

# Place

Celebrating 20 years of Advocacy, Education and Outreach

*"Place is the vessel in which the spirit of community is kept."*

From a speech delivered in Boston by Donald Rypkema, consultant to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, at the 1999 Annual Meeting of Historic Massachusetts (HM)

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## Fisher Hill Reservoir: History of Two Discrete Projects and One Public Park

By Edward Hsieh

In June of 2001, the Town of Brookline was offered the prime opportunity of acquiring the 10-acre, State-owned Fisher Hill Reservoir that sits across the street from the 4.8-acre covered reservoir owned by the Town. This large open space, nestled within an historic area of our community, has been of interest to the Town for over two decades and has been explicitly mentioned as a target for acquisition in the Open Space Plan 2000 and Open Space Plan 2005. Since the offer, the Town has been active in reviewing potential plans for both the State-owned and Town-owned reservoirs in Fisher Hill while moving forward on acquiring the State-owned site. Unfortunately, some are concerned that development of the State-owned site has become too dependent on the development of the Town-owned site.

### HISTORY OF FISHER HILL RESERVOIR

The Fisher Hill Reservoir sits within one of the most storied subdivisions in Brookline. The subdivision defined by Boylston Street on the south, MBTA tracks on the north, Chestnut Hill Avenue on the west and Cypress Street on the east has served as the home of some of the most prominent and forward-thinking individuals in the history of Brookline, including Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, William

Hyslop, Benjamin Goddard, Henry Lee, Joseph H. White and Jacob Pierce. In 1884, several residents hired the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted to create a development plan for Fisher Hill. The resultant subdivision is today the most unchanged Olmsted

designed subdivision in the country, leading to Fisher Hill garnering recognition as a National Register Historic District in 1984.

Initial construction of the reservoir which straddles Fisher Hill Avenue commenced during the same period that Olmsted was brought in to create a design. In 1875, the underground reservoirs located on what is now the Town-owned site to the East of Fisher Hill Avenue were built as a back-up water supply for Brookline and supplied by water pumped from the Charles River. In 1884, the State-owned site was developed by Boston as part of a plan to address the rapid influx of population to Boston

due to the Irish Potato Famine of 1843-45.

Planners had thought that the Cochituate System, which was built to supplement waning supplies for Boston, would be sufficient for the years to come following its establishment in 1845, but by 1870 the sharp increase in population merited the implementation of a four pressure zone system.

By diverting the Sudbury River and leveraging the existing Cochituate Aqueduct, the planners were



Graphic of the proposed design for the State-owned Reservoir Site. Courtesy Town of Brookline.

(Continued on page 4)

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# Sounds and Scenes Family Festival

## A Celebration of Music and Landscape

Allerton Overlook, Leverett Pond, in Olmsted Park

Saturday June 7, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

### Featuring

Activities for children ages 3 to 10, plus guided walks

Concerts at 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM and 12 NOON

Hear Maria Sangiolo, Brookline Music School Faculty and  
 Lorraine and Bennett Hammond!

### Organizing Sponsor

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

### Participating Sponsors

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance

Alliance members – High Street Hill Association

Friends of Leverett Pond

Friends of Fairsted

Immediately following *Sounds and Scenes*

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance will lead

## Sounds of Spring

A two mile walk beginning at 1:00 P.M. at Allerton Overlook in Olmsted Park  
 (intersection of Allerton Street and Pond Avenue, Brookline)



Scheduled for publication this fall

## *Landscapes of Brookline – An Enduring Legacy*

Contemporary photographs of historic landscapes

by Brookline photographers

**Frances Shedd Fisher, Marian Lazar, Jean Stringham,  
 Bruce Wolff and Judy Wong**

**A publication of Brookline GreenSpace Alliance**



### GROWING GREENSPACE

An Annual Garden Party Fundraising Event ~ June 22

Call 617 277-4777 for ticket information.

# What About Brookline's Water?

by Frances Shedd Fisher

Water – H<sub>2</sub>O – essential, mythical, purifying, covers about 70% of the earth's surface. In poetical terms water represents “the dailiness of life.” Scarcity due to drought, development and geography have led to conflict in other areas while, in our area, due to a combination of luck and planning, water is still abundant and pure.

