

# PLACE

Spring 2011



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## Volunteerism Adds Value: for the volunteer and for the community

Whether it is an ongoing effort to enhance a particular park or teach people how to grow their own food, or a call to arms to represent an immediate need – to save a forest, or to collaborate with the Town to conduct an inventory of street trees so that they can be better maintained – Brookline and our environment benefits from local volunteerism.

Our open spaces thrive when there is a Friends Group that cares for them. Natural habitat can survive when citizens decide that they are willing to act as ongoing caretakers. People can learn the value of fresh produce and how and where to grow it when volunteers put their skills together and act as a resource and support group.

There are so many examples of Brookline citizens banding together to better their neighborhoods and open spaces. Brookline has an excellent department of open spaces, but the *shine* comes from the extra care that someone deeply connected adds to the maintenance or enhancement the Town does not provide. A well-placed bench dedicated to an individual that has devoted himself to an individual park is a symbol of such volunteerism and at the same time, it is the enhancement to that park that might not be provided by the Town itself.

To tell the complete story of volunteerism, though, one needs to talk about the personal value to the volunteer. In a world where it is often hard to feel we can make a difference, volunteering gives us the opportunity to see an immediate difference. A park cleanup may be a small thing but a before and after picture is evidence of improving our community. And community is a large part of volunteerism. We can improve our community for the general wellbeing of its citizens and we can create a sense of community among volunteers. Talk to someone who gives of themselves and they will often tell you they get as much back.

So to better know our neighbors, to make a difference in our community, to feel we are making more green and beautiful places in our world, try volunteering with your local Park Friends group, Land Trust or non-profit organization. They need your help and it feels good to be doing good.

(For information on BGSA member organizations, go to [www.brooklinegreenspace.org/html/About/friends.html](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org/html/About/friends.html); or on how to start your own Friends Group, go to [www.brooklinegreenspace.org/html/Resources/toolbox.html](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org/html/Resources/toolbox.html))

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the enhancement of open space in Brookline by supporting citizens in caring for their green spaces.

## Growing GreenSpace Raffle Tickets Still Available



Prize list and purchase information at [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org)

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## Annual Meeting Highlights Volunteers



Kate Bowditch

The Alliance Annual meeting on April 4, featured a presentation by Kate Bowditch, Chair of the Brookline Conservation Commission and Director of Projects for the Charles River Watershed Association. Her topic was Stormwater Permitting and Regulations: Impacts in Brookline. Federal and state regulations are changing and will require changes in how Brookline deals with stormwater runoff. She discussed strategies such as green streets to reduce the volume of water running off streets into storm drains.

The second part of the meeting was devoted to recognizing volunteers and the important part they play in Brookline. Ponnice Katz was recognized for many decades of service as a Town Meeting member. Ryan Pace, an attorney and member of the BGSA board was thanked for his diligence and hard work in negotiating the terms of the Fisher Hill Conservation Restriction (see article next page). Linda Pehlke, president of the Friends of the Minot Garden, spoke about the rewards of bringing the Rose Garden back to life.



Arlene Mattison and Ponnice Katz



Linda Pehlke



Left to right: Ryan Pace, Arlene Mattison and Edward Hsieh.

# Brookline GreenSpace playing key role in Fisher Hill Reservoir Park project

By Frances Shedd-Fisher

From 1978, when the state-owned Fisher Hill Reservoir was taken out of service, until 2001 when it was declared surplus land and available for purchase, the 10 acre site was just a gleam in the eye of planners and conservationists in Brookline. It took another decade of planning, negotiating, seeking approvals and documenting, before the site became Town-owned property, destined to become Brookline's next premier park.

