saturday, August 16 | 8-10 AM**

Friends of Spy Pond Park

Weed, remove invasives, plant natives, pick up litter, groom the tot lot. Spy Pond Park, 40 Pond Lane, Arlington. Meet at the boat ramp.

For more information, contact [fsppvolyteer@gmail.com](mailto:fsppvolyteer@gmail.com) or preregister at [forms.gle/woMA5JXVx-wmbNhRh6](https://forms.gle/woMA5JXVx-wmbNhRh6)

SHAWN CAREY



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Or give securely online:  
[belmontcitizensforum.org](http://belmontcitizensforum.org)

Contact us:  
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