



Belmont Citizens Forum

Cambridge Real Estate Developments: Context for Hill's Crossing Overlay District

By Vincent Stanton, Jr.

At Town Meeting this fall (or possibly next spring), the Belmont Planning Board, in collaboration with the Office of Planning and Building, will sponsor an article proposing a new zoning overlay for the Brighton Street General Business district, the Hill's Crossing Overlay District (HCOD). The proposed zoning is analogous to the form-based code adopted by Town Meeting in March for Belmont Center (BCOD) and shares similar goals and methods: to revitalize an area that is not fulfilling its economic potential by increasing the scale and scope of what can be built "by right," including new housing and a wider range of business uses (see "Brighton Street Rezoning Gets Started" in the [May/June 2026 BCF Newsletter](#)).

The draft text of the HCOD is on the town website. The overlay envisions four form-based sub-districts within the HCOD, with maximum density along Brighton Street south of the Fitchburg Line (subdistrict FB-5, up to 6 stories; an earlier version of the plan included the Hill Estates, where 7 stories would have been allowed, but that has been dropped). That scale of development—denser than what the BCOD allows in Belmont Center—raises similar concerns about parking and traffic on a narrow street (Brighton/Blanchard) that is already very congested during morning and evening rush

hours, with the added complexities of an at-grade railroad crossing (38 trains per day) and a new community path crossing that is likely to increase pedestrian and bicycle traffic significantly.

However, while six-story buildings on Brighton Street may seem dense (compared to the mostly one- and two-story existing buildings), there is a proposed development about 650 feet east of the HCOD called Cambridge Point, that—if fully built out—would dwarf the Belmont plan. A 42 acre mixed residential-commercial development with thousands of new residents and a similar number of daily workers arriving by car or public transit,



IMAGE: GOOGLE EARTH PRO WITH AUTHOR'S ANNOTATIONS

Hill's Crossing Overlay District in relation to two developments in Cambridge: 87-101 Blanchard Road and Cambridge Point (only the northwest corner is shown).

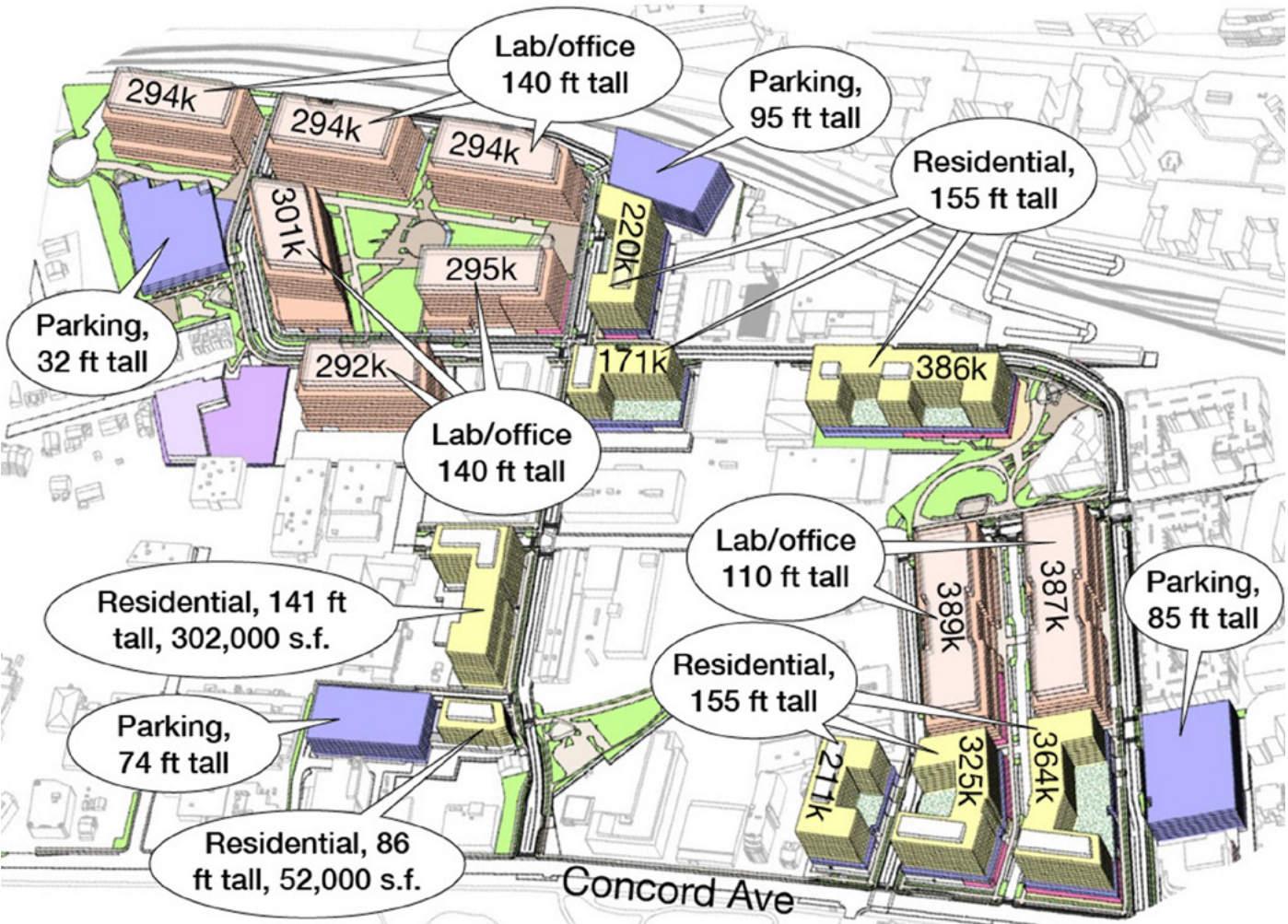
its impact on traffic and parking has to be taken into account when evaluating the HCOD.

Further, a second Cambridge development at 87-101 Blanchard Road, on the southeast border of the HCOD, just started construction in August. The new building will be six stories tall and provide 110 units of affordable housing for seniors, plus common space on the ground floor. The building is nominally 68.7 feet tall, but with rooftop utilities it will exceed 80 feet in some areas. The maximum permitted height in the HCOD will be 62.5 feet along Brighton Street; for comparison the clock at the top of the Bradford building, at the intersection of Trapelo and Common streets, is 58 feet tall.)

On a positive note, these two Cambridge developments might be expected to increase the economic viability of retail businesses in the HCOD by substantially increasing the local population.

Cambridge Point

Over the past five years, a Denver-based national real estate company called Healthpeak has spent close to \$1 billion acquiring over two dozen land parcels in West Cambridge, just east of Belmont. The parcels comprise about one third of a roughly 120 acre area referred to by Cambridge planners as the quadrangle, bounded on the north by the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line, on the south by Concord Avenue, on the west by Blair Pond and the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood (just east of Blanchard Road) and on the east by Wheeler Road (behind the Alewife CVS and Trader Joe’s). There are presently 21 buildings on the 42 acres acquired by Healthpeak, 18 of which will be torn down and replaced with larger buildings, as well as more green space, sidewalks and other public amenities including a bicycle pedestrian path along the south



Cambridge Point campus, with building uses colorcoded (commercial, residential, parking) and building heights marked on the roof. Note that the actual buildings will be slightly taller under a provision of Cambridge zoning law that allows taller first floors in flood prone areas.

side of the Fitchburg Line tracks and a bridge over the tracks at Fawcett Street.

Healthpeak has proposed a \$4.5 billion mixed-use development featuring residential, office, laboratory, light manufacturing, retail, and restaurant space. The Healthpeak proposal has been well received by the Cambridge Planning Board which, with the Cambridge Community Development Department and the Alewife Zoning Working Group, rewrote the zoning code for the quadrangle partially in response to Healthpeak’s early proposals. The new Alewife Overlay District: Quadrangle (AOD-Q) was adopted by the Cambridge City Council in September 2023 to guide large-scale, mixed-use proposals like Cambridge Point. The AOD-Q allows buildings twice as tall (under certain incentive options) as the zoning it replaced: 155 feet vs. 70 feet.

In fact, the proposed Healthpeak project is not entirely novel; it overlaps with, and in some respects is a successor to an earlier proposal for the quadrangle from local developer Cabot, Cabot & Forbes (CCF). That proposal was turned down repeatedly by the Cambridge City Council, culminating in a March 2021 vote of 7-1 against, prompting CCF to abandon its proposal and, soon thereafter, sell its land to Healthpeak. The AOD-Q zoning was also undoubtedly influenced by that experience. (See “Building Booms on Belmont’s Border” in the January/February 2021 BCF Newsletter.)