The purchase price of \$800,000 – generally viewed as a bargain price – represents less than 18% of the projected total cost to the Town of creating the park that has been envisioned by planners and citizens – soccer field and Great Lawn, natural wooded areas, walking paths, and the renovation of the historic 1887 gatehouse designed by Arthur Vinal. In order to assure an ongoing environmental benefit accrues from the land sale the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has required, as a condition of sale, an independent, third-party organization hold a conservation restriction on the land. We are told that this condition is a growing trend in such transactions, not specific to Brookline. The restriction, in this case, requires the holder to assure ongoing recreational use of the land. This means that Town government, representing Brookline taxpayers, may not later decide, for example, to build a school on the site, or to allow parking on the open land of the park, as has been done in parks on occasion in the past. While parks are protected by the Constitution of the Commonwealth, the protections require a complicated process and are not absolute. According to the terms and conditions of sale, the land purchased on Fisher Hill must continue to be used for recreational open space in perpetuity. Brookline GreenSpace Alliance (BGSA), asked by the Town to become involved in spring of last year, has agreed to take on the responsibility of holding the Fisher Hill Conservation Restriction; agreements with the Town were signed in December 2010. The purchase of the Fisher Hill site, under discussion since 2001, was approved by Town Meeting in 2007, and the sale of the

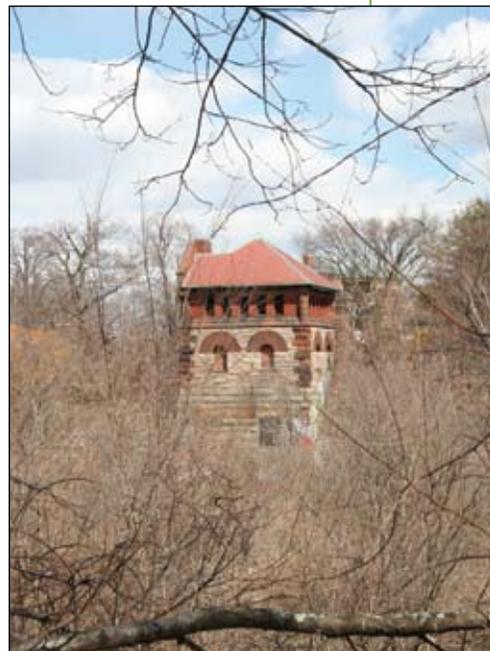
The land purchased on Fisher Hill must continue to be used for recreational open space in perpetuity.

land to the Town was finalized in February of this year. (See [brooklinegreenspace.org](http://brooklinegreenspace.org) for article in PLACE, spring 2008, explaining the history of the process and the funding source for the project.)

Conservation restrictions more typically prevent development of land by legal agreement to limit its use to protect natural features. For example, in order to assure the retention of habitat and watershed or the protection of a beautiful vista and less density in an area, all in the public interest, the land owner might agree to forego the financial benefit of development of a plot of land, in perpetuity, in exchange for a reduced tax burden. In the case of the Fisher Hill restriction, the holder of the restriction is required to assure that the owner – the Town of Brookline -- continue the agreed upon use. While it is highly unlikely the Town will change its mind about maintaining the land as recreational open space, the Commonwealth is taking the long view. In agreeing to hold the restriction, BGSA becomes, in effect, the “eyes” of the Commonwealth in this matter, its partner in assuring a recreational use for the land going forward.

In its determinations before agreeing to assume the responsibility of holding the Fisher Hill restriction, the BGSA Board took a number of factors into consideration. First, does the role fit the mission of the organization to “preserve and protect” green space in Brookline; is such a role in the interests of the community and BGSA constituents; is such a role in the interests of the organization – would it deflect or detract from other goals and aspirations of the organization; does BGSA

The Gatehouse, looking across Fisher Hill Reservoir.



(continued on page 4)

## Fisher Hill Reservoir (continued from page 3)

have the skill, means and resources to take this on; is another organization in Brookline more suitable to fill this role?

The questions posed by the Board, and answered through the board debate and due diligence and over the course of the negotiations with the Town, were wide-ranging. In addition to numerous technical and legal questions, one area of discussion that received a good deal of attention was the question of “fit” with the organization’s mission and resources. Representing BGSA in negotiations with the Town were Arlene Mattison, BGSA President, Edward Hsieh, BGSA Executive Director, and Board member Ryan Pace, a partner with the law firm Anderson & Kreiger.

