

## **Open Space and Recreation Plan Nears Completion**

*By Dick Madden*

To be eligible for state and federal grant money to purchase and maintain open land in Belmont, the town must have an up-to-date Open Space and Recreation Plan. This 80-plus-page document, in the works since 1996, describes in detail all the open land in town, including playgrounds and ballparks. The plan, which will replace the outdated report of 1979, is undergoing a final draft by a consultant dealing with issues of accessibility for the handicapped. Once it is finished, the plan will go to the Board of Selectmen for approval and then to the state for final acceptance.

The plan is a rich source of information about our town. Here are some excerpts:

Extensive wildlife habitat is found at Little Pond and the wetlands and marshes of the Metropolitan District Commission's 115-acre Alewife Reservation, a natural local treasure shared with Cambridge and Arlington. The Alewife wetland habitats help support great blue heron, a variety of waterfowl species, muskrats, painted turtles, and herring. These wetlands serve a vital function of helping to attenuate flood flows which impact on the low-lying areas of the Little Pond and Winn Brook section of town. Officials and neighborhood groups of the communities of Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge hope to preserve and expand the wetlands resources of the Alewife Reservation.

The plan also states:

The existence of a regional greenway in the northwest section of Belmont is a significant factor in sustaining the town's wildlife population. This greenway consists of over 500 acres of contiguous open space, 300 acres of which are in Belmont. The greenway includes the Metropolitan District Commission's Beaver Brook Reservation, Massachusetts Audubon Society's Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, Belmont's Rock Meadow, McLean Hospital, and the site of the former Metropolitan State Hospital. In an otherwise densely developed region, the greenway provides critical habitat that hosts an impressive array of wildlife species. Natural areas in metropolitan Boston are becoming increasingly fragmented by development, leading to a loss of bio-diversity. Belmont's regional greenway helps protect its wildlife population from disease and genetic isolation and its preservation is essential to the ecological integrity of the area.

The plan was undertaken when the selectmen, in 1996, approved the formation of a working committee of approximately 25 people. The committee included representatives of various town boards and commissions as well as interested citizens of the town. Four subcommittees formed: open space and recreation inventory, community setting, environmental analysis, and community process. Members worked tirelessly to produce a first draft report dated September 1996. The final version should be completed by the end of June 2000.

All those who worked to prepare this comprehensive report are to be commended. It is hoped that their efforts lead to the preservation of open space throughout the town.

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