Under the new AOD-Q rules, the type of development proposed by Healthpeak is referred to as a planned unit development (PUD), meaning multiple buildings, with a minimum of 250,000 square feet of nonresidential space plus at least 40% residential space and at least 20% public or beneficial open space. PUD applicants qualify for the highest building density. In addition, Healthpeak plans to qualify for several bonus criteria under the AOD-Q PUD zoning by providing “major infrastructure” benefits to Cambridge:

- Constructing a bicycle-pedestrian bridge over the Fitchburg Line, which qualifies the developer for a 0.25 times increase in allowed floor-area ratio (FAR) across the whole development
- Contributing one acre to Cambridge, which the city will use for a DPW facility; that qualifies the

developer for a 1.5x FAR bonus applied to the area of land conveyed

- Possibly building a new commuter rail station along the Fitchburg Line, pending MBTA approval (which seems unlikely at present).

The scale of Cambridge Point is daunting, comprising 4,581,640 sq.ft. of living and working space, albeit the project would be built out in phases over two decades or longer.

- Nine commercial buildings, ranging from 9 to 12 stories tall (110–140 feet) comprising 2,521,000 sq.ft. of mostly office and biotech labs
- Eight residential buildings, ranging from 7 to 14 stories tall (86–155 feet) comprising 1,985,000 sq.ft. of residential space and providing approximately 2,300 new dwelling units
- Four multistory garages, ranging from 34 to 95 feet tall and providing 4,578 parking spaces
- 75,640 sq.ft. of “neighborhood uses” comprising restaurants and public gathering spaces
- About 800,000 sq.ft. of incremental green space, mostly around the large buildings.

The Cambridge Point project will require a special permit from the Cambridge Planning Board. The board granted preliminary approval of Healthpeaks application on April 28, 2026. Currently, the proposal is still in the state permitting process, with the second of three required environmental reports just filed. Healthpeak expects to receive final approval from the state and Cambridge by the end of this year. Construction might start a year later.

Traffic impacts

All traffic in the quadrangle ultimately flows to or from Concord Avenue (there is no other way in or out), and hence has implications for Belmont. A Healthpeak presentation from November 12, 2025, included a slide on “Trip Generation and Parking,” which predicted 15,000 trips per day, and 1,500 to 1,600 peak trips per hour after full build-out (decades from now). Healthpeak has not yet provided a full traffic study; in July 2026, the company noted it is “coordinating with the city on a full study.”

Cambridge traffic counts indicate an average daily volume of ~17,780 vehicles east of Blanchard Road (i.e., at the Belmont-Cambridge border; 2015 data). If the Healthpeak estimate is correct (15,000 trips

per day), it would almost double traffic on Concord Avenue. Much of that traffic would presumably be headed east to Cambridge business districts (Harvard, Central, and Kendall Squares) and to Boston, but some fraction would be westbound into Belmont.

However, as noted above, Cambridge Point only comprises about one third the area of the quadrangle. Much of the rest is already built up, but by no means all. Other developments will likely contribute to additional car trips.

Also worth emphasizing: the pedestrian-bicycle bridge promised by Healthpeak, currently planned for the bend of Fawcett Street, will be the eastern terminus of a linear path along the north edge of the Healthpeak campus, hugging the Fitchburg Line, and extending all the way west to the Belmont border at Brighton Street. The Healthpeak team confirmed that connection to Brighton Street at a July 15, 2026 public meeting. (An important caveat: MBTA cooperation will be required.) If built, that path could be an important contributor to the vitality of the HCOD as it would provide a direct route for thousands of Cambridge Point residents, and thousands of additional people who commute to work at Cambridge Point, to reach Brighton Street restaurants and shops via a short walk or ride.

What will get built, and when?

It would be hard to exaggerate the difference between the market environment for biotech laboratory space in 2021, when Healthpeak started acquiring land, and today. From 2013 to 2021 vacancy rates for lab space hovered at historic lows—near zero in Kendall Square—as a result of insatiable demand from biotech startups as well as big pharmaceutical companies moving in to be near all the startups. Since late 2021, vacancy rates have climbed sharply, according to Newmark Research, a real estate research firm. Their fall 2025 data show that Massachusetts lab space vacancy rates rose for the 13th consecutive quarter, from 5.1% in the first quarter of 2022 to 36.1% in the third quarter of 2025. Over the same period,

Newmark data show average asking rent for lab space in Cambridge dropped 18.9%, after surging in 2021.

The market for office space in Cambridge has been pummeled just as hard, with vacancy estimates of 14% to 20% depending on the building and address. According to a recent report from Lincoln Property Company, a developer, the vacancy rate in Cambridge decreased 0.5% in Q4 2025, ending the quarter at 13.4%, the first decrease in vacancy since Q4 2022.

In February, OZK Bank, which financed the conversion of the old Sullivan Courthouse in East Cambridge into a brand-new 20-story office tower, announced that it was writing off \$72.4 million of its \$300 million loan because the developer of the building had been unable to find tenants. In July 2026, the developer, still unable to rent out the office space, sold the building to Brookfield, a large asset manager, for \$1, with Brookfield assuming \$232 million in debt.

Healthpeak has been open about the bleak economic climate in recent public meetings, noting, in addition to high vacancy rates and low rents, elevated interest rates and construction cost inflation also challenge real estate development returns. Nonetheless, the company has committed to proceed with permitting work through final approval, and then plans to focus initially on residential development along Fawcett Street or Smith Place.



Cambridge Point campus, residential tower, view southeast toward Fawcett Street.

HEALTHPEAK AND ELKUS MANFREDI ARCHITECTS NOV. 12, 2025 SLIDE 19

87-101 Blanchard Road to be redeveloped as housing

Cambridge Point is the biggest, but not the only Cambridge development that will impact Belmont’s plans for Brighton Street.

Bordering the proposed HCOD on two sides was, until early August, a frumpy 1.5-story brick-and wood-shingled commercial building at 87-101 Blanchard Road in Cambridge. Built in 1970, it was the last building on Blanchard before the street name changes to Brighton as it continues north. The building used to house retail businesses including Able Rug, The Quilt Shop, The Knittin’ Kitten, Orient Sunshine Massage, Sewing & Vac Center, and a Pepperidge Farms outlet store, but has been empty for several years.

The building and surrounding land were purchased by B’nai B’rith Housing (BBH), a local affordable housing developer, in July 2023 for \$6,250,000. BBH subsequently applied for a building permit under Cambridge’s city-wide Affordable Housing Overlay zoning (AHO), which allows affordable housing to be built across the city by right, subject to the provisions of the AHO. Under those rules no parking or traffic study was required. The building application only required an advisory meeting with the Planning Board. That meeting was held February 1, 2024, completing all of the requirements. The project has been ready to start construction since early 2024. In May 2026, BBH announced that it had closed on the necessary financing. The expected construction cost is \$77,553,285, according to documents filed with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (MEOHLC) (all numbers from 2024). The existing building was demolished in early August. The new building will start going up as soon as the site is prepared, probably by late August.

The former commercial building will be replaced with a six-story building on a larger footprint (176 feet along Blanchard, vs. 139.5 feet previously) containing 110 one-bedroom units for seniors (age 55+) plus common spaces including a community room, outdoor courtyard, library, and fitness center. Seventy-seven units will be affordable to individuals or households earning up to 60% of the average area median income (AMI)— \$62,340 for one person,



87-101 Blanchard Road, former commercial building, view from Hamilton Road.

or \$71,280 for two people. Another 33 units will be affordable to individuals or households earning up to 30% of AMI (\$31,150 and \$35,600, respectively).

Drawings submitted by BBH show an L-shaped building that starts at four stories near the intersection of Blanchard and Normandy Streets, steps up to six stories as it runs toward Brighton Street, then turns east toward Cambridge at Wellington Brook to form the short arm of the L. Elevation renderings show that the top of the building, comprising utilities (HVAC equipment), will be at least 80 feet tall.

The building application shows that the 38 parking spaces for the existing 37,953 square foot commercial building will be reduced to 30 spots for the 110-unit apartment building (0.27 parking spots per unit), along with 72 indoor and 14 outdoor bicycle parking spots.

Implications for Belmont’s HCOD

Both Cambridge developments will increase population density in the HCOD area, potentially enhancing the environment for retail business. At the same time, they will add to traffic, parking, and stormwater management concerns.

For context, the Hill Estates, Belmont’s largest apartment complex, comprises 396 apartments and townhouses, mostly two-bedroom units, on 14.7 acres of land. The Blanchard Road building will increase

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

The BCF Newsletter is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

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that by about 28%, while a fully built-out Cambridge Point would more than quintuple the Hill Estates. In addition to perhaps 4,000 to 5,000 Cambridge Point residents, several thousand more people would commute to Cambridge Point for work.