In response to board concerns about potential costs related to enforcement of the Fisher Hill restriction, the Town agreed to make a one-time \$24,500 payment to BSGA for its use in connection with the restriction and an annual payment of \$500 subject to appropriation. The \$24,500 “stewardship fee” may only be used to bring an enforcement action under the terms of the restriction, or for other actions directly related to holding the restriction so, effectively, the fee will be held in escrow. While it is highly unlikely BGSA would have agreed to hold the restriction if they actually thought it likely they will have to sue the Town to enforce its terms, consultation with Land Trust Alliance and Trust for Public Land, including BGSA Board member Ernest Cook, a Senior V.P. for TPL, persuaded the Board to take a conservative view.

Interest earned on the \$24,500 will be available to BGSA to help cover costs in connection with its duties: staff time to monitor use of the parkland, prepare reports to EOEEA, prepare an annual financial report to the Town, including documentation from its insurance provider, etc. The \$500 annual appropriation is meant to cover additional liability insurance premiums specific to its role as holder of the conservation restriction. BGSA will absorb remaining costs related to holding the restriction, deeming it consistent with its preservation mission.

After full consideration of the costs and benefits of holding the Fisher Hill Conservation Restriction and negotiation of reasonable mitigation, the board voted overwhelmingly to take on the new role in support of the creation and protection of the new Fisher Hill Reservoir Park. While other groups were considered, in the end, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance was the only organization in

Brookline willing and able to take on this important task for the benefit of the community. While holding a conservation restriction represents a new direction for BGSA, it is consistent with its mission “to preserve, protect and enhance the open spaces of Brookline.”

Board member and landscape architect Gina Crandell is the BGSA representative on the Fisher Hill Reservoir Park Design Review Committee. The process, now underway, has a broad outline to follow for the park based on the Master Plan created early in the long process leading to this point, but the devil is in the details, so Gina and neighbors and park advocates will be weighing in to assure the park is the best it can be. According to Gina, “All the design proposals reflect an appreciation of the site, so I presently believe this project has the potential to be a great project which BGSA and the Town will be very proud of.” After an intense process, design development drawings and construction documents should be completed by the end of May, 2012, and construction on the new park can begin.

Quoting from an Op Ed I wrote for the Brookline TAB, published on March 31, 2011, “The old reservoir site has the potential to be an extraordinary park. Even in its current wild and overgrown state, the dramatic form of the deep reservoir basin, faced with stone, is quite wonderful. The magnificent Richardsonian-style granite and sandstone gatehouse rising from the eastern edge of the reservoir is an architectural treasure, testament to a time when quality, elegance and style were considered necessary components of functionality. With the assistance and commitment of Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, our community has been given a great opportunity. It is now our responsibility to make the most of it.”

**Frances Shedd-Fisher, a founding member of the BGSA Board and the organization’s second President, now serves on the BGSA Advisory Committee.**

from BGSA Board minutes:

--“If we are serious about land protection, then we need to do this; we succeeded in our original mission and now need to face the issues at hand.”

—“In Brookline, there are many groups doing special events in the parks; what is needed is education and advocacy and land protection; this is an opportunity to do what no one else does; there is a need, and BGSA fits it.”



GreenSpace Board members at the Fisher Hill Reservoir.

## Preserving Land for Future Generations *by Joe Geller*

The purpose of the Brookline Conservation Land Trust according to its charter and by-laws is to purchase, preserve and conserve real estate in the Town of Brookline in its natural scenic and open condition. The BCLT charter also embraces disseminating information and educating the public about the value of preserving land in its open and scenic state. In addition, where appropriate, the Trust is to make the properties it acquires available for public access. The Trust was established in 1977 when the Town was given the opportunity to acquire a piece of property on Walnut Street across from the Town's historic public green to protect in perpetuity as open space. The Town was unable to raise the necessary funding and turned to a number of citizens for help. These citizens raised private funds and formed the Land Trust to purchase the property. The original Trustees were Ed Lawrence, Margaret Thomas and Fred Hoppin. Board members are all volunteers. The Trust later amended its by-laws to add the chair of the Conservation Commission or designee to the board.

