



Belmont Citizens Forum

Vision for a Better Belmont: Julie Wu

This article is the seventh installment in a series of interviews with Belmont leaders about their vision for Belmont's future. Jeffrey North conducted this interview. It has been edited for length and clarity. – Ed.

Julie Wu is president of the [Belmont Pan-Asian Coalition](#), co-chair of Belmont's [Diversity Equity and Inclusion Implementation Committee](#), and was a member of the [MBTA Communities Advisory Committee](#). She is also a founder of [Belmont Composts!](#) and a member of the town's Solid Waste and Recycling Committee.

Diversity, as measured by ethnicity, race, language, gender, age, income, disability, and country of origin, has increased in Belmont's population over the last three decades, as indicated in census data (see link below). However, this expanding diversity is not reflected in town civic life, which remains comprised predominantly of older, relatively wealthy white residents.

BCF

The purpose of the Diversity Task Force (DTF), as charged by the Select Board in 2022, was to “suggest ideas to help educate the citizens of Belmont and make it a more welcoming community.” The DTF report contains 68 recommendations presented to the Select Board, including creating an ongoing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Implementation Committee (DEIIC). What is the role of the DEIIC?

Julie Wu

The charge of the DEIIC, a three-year committee, is pretty much limited to creating a plan for the town to implement the DTF recommendations.

The DTF recommendations are comprehensive, wide ranging, and, the DEIIC felt, important for the town to start working on right away. The DEIIC decided, especially since there is no town DEI director and no imminent plan to hire one, that we would like to spend our three years not only making a plan, but also getting a head start on imple-

mentation, despite having no budget. So we went through the recommendations, categorized them in terms of short-term, medium, and long-term feasibility, and have gotten to work seeing what we could do by ourselves, as well as what we could accomplish by talking to the various departments in town, to address what we call “low-hanging fruit”—recommendations that could be implemented relatively quickly and easily, without a need for funding or policy changes.

As for the recommendations that are more long term, our ongoing meetings with the various departments show an effort in most departments to move towards them. While the DTF recommendations were approved by the Select Board, the DEIIC has no particular authority over the other departments in terms of enforcement. We're really just having conversations and talking about what we would all like to see happen, but I believe these conversations do in many cases help move things forward.

BCF

What “low-hanging fruit” has the DEIIC worked on?

Julie Wu

We have talked with the facilities department about making single-occupancy bathrooms in municipal bathrooms gender inclusive. Pretty much everyone agrees with this common-sense measure that should cost little to implement. There's no reason to designate a gender for a single-occupancy restroom. But there are regulations regarding the relative proportion of male and female bathrooms in a municipal building, and unions must apparently be consulted if there is a change, so Director of Facilities David Blazon has told us he will be working on this with the unions.

We are also in the process of sending out a simple survey to businesses to gauge, for example, whether minority business owners are experiencing discrim-

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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. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

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

belmontcitizensforum.org

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ination, and also to see whether business owners have antidiscrimination policies.

A recommendation we felt was very important to immediately address was providing Fair Housing Law training for municipal bodies and employees. This issue was particularly relevant to the discussion of the MBTA Communities law. We wanted to ensure that Town Meeting's discussion would not involve illegal discrimination against protected classes such as, for example, families. Lacking the budget required for real Fair Housing training, we simply notified the town clerk, moderator, Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Town Meeting, etc., of the need for compliance with Fair Housing law and provided a relevant document describing what this meant in terms of the MBTA Communities law. This information was duly circulated prior to the Town Meeting discussion.

The DEIIC has also talked with different departments about making their forms gender inclusive.

BCF

What are some of the DTF's most impactful recommendations? Are those recommendations being implemented?

Julie Wu

Two of the most important recommendations were to create two DEI director positions—one for the town and one for the school district. The town has, for obvious reasons, been unable to come up with funding for a town position, but the school did hire a DEI director. She has moved on, and the school district is in the process of hiring a new one. The DEIIC would like to make sure this position remains funded.

BCF

What are some of the most important areas for improvement for making Belmont a more welcoming community?

Julie Wu

We know from demographic data that the minorities in our community are vastly underrepresented by the town's employees and elected representatives. Per 2020 data, the town is 76% white; the town's municipal employees are 96% white. This disparity is something that Human Resources is absolutely

aware of and taking steps to address.

In the schools, an equity audit and data from the Youth Behavior Risk Surveys have shown serious disparities and mental health issues among our kids who are either of color, LGBTQ+, or (especially) both. The DEI director was hired in part to address those issues. We hope that her replacement will continue to address these serious issues.

We need to collect more data to learn more about how marginalized groups feel in the community at large, and one of the DTF recommendations is to do a town-wide survey. This sounds like a daunting task, but we could accomplish it in an inexpensive way by modeling our survey on those done by neighboring communities and staying mostly digital.

BCF

Are other town departments, committees, and community groups implementing the DTF recommendations? In what ways?

Julie Wu

Many of them are, sometimes of their own accord, which really just goes to show that much of our town is aligned in our goals.

For example, the Housing Trust's goals are pretty much aligned with the DTF recommendations' goals for housing, which include measures to increase housing affordability in Belmont. And the Housing Trust has expressed an interest in working with us on Fair Housing law training to promote compliance not only within our government but also within the community, among landlords and real estate agents.

Human Resources has implemented a multiday DEI training for all employees in the past year, and they have taken active steps to try to diversify their hires. Even if they're not immediately successful,



Julie Wu.

COURTESY OF JULIE WU

they are making the effort, and we're doing our best to support those efforts.

The Police Department had already been interested in leaving the Civil Service before the DTF made its recommendations, and they have since left Civil Service, resulting in an increased overall number and more diverse pool of applicants and hires.

The Board of Health has, of its own accord, been doing its own good work, for example, addressing the effect of opioids on our community. And they are making efforts to reach out to marginalized communities by, for example, translating forms into prevalent languages in Belmont like Spanish and Chinese.

I would note that people do, in general, cite the DTF recommendations (such as our recommen-

dation to continue hybrid meetings), to bolster their arguments in Town Meeting, which means that people value our recommendations, which is heartening.

BCF

The number of Town Meeting members that are from traditionally underrepresented groups is low relative to their percentage of the population (almost 30% according to the 2020 census). The same is likely true for appointed members of town committees. The Belmont Pan-Asian Coalition has held candidate forums and co-sponsored a “How to run for office in Belmont” session. What other measures, for example, by the Select Board, the moderator, current Town Meeting members, or existing Belmont committees, might help Belmont’s governing institutions become more representative of its citizenry?

Julie Wu

Members of the Select Board have attended Belmont Pan-Asian Coalition social events. It would

be a good idea for the moderator, Town Meeting members, and Belmont committees to do the same, both for the Belmont Pan-Asian Coalition events and for the other stakeholder/affinity groups in town.

The stakeholder groups have their own responsibility to encourage their membership and try to break down whatever barriers remain to civic engagement.

