



Fate of Silver Maple Forest Still Uncertain

By Anne-Marie Lambert

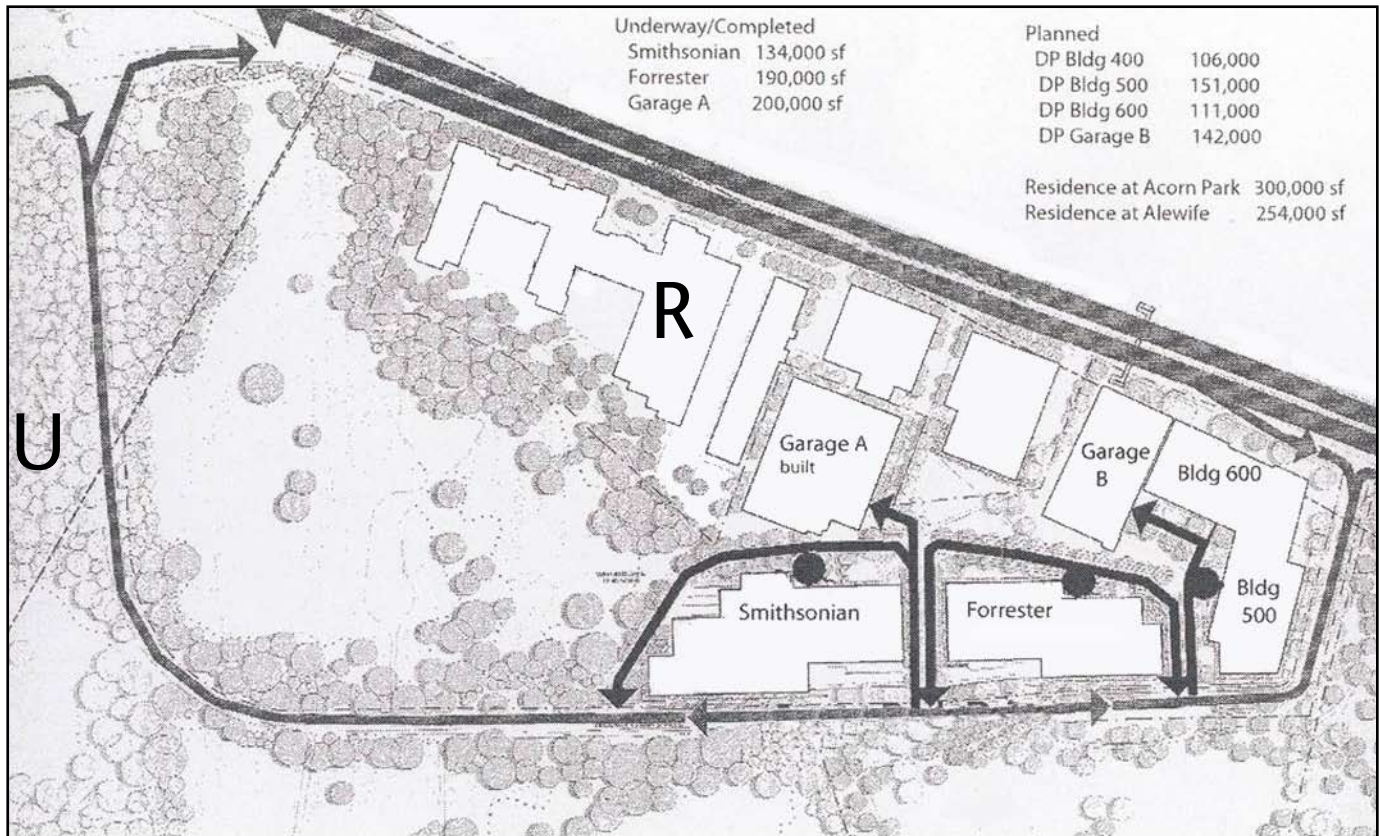
The O'Neill Properties Group is still pursuing a building permit to develop a 299-unit apartment complex on the Belmont Uplands site. Before such a building permit can be issued, though, O'Neill must fulfill conditions required by Belmont's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) in a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit to build affordable housing at the Uplands.

While an appeal to the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is still unresolved, and Belmont's ZBA conditions are not all addressed, there is a real possibility that construction could start on the site as early as spring 2012.

Uplands Appeal Unresolved

In an appeal decision issued December 14, 2011, more than nine months after a March 2 hearing, Middlesex Superior Court Judge Jane Haggerty denied most of the motions of the Belmont Conservation Commission and Coalition to Preserve the Belmont Uplands opposing the development. (See "State Appraisal Raises Stakes at the Uplands," *BCF Newsletter*, May 2011.) However, Haggerty did allow the BCC's motion for judgment on one key issue: whether the project complies with Department of Environmental Protection Stormwater Management Standard 3.

ANNE THOMPSON



Current and planned development along Acorn Park Drive. The Uplands (U) site is to the left; the Residences at Alewife are near the center (R).

