

# PLACE

Spring 2019

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.

Our newest member is Friends of Putterham Woods. More information on the Friends and Putterham Woods (pictured here) is on page 3.

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### Editor Marian Lazar

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## Land

Land for habitat. Land for playgrounds and schoolyards. Land for growing trees that clean the air and retain water in the soil to help with wastewater and erosion. Land for playing fields. Land for the beauty of it. Land for gathering together as a community.

Open space is a precious commodity and rare in urban settings where the pressures to build are enormous.

Brookline has the opportunity to purchase the buildings and land owned by Newbury College on Fisher Hill. The College's current buildings may be able to serve municipal needs as schools or offices, or if necessary be rebuilt as 22nd century facilities. The protracted search for a site for a new elementary school and playing fields to accommodate team sports has shown how desperately Brookline needs land to meet the needs of its current residents. Acquisition of this built land on Fisher Hill will take some pressure off of our town to build on unbuilt land.

The well-being of Brookline residents calls out for the acquisition of the Newbury College 7 acre parcel. This rare opportunity comes at a time when Brookline has spent years debating, and money studying, how to find space to educate and exercise its population. The choices of classrooms or parks, buildings or trees, rutted or closed playing fields, and artificial turf or an historic town green serving multiple generations and uses have been divisive and unsatisfactory.

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance urges Town leaders to move assertively to acquire Newbury College. No matter how the Town may utilize the existing buildings, it may be one of the only chances to relieve the pressure on our existing open land to meet the many functions desired or expected from our Town.



Recent BGSA sponsored bird walk. Next bird walk April 28. Details at [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org).

## Friends of Putterham Woods

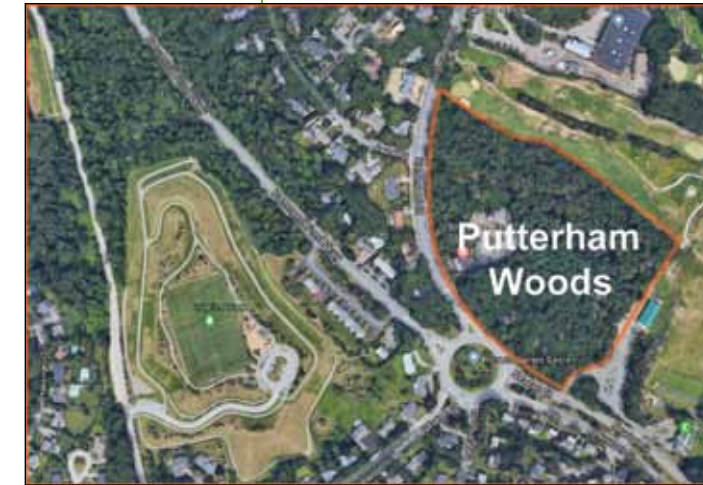
The Friends of Putterham Woods formed with the goal of restoring these woods and their surrounding spaces. The woods wrap around the Robert T. Lynch Municipal Golf Course at Putterham Meadows along with Brookline Fire Station 6. Despite the challenges of planning in a rainy fall, we had our first clean-up of Putterham Woods on Saturday morning, November 10, 2018. Off into the woods we went. Along the way, we collected an alarming amount of trash, filling 10 very large bags along with a number of items that did not fit in the bags including tires, pieces of metal and plastic, roofing shingles, tiles and a propane tank. Some additional items including a bathtub and several large containers of liquid were left in place due to their size. We will work with the Town in a future clean-up to remove those items.

On our walk, we also noted the areas where felled trees need to be cleared in order to provide space for new plantings and to make the one existing path through the woods traversable again. As we walked, we shared ideas about our vision of trails that could connect to Dane Park and establishment of a public botanical garden bordering all areas of the golf course. We noted a stone at the perimeter of Putterham Woods honoring Emma Cummings. This picture prompted us to contact Ken Liss of the Brookline Historical Society. A wealth of knowledge, Ken readily sent us some information about Emma and a link to a Boston Globe article about her.