Members of the stakeholder groups need to step up! To those who don’t pay attention to our town governance, who leave it to others, I have to ask you to question why you are letting other people speak for you. I invite you to speak up for yourself and your own interests.

BCF

Diversity is being invited to the dance. Inclusion is being asked to dance,” according to noted diversity advocate Verna Myers. I’m not sure who added, “Equity is allowing you to choose the music.” What does Belmont look like if we invite, ask, and allow? And what does the town look like if we don’t—if we continue the status quo?

Julie Wu

DEI is currently being villainized in this country as something radical. It’s not radical. It’s basically about having empathy for people whose life experience differs from yours and acting on that empathy, institutionalizing it, so that everyone is consistently heard and included as equally important. A more empathetic society is better for everyone. And fortunately, I think that kind of society is what most people in Belmont are striving for.

Read the full report, [Recommendations to the Select Board for Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Town of Belmont](#), from the Diversity Task Force at bit.ly/BCF-DEI-report.



[Belmont Pan-Asian Coalition logo](#)

Select Board Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Each year, the Belmont Citizens Forum asks Select Board candidates questions about issues facing our town. This year, Paul Joy and Taylor Yates provided answers. They were limited to 1,000 words.

BCF

About 95% of the property tax levy in Belmont comes from homeowners and 5% from business owners, a ratio that has varied little in decades.

a) Is the development of more business space a realistic solution to Belmont’s financial challenges, with much of the existing commercial space empty or underutilized?

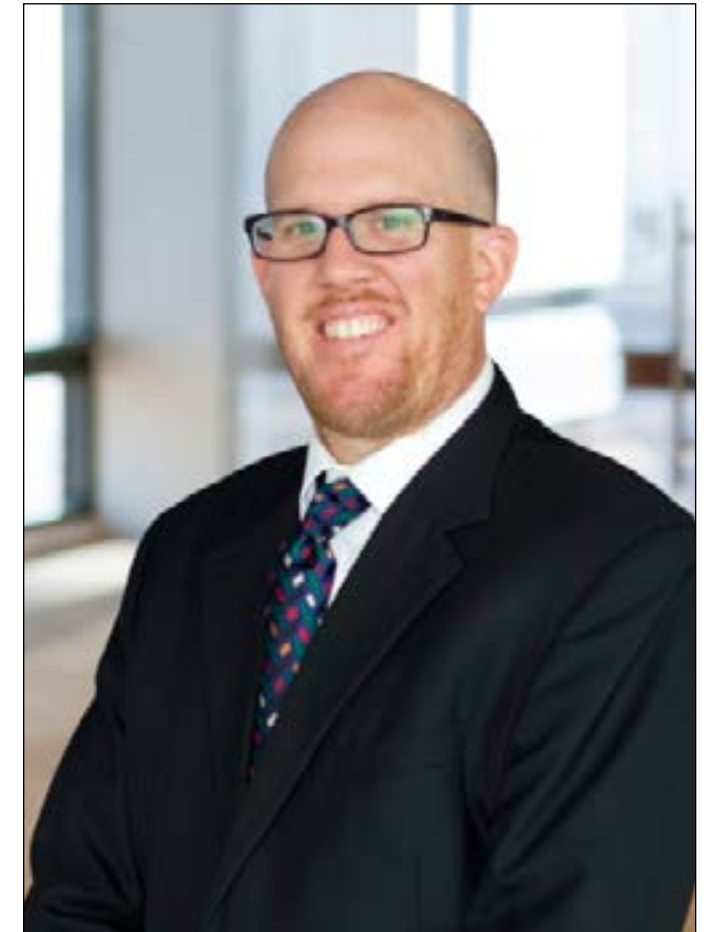
Taylor Yates

There’s meaningful revenue potential in rezoning our business districts, but we must be realistic about the timeline. The initiatives I’ve led—rezoning Belmont Center, rezoning Brighton Street, and crafting a comprehensive development plan—are long-term investments that will take years to fully boost our bottom line. In the meantime, we need to explore a broader range of solutions. Before considering additional overrides or service cuts, we must show taxpayers that we’re proactively seeking new revenue streams.

Paul Joy

Developing additional business space is a realistic solution—if pursued smartly. [Economic planning and real estate consultants] RKG’s post-COVID market analysis [Fiscal Impact Analysis Summary Report, November 2024] shows that leveraging Belmont-specific consumer data can attract diversified businesses to fill vacant spaces. Recent developments, such as the purchase of 60 Leonard Street and Locatelli and Tellier securing new tenants at Belmont Center, prove progress. With the Bradford lawsuit now settled, we must streamline our permitting process, which currently delays projects by three months or more, to support rapid retail, restaurant, and hotel developments. Prioritizing both immediate storefront occupancy and long-term investment is key.

b) The number of empty commercial spaces, both retail and office buildings, convey that Belmont is not



Paul Joy

prospering or attractive. Does the Select Board have a role in enhancing the business climate in Belmont (or is that exclusively up to the landlords)? If so, how would you encourage the revitalization of Belmont’s business districts?

Paul Joy

The Select Board plays a critical role in enhancing Belmont’s business climate by setting policies that attract investment, even as landlords manage their properties. I propose three key initiatives.

First, parking reform—eliminate restrictive off-street parking requirements, create parking benefit districts, and price parking to encourage turnover, using revenue to fund local improvements like curbs, sidewalks, and parklets.

Second, zoning and permitting reform—streamline processes to reduce delays and expand allowable uses (such as hotels) that diversify our commercial districts.

Third, proactive tenant recruitment by hiring an economic development coordinator to leverage our market analysis and secure grants through Massachusetts’s One Stop for Growth.

With focused Select Board leadership, we can grow Belmont’s economy, create jobs, and improve the town’s finances sustainably.

Taylor Yates

In the summer of 2024, the Planning Board commissioned a fiscal and market analysis to shape our 2025 economic development agenda. The study revealed two key insights:

1. Retail vacancy isn’t as dire as it seems—while a few high-profile vacancies persist, our submarket’s overall retail vacancy rate is actually only 2.3%, signalling we are a strong destination for businesses.
2. Beyond retail, Belmont has untapped potential—the town is well-positioned to attract hotels and possibly medical services.

To capitalize on these findings, we can take three strategic actions:

1. Zone for success—ensure our zoning regulations allow for appropriately designed buildings.
2. Streamline permitting—modernize processes to make it easier for businesses to navigate approvals.
3. Integrate housing into retail districts—create built-in foot traffic to support local businesses.

This approach is already in motion through the Belmont Center overlay project, which I’ve led as Planning Board chair. It’s a model for how we can use data-driven strategies, consensus-building, and execution to strengthen Belmont’s economic future. This is the kind of leadership I intend to bring to the Select Board.

c) What scale of development is realistic (e.g., enough to increase commercial tax revenue from 5% to 7, 10, or 15% of the property tax levy)? Can Belmont’s current business districts support that level of growth?

Taylor Yates

Yes, I believe Belmont can achieve a 10% commercial tax base—it will take hard work, time, and a bit of luck, but it’s a goal worth striving for. That said, we can strengthen town finances even faster by taking a broader approach.