Haggerty remanded the case back to the DEP. The DEP interpreted the judge's decision narrowly. Rather than reopen the hearings or accept additional evidence, the DEP has suggested that each party should identify all testimony relevant to Stormwater Management Standard 3 by a deadline set by the state Office of Appeals and Dispute Resolution. The plaintiffs are likely to disagree with this interpretation and request that the hearing be reopened.

Five days after the decision, the plaintiffs filed a motion to appeal Haggerty's denials. They have also filed a motion to stop any land clearing until the latest appeal is resolved.

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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. Our *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 info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

More Changes to Uplands Conditions

"Belmont Uplands Update" was an agenda item for the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) meeting on September 21, 2011. However, it appears that the ZBA did more than get an update. According to the meeting minutes, the ZBA relaxed one of the conditions for approving the O'Neill development on the Uplands.

While an appeal to the state Department of Environmental Protection is still unresolved, and Belmont's ZBA conditions are not all addressed, there is a real possibility that construction could start on the site as early as spring 2012.

The ZBA approved a motion to modify Condition #39 "to remove prohibition on pets with the provision that pet owners must agree to a pet rider provision added to the lease which shall include language requiring pet owners to clean up after their pets." In short, Uplands residents can have pets, and dogs can be walked on the Uplands. The minutes do not mention any discussion of the potential harm to



Alewife Reservation duck.

SUSAN JONES

wildlife from interactions with dogs, leashed or unleashed.

It is common for 40B developers to request incremental changes to conditions which may not be substantial individually but may be substantial in aggregate. The ZBA determined that this modification alone did not constitute a substantial change and did not warrant reopening public hearing. It is not clear if the ZBA considered the aggregate of all conditions, or if the action on the agenda item as published satisfies the Open Meeting Law.

O'Neill Meets Some 40B Conditions

Before the town can issue a building permit, O'Neill Properties must meet each of the conditions set by the ZBA when it issued the Chapter 40B comprehensive permit. Slowly but surely, O'Neill is addressing these Chapter 40B conditions. One ZBA condition (25) regarding sewerage allows the Uplands development to connect to Belmont's sewers as long as the builder can show a good-faith effort to obtain Cambridge's approval. O'Neill has tried and failed to get the approval from the city of Cambridge to connect to its city sewerage lines, and now plans to run its own water and sewer lines to Belmont, along Frontage Road, a state-owned highway.

At the September 21 ZBA meeting, James Ward, an O'Neill representative, reported that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation will accept placing the pipes under Frontage Road but wants the town (Belmont) to own the pipes. In previous ZBA hearings, the town of Belmont stated it did not want to maintain the development's new sewer pipes. On September 21, the ZBA confirmed that an agreement between the developer, the town, and the Department of Transportation would meet condition 25. That condition states that the town shall not have any legal responsibility for the operation or maintenance of stormwater management or wastewater systems.

Conservation Restriction Gets Tricky

Glenn Clancy, Belmont's director of Community Development, is still waiting for O'Neill to deliver an updated conservation restriction on 7.91 acres of the property. The

Stormwater Management Standard

Mass DEP Stormwater Management Standard 3 (SMS3) seeks to reduce water pollution and keep waterways healthy. SMS3 states that new development needs to ensure that the same amount of water infiltrates the soil—or "recharges" the groundwater—from the site after development as it did before building.

Roofs and pavement are impermeable surfaces, and send stormwater rushing off-site instead of soaking into the soil. This stormwater can sweep residues of gasoline, motor oil, animal waste, and other pollutants into storm drains, which then direct the stormwater into ponds, brooks, and rivers.

When stormwater infiltrates the soil, vegetation and soil particles filter pollutants out of the water. The water slowly flows through the earth into local streams and rivers, recharging them with fresh water between rains.

Chapter 40B permit includes a draft conservation restriction held by the town of Belmont, but none for Cambridge's portion of the proposed open space.

O'Neill may not have to get a separate Cambridge conservation restriction. Instead, O'Neill could approach the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and propose that it hold the conservation restriction for property in both towns.

There are some advantages and disadvantages to having the DCR hold a two-town conservation restriction. A DCR-held conservation restriction would not require approval by the state secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and it would allow the DCR to develop trails on the land.

However, a new two-town conservation restriction would differ substantially from the 2006 draft conservation restriction included in the Chapter 40B permit, and significant changes in the conservation restriction would mandate



Nearby Developments

Meanwhile, several other developments are planned for the land surrounding O'Neill's proposed Residences at Acorn Park, and each project goes through a separate permitting process. On Acorn Park Drive, the Forrester Building opened last fall. Discovery Park Buildings 400, 500, 600 are planned for the site where the last Arthur D. Little building was torn down.

