

Belmont Comprehensive Plan – **Open Space, Greenways & Pathways:**
Working Group Statement of Values and Recommendations
December 2009

I. Statement of Values

“A Working Vision for Belmont’s Future,” adopted by Town Meeting, includes the promises that “we will protect the beauty and character of our natural settings,” “we will conserve our natural habitats,” and “we will preserve our small town community atmosphere.” As stewards for future generations we support the following values which underlie our care for Belmont’s open spaces, greenways, playfields, and pathways:

1. Connectedness – Places for community gathering and interaction; centers for neighborhood identity; spaces preserving our connection to the natural world; connections to broader greenway corridors for both people and wildlife
2. Vistas – Contributing to the natural beauty of the town; enhancing enjoyment of the changing seasons; preserving a sense of space and light in the densely developed metropolitan area
3. Recreation – Passive and active; youth and adult organized sports; open areas for informal play; spaces to enjoy exercise and relative solitude and closeness to the natural world.
4. Conservation – Protecting green spaces important for air quality, water quality, wildlife habitats and natural beauty
5. Preservation of the Historic Elements of the Town – Sense of Town’s identity, pride of place; connection to the Town’s agrarian past – an element of the Vision 21 Statement
6. Clean Water – Protecting contributing watersheds and maintaining natural filtering and buffers from pollution sources. Celebrating and protecting streams and ponds, and wetlands
7. Storm Water Management/Flood Control – Maintaining and protecting our green infrastructure to provide vegetated buffers (wetlands) and unobstructed waterways
8. Health - Providing opportunities for maintaining and improving good physical and mental health; helping children develop life-long sports and physical exercise habits
9. Small Open Spaces – Providing breathing room in densely developed neighborhoods and business districts.
10. Equity - Aspiring to provide close proximity or at least convenient access to open spaces, playfields and public gathering spaces for *each* neighborhood in town, particularly taking into account residential densities

II. Passive Recreational and Natural Open Spaces, Parks & Greenways

A. Policy & Goals

1. Preserve and enhance existing open spaces (both public and private)
2. Ensure adequate maintenance of what the town now has.
3. Develop more links between open spaces and greenways.
4. Protect greenway systems and other open spaces as a flood control/drainage management system.
5. Maintain clean, unobstructed waterways

B. Strategies

1. Support the continuing development of the Western Greenway in western part of the town.
2. Support creation of a Belmont Greenway in the eastern part of the town as an urban trail.
3. Link the two greenways as a continuous system.
4. Adopt a town policy for acquiring open space and for obtaining or approving conservation easements for the preservation of *private* open spaces.
5. Consider daylighting existing underground culverted streams to provide greater natural amenities, control floods and establish better drainage.
6. Develop a protection plan against invasive species.

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Identify the missing links between the Western Greenway system and a proposed Belmont Greenway. Identify the urban trail route for the Belmont Greenway.
2. Develop criteria to identify private open space parcels appropriate for preservation which might become available in whole or in part, (e.g. Belmont Country Club).
3. Pass the Community Preservation Act to provide a funding source for open space acquisitions.
4. Develop a town policy on the right of first refusal for open space properties and analyze its likely cost.
5. Identify specific portions of culverted streams that could be daylighted and hold public meetings to present costs and benefits.
6. Provide bike parking accommodations at greenway destinations (e.g. trailheads).
7. Pass a Belmont Wetlands By-Law
8. Initiate an “Adopt a Stream” program to promote and provide resources for management and maintenance of the Town’s waterways.
9. Review cemetery policies to ensure compatibility with open space and recreation values and to preserve open space as long as possible while balancing cemetery interests.
10. Develop an invasive species action plan with strategic recommendations to prevent, control and, where possible, eradicate invasive plant (i.e., knotweed, bittersweet) and insect species (i.e., winter moth, Asian longhorn beetle), that can do long-term harm to our wetlands, meadows, urban forests and specimen trees.

III. Active Recreation Playfields and Courts

A. Policy & Goals

1. Improve the maintenance of the playfields and tennis and basketball courts the Town now owns.
2. Consider allowing additional uses of recreational playfields or courts (e.g. dog parks at playgrounds early in the morning, skateboard park, etc.)
3. Encourage private schools to continue sharing their recreational fields and courts with the Community.
4. Identify and provide opportunities for developing interest in life long sports

B. Strategies

1. Convene an inter-departmental working group, with the support of Friends groups, to identify multiple uses that could be established.
2. Identify the true costs of maintenance and current sources of funding – both public and private, and the percentage share contributed each by the town and by private sources.
3. Convene an inter-departmental working group, to identify opportunities for coordinating the maintenance of playfields, playgrounds and parks across departmental jurisdictions for greater efficiencies and cost savings (e.g. park area surrounding Clay Pit Pond).

