



Belmont Citizens Forum

Town Meeting to Decide MBTA Zoning

Below are three articles on the MBTA Community zoning (3A rezoning) proposals that will come before Town Meeting this November.

An Overview of 3A By Taylor Yates

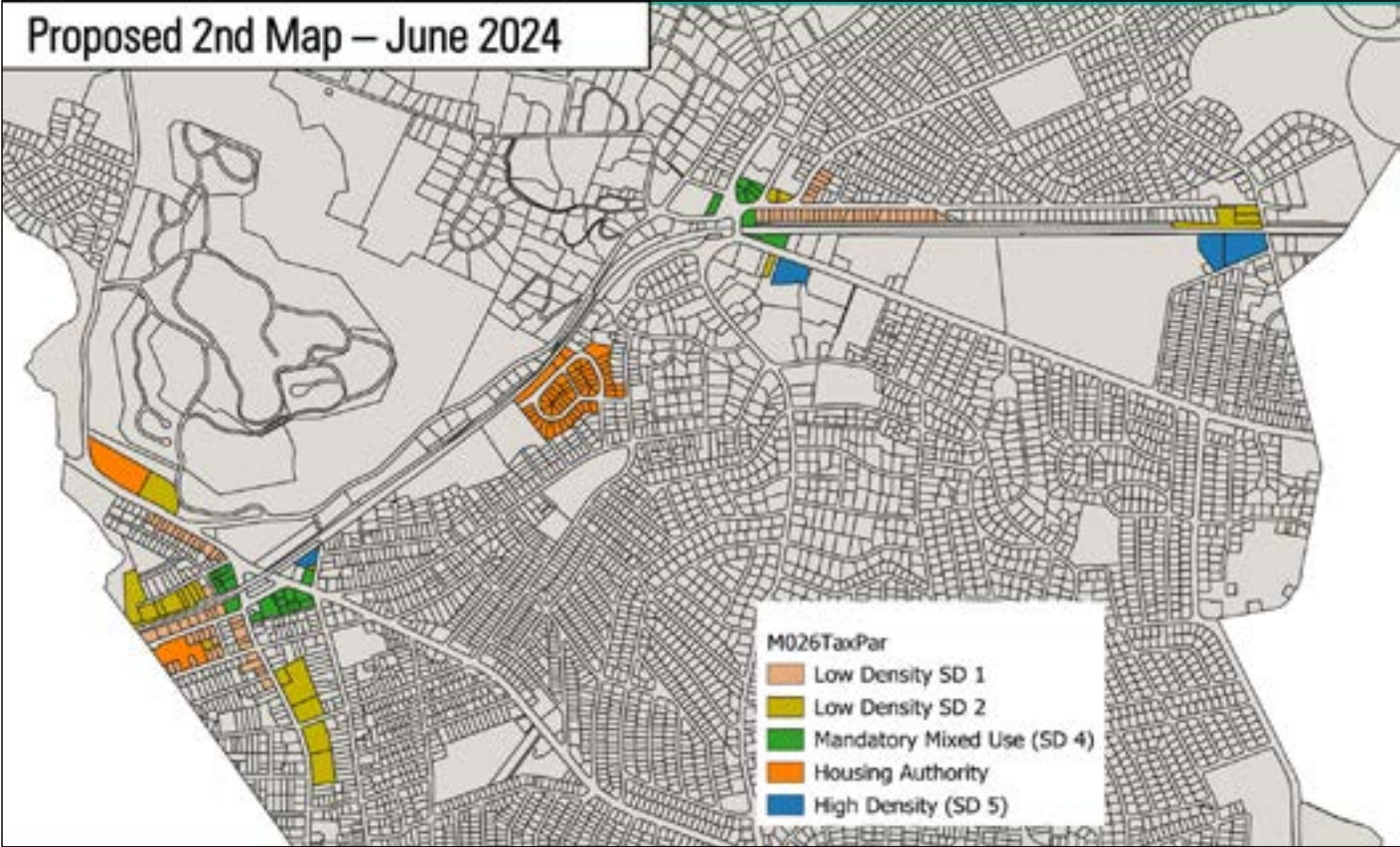
This fall, Belmont Town Meeting will consider a plan to comply with the MBTA Communities Act, a law passed by the state to increase the supply of housing across 177 towns. Each town, including Belmont, is required to zone for a specified amount of multifamily homes across a specified number of acres. Belmont must zone for at least 1,632 homes across a minimum of 27 acres.

After two years of work by both the MBTA Communities Advisory Committee and the

Planning Board, Belmont has developed two plans that would comply with the law. The Planning Board voted 5-0 in favor of compliance with the MBTA Communities Act, and encourages Town Meeting to adopt at least one of the plans.

The most important requirement for Belmont is the number 1,632, the number of multifamily units. This number is 15% of our total housing stock as of the 2020 census.

Every MBTA community was assigned a multiplier of 5% to 25%, based primarily on its access to rail transit. Commuter rail communities like ours are assigned a multiplier of 15%. It cannot be emphasized enough that we must zone for this number of homes. We do not have to build them now or ever. This means that we can create a plan that adds housing organically over time.



Map of the proposed rezoning from the [June 7, 2024, presentation](#) by Roy Epstein, Select Board chair, and Christopher Ryan, director of Planning & Building. See a color version at BelmontCitizensForum.org.

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

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

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The second most important requirement is that 50% of the acreage of the overall plan must be in a single, contiguous district within a half-mile of a rail station, and that no district could be less than five acres. This meant that early on, the architects of Belmont's plan had to choose either Waverley or Belmont Center to host 50% of the acreage. Waverley was chosen.

There are many other technical requirements that Belmont has spent the better part of three years incorporating into a plan that would work for the town. In May 2022, Belmont formed the MBTA Communities Advisory Committee, a group of seven people drawn from other Belmont committees and boards including the Select Board and Planning Board.

After nearly two years of work and much community outreach, the committee presented the Planning Board with a proposed plan. The Planning Board made revisions based on other planning goals, and developed the language of the zoning bylaw and the dimensions of the housing types that would be allowed, all with the assistance of consultant Utile. In the summer, the board submitted two plans to the state for pre-compliance review to maximize the chance that whichever plan Town Meeting chooses to adopt will comply with state law. *[Since this article was submitted, the state has determined that both plans are compliant -Ed.]* The board will continue to conduct community outreach until Town Meeting in November.