Meanwhile, between Acorn Park Drive and Route 2, the enormous Residences at Alewife development is

being built facing Route 2, on a large parcel that includes the site of the former Faces building (see "Five Story Complex Planned For Faces Site," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, September 2011). There is no regional review of the developments' aggregate impact on flooding, the environment, and traffic.

Trees on the Alewife Reservation.

additional ZBA review. Also, the Cambridge portion of the proposed conservation restriction area includes a segment of Acorn Park Drive. Can a road count as open space in a conservation restriction? It isn't clear.

Town Requirements

Clancy also needs to ensure that the project complies with Belmont's zoning bylaw before he can issue a building permit. Property in the "Belmont Uplands District" requires a minimum of 65 percent open space. That open space must be "permanently restricted," even if the land is in another town. While the text of ZBA's condition 1(B) states that a revised project zoning summary indicates compliance with the open space requirement, O'Neill may still need to establish a conservation restriction to get a building permit.

Clancy is also concerned about other permit issues for the site. The planned Uplands development, which O'Neill has titled The Residences at Acorn Park, involves building on multiple lots. Belmont typically requires lot consolidation prior to issuing a building permit, in order to prevent future zoning problems. For example, different lots might have different setback requirements that need to be reconciled before building can begin. As of this writing, the lots have not been consolidated.

Adopt a 40B Condition

The forest and wildlife at the Uplands do not have a direct voice in hearings and meetings affecting their fate. Please contact BCF if you are interested in monitoring the Uplands project's compliance with Chapter 40B conditions.

This is a great way to demonstrate citizen interest and help the town of Belmont's limited staff track this very complex project. Join other gumshoe citizens trying to make sure any issues are caught, monitored, and handled appropriately before any building occurs.

Contact bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com with subject heading "Uplands Adopt-a-40B-Condition Program."

Tours Near the Belmont Uplands

One of the best ways to ensure future preservation of open space is to introduce people to local nature.

If you have a group of three or more people interested in joining a guided one-hour weekend walk on the public trail by Little River bordering the back of the Uplands Property, please e-mail bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com with the subject "Uplands Tour Program."

Belmont's FEMA Insurance At Risk?

The June 2010 floodplain maps published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) show that part of the proposed Residences at Acorn Park is in a FEMA-designated floodway: a portion of a proposed fire road that runs around the buildings. In order to bear the weight of heavy trucks, that road may require a retaining wall. Although the site plan for the Residences at Acorn Park does not show a retaining wall, O'Neill's previous commercial proposal for the site included a retaining wall at that location, and a retaining wall may be required for the residential development to maintain a consistent elevation.

With or without a retaining wall, the entire town's membership in the FEMA insurance program may be at stake. Any development project that includes a change in elevation or other "filler material" in a designated floodway requires that the developer either obtain a no-rise certification or get a Conditional Letter of Map Revision from FEMA in order for the permitting municipality to remain in the FEMA insurance program. No certification, no insurance.

If Belmont loses its membership in the FEMA

insurance program, all landowners in Belmont lose FEMA insurance in the event of a flood attributable to the permitted development. In short, Belmont property might not be able to get FEMA money after a flood.

According to Belmont's town counsel, in order to comply with the ZBA condition 8B, the developer needs to certify compliance with all relevant regulations. The developer, not the town, is liable if the certification they provide to meet Condition 8B is incomplete. To date, O'Neill does not appear to have determined that any FEMA regulations apply.

Who Defends the Forest?

While Belmont's Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to oppose development at the Belmont Uplands site in 2004, all subsequent defense of the forest has been left to Belmont's ZBA, the Conservation Commission, building inspector, and citizen groups. Without continued diligence and creativity by public and private stakeholders, there is a very real possibility that the five-acre mound of unprotected land on this site will be clear-cut and construction will start as early as spring 2012 on the proposed 299-unit building.

Anne-Marie Lambert is a Director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.



Alewife Reservation.

New Wellington School Goes Green

By Michelle Oishi

Belmont's largest elementary school is now also environmentally conscientious. The new building's design reduces the school's consumption of fossil fuels by incorporating several elements of sustainable design practices.

Wellington was designed by Jonathan Levi Architects with Burt Hill/Stantec in accordance with green building guidelines set by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) called Massachusetts - Collaborative for High Performance Schools or MA-CHPS. It is similar to the Leadership in Environment and Energy Design (LEED).

Both MA-CHPS and LEED evaluate building performance using criteria including energy use, the quality of the indoor air and environment, water use, aspects of the site, materials used in construction, and how the building will be operated and maintained. Wellington was designed to reduce the structure's impact on the local environment and use of natural resources.

The new heating and ventilating (HVAC) system provides fresh air. The system employs a ground-source heat pump that uses the earth, which stays at a fairly constant 50 to 60 degrees, to moderate the temperature of the air. During the cold months, outside air is warmed indirectly by the geothermal wells before being heated by the roof-top mechanical units and circulated throughout the school.

