



How Rail Trails Can Serve Public Housing

Drake Village, Arlington, and Lessons from Across the Northeast

By Jeffrey North & Vincent Stanton, Jr.

Development of the Belmont Community Path is proceeding in two phases. Phase I is close to the 100% design threshold. Planning for Phase 2, which will run from the Clark Street Bridge to the Waltham border, started in late 2022 when the town hired Pare Corporation and Toole Design.

The Pare team studied the route options during winter and spring 2023 and recommended a final route to the Community Path Project Committee (CPPC) in May 2023 (see “[Belmont Community Path Route Take Shape](#),” BCF Newsletter, September 2023.) The CPPC unanimously endorsed the recommended route, moving the decision to the Select Board.

A key element of the recommended route is a new pedestrian-bicycle bridge over the Fitchburg Line about 600 feet west of the Clark Street Bridge. One end of the proposed bridge would be located just east of 750 Pleasant Street, the other end behind the Belmont Housing Authority’s (BHA) headquarters building at 59 Pearson Road. Then the path would proceed west toward the Town Yard and Waverley Square, parallel to the Fitchburg Line, via a ramp along the back edge of the Belmont Village parking lot.

Because this new bridge and its associated ramp would partially be on (or extend over) land controlled by the BHA, which manages Belmont Village, it requires permission from the BHA. A BHA decision about the path has been delayed by ongoing planning, since 2020, to redevelop Belmont Village, which is 75 years old, and not well matched to the current needs of residents (e.g. no accessible units, no

single units). The range of possible redevelopment options includes a multistory building at the back of the parking lot — very close to the proposed ramp.

What would it be like to have the path so close to Belmont Village? Are there any local precedents for paths adjacent to public housing? The answer is yes, there are many examples, including several in Arlington. In fact, the Arlington Housing Authority (AHA) on its website has a page titled “[Our Properties](#)” that provides a photo and a very brief description for all six AHA properties, five of which feature their proximity to a bicycle-pedestrian path:

- “Winslow Towers is an elderly/disabled high-rise development located steps to Arlington Center. It is located on the public transportation route and near the Minuteman Bikeway, local stores, shops, and restaurants.”



Sign for the Minuteman Bikeway next to Winslow Towers, an Arlington Housing Authority property.

VINCENT STANTON, JR.

Belmont Citizens Forum

Officers

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

Directors

Sumner Brown
David Chase
Vincent Stanton, Jr.

Newsletter Committee

Meg Muckenhoupt, Executive Editor
Jeffrey North, Managing Editor
Fred Bouchard, Evanthia Malliris,
Vincent Stanton, Jr.

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

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

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

belmontcitizensforum.org

© 2026 Belmont Citizens Forum.
All rights reserved.

- “Chestnut Manor is an elderly/disabled 100-unit high-rise development located within minutes of Arlington Center. It is located on the public transportation route and very near the Minuteman Bikeway, stores, shops, and restaurants.”
- “Cusack Terrace is an elderly/disabled 67-unit high-rise development . . . located near Buzzell Field, the Donald Marquis Bikepath, and a short walk to Arlington Center.”
- “The Drake Village Complex consists of two elderly/disabled developments . . . Both developments abut the Minuteman Bikeway, Hurd Field, and the Arlington Reservoir.”
- “Mystic Gardens . . . five one-bedroom elderly/handicapped apartments and one two-bedroom affordable housing apartment . . . located near the Mystic River, Dugger Park, and the Alewife Greenway Bike Path.”

Clearly, the AHA views proximity to paths as an amenity.

Drake Village is a particularly interesting example. Built about a decade after Belmont Village, the older two-story buildings at Drake Village are also deteriorating, and no longer a good match for the Drake Village population. The AHA is planning to tear down those units and redevelop that part of the complex.

The 4.28-acre Drake Village Complex is surrounded by paths on all sides (see photo). To the south, the Minuteman Bikeway, the most widely used path in Massachusetts, runs within 57 feet of the two-story “cottages” and features a spur into the Drake Village parking lot. To the northeast is the Arlington Reservoir, which is circled by a popular walking path that also includes a spur into Drake Village. To the southwest is Hurd Field, a public park flanked by a walking path, and to the northwest is a smaller path that runs parallel to Sickle Brook, connecting the Minuteman Bikeway to the Arlington Reservoir path.

The result: seniors and residents who are disabled can safely, and without a car, reach the 77 bus on Massachusetts Avenue, groceries, medical offices, and nature. Posted trail maps and guides show signed access points in Arlington, including parking off Drake Road, which is useful for visiting families, home health aides, and volunteer services that support residents.

Across the Northeast, other housing communities are discovering the same benefits.

Mobility, Health, and Safety

What makes this path so valuable? First, it promotes mobility and independence. A trail reduces the “first/last-mile” penalty that often isolates elders and low-income households from transit. The Minuteman runs 10 miles from Bedford Depot to Alewife Station and is maintained by the four host communities, reliability that matters when your trip is to a clinic or pharmacy.

Second, it enhances health and safety. Smooth grades and separation from traffic make it easier to meet daily step goals, take a neighborly stroll, or pedal to an appointment without braving Massachusetts Avenue. For older adults, that can mean more physical exercise and fewer falls.

Third, it creates community connection and stewardship. Trails bring foot traffic, eyes on the landscape, and volunteer attention, factors that correlate with better maintenance of the area and greater safety. While many studies focus on single-family home prices, the broader findings are consistent. Homes near rail trails show faster sales and strong demand, suggesting perceived neighborhood value from well-managed paths. Public housing communities can capture the same livability boost.

Other Local and Regional Examples

Arlington offers a second example: Mystic Gardens. There, the housing authority highlights proximity to the Alewife Greenway Path along the Mystic River, another off-street path linking



Map of the Drake Village site in Arlington.

residents to parks, bus routes, and commercial districts.

Across the river in Cambridge, the Rindge Towers/Fresh Pond Apartments (affordable high-rises on Rindge Avenue) sit beside the Alewife Linear Path, which connects directly to the Minuteman. Property information for the complex calls out “easy access to the Minuteman Bike Path,” underscoring how this network functions as a practical, everyday conduit for residents, especially those balancing work, childcare, and limited car access.

Beyond Massachusetts, other Northeast cities are learning similar lessons:

- New Haven, Connecticut: The Farmington Canal Heritage Trail now runs through downtown neighborhoods with significant affordable housing, providing car-free access to jobs and services.
- Providence, Rhode Island: The Woonasquatucket River Greenway lines a corridor of income-restricted and workforce housing, placing households directly on a safe bike and walking path to markets and



VINCENT STANTON, JR.

View of Drake Village from the Minuteman Bikeway.

schools. Some new net-zero affordable homes are being built right along the greenway, blending housing and sustainability in one stroke.

What Belmont Can Learn

Belmont's future community path can apply these lessons:

1. Design the "front door." Wayfinding, lighting, and benches can make access real for seniors and people using assistive devices.
2. Provide secure bike and mobility storage. E-bikes, trikes, and scooters expand who can use the path; safe storage expands participation.
3. Close the last gaps. Safe crossings and winter maintenance are equity issues, not extras.
4. Program the path. Walking clubs and volunteer "trail stewards" can help residents claim it as their space.

Drake Village shows how placing public housing beside a bikeway can extend health, independence, and dignity, one low-stress trip at a time. The Northeast's growing trail network proves that when

we connect front doors to paths, we connect people to opportunity.