The two plans submitted to the state are identical with the exception of the eastern edge of Belmont. One plan includes the site of Purecoat, an industrial plating company on Brighton Street. Under this plan, Purecoat would be allowed to develop a large apartment complex with ground-level retail. The second plan excludes Purecoat but includes the southeastern corner of Belmont, which would allow more three-family homes and some street-level retail. Each plan has merits, so it will likely be up to Town Meeting to decide which is best for Belmont.

Beyond the eastern edge of town, there are a few other important development opportunities included in the proposed plans. The most notable is Waverley Square, which will host our largest district and account for at least 50% of our total acreage.

Waverley was selected early on in the process because of studies demonstrating the neighborhood would benefit from this kind of investment and

because of its proximity to Sherman Gardens, a Belmont Housing Authority property that needs redevelopment. Still, we strove to ensure that Waverley hosted only 53% of the total acreage of our plans, and that the rest would be spread around town.

Belmont Center will benefit greatly from added density, which will increase foot traffic for our small businesses and vibrancy for our residents.

Belmont Center was also included in our plans, especially the areas behind the Claflin parking lot. Belmont Center will benefit greatly from added density, which will increase foot traffic for our small businesses and vibrancy for our residents. The Claflin lot was considered but could not be included in the new zoning without being deaccessioned by the town. That move would entail a lot of community discussion and visioning that did not fit in the MBTA Communities Act deadline.

Our most innovative use of the MBTA Communities Act is the inclusion of Belmont Housing Authority properties. These need redevelopment and expansion to ensure we provide some of our most vulnerable residents with high-quality, affordable housing options. These areas constitute 659 of the new homes zoned for in the plan.

In the end, we hope that Town Meeting will do the right thing and adopt a plan that complies with the law, expands our housing options, and brings good development to Belmont.

Taylor Yates is chair of the Planning Board, chair of the Vision21 Implementation Committee, and a Town Meeting member from Precinct 2.

Misconceptions About 3A Zoning

By Christopher J. Ryan, AICP

With Belmont's MBTA Communities Zoning (or 3A) proposals coming up for a vote at Town Meeting in November, the Planning Department would like to clear up a few misconceptions.

The first concern we have heard is that the 3A program, mandated by the state, requires Belmont to build 1,632 multifamily housing units. This is incorrect on two counts.

First, the law does not require Belmont to build any multifamily homes; rather, Belmont must develop zoning bylaws that would allow 1,632 additional units. It would be up to the market to respond to the new zoning.

Second, the number of units in Belmont's proposed maps would not result in a net gain of 1,632 units because many areas proposed to be zoned will likely never be built. There would either be no net gain or too little net gain in units to make it feasible.

For example, one of our proposed zoning districts would allow the development of a three-family residence or triple-decker. Many of the lots this is applied to already have a triple-decker so it would make no sense to tear it down and build another to replace it. Other lots in this type of zoning subdistrict have two-family homes where it still may not make sense to replace a two-decker with a three-decker.

In other areas where the zoning is applied, it may be years or decades before redevelopment takes place if it does it all. Overall, we have estimated that rather than 1,632 new units being added to Belmont's housing inventory, we optimistically estimate that around 1,000 new units could be added over two to three decades.

A second concern that has been expressed is that "by-right" or "as-of-right" zoning will not give Belmont the control it needs over project review and approval.

In short, the town will still have very robust regulations on design and site plan review, and every MBTA 3A project will have to undergo that review. We also are proposing to strengthen these rules and consider a parallel set of rules and regulations to add to the regulatory toolbox. "By-right" means that the town will not have discretionary review authority over projects, which many consider

an unfair added burden to development that allows subjectivity to be injected into the process.

Thirdly, we have heard comments that 3A is an affordable housing program, just like Chapter 40B. This is not the case. 3A is a market-based law and only requires the zoning be for multifamily housing generally and not specifically affordable multifamily housing. Granted, Belmont will be applying its existing Inclusionary Housing requirements to any applicable 3A project that is proposed, but this would be the case for any multifamily project.

The maximum percentage of units required to be affordable under the Inclusionary Housing Bylaw is 15%. This application of the Inclusionary Housing Bylaw is also beneficial to the town because it adds to the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Belmont is required to attain 10% SHI before the town reaches permanent safe harbor from unfriendly 40B projects. Currently, the town is at 6.21%, and Belmont will soon be 6.77% once McLean Zone 3 is developed.

If 3A passes in Belmont, conceivably 743 additional affordable units could be created. Those

units would effectively double the number of affordable units and bring Belmont to 12.7% SHI.

Speaking of affordable housing, the small number of affordable units that may result from 3A are still beneficial to Belmont. Those units would be targeted to households at 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). For the Boston area, 80% AMI for a one-person household is \$91,400 and \$130,550 for a four-person family.

Hopefully, the remaining units will still be affordable to local residents who need a place to live and also those who would like to move here. People already in the community could include seniors looking to downsize or remain in Belmont near their friends or family. People hoping to live in Belmont could include adult children who went to school here, teachers, public employees, or store employees who would like to live close to their jobs.

Finally, many residents are worried about the impacts of the development of housing under the law. First, I must reiterate that it will take many years for even part of the potential of the law to be realized. However, even with an eventual full net

buildout, we have estimated, with the assistance of our market analyst, that the overall impact of the program will be net fiscally positive.

Other impacts are more difficult to estimate, but the MBTA Advisory Committee and the Planning Board have both sought to place zoning in areas appropriate and sensitive to the existing development pattern. Many cases will not add much to the net increase in the number of units, so impacts like traffic, parking, and noise should be negligible. Further, with a more robust Design and Site Plan Review process, the Planning Board and their peer review consultants will ensure a thorough scrutiny of any new projects, all as part of an open and participatory public hearing process.

We know that residents may have additional concerns and questions. For updated information, please visit the Planning Department's Frequently Asked Questions page on our website at: www.belmont-ma.gov/mbta-communities-information/pages/frequently-asked-questions. Please also feel free to email me at cryan@belmont-ma.gov or call 617.993.2658.

Chris Ryan is the director of the Office of Planning & Building for the Town of Belmont.

Benefits of the MBTA Communities Act for Belmont

By Thayer Donham

Massachusetts has a statewide housing shortage and is the third most expensive state in the country to rent a home. Since there is not enough housing of any kind, the state is experiencing an outmigration, particularly of young people under 35, who either leave or move outside of Interstate 495 to live, increasing their commute time and expense.

The state government under Governor Charlie Baker created the MBTA Communities Act (3A) to encourage housing production, particularly around the MBTA stations and MBTA lines. The idea was that new and existing residents would use public transit and help to alleviate another of the Boston area's serious problems—traffic. New housing would also support the commercial areas around MBTA stations.