For example, senior housing is not only a pressing community need but also a thriving real estate sector and a fiscal win for the town. While commercial real estate remains the backbone of a strong financial future, it’s just one tool in our toolbox. Expanding our vision to include strategic development opportunities will put Belmont on a more sustainable path forward.

Paul Joy

To increase Belmont’s commercial tax base from 5% to a more realistic 7.5% by 2050, we would

need to add approximately 1 million square feet of new commercial space (35,000 to 45,000 sq ft per year). This kind of growth is achievable through incremental densification, such as targeting underutilized spaces and increasing height limits, which can be facilitated by zoning and permitting reforms. RKG’s Fiscal Impact Analysis assumes no residential growth, which is unrealistic given our housing needs and the regional housing crisis. However, by focusing on eliminating unnecessary parking requirements and promoting the development of space-efficient retail, office, and hotel uses, Belmont can strike a balance between residential and commercial growth.

Reaching a 7% to 8% share of the property tax levy is realistic (see table on p.6), but requires strategic action, including thoughtful zoning and an efficient permitting process to drive the needed commercial development. Ultimately, Belmont’s commercial growth must complement its housing development to create a vibrant, well-balanced community.

d) What outcome should the Select Board seek at the Purecoat / Crate Escape site? Can that property make a significant net revenue contribution?

Paul Joy

Focus must be entirely on the Brighton/ Blanchard corridor—specifically the 2.4-acre Purecoat/Crate Escape site and nearby 15-acre Hill Estates. This area offers a clear opportunity to boost Belmont’s housing and economic base while achieving a sustainable 7% to 8% commercial tax base. Transforming it into a vibrant, mixed-use hub will increase tax revenue, create hundreds of jobs, and help resolve issues like traffic congestion, aging infrastructure, and climate resilience. Environmental remediation at Purecoat is essential for safe, long-term development. Building on lessons from previous zoning debates, we must act decisively this year to set a new standard for sustainable, community-focused growth immediately.

Taylor Yates

The most likely outcome is a mixed-use residential building, and our goal should be to maximize its financial benefits for the town. That means expanding commercial square footage and



Taylor Yates

allowing for a diverse mix of housing to create a vibrant, revenue-generating development. When done right, this redevelopment can be a major financial boost for Belmont and a transformative improvement for the Brighton Street neighborhood.

BCF

As Belmont faces what retiring Select Board member Roy Epstein once called “fiscal Armageddon,” what is the right balance between funding the schools, funding central functions of town government, and funding “elective” programs and services (e.g. library hours and programs, Senior Center services, recreational programs)?

Taylor Yates

As a father of three, I am a strong supporter of our schools and the future of Belmont’s students. One of my first contributions to town government was chairing the Yes for Appointed Treasurer campaign, because I believe professional financial management ensures every taxpayer dollar is used wisely.

I joined the Planning Board—and am now running for Select Board—because I see an opportunity to “grow the pie.” By expanding Belmont’s commercial tax base, we can generate more revenue for our schools and essential town services,

Average C&I Growth Rate	Total New C&I SQFT (k sqft)	Total New C&I Assessed Value (\$M)	% C&I	C&I SQFT Annual Increase (k sqft)	C&I Assessed Value Increase (per YR) (\$M)
0.25%	84k	\$ 29M	4.9%	3.3k	\$ 1.1M
0.5%	174k	\$ 61M	5.2%	7k	\$ 2.4M
1%	372k	\$ 130M	5.7%	15k	\$ 5.2M
2%	859k	\$ 301M	7.0%	34k	\$ 12.0M
2.50%	1,155k	\$ 404M	7.8%	46k	\$ 16.1M
3.50%	1,878k	\$ 657M	9.6%	75k	\$ 26.3M
3.70%	2,047k	\$ 716M	10.0%	82k	\$ 28.7M
5.60%	4,172k	\$ 1,461M	14.6%	167k	\$ 58.4M

Table of commercial and industrial (C&I) growth provided by Paul Joy.

reducing the pressure on residential taxpayers while strengthening our community for generations to come.

Paul Joy

Belmont's fiscal challenges demand a balanced approach that aligns data, logic, and outcomes. Our limited tax base—combined with rising costs in education, core town functions, and citizen services—demands financial discipline. To stimulate growth, we must focus on parking reforms, strategic rezoning along key corridors (including Concord Avenue, Brighton/Blanchard, the Trapelo Corridor, and South Pleasant Street), and modernizing operations through digital government tools.

These measures will drive financially prudent growth, unlocking new revenue streams without overburdening residents. By embracing these practical strategies, we ensure that essential services receive full funding while elective programs benefit from new revenue. This approach rejects inflammatory rhetoric like “fiscal Armageddon” in favor of sustainable, smart investments that secure Belmont's long-term future.

BCF

What priority do you assign to improving pedestrian and bicyclist safety, limiting traffic, protecting open space, and preserving historic buildings? If those are priorities, what specific measures will you support to improve the status quo?

Paul Joy

Ensuring street safety is the highest priority. I will upgrade critical crosswalks near schools using high-visibility markings and flashing signals, funded through Safe Streets to Schools and MassWorks grants, and deploy real-time traffic monitoring to ease congestion in bottleneck areas. For open spaces, I support multiuse green area investments and conservation easements financed in part by parking benefit district revenues. Historic preservation will focus on adaptive reuse to retain Belmont's heritage while ensuring functionality. This balanced, funded approach enhances safety, improves traffic flow, and preserves our historic character for all residents.

Taylor Yates

1. Protecting open space and historic buildings is near and dear to my heart. These are the things that define Belmont's character and make our town as livable as it is. As we rezone key areas, I will stand up for open space and historic preservation so that development preserves and enhances our town's historic character, open spaces, and our quality of life
2. Pedestrian and bicyclist safety are key concerns for me. I supported the Pleasant Street crosswalk and continue to support traffic calming measures throughout our town.
3. Traffic will always be a challenge in Belmont—we're a natural cut-through town due to our proximity to major job hubs like Cambridge and Watertown. But we don't have to just accept congestion as a given. I support a strong partnership between the Traffic Advisory Committee and the Planning Board to rethink key streets, improve traffic flow, and implement smart solutions that ease rush-hour bottlenecks while calming out-of-town traffic. With thoughtful planning, we can strike a balance between mobility and livability.

BCF

According to the latest EPA data (circa 2022), Belmont's streams are the dirtiest in the Mystic River Watershed, grading D (Winn Brook) and D+ (Little River). What priority do you assign to cleaning up Belmont's streams? Do you have any ideas for improving or accelerating Belmont's current plans to address the problem of sewage seeping into our stormwater system?

Taylor Yates

Belmont must stay on track with critical infrastructure upgrades—replacing aging sewer lines, eliminating combined sewer and stormwater pipes, and completing the capping of the old incinerator site. These projects aren't just maintenance; they're essential investments in cleaner water, a healthier environment, and a more resilient community.