Jeffrey North is the managing editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter. Vincent Stanton, Jr., is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Trails, Crime, and Property Values

Trails don't raise crime. They increase value.

Dozens of studies across the United States and the Northeast show that well-designed rail trails, bike paths, and greenways do not increase crime in adjoining neighborhoods. In fact, many communities report the opposite: more "eyes on the trail" deter vandalism and improve neighborhood safety.

A 2019 review by the National Recreation and Park Association found no correlation between greenway construction and higher crime rates, while police departments often note fewer illegal dumping and trespass complaints once trails open.

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has documented similar outcomes in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Trail users and volunteers become a de facto neighborhood watch. Proximity to trails and linear parks consistently boosts nearby property values. Studies in eastern Massachusetts and upstate New York have shown homes within a quarter-mile of a major trail sell 3% to 11% faster or at higher prices than comparable homes farther away.

Realtors in Arlington, Lexington, and Somerville now advertise "steps to the Minuteman Bikeway" as a key amenity, proof that trails signal livability, convenience, and community vitality.

The takeaway: thoughtfully maintained, locally managed rail trails and greenways are not magnets for crime. They're magnets for people who care about where they live.

Opinion Treat Invasive Plant Removal as a System

By Jeffrey North

Belmont's conservation lands—Rock Meadow, Lone Tree Hill, Habitat, and our many wooded edges and wetland buffers—face a quiet but relentless challenge. Aggressive invasive plants threaten the fundamental health and richness of our local native plant communities, and consequently the fauna that rely on them for food and shelter.

Invasive species such as glossy buckthorn, bittersweet, knotweed, and tree of heaven do not care about property boundaries or budget cycles. Yet our response to this threat is fragmented: volunteers clear a patch, a contractor mows a section, a grant funds a pilot project. Then, when the effort cannot be sustained, we start again somewhere else.

Each of these efforts is valuable, but without a coordinated plan, the results can be temporary (e.g., local landscaping firms recommend that knotweed elimination requires at least a 3-5 year commitment, including repeated herbicide application) and muted (e.g., where a nearby non-targeted invasive plant population can reseed a cleared area). To use our limited resources most effectively, Belmont needs a systematic approach to invasive species management, an approach that treats these projects as part of a single, long-term restoration strategy. A systematic approach includes:

- Mapping: identifying where invasive species dominate and where native plant communities remain.
- Setting priorities: protecting high-value areas first, such as rare habitats, scenic gateways, and restoration sites where success can inspire further efforts.
- Monitoring: tracking what was removed, when, and how effectively it was controlled. Without data, we cannot measure progress,



VINCENT STANTON, JR.

Invasive Japanese knotweed on both sides of Wellington Brook, Belmont.

effectively plan future projects, or justify future funding.

Collaboration is the key. The Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill, the Belmont Conservation Commission, the Judy Record Conservation Fund, Mass Audubon's Habitat, the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF), and our dedicated volunteers, under the auspices of the Belmont Conservation Volunteers, all play important roles. But a shared townwide invasive-species management plan, developed with professional ecological guidance, would align these efforts, guide grant proposals, target priority projects, and prevent duplication.

Sustained effort over time matters, too. Herbicide treatments, forestry mowing, and volunteer hand-pulls all have their place, but they work best when sequenced and maintained according to a clear schedule. Investing in coordinated follow-up to the initial removal of invasive plants, especially in the second and third years after initial removal, multiplies our returns.

Belmont's conservation lands are our living legacy. Managing them systematically is not bureaucracy, it's stewardship. When we share information, coordinate timing, and track outcomes, every

What You Can Do: Join the effort to restore Belmont's open spaces.

- **Volunteer** Help remove invasive plants at the next Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day or Rock Meadow cleanup. Gloves, tools, and training are provided.
- **Adopt a Patch** Neighbors can “adopt” small sections of town conservation land for seasonal monitoring and maintenance. Ask the Conservation Commission or Land Management Committee how to get started.
- **Report Outbreaks** See new infestations of knotweed, bittersweet, or tree of heaven? Contact the Belmont Conservation Volunteers at belmont-conservation-volunteers@googlegroups.com so treatments can be scheduled before they spread.
- **Support Funding** The Judy Record Conservation Fund and BCF help finance local ecological restoration projects; your donation strengthens long-term stewardship.
- **Stay Informed** Subscribe to the BCF *Newsletter* for updates on restoration, native planting, and community science opportunities.

Each patch we clear adds up. With steady coordination and shared commitment, Belmont's landscapes can recover their natural beauty and resilience.

volunteer hour and every donated dollar counts more.

Let's bring our fragmented efforts together under a single map, a shared plan, and a unified purpose: restoring the ecological health of Belmont's open spaces for generations to come.

Our Patchwork Approach

Here are a few current and recent invasive plant control efforts — all well intentioned but perhaps adding up to less than could be accomplished with a more comprehensive approach:

The Belmont Public Library Trustees, with support from the Judy Record Fund, hired the landscaping firm Essex Horticultural to control Japanese knotweed behind the library, along the banks of Wellington Brook. The three-year project (2022–2024) entailed targeted glyphosate application and appears to have been successful, yet there is knotweed still growing immediately upstream of the cleared area, on private land, which threatens the extensive landscaping behind the new library.

The Belmont Women's Club hired Parterre Ecological in 2024 to control knotweed, tree of heaven and other invasive plants on the uphill part of their property flanking Concord Avenue. According to Ryan Corrigan of Parterre, this ongoing project



Patches of knotweed treated with glyphosphate on the grounds of the Belmont Woman's Club.

was necessitated when soil brought to the site by a contractor turned out to have been contaminated.

Last fall, the Community Path Project Committee, with permission from the Select Board and financial support from the Belmont Citizens Forum, engaged Parterre to use herbicides to control knotweed and tree of heaven on the town-owned property north of Belmont Center Station, the location of the future Belmont Community Path. Separately, on October 13, Belmont Serves volunteers, working under the authority granted to the Belmont Conservation Volunteers, dug up Asiatic bittersweet in the same area (a plant that can be controlled without herbicides, with persistent effort). Construction of the path, which includes a significant landscaping budget, is expected to begin in 2027, making this work urgent.

Belmont Serves volunteers have also dug up Japanese knotweed in the town-owned Royal Road woods in 2023-2025 in an effort to weaken the plant.

In contrast to these mostly one-off efforts, the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill (LMC-LTH) engaged Parterre Ecological in 2019 to map invasive species on the 119 acre property and recommend prioritized control measures. For the last five years, Parterre has been working to control the most aggressive invasive plant populations on LTH, using physical and chemical means, within the constraints of available funds. (See progress reports on the LMC-LTH website.) In parallel the Belmont Conservation Volunteers have been working on LTH since 2023 to clear some invasive plants not prioritized by Parterre (e.g., akebia, garlic mustard) as well as swallow wort and Japanese knotweed. Nonetheless, even invasive plant management on LTH could benefit from a more comprehensive approach. For example, there are significant invasive species populations on McLean land, including Japanese knotweed, that are not subject to these control efforts.

There is a similar problem with the community path, where there are extensive invasive plant populations on MBTA-owned land flanking the Fitchburg Line (for example, Japanese knotweed and tree of heaven on the north side of the tracks between Belmont Center Station and the Clark Street Bridge).

Jeffrey North is managing editor of the BCF Newsletter.