Water in Brookline is supplied by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) which supplies water to municipalities in greater Boston and the MetroWest areas. MWRA's water comes from the Quabbin Reservoir, about 65 miles west of Boston, and the Wachusett Reservoir, about 35 miles west of Boston. The Quabbin alone can hold a 4-year supply of water.

The reservoirs are filled naturally by rain and snowfall onto protected land near the reservoirs, eventually running into streams that flow into the reservoirs. The water in the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs is considered to be of very high quality. Over 85% of the watershed lands that surround the reservoirs are covered in forest and wetlands, about 75% of which cannot be built on, keeping the water supply clean and clear. The streams and the reservoirs are tested often and patrolled daily by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

## Tasty water

In taste tests organized by the Today Show in July 2007, two professional wine tasters were given bottles of tap water from 12 cities across the county. New York City's water – whose quality is generally considered to be among the best in the nation – was not entered to avoid bias given that NYC is the site of NBC's Today Show. According to the tasters, the best tasting municipal water came from Salt Lake City (Rocky Mountain runoff water), Boston (Quabbin Reservoir) and Columbia, S.C.

One taster said Boston's water “has a purity – it's straight down the middle,” while the other taster declared, “It's very crisp and appealing.” Columbia's tap water was described as “a chunky monkey,” apparently meant to be a compliment! While all 12 samples of water were fit for drinking, one of the samples was

described as “tasting as if it had come out of 40 feet of new garden hose.”

NBC also reported that scientific tests show that bottled water is no better for you than tap water and in many areas you can buy 1,000 gallons of tap water for the price of one bottle of “spring” water. Americans spend \$30 billion a year on bottled water and, according to one report, 47 million gallons of oil are consumed annually to produce the bottles it comes in.

## Water standards and safety

The MWRA is, of course, responsible for assuring drinking water meets strict state and federal regulations. Water is treated at the new Carroll Water Treatment Plant at Walnut Hill in Marlborough. At the plant, water is disinfected with ozone gas bubbles, chloramines are added to protect water from potential contamination, and fluoride is added for healthy teeth. MWRA water is naturally lead free and, according to a March 2008 press release responding to questions about trace elements of pharmaceuticals reported to have been found in U.S. drinking water, “based on what the most current research indicates about the sources of these chemicals, MWRA believes there is little possibility for them to be present in our drinking water. Most other water systems have sources which are less protected, more developed, and more polluted, and even with very extensive treatment, chemicals may remain in their water.”

Water leaves the plant through the MetroWest Water Supply Tunnel, and local pipes eventually carry water into buildings in Brookline and our neighboring communities. According to Jeffrey McLaughlin, MWRA Community Relations Coordinator, Brookline's pipes, all cast iron and lined with concrete several years ago, are in excellent condition, “among the best.”

## Early Days

Before 1795, residents around Boston relied on local wells, rain barrels and a spring on the Boston Common for their water. In 1795, private water suppliers developed a delivery system, using wooden pipes made from tree trunks, to carry water from Jamaica Pond to Boston. By the 1840s, the City of Boston

(pop. 50,000) was faced with water quality and capacity issues. Another source of water was needed.

In 1845, a tributary of the Sudbury River was impounded to create Lake Cochituate which then became the cornerstone of the Boston water system. The Cochituate Aqueduct was completed to transport water to the Brookline Reservoir from which pipelines were constructed to small distribution reservoirs in all parts of the city. The first water from Lake Cochituate flowed into the Frog Pond on Boston Common in 1848 at a dedication ceremony which drew 100,000 people. (Brookline Reservoir is, of course, now a public park.)

## Need for water grew with Boston area

Quabbin Reservoir was Boston's fourth westward reach for a pure upland source of water that could be delivered by gravity and not require filtration. Construction of the Quabbin required impoundment of the Swift River and the taking of the towns of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott.

Construction began in 1936; filling commenced in 1939 and was completed in 1946. At the time, the 412 billion gallon reservoir was the largest man-made reservoir in the world devoted solely to water supply. It is still believed to be sufficient to supply the Boston metropolitan area for the foreseeable future.