Since Belmont has no control over these projects, it is probably most productive to think about how they could advance Belmont's development goals. For example, one approach would be to encourage restaurants and other small retail spaces that could attract nearby Cambridge residents and commuters. Restaurants are permitted in all HCOD subdistricts per the use table in section 10B.4 of the draft bylaw.

A more ambitious alternative would be to try to compete for some of the startup company tenants expected to fill the lab buildings at Cambridge Point. Indeed, there already is a significant startup cluster along Cambridgepark Drive, just 2,500 feet east of Belmont.

The HCOD use table permits research laboratory uses in zone FB5 along Brighton Street. A third angle would be to consider whether the increased density at Cambridge Point, plus the proximity to Alewife Station, strengthens the case for a hotel (also permitted in zone FB5).

As far as driving to Harvard Square via Concord Avenue, well, air taxis are expected to be widely available by 2030.

Vincent Stanton, Jr., is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



87-101 Blanchard Road, new apartment building, architectural perspective from Hamilton Road.

Completing Belmont's Community Bike Path Will Pay Dividends

By Jeffrey North

A recent analysis commissioned by the Norwottuck Network estimates that finishing the 104-mile Mass Central Rail Trail from Northampton to Boston could generate over \$200 million in new economic activity each year, driven chiefly by trail-oriented tourism and associated spending. The study projects 4 to 5.5 million annual visitors if the corridor is completed, with the investment in remaining gaps paying for itself in under a year. Belmont's Community Path is one of those gaps; without it, the corridor remains incomplete, and the full tourism and spending potential cannot be realized.

Completing Belmont's segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail is not just a quality-of-life project; it is a quiet but powerful development initiative in "bikenomics" that will pay dividends for households, businesses, and the town's tax base for decades.

Experience from other Massachusetts paths suggests how that regional number translates locally. A Cape Cod Commission study of several rail trails found that nearby businesses gained between \$378,000 and \$9.2 million over just four months from trail users, along with tens of thousands of active commuting trips and large reductions in vehicle miles traveled. Rail-trail impact studies elsewhere, including a National Park Service study, consistently find that visitor spending on food, lodging, and gear, plus local "durable goods" purchases like bicycles, injects hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars annually into communities along a single corridor. As a key link between Cambridge/Watertown and Waltham/Arlington, Belmont is well positioned to capture a meaningful share of that corridor-wide activity once the gap is closed.

Strong returns on public investment

Cambridge Econometrics' work on "Complete Streets" in Massachusetts finds that projects which reallocate space to walking and biking are associated with generally positive economic impacts, including growth in nearby property values and employment. Broader analyses of cycling and walking infrastructure report very high benefit-cost ratios: one UK



assessment found average returns of 13:1 or higher for investments in active travel, counting health, travel time, and environmental savings. Global reviews of cycling investments conclude that each \$1 million spent can create 8–11 local jobs and generate lasting savings through lower crash costs, reduced congestion, and cleaner air, according to a 2021 World Bank paper.

Applied to Belmont, the Community Bike Path is a relatively modest capital project embedded in a much larger statewide corridor whose projected annual benefits rival or exceed the total remaining construction cost. That means local and state taxpayers are not only improving safety and mobility; they are buying into an asset with unusually strong financial returns compared to many transportation projects.

Local business, property values, and town revenue

Studies of rail trails around the country show that businesses near trails see higher sales, and many new businesses explicitly cite a nearby trail as a factor in their decision to open. An American Trails review notes that trail-related "amenity value" has been associated with tens to hundreds of millions of dollars in higher property values in cities like Indianapolis and Austin, and even 25% price premiums for homes adjacent to prominent trails such as Dallas's Katy

Trail. Those higher values, in turn, translate into stronger property-tax bases for municipalities.

For Belmont specifically, the Community Path connects directly to both commercial centers and regional paths. [A 2021 Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter article](#) on the project noted anticipated benefits including new revenue in the town centers, safer routes for students, and better links to neighboring communities. When people can safely bike or walk to local shops and restaurants—or when visitors can easily roll into town from Cambridge, Arlington, Waltham, or beyond—spending that might otherwise bypass Belmont will land in our businesses instead.

Health, household savings, and resilience

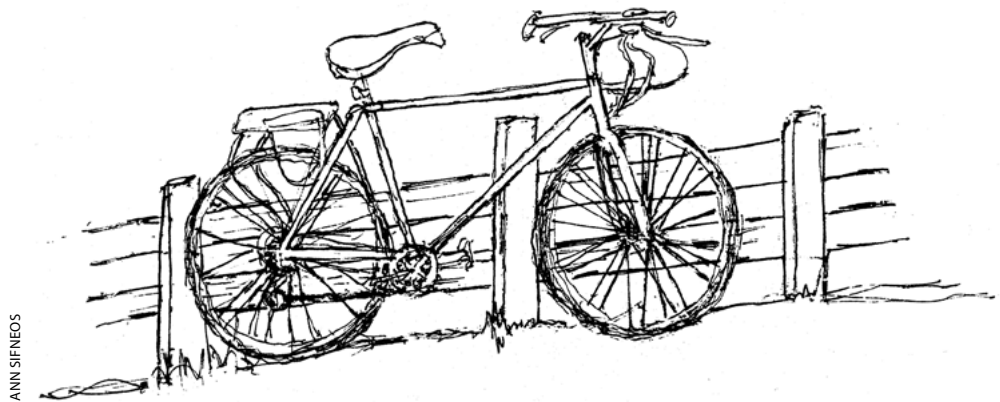
Economic analyses of active-transportation networks increasingly emphasize “co-benefits” that show up in lower health-care spending and household transportation costs. The Norwottuck Network’s Mass Central Rail Trail study estimates that a fully connected corridor would save \$6.0 to \$7.7 million per year in health care costs as more residents build physical activity into daily routines. [Analysis from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy](#) suggests

that a connected system of trails and active transportation infrastructure could eventually generate \$138.5 billion per year in economic benefits when health, climate, and mobility savings are included.

At the household level, shifting even a portion of local trips from cars to bikes or walking reduces fuel, maintenance, and parking costs, effectively raising disposable income. For Belmont families facing high housing and living costs, a safe, all-ages trail that links homes, schools, transit, and shops is both quiet economic relief and a climate and health intervention.

In short, completing Belmont’s piece of the Mass Central Rail Trail is not just about filling a map gap. It is about plugging the town into a proven engine of regional spending, property-value increases, job creation, and long-term savings. It is an investment whose economic benefits, according to the best available research, will compound far beyond the project’s upfront cost.

Jeffrey North is the managing editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter.



CITIZEN FORUM DONATES LAND FOR COMMUNITY PATH

On August 10, 2026, the Belmont Select Board accepted, as a donation from the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF), a 107,172 square foot parcel of land, part of the former Central Massachusetts Railroad right-of-way between Brighton Street and Belmont Center, to be used for the long-planned Belmont Community Path. The first phase of path construction, from Brighton Street to the Clark Street Bridge, will include long-needed pedestrian access under the railroad tracks from the Winn Brook neighborhood to the Belmont Middle High school, the pool, the skating rink, and the library along Concord Avenue. The path will also afford residents safe, off-road access directly from Belmont Center to the Alewife MBTA station, and to bike routes to Kendall Square, Cambridge, Boston and the Minuteman Bikeway to Arlington and points west. In 2008, BCF purchased the land for \$77,000 with the intention that it be used by the town for the Community Path (at that point a distant dream).

Fighting Algal Blooms: A Belmont High Schooler Has a Solution.

By Omar Albarbari

Every summer, harmful algal blooms (HABs) affect lakes and ponds across Massachusetts, sometimes [leading to swimming advisories or closures](#). These blooms can produce toxins that threaten people, pets, and wildlife. Monitoring is expensive, and many of our local bodies of water are affected by these algal blooms. At the time of this writing, Hardy Pond in Waltham has an active bloom, resulting in warnings against swimming, fishing, and boating.