Partners in Invasive Species Work

- **Town of Belmont's** Conservation Commission oversees the management of the Rock Meadow conservation land and the protection of wetlands, while the **Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill** directs the restoration and stewardship of the McLean open space.
- **Judy Record Conservation Fund** provides grants and professional support for ecological restoration, including invasive species control, trail improvements, and habitat restoration at Lone Tree Hill, Rock Meadow, and other protected lands.
- **Belmont Citizens Forum** organizes volunteer days, publishes local environmental news, and convenes partners to coordinate conservation work and share best practices.
- **Belmont Conservation Volunteers** is a citizen group devoted to hands-on work, like trail clearing, trash removal, and invasive plant control, on public lands across town.
- **Mass Audubon's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary** manages its Belmont sanctuary through ongoing invasive removal, native planting, and educational programming on ecological stewardship.
- **Regional partners** include organizations such as the Mystic River Watershed Association and the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration. They offer technical guidance, regional mapping tools, and potential funding opportunities for invasive management projects.
- For more about regional cooperation and coordination, read about Comprehensive Invasive Species Management Associations (CISMAs) in "[What is a CISMA and Why do We Need One?](#)," BCF *Newsletter*, July 2022.

Why Recycling Stagnates

Belmont's options for dealing with waste woes

By Jeffrey North

Dr. Jonathan S. Krones, associate professor of engineering at Brandeis University, gave a virtual presentation titled “Garbage 101: How the waste system actually works, and what we can do to achieve a more circular economy” sponsored by the Belmont Public Library last November.

The talk offered a rare behind-the-scenes look at how waste and recycling systems actually function in Massachusetts and around the country. It also delivered a clarifying message to communities like Belmont: our recycling system is struggling not because residents are necessarily doing it wrong, but because the system was never built to do what we now expect of it.

Krones organized the evening around seven core insights about the waste system in the United States. For Belmont residents, the most urgent issues were related to recycling: why recycling rates have not improved in more than 15 years; why “single-stream” systems create persistent contamination; and how local choices paired with upstream reforms can support the circular economy we say we want.

Recycling in Decline: What Went Wrong?

Recycling rates in the US rose swiftly from 1990 to 2010, climbing from less than 10% to roughly 35%. But since then: stagnation. For more than a

decade, national recycling rates have hovered at 32% to 35%, even as public interest in sustainability has exploded.

Why aren't we making progress? According to Krones, the culprit is a perfect storm created by two powerful forces.

1. The shift to single-stream recycling, in which all materials, paper, glass, metal, and plastic, go into one bin
2. Our inability to effectively regulate what gets produced—and thus disposed of

For years, China subsidized the world's recycling habit. With low labor costs and minimal contamination rules, Chinese importers hand-sorted mountains of mixed recyclable material that US systems couldn't cleanly process. In some cases, municipalities were actually paid for their recyclables.

But in 2017, China closed the door. In an abrupt crackdown on importing contaminated recyclables, known as Operation National Sword, shipments that once sailed across the Pacific were now rejected. Plastic exports to China collapsed from 581,000 metric tons in early 2017 to just 23,900 metric tons a year later.

US cities suddenly had nowhere for their mixed, contaminated recyclables to go. Processing costs spiked. Many materials were disposed of outright.

The recycling industry's business model, with billions invested in single-stream sorting facilities, no longer worked.

Single-Stream: Convenience at a Cost

Single-stream recycling was intended to make recycling easier. And it did: participation rose sharply because all recyclables could go in one cart. But the convenience came with a hidden flaw: high contamination.

When all items are commingled, they crush, smash, tangle, and soil one another. At a materials recovery facility (MRF), workers

and machines attempt to separate materials back out again, but often, the system simply can't.

Recyclability: Shape and Material

A plastic tub may recycle well; a plastic bag likely will not. MRFs can only process certain forms: rigid containers, bottles, cans, and clean paper. Items that are too small, flexible, flimsy, or tangled cannot be separated out by sorting machinery, even if they are technically “recyclable” in a laboratory sense.

Krones warned against “wishcycling”—the well-intentioned habit of tossing questionable items into the recycling cart. It feels virtuous, but wishcycling increases contamination, raises costs, and often causes other, genuinely recyclable materials to be landfilled.

His distilled message: “Nothing is recycled until it becomes a new product.” Collection is just the first step.

The System Wasn't Designed for Recycling

A major theme of Krones's talk was historical. To understand today's recycling crisis, he argued, we must understand the purpose of the waste system itself.

Sanitation Isn't Recycling

The waste system's core objectives, enshrined in the 1976 Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), are to:

- Remove waste quickly from where people live
- Move it away efficiently and cheaply
- Isolate it from the environment

Recycling, by contrast, requires slowing the system down, sorting, cleaning, and preserving the material quality necessary to feed manufacturing markets. These goals conflict. As Krones put it, waste management's job is, adapting a prayer from Fiddler on the Roof: “Bless the waste—and keep it far away from us.”

This explains why US recycling programs so closely resemble trash collection rather than being run as independent MRF enterprises. It also explains why recycling contaminates easily: the system was not built to maintain materials' value.

Waste companies are investing in improved separation technologies, adopting new AI-powered robots to sort a dizzying array of different material types. Krones is not optimistic that doubling down on the current system will fix the problem. As long

as producers do not have to shoulder the costs of responsible disposal, the mix of items on the shelves will always be one step ahead of the waste industry's ability to sort and recycle them.

Beyond the Blue Bin: Industrial Waste

Most residents think of “waste” as what they put at the curb. But Krones's research shows that there is a similarly large world of industrial waste with its own challenges and complexities.

Non-hazardous industrial waste is generated by a variety of activities, but it is largely invisible to the public. In fact, his best estimate puts the total mass of this waste at about a quarter of a billion tons per year in the US, about the amount of municipal solid waste we produce. Some recent results include the following.

- Phosphogypsum: 33 million metric tons in 2024; 1.73 billion tons accumulated since 1989
- Bauxite residuals (“red mud”): 600,000 dry tons (3 million wet tons) in 2024

These materials pose environmental hazards but also opportunities for beneficial reuse. For example, coal fly ash could replace Portland cement, or steel slag could serve as industrial insulation.

While fascinating, these findings also reinforce an essential point for local recycling discussions; municipal recycling is important, but it is only part of the nation's overall materials problem.

Recycling's Future: a Return to Separation?

In New England, many towns still operate municipal transfer stations where residents drop off source-separated recyclables: clean cardboard here, metal there, glass elsewhere.

Krones is actively researching whether these centers may hold the key to retaining material value in a post-China world. Early findings suggest:

- Source-separated materials maintain far higher quality than single-stream mixtures.
- These materials can feed local or regional recycling markets, reducing global transportation impacts.
- Transfer stations may serve as critical infrastructure for a localized circular economy.

Belmont is currently reliant on contracted curbside single-stream service. The town may wish to pay attention to these developments, particularly



A municipal single-stream recycling plant in Montgomery, MD.

as the town revisits future hauling contracts and climate-related waste strategies.

E-Waste and Repairs

Though not the focus of the evening, Krones highlighted e-waste as the fastest-growing waste stream worldwide. Most electronics are difficult to repair by design, leading to unnecessary disposal of valuable materials.

He championed the Right to Repair movement, which protects consumer access to repair information, tools, and parts. He also praised community repair events, like Fixit Clinics and Repair Cafés, that help residents learn to repair household items rather than discard them. Massachusetts supports these events through its Recycling Dividend Points program.

Repair, Krones stressed, like waste reduction and reuse, is much preferred to recycling, as it allows us to keep using the things that have already been produced.