Belmont is well-positioned to benefit from new housing production in town. Creating more homes allows for a diversity of housing types with a range of prices to accommodate people and families at

all stages of their lives. It could allow residents to downsize or purchase a starter home.

The Planning Board and Town Meeting have heard from Belmont seniors many times over the years that there is no place in town to downsize.

The Planning Board and Town Meeting have heard from Belmont seniors many times over the years that there is no place in town to downsize, and they want to stay here in Belmont where they have their lives and social connections. We have heard from parents that their grown children cannot afford to rent or buy in Belmont.

The need for additional homes was one of the drivers for working with Northland Residential to propose new rental apartment buildings and new senior townhomes at McLean Zone 3 that will start construction soon. The previous vision for the site was only for senior townhomes, proposed after a continuing care facility on the site became nonviable.

More homes provide a broader customer base for local and regional businesses. Housing clustered around transit and commercial development allows people to live adjacent to where they shop and work. Those residents provide the foot traffic necessary to maintain a steady client base.

Mixed-use developments take advantage of land costs by building to a higher density and providing vibrant 24-hour neighborhoods that support commercial businesses. Increased tax revenue from new, larger developments will support the town's financial needs. With new higher density development in strategic locations, there is a reduced per capita cost for municipal services.

The proposed 3A zoning that will be on the warrant at the special Town Meeting in November includes form-based related provisions. *(For more*



Map of proposed Waverley area zoning from July 2 Planning Board meeting.

information on form-based codes, see formbased-codes.org/definition - Ed.) Those provisions establish a design model to inform developers and property owners as to what kinds of development will be in keeping with the community's character.

The proposed 3A zoning also places the zoning overlays on strategic locations identified during the public planning process by the MBTA Advisory Committee. These sites include the Belmont Housing Authority properties, Belmont Center, Waverley Square, and potentially the site of Purecoat North. These sites have potential to be redeveloped for housing or mixed use and are adjacent to or within commercial areas.

The Select Board and Planning Board met with the owners of Purecoat North in September to discuss redeveloping the site using the 3A zoning. This site was recommended for multifamily zoning

overlay to generate new housing. The town also hired a consultant to prepare a financial analysis that showed that the proposal was revenue-positive for the town.

The town staff has worked closely with Belmont Housing Authority to ensure that the 3A zoning applies to redevelopment options they have been considering for their outdated sites. The 3A zoning will allow the BHA to apply for funding to modernize their developments at Sherman Gardens, Belmont Village, and Waverley Oaks.

Thayer Donham is a member of the Planning Board and served on the MBTA Communities Advisory Committee. She is a Town Meeting member from Precinct 5.

Waltham Rail Trail Makes Slow Progress



Map of segment 3 of Waltham MCRT. Phase I of segment 3 extends from the current eastern trail terminus in Weston, just west of the trestle bridge over the Fitchburg Line tracks, to Jones Road in Waltham.

By Vincent Stanton, Jr.

The Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (MCRT), when complete, will extend 104 miles along the former right of way of the Massachusetts Central Railroad (MCRR), connecting Northampton on the Connecticut River to North Station in Boston. Design of Belmont's 2.1 mile segment of the MCRT is proceeding in two phases. Phase I (Brighton Street to Clark Street Bridge) will be 75% complete by the end of October, with 100% design expected in early 2025 and construction scheduled to start in 2026.

When Phase 1 is completed, cyclists and pedestrians will be able to travel east from Belmont Center to North Station in Boston entirely off road via the Fitchburg Cutoff Path to Alewife Station, the Cambridge Linear Path to just beyond Massachusetts Avenue, the Somerville Community Path through Davis Square, then along the Green Line Extension (GLX), and finally under Route 93 and through several small Charlestown parks to the north bank of the Charles River opposite North Station and TD Garden, which is accessible via a pedestrian walkway on the North Washington Street bridge. The final segment of this route—the path along the GLX—was completed in June 2023.

To the west, the picture is more complicated. Progress on the 5.3 mile Waltham path is best considered in three segments:

1. 0.72 miles from the Belmont border to Beaver Street,
2. 3.7 miles from Beaver Street to 1265 Main Street at Hillside Road, and
3. 0.86 miles from Main Street to the current terminus of the Weston path, about 0.1 miles from the Waltham-Weston border.

As reported in the November/December 2023 [BCF Newsletter](#), segment 2 is complete except for the Linden Street Bridge. Repair of the rusting nineteenth century truss bridge and installation of a new deck for path users was included in the Waltham path design package, and was also part of the bid documents issued by Waltham in fall 2021. However, the bids for that component of the project varied over 11-fold among the six bidders (from \$177,100 to \$2,000,000), suggesting a lack of clarity about the scope of work. In the end, Waltham decided not to include the Linden Street Bridge. (Note that Waltham, unlike Belmont, elected to pay for construction of its path via a [\\$9.3 million municipal bond](#). The Belmont path will be funded via federal and state dollars; see "[Belmont Community Path Costs Explained](#)" *BCF Newsletter*, May/June 2022).

Write for the BCF Newsletter!

The BCF is looking for writers at all experience levels and all ages to write for our bimonthly newsletter. The BCF Newsletter provides in-depth coverage of local and regional issues including environmental protection, historic preservation, economic development, transportation, bicycling and pedestrian safety, and town planning and zoning.

The BCF's Mission

The Belmont Citizens Forum is a community organization that strives to preserve Belmont's natural and historical resources, limit traffic growth, and enhance pedestrian safety.

Mission Statement

To preserve and protect buildings, objects, open space, and districts in the town of Belmont that have historical, architectural, environmental, or general cultural significance.

To disseminate information about, and promote interest in, the historical, architectural, environmental, and general cultural heritage of the Town of Belmont and its vicinity.

To create public awareness and interest in traffic and public safety issues, as they relate to Belmont and surrounding communities.

To promote interest in the preservation and protection of environmental resources.

To educate the public and community leaders about the environmental importance of open space and the necessity of continuing community participation and oversight in proposed development projects.

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Left: 1896 trestle bridge over the Fitchburg Line tracks and unimproved future trail, photographed from the Waltham side. Right: Waltham segment 3, an unpaved path between Fitchburg Line and Jones Road.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) holds a 99-year lease on the former MCRR right of way from Beaver Street in Waltham to Berlin, Massachusetts, and has guided and funded much of the MCRT's development west of Belmont. The DCR recently stepped in to take over and pay for refurbishment of the Linden Street Bridge via the Mass Trails Grant program. The project will be advertised to bidders this fall and, according to the [DCR website](#), construction is expected to begin in spring 2025.