*Most of the information for this article was taken from the MWRA's website which contains much interesting and detailed technical and historical information.*



Brookline Reservoir Park, dusk. Photo by Frances Shedd-Fisher

## Fisher Hill Reservoir continued from page 1

able to feed Brookline Reservoir and Chestnut Hill Reservoir by gravity. In turn, these two reservoirs fed the four pressure zones. The Fisher Hill Reservoir was created as part of the Southern High Pressure Zone, a zone developed to cover areas that could not be supplied by gravity. A high service pumping station fed water from Chestnut Hill Reservoir into Fisher Hill Reservoir.

In 1978, further expansion of the system allowed for the Southern High Pressure Zone to be taken offline, but according to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), which took over management of the water delivery and distribution systems around the metropolitan Boston area in 1985, the lack of redundancy in the Southern High Pressure Zone necessitated that the reservoirs in the zone remain on emergency standby. Continued development of the system eventually eliminated the need to keep the reservoirs on standby. By 2001, the State Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) had declared Fisher Hill Reservoir surplus property, paving the way for acquisition by Brookline.

### PLANNING THE FUTURE REUSE OF FISHER HILL RESERVOIR

When the Town received notification of the availability of the State-owned portion of the Fisher Hill Reservoir, DCAM was offering the site for direct municipal use at a price substantially below market value. The Town requested the opportunity to explore alternative uses for the site, and the Board of Selectmen appointed a Master Planning Committee in December of 2001 to explore possibilities for both the State-owned and Town-owned sites.

After exploring potential uses including affordable housing, open space protection and recreation, in December of 2002, the Master Planning Committee recommended to the Board of Selectmen that the State-owned site be used as a passive park and recreational field with the guidelines that the site be respectful of the character of the neighborhood, be handicapped accessible, provide reasonable parking, provide natural

habitat, protect the historic gatehouse and provide pedestrian access. The Committee further recommended that the Town-owned site be developed while respecting the single-family nature of the neighborhood and



View of the gatehouse looking from the perimeter path across the basin. Photo by Frances Shedd-Fisher

offering affordable housing. Funding from the development of the Town-owned site was expected to offset the cost of work on the State-owned site.

Subsequently, in January of 2003, the Board of Selectmen appointed two distinct design review committees to develop plans for the respective sites within the guidelines established by the Master Planning Committee.

### DESIGN FOR THE STATE-OWNED SITE

The Fisher Hill State Site Design Review Committee held public meetings during a nine month span. The Halvorson Design Partnership developed a plan for the State-owned site based on the meetings, which was approved by the Committee. This plan divides work on the park into two phases.



The Town-owned site looking across Fisher Avenue to the State-owned site. Photo by Frances Shedd-Fisher

Phase One, anticipated to cost \$1.85 Million, involves purchasing the property, developing a design, and making the park safe and accessible. This includes clearing out the overgrown and invasive vegetation, developing walking paths, grading, and fencing. According to Town staff, a full Design Review Process led by the Park and Recreation Commission to develop construction plans based on the Halvorson plan will occur after the purchase of the property is completed and prior to commencement of work on Phase One.

As suggested by the Design Review Committee, a fence around the basin to prevent climbing down the stone walls of the basin and a fence around the exterior to restrict access from random points will be considered during the Design Review Process. The grading of existing trails will also be examined with regards to ADA standards. Plus, enhancements to the natural topography of the site will be considered with the goal of creating additional paths, opening and expanding views within the park, and supplementing the natural habitat and environment. The work undertaken during this stage will lay the groundwork for passive and active uses of the park to coexist.

Phase Two will bring the active/passive combination to fruition. A planned regulation soccer field will serve as the centerpiece of this stage. The field will also double as a "Great Lawn" for other activities. Currently, according to the Town, the basin, where the field will most likely be situated, is very steep and will likely require grading and fill to make the area level enough for the intended uses. Further attention to walking paths, topography and habitat to help the active and passive mesh will also be considered during this phase.

Plans also include renovating the historic gatehouse, as it serves as a recognized symbol of the legacy of the space. Plus, some of the site will be used as a staging and storage area for the Town water department; currently, the staging area is being considered as an extension of the parking area that is called for within the guidelines established in the Master Plan.

Currently, \$3.5 million is budgeted for Phase Two. However, unlike the funding for Phase One, this funding has not yet been appropriated. It is currently expected that money from the sale and development of the Town-owned site will offset this cost, but progress on the design of the Town-site has been laced with controversy.