What Belmont Residents Can Do

Krones offered clear steps communities should take to improve recycling outcomes.

1. **Avoid wishcycling.**
If you are not certain an item is recyclable in Belmont's system, place it in the trash. This protects the value of truly recyclable items.
2. **Support upstream policies.**
We often think that recycling solves the waste problem. It doesn't. Improvements must occur in product design and manufacturing:
 - Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging
 - Design standards for recyclability and repair
 - Restrictions on problematic materials (certain plastics, multilayer films)
3. **Choose repairable goods**
Buy items designed to last and learn basic repair skills.
4. **Engage locally.**
Belmont residents can advocate for:
 - Clearer recycling guidelines



Illustration from 2024 Global E-Waste Monitor Report.

- Greater transparency in municipal recycling contracts
- Exploring supplemental programs for source-separated materials
- Local repair workshops

These small steps create feedback loops that influence both producers and policymakers.

Toward a Circular Belmont

Krones closed with a simple principle: “What comes out must first have gone in.” We cannot recycle our way out of a system designed to produce waste. Instead, achieving a circular economy requires changing what gets manufactured, purchased, and consumed, and then ensuring that what remains can actually flow back into productive use.

Recycling still matters. But the deeper solution lies further upstream.

For Belmont, this means that today's recycling frustrations are not signs of failure; they are signals that our waste system is overdue for a redesign. And as Krones's research makes clear, communities like ours have a meaningful role to play in pushing that transformation forward.

Dr. Jonathan S. Krones is associate professor of engineering at Brandeis University, where he researches waste systems and engineering education in liberal arts contexts.

Beth Lambert: Restoring Rivers and Wetlands



COURTESY OF BETH LAMBERT

Beth Lambert

By Jeffrey North

This article is part of the Belmont Citizens Forum's series on environmental leadership in Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), part of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), works to restore and protect rivers, wetlands, and watersheds across the commonwealth. From removing aging dams to revitalizing salt marshes and wetlands, DER supports projects that strengthen ecosystems, improve climate resilience, and reconnect communities to nature.

The Belmont Citizens Forum spoke with Beth Lambert, director of DER, about the division's statewide restoration priorities and her vision for the future. Jeffrey North conducted the interview.

BCF

What does DER do?

Lambert

The Division of Ecological Restoration's mission is to restore and protect rivers, wetlands, and water-

sheds for the benefit of people and the environment. We do this in three ways. We directly manage river and wetland restoration projects throughout the state, working in partnership with others to guide these projects from feasibility through design, permitting, and construction. We also help others build capacity to lead and support restoration. Finally, we share restoration knowledge with organizations and individuals across the state.

BCF

What are the most urgent ecological challenges facing Massachusetts' rivers, wetlands, and watersheds today?

Lambert

Massachusetts rivers and wetlands suffer and degrade from water pollution, habitat damage, and water withdrawals, all exacerbated by climate change. Massachusetts rivers and wetlands are chopped into disconnected segments by more than 3,000 dams and 25,000 culverts, also known as road crossings. Dams and road crossings prevent fish and wildlife from accessing key habitats, which has led to a long-term decline in native fish and wildlife that rely on connected, free-flowing rivers. Coastal wetlands are crisscrossed by roads. These roads and their undersized culverts block salt marshes from receiving the twice-daily tides that they need to thrive. This in turn has resulted in a loss of salt marsh and loss of habitat for migratory and resident birds, certain fish, plants, and other iconic species.

BCF

DER has become nationally known for its dam removal work. Can you describe why dam removal is a priority and share a few success stories?

Lambert

Removing a dam is one of the best things you can do for a river. Massachusetts has more than 3,000 dams. Dams drown floodplains and river habitat, damage water quality, and block the movement of fish and wildlife. When you remove a dam, the river immediately begins to heal. Fish and wildlife blocked by the dam return. Water quality improves.



Miller Turner Dam removal, Pepperell, MA

The former pond becomes a free-flowing river surrounded by a floodplain.

Dam removal also helps communities adapt to climate change. The majority of Massachusetts dams were built in the 1700s and 1800s to power mills and are now aging. As dams age, they deteriorate, presenting a risk of failure during storms. Removing the dam removes the threat to public safety associated with dam failure and builds community resilience to large storms associated with climate change.

The story of dam removal in the Mill River highlights the resilience of nature and the benefits of dam removal for people. In 2005, the Whittenton Dam on the Mill River in Taunton nearly failed during a series of large storms. Downtown Taunton was evacuated; 4,000 people had to leave. The dam was repaired during the emergency by state and federal agencies.

This 2005 dam safety crisis event catalyzed dam removal throughout the state, and particularly along the Mill River. Between 2007 and 2018, DER and more than 15 nonprofits, agencies, and others worked together to remove the Whittenton Dam and two others from the Mill River. The Department of Transportation built a fish ladder at a fourth dam. Because of the dams, river herring had been extirpated from the watershed for over 200 years.

With the removal of the three dams, river herring slowly began to return to the river each spring, swimming upstream from Narragansett Bay, through the Taunton River, to spawning habitats in the upper part of the Mill River. Within five years, over 30,000 river herring were returning to the Mill River each year. And Taunton is safe from potential dam failures.

BCF

What role does ecological restoration play in preparing Massachusetts communities for climate change—flooding, storms, and heat waves?

Lambert

Restoring rivers and wetlands enlists the power of nature to help people adapt to climate change. Healthy salt marshes buffer communities from coastal storms and the effects of sea level rise. Upgraded culverts prevent roads from flooding or blowing out during floods. Removing an aging dam can reduce upstream flood levels and eliminate the threat of dam failure. Restored wetlands absorb floodwaters and filter pollutants.

Community and Partnerships

BCF

What is the role of partnerships in river and wetland restoration?

Lambert

DER takes a partnership-based approach to restoration, working side-by-side with municipalities, landowners, nonprofits, and agencies to plan and carry out restoration projects. Restoration has powerful co-benefits such as improved public safety, job creation, outdoor recreation, economic benefits, and others. These benefits attract diverse coalitions of restoration partners, each contributing essential expertise and resources to the project.

Partnerships are essential to restoration projects, and we credit our partners for restoration successes. It's not unusual to find DER, a rod-and-gun club, a Department of Public Works engineer, a local land trust, and two federal agencies working together to remove dams, upgrade culverts, and restore wetlands along a cold water stream. Each partner contributes critical expertise, funding, time, or local knowledge, all needed for project success.

BCF

How does DER select its projects?

Lambert

DER selects projects that bring significant ecological and community benefits to the commonwealth. DER selects restoration projects and grant recipients through public, competitive processes.

Some of DER's programs are widely available to public, private, and agency landowners and organizations. Other programs target specific audiences such as municipal road managers or municipal dam owners. Local partners can get involved by reviewing and applying for these opportunities. In addition, landowners and others can contact our staff directly to discuss project ideas.

DER shares requests for responses through email, newsletters, our website, social media, and through our partners. Find out more on our [website](#) or by signing up for our quarterly newsletter or email list for grant opportunities.

BCF

DER's projects often depend on local buy-in and collaboration. What strategies have you found most effective in helping landowners move from interest to implementation in restoration projects?

Lambert

Project owners follow a variety of paths to move from interest to implementation. Sometimes a watershed association or regional planning agency may connect with a property owner or community that has an interest in restoration. They may help the project owner think through their restoration options and then refer the landowner to one of DER's grant programs or project selection programs.