Since the purchase of that first property in 1977, three other properties have been donated to the Trust and the Trust has held or holds conservation restrictions on portions of other private properties. The Land Trust provides individuals with a simple and effective way to preserve land and its environmental values for the community, while enabling the owners to receive a tax benefit from the donation. One of the three properties that the Trust acquired was a portion of the Gardner Estate on Warren Street that abutted the Olmsted House National Park Service site. After the acquisition, the Trust negotiated with the Park Service to have it acquire the property and incorporate it into the Olmsted site. The Trust also is the Trustee of a Conservation easement protecting portions of a property on Boylston Street.

From its inception in 1977 until this year the Trust has operated rather quietly to preserve

open space in Brookline. It has been supported by abutters, the Trustees and Friends of the organization, who assist with costs incurred for the maintenance of the properties. In 2008 the Brookline Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen and Board of Assessors approved a formal Conservation Restriction Policy for the Town. The Trust recently negotiated conservation restrictions on their parcels under this policy to insure that the Trust, a nonprofit organization, would no longer have to pay property taxes on their land as long as conditions outlined in the restrictions are met. The agreements require public access to some of the properties, including creation of trails and signage, and describe appropriate maintenance practices for each.

This year the Trust appointed three new trustees, Joe Geller, Lew Edgers, and Matt Cooney and the Conservation Commission designated Werner Lohe as its representative. The new Board of Trustees, along with founding Trustee Ed Lawrence, are exploring ways to fulfill the requirements of the conservation restrictions and further the Trust's mission of preserving natural scenic open space for the enjoyment of the community. The Trust looks forward to working with the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance to support our mutual interests, and would, of course, welcome the opportunity to acquire additional properties in Town or assist in the creation of conservation restrictions to protect additional green space in our community.

One of the properties preserved in a natural state by the Brookline Conservation Land Trust.



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As a member of the Alliance you'll receive our publication PLACE, periodic e-mail alerts to keep you informed of meetings and issues affecting local open space, notice of walks, talks, tours and educational forums.

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## Bountiful Brookline and How it Grows

*Bountiful Brookline is one of the newest member organization of Brookline GreenSpace Alliance. Marian Lazar interviewed Cathy Neal, the director of Bountiful Brookline, to learn more about the organization and its volunteers.*

**Marian Lazar:** This issue is devoted to volunteerism and volunteer organizations, so an article about Bountiful Brookline is very appropriate. Where have you come from, where are you now and where are you going?

**Cathy Neal:** As a landscape architect, I have a real interest in urban agriculture. It struck me that Brookline did not have a community farm. I said what if we could look at the whole community as a setting to grow food and partner with existing entities to address this idea. The first thing I did was to take this concept to Molly Paul at Brookline Community Foundation. Molly was interested.

**ML:** How long ago was this?

**CN:** Spring of 2009, so we are still young. March of 2009 I met with Molly Paul. September of 2009, our first steering committee was formed. Of those original eight, some stayed on. Growing food is a timely issue and has struck a chord.

**ML:** How does it work as a volunteer organization?

**CN:** Some volunteers stay but some bail out very quickly. Some come back later and get more involved. At our first public event in March 2010, Spring Into Gardening, we had 400 plus people, exceeding our expectations. From that developed our first mailing list, getting more people involved. Some show up at the garden for a few hours or for one event. People join in different ways; planning for that presents a challenge.