HABs are rapid overgrowths of cyanobacteria or algae that have many negative consequences. They can block sunlight, exhaust dissolved oxygen and nutrients, and release cyanotoxins into the water. Algal blooms are becoming more common because of increased stormwater runoff and the resulting nutrient pollution and as a consequence of global warming, which also brings warmer temperatures and more intense rainfall. Available monitoring methods have many problems that prevent usage in our beloved local ponds and lakes. For example, laboratory testing is slow and expensive, as it requires multiple people and sending water samples to a laboratory with specialized equipment and staff. Satellite imagery misses small ponds and early signs of bloom development because of its low resolution, and it only takes pictures once algal blooms already form. Continuous monitoring equipment is often-times too expensive for towns and organizations that steward these small and local bodies of water. [A Cambridge report](#) stated that a water-quality buoy costs \$47,000, with other water-quality buoys landing in the range of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

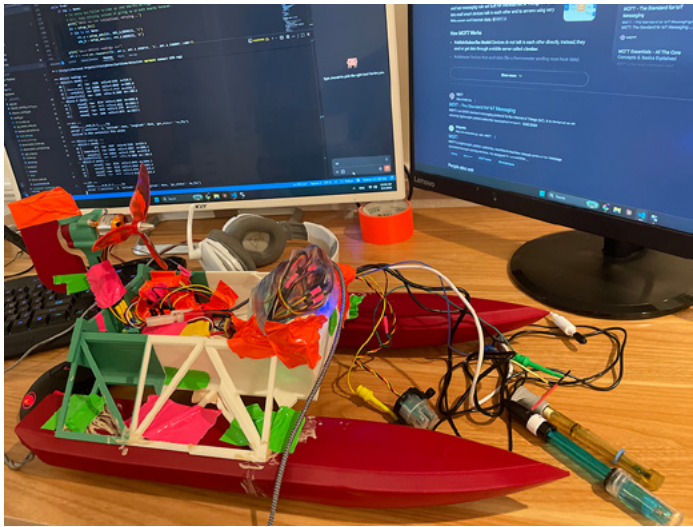
Algal blooms are a real and worsening problem, so I decided to take action. I’m a Belmont High School senior, and I designed a system intended to tackle all of these environmental challenges. Early prototypes of my system have a drone that flies and captures specialized imagery, a boat that collects water-quality measurements like temperature, pH, turbidity, conductivity, nitrate and ammonium, and a central server that connects the devices and returns a real-time spatial map that shows areas at risk for

a bloom using machine-learning methods. Then, a device like a phone or laptop can be connected to the server and access the map through any browser.

This system is designed to be low-cost, hyperlocal, and accessible for our waters. Alternatives, such as the water-quality buoy mentioned above, are much more expensive than the system I’m developing, which currently costs about \$500. Additionally, my system provides mapping, imagery, and adaptability to multiple different bodies of water rather than simply numbers and measurements from one static location. The goal is to get essential technology in the waters where it is needed most to improve local monitoring efforts. This may allow for preventative action to be taken, and for earlier and more specific warnings to prevent adults, kids, and pets from getting sick.

Currently, this system is under development with field testing ongoing. This system will shift and transform as different needs and concerns become clear in testing. I am always interested in collaborating with people and organizations who share an interest in protecting our waters. If you wish to contact me about this project or to collaborate on it, please reach out to me at omarbarbari9@gmail.com. My inbox is always open!

Omar Albarbari is a senior at Belmont High School.



Omar’s prototype is currently under development with field testing ongoing.

Our Environmental Stewards:

Tim Johnson, Native Plant Trust

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

Native Plant Trust, based at Garden in the Woods in Framingham, is the nation’s first plant conservation organization and the only one devoted solely to New England’s native plants. It works across the region to protect rare and endangered species, manage sanctuaries from Maine to Vermont, and shows how gardens, streetscapes, and restored habitats can all support biodiversity in our changing climate. From its nurseries to its education programs and volunteer conservation corps, Native Plant Trust saves native plants in the wild, grows them for gardens and ecological restorations, and teaches people throughout New England how to use them to create more resilient landscapes.

The Belmont Citizens Forum spoke with Tim Johnson, CEO of Native Plant Trust, about its work in conservation, eco-horticulture, and public education, and about how residents and municipalities can help expand native-plant habitat in communities like Belmont. Johnson previously led the Smith College Botanic Garden and has worked in environmental horticulture and conservation science. He shared his vision for putting New England’s plants at the heart of local climate and biodiversity solutions with BCF editor Jeffrey North.

Native Plant Trust is the nation’s first plant conservation organization, but it is also very much a Massachusetts institution. Tim, as CEO, what role do you see it playing in advancing biodiversity and climate resilience in communities across our state?

Tim Johnson: Native Plant Trust is an extraordinary organization with 125 years of experience protecting native plants in this region and developing models and approaches that other regions have adopted. Our work plays out at a few different scales that integrate in a wonderfully dynamic way. The result is an approach that has much greater impact than one would expect for our organization’s size.

I think about the foundation of our work as informing the region of the plight of native plants; after all, you cannot change what you don’t measure. Through the Plant Conservation Volunteer program, we train community members to conduct hundreds of annual surveys across New England to detect changes in abundance and bank seeds for long-term conservation initiatives. These data, along with data from partners in the state heritage programs and historical data from herbaria, are used to create Flora Conservanda, a comprehensive assessment of species extinction risk for the plants of New England; this is the priority list for species conservation in our region. The organization also keeps the region’s professional botanists updated on taxonomic changes and new occurrences so they know which species to be looking for in the region. We produce two important

resources for this: the Go Botany web platform and the publication *Flora Novae Angliae*.

Native Plant Trust also helps address native plant supply chain issues. We develop protocols to propagate native species and grow plants for restorations that demand locally adapted plant material. Last year, the organization launched the Restoration Accelerator™ dedicated to solving a decades-old issue by increasing the supply of locally adapted, locally grown seed for large-scale restorations.

Finally, one of the most important facets of Native Plant Trust’s work is its participatory nature. In addition to the Plant Conservation Volunteer program, we help professionals and amateurs alike develop their conservation and botanical skills, learn to designing native plant gardens, and develop new approaches to gardening and greenspaces management that ditch harmful herbicides, pesticides, and synthetic fertilizers. We don’t just need a larger Native Plant Trust; we need a larger native plant movement.

Your path runs from childhood explorations in Wisconsin to graduate work on threatened orchids and leadership at Smith College’s Botanic Garden before joining Native Plant Trust. How have those experiences shaped your sense of what a conservation organization rooted in New England should be doing right now?

Johnson: The big takeaway for me—and I say this as a trained scientist—is that more so than science

and practice, the rate-limiting factor in conservation work is not the science, but the pace at which we can change hearts and minds. If we collectively loved nature like a member of our community... like a member of their family... we would not have the climate change and biodiversity crises that we have today. And if we can cultivate that deep sense that nature is part of us and we are part of nature, implementing the changes we need to see from society will be much, much easier.

John Muir wrote about nature, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” The opportunity of being a conservation organization in New England doing work in New England is that we are almost always a very short walk away from something remarkable that can turn another heart and another mind toward the irreplaceable value of biodiversity.



Tim Johnson

Native Plant Trust has been involved in projects ranging from restored Connecticut salt marshes to alpine habitats in Maine and coastal systems threatened by sea-level rise. Which New England landscapes are most at risk in the near term, and what kinds of science, policy, and community partnerships do you think are most essential to protect them?

Johnson: Most of them are at risk. A report Native Plant Trust completed in 2021 with The Nature Conservancy titled Conserving Plant Diversity in New England revealed the degree to which we can excel at conserving land and fail at protecting biodiversity. While the region is making faster than expected progress on land conservation, our contemporary approach is failing to protect the full breadth of plant communities and rare plants.

The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) sets a goal of preserving 15% of a plant

community as a baseline for protection. New England has 10 distinct forest communities; of those, only four meet the GSPC goal. Similarly, there are 18 distinct wetland communities in the region, which we all know are critical to cleaning our drinking water and providing habitat to migrating birds and year-round wildlife; only six meet the GSPC target. None of the five most abundant wetland communities in the

region meet the target. An important policy change would be to incorporate into land conservation strategies the goal of having proportional representation of all these different ecosystems, as well as targeting what we call an “important plant area,” where rare and threatened species are at a higher density, to ensure land conservation dollars are being used efficiently to protect species. In this way, we can really know we are giving all biodiversity the best shot at survival.

Another important change I hope to see is a new focus on land stewardship, making this professional track visible to middle and high schoolers, developing early career and continuing education training opportunities, and increasing state and NGO support for land stewardship positions focused on effective landscape management. I fear that given the many ways humans are impacting natural areas—climate change, altered hydrology, disrupted disturbance regimes, agriculture—it isn’t realistic to simply place lands in easements and let them run wild without the ability to assist the landscape.

Finally, I’d like to see more focus on plant conservation in general. Globally, only about 6% of species-focused conservation dollars support plants. The majority of species on the Endangered Species List (ESA) in the United States are plants, and yet less than 5% of ESA funding goes to plants. This is nonsensical given that everything relies on plants and the potential to accelerate the rate of delisting

through effective recovery by focusing more on plants.

You’ve emphasized the need to “know them, don’t grow them” when it comes to invasive plants, and Native Plant Trust offers guidance and classes on identification and control. For municipalities and residents in places like Belmont, what are the most practical steps we can take over the next few years to “root out” invasive plants and meaningfully address existing infestations?