Emma was an early advocate of Putterham Woods through her work as a member of Brookline's Tree Planting Committee in the early part of the 20th Century. She also chronicled the many birds that came through Putterham Woods. We hope to honor the vision of Emma Cummings through our work with the Friends of Putterham Woods. A restored botanical garden, expanded to include the golf course, will attract birds, bees and butterflies. We want to work with the Conservation Commission to create a sense of place at the boundaries of the Saw Mill Brook that runs through this area. Our goals include:

- Ongoing fall trash cleanups
- Reestablishing the outer boundary by clearing invasive plants and allowing existing native plantings to flourish
- Clearing the woods of diseased and/or felled trees
- Reforesting the woods
- Re-creating the trail through the woods
- Re-establishing these woods as a bird sanctuary
- Creating trails connecting all of Putterham Meadows to the Woods and the Woods to the rest of the golf course
- Along these trails, creating a botanical garden
- Within the botanical garden, fostering the development of a bee and butterfly habitat

At our 5:30 PM meeting at the golf course clubhouse on January 15, we began our planning for our spring walk through and clean up.



Fall clean-up at Putterham Woods



## Can Brookline be Reconnected to the Charles River?

Are you tired of walking and biking on the crowded, dangerous streets in and around Brookline? Would you rather be in the Charles River parklands instead of Commonwealth Ave? Fortunately, this alternative could become a reality as part of the billion-dollar reconstruction of the Mass Pike's Allston interchange.

After years of debate, state transportation officials announced a final plan to build the biggest highway project in Boston in a generation: putting the Massachusetts Turnpike at ground level in Allston and elevating a section of Soldiers Field Road along the Charles River onto a new viaduct above the highway.

The \$1.1 billion project promises to radically reshape the western face of the city that carries about 150,000 cars a day. The main objectives are to replace the aging viaduct and straighten the turnpike where it takes a sweeping curve through now-abandoned rail yards. That in turn would free up land for a new train station and dozens of acres of new development by Harvard University, as well as creating a wider band of green space along the river.

The start of construction is at least several years off — the state still does not yet know how it will even pay for the job, and intends to set a funding strategy after the final design and price tag are set.

MassDOT's reconstruction of the highway will bring years of delays and disruption to everyone who drives on the Pike and surrounding streets. But if done right, it will also connect Comm Ave and the nearby Brookline neighborhoods to the river paths.

Today, if you cross Comm Ave at Pleasant Street or St. Paul Street,

you come to a dead end created by the hulking and rusted elevated Mass Pike viaduct. But when this portion of the highway and Soldiers Field Road are rebuilt, the highway will be built flat on the ground, with Soldiers Field Road above it. This new configuration makes possible the construction of a new footbridge to the Charles River paths, possibly between Nickerson Field and Agganis Arena.

Another possibility to connect Brookline with the Charles River comes where the BU Bridge meets Comm Ave near the end of Amory Street. The existing Mass Pike has a steep climb in this section as it transitions up onto the elevated

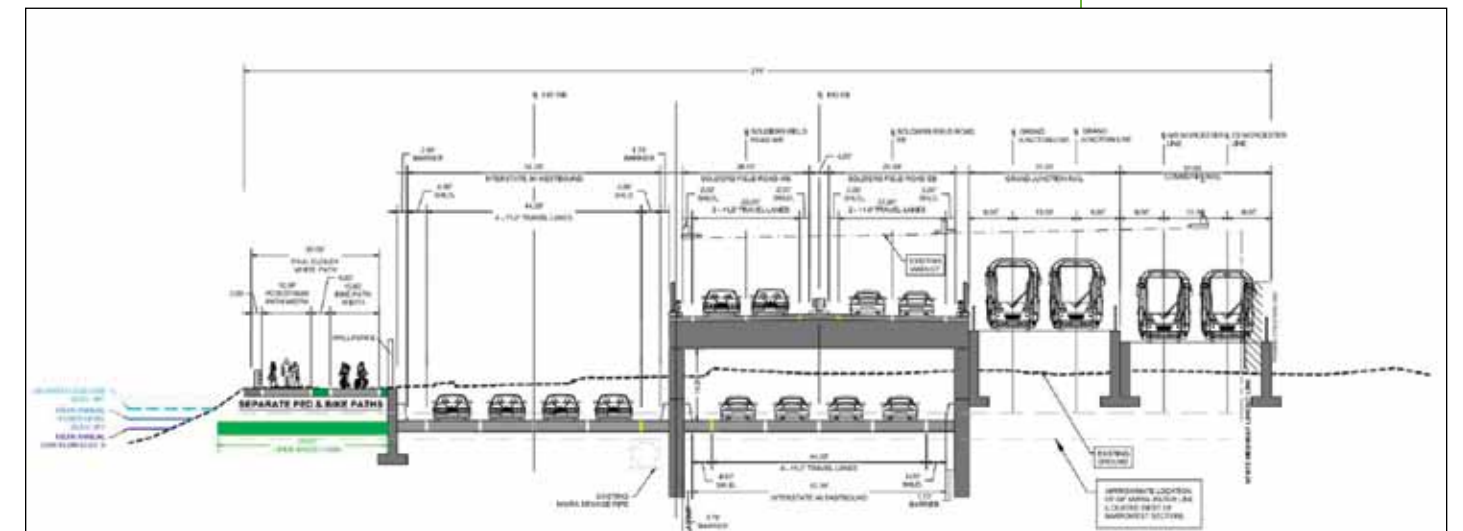
viaduct preventing any access to the river. But the new Pike will be at-grade or, even better, several feet below grade. The Grand Junction railroad bridge that crosses Soldiers Field Road where many trucks have been “storroved” is being replaced too. This new rail bridge could include space for walking and biking and connect to the river paths. And because the highway will be flat, a footbridge or pedestrian plaza on air-rights could be built too.