**ML:** How do you know that you're going to get the forces to build a community around the idea of growing food?

**CN:** Our vision is that Brookline will become a sustainable food system. For our first effort - Matt Baronas at Public Housing funded a container gardening workshop at High Street Veterans Housing. I got a Master Gardener from Boston Natural Areas Network, we advertised and sixteen people came; multigenerational; multiethnic. Out of that, a core stuck it out through the El Nino summer. During the following winter I encouraged them to become a community garden. BB obtained funding through New England Grassroots Environment Fund, and now they have become an active gardening community. That

epitomizes what Bountiful Brookline does; provide support, technical assistance and let whatever happens, happen.

A resident of High Street Veterans Housing, Michael Gould, has become garden coordinator. He started a composting operation, installed a cold frame and received a grant for vertical growing. Empowering those without resources to grow and control their own food is key to what we believe in. Nourishment is fundamental to life.

That's one piece. The food pantry is another. The Brookline Community Foundation asked Bountiful Brookline to become stewards of their garden at 40 Webster Place. That harvest goes to the pantry. Last year, Jenny LaVigne, one core member, oversaw the garden crew for key tasks such as watering, tending, harvesting. This year we signed a three-year agreement to use a private backyard, doubling our garden space. The logistics of running two sites is more challenging, so we have to think about how to best involve volunteers. Key people are essential for critical roles. Our garden intern, J. D. Hutchison, will stay on as our garden coordinator.

He will receive a very small stipend. We don't have sufficient funds; that's one of our challenges. Running two sites is a real job, and we believe it needs to be compensated fairly. Another challenge is funding garden operations - the basic supply costs. This summer we hope to sell produce to support costs and programs. We must create a sustainable model, both financially and in terms of work force. When you're growing food, people have to show up to water, weed and harvest. We're recognizing that it's not reasonable to expect a few to do everything on a volunteer basis.

We've had seven phenomenal interns from different colleges. Some are moving on, and we are just about to start with a Northeastern co-op as the program assistant.

**ML:** Do you have a staff person to coordinate?

**CN:** Jenny and I have been the primary coordinators. Interns and a working board are very involved as well. Other than small intern stipends, everyone has provided time and expertise on a pro bono basis. Spring Into Gardening 2010, the steering committee was the event committee. This derailed us for the five months that we planned it. Spring Into Gardening 2011, we had a dedicated



Moving garden beds.

event committee and an intern as event coordinator. It took a huge commitment and effort to pull something like this off – having never done it before. There’s a whole ethos of volunteerism; how to create a sense of opportunity, responsibility and commitment in a community organization. We don’t want to deny someone their good feeling, however, our collective actions must come together for the overall goal. What we do is not about individual ownership; but the common good.

People want to be inspired, but it’s still hard work. That’s the piece that is sometimes forgotten. Volunteering on a workday is coming out to garden. You’re shoveling, or bending over planting stuff, or weeding, or moving compost. It’s not glamorous. Volunteering starts with actions. You start by giving two hours and continue because you feel so good. Take Michael Gould. At first, he was skeptical. Now, he’s found his niche. He’s a great gardener and organizer.

**ML:** What do you see as the future of Bountiful Brookline?

**CN:** Although I had a vision, we are still a work in progress. I consider myself a visionary, but also a realistic optimist. I had an idea and set out to make it happen. Although there have been frustrations, we are now in this interesting transition. We are looking for new members and interviewing people to join the board. We have standing committees and are moving toward more formal organization. When we started, our team was informal. Now we’re saying commit for two to three years, join a standing committee; there are certain expectations.

Another aspect of the organization is our relationship with different partners. This summer, Alan Balsam, Director of Public Health, is giving us an intern, paid by the Health Department, to do a market survey. We need to know whether people care about this. Before you take an idea into the community, you need to step back and say, “Who knows? Do you think it’s of value? Does it improve the quality of our life in this community?” That will help us move forward. This is not just about having fun, but how to make Brookline a better community. That’s why we do it.