#### DESIGN FOR THE TOWN-OWNED SITE

The Fisher Hill Town Site Design Review Committee, consisting of representatives from the Selectmen, abutters, affordable housing and open space advocates and other community members, was convened in 2003 at about the same time as the State Site Committee. The Town Site Committee held meetings from 2003-2005 to develop goals for the site.

According to participants, the process of creating a plan acceptable to all interests has been complicated because it is difficult to reconcile the goal of respecting the historical single-family nature of the neighborhood with the goal of offering affordable housing opportunities. In addition, some still questioned the decision to develop the site at this time given that it is the last Town-owned undeveloped land. The Committee was not able to come to a consensus on whether to maximize the number of affordable housing units within the constraints of the guidelines, or on the target income levels for the affordable housing, or the density of the units, or on whether single family style homes facing Fisher Avenue could actually blend effectively with multiple units, or on whether to make the development into a cul-de-sac with public walking paths, as proposed by BGSA.

In 2006, the Town held a charrette involving neighbors to the development in an attempt to resolve unanswered questions and build consensus. While no issues were resolved, points of view were shared. In 2007, as a follow-up to the charette, the Selectmen established a reconstituted Committee with neighbors and affordable housing advocates representing community interests; the reconvened committee was tasked with issuing a Request for Information (RFI) to developers to gauge interest and gather further potential ideas for the development. Within the RFI, several guidelines addressing the long standing questions were suggested.

According to the RFI, the development should consist of mixed income housing consistent in appearance with the quality of neighborhood housing and with a maximum of 40 units. The RFI also establishes that the houses directly abutting Fisher Avenue should be single family houses with a “custom home



The perimeter path around the basin at Fisher Hill Reservoir.  
Photo by Frances Shedd-Fisher

design” style that will match the varied architecture throughout the neighborhood. These should mask the small multi-family homes located in the lots behind, which in turn cover the large multi-family units farthest back in the development; the multi-family units should accommodate 24 affordable housing units. The development should be built with “green” materials and techniques, and an open space buffer should help minimize impact of the development on the existing neighborhood. A pedestrian path should link the new Town park across Fisher Avenue to Seaver Street.

After receiving many responses to the RFI, the Town is currently preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to select a developer for the site. However, although the RFI seems to imply that many of the complexities have been addressed and states as one of three primary goals the funding of the park on the State-owned site with \$3.25 million, it is not clear whether the planned housing development will fully achieve the goal of funding the park development since that is somewhat subject to the whims of the market. Nor is it

clear whether the impending Design Review Process for the Town-owned site will drag on for a long time as the process leading up to the RFI and RFP did, effectively stalling the linked recreation project on the State-owned site.

#### LINKING FUNDING OF TWO DISCRETE PROJECTS

There has been much concern expressed that having funding of the development of the State-owned site contingent on funding from the Town-owned site will unnecessarily postpone the creation of a much-needed Town park. The future of the Town-owned site is still mercurial as the sale of the property and development of homes on the site are still far down the line, while the State-owned site has a more fully defined future.

In 2006, recognizing the unique opportunity to address open space needs in Brookline, Town Meeting approved the bonding of \$1.35 million needed to fund Phase One of the purchase and development of the park and at the same time committed to budgeting the total \$4.6 million needed for both phases within the CIP. After three attempts by Brookline, the State Legislature and Governor Patrick have finally agreed in 2008 to sign off on the sale of the property to Brookline. Currently, the Town is awaiting a survey of the site to determine the price of the land, and as long as the cost of the property falls within the range of the \$500,000 estimated in 2001 and budgeted for within the \$1.35 million, the property will become Town-owned land, allowing the Design Review Process and then Phase One development to commence. But that is as far as it can go under the current scheme.

Phase Two of the park development will remain in limbo as long as progress on the Town-owned site remains slow and uncertain. It has been suggested that the development of the two sites be un-linked through seeking alternative funding means for Phase Two of the park project, grants or even bonding. Whether this is practical or will be allowed by Town Meeting is to be determined. But one thing is certain: Fisher Hill Reservoir poses a prime opportunity to provide additional usable public open space to Brookline citizens, and the utmost should be done to ensure it can move forward. The need is clear, and it will not diminish with the passage of time.