Paul Joy

Cleaning up Belmont's streams is a top priority to protect public health, ecosystems, and property values. We must address sewage leaks from aging

infrastructure and illicit connections by deploying advanced robotic inspection tools like SewerAI to pinpoint problems. Funding should come from federal and state sources, including the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and the new stormwater enterprise fund can finance vital upgrades and promote green infrastructure such as rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavements.

BCF

Describe how the town can make progress towards implementation of the decarbonization plan adopted by Town Meeting, green infrastructure projects, the community path, and the town's affordable housing goals.

Paul Joy

Belmont should expand its Energy Committee into a Comprehensive Sustainability and Energy Committee to integrate decarbonization, green infrastructure, and energy efficiency. The committee will advise on rooftop solar, battery storage, microgrids, and pursue grants for decarbonizing municipal buildings and electrifying heating systems. Leveraging statewide funding and committee expertise, Belmont can progress its decarbonization plan, green infrastructure projects, community path, and affordable housing goals, driving long-term environmental and economic benefits for our community.

Taylor Yates

I support getting the community path built through Belmont to remove cars and improve public health. I will work with the Municipal Light Board to ensure that Belmont's energy comes from non-carbon sources and that heat pump and EV programs can be expanded.

I support the Housing Authority in its efforts to rebuild Sherman Gardens and Belmont Village. We took an important step forward by including these properties in the MBTA Communities Act, and I look forward to the advancement of these redevelopments.

BCF

Is it time for a new comprehensive plan

for Belmont, updating the 2010 plan? (The Planning Board has issued an RFP for consulting services to develop such a plan.) How should the town be implementing the decarbonization plan adopted by Town Meeting, green infrastructure projects, the community path, and the town's affordable housing goals?

Taylor Yates

I have been advocating for updating the 10-year comprehensive plan since 2019. As chair of the Planning Board, putting one on the 2025 agenda was one of my first acts. A comprehensive plan brings together the various functions of town government to tackle things like economic development, climate change, the community path, and affordable housing. It is the foundation for a collaborative effort by town government to implement a vision for a better Belmont.

Paul Joy

Belmont's 2010 plan is outdated. We need a modern, integrated comprehensive plan that aligns decarbonization, green infrastructure, the community path, and housing affordability. This new strategy should accelerate renewable energy adoption, energy-efficient building practices, and sustainable growth. We must secure fair, permanent easement agreements for the community path, including at Belmont Center. Streamlining permitting and modernizing development practices—such as eliminating parking minimums—will enable Belmont to meet today's needs while anticipating future challenges.



TIM TODREAS

Belmont Will Create New Comprehensive Plan

By Chris Ryan and Taylor Yates

A common concern we hear from Belmontians is that town government seems to be reacting to events, rather than planning ahead. That may or may not be true, but what is absolutely true is that Belmont lacks an important tool to let it do much more: a 10-year comprehensive plan.

A comprehensive plan is a common tool that communities across the country use to establish a vision for the future and set goals and establish action items to achieve that vision. Like a corporate strategy document, it ties together the functions of government and our myriad priorities into a 10-year road map. That road map gives us the foundation we need to take the big, multiyear steps necessary to solve our hardest problems. It is the baseline that enables us to deal with unexpected events, like pandemics and new state laws, without derailing our own priorities.

That road map gives us the foundation we need to take the big, multiyear steps necessary to solve our hardest problems.

Belmont is getting ready to kick off the development of a new comprehensive plan this spring once a committee is formed by the Select Board and sworn in. This is the first plan developed by Belmont since the [2010 Master Plan](#) effort and could be the first comprehensive plan that Belmont actually adopts and implements since [1963](#).

The 1963 plan was focused on land use, transportation, and community facilities. Some key features of the 1963 plan were relocating Town Hall and the town center fire station, improving business districts, introducing various kinds of apartment development, and protecting single-family zoning districts.

The 2010 plan was the most recent modern comprehensive planning process. It involved a Plan Committee, a Technical Committee, and an extensive working group, both advised by professional planning consultants. It included six key topic areas of concentration:

- Commercial development
- Housing
- Historic preservation
- Open space and greenbelt connections
- Transportation and energy
- Public facilities and finance

That plan used a sustainability approach that considered the social, economic, and environmental legs of sustainability and their intersection. It was not adopted by Town Meeting, despite the fact that it was robust and detailed.

The new plan will be developed by the consulting firm VHB and include a committee and a group of engagement envoys to assist in conducting community outreach to maximize diverse and deep public participation. This plan will be composed of nine critical domains.

1. Land use and urban design
2. Transportation and mobility
3. Housing
4. Economic development
5. Community facilities and services
6. Arts and culture
7. Community cohesion and interaction
8. Physical environment and climate, and
9. Open space and recreation

The plan encourages authentic public engagement and participation, accountable implementation, consistent content, and coordination and connectivity among the nine domains.

The plan will include a set of guiding principles and processes to ensure that best practices are followed. They include:

1. Livable built environment
2. Harmony with nature
3. Strong and resilient economy
4. Interwoven equity

5. Healthy community
6. Responsible regionalism
7. Sustainability and climate resiliency, and
8. Transparency

The planning process began in January 2025, when the consultants began developing a community profile, and will span 17 months. In February, the project formally kicked off with a Plan Committee meeting, interviews with key stakeholders, a testing of future scenarios for the town, the development of the community engagement plan, and the creation of a branding and marketing strategy.

The planning process from start to finish will include three public meetings, the first tentatively scheduled for March 2025, and also include a number of committee meetings, roundtables, pop-up meetings, and listening sessions. The process is expected to conclude in May 2026 with a final plan for adoption.

We want to emphasize that the public is encouraged to follow the process and participate in one of many ways, including responding to a survey, attending public meetings, and engaging in the

various sessions noted above. The project's progress can be followed by visiting the project website at bit.ly/BCF-Plan

The Planning Board anticipates that a number of zoning recommendations will emanate from the plan including the possibility of a complete zoning bylaw revision to bring Belmont's land use regulations up to date and facilitate strategic development goals. The plan will include a new open space and recreation plan, a requirement for nearly all Massachusetts cities and towns.

Citizen participation will be crucial to the development of a robust and forward-thinking plan that is as inclusive as possible. If you have any questions, you are encouraged to reach out to Chris Ryan, comprehensive plan project manager, at cryan@belmont-ma.gov.

Chris Ryan is the town planner and director of the Office of Planning and Building.

Taylor Yates is chair of the Planning Board, chair of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, and a Precinct 2 Town Meeting member.

Write for the BCF Newsletter!

The BCF is looking for writers at all experience levels and all ages.

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.

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- preserve Belmont's natural and historical resources,
- limit traffic growth, and
- enhance pedestrian safety.

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Town Meeting to Vote on Rodenticide Article

Belmont Will Consider Home Rule Petition

At the upcoming May Town Meeting, members will vote on a warrant article requesting that the Select Board file a Home Rule Petition with the Massachusetts Legislature. This petition would grant Belmont the authority to prohibit or restrict the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) within town limits. Once the authorization has been granted, a bylaw or other rodenticide restrictions will be presented to future sessions of Town Meeting for approval.