This summer, Public Housing is giving us two teens employed through that agency. They will be working for Bountiful Brookline as well as in the gardens at Sussman House and other public housing sites. We are able to gain from them but also giving back. It’s a nice partnership because

we have the content, and they have the kids. **ML:** Do you envision that some time in the future, meaningful amounts of food will be produced in Brookline?

**CN:** I think there’s actually a good amount of food already produced in the community. For several years we’ve tried to get at that. I wanted to do a community growing map on GIS, to show how much food is grown in different neighborhoods. It would be interesting to see how much is grown.

And then the other piece is to identify where could food still be grown.

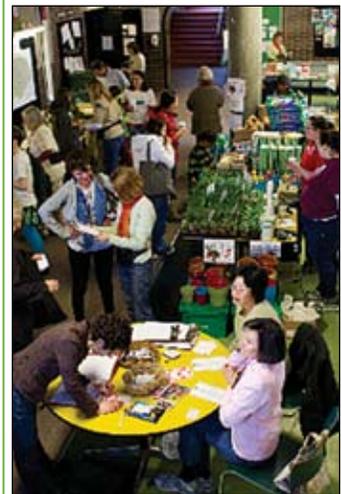
**ML:** Front yards?

**CN:** Yes, there are front yards, but I’m a landscape architect and don’t like tearing up front lawn. Heidi Krantz’s garden, which was on the Edible Garden Tour, is the ultimate edible landscape. She has strawberries, blueberries and tulips. That’s the way. Thirty percent of the people in Brookline live in houses but many of those are in deep shade. We as a community need to think about community gardening as not just a plot at Larz Anderson. So where do I see the organization going? There needs to be more cooperative community gardening. Bountiful Brookline can facilitate that discussion. At Spring Into Gardening people have been able to find others to share land and gardening. Those of us who have land can put it to use. We need to look at planting fruit trees, tapping maple trees, and raising poultry. We need to look at bees, and at space-saving vertical growing.

Other opportunities include school gardens, used for curriculum during the year and by another group in the summer. Another example is the 200 Foot Garden [near 99 Kent Street]. Patrick Gabridge approached the property manager, got their blessing, planted the strip of land, and you can walk by and help yourself.

**ML:** Do you see yourself as a catalyst?

**CN:** Yes. What is Bountiful Brookline? Alan Balsam said we are the nexus on local food issues. As that nexus, we’re not trying to simply create something new. We are working to utilize the wonderful resources that we already have in our community, and to connect people and agencies and institutions in a different way around the topic of food.



Spring Into Gardening—signing in.

Teens growing food at 40 Webster Place.



## The GreenSpace Environmental Learning Project is Changing



Children and heron at Hall's Pond

**B**rookline GreenSpace Alliance has administered the GreenSpace Environmental Learning Project (formerly the Hall's Pond Learning Project) for the past 7 years. This program, the only free program of its kind in town, has introduced countless Brookline public school students to the wonders of nature in our very own community.

The GreenSpace Environmental Learning Project consists of a public school portion and a free-to-the-public field trip program. The public school portion focuses on bringing students into one of the three Brookline nature sanctuaries for hands-on, naturalist-led ecology lessons. The naturalist coordinates with the teacher to ensure that the lesson plan is tailored to the curriculum.

Because of this program, students, some of whom would never have such an opportunity,

have ventured into one of Brookline's three sanctuaries under the guidance of a trained naturalist. Teachers and students have commented on how delighted they were to witness a heron swoop down onto Hall's Pond Sanctuary, or to find Spotted salamander eggs in D. Blakely Hoar Sanctuary, or to bounce on the unique vegetated shoreline of Lost Pond Sanctuary. These place-based experiences are key to reducing the nature-deficit disorder plaguing the younger generation and to ensuring that future stewards will care about our natural world.

BGSA is committed to place-based education. The Learning Project will continue on via free-to-the-public weekend field trips and special educational events. However, regrettably BGSA will indefinitely postpone future seasons of the public school portion of the Learning Project because of insufficient grant funding.



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