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Analyze the benefits of relocating a new ice skating facility to maintain playfield space if the Library is moved across Concord Ave.
2. Prepare a report on the requirements for successful dog parks and identify potential locations.
3. Identify potential locations for a skateboard park.
4. Establish a gateway to Pequossette Park, linking it to Trapelo Rd.
5. Provide bike parking accommodations at recreational fields and parks.

IV. Private Neighborhood Open Spaces and Vistas as Visual Amenities

A. Policy and Goals

1. Recognize private residential open spaces - front, side, and rear yard lawns, wooded areas and native vegetation - as valuable visual amenities for neighborhoods
2. Protect views of significant structures and topographical landmarks for their role in providing orientation and a sense of place.

B. Strategies

1. Examine residential zoning bylaws to prevent oversized building footprints from eroding neighborhood visual open space.
2. Identify important vistas that should be maintained throughout town.

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Prepare residential zoning bylaw amendments to establish larger minimum setbacks to maintain neighborhood visual open space. Consider new residential zoning density requirements as measured by floor area ratio and open space requirements.
2. Analyze the cost of acquiring scenic vista easements from private property owners and offering tax abatements for the donation of such easements (e.g. View coming down the Concord Ave. hill toward Belmont Center).

V. Commercial Squares: Town Green / & Community Meeting Spaces

A. Policy & Goals

1. Create more community public gathering places in village commercial squares to foster a greater sense of community.
2. Beautify the commercial squares
3. Maintain the public streetscape in the town's commercial squares through public/private partnerships.

B. Strategies

1. Expand green spaces and sidewalks
2. Prepare preliminary plans for improved streetscape amenities in all commercial centers, including crosswalks leading directly to green spaces
3. Develop strategies to maintain the commercial squares

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Widen sidewalks in commercial squares to accommodate street furniture, outdoor cafes and comfortable gathering
2. Plant more street trees
3. Design streetscape improvements including paving, lighting, benches and planters.
4. Widen sidewalks and add small plazas at intersections along Trapelo Road.
5. In Belmont Center, redesign the intersection of Leonard Street and Concord Avenue to improve safety. Narrow pedestrian street crossing, and create small plazas and wider sidewalks.
6. Investigate creating a more significant town green in Belmont Center.
7. In Waverley Square, seek to expand the existing public park located between Lexington St. and Trapelo Rd. on an air rights deck above the rail tracks.

8. Encourage the planting of native species in municipal and town gardens, memorial sites, parks, and traffic islands.

VI. Recreational Trails

A. Policy & Goals

1. Expand off-street town recreational trails that interconnect existing parks, open spaces and conservation areas.
2. Establish an in-town trail linking existing recreational trails in other towns to the west and east of Belmont
3. Encourage wider use of existing trails.

B. Strategies

1. Establish a trail through Belmont that will link with the Mass Central Rail Trail in Waltham to the west and the Alewife Reservation Trail in Cambridge to the east.

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Determine alternate safe routes, including street crossings, for a trail through Belmont, linking trails to the east and west of the town. Identify missing links necessary to create the trail.

VII. Commuter and Community Paths

A. Policy & Goals

1. Encourage bicycle and pedestrian travel to commuter rail stations, bus terminals and the Alewife Red Line Station
2. Designate more pathways from neighborhoods to the commercial village centers
3. Recognize and increase public awareness that Belmont streets are multi-modal pathways that must be shared by autos, cyclists and pedestrians (under state law).
4. Encourage walking and biking to schools.
5. Increase awareness of neighborhood and community history through public art opportunities and signage establishing connections along community paths.
6. Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections across the rail right-of-way to improve connections between neighborhoods and from neighborhoods to schools, trails and bike paths
7. Preserve the town's pleasant walking atmosphere, recognizing sidewalks and street trees as important assets providing in-town connections and walking connections to neighboring towns.