All of these possibilities would make bike commuting, jogging, and walking along the Charles River much more accessible for Brookline residents. The project is still in its planning stages and while MassDOT acknowledges these possibilities, they haven't committed to building the footbridges that would realize this great potential.

Diagram showing Mass Pike at ground level and Soldiers Field Road above.



Current condition of the turnpike viaduct



Possible locations for bridges connecting Brookline to the Charles River parklands



For more information, you can join the email list of the People's Pike (a coalition of residents and advocacy organizations) at [bit.ly/Join-PeoplesPike](https://bit.ly/Join-PeoplesPike) or follow <https://twitter.com/peoplespike> or <https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesPike/>

Sketch showing Mass Pike at ground level and Soldiers Field Road above.

## Back to the Future: Using Olmsted as Inspiration

Originally published by Steven Miller (January 10, 2019) <[http://livablestreets.info/back\\_to\\_the\\_future](http://livablestreets.info/back_to_the_future)> Slightly updated, by Jules Milner-Brage

**B**eacon Street in Brookline, from Audubon Circle to Cleveland Circle, was designed in the late 1800s by Frederick Law Olmsted as a wide, tree-lined boulevard with separate “lanes” for trolleys, carriages, pedestrians, and a bridle path for horseback riders. Unfortunately, the triumph of motorcars led to a 1930s remake that widened the already-large carriage lanes and replaced the median bridle path with angle-parking spaces and a maneuvering lane. The predictable result was faster traffic and more dangerous pedestrian crossings.

Perhaps now is the time for another Beacon Street change — to bring back its original Olmsted design’s better support of diverse ways for people to travel from place to place. There is a renewed vision for the part of the Beacon Street median previously reserved for horseback riding. In the future, this bridle way could be restored as a 10-to-15-foot-wide multi-use path for people cycling, scooting, jogging, and more. The enormously wide roadway has plenty of room so that this path can be restored with no loss of car traffic lanes and parking capacity, and no limitations on light-rail service.

The process can be broken into several small, low-cost steps with minimal disruption and maximum gains. Restoring the Beacon Street bridle path has multiple benefits. The path is an integral part of Olmsted’s beatific vision of a green and tree-lined promenade. There will be no loss of car travel lanes, no loss of car parking with safer in/out movement, easier pedestrian crossing, easier access to the trolley, and a quieter pedestrian environment along the sidewalks at the outer edges of the street. There are also low-cost methods of incrementally implementing the change using paint and planters, rubber curbs, and/or flex-posts, so that the idea can be tested and any kinks worked out before eventually doing the costlier moving of stone curbs as capital budget constraints allow. Following the recommendation of the Town Administrator, Select Board, and Advisory Committee, in November 2018, Brookline Town Meeting voted to authorize scoping of a feasibility study that will shape the project’s design requirements.