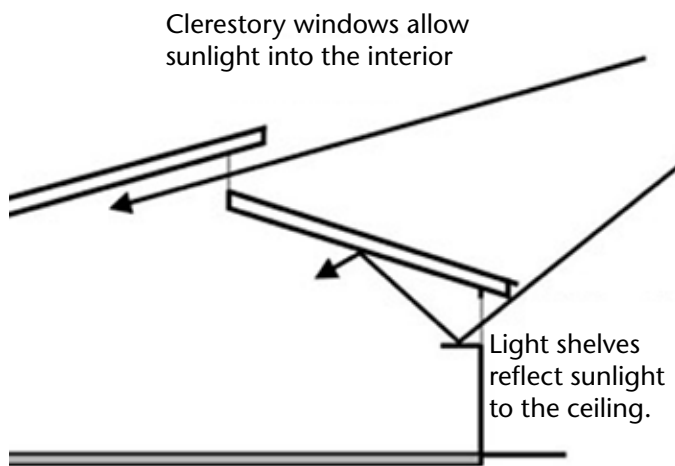
Instead of burning fuel to warm 30 degree air to 70 degrees, the furnace only needs to generate enough heat to warm 50 degree air to 70 degrees. The pre-warming of the air combined with well-insulated windows and air-tight exterior walls allows the HVAC system to perform more efficiently and reduce fuel consumption. During warm months, the ground source cools the air. Although only some rooms are truly air conditioned, the cooled, fresh air circulates throughout the entire building.

The building's orientation helps bring natural light into the rooms and reduce the need for artificial lighting...The school's main hallway features a long skylight with a direct view of the sky.

Careful placement of the building and thoughtful design of the classrooms ensures natural light in the interiors and minimizes heating and cooling loads. The school is oriented to receive mostly southern and northern light. The sun's angle makes it easier to control the light entering the school with shades than light from the east or west. Trellises shade south-facing glass in the warm months and are angled to admit sunlight during colder months. This set-up reduces glare and allows for passive cooling and warming of the building, reducing heating and cooling loads.

The building's orientation helps bring natural light into the rooms and reduce the need for artificial lighting. In the classrooms, large expanses of glass are set above three-foot-deep shelves that project into the room above the regular windows. The top surface of the shelf reflects the sunlight up onto the room's high, sloped ceiling. The ceiling then reflects the light further into the interior. Clerestory windows in the wall between classrooms and the halls bring light into interior corridors.

The school's main hallway features a long skylight with a direct view of the sky. This central core, which unites the primary and



An illustration of architectural light shelves similar to the Wellington School's light system.

MICHELLE OISHI



MICHELLE OISHI

The skylight in the Wellington School's main hallway.

secondary wings of the school, is anchored by the double-height gym at one end and the cafeteria at the other and creates a light-filled space. While artificial lighting is also used in the school, both day-lighting controls and occupancy sensors are located throughout the building to minimize the use of artificial lights.

Wellington's design reduces the building's impact on the local climate as well. The building has a white roof to minimize the amount of heat radiated by its large expanse into the immediate surroundings, a condition referred to as "heat island effect." The white material reflects the sun's rays, unlike black membrane roofing which absorbs the sun's heat and then radiates it back. The structure has also been designed to support future solar panels and possibly a vegetated or green roof.

The building's site is also important for green building as well as how much heat, light, and water run-off the building generates. Reusing the same site is advantageous because the

school remains close to the community it serves and so families can walk, ride bikes, and drive shorter distances to get to the school. During construction the lot was cleared of the remains of the fire-damaged former Belmont High School and an old heating oil tank. While the old and new schools have similar building-to-lot coverage, the new surfaces are cleaner, generate less heat, and more permeable to water. The school also has a groundwater recharge system for the rainwater that comes off the roof. Rather than running off to the town's stormwater system, the rainwater is kept on the grounds and allowed to percolate back into the ground.

As the Wellington School staff and students settle into their new home, the school will accumulate data on how the building performs. Today, the Wellington community is enjoying its delightful new home.

Michelle Oishi is an architect and a Wellington parent.

Center Parking Study Says End Time Limits

By Meg Muckenhaupt

One day, all drivers will be able find a spot on Leonard Street and park there as long as they want—if they're willing to pay a price. Consultants at Nelson\Nygaard, hired by the town to study parking in Belmont Center, have come up with a plan to end time limits and establish tiered pricing zones. Nelson\Nygaard consultants Jason Schrieber and Lisa Jacobson presented their draft Parking Management Plan at a public forum hosted by Belmont's Office of Community Development on December 12.

Schrieber and Jacobson used several methods to figure out the scope of this problems. They surveyed Belmont Center parking on a Thursday and Saturday last May (see map); conducted an online survey which garnered 250 respondents; conducted man-on-the-street interviews with 100 people in Belmont Center; and held a public open house and a meeting with the Belmont Center Business Association.