SGARs are potent rodenticides that disrupt blood clotting, causing prolonged internal bleeding in rodents. However, these poisons also have unintended and harmful effects on Belmont's

wildlife. Predators such as hawks, owls, eagles, and foxes that consume poisoned rodents frequently suffer secondary poisoning, leading to illness and death. Studies have shown that SGARs are a major threat to raptor populations, weakening natural rodent control efforts (healthy raptors will eat a great number of rodents) and disrupting local ecosystems.

Currently, Massachusetts law preempts municipalities from regulating pesticides, meaning that Belmont cannot enact its own restrictions on SGAR use. By passing this warrant article, the town would seek special legislation to grant it the authority to implement local regulations on these toxic chemicals.

If the warrant article passes at the Town Meeting, the Home Rule Petition would then require approval from the Massachusetts Legislature before becoming law. The resulting law would allow but not oblige Belmont to adopt its own new rules and restrictions on the use of SGARs.

Belmont has already joined other communities that are advocating for safer, more sustainable pest control methods and adopting sustainable, environmentally responsible pest control measures. Integrated Pest Management techniques—such as habitat modification, proper waste management, and the use of non-toxic deterrents—offer effective alternatives to chemical rodenticides while protecting wildlife and public health.

No ban, bylaw, or other codified rodenticide restrictions are being requested from Town Meeting at this time.

Residents concerned about SGARs' impact on Belmont's environment and biodiversity are encouraged to support this initiative. For more information on efforts in Belmont, including ways to reduce rodent problems without harming wildlife, visit Save Belmont Wildlife on the Sustainable Belmont website:

www.sustainablebelmont.net/save-belmont-raptors/

And for more information including initiatives across Massachusetts, see the Campaign to Rescue Raptors on the MA Audubon website:

www.massaudubon.org/take-action/advocate/rescue-raptors

Profiles in Belmont: Pat Brusch

By Elissa Ely

If you want to reach Pat Brusch, here's a recommendation: do not text her. Call on the landline, which is the only phone she will answer. If you decide to email her, there's no need to type fast. Get a cup of coffee and a good meal, because it may take some time to hear back. "I'm stuck in the 50s," she explains. "I am a horror with electronics. The non-electronic paper world is my world." This is someone who cheerfully admits she once contacted the publishers of *Computers for Dummies* because the book hadn't explained what "a click" meant.

Yet, volunteering in Belmont for more than four decades, she is also proof that the electronic horror can be an invaluable community gift. Pat has been a Town Meeting member since about 1986, a past president of Friends of Belmont Library Board, past member of League of Women Voters and the Mount Auburn Hospital Auxiliary, past chair of the Warrant Committee, and a member of search committees too numerous to name. There were 18 years of weekly attendance at School Committee meetings, and she remains on the board of the philanthropic Belmont Savings Bank Foundation, the Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee, and the Permanent Building Committee (with other involvements most likely left unnoted because of authorial incompetence). She puts to shame the word "useful." "Everybody's devoted to something," she says. "I'm not an outdoor-sy person. I'm not a hiker. I'm a really good observer and a detail person, and I can be annoying as hell."

All this began in Gardner, the factory town where she grew up. Pat's dad was a traditional



Pat Brusch

8-to-5 worker; the family business was furniture. Outside of work, he volunteered with veteran and civic organizations. Her mother, a home economics major, had a precise eye for measurement: girls got half a cup of rice at dinner, boys three-quarters of a cup. She portioned out her volunteerism as well: one day a week in the library, one day in the hospital, lots of church involvement, and immersion in the "College Club" which raised and awarded annual scholarships for senior high girls. Her parents were examples of the possible.

COURTESY OF PAT BRUSCH

A broad movement

As of February 1, 2025, Mass Audubon knows of **21 towns and cities** (including Boston!) that have reduced the use of SGARs on municipal property.

These reductions are sometimes via policy and not codified into bylaw/ordinance. These reductions are not always a ban. Sometimes, the municipality may still be using some SGARs in certain locations but have removed them in other areas.

Mass Audubon knows of **six towns and cities** that have filed (or will soon file) home rule petitions to request authority to restrict SGARs on private property: Newton, Newbury, Orleans, Brookline, Eastham, and Wellfleet. At least six towns and cities are working on passing these home rule petitions this spring: Arlington, Kingston, Lexington, Belmont, Winchester, and Grafton.

To Mass Audubon's knowledge, there are **66 community groups** organizing to reduce the use of SGARs in **towns and cities across the state**.

Source: Mass Audubon Rescue Raptors Toolkit

From the age of preschool, Pat wanted to be a nurse. There were no family relatives in medicine; it was just an inner certainty without explanation. On her parents' insistence, she went to college instead of directly to nursing school. Afterwards, she rose quickly. Within two years, she was head nurse on her unit at New England Medical Center, and then, supervisor. But administration alone was unacceptable to someone who yearned for direct care. "I wanted to carry the bedpans, I wanted to rub the patient's back, and comb their hair." She lasted six months before returning to clinical work in addition to supervising.

For four years, she was a night nurse on the infectious disease floor. This is where she met her husband. She had called the intern in the middle of the night to pronounce a death. "You hated to do it," she said about waking him, "they were so grumpy." They married a few years later, and moved to Belmont in 1978, when she was pregnant with her second child. The move was meant to be. After buying their house, she realized that one of her brothers lived 10 doors away.

Volunteering began pragmatically, because babysitters were available during meetings to care for her children. It started with the League of Women Voters. "Sign me up!" she remembers thinking, "I wanted to do something other than diapers and meals, and someone babysitting my kids was solving my problem. If people needed something done, I did it—things no one else wanted to do: 'Hey, would you like to run the bake sale for the library?'"

She was always a reader. "I read all the time, and I did 50 zillion things for the library." Among them was helping to computerize the Belmont Library in the mid-80's when she was president of the Friends of Library Board—the first department in town to be digitized.

Of course, she was also a mother of children in public school. When Winn Brook Elementary was vying for renovation funds with Chenery and Burbank Schools, Pat found a diplomatic strategy. In collaboration with a Burbank parent, she approached the School Committee, suggesting a way the elementary schools could be helped simultaneously. This led to passing the first debt exclusion in town and to parallel renovation projects. "I LOVED tramping around in my boots

and hard hat at Burbank and Winn Brook," she says.

Rebuilding Chenery Middle School followed. Now, as current chair of the Permanent Building Committee, she could tell you a lot about pipes, nails, and regulations. It suits her. "I'm a life-long learner," she says. "I trained as a nurse, and now I oversee construction projects. A building is a body, and the construction is a healing."

"I trained as a nurse, and now I oversee construction projects. A building is a body, and the construction is a healing."