In addition, DER has several grant opportunities, such as the Dam Removal Preliminary Design Program, that gives landowners an assessment of the cost and the process for carrying out restoration at their site. Lastly, our staff regularly meet with interested landowners, communities, and citizens to discuss the restoration process.

BCF

How does DER ensure that restoration work benefits communities equitably, including historically underserved towns and neighborhoods?

Lambert

Environmental justice is one of the core pillars of the Department of Fish and Game's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. DER seeks to meaningfully engage with residents of environmental justice neighborhoods and to ensure that restoration benefits are shared equitably across the state. We work with project owners and partners to engage with and seek input from residents that may be affected by a restoration project, with particular attention to environmental justice neighborhoods.

DER also incorporates environmental justice into grant and project selection criteria. This helps us target communities with the greatest need and ensures that grant decisions are fair and equitable.

Lastly, we work hard to make our grant and project application processes as straightforward as possible, so that understaffed or underresourced communities are not deterred from applying.

Education and Public Awareness

BCF

Public awareness of ecological restoration has grown in recent years. What strategies does DER use to explain the value of restoration to residents and decision-makers?

Lambert

We emphasize the diverse benefits of river and wetland restoration, from public safety to job creation to cost savings to improved outdoor recreation. We share examples of projects from around the state. We bring together towns that have completed projects with towns and landowners that are considering restoration.

BCF

What role does science communication and storytelling play in building support for restoration projects?

Lambert

River and wetland restoration projects make incredibly compelling stories.

- Restoration projects demonstrate that:
- The actions of individuals can lead to positive change
- People from different walks of life can work together towards a common goal
- Rivers and wetlands can heal, even after centuries of damage

People who participate in restoration projects are blown away by how quickly rivers and wetlands recover. It's an incredible experience.

BCF

How do you engage—or what guidance would you give to—schools, universities, or young profes-

sionals who may want to build careers in ecological restoration?

Lambert

Early career professionals enter the ecological restoration field from a variety of academic paths, from biology or engineering to environmental studies, community planning, and environmental law. We encourage interested students to pursue internships with the Commonwealth, with local watershed associations, or with one of the statewide or national nonprofit organizations to get some hands-on experience and learn what it's like to work in the environmental field.

Policy and Funding

BCF

What state or federal policies have been most important in advancing restoration work in Massachusetts?

Lambert

One of the most important policies was the formation of the Division of Ecological Restoration in 2009. This created a central, coordinated, expert-driven capacity within state government to restore river and wetland habitat. DER leads restoration projects, helps other organizations build capacity to lead and support restoration, and shares restoration knowledge.

More recently, the Healey-Driscoll administration released Biodiversity Goals for Massachusetts. These biodiversity goals for Massachusetts include a 25-year plan to protect, restore, sustain, and connect nature, with specific targets like preserving 30% of the state's lands and waters by 2030 and 40% by 2050. The plan also involves accelerating the restoration of critical habitats, removing dams, improving fish passage, supporting food security, and increasing community access to nature and education.

BCF

Funding is always a challenge. How does DER secure resources for large-scale restoration, and what role do federal infrastructure and climate bills play?

Lambert

DER leverages its relatively small state budget for large federal grants. These grants, in combination with other state grant programs, cover the majority of restoration costs.

BCF

How do you measure success—both ecological outcomes and community benefits—across the projects DER supports?

Lambert

We partner with MassWildlife, the Division of Marine Fisheries, Woodwell Climate Research Center, the University of Massachusetts, Salem Sound Coast Watch, the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, Westfield State University, and others to track the ecological results of our restoration projects. Our colleagues in communities track community benefits. For example, one municipal road manager was so excited about his new culvert that he took videos of the culvert in the middle of the night during a storm to demonstrate how well the culvert was working!

Looking Ahead

BCF

What innovations—whether in science, engineering, or policy—are you most excited about in the field of ecological restoration?

Lambert

I'm excited about building capacity at the local level to lead and support restoration. This is one of the most effective ways that we can address restoration needs at scale.

Recently, DER launched the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program. Through this program, DER provides funding and technical assistance to regional organizations to help them gain the skills and staff capacity to build watershed-scale restoration partnerships, with a focus on getting projects on the ground.

DER is currently supporting three Regional Restoration Partnerships in the Buzzards Bay, Berkshires, and Merrimack regions. The partnerships have been enormously successful at identifying high-value river and wetland restoration projects and advancing them through design, permitting, and construction. I can't wait to expand the program to other regions of the state.

BCF

If you could pose one or two questions to your peers leading other environmental agencies or nonprofits, what would you most want to learn from their experience in advancing restoration and resilience?

Lambert

Over the last decade, DER and many other environmental organizations have all been scaling up to meet the growing need for restoration assistance. How do we use our respective strengths in combination to address restoration needs and magnify our collective impact?

BCF

Looking ahead 20 years, what is your vision for Massachusetts's rivers, wetlands, and coastal systems if DER's restoration priorities succeed?

Lambert

In 20 years, restoration will be a mainstream and common sense approach for how communities do business. Rivers will run more freely, with 300 dams removed. Municipalities, with support from DER and other agencies, will upgrade 2,500 of the state's 25,000 culverts, leading to significant gains in stream connectivity and native fish populations. Every watershed in the state will have a restoration "hub" of technical resources and project management expertise. DER and partners will continue to restore the health of salt marshes, removing critical barriers to salt marsh migration as sea level rises.

Beth Lambert is a director at the Division of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

Jeffrey North is managing editor of the BCF Newsletter.



DER salt marsh monitoring, Newbury, MA.

COURTESY OF BETH LAMBERT

Profile in Belmont: Ken Stalberg

By Elissa Ely

Few of us recognize our path in this spinning world until long past childhood. It's usually vague, convoluted, unclearly marked. If we're lucky, we don't wander down too many side streets leading nowhere (or worse, to unhappiness). For some, the wandering never ends.

Ken Stalberg, former "Mailing Maestro" for the BCF *Newsletter*, principal violist with the Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra, the Boston Classical Orchestra, and the Boston Landmarks Orchestra, as well as a violinist with the Boston Ballet Orchestra, took a straight path from a young age. His mother was an amateur pianist ("and a very good one, though she had small hands"), and his father repaired woodwind and brass instruments in their basement. Once a week, after working a government day job, he would make the rounds of local music stores in Silver Spring, Maryland, collect his clients, and bring them home. Though he wasn't formally trained, he played well enough to test and treat them all.

Ken's father took him to his first violin lessons: Saturday mornings, the University of Maryland. He was 10 years old, in a class with 35 to 40 other students. It was led by a hard-working, well-meaning professor who, in the crush of young players, couldn't attend fully to the individual. "I developed bad habits," Ken said, "which had to be broken." Many years later, he and the professor played in a chamber performance together. "Oddly enough," he says wryly, "he didn't remember me."

To be clear, a straight path didn't involve endless love for practicing ("I admit that I lied to my mother on more than one occasion"), but the music took hold. The road was certain though the instrument was not, and for a while Ken thought he might take up the flute. In the Stalberg home, classical music was a constant visitor, and one day he was listening to Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, lifting the record player needle over and over again to return to a particular segment. "I was captivated. It sent me into ecstasy," he recalls.



Ken Stalberg

COURTESY OF KEN STALBERG

Clarity arrived in the 11th grade and in the presence of a Beethoven String Quartet recording his mother had borrowed from the library. Music, he understood, would be his vocation. String music. He was called.