There has also been some progress on segment 3, again, under the purview of DCR. In March 2024, DCR awarded a \$2,255,230 contract to [Kodiak Corporation](#) to refurbish the 1896 MCRR trestle bridge over the Fitchburg Line tracks in Weston (see map on p.7), and extend the path about 0.4 miles into Waltham, where it will stop at Jones Road (covering about 0.5 miles total). Construction is underway, though progress has been slowed by a shortage of MBTA flaggers (required for work close to the tracks), according to DCR Director of Trails and Greenways Gerald Autler. The project is expected to be completed by summer 2025.

As to the remainder of segment 3, Autler wrote, "The segment from Jones Road to Main Street really needs to wait until the roadway infrastructure—Green Street extension, new Route 117 bridge, Stow Street closure—happens. Otherwise our project would be complex, expensive, and would then need to be partially redone when that infrastructure is built." The timeline for the MassDOT roadway project is uncertain. It appears to still be in the design phase.

As to segment 1, from Belmont to Beaver Street, unfortunately there is no progress to report. It may be worth noting that in July 2024, Duffy Brothers Construction, Inc., the owners of the land east of Beaver Street and southeast of Waverley Oaks Road, applied to the Waltham Conservation Commission (WCC) for a three-year extension of the WCC's previously issued Order of Conditions requiring cleanup of an oil spill into Beaver Brook (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection [file #316-0793](#)). The WCC's July 24, 2024, [agenda](#) states: "Applicant [Duffy Brothers] expects to secure a contractor by late 2024, begin site prep early spring 2025, and begin work late

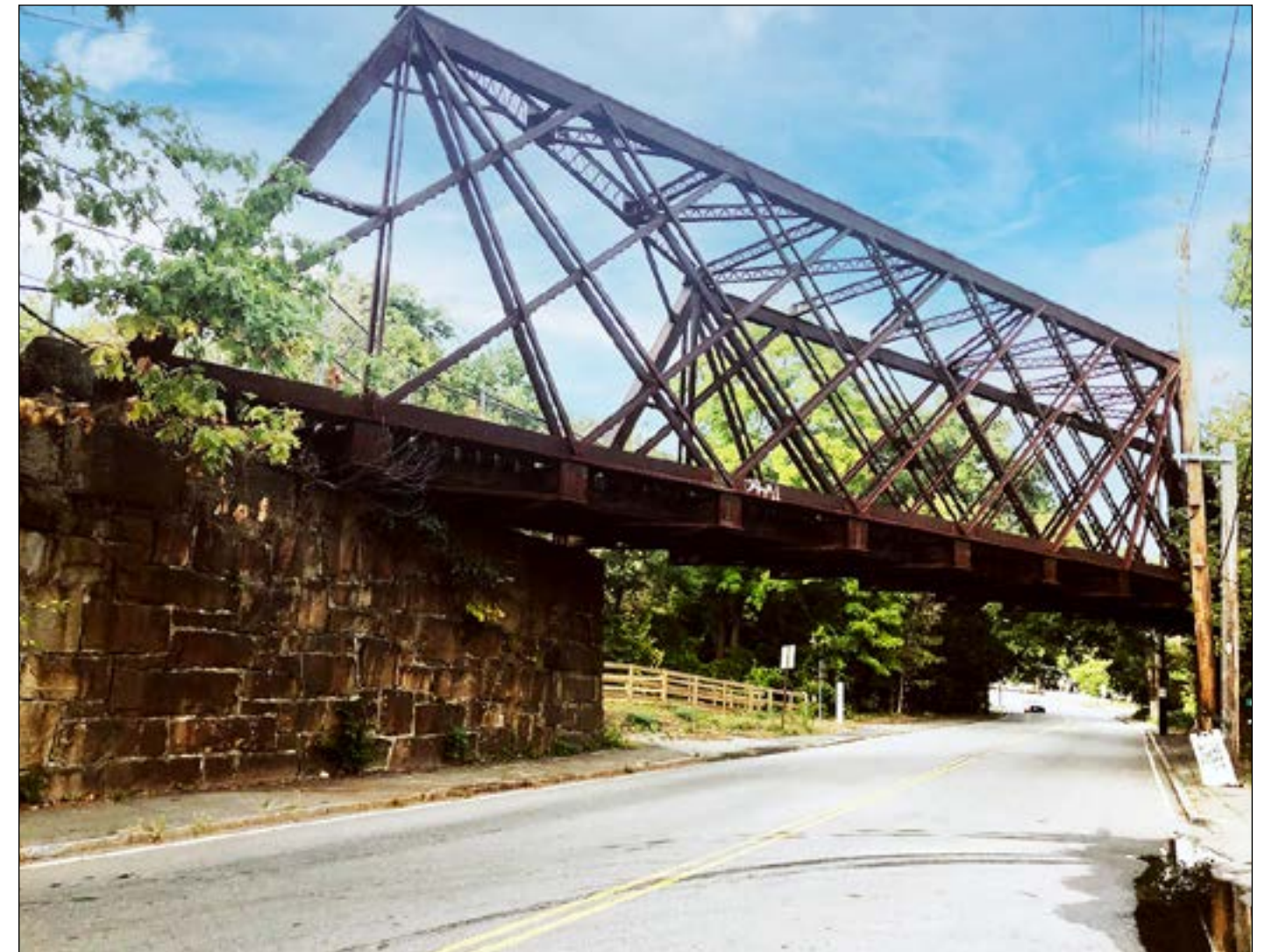
spring/early summer 2025." Addressing that environmental issue may relieve an impediment to progress on the Beaver Street to Belmont segment.

West of Waltham, the MCRT is complete in [Weston](#) (opened 2019), extending to Route 126 in Wayland. That segment was built by DCR in collaboration with Eversource and the municipalities. Still further west, MCRT projects in Sudbury and Hudson are in advanced design, with construction expected to start next year.

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



1896 trestle bridge over the Fitchburg Line tracks in Waltham, photographed from the Waltham side.



Linden Street Bridge, Waltham.

Profiles in Belmont: Peter Struzziero

By Elissa Ely

Eight hundred people a day used to visit the Belmont Public Library on Concord Avenue when the building existed, and few of them ran into Peter Struzziero, the library director. Even fewer run into him now. You would need to hang a right off Grant Street onto tiny C Street, past Department of Public Works trucks and equipment, into a cavernous but immaculate town garage the size of a warehouse, and through a door that appears out of nowhere. It's a little like spelunking, except there are windows.