Different Groups Need Different Parking

The study shows that three constituent groups—shoppers, employees, and commuters—all have problems parking in Belmont Center. Shoppers can't gain quick and easy access to businesses. Leonard Street's parking is continuously full, so shoppers who drive can't make quick stops to pick up a bagel, coffee, or a tube of toothpaste. Instead, many drivers end up at the Claflin Street lot. Once there, the first (and only) signs drivers see tell them to stop and not turn right. Drivers entering the lot can't see signs that identify which spaces are free for two hours, and which ones are pay spaces. If they do manage to park their cars in the Claflin lot, shoppers then have to figure out how to walk back out to Leonard Street. There is no obvious public access, and there are no visible signs showing which stores let shoppers walk through.

Employees need long-term parking. There's plenty of all-day parking available in the Claflin lot, but it costs \$3 a day—\$60 a month—and the outdated machines can't give change and don't take credit cards. All other parking spaces in the Center are free. Employees must either

move their cars every two hours, or park on nearby residential streets. At the public meeting, one audience member commented, "Farnham Street has turned into an employee parking lot," adding that cars are continually blocking driveways and hydrants. The consultants counted six to nine nonresident cars parked on that street for the entire day, according to Schrieber.

Commuters face several obstacles. The Claflin lot doesn't open until 8:30 am, so train riders who need to get to work by 9 am can't use the lot—and walking all the way to the station from the lot is challenging when sidewalks are icy.

Because there is no accommodation for commuter parking, commuters don't take the train from Belmont Center—which means they don't buy groceries, eat dinner, or go shopping in Belmont Center on the way home from work.

A Belmont commuter in the audience noted that even when sidewalks are dry, a commuter parking in Claflin has to cross four lanes of traffic at Leonard Street to get to the train station. Royal Road's few all-day parking spots fill up quickly, with no provision for "kiss-and-ride" drop-offs or short-term parking. Because there is no accommodation for commuter parking, commuters don't take the train from Belmont Center—which means they don't buy groceries, eat dinner, or go shopping in Belmont Center on the way home from work, either—a net loss for businesses.

One audience member noted that Claflin Street, Royal Road, and Channing Road were closed to commuters and said, "You have shut it down... you make it almost impossible for us." Schrieber responded, "Belmont's approach to commuters is not to accommodate them." According to Schrieber, "Every other station" on the Fitchburg line has more commuter parking and charges less per day than the Claflin lot. In

many cases, towns give a discount to residents who park in a long-term lot.

To Manage Parking, Change the Price

Even though commuters, employees, and shoppers are all frustrated by the current system, Belmont actually has ample spaces. At the back of the Claflin lot, Schrieber and Jacobson observed that at least a dozen spaces were free all day long each day, and noted that there's plenty of parking on Concord Avenue. "Overall, there's not a ton of cars parked in the Belmont Center parking system," said Schrieber. The problem isn't supply; it's managing the space well.

The draft Parking Management Plan has four guiding principles:

- Provide convenient parking for shoppers/clients
- Establish clear town and private employee parking areas
- Accommodate commuter parking appropriately
- Protect residential neighborhoods from spillover

To provide convenient parking for shoppers, Schrieber and Jacobson set a goal of having one to two spaces available on Leonard Street at all times, so drivers can park immediately. Today, Leonard Street parking is free with a two-hour time limit. "That ensures turnover, not availability," said Schrieber. Spaces turn over once every two hours and immediately fill up again—frustrating shoppers and clients. On the other hand, the two-hour time limit hampers some Belmont Center businesses; their customers have a maximum of two hours to dine, shop, bank, or get their hair done; then they have to get out or face a fine.

It's also an expensive way to manage parking. "Enforcing time limits is the

most costly thing enforcement personnel can do," Schrieber said, because ticketing involves keeping track of where cars are for hours at a time.

There is only one way to make sure spaces are always available. "Price is the only measure that does that," said Schrieber, "...Price it based on availability and demand." Schrieber and Jacobson suggest making street parking right in front of the stores expensive enough so that employees don't park there, and short-term customers move on after making their purchases.

For example, the first 15 minutes of parking on Leonard Street would be free, for quick-trip customers, with extended parking costing \$1 per hour. Parking in other locations would cost less or be free, with no time limits. That way, customers who wish to spend a leisurely three hours in Belmont Center can park slightly farther away and not worry about rushing back to move their cars and avoid a ticket.

Once Leonard Street parking more available to shoppers, the employees who have been parking on Leonard Street will still need a place to park. Schrieber and Jacobson gave recommendations for both public and private parking for employees. For public parking, the town should lower monthly permit prices in the Claflin lot to make it more appealing, and make payment more convenient. Commuters could either use a multi-space meter that takes credit /debit cards



Zipcar comes to Belmont.

and coins, or an in-car meter similar to a Fast Lane transponder.

For commuters, the consultants suggested making parking available on nearby residential streets—with a twist: parking revenue for those streets.