His mother, pianist and music lover, was not happy at first. She tried to talk him into something more self-sustaining, like medicine or engineering. But music was sustenance. He went on to Oberlin Conservatory, then to Tanglewood, then to Boston University. One formative mentor, concertmaster in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, had a photographic memory. Sometimes he taught a difficult piece without a score ("I used to think that 'jaw dropping' was just an invention"). He insisted that

his students join nonmusical as well as musical communities—which was to say, find their ways to the rest of the world.

A second mentor, chamber music coach in Tanglewood, had such deep interpretive understanding that "the man just dripped music." To make a passionate point, he once hurled his pocket score against a wall, pages exploding everywhere. "I used everything I learned from those two," Ken says, "filtered through my own choices and experiences."

Like most dewy young musicians, he didn't understand at first that the reality of a life in music requires more than music. "We're freelancers," he explains. "If you're not a member of a symphony—and I was lucky to get in early—it's the art of accepting every bad job so you'll be asked for the next bad job."

There's also the nagging issue of financial survival. Ken has been involved for years with writing collective bargaining agreements: 20 to 30 page contracts, often opposed by management, renegotiated every three to four years, and far from the purity of scales.

He and his wife were living in Watertown when, during the 1991 Nor'easter "Perfect Storm," they moved to Belmont. Friends were nearby, the neighborhood around McLean was peaceful, the house had a studio, the studio had a bathroom. They raised two sons there; one sings in a chorale, the other became a piano teacher who lives around the corner.

Involvement with BCF began when McLean was planning to sell off property for development. Like many Belmont residents, Ken wanted to preserve open spaces and protect traffic manageability. Eventually the meetings he sat in on led to the newsletter mailings he helped out with. Every few months, there were mailing parties; friendly faces pasting address labels on about 2,000 issues around a dining room table with snacks. Those parties, which ended during the pandemic, led to volunteering as Mailing Maestro. ("I didn't come up with the name, by the way.")

The newsletter that appears so reliably in a mailbox winds its way through an obstacle course beforehand—it should be short of breath by the time it arrives. Heavy post office tubs, rubber bands, and labels are driven to a digital print and copy

business in Cambridge that bundles and returns the publications for mailing.

There used to be an easy commute afterwards to the Belmont Post Office, but nothing easy is easy for long. Because of ever-evolving postal service rules, the drive to Belmont became a drive to the BMEU (Business Mail Entry Unit) in Waltham, where Ken and the postal clerk had long conversations about the state of the USPS. When the BMEU was shuttered, he had to find another office that accepted bulk mailings. Now the tubs and bundles—altogether weighing more than 200 pounds—travel to Central Square.

Musicians are nothing if not disciplined. His son Nathaniel often helped ("he's wicked quick"), and over 20 years, Ken missed only one mailing. Sometime last summer, he stepped down, and became the Mailing Maestro emeritus. (Take notice, Belmont Citizens Forum administrators, and make time for a well-earned plaque.)

For musicians, there's no obligatory retirement age with a farewell luncheon and the dismissal of a gold watch. "So far, my memory is good," Ken says. "I'll know it's time to quit when I can't remember if I went back to a repeat."

There's also the pleasure he takes in teaching; mostly children in younger grades, but some up to high school. His method is as much personal philosophy and lessons from his own mentors as it is scales and scores. "I believe in humor as a big part of teaching, and also, humor as a big part of approaching life," he says. At the same time, his students must learn habits they won't have to break. "I don't allow them to skate. There are constant reminders of rhythm, and how to hold the bow. I won't compromise on these points. The world doesn't need another player playing out of tune." Getting it right is especially important when making music with others. "That's what I feel is the real point, in a deep, wordless way."

This profile should come with a sound track, for the joy of listening to a boy called early in life to his path, a principal violist and violinist in multiple orchestras, a teacher, and a former Mailing Maestro (take notice, Belmont Citizens Forum administrators, and make time for that oral project, too).

In the end, though, here's what everyone should know most clearly: "Music," Ken says, "gives me hope. Especially when I'm playing."

Elissa Ely is a community psychiatrist.

Bicyclist Rides the Henry Knox Trail

Fort Ticonderoga to Cambridge, 1775 and 2025



DAVID WEBSTER

David Webster at the Sudbury River marker, August 2025.

By David Webster

When I lowered my bicycle on the grassy bank of the Sudbury River in Wayland and stared at the granite marker and historic broken Stone Bridge, time froze. The marker identified this place as being on the Knox Trail. I imagined steam rising from sweaty horses and oxen and then evaporating into the frigid winter air as the straining animals pulled their heavy loads of captured cannons across the bridge towards Boston.

This winter marks the 250th anniversary of an extraordinary Revolutionary War event that was pivotal in forcing the British evacuation of Boston in 1776. During the winter of 1775–1776, Henry Knox, a 25 year old Boston bookseller, led a grueling expedition to transport 59 artillery pieces and armaments captured at Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain in upstate New York to General George Washington on the Cambridge Common on January 24, 1776. This “noble train of artillery,” as Knox described it to Washington in a December 1775 letter, was subsequently placed with fortifications on Dorchester Heights in a single night, surprising the British

Army and compelling them to ship out of Boston on March 17, 1776.

One hundred and fifty years later, the state of New York and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts commemorated this courageous and harrowing journey with more than 58 stone markers that both memorialize the expedition and serve as landmarks along the route. Each marker includes a bronze tablet featuring a relief image depicting oxen pulling sleds loaded with cannon driven by a patriot teamster and under the watchful eye of Knox. Markers close to Belmont can be found along Mt. Auburn

Street in Watertown, Main Street in Waltham, and on the Cambridge Common.

I became intrigued with the expedition and the markers spaced along the route from Fort Ticonderoga to Cambridge. I took it as a challenge to learn more of the trip’s history and topography by finding each marker on an expedition of my own, by bicycle. Clearly, there can be no repeat or reenactment of moving 60 tons of cannons down Lake George, along the frozen Hudson River, and across the snowy Berkshires and central Massachusetts.

I endeavored to find each marker, tracing the historical route of Henry Knox for six days during the summers of 2024 and 2025. I biked the New York section starting at Fort Ticonderoga during the summer of 2024 and the Massachusetts section in August 2025.

My quest was a rewarding combination of physical challenge, historic discovery, scavenger hunting to find each marker, and glimpses into the rural, urban, and forested roads and towns of upstate New York and across Massachusetts. I was aided by some helpful, if not essential, websites

which describe the location of each marker. A good one is www.hudsonrivervalley.org/knox-trail.

The location of at least one marker south of Schuylerville, New York, remains a mystery. Other markers have been moved to new locations to make way for more recent development. However, each segment of the route that ended at a marker was an adventure with its own story, a sense of awe, and often a conversation with a local resident.

Unless you relish navigating with uncertainty and can put up with a variety of roads, drivers, and traffic conditions, I cannot necessarily recommend the Henry Knox Trail as a bike route. However, it also would be a gratifying and challenging trip by car. Either way, you can expect surprises.

For me, some memorable moments were seeing redcoat reenactors drilling at Fort Ticonderoga, chatting with the Lake George landowner who has a marker in his yard, and chancing upon a modern art metal sculpture depicting the expedition near the Saratoga Battlefield. I rode paralleling boat canals and the bike-friendly Empire State Trail near Albany, crossing the Hudson River. I encountered an antique car show and a bear in Great Barrington, came across a cricket match in Shrewsbury, and stood next to a unique marker at a broken stone bridge where Knox crossed the Sudbury River. Finally, I reached the Knox monument on Cambridge Common.