The library's reconstruction project is well underway, hopefully to be completed by late 2025. Meanwhile, the director's interim office is rich with family photos, posters, a refrigerator, the

imperative coffee maker, a few windowsill plants with questionable futures, and a trophy his team won at Trivial Pursuit during a librarian conference ("Never play Trivial Pursuit with a librarian," Peter advises. "They know everything.") The commuter rail rumbles by outside the window every 15 minutes or so: company of a sort.

High on a shelf, next to the trophy, there is a single book. The book is *Frankenstein*, and though Mary Shelley will never know, "it was my colleague in the journey of readership." As a child with learning disabilities, Peter spent vast amounts of time in his Billerica library. He started with picture books like the personable Berenstain Bears, slowly moved onto books with fewer pictures,

and eventually, to books with no pictures. Here's where *Frankenstein* entered, with his cobbled-together body and tragically embittered heart. Horror stories have always dazzled Peter. For different reasons, libraries have, too.

"I should have been a car salesman, or a barber or a bartender," he says. Instead, he became a librarian. Naturally, there is a story behind it. His was a single-parent family without financial resources, where Christmas vacation meant armloads of library books instead of ski lift tickets. One Christmas, a librarian at the check-out desk

gently pointed out the \$35 fine that forbade them from taking anything home for the holiday. Stressed and insolvent, his mother burst into tears. The librarian put a sympathetic hand on her shoulder and, just like in a novel, the overdue fine vanished. Books went home in the arms of the family, and Peter's future path appeared. How could someone become a bartender?

After a stint in Disney World "with a walkie-talkie and a food cart," followed by a college degree in communications and philosophy, he graduated in 2009 from the Master of Library and Information Science program at Simmons University. "I kept going to the library until they started paying me," Peter says. Then he started paying back.

Librarians are caregivers. "This is an outward-facing organization," he explains of his mission. "We don't just sit in the building and give people a book." Or course there is the One Book One Belmont community-wide program with its posters of local luminaries holding their books aloft (*Frankenstein* made a 2018 appearance). But the library is also the largest source of food donations to the Belmont Food Pantry, and it sponsors something like 500 programs a year, including a monthly Friday night movie series Peter has a special fondness for. "We're a community center in this town," he says.

"We're guides for information" he adds, "and the more information that's out there, the more we're guides. A library has to adapt, adapt, adapt." When vinyl records came into vogue back in the 1950s, libraries acquired records. When take-home movies arrived in the 80s, libraries acquired movies. And when the world went digital, so did the library. Peter spends much of any work day reading on screen, and as a result, enjoys paper books after hours. For the curious, his reach is broad: he's reading one book about medicine and another about George Carlin.

Over the last 10 years, most of his tenure in Belmont has been focused on creating the new library. His vision required complete collaboration with the town from the start. Fundamental questions—should it be a renovation? an addition? an entirely new building?—led to hundreds of meetings. "We put in the effort, and let Belmont decide what this project should be, down to every square foot," he says. Community fundraising was imperative, too, and eventually Belmont residents

donated \$5 million out of the projected \$39 million cost. "I've never worked in a community so engaged and involved in its own success," he says.

This is also a library director whose photographed left arm was donated to a fund-raising calendar, the "Tattooed Youth Librarians of Massachusetts."

With shovels in the dirt now, Peter's job has shifted. He spends a lot of time "staring at spreadsheets," ensuring the new building comes in on budget and on time. He also manages the complex day-to-day requirements of three small, separated library spaces that miraculously compensate for one former 30,000 foot space. There is developing next year's budget, and—of course—meetings ("a LOT of meetings").

This is a library director who treasures his colleagues, including the current chair of the board of trustees ("I'm a product of her leadership—when we met, I was a ball of clay") and the assistant library director ("My partner in all things, she's the future"). Treasuring others comes with a self-appraisal that is modest. "My skill is in identifying people smarter than me to hire."

This is also a library director whose photographed left arm was donated to a fund-raising calendar, the "Tattooed Youth Librarians of Massachusetts." The arm is inked with portraits of wise men from the films of Peter's youth: Yoda, Mr. Miyagi, even Willy Wonka. They're variants on father figures, and also throwbacks to his film review site, The Big Brown Chair. He founded it "back when everyone had a blog." The reviews were uniformly adoring, and though they did not bring him fame, they did bring him to the attention of a fellow reviewer who became his wife.

The era of wooden card catalogs with squeaking drawers is gone. So are the days when the sound of a stamp on a book meant its ownership was guaranteed for the next two weeks. But the days of the library are not. "For the most part, people don't know who I am," the director says. "But I'm here to make them fall in love with libraries."

Elissa Ely is a community psychiatrist.



Peter Struzziero.

COURTESY OF PETER STRUZZIERO

Belmont's Student Bikers Cut School Traffic

Test and photos by David Chase

This fall, we solved a school crowding problem by moving two grades from the middle school to the new combined middle and high school. However, with almost 50% more students arriving every morning, this move aggravated an already-bad traffic problem on Concord Avenue.

The new combined school has 2,128 students. If each one of them traveled in a car through the single-lane Goden Street entrance, the line would take over an hour to clear.

Fortunately, that doesn't happen; many students carpool, many walk, many get dropped off a short distance from the high school and walk

the remainder, avoiding (and not worsening) the backups on Concord. Fifteen percent (324) take the bus. And because the new high school and middle school have far more and much better bike racks than they did in the past, almost 14% (290, on one day's count) ride a bike or use a scooter.

The combined school has several kinds of racks. The best ones are upright "staples" anchored in concrete, and sheltered from the weather, close to the building entrances. These are very popular. The racks near the high school entrance were overwhelmed with bicycles, both locked and unlocked; I counted 109 bikes and scooters parked on or around just these racks (below).

Some racks use an old inferior design that is more difficult for secure locking and use space less efficiently. They're better than no rack, but clearly less useful and less popular than the staples just past them.

The middle school, with fewer (and younger) students, has sheltered racks that are all in use, but generally not as crowded as the high school racks.



Racks further from the entrance (and unprotected from the weather) were not nearly as heavily used (below).



Shelter and proximity make the old racks worth the trouble.



A study conducted in the fall of 2017 counted about 100 students out of 1,294 commuting by bicycle. If bicycle use had scaled with increased school size, we would see (about) 165 students biking. Instead, we see another 75% more than that.

Installing a large number of convenient, sheltered bike racks of good quality turned out to be a good choice. It will be interesting to see how well these racks are used during the winter. Will the shelter and proximity and weather are good enough to keep kids biking to school?

This survey also suggests that, when the first phase of the Belmont Community Path and the tunnel connecting to the Winn Brook neighborhood are complete, we'll need more racks and perhaps stand-alone shelters for some of the currently exposed bike parking. All the best ones are full already.