Johnson: This is a really tough issue, and I don’t think scientists or conservation practitioners have figured it out. What do we do about a threat to nature that self-replicates, spreads on its own, and changes environments in ways that favor itself? I realize I could be talking about invasive plants or humans at large! How do we change human behaviors that facilitate the transit of these species in the face of global commerce and end-stage capitalism? With limited resources, how can we allocate more funding to work that may take years or even decades to resolve?

Step one is for states to create prohibited lists. Massachusetts already does this, banning the import, export, trade, sale, and distribution of plants on the Massachusetts Prohibited Plant List. Connecticut and New Hampshire also ban invasives, and New Jersey just passed a similar law.

Step two is enforcement, to remove invasive species in the landscape. It’s important to note how intrusive this can be; imagine telling your neighbor who has a mature tree that it should be removed because it is an invasive Bradford pear. They may understand that the species is an ecological menace, and they may also feel that it is wrong to cut down a tree.

Step three is that regions, and ideally the entire country, need to band together to prevent invasives from being passed around. The plants do not care about our geopolitical boundaries. It’s a tough problem with imperfect solutions, but I don’t know that ignoring it is a good idea. We do see that, with diligence and restoration approaches focused on repairing ecological processes, heavily invaded landscapes can be reclaimed.

You’ve talked about “bio-productive gardens” and ecological horticulture as ways to put yards and shared landscapes to work for nature. If you were advising a

typical Massachusetts homeowner, school, or house of worship, what two or three design and maintenance changes would you recommend for the greatest impact on wildlife and climate resilience?

Johnson: First, I take a long-term view on gardeners. I trust that if you spend time in the landscape, you will eventually come around to organic practices and native plants. The trick is to help people along this very natural journey a little more quickly through positive reinforcement.

The most impactful thing a person can do to make their landscape healthier for nature and for kids, families, and their community is not to use herbicides or pesticides. Doing so might mean changing your plant selection to make sure you have the right plant in the right place. This change alone means that any wildlife—not to mention water and air—that comes through your landscape leaves a little healthier than it arrived.

Second, I would look at lawn reduction where possible. Lawn has very little ecological value and generally requires a large amount of chemical, fossil fuel, and water inputs to maintain it. That said, it’s tough to play baseball in a forest or to throw a frisbee in a meadow. Less is more; lawn should not be the default greenspace.

Third, plant natives, especially native trees, which not only provide food for large numbers of insects, which are nature’s protein bars, but also help to mitigate heat island effects and reduce heating costs. Research shows that landscapes with 70% native cover perform just as well as those with 100% native cover. So you don’t have to get rid of your peonies to have an ecologically bountiful yard. Most of the people I see moving towards natives are doing so one patch of lawn at a time. Progress is the goal, not perfection.

For institutions, I would look for ways to align the landscape’s purpose with the organization’s mission. You will almost certainly want a native plant-rich landscape if you adopt this mindset. Now that wetland is part of the college curriculum, that native tree canopy is habitat for raptors, and that meadow of milkweed is a demonstration garden for producing natural cordage.

Many readers are eager to plant more natives, but they find them in limited supply at local nurseries. With Garden in the Woods, Nasami Farm, and the Northeast

Seed Network, how is Native Plant Trust working to build a resilient regional seed and plant supply? What would you like to see from the nursery industry and from local governments to support that shift?

Johnson: This isn’t my area of expertise, but I will share some thoughts.

Garden centers are constantly asking for more help managing and marketing natives, and customers are constantly demanding more transparency around how plants are produced and where the seeds come from. It should be easy to align these goals.

There is a real opportunity for the nursery industry in this region to lead the nation by establishing a certification or labeling standard for plants produced without pesticides and plants that are truly native to the region. Just as organic labeling commands a premium price, certified native species and certified pesticide-free labels can be a value add for retailers and consumers. Government incentives can help businesses absorb risk through training programs and capital improvements that enable nurseries to be more efficient at propagating plants from seed (which is not how most plants in the nursery trade are produced) and by isolating pesticide-free plants and equipment from contaminated areas.

Finally, the garden industry saw in the pandemic—when we were stuck at home and making big investments in our gardens—that we didn’t have enough tree and shrub stock on hand; prices skyrocketed, and the availability of small-caliper trees shrank. Again, there is an opportunity to help existing nurseries expand their capacity and to help new nurseries get started by creating programs that offset the three to seven year investment required to grow trees.

Native Plant Trust has made a point of expanding access to its gardens, courses, and conservation programs. What does equity look like in the world of native plant gardening and conservation, and how do you hope to broaden who sees themselves as part of this work in Massachusetts communities?

Johnson: The modern conservation movement made a big mistake in the 1950s by failing to embrace the civil rights movement. All of this work is about equity, access, and creating “a more perfect union,” to quote Barack Obama. It wasn’t accidental that people of color were excluded from the conservation

movement; it was racism. The result is that the world of gardens and conservation is still segregated, and we have a lot of work ahead of us to mend this rift. I think many people of color see themselves as conservationists... they are just leery of engaging with organizations that marginalize them. In other words, how can we expect people to show up for the rights of nature when there are members of our community who have fewer rights than nature? We have to see conservation and land access as synonymous with social justice work; we have to embrace that it’s going to take time and sustained effort to fix what is broken; and we also have to be less accepting of the slow pace of change.

This series highlights environmental leadership in and around Massachusetts. For local officials, volunteers, and neighborhood groups in towns like Belmont, what partnerships or specific actions with Native Plant Trust would you most like to see emerge over the next few years?

Johnson: I would love to see people investing in their journeys, taking the resources Native Plant Trust provides and putting them to use in their neighborhoods, finding solutions that work for their neighbors, communities, and organizations. And I would like to see Native Plant Trust grow to a size that we can better support this work at a grassroots level.

If you could sit down with your peer leader of other regional conservation organizations, what questions would you most want to ask them about advancing shared environmental progress and strengthening our common natural wealth? What lessons from your experience at NPT would you most want to share with other environmental leaders across Massachusetts?

Johnson: The Commonwealth’s environmental organizations have some of the most skilled, dedicated, inspiring, and enjoyable leaders anywhere in the world... I’m not sure I have much to teach them. And I feel anytime I get to engage with our peers, they are eager to collaborate and well aligned with what needs to happen to the natural areas that make Massachusetts a state people want to live in, work in, and visit. I think the question I would ask is, what do I have to do to get us all in the same room more often?

Holding On and Letting Go

By Anne Marie Mahoney

What should a bereavement support group and town government have in common? A deep respect for participants' experience of loss.

I do bereavement work, facilitating programs on coping with grief and loss in church settings and the Beech Street Center. Through Boston College, I teach other facilitators how to lead bereavement programs. How is this work relevant to Belmont politics? Reflecting on the divisive controversies over the naming of the new skating rink and the Belmont Center overlay zoning proposal, I realized that many speaking out on these issues were acting from a place of loss. Residents, and Town Meeting Members in particular, were unconsciously attempting to make sense of grief over the potential loss of what they valued, what was safe, and what was familiar in their lives. Others seemed to forge ahead into a vaguely defined future Belmont with little understanding of the underlying personal dynamic at work—the tension between the two perspectives generated much of the controversy.

One of my themes in leading grieverers to find their path to a new normal following the loss of a loved one is “Holding On and Letting Go.” * A pivotal task of learning to live with loss is discerning what to hold onto and what to let go of. And why we hold on or let go.

Loss comes in many forms, not only death. We experience the loss of a home, a job, our health, or our independence. Our children move away, we retire, we lose touch with old friends. Learning to cope with loss is the work of grieving. It's hard. It takes time.

Two recent losses are good examples of holding on and letting go. The fire that destroyed Moozy's took away a business and jobs, but what we heard from those interviewed were the memories created in that space, the feeling of community and celebration. While owner Dante Muzzioli vowed to rebuild—holding on—the reality was that the remains of the building had to be razed—letting go.

We gathered to mourn the death of the glorious copper beech tree on the Town Green. We recognized the tree's place in the town's landscape, having lived longer at the entrance to Belmont Center than any of us. The tree was diseased beyond recovery. Time to let go. We hope that new copper beeches will be planted to shade the green, and that Moozy's will reopen in a shiny, new building with more ice cream flavors to celebrate.

Throughout the town, we “hold onto” those we cherish, admire, and see as role models for future generations through monuments or named places. My favorite examples include the bench at Clay Pit Pond to remember Ted Hennessey, a BHS graduate killed on Flight 11 on September 11, 2001, and the baseball field named for Chenery Math teacher and baseball coach Arthur Craig. And, sadly, the recently demolished Paul White Fieldhouse, named for the BHS athlete killed at the Battle of the Bulge.