For commuters, the consultants suggested making parking available on nearby residential streets—with a twist: parking revenue for those streets. Belmont could issue either in-car meters or permits for commuters (or for employees and residents), controlling the number of cars parked on the street during the day. Streets would opt in block by block. All income from meter or permit sales would go into a fund to be used for that street for whatever the neighborhood decides is important; sidewalk repair, plowing, street trees, and so on.

One audience member asked whether church parking lots could help ease commuters' burdens. Belmont's bylaws do allow for parking in church lots, thanks to a Town Meeting article that was passed two years ago, said Jay Szklut, Belmont's Planning and Economic Development Manager. However, Szklut said that he wasn't sure how tax law would affect a church charging for parking, and no church in Belmont is currently offering commuter parking.

Improving pedestrian connections and signs around the Center would help customers find their way to parking and businesses. Better lighting and signs at the Claflin Street lot and relocating the pay machine would go a long way toward making the under-used lot easier for customers to access.

In the long term, though, Belmont Center will need to accommodate more customers. The current recession will ease, and businesses will get busier. Restriping the Claflin lot would produce only a few more spaces, and building a parking garage is extremely expensive. Limiting truck-loading hours on Leonard Street would help a little.

Schrieber and Jacobson noted that Belmont Center relies heavily on on-street parking, and offers very few transportation alternatives to cars. To keep Belmont Center businesses thriving, the town will need to both look at more parking on residential streets, and think about how to encourage people not to bring their cars at all. The consultants praised Belmont's new Zipcar location in Belmont Center.

The report also recommends installing bike racks—making it easier for customers to get to the Center with no need to park. Given the likelihood of a community path passing through Belmont Center in the next decade, that recommendation may be the most practical parking suggestion of all.

Another public meeting on Belmont Center parking is being scheduled for January. For more details, check the town calendar at www.belmont-ma.gov.

Meg Muckenhoupt is Editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*.

Snow Shoveling

Snow is dangerous. When sidewalks are blocked with icy, unshoveled snow, pedestrians are often forced to walk in the street with traffic. Some elderly pedestrians don't come outside at all, becoming isolated and weak from lack of exercise. Getting the snow off the sidewalks saves lives.

Senior citizens who would like help clearing their sidewalks should contact Marie Poore, Volunteer Coordinator, at the Belmont Council on Aging at (617) 993-2979. Please register as far in advance as possible.

Belmont Shows Signs of an 'EcoMind'

By Jane Sherwin

Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, Belmont resident, author, and tireless campaigner for a healthy world, spoke on December 5 about her new book, *EcoMind*, to a large audience at the Belmont Hill School.

Speaking at the invitation of Sustainable Belmont, Moore proposed an EcoMind mental map, or view, of the world. People with an EcoMind understand that humans have both the need and the capacity for fairness, cooperation, and efficacy. They see that we are capable of deliberative problem solving: for example, removing the power of money in politics, or democratically setting rules to ensure transparency.

An EcoMind, said Lappé, counts on empathy, imagination and curiosity, and the need for power and meaning. The consequence of an EcoMind is a "living democracy," one that shapes rules aligned with nature, so that needs are met, fear recedes, and trust grows.

In contrast, Lappé sees the dominant mental map as life destroying, a "scarcity mind" assuming a lack of both goods and goodness. People with scarcity minds deem that humans are selfish and therefore incapable of coming together for the common good, believing that only the marketplace will work—an attitude that in turn produces real scarcity. In closing, Lappé asked her audience to consider what Belmont might become with an EcoMind.

Are there signs of Belmont EcoMind?

Do our current efforts—and politics—reflect our capacity for fairness, cooperation, efficacy, and deliberative problem solving? Are we shaping our rules "in alignment with nature?"

We have certainly come a long way from the years between 1900 and 1950 when the surge in housing demand and the collapsing economics of small farms meant that we converted our farmland to homes. I recall one older resident telling

me about a developer telling a desperate farmer, "I can take that land off your hands for you."

Even by the 1920s Belmont was a "town of homes," and moving steadily away from the market garden economy and the country town that drew people out on Sunday afternoons for the purchase of fruits and vegetables from local stands. Children who now buy candy from an endless selection at CVS used to pick (or steal) apples from Belmont's orchards. Others played November football with a Hubbard squash in plowed fields, or helped out picking vegetables at the top of the season.

Many of our leaders were farmers, and some farmers were leaders in state agriculture. But they could not stop the profound changes in our economy including urban population pressures, financial collapse, and produce shipped by refrigerator cars from thousands of miles away.

Despite these discouraging changes, there were signs of an EcoMind even in the 1960s, when we preserved the McLean Hospital farmland (now



Bounty at Belmont Acres Farm, Glenn Road.

SUSAN JONES

known as Belmont's Rock Meadow conservation land). We are blessed with a thriving, working farm off Glenn Road, made possible by the generosity and enthusiasm of the Richardson family—evidence of an EcoMind if there ever was one—and a place where children can work with growing food.