If we don't like traffic, we should do what we can to make the alternatives easy and inviting.

David Chase is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Transportation at BMHS

This is the first year of the combined middle and high schools in Belmont, and every day, almost 50% more students now arrive and depart than before.

Total enrollment: Belmont High and Middle Schools combined have $1,462 + 666 = 2,128$ students

You can read more about Belmont High School traffic counts by mode from 2017—before the schools were combined—at bit.ly/BCF-School-Counts.

From that study:

Bikes: 158 students + 6 teachers and staff.
 Walking: 250 walking
 Cars: 750-800 cars entered campus daily, with more than 1,600 vehicles using Concord Avenue during AM peak traffic hour
 Buses: 138

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor;

On June 26, Belmont Town Meeting approved the amended Traffic Monitoring and Mitigation Agreement between Belmont and McLean Hospital. Part of the agreement is to improve the intersection of McLean Drive and Mill Street. The plan is to install adaptive traffic signals at the intersection that use a camera and software to control the lights based on what is needed on a moment-by-moment basis.

In 2017, a high school student who needed community service credits and I spent the summer counting cars to estimate the cut-through traffic in Belmont during the morning rush. We did good work. I claim that I am an expert on Belmont traffic.

My intuition is that if McLean land could be used for the McLean Drive and Mill Street intersection, traffic flow could be improved more than adaptive lights alone could do.

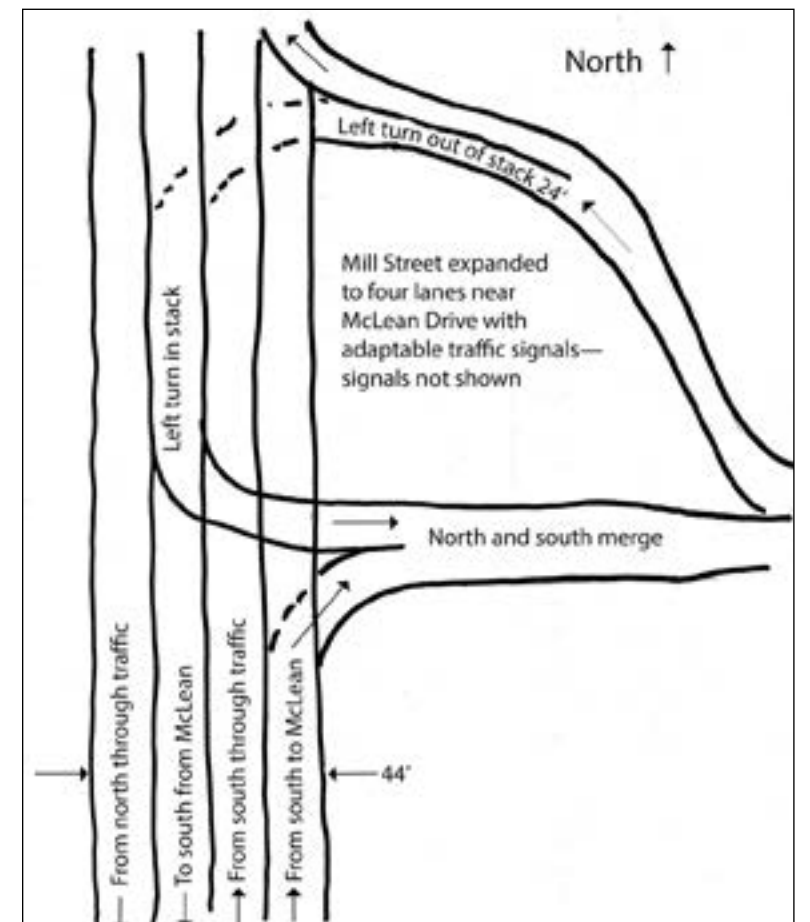
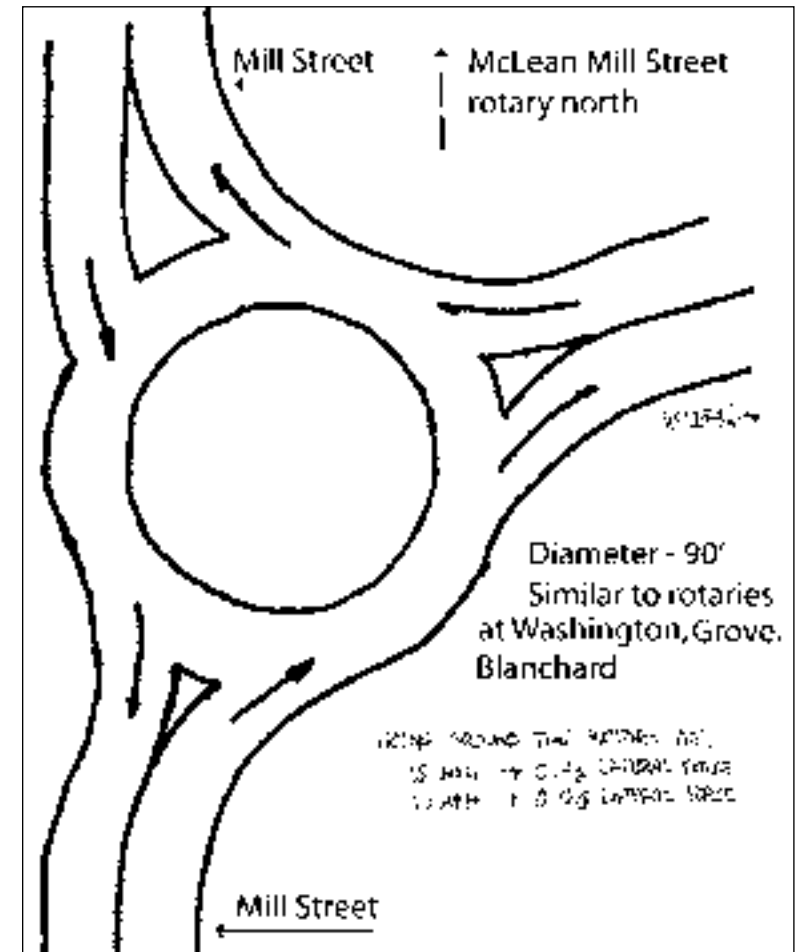
Attached are two sketches of what might be done with more land—that is, more McLean real estate—to improve traffic flow. The sketches show how much land might work.

If McLean has no interest in using McLean land for such improvements, then I am finished with this project. If McLean has possible interest in using McLean land for traffic flow improvements, then we should meet at the intersection and talk briefly.