When the Select Board decided to “let go” of the Skip Vigliorolo name on the new rink, the community erupted in an outpouring of emotion. What the board missed was that no naming policy, however detailed, could account for the gut need to hold on to the memory of a beloved coach and wonderful citizen. The timing of the Special Town Meeting debate could not have been worse. The proponents of retaining Skip's name were not trying to be obstructionist; they were grieving the recent death of their loved one. Conversely, the Select Board seemed unable to “let go” of their authority and to understand the dynamic beneath the surface—a community unwilling to relinquish a name they cherished.

Where is the loss in the overlay proposal? Put aside the various analyses of finances, housing, school-aged children, and infrastructure. What residents saw was an overlay proposal to wipe out the existing Belmont Center, taking with it businesses, employment, small-town ambiance, and everything that was familiar about the center. Opponents reacted with anticipatory grief. They could lose their livelihood, their dentist, their favorite restaurant or prescription provider, the locus of Town Day and Farmers' Market. The abutters feared their homes would be devalued

and their property damaged. The intensity of the potential loss and the need to hold on was palpable at every Planning Board session. The disconnect between the reality of a near-fully occupied, vibrant center and the claims that the center was dying was baffling and only fed the confused grief.

Yes, our town should not stagnate. I keep hearing, “Change is hard.” I want to retort, “You have no idea!” Change is meant to be hard so that we choose change wisely and carefully. Change is hard because it's challenging to discern what we hold onto and what we let go of, whether it's sorting a loved one's clothing and books or deciding which furniture to move to the downsized house. Filene's, Brigham's, and Bildner's are not coming back any more than the First National or Woolworth's would. Regardless, residents did not want to trade a wall of five-story buildings for what they treasured in Belmont Center.

People feel threatened when what they value could be taken away. The town has learned to preserve our architectural heritage by revitalizing historic buildings, such as the Police Station and the Town Hall complex, giving them decades of new life. The best decision was turning the fire station into a restaurant! Unfortunately, we heard little on what should be saved in Belmont Center.

How might everyone's viewpoint, not just the presenters', be respected at Town Meeting? By listening! I facilitate a monthly bereavement support group at the Beech Street Center. The session is an opportunity for those present to share their experiences of grief and loss and how they are coping. Participants listen and share, learn and chart a path forward.

Residents begged for an open forum about the overlay. A genuine exchange of ideas, an opportunity for all parties to come together and listen to each other. Wouldn't an open exchange of data and concerns, weighing the pros and cons, have been a better preparation for Town Meeting? There was a lot of talking at, not much listening to. Would we tell grieverers that their pain and loss didn't matter, wasn't real, held no place for memories or comfort? Couldn't we have honestly examined the losses that residents feared and developed solutions that looked to a stronger future for Belmont?

The town is now barreling forward with a Brighton Street/Hill's Crossing overlay proposal. This town does not need more negative labeling and misrepresentation. We need open, respectful dialogue and a shared vision for Belmont's future. A future that



JEFFREY NORTH



FRED BOUCHARD

We gathered to mourn the death of the glorious copper beech tree on the Town Green. We recognized the tree's place in the town's landscape, having lived longer at the entrance to Belmont Center than any of us. The tree was diseased beyond recovery. Time to let go.

includes change—well-thought-out, vetted, and agreed-upon change that rises from residents, rather than imposed on them.

No one has a corner on wisdom, but we can acquire wisdom by understanding loss. Grievors realize that life is never the same after loss, nor should it be. I suggest that Belmont’s future depends on a delicate balance between what we choose to let go of and what we need to hold onto.

*A New Parish Guide to Grief Ministry by Anne Marie S. Mahoney, Twenty-Third Publications.

Anne Marie Mahoney has held a remarkably wide range of elected offices, appointed committee roles, and volunteer service positions in Belmont over several decades, including the Select Board, School Committee, Town Meeting, Chair of the Capital Budget Committee, Permanent Building Committee, Municipal Rink Building Committee, Chair of the Police Station/DPW Building Committee, Community Preservation Committee, and other media, civic education, and public-facing roles.

Visit the *Newsletter Archives*

25 Years of Environmental and Civic Reporting in Belmont

Just a few of the articles you will find in the Newsletter archive:

[Rock Meadow Lacks a Conservation Restriction](#)

[Serving Those Who Served](#)

[Miyawaki Forest Planted at Belmont Middle and High School](#)

[MyRWA Protects and Restores Mystic Watershed](#)

[Profiles in Belmont](#)

[Book Review: Here Comes the Sun by Bill McKibben](#)

[Where Does the Water Go?](#)

[Clay Pit Pond’s Setting Belies Toxic Past](#)

[Belmont’s Historic Homer House: Unraveling a Local Mystery](#)

[Rail Trails and Public Housing: How Paths Can Serve Belmont Village](#)

A Call for Authors

Belmont Citizens Forum invites writers, researchers, photographers, and engaged neighbors from across Belmont to help shape the next generation of stories about our town.

For more than two decades, our bimonthly newsletter has offered in-depth, independent coverage of issues ranging from the Community Path and rail-trail planning to Rock Meadow and Lone Tree Hill conservation, historic preservation, and the health of the Mystic Watershed.

Now we are looking for new voices to explore what comes next.

Do you care about how Town Meeting decisions affect neighborhoods, climate resilience, transportation, or housing? Are you curious about the people who keep Belmont running—municipal staff, volunteers, veterans, educators, young activists, and long-time residents with deep local knowledge? If you enjoy asking good questions, digging into public records, walking the sites you’re writing about, or simply explaining complex issues in clear language, there is a place for you on the Belmont Citizens Forum team.

We welcome contributors with a range of experience: from seasoned journalists, planners, and policy analysts to first-time writers who want guidance on interviewing, fact-checking, and shaping a narrative. Typical assignments include 800 to 1,500-word feature articles, shorter news pieces, profiles, opinion essays, book reviews on environmental and civic topics, and photo essays that help readers see familiar places with fresh eyes.

If you are interested in writing—or know someone who might be—please visit the newsletter archive at www.belmontcitizensforum.org/newsletter-archive to review past issues, then contact the Belmont Citizens Forum to discuss ideas, deadlines, and support for developing your story. Together, we can continue providing Belmont with thoughtful, nonprofit community journalism that informs public debate and inspires effective civic action.

4-H: A Place to Learn, Lead, and Belong

By Amalia Müller

4-H is an organization I participate in, and it has brought me my closest friends and made me a better, more well-rounded person. 4-H is a nonprofit youth organization similar to the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. Unlike Scouts, 4-H is mixed ages and genders. The 4-H age groups are: Cloverbuds (ages 5-7), Juniors (ages 8-13), and Seniors (ages 14-18). Many graduates return to volunteer after they age out of 4-H. 4-H is mostly kid-run, with adult guidance. Every year we hold elections for club officers. Our club’s president is Gemma Larson, a junior at Belmont High School.

Each club has its own structure and meeting schedule. My club meets once every month. At the start of our meetings, we recite the 4-H pledge. Next, we check in on our club’s bank account and upcoming events. Lastly, we do our club activity. We have done how-tos on drawing, photography, and crocheting. We also do a visual presentation once a year.

A visual presentation (also known as a VP) is when we research a topic and give a how-to demonstration or an illustrated talk using a set of slides, poster boards, or props to illustrate our main points. In our club, members of all ages are expected to give a VP. Each presentation has a time limit. Before finalizing our presentations, we get to practice presenting to our club. If we feel confident in our presentation, we can compete at the regional level, where we are judged. If our presentation is strong, we could make it to the state level or beyond.

Additionally, we participate in a fair every year. If you are curious about 4-H, then you can come to the Middlesex County 4-H Fair at 55 S. Chelmsford Road in Westford. The fair dates are in late August. The fair has many animals — horses, sheep, goats, rabbits, and more. It is a three-day/four-night festival/

show for clubs across the county. It is definitely the highlight of the 4-H year.

On the first day of the fair, there is a parade. Clubs dress up in the year’s theme; for example, this year’s theme is “1776-2026: Then and Now.” The winner of the parade gets a trophy. Other fun things to see at the fair: local businesses have booths to sell their products. Last year, there was a blacksmith, pony rides, bird handlers, and much more to see and do.

The last thing that I find super cool about 4-H is that every club specializes in a different animal. My club is a horse club — Littleton Hack ‘n’ Tack (the longest continuously running horse club in the United States) — and my sister is in a rabbit club — RCCC (Rabbit & Cavy Carrot Crusaders). Other clubs feature cows, sheep, chickens, goats, or dogs. I love my club and encourage you and your kid(s) to check out 4-H, where you will find something you will love and treasure forever.