B. Strategies

1. Redesign Belmont streets as multi-modal pathways to be shared by autos, cyclists, parked cars and pedestrians as safely as possible
2. Maintain sidewalks as the most frequently used pathways to commuter rail stations and bus stops
3. Improve the number and legibility of on-street bike lanes
4. Create off-street bikeways that connect to public transportation
5. Provide amenities at rail stations, such as secured bike accommodations, to encourage cyclists to commute to train stations.
6. Create neighborhood histories with the assistance of the Historic District Commission and the Historical Society to enhance community paths.
7. Identify opportunities for additional rail right-of-way crossings
8. Establish a trail through Belmont that will link with the Mass Central Rail Trail in Waltham to the west and the Alewife Reservation Trail to the east.

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Determine alternate safe routes, including street crossings, for a trail through Belmont, linking trails to the east and west of town. Identify missing links necessary to create the trail.

2. Identify town-owned parcels adjacent to the commuter rail tracks that are likely to be part of the Belmont trail and maintain town ownership of the parcels
3. Develop trail marker signage systems, providing both historical neighborhood information and directional information and install them along designated community paths.
4. Adopt "Safe Routes to School" policies, and educate families about safe walking and biking practices for getting to and from schools.
5. Construct a bike and pedestrian tunnel under the rail right-of-way at the end of Alexander Avenue to the High School grounds.
6. Establish a White Street pedestrian/cyclist bridge path to connect Waverley Square and Pleasant Street.
7. Identify the Clark Street bridge as open to pedestrians and cyclists.
8. Maintain the Lion's Club/Belmont Center Station pedestrian tunnel for 24 hour a day, year round use.
9. Identify sidewalk problems and provide unobstructed, safe, accessible sidewalk pathways.
10. Fund the care, maintenance and planting of street trees.
11. Fund the maintenance and, where necessary, the reconstruction of sidewalks.

IX. Scenic By-ways

A. Policy and goals

1. Identify possible additional scenic by-ways in the town, the maintenance of which would serve to support the preservation of historic elements of the town's natural beauty

B. Strategies

1. Consider designation of additional streets as scenic by-ways

X. Implementation: Funding & Maintenance

A. Policy & Goals

1. Provide greater maintenance efficiencies and coordination among departments, committees and commissions responsible for open spaces, pathways and streets.
2. Establish greater awareness across town departments of the policies and practices related to the stewardship and care of open spaces, including familiarity with the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
3. Continue current town policy of jointly funding maintenance of recreational properties through public/private partnerships, continuing to foster a sense of ownership and vested interest in recreational properties.
4. Identify resources for preserving existing private open spaces.
5. In commercial squares, seek to form business organizations to help the town maintain the squares and deltas.

B. Strategies

1. Examine the town's management and oversight structure for open space and consider areas of consolidation, as well as the establishment of new committees, so as to best achieve open space goals.
2. Develop coordinated maintenance responsibilities across town departments, committees and commissions.
3. Establish business organizations in each commercial square, (possibly funded with dedicated resources, e.g. parking meter revenues), to help maintain the squares in a public/private partnership with the town.
4. Pursue grants and other funding

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Consolidate maintenance responsibilities for all town conservation land

2. Restore town funding for planting shade trees town-wide and, specifically in commercial centers, in partnership with commercial square business associations.
3. Pass the Community Preservation Act to provide a funding source for open space acquisitions.

XI. Education and Outreach

A. Policy & Goals

1. Connect residents to open space by providing them with the information they need to learn about open space resources in town and to take informed actions related to sustaining these resources.
2. Educate the community to the connection between maintaining open space and forest canopy and positive benefits to maintaining the environment and personal health.
3. Build support in the community for providing the necessary resources for maintaining the town's open space and recreation assets.

B. Strategies

1. Gather and disseminate information on Belmont's open spaces, parks, recreation fields, greenways and pathways.
2. Encourage understanding of the value of Belmont's open space assets:
 - a. Inform residents that healthy trees and forests in urban areas contribute to improved air and water quality, watershed function, energy conservation and social well-being.
 - b. Inform residents of Belmont's historic landscape, agrarian past, and development history to create a greater understanding and appreciation of the town's open space resources.
 - c. Inform residents of the role of greenways and trails in providing vital links between the built environment, natural areas, and native habitats of our town, as well as neighboring communities.

C. Specific Recommendations

1. Expand information on the town website about access to our open spaces, playing fields, and conservation lands, including rules and maps.
2. Develop interpretive trails and signage for a town-wide trail system including areas of historic, biological, and special interest.
3. Work towards a unified identity for stewardship and use of town parks and conservation lands through use of signage and logos.
4. Educate the public about how to use chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and herbicides in thoughtful ways, and about natural and less toxic alternatives.
5. Educate the public about water conservation methods in lawn and garden care.