“We the people of the United States” certainly are indebted to the imagination, courage, and resourcefulness of General Knox and so many others who served and fought through the years for our freedom from monarchy and autocracy. Beginning this December, many celebrations are being planned along the route to commemorate the 250 year anniversary of the Henry Knox Expedition.

Riding a bicycle on paved roads on glorious summer days past farms, rivers, and towns bears no comparison to Knox’s 300-mile trek hauling heavy sleds of cannons in the dead of winter in a time of war. However, the 58 times I discovered and read the monument inscription, I was thankful for what these brave souls did and the legacy that they entrusted to us to preserve. The standard Massachusetts inscription reads:

THROUGH THIS PLACE PASSED GENERAL HENRY KNOX IN THE WINTER OF 1775–1776 TO DELIVER TO GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON AT CAMBRIDGE THE TRAIN OF ARTILLERY FROM FORT TICONDEROGA USED TO FORCE THE BRITISH ARMY TO EVACUATE BOSTON. ERECTED BY THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS 1927.

David Webster is a Belmont resident.

First Church History

John Howe (left) speaks with attendees after his talk at the Beech Street Senior Center about the history of First Church in Belmont, Unitarian Universalist, which was built in 1890 in the Romanesque Revival style.

The church is one of Belmont’s important historic buildings, adjacent to the 1853 Lyman Underwood House. His presentation included photos showing the church in its original location on the north side of Concord Avenue, with the railroad tracks at street level. Howe was a long-time Belmont resident, and remains an active member of First Church. The Belmont Historical Society hosted Howe’s talk last November.



JOHN BEATY

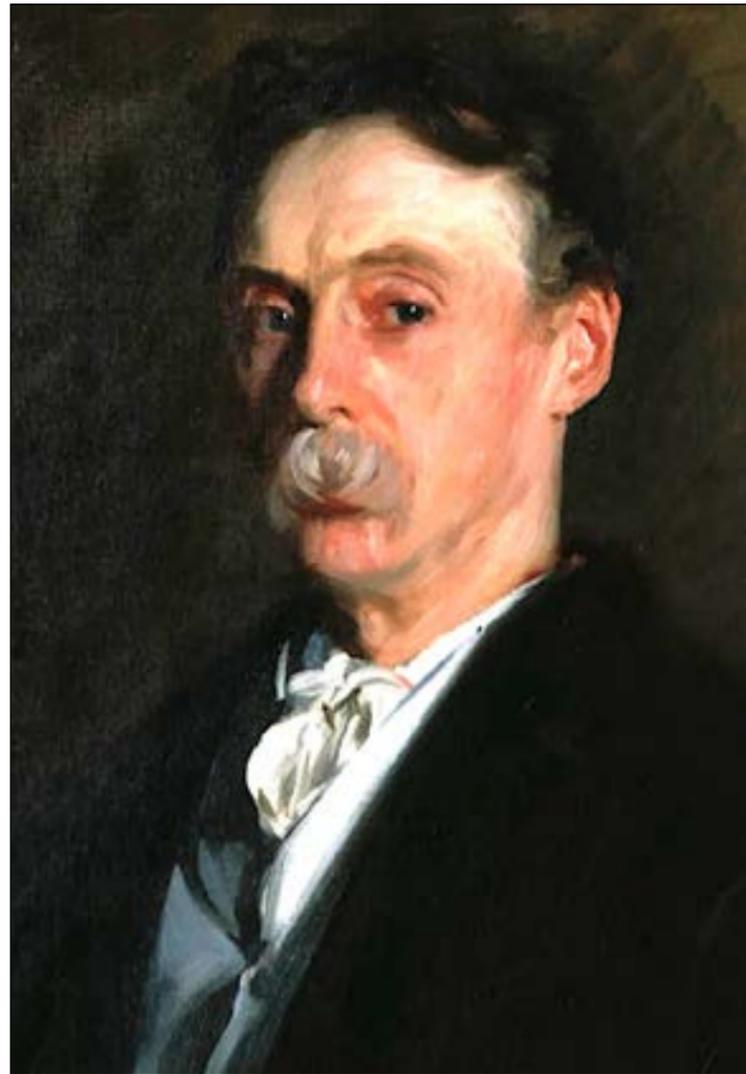
Belmont Farmers Built Chicago Skyscrapers

The Story of the Brooks Brothers

By Edmund McDevitt

In 1831, in the section of Watertown that later became the south part of Belmont, Peter Chardon Brooks was born. The child was to become one of the most important historic figures in the development of the skyscraper.

Little is known about his family's residence in Watertown. Peter Brooks's grandfather, the original



Peter Chardon Brooks III portrait, oil on canvas by John Singer Sargent, 1890.

Peter Chardon Brooks (1767–1849), was, at the time of his death, quite possibly the wealthiest man in Boston. His wealth came from a marine insurance business, some of which insured ships involved in

the Atlantic slave trade—no surprise, given that the family were slaveholders prior to and after the American Revolution.

The elder Brooks was also the grandfather of the historian Henry Adams and the great-great grandfather of Massachusetts governor and senator Leverett Saltonstall (1892–1979). Leverett Saltonstall's mother was Eleanor Brooks, Peter Chardon Brooks's daughter, providing a bit of interesting insight into the insularity of Boston society. Leverett Saltonstall was also a descendant of Sir Richard Saltonstall of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who founded Watertown.

Investment in Chicago Begins

Peter Chardon Brooks III and his brother Shepherd invested heavily in Chicago real estate at the beginning of the rise of the skyscraper. They built Chicago's 1883 Montauk Block (demolished 1902), a very early tall building, 10-stories high, and the first building to be deemed a "skyscraper." Historically, another Chicago building, the Home Insurance Building, completed in 1885, is considered the first true skyscraper, employing what became the standard method of construction, a fireproof structural steel frame that fully supported the building. The Montauk relied both on its steel structure and on its walls for support, whereas later skyscrapers were supported entirely by their interior steel lattice.

The Brooks brothers (no relation to the men's suit company) spent most of their lives in Medford on what is now the Brooks Estate. Their friends and associates in Massachusetts knew little of their extensive investments in Chicago. Their reputations were those of "gentlemen farmers."

The brothers, mostly Peter, worked extensively with Owen Aldis, a Chicago developer, and with the architecture firms Burnham and Root and Holabird and Roche, two of the most important 19th-century tall-building design firms. Peter was very involved in the details of his buildings and depended upon Aldis both to

innovate with him and to manage the process. They together adhered to several development principles:

- The office building with the most light is the best investment.
- Second-class space costs as much to operate as first-class space; therefore, build no second-class space.
- Common areas should make a lasting impression.
- Operating expenses must always be kept in mind.
- Upkeep is important; it should be management progressive.