Requests for her involvement grew. Way back in 1990, Pat was asked to be a "corporator" of Belmont Savings Bank, "a sort of eyes and ears ambassador. I was at it for 20 years, and I still can't tell you what a corporator is." Then, in 2010, Belmont Savings Bank went public. No longer a sleepy local bank, it began to sell and trade stock. One requirement was the creation of an independent foundation that would donate money to the community.

Pat got a call (on her landline). The new CEO was asking for her resume, "which of course, I didn't have." He asked what foundations she belonged to, "which were none." Still, he wanted her to join as the foundation's community member.

"It was a whole new world for me, philanthropy," she says. "Our mission is to be good members of the communities." Her job, with one ear to the ground, is to vet applicants. "I got to be pretty good at ferreting out red flags." The foundation has supported a renovation of Joey's Park, a playground at Butler School, and more recently, multimillion dollar donations to the library and rink.

Though she seems to be everywhere, Pat doesn't drive anymore. Friends from her volunteer worlds, as well as her neighbors, do. Someone calls from Wilson Farm asking what she needs. Someone brings her to the hospital. Someone asks where she has to go.

A network of volunteers, helping the premier volunteer. This is only right.

Elissa Ely is a community psychiatrist.

Amateur Owling: Meet the Eastern Screech Owl

By Fred Bouchard

Owls have pop cred and cool cachet. These regal predators of the dark hours are icons of wisdom and spookiness: secretive, inscrutable, hair-raising. Kids are drawn to their candid, piercing, surprised eyes. They are harbingers of the occult and the unknown.

With feather-soft wingbeats, owls are inaudible in flight, the better to sneak up and snatch unwary prey with razor-sharp talons.

Owls' amazing eyes have huge corneas and pupils. Their retina's plentiful rods are super-sensitive to light and movement though a paucity of cones limits perception of color. Yes, they really can rotate (not spin) their heads witch-like up to 270 degrees. Their off-center ears allow for pinpoint auditory triangulation.

You've probably gawked awestruck at owls on National Geographic and Nature channels, or hung out with ur-naturalist David Attenborough on his owlish explorations, marveling at their slo-mo nocturnal derring-do.

You can meet individuals of New England's few common owl species close up. Rescue birds are housed outdoors at Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm in Lincoln, or you can attend meet-and-greets with professional handlers via Mark and Marcia Wilson's informative website eyesonowls.com.

Owls are usually easier to find on organized bird walks, if the leader has a pre-located quarry in mind and knows nearly precisely where to find it. Check



Eastern Screech Owl

out Brookline Bird Club (BBC) for walks (oftener in winter and spring) to well-known owl haunts: Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Menotomy Park in Arlington, Horn Pond in Woburn, Cold Springs Park in Newton, and Mass Audubon Habitat in Belmont, to name a few.

Owls may seem aloof and secretive, but they're remarkably common in suburban areas, and not especially shy of humans. If you're sharp-eyed and patient, you might spot an owl flitting by at dawn or dusk. If you're inclined to go walkabout after dark,

attune your ears to their various calls—but be sure to leash your toy dogs.

As participants in the Brookline sector of 1990s Greater Boston Christmas Bird Counts, Bob Martell and I would regularly tally a dozen Screech Owls, a Great Horned Owl or two, and an occasional Barred Owl. All by voice, mind you, with few visuals beyond a shadow or two. Occasionally we'd importune (and spook) our quarries by shining a halogen torch into the canopies. These are the big three of urban owls; other species—like scarce and local Short-eared and Long-eared Owls, and cute but elusive Saw-whet Owls—are seldom found outside rural areas.

But how about this: Have the owls come near you – while you're sleeping! It's no dream to be woken up in the middle of a suburban night hearing sharp hoots, eerie whinnies, or hollow grunts. Ambient silence and minimal distractions are key aids. Crack your windows. Filter out midnight cowboys and air traffic. Turn off media, a/c, fans. Sleep lightly. Ignore snoring spouses. To aid the all-seeing owls, and not confuse avian migrants, please extinguish external night lights.

Let's peek at the natural history of Eastern Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*). The Northeast's commonest small (7–10 inches) owl is chunky, neck-less, with pointy ear tufts and yellow eyes. Plumage is either bright rust or gray, bark-streaked for camouflage. Its geographic range covers the Eastern continental United States, excluding Maine. Its song is a descending whinny, its call a petulant, plosive chirrup; juveniles may wheeze. They nest in tree cavities, but often adapt to an ample nest box.

Like most owls, Screech Owls tag a favored tree with whitewash (feces) and strew its base with pellets, the regurgitated fur and bones of their prey, mostly small rodents and birds. Screech Owls, like many predators on urban pests, have become poison victims by preying on rodents targeted by the ubiquitous, now infamous, second generation rodenticide (SGAR) boxes. Read "[Rat Poisons and Wildlife](#)," BCF Newsletter, March/April 2024.

Here are elaborated entries from my recent E-bird reports of Eastern Screech Owl:

1/27/24: I wake with a start. It's pitch black and chilly; digital clock reads 3:45. A damp breeze blows in the bedroom window, followed by a low, featureless trill. It lasts several seconds: no descending whinny. Wait: again. Pause: again. Hmm. Atypical for the

season; screechies usually turn up late summer. Surely not a Saw Whet Owl!

7/31/24: Two soft, brief whinnies waft through the bathroom window while I'm brushing teeth. My earliest previous summer record in a decade was 7/22/23. Is climate change involved? Oh, wait: my neighbors cut down the ancient 60-foot maple behind our garage just two weeks ago. That'll prove a subtle game-shifter for all Winn-Brook birds.

Previous entries back to 2018 include a few annual hearings at night. Sometimes I'd whinny back at them. I was not tempted to get dressed and go out and possibly roust them with a flashlight. That could activate the "needle-in-a-haystack" and another adage: unlike "good" children, screechies are usually heard but not seen. And neither heard nor seen in the vicinity of the larger and equally common Great Horned Owls and Barred Owls, either of which might pluck a screechie as a midnight snack.

My recent Screech Owl sightings were of gray and red individuals residing separately at Mount Auburn Cemetery. The grey (2021-3) lived in a large sugar maple not far from the grounds crew's headquarters. You'd locate his off-kilter (horizontal) knot-hole, and he'd either be IN (dozing or squinting at you) or NOT. The red (2019-21) made its home in a scarlet oak not 200 yards away.

Such birds were often featured starlets on BBC walks. On lucky days, they might be sunning themselves on an open branch. Owls tend to be loners except in breeding season, usually late winter; to my knowledge, no one ever reported whether those two ever met. Another grey thrived for years in a hole above a bench near the one-mile marker on the Fresh Pond loop.

Owl fans may expand their knowledge by watching this taped webinar "Owls of Massachusetts" [expires May 1] by Mass Audubon naturalist Doug Lowry, hosted by Robert Hayes of Tewksbury Public Library: bit.ly/BCF-MA-owls.

Fred Bouchard is a member of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter Committee and is a semi-centennial member of the Brookline Bird Club.

Shawn Carey is a globetrotting nature photographer and videographer whose avian portraits have graced all five of the newsletter's bird essays. View more of his work at migrationproductions.com.