For more information about Littleton Hack ‘n’ Tack, contact Liza Cassarino, leader, at dutchessL@aol.com or 508-560-7173. For more information about RCCC, contact Deanna Bourbeau, leader, at dmbkmb@gmail.com. To learn more about all the clubs in Middlesex County, please contact Erica MacLean, Northeast Region Extension educator, at ericamaclean@umass.edu or 413-887-2101.

Amalia Müller is a ninth grader at Belmont High School.

ERRATA

The Profile in Belmont: Cabell Eames article in the July Newsletter, the fourth paragraph on Page 13 should read as follows: “The shift took her to an immigration law firm in Boston, where she presented immigration policy proposals and worked with federal policymakers on immigration issues. She also worked with congressional offices to help secure H-1B visa approvals.”

Stonefield Farm and Boston Area Gleaners: Growing and Moving Food to Relieve Hunger

By Jeffrey North

On a summer day at Stonefield Farm in South Acton, rows of lettuce, tomatoes, and callaloo are harvested not for a farmstand or supermarket but for food banks, pantries, and community kitchens. That distinction captures what makes Boston Area Gleaners unusual: it operates as both a working farm and a regional food-access organization, using Stonefield to grow food and move large volumes of fresh produce efficiently to communities facing hunger.

For Belmont readers, the story is worth attention not only because it involves a nearby preserved farm, but also because it shows how food access depends as much on infrastructure as on agriculture. Growing vegetables is only part of the challenge; storing, sorting, refrigerating, and transporting highly perishable food are just as essential if fresh produce is to reach households that cannot easily afford or access it. Boston Area Gleaners (the Gleaners) has built a model that aims to solve both problems at once.



The Gleaners began in 2004 as a volunteer gleaning effort and became a nonprofit organization in 2007.

The Gleaners began in 2004 as a volunteer gleaning effort and became a nonprofit organization in 2007, focused on recovering surplus crops from local farms. The core idea was simple: healthy food was being left in fields because farmers lacked a profitable market or could not justify the labor to harvest it, while many families and food pantries lacked reliable access to fresh produce. Over time, that effort expanded beyond volunteer gleaning into a broader regional system that now includes farm donations, wholesale recovery, trucking, cold storage, and dedicated on-farm production.

That evolution took a major step forward in 2021, when the Gleaners purchased Stonefield Farm from the Simeone family, who had farmed the land for nearly a century. Stonefield had grown vegetables and plants since 1929, and its preservation had long been a local priority in Acton. The Gleaners’ acquisition, combined with a permanent Agricultural Preservation Restriction held by the town of Acton and Sudbury Valley Trustees, ensured that the 51-acre property would remain in agricultural use and open space in perpetuity.

Growing food for food banks and pantries

That preservation story matters, but the most striking development is what the Gleaners have chosen to do with the farm. About 25 acres are actively cultivated, and the crop plan is designed not for retail sales but to meet the needs of food access partners. All food grown at Stonefield now goes to pantries, food banks, and community kitchens rather than to commercial outlets. In practical terms, Stonefield functions as a mission-driven production farm, with its harvest planned for hunger relief.

This means the farm grows the foods that food banks and pantries can use and when they can use them. The Gleaners’ staff schedule plantings so that Stonefield’s harvest helps fill periods when gleaning opportunities at other farms taper off. Instead of treating the farm as an isolated business, the Gleaners treat it as one component of a larger supply system, using their own fields to smooth seasonal

fluctuations and provide a steadier flow of produce to partner organizations.

The result is a farm whose output is both substantial and targeted. Recent reporting from Acton noted that Stonefield weekly ships two to four pallets of its own grown produce along with 10 to 15 pallets from other farms to the Greater Boston Food Bank and grows roughly 1,500 heads of lettuce weekly, along with tomatoes and other staples for donation to food access partners. These are not symbolic donations; they represent a steady stream of food entering the emergency food network. The farm also grows culturally important crops, including callaloo, a Caribbean leafy green in the amaranth family, reflecting the Gleaners’ effort to provide food that is not only nutritious but also familiar and meaningful to the communities receiving it.

Culturally appropriate produce

That emphasis on culturally appropriate produce deserves attention. Food access is often discussed in terms of calories, pounds, or truckloads, but the Gleaners’ approach suggests that dignity and cultural relevance matter too. A pantry visitor is more likely to use fresh produce that fits their household’s cooking traditions, and a regional food system works better when it reflects the diversity of the people it serves. In that sense, Stonefield is not simply producing volume; it is producing with purpose.

Stonefield’s own harvest is only one part of the Gleaners’ food access work. The organization’s original specialty, gleaning, remains central. Volunteers go to farms across the region to harvest surplus crops that growers would otherwise leave behind because the economics no longer make sense. The Gleaners also accept post-harvest donations from farms and wholesalers and recover full tractor-trailer loads of produce rejected by retailers for cosmetic or technical reasons, even though the food remains perfectly edible.

Multiple streams of recovered food converge within the same system. A load of rejected vegetables from a wholesaler, surplus produce donated by a farm, and lettuces cut that morning at Stonefield can all enter the same distribution pipeline serving partner agencies. This diversification is important because it reduces dependence on any single source

and makes the overall network more resilient to weather, market disruptions, and seasonal variation.

The logistical side of that network is where the Gleaners’ regional importance becomes especially clear. Farmers, wholesalers, and food banks may all want surplus produce to reach people, but without trucks, refrigeration, loading areas, and food-safety systems, much of that food would never move, except to landfill. The Gleaners operate food-safety-compliant trucking to transport produce from farms and wholesale sources to Stonefield and onward to food pantries, food banks, and community kitchens.

Help Wanted: A Profiler

Do you enjoy talking with interesting people and bringing their stories to life on the page? The Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter* is seeking a volunteer profiler to write short features about notable and engaging Belmont residents.

In this role, you will:

Identify (in consultation with the Newsletter Committee) and interview Belmont neighbors who are making a difference in civic life, the environment, the arts, local businesses, and community service.

Craft crisp, readable profiles (typically 800–1,200 words) that fit the Newsletter’s informed, community-focused voice.

Work with the editor and Newsletter Committee on story selection, deadlines, and light editing support.

This is an excellent opportunity for an aspiring or experienced writer, journalist, or engaged resident who wants to deepen their connection to Belmont and help showcase the people who shape our town.

Prior interviewing or writing experience is helpful but not required; curiosity, reliability, and comfort talking with interesting people are essential.

To learn more or express interest, please contact bcbprogramdirector@gmail.com.

In effect, it supplies the connecting capacity that many smaller organizations lack.

Cold storage is equally critical. Fresh produce cannot simply be gathered and redistributed on an improvised schedule; it must be held at safe temperatures, sorted, and assembled into shipments that match the needs and capacity of downstream partners. The Gleaners have been expanding cold storage at Stonefield through a mix of public and private funding, aiming to triple current capacity and strengthen the farm’s role as a major supplier to food banks and food access organizations. With more refrigeration space, the Gleaners can better absorb seasonal gluts, manage a wider range of products, and maintain more consistent deliveries even when supply spikes unexpectedly.

A new understanding of the hunger problem

That logistics story may be less picturesque than rows of vegetables, but it is arguably the heart of the model. Hunger is often described as a problem of scarcity, yet the Gleaners’ work is built on a different understanding: in many cases, food exists, but it is in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or beyond the reach of organizations that could distribute it. The challenge is as much geographic and economic as it is agricultural. By pairing a preserved working farm with trucks, cold rooms, and a regional distribution system, the Gleaners are addressing those barriers directly.

For Belmont, the relevance is close to home, even though Stonefield itself is in Acton. Local pantries and food programs are part of a wider network of organizations that depend on steady flows of fresh food, and the Gleaners’ model shows what it takes to create those flows reliably. It also offers a useful civic lesson: land preservation, public investment, nonprofit coordination, and practical infrastructure can reinforce one another when the goal is not only to save farmland but also to use it for a public purpose. Further, many Belmont citizens have volunteered to work with the Gleaners.

A conservation success

In that respect, Stonefield Farm is more than a conservation success or a generous farm donation site. It is an example of regional food infrastructure in action, a place where production and logistics are deliberately woven together. Vegetables are planted with distribution needs in mind; truck routes and cold storage are justified by real harvests from the farm and outside partners, near and far; and a preserved piece of agricultural land serves not only the landscape but also the people who need the most access to fresh food.