Today we have an actively supported food pantry, the beautiful teaching garden in the Chenery Middle School courtyard, and the ongoing battle to protect the Belmont Uplands.

Today we have an actively supported food pantry, the beautiful teaching garden in the Chenery Middle School courtyard, and the ongoing battle to protect the Belmont Uplands. The Pomona Project, run by Joan Teebagy under the auspices of the Belmont Food Collaborative, encourages the planting of fruit-bearing shrubbery. Our Farmers' Market just completed its sixth year, and we have victory gardens in Rock Meadow.



Chickens at Belmont Acres Farm, Glenn Road.

John Kolterman, who heads up Sustainable Belmont, said he is optimistic about Belmont's ecological future. "We're beginning to get some traction—there is momentum underway, despite some strong resistance to change. We have a new light department manager who is highly receptive to new programs like alternative energy. Next March we'll be looking at the possibility of schoolyard gardens at the elementary schools, and we're exploring a collaboration with other communities in an "energy stretch code," for increasing energy efficiency for existing or new structures."

While the town's Vision 21 Committee commissioned Sustainable Belmont, Kolterman points out that environmental action is coming from many directions. Belmont Hill School is installing rooftop solar photovoltaic systems, and it's possible that Temple Beth El will be doing the same next year. Zipcars are now available in town. The Belmont Food Collaborative, the umbrella organization for the Farmers' Market, is another independent group.

"The Town is Full of Clubs"

Joan Teebagy, a Belmont resident and a member of the Food Collaborative's board of directors, said "the town is full of clubs which revolve around a communal purpose: the Lions Club, the Garden Club, and the Woman's Club. We have an interfaith council, and Habitat on Belmont Hill. We've formed parts of government not just for governing but preserving our history and our land, which we've set aside democratically. Even the struggle over the Thomas Clark house on Common Street means that someone is paying attention. The fact that we are discussing these issues, no matter how it turns out, means we are engaged for the common good."

Teebagy also points to the work of the Belmont Land Trust in preserving open

space, and the individual landowners who've been willing to give. While there is little space still to preserve—imagine what might have been done in 1950 with an EcoMind—still the work goes on.

"I would say I'm optimistic," said Teebagy. "People move to Belmont because they can see we are an involved community."

Like Kolterman and Teebagy, Anne Stuart said she sees a good mix of diverse people and groups working together. Anne and her husband Paul Santos are on the board of the new Belmont Food Collaborative. "We're working on educating residents about healthy food and healthy living, and getting fresh food to Belmont residents."

Chickens are Promising Developments

Stuart includes even the backyard chicken movement in her list of promising developments. "I'm grateful that the town accepted chickens in backyards so easily—some towns have been opposing the idea of chicken-keeping." She also points to the Belmont Citizens Forum as evidence of a growing EcoMind, and the fact that we have a strong animal control officer, John Maguranis, who works to educate Belmont about tolerating wild animals and living alongside them.

Whether you keep chickens or not, and no matter how you feel about coyotes, you might agree that we can see progress in collaborating on the town's health. Perhaps, Lappé suggested, a next step would be establishment of a municipal food council—about 100 of these councils are in place around the country—to support the delivery of healthy food, as in the schools, to foster awareness of healthy food choices, and perhaps even to support the food pantry. The evidence suggests that if you have something in mind, Belmont will be ready to consider it.

Read more about Lappé and her work at www.smallplanet.org.

Jane Sherwin is a Belmont resident and a writer. She can be reached at jane@worddrivecommunications.com.

Environmental Events

Arlington Rain Garden Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, 7-8:30 p.m.

The Mystic River Watershed Association will discuss their project to construct two rain gardens in Arlington in 2012. The gardens will reduce storm-water runoff which carries significant levels of pollutants into the river system including nutrients. Free. Mysticriver.org. *Robbins Library, 700 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington.*

Native Heroes

Tuesday, January 24, 7-9 p.m.

Examine the reasons to include native plants in your garden, and be introduced to a collection of plants that won't escape into the natural community, produce a pleasing landscape, and provide valuable nourishment and habitat for birds, mammals, and insects. Co-sponsored by the New England Wild Flower Society and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. \$18 Audubon members, \$24 non-members. Registration required. Newfs.org. *Drumlin Farm, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln.*

Climate Reality Project

Tuesday, January 24, 7-9 p.m.

The Climate Reality Project, Al Gore's new initiative, aims to bring the facts about the climate crisis into the mainstream and to engage the public in conversation about how to solve it. The Project will be presented by Anne Kelly, Director of Business for Innovative Climate and Energy Policy and one of 3000 Climate Reality Project presenters trained by Al Gore. Free. Lexgwac.org. *Cary Memorial Library, 1874 Massachusetts Avenue, Lexington.*

Polar Plunge in the Mystic

Thursday, January 28, 1-2 p.m.