The Landmark Marquette Building

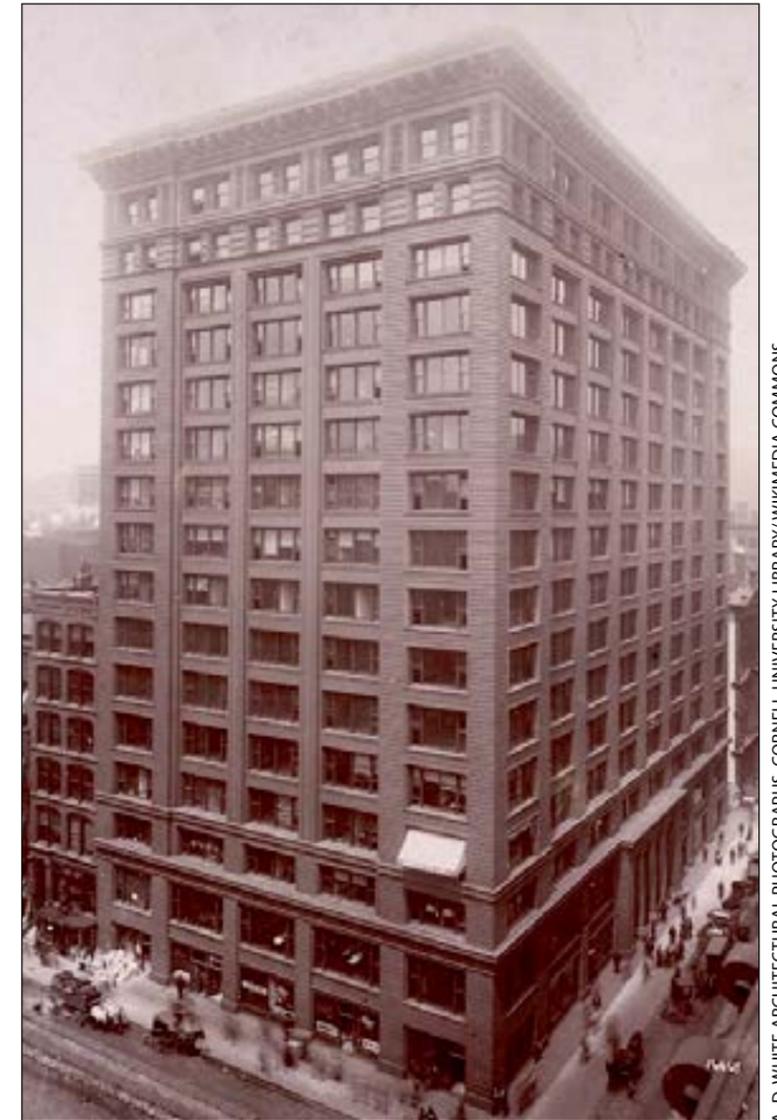
In 1895, they completed construction of the Marquette Building, a Chicago landmark and current home of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In keeping with having common areas "make a lasting impression," the revolving doors and lobby are adorned with relief sculptures. The lobby ceiling contains a spectacular encircling mosaic that depicts the 1674–1675 expedition of Quebec explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet to the swampland that later became Chicago. The shimmering mosaic, designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany and his art director, Jacob Adolph Holzer, is one of several large Tiffany works in the city but is the first such high-class decoration in an office building in the city. Peter Brooks is known to have understood early on that the top floors of buildings should be marketed as the most prestigious to occupy.

Peter was very detail-oriented (his brother Shepherd was not). According to Joyce Goldenstern in her "Monadnock on the Prairie," for Peter (whose visits to Chicago were brief and infrequent):

"Nothing was too minute for his scrutiny: paint color, faucets, urinals, plumbing, and elevators invited his long-distance comments and commands. He is said to have in his study a grid-map of downtown Chicago, dotted with colored pins on which he studied the patterns of speculative office space. Like a chess master, he anticipated his competitors' moves and plotted his own. He knew each block, each corner lot and its potential by heart."

Elevators were a means to an end: they carried people to those prestigious floors at the tops of buildings. The Marquette Building (remember, this is 1895) has 11 of them! Also keep in mind that not too long before the Marquette opened, people did not trust elevators; they would gladly put supplies and equipment on them, but not themselves. Elevators were, for Peter Brooks, a key element in his ideas about classy buildings.

Owen Aldis apparently cajoled Peter Brooks to



1895 photograph of the Marquette Building.

add multiple amenities to the Marquette Building. Brooks was well known for his disdain for building art and decorative flourishes. He famously directed that the first half of the 1891 Monadnock Building be thoroughly unadorned. Architect John Wellborn



Lobby of the Marquette Building.

Root, an artist at heart, had, a few years earlier, gotten away with all sorts of whimsical decoration on another Brooks project, The Rookery. It's not clear what Peter Brooks thought of those fillips, but he was very careful to instruct Root on what to include in and on the Monadnock Building, a very speculative office structure at the time. So Aldis's Marquette design ideas are all the more remarkable. The Marquette was, and remains, a unique and classy office building.

The "Gentlemen Farmers"

Surprisingly, to this day, the deception of the Brooks brothers, the quiet fiction that they were just your ordinary well-to-do farmers, persists in Massachusetts. According to Joyce Goldenstern:

"Before he died, Peter, the grandson, told the historian of his Harvard class that he had never worked, that he had no profession. Poor health, he noted, had prevented him from pursuing a career. Whether motivated by modesty or mockery, Peter's words did not coordinate perfectly with the facts of his life. He, along with Shepherd, had, indeed, worked. They lived the quotidian life of New England farmers, tending to crops and cows, mending stone walls and walkways. In addition, both men, from afar, invested in the development of the burgeoning frontier city of Chicago. They bought land, planned and paid for office buildings, and collected rent."

Peter's vision and foresight with respect to Chicago's tall buildings of the time not only made him a lot of money, they also put him in rare company: the true innovators and mavens of our contemporary world. But his story remains buried and mostly unremarked upon in his own home state. And he was born in Belmont.

Edmund McDevitt was born and brought up in Belmont (in the part of Belmont excised from Watertown) and is a 1957 graduate of Belmont High School. He is, among other things, an active architecture docent, leading walking tours for the Chicago Architecture Center.



Correction

The article "Serving Those Who Served" (BCF Newsletter, November/December 2025) contained a mistaken identity. The gentleman pictured on the left on page 3 (and above) is Mr. Robert Young, a 100-year-old veteran, not Robert Taylor. We apologize for the mistake, and we salute Mr. Young's service

Thank you to our contributors

WRITERS

Elissa Ely • Edmund McDevitt • Jeffrey North • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • David Webster

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS

John Beaty • Jeffrey North • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

COPY EDITORS

Fred Bouchard • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Fred Bouchard • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

BELMONT NEEDS YOU.

Not tomorrow. Not "when things calm down." Now.

Your town is under constant pressure: from development, traffic, climate impacts, infrastructure, and policy decisions. The Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* exists to keep watch. But we cannot report, investigate, or inform without writers willing to step up. We want sharp minds, steady pens, and citizens willing to roll up their sleeves.

If you care about Belmont's streets, wetlands, budgets, bylaws, boards, trees, trails, taxes, wildlife, rezoning plans, or the future your neighbors will inherit, then consider this your draft notice.

Pick up your pen like others pick up a shovel or a ballot. Write one article. Write a few. Write on the issue that keeps you pacing your kitchen at night. No journalism experience needed. Just a willingness to serve your town by telling the truth about what's happening in it.

Belmont needs you on these pages. Report for duty at: bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com

Thank you for your continued support.

Your contribution makes a difference!

Each BCF *Newsletter* issue costs about \$5,000 to publish. Thank you for your support!

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

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

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

Or give securely online:
belmontcitizensforum.org

Contact us:
info@belmontcitizensforum.org

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

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

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

January/February 2026



Rail Trails can Serve Public Housing 1
Opinion: Treat Invasive Plants Systemically . . 5
Why Recycling Stagnates 8
Beth Lambert: Restoring Rivers, Wetlands . . 11
Profile in Belmont: Ken Stalberg 16
Bicyclist Rides Henry Knox Trail 18
Belmont Farmers Built Skyscrapers 20
Correction. 23

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