At a time when food insecurity in Massachusetts has risen again under the pressure of inflation and high living costs, that combination feels especially timely. The Greater Boston Food Bank’s [2026 food access report](#), produced with Mass General Brigham, found that about 40% of Massachusetts households experienced food insecurity in 2025. Stonefield Farm



Stonefield Farm is an example of regional food structure in action.

shows that fighting hunger is not only about charitable intent. It is also about building the physical systems that can move good food quickly and reliably from places of abundance to places of need.

Jeffrey North is the managing editor of the Newsletter.

Learn more about how to get involved: <https://www.bostonareagleaners.org/get-involved.html>

Letters to the Editor

In his article in the July / August Newsletter, [Traffic Jam! TAC Raises Transportation Issues](#), Chip Gaysunas presented a good description of the Transportation Advisory Committee’s (TAC) work. I appreciate the many efforts of volunteers serving on boards and committees, and TAC is an important one for Belmont. I served on the TAC for almost 5 years and on the HS/MS Traffic Task Force, which addressed challenging topics, accommodated many points of view, and had minuscule funding for equipment and infrastructure.

A few traffic-related questions and comments occurred to me after reading Chip’s article:

—Where can residents find the current “prioritization” list for, call it, “The Top 10” most unsafe or problematic areas in Belmont?

—On that list, what is the plan and timing to address the safety deficiencies?

—When I served, we had public conversations at nearly every meeting and often allowed prolonged discussions with residents about issues or designs, to fully understand the concerns and residents’ ideas for solutions. Why make it seem that Public Input was just invented?

—Leonard/Concord/School/Goden corridor/side street congestion continues to worsen, not improve; this will be significantly exacerbated with the Planning Department’s projected 500 units

of housing and hoped-for 1,200 employees in the Belmont Center. What is TAC/Engineering really doing to mitigate this congestion?

—Why is the extensive Heavy Truck traffic aspect (traversing to/from Watertown and Waltham) missing from the White Street summary?

—Finally, if the Committee’s charge is to make recommendations to the Select Board, but everything TAC does is “under the direction of the Town Engineer,” does TAC have the independence to get things done?

There are about five major “projects” I identified and documented several times over the past three years that may finally be “underway” with Chip’s mention of the TAC task forces. These include the School Speed Zone signage/maximized placement distances, Special Speed Zones, visible and working School signals, cyclist sharrows on key/school corridors, and removal of all “30 MPH” signs unless DOT specifically refuses to do so after written request. Let’s publicize that list and set some dates for completion. I’ll help!

Respectfully,

Larry Link
49 Orchard Street
TM Precinct 1
Member, Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee

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From: S Harris
Date: Wed, Jul 15, 2026 at 10:19 AM
Subject: Small correction
To: <bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com>

I always learn a lot from the Belmont Citizens Forum and appreciate all the hard work that goes into it.

I especially enjoyed the article about the McClean development but would like to make one small correction. Olmstead Drive is not an access road for either side of the Woodlands development. All Woodlands automobile access is from Mill St.

Thank you,
Susan Harris

Dear Belmont citizens,

We are 8th graders from Belmont working on a civic action project, and we have an idea that we want to advocate for change in our communities. Our names are Rohin, Alex, and Manex. Our idea is to install more bike lanes in Belmont, and we have acknowledged the benefits and problems it solves, while also considering the downsides and obstacles. We have copied our teacher on this email, Ms. Metter.

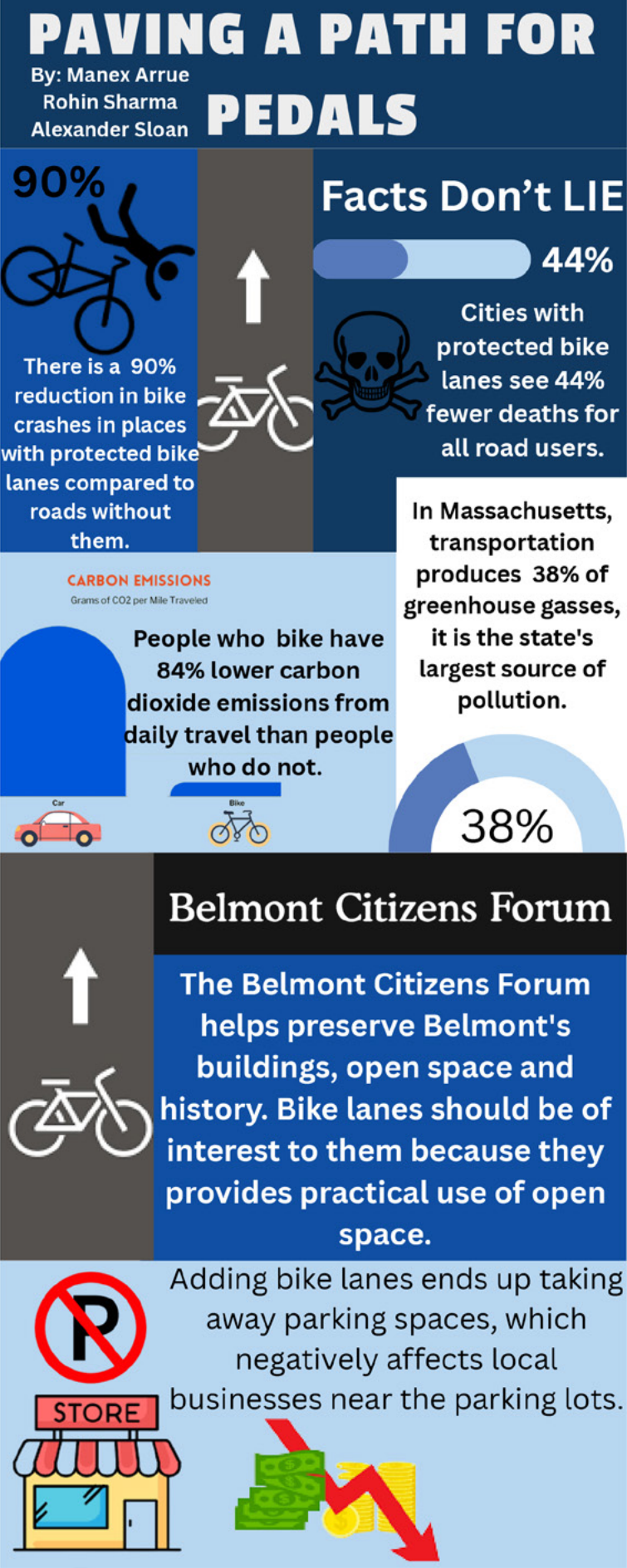
Installing bike lanes has a huge impact on fighting global warming because it promotes more biking throughout the community and, in turn, reduces the leading factor of air pollution in Massachusetts (CO² emissions from cars). It also significantly reduces the number of car crashes in cities and towns, helping keep the safety of the community members and letting them freely bike around. We have exact statistics in our attached infographic below that we hope you take a few minutes to look at.

So, we ask you to look at Belmont’s free open space and imagine a town with more bike lanes. If you consider this to be a good idea for the community, we hope that you take our plea into account and add more spaces. So, as we have researched, your main focus is on open spaces in town, we ask you to look at those open spaces and try to fit in more bike lanes for the community.

We thank you for listening to us on this issue. Because of the reasons we have stated above, we hope that you take a look at our infographic and consider using more open space in the town for bike paths around Belmont.

We send a big thank you for your time and consideration,

Rohin, Manex, and Alex



Hello,

I am a professor at Boston University working to improve early detection of Lyme disease following a tick bite. We are currently seeking volunteers in the Boston area for a clinical study who have recently been bitten by a tick or developed a Lyme disease rash.

Because your members spend significant time outdoors, we thought this study may be relevant to your community and could help improve the diagnosis of Lyme disease for future patients. Would you be willing to circulate the Institutional Review Board-approved study flyer to your members via your newsletter, email list, social media channels, or other communications? Qualified participants will receive a \$50 gift card.

The poster can be shared as-is, requiring no editing or additional effort from your team. If you are able to help, we would be very grateful for your support. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you for your consideration.
Alexander A. Green
aagreen@bu.edu

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

for a research study on Lyme Disease Detection



- Have you been **bitten by a tick**, know the precise site of the bite, and can contact us within **3 days** of removal of the tick?
- OR
- Do you have a **clinically diagnosed Lyme rash**?

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

- Requires only **20 minutes** of your time at the BU Clinical Testing Lab
- We will sample the tick bite site or Lyme rash using a microneedle patch to see if Lyme-causing bacteria can be detected
- Participants may experience mild discomfort, redness, or irritation at the site of the microneedle patch application
- Qualified participants will receive a \$50 gift card
- Scan the QR code and complete the 2-minute survey to determine your eligibility



Principal Investigator:
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☐\$50 ☐\$100 ☐\$150 ☐\$250

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- ☐ 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.

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September/October 2026



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