This group-dive into the Mystic River will kick off the Mystic River Watershed Association's 40th anniversary year. The event is free and open to the public. Hot drinks will be served. Check the MyRWA web site for more information about the dive and other anniversary events. Mysticriver.org/40th-anniversary. *Mary O'Malley Park, Commandants Way, Chelsea.*

Winter Tree Identification

Saturday, January 28, 1-3 p.m.

The Friends of the Fresh Pond Reservation will introduce walkers to extraordinary trees with easily remembered shapes, bark, and branching patterns. Attendees will walk on the golf course to look at a number of specimen trees that are inaccessible to the public during other seasons. All levels of experience welcome. Free. Registration required. Friendsoffreshpond.org, friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com, (617) 349-6489. *Neville Place front door, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge.*

Walking the Charles in Winter

Saturdays, January 28 and February 11, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Join rangers from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and explore the Charles River's trees (January 28) and the "lost half mile" between the Charles River and Boston Harbor (February 11). Free. Sponsored by the DCR. www.mass.gov/dcr/events.htm. *Meet at the plaza in front of the Museum of Science, Boston.*

Creating Beautiful Gardens Filled with Life

Wednesday, February 1, 7-8:30 p.m.

Carolyn Summers, author of *Designing Gardens with*



SUSAN JONES

Flora of the American East, will review the science behind the essential life support function of indigenous plants, show a variety of formal gardens and more "naturalistic" landscapes, and illustrate the effective use of our northeastern native flora and their full design potential. Free. Sponsored by Grow Native Massachusetts. Grownativemass.org. *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge.*

How to Weatherize Your Home

Wednesday, February 1, 7-9 p.m.

Are you tired of high heating bills and want to do something about it? Join Sustainable Belmont for a presentation on how best to weatherize your home. Paul Eldrenkamp, a local expert on air-sealing and insulation, and owner of Byggmeister, will offer advice on weatherizing existing housing stock. Free. Sustainablebelmont@gmail.com, www.sustainablebelmont.org. *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Backyard Sugaring

Saturday, February 4, 1-3:30 p.m.

Do you have a sugar maple or two in your yard? Join Mass Audubon to learn how to make your own delicious syrup. The class will cover everything—tree identification, equipment needed, tapping, weather, boiling, finishing, and storing—that you need to know to get started. Fee \$20 Audubon members, \$25 non-members. Registration required. Drumlinfarm@massaudubon.org, www.massaudubon.org, (781) 259-2200. *Drumlin Farm, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln.*

Benefit Concert for the Silver Maple Forest

Saturday, February 4, 7:30 p.m.

The Jim Scott Ensemble, Stan Strickland, Reverend Fred Small, and other musical guests perform to raise money to save Belmont's Uplands/Silver Maple Forest. Tickets \$20 at the door, \$18 via advance web sales. Sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum, the Coalition to Save the Belmont Uplands, Sustainable Belmont, Friends of the Alewife Reservation, and several other groups. Information: www.belmontcoalition.org, (617) 388-3719. *First Parish in Arlington, 630 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington.*



Help the BCF Newsletter

Spend an evening with fellow BCF **Newsletter** aficionados and help get this in-depth, informative publication distributed! Sign up for our **Newsletter** "mailing parties," hosted by a genial volunteer, or if evening doesn't work for you, step up to drop off a supply of **Newsletters** to key locations around Belmont.

We know you enjoy the **Newsletter**, so please help make sure that it's seen and read. Contact Karen Parmett at bcfprogramdirector@gmail.com for more information, and thank you!

We need you.

If you can volunteer even a few hours a month, you can make a difference. You do not need to be an expert—just a person who cares about our town.

I can devote time to:

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- Environmental Protection
- Planning & Zoning
- Community Path
- Walking in Belmont
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I can help pay for this newsletter:

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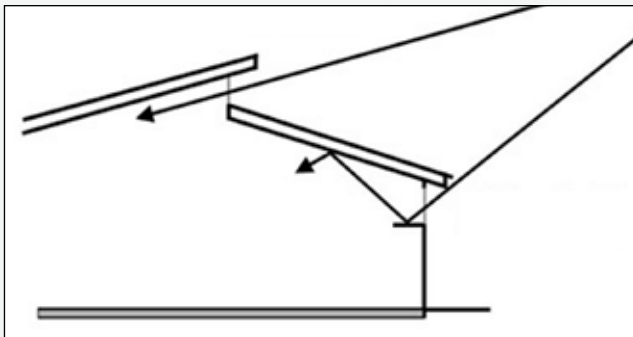
If you have questions, please e-mail us at info@belmontcitizensforum.org. The Belmont Citizens Forum is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your donation is deductible from federal taxes to the full extent provided by law.

Make checks payable to **Belmont Citizens Forum** and mail to Belmont Citizens Forum, P.O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478.

Thank you.

January/February 2012

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