If there is some interest in seeing if my intuition is appropriate, I will recruit a high school student and we will take data by video filming an hour or so of intersection traffic during rush hour. Then the student and I will evaluate what works. If we are confident in our analysis and can convince both Belmont and McLean that using McLean land has merit, then we can make further decisions.

The Belmont Select Board and Town Engineer Glenn Clancy are aware of my interest in improving traffic flow at the intersection. Glenn Clancy can affirm that I can legitimately claim to be an amateur expert in Belmont traffic.

Sumner Brown is a director of the Belmont Citizens Forum and a Town Meeting member.



Belmont Serves Subdues Center Knotweed

On October 14, stalwart Belmont Serves volunteers—working with Belmont Conservation Volunteers—took shovels and snips in hand to clear a massive Japanese knotweed infestation on town-owned land abutting the railroad tracks, the site of the future community path. Thank you to everyone who pitched in.



JEFFREY NORTH

JEFFREY NORTH



JEFFREY NORTH



RADHA IYENGAR

BCF Community Service Opportunity

I hope to recruit a high school student to work with me on a Belmont traffic project for community service. The project will use the rotary at the intersection of Grove, Blanchard and Washington Streets to estimate the effectiveness of similar rotaries at the entrance to McLean Hospital at Mill Street, and at the intersection of Concord Avenue and Common Street at Belmont Center.

I am a retired electrical engineer with an advanced degree from MIT. I did a traffic study in 2017 with a high school student to estimate Belmont's cut-through traffic during the morning rush hour.

Here are some parts of the project, which should total about 40 hours:

- Observe the Grove Street rotary
- Collect video traffic data at McLean Hospital and Belmont Center
- Predict what rotaries would do for traffic at McLean and Belmont Center
- Meet with Glenn Clancy, Belmont town engineer, with me
- Prepare manuscripts for the Belmont Citizens Forum newsletter

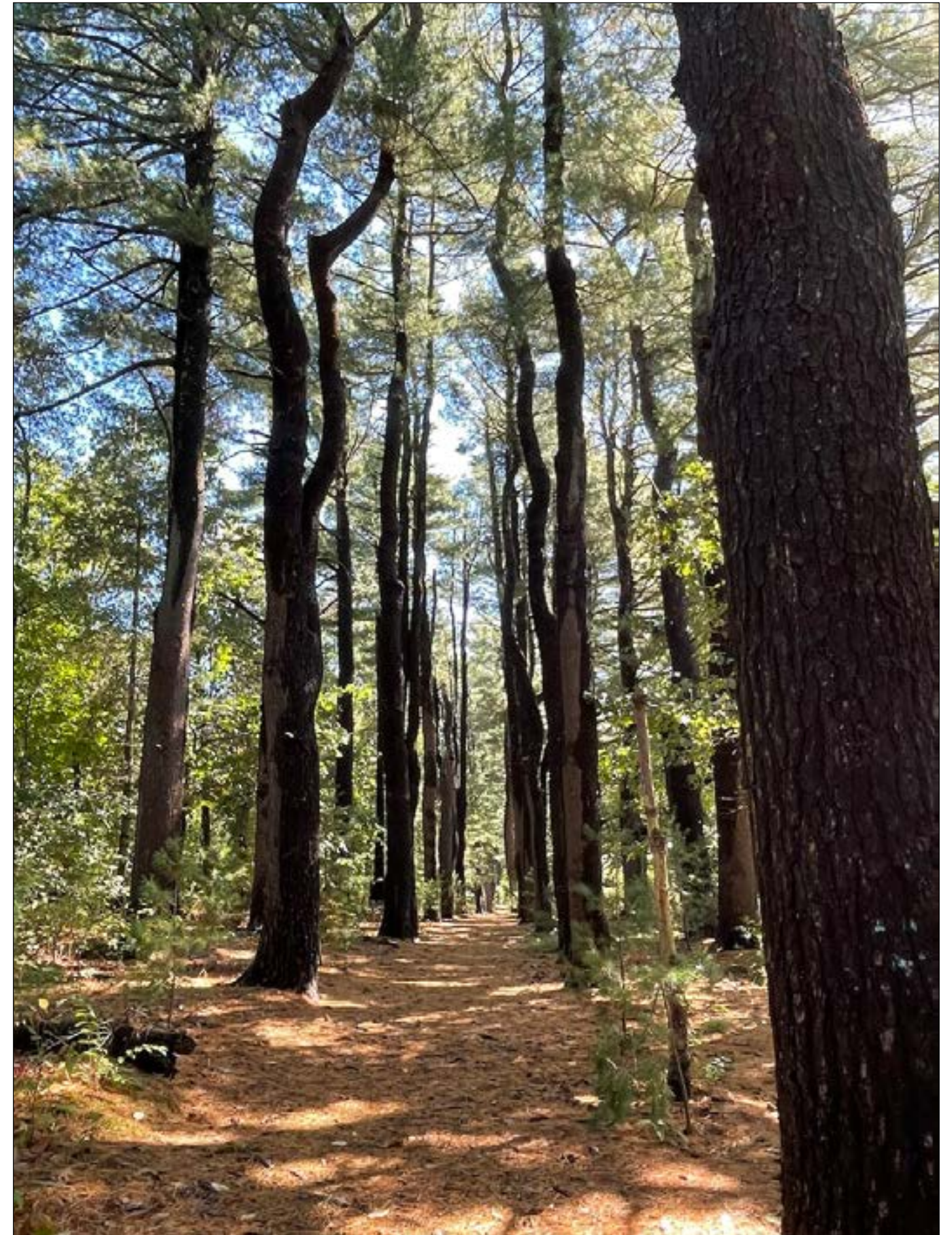
There is no one ideal student for this project. If the student delights in solving physical puzzles, or explaining ideas, great. If a student has a best friend who could make a great team, that is possible.

To apply, contact Sumner Brown, 617-484-1149, sumner3144@gmail.com.

Lone Tree Hill Displays Autumn Glory

Photos by Jeffrey North

Lone Tree Hill is a popular spot for a springtime stroll—but Belmont’s open space offers fall fascination as well. From asters to mountain mint, the site’s native plants put on a colorful autumn show.



Belmont's Brumal Birds Will Soon Abound

By Fred Bouchard. Photographs by Shawn Carey.

We've changed tactics for getting familiar with our bird buddies of the brumal (pre-vernal, i.e., winter) season. We'll pair like with like—woodpeckers, raptors, songsters, and feeder favorites. For more information, research any species by visiting ebird.org.