### MOVING SLOWLY

Friends of the Bridle Path have suggested dividing the restoration project into three major phases, each with small, manageable components. This will allow Brookline residents to provide feedback and for Town staff and proponents to identify and address any issues that arise. During the first phase, “proof of concept” demonstrations would be conducted within a limited segment of Beacon Street between two of its business districts: between Carlton Street and Charles Street in the east; or between Summit Path and Winchester Street in the middle; or between Winthrop Road and Ayr Road in the west. For periods of a few days to a few weeks, barrels/

cones and road tape would be used to show how parking (and perhaps lane) lines would be moved, and rubber ramps would be installed to cover missing curb cuts. The goal is to allow drivers, walkers, and cyclists to get a feel for the proposed new layout. These demonstrations are expected to take place starting in 2019, with the first slated for Saturday, May 18, between Carlton Street and Kent Street. The second phase would be “quick-build” pilot installations in the same segments using temporary rubber curbs (and/or flex-posts) and paint (and perhaps some temporary crossing signals and stone-dust surfaces). These pilot installations could remain in place for periods of a few weeks to several months, and would permit engineers to explore ways to deal with intersections currently lacking crosswalks or signals, and with any storm-water drainage issues as well. This phase could be done in 2021 or 2022. The final phase, moving stone curbs and revising pavement, would not begin until public feedback and several design iterations had produced an acceptable plan.

### CHALLENGES (AND OPPORTUNITIES) AHEAD

Restoring the Beacon Street bridle path will require both citizen and town staff engagement. The Brookline Department of Public Works’ Transportation Division has to operate within tight budgetary and personnel limits. But the incremental, multi-year process that Beacon Street transformation needs should allow this work to fit in. While revising many of Beacon Street’s segments is generally straightforward, several of its intersections are complex — particularly at Coolidge Corner (Harvard Street), Saint Mary’s Street, and Washington Square (Washington Street). It would be a shame to have a gap in an otherwise continuous safe route between Audubon Circle and Cleveland Circle. But if a temporary missing connection would make this project do-able within staffing and budgetary constraints, it would be foolish to let the perfect become the enemy of the good. Simplifying the project may be an approach to increased feasibility. Perhaps revision of the most complex intersections could be left until last. In fact, there has been already been some discussion of ways to improve the narrow and uncomfortable trolley access space at Harvard Street (in Coolidge Corner), and it is possible that, as a happy synergy, this work might create opportunities to continue the median path through the intersection. Inevitably, there’s the money issue. Hopefully, Brookline can secure grants for the recently approved feasibility study. And both demonstration and pilot phases of implementation should be relatively inexpensive. But it’s likely that a more-final, more-perfect, full-length transformation will be costly. Town leaders will have to carefully program the capital expenses into future budgets — implementing the vision incrementally in various segments should make this affordable. Frederick Law Olmsted was a man of many careers, failing at several before finally finding his glory road in Central Park. Beacon Street, like its designer, has flourished and floundered. In the twenty-first century, can Beacon Street regain the beauty and function that it lost in the twentieth? It’s a question worth asking, and a vision worth working towards.

About Friends of the Beacon Street Bridle Path: <<http://beaconbridleway.org>>  
About the Emerald Network initiative of LivableStreets Alliance: <<http://emeraldnetwork.info>>

### Upcoming programs



A talk and community discussion about the original Olmsted plan to widen Beacon Street and a renewed vision to restore its bridle path.



A community event encouraging people to stroll, scooter, bike and envision Beacon Street with its bridle path reopened, inspired by its Olmsted design. With food, local groups and fun along the path



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## Support for Friends Groups

One of the primary objectives of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is to support and foster volunteer groups who help care for our parks. Park Friends groups' contribution to the quality of life in Brookline is invaluable and BGSA acts as their backup system.

The Umbrella functions of the Alliance include acting as fiscal agent; promoting activities throughout the year through email announcements, Facebook and Twitter; holding informational meetings with the Park & Recreation Director; and hosting gatherings to exchange ideas.

By supporting a strong network of park volunteers, BGSA enables individual groups to raise funds for special projects, attract more people to their parks, and foster a sense of stewardship throughout Brookline.

**Participate in your park and Brookline GreenSpace Alliance**

## Park Friends Groups Breakfast

BGSA hosts the Park Friends Group Breakfast annually as an opportunity for parks volunteers to gather and exchange ideas and information about their parks. This year Erin Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Space presented her departments projects for this year.