Akebia (Chocolate Vine) Invades Belmont

By Dean Hickman and Leonard Katz

Akebia quinata, also known as chocolate vine, is an evergreen ground cover and climbing vine with compound leaves, typically having five leaflets with notched tips. It is invasive in our area, and has taken over as ground cover and climbed and smothered trees in two forested conservation areas in Belmont: Beaver Brook Reservation, northeast of the upper Mill Pond off Mill Street; and in the Pleasant Street area of Lone Tree Hill, across the brook from the Coal Road Trail, on the hill above



Akebia quinata

the back entrance to the Star Market parking lot.

Akebia quinata seldom flowers this far north, although we have observed this once locally. The flowers are small, purple to red, and fragrant. Its fruit, not yet observed locally, is a large, soft, edible sausage-shaped pod that ripens in late summer to fall. When eaten by wildlife, seed dispersal can extend its range beyond any area of initial introduction.

The plant, which originated in northeast Asia, was introduced as an ornamental in the United

States in 1845. Its leaves and stem are neither consumed by native animals nor vulnerable to native plant diseases. These advantages over native plants allow it to be invasive. And its shade tolerance allows it to invade forested areas.

Control methods

Akebia can be controlled by manual cutting of the vines and removing as much root as possible. For large infestations, using a systemic herbicide such as glyphosate is an option, but as with any toxin, this must be done carefully and selectively, by

cultivation to list it as an invasive plant. However, it seems to us that our observations in Belmont go a considerable way to providing this evidence.

We shared our information in May 2024 with members of the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group, including its chair, who represents the nursery industry which still sells this plant. We have not received a reply as of 1/26/25.

The Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill and Belmont's Conservation Commission have both authorized Belmont Conservation Volunteers to remove *Akebia* from conservation lands. The plant is established at Lone Tree Hill near the base of the Coal Road Trail above Pleasant Street. It is present on both sides of the secondary entrance to the Coal Road Trail that runs from the kiosk toward Star Market and has taken over as ground cover uphill, across the seasonal Junction Brook from the Coal Road Trail.

Stems form a wiry mesh with runners reaching as long as 10 to 20 feet. Stems branch at distinctive nodules which make it easy to identify. The Belmont Conservation Volunteers have been delaying its advance and destructive effects by removing its wiry runners that strangle and smother young saplings and native ground cover. Several volunteers worked at containing this patch of *Akebia* on six weekends in September and October last year, but more work needs to be done.

It is unclear if pulling the *Akebia* will suffice to eradicate this invasion, as the nodules are large in places, and the roots deep, especially close to the Junction Brook. In our view, this behavior is clearly invasive. Supporting our experience, *Akebia* was anointed "Weed of the Week" 20 years ago by the USDA Forest Service and, accord-



Akebia-smothered area near the Coal Road.

ing to their reference guide, it is next on the list to be added to their growing Invasive Plants List along with 15 other species.

Our Hope and Community Opportunity

We hope that with further volunteer effort in 2025, this localized *Akebia* invasion in the most ecologically intact region of Lone Tree Hill will be eradicated without herbicide use, or at the very least contained so that it does not spread.

To help Belmont Conservation Volunteers control *Akebia* and other invasive plants in Belmont's conservation lands, please join our Google group to receive announcements of our restoration events, starting each spring. Learn more at www.sustainablebelmont.net/belmont-conservation-volunteers/

Belmont Conservation Volunteers' first group volunteer opportunity will be Saturday, March 22, at 9:30 AM, rain date March 23. We also list our events in the Belmont Voice calendar. We hope to meet many of you this spring, going after the *Akebia* at Lone Tree Hill first and garlic mustard and winged-knotweed later in the spring.

Dean Hickman and Leonard Katz are leaders of the Belmont Conservation Volunteers.

Buy Rain Barrels to Conserve Water, Environment

By Dean Hickman

I have seven rain barrels, three around a detached garage and four around the house. Needless to say, I am a proponent of the humble rain barrel. These barrels collect water when it rains and provide "soft" chlorine-free water for the garden, including my fruit and vegetable plots when it's dry. Some folks even wash their cars and windows with collected rainwater. Rain barrels include a spigot so you can access the water, and a mesh mosquito barrier.

Rain barrels are not only a water conservation tool; using rainwater instead of your domestic water supply will also reduce your water bill. During storms, rain barrels even contribute to preventing excessive water from reaching impervious surfaces that ultimately channel into local streams, ponds, and rivers, sometimes overwhelming so-called combined sewer overflows (CSOs), which, as a result, discharge sewage water into the Alewife Brook in neighboring Cambridges.

Ideally, CSOs would not exist. Save the Alewife Brook is a local organization that is working to address flooding and water quality problems in Alewife Brook, which is fed by Belmont's Wellington Brook via Clay Pit Pond/Blair Pond and Winn's Brook via Little Pond/Little River. By capturing and using rainwater, Belmont residents can help reduce the volume of water that needs to be absorbed. This in turn helps minimize the pollution caused by CSOs, and supports the health of Alewife Brook. Finally, using rain barrels conserves domestic water usage, decreasing energy consumption and greenhouse emissions at water treatment plants.

To learn more about the barrels and participate in Belmont's 2025 Rain Barrel Program, please visit www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com/community and select our state and town. Barrels and downspout diverters are available for purchase until the order deadline of April 20, midnight. Preordered rain barrels will be available for pick up on Saturday, May 3, 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM at the Belmont



Rain barrel purchased several years ago with downspout diverter.

Department of Public Works, 37 C Street, just as the growing season gets into full swing.

About the Great American Rain Barrel Company

This local food-import company has been repurposing food-grade shipping drums into rain barrels since 1988. The Great American Rain Barrel Co. has been designated an approved vendor by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection since 2010.

Dean Hickman is a Belmont resident and the chair of Sustainable Belmont (www.sustainablebelmont.net/).

Belmont Cultural Council Awards Ten Grants



Treasurer Annette Goodro; Emily Kennerly; non-voting member Nancy Linde; Marianne Lynch; Sue Morris; Secretary Gloria Pimentel; non-voting member Rebecca Richards; and Vera Savage.

The BCC is part of the Massachusetts Cultural Council's network of 329 Local Cultural Councils (LCCs) serving all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth. The LCC Program is the largest grassroots cultural funding network in the nation, supporting thousands of community-based projects in the arts, sciences, and humanities every year. The state legislature provides an annual appropriation to the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency, which then allocates funds to each community.

State Representative Dave Rogers stated, "I am grateful to the members of the Belmont Cultural Council for their hard work and dedication to advancing Belmont's great cultural programs. The BCC's support is often a key lifeline for organizations that enrich our community, with 10 different grants benefiting Belmont this year. Working with Senator Brownsberger, I am pleased to have helped secure another year of funding for the BCC."

"I so appreciate the contributions that Belmont artists make to the community, and I am grateful for the work of the cultural council in supporting Belmont artists," commented State Senator Will Brownsberger.