Downy Woodpecker / Red-bellied Woodpecker

Woodies are mostly non-migratory. While flickers and sapsuckers head South, the rest abide with us—quite vocally—year-round; in leafless months we get to see them better. Of the five remaining, three mainly stay in forested areas: the mid-sized Hairy, the majestic Pileated (“Woody”) and the rare Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Our likelier winter peckers flit between deciduous tree trunks just about anywhere, seeking grubs in bark crevices, or boring holes for a nut stash or nest. The smaller (6½”) Downy, a backyard and feeder regular, favors suet and oily seeds like sunflower seeds. It has black/white wings and white breast; males sport a red crown spot. Its cry is a single acute “pik!”, its call a quick, descending half-dozen “pik!”s.

Rare in New England until the 1990s, Red-bellied emigrated swiftly from southern hardwood lands, and are now permanent, vociferous residents. As big (9”) and bulkier than the Hairy, they're more noisy, aggressive, and gregarious. Their trilling “churr” and raucous “chaff-chaff!” carry far through woodlot, yard, and wetland. Its name is a misnomer: their bellies are buffy-pink, and the red is limited to males' crown and nape and females' cowls.



Downy Woodpecker.

Black-capped Chickadee / Carolina Wren

When it comes to picking state birds, our fellow countrymen tend to favor the obvious: seven states chose Northern Cardinal, six Western Meadowlark, and five Northern Mockingbird. Only we Bay Staters named Black-capped Chickadee as our official avian mascot; Maine just chose “chickadee”, tacitly including the rare northern Boreal Chickadee.

It's easy to see why: they're “smaht,” inquisitive, gregarious, and darn cute in their black hourglass mask over gray and white. Flitting in small packs often at eye level, they dee-dee-dee incessantly, patrol yards, peck at feeders, puzzle out buds, nest in knotholes, even perch (albeit warily) on your palm for a seed. As woodland town criers, chickadees (there are seven regional species nationwide) lead other small birds in their wake to “out” and annoy avian antagonists, from jay to owl. Come spring, they'll sing their sweet wistful two-note song.



Black-capped Chickadee.



Carolina Wren.

Another captivating personality—and recent Dixieland emigré—is the Carolina Wren. Chunkier, with rustier barring than our homegrown, migratory House Wren, Carolinas sport a wicked white supercilium (eyebrow) and shout wild ringing triplets twee-dle-dum!, with trills and raucous chatter. You'll hear them first—they'll roust you before dawn! Both wrens may inhabit nest-boxes, but Carolinas have endured through milder winters. Veteran birder and statistician Bob Stymeist reports, “On the Greater Boston Christmas Count 40 years ago, a highlight was the sighting of a single Carolina Wren; on 2023's CBC, we had an all-time

high of 219!” Compiler Stymeist adds, “Belmont section recorded 19.”

Red-tailed Hawk / Bald Eagle

Red-tails stand out hands down as New England's commonest diurnal raptor. We see these robust buteos roost in trees, unconcernedly baring their pale streaky breasts, and look you right in the eye. Circling in pairs in fair weather, hunting or sparring, they veer to show off their red-topped rumps; yes, they even drop fearlessly into our yards to snag a laggard squirrel. Their call, one we hear in film and TV for all raptors, is a downward hissing keeerrrrr! (Blue Jays imitate it flawlessly.) Another diurnal hawk we're less likely to spot in winter is the sleeker, streakier Cooper's Hawk, an accipiter agile enough to nail a bunny. Dog walker advisory: keep a tight, watchful leash on your toy poodles.

Our grand national bird has greatly increased in number since the prohibition of DDT in the 1970s, though those gains have been somewhat undercut by the recent onslaughts of other pesticides and avian flu. The local presence of Bald Eagles rises notably between late fall

and early spring: they fish, roost, and breed at Spy Pond and the Mystic Lakes, where they are frequent—utterly majestic—flyovers. Their calls are surprisingly high-pitched mewls and whinnies. I spotted two brown juveniles teeter, low and stealthy, over the the Fitchburg Cutoff bike path between Brighton Street and Alewife and Blair Pond last April.

You're not likely to confuse these awe-inspiring birds of prey if you keep respective measurements and proportions in mind. Red-tails average a 20-inch body and 50-inch wingspan; Bald Eagles run a whopping 30 inches and 80 inches. Possibly



SHAWN CAREY

Bald Eagle.

more telling are silhouettes: Red-tails have short heads and long (often reddish) tails; Bald Eagles have large heads and short tails (both white in adults).

Dark-eyed Junco / Mourning Dove

Juncos are confusing by name (Spanish for wetland reed) and complex in phylogeny, with many subspecies. Dark-eyed Juncos, America's most abundant forest birds, are readily identifiable as the Northeast's large (6+ inches), dark winter sparrow, with neat if somber gray plumage, pink bill and legs, white tummy, and a parting giveaway: white flashes in the tail. They arrive in October, depart in April, and summer north and west of the Berkshires, preferring conifers and forest edges. They happily forage beneath feeders, calling a plosive "tzip!", buzzy "zeet!", and tinkling titters in a flock.



Dark-eyed Junco.

Mourning Doves look and act differently from their urban cousins, the robust gray-and-white Rock Pigeons. A soft scaly beige with dark spots, doves' flight profile is svelte and long-tailed, with quick, whistling wing-beats. Widespread throughout America, they range in the East from Quebec to the Caribbean, favoring farm fields and suburban haunts. They roost and coo sociably (mournfully?) along wires, peer at you from rooftops, and gather in small winter flocks in parkland copses. They'll surprise you when they explode from a ground covey with a loud, rapid whistling of their wings. Unrelated and dissimilar passerines, Juncos and "MoDos" share a few traits: foraging under feeders, a gregarious nature, white tail feathers, and a truly continental range.

Fred Bouchard is on the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter Committee and is a semicentennial member of the Brookline Bird Club. Shawn Carey is a globetrotting avian photographer and videographer whose work has graced all four of the newsletter's bird essays. View more of his work at migrationproductions.com.



Red Tailed Hawk.

Thank you to our contributors

WRITERS
 Fred Bouchard • David Chase • Thayer Donham
 • Elissa Ely • Chris Ryan • Vincent Stanton, Jr. • Taylor Yates

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS
 Shawn Carey • David Chase • Jeffrey North • Radha Iyengar • Vincent Staton, Jr.

COPY EDITORS
 Sue Bass • Fred Bouchard • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE
 Sue Bass • Fred Bouchard • Evanthia Malliris • Vincent Stanton, Jr.

MAILING MAESTRO • Ken Stalberg

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