Statewide, LCCs award \$7.5 million supporting 7,500 cultural programs that include everything from field trips to lectures, festivals, and dance performances. Grants support grass-roots activities: concerts, exhibitions, radio and video productions, school and youth programs, writing workshops, historical preservation efforts, lectures, First Night celebrations, nature and science education programs, and town festivals.

The BCC will seek applications again in September 2025. For guidelines and complete information on the BCCL, visit its website at www.belmont-ma.gov/cultural-council or email Belmontculturalcouncil@yahoo.com.

Applications and information about the Local Cultural Council Program are available online at massculturalcouncil.org/communities/local-cultural-council-program/.

Vicki Amalfitano chairs the Belmont Cultural Council.

By Vicki Amalfitano

State Representative Dave Rogers, State Senator Will Brownsberger, and Belmont Cultural Council Chair Vicki Amalfitano recently announced the award of 10 grants totaling \$9,100, for cultural programs in Belmont during 2025.

The Belmont Cultural Council (BCC) has focused largely on supporting Belmont organizations which enrich the Belmont community with music, fine arts, interpretive science, and humanitarian initiatives, as well as applicants sponsored by a Belmont organization, in awarding grants for 2025.

The 2025 grantees are:

- Belmont Art Association, Transforming Belmont 2025, \$1,400
- Belmont Celebrates AAPI Heritage Month 2025, \$700
- Belmont Community Chorus, \$750
- Belmont Porchfest, \$1,800
- Belmont World Film's 22nd Family Festival, \$500
- Tanya Barteveyan, Music of Florence Price and Dianne Rahbee, \$750
- Deborah Boykan, Influence of African American and Native American Folk music on Antonín Dvorák and other European and American Music, \$500
- Ellery Klein, Community Irish Céilí, presented in collaboration with Powers Music School, \$700
- 2025 Boston International Asian Music Festival Belmont, \$800
- Payson Park Music Festival, \$1,200

"These programs take place in Belmont locations, outdoors, in schools, at the Beech Street Center and other local venues," stated Vicki Amalfitano, BCC Chair, "to foster a richer cultural life in Belmont."

Decisions about which activities to support are made at the community level by a council of municipally appointed volunteers who are all Belmont residents. BCC members are: Chair Vicki Amalfitano; Katherine Creagh; Curtis Eames;

Join BCF for Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day April 26

Join us in stewarding Lone Tree Hill! The Belmont Citizens Forum, in conjunction with the Judy Record Conservation Fund, is holding its eleventh annual cleanup and trail maintenance day on April 26, from 9 AM until noon. Help with the planting of white pine saplings near the Meadow Edge Trail, cleaning up and removal of invasives at the Mill Street parking lot and the Coal Road respectively. Students can earn community service credits.

Bounded by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street, Lone Tree Hill spans 119 acres of permanently protected conservation land and is available to everyone. It is stewarded through a public/private partnership by the town and McLean Hospital, and is managed by the Land Management Committee.

For more information, email bcfprogram-director@gmail.com.

Right: Volunteer Timmy Etkind at the 2024 Lone Tree Hill volunteer day.

Below: Volunteer collecting trash in 2024.



JEANNE MOONEY



DEAN HICKMAN

Calendar of Events

An Experiment in Lawn to Meadow Conversion: Exceeding Expectations
Wednesday, March 12 | 7–8:30 PM

Online via Zoom

Sara Weaner Cooper, executive director of New Directions in the American Landscape, will discuss how she converted her lawn into a wildflower meadow while leaving the turf in place and avoiding herbicide, heavy physical labor, and unhappy feedback from neighbors.

Rescue Raptors Orientation for New Volunteers

Thursday, March 13 | 7–8 PM

Online via Zoom

Interested in helping your town or city rescue raptors and other wildlife by reducing the use of rodent poison? Learn more about the risks of these poisons, alternative rodent control options, and how we will help you kick-off a campaign in your area.

Fundamentals Unit 202: Protecting Wildlife Habitat

Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions

Thursday, March 13 | 6–8:30 PM

Online via Zoom

Learn more about the presumption of significance for wildlife habitat, protecting habitat for rare wetlands wildlife, protections for vernal pool habitat, wildlife

habitat evaluations, and determining if a project will have significant adverse impacts on wildlife habitat. Register at <https://www.maccweb.org/events/Event-Details>. For



SHAWN CAREY

more information: Paige Buller, paige@maccweb.org.

Waltham Land Trust Fundraiser
Thursday, March 20 | 11:30 AM–9 PM

The Chateau, 195 School Street, Waltham

Enjoy delicious Italian-American family-style food and benefit the Waltham Land Trust. The trust will receive 20% of food and drink sales at or from the Chateau in Waltham.

Belmont Conservation Volunteers
Saturday, March 22 | 9:30 AM–noon

Pleasant Street area of Lone Tree Hill

Please join us on Saturday, March, 22, from 9:30 AM til noon, for our first 2025 weekly land restoration event, removing the *Akebia* (chocolate vine) that smothers young trees in Lone Tree Hill. Meet at the kiosk where the trail turns right, just up the Coal Road from Pleasant Street. Gardening or work gloves needed; pruners and small digging tools welcome.

Visit www.sustainablebelmont.net/belmont-conservation-volunteers/ to join the Google Group for information and email notices of our events

What We Sow in Cultivated Places
Wednesday, April 9 | 7–8 PM

Online via Zoom

Gardeners are powerful agents of change, and the landscapes they steward can impact climate change, habitat loss, and more. Jennifer Jewell, creator and host of Cultivating Place, will explore this power through the lens of the ecology, cultural history, and industry surrounding seeds, a story that holds both cautionary tales and guiding lights as we seek to effect positive change.

Rescue Raptors Office Hours
Tuesday, March 25 | 7–8 PM

Online via Zoom

Heather Packard, Mass Audubon's community organizer, can help people interested in launching or managing a Rescue Raptors campaign get started. She can help with strategy, communications, research, events, and more to support your local campaign.

26th Annual Charles River Earth Day Cleanup
Waltham Land Trust

Saturday, April 26 | 10 AM–Noon

Shaw's parking lot, 130 River Street, Waltham

Celebrate Earth Day by removing litter from the banks of the Charles River between Farwell Street and Newton Street. Trash bags and disposable gloves provided. 10 AM: Learn more about the negative impacts of invasive vegetation on native plants. 10:30 AM: Trash pickup begins. Free. Registration required.

Habitat Intergenerational Program Annual Plant Sale

Saturday, May 3 | 9 AM–1 PM

Mass Audubon Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary

Herb and vegetable plants along with some native plants will be on offer. Parking is limited, carpooling is encouraged. 10 Juniper Road, Belmont. For more information: habitat@massaudubon.org

Thank you to our contributors

WRITERS

Vicki Amalfitano • Fred Bouchard • Elissa Ely • Dean Hickman • Leonard Katz • Chris Ryan • Taylor Yates

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS

Shawn Carey • Dean Hickman • Jeanne Mooney • Tim Todreas

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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March/April 2025



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