## Beacon Street Reconstruction Project

By Edward Hsieh

*The Beacon Street Reconstruction Project was previously reported on by Edward Hsieh in Spring 2007 PLACE (see [www.brooklinegreenspace.org/Publications](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org/Publications)).*

**T**he trees have leafed out and the traffic woes are almost over on our Frederick Law Olmsted designed thoroughfare.

The Beacon Street Reconstruction Project is drawing to a close, and according to project coordinator, Bill Smith, the Project will be “substantially complete with all facets of the project by Memorial Day of 2008.”

Construction along Beacon Street is complete as of this writing in late April of 2008 except at Fairbanks where the trailers have been located during the Project. Work on this small area should not draw out past the end of May. Two of the three historic stairways between Coolidge Corner and Washington Square have been completely refurbished and are getting new hand rails at the end of April; the third stairway is being worked on and should be done before the end of May.

The furniture has been placed, including benches and receptacles; 20 of the 42 planned bike racks are out, with the remainder scheduled to be installed before May 18th. One prototype new railing to keep news boxes in line and in character with the other furniture is in place with the rest scheduled to

go in along with the final pieces of furniture.

The final phase of plantings began on April 22nd and involved significant tree plantings and additional groundcover and shrubbery plantings consistent with the contract drawings. The Town employees on the Project and from the Division of Parks and Open Space have paid close attention to the status of the new plantings and are aware that many of the plantings have died. Those plantings perished primarily due to lack of watering by the contractor during the drought last summer and are being replaced.

As the Project draws to a close, the Town will focus on examining the traffic signals and equipment and completing upgrades to those systems where necessary. Mr. Smith has been aware of concerns raised during the Project about congestion and the potential for air pollution due to equipment idling

along Beacon Street. He indicated that the Town is mindful of pedestrian traffic counts, which have been used to time the signal cycles to combat these potential problems. Further, the Town will continue to evaluate the system going forward and adjust accordingly.

Mr. Smith also mentioned that the MBTA has approached the Town about developing a prioritization signal system along Beacon Street that will improve the flow of trolleys. Work on a prioritization system is in its early stages, but if it is brought to fruition, promises an even more efficient, multi-use Beacon Street in line with Olmsted’s vision.



New plantings from the Beacon Street Reconstruction Project in front of the Coolidge Corner MBTA trolley stop. Photo by Judy Wong

## Muddy River Project

By Hugh Mattison

**P**rogress on the Muddy River Restoration Project is about as sluggish as the water flow on a late summer's day – on the surface at least. However, the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is now preparing 90% design plans. Over the next few months, a number of permits from different agencies (Boston Traffic Department, Boston Conservation Commission, Mass. Historic Commission, and others) will be sought and are expected to be issued, moving the process forward.

The most complex permitting deals with managing traffic along Brookline Avenue while replacing two six foot culverts with

a bridge crossing a 24 foot channel, and other changes to traffic patterns – during Red Sox season. Phase 1, the “daylighting” of the parkland in front of Landmark Center and traffic configuration changes, is scheduled to start next spring (2009) and be complete by FY11. As Mike Keegan, ACOE Project Manager says, “The money's in the bank,” indicating that funding will not slow this Phase down. The \$10 million in federal dollars approved and allocated will not be released, however, until the City of Boston and Town of Brookline sign a memorandum of understanding related to their obligations going forward which will, in

turn, trigger release of state funds approved for this project.

Meanwhile, the design of Phase 2 is scheduled for completion in FY11, with construction in the rest of the Muddy River Project Area to start shortly after. In the final analysis, if the river and Leverett and Willow Ponds are dredged and revitalized and landscaping is restored, the total cost could be as much as \$90 million, divided among state, federal and municipal governments. The result will be healthy waterways, solutions to flooding issues, and the restoration of an historic Olmsted landscape.

(continued on page 8)

## Longwood Medical Area

By Deborah Rivers, AIA

*This article is a sequel to an article that appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of PLACE.*

The Longwood Medical and Academic Area (LMA) continues to evolve and grow as the institutions' needs and community responses to their actions shape the built character of the district. One year later there is news on various projects previously covered.

Brigham & Women's Shapiro Center for Cardio Vascular Care at 70 Francis Street will be completed and occupied this spring. The somewhat bulky mass of the building is visible from the Muddy River Reservation and Station Street in Brookline Village, especially when the trees are bare. The Center will draw increased traffic and parking into the LMA. On a positive note, the project is on track to be LEED Silver Certified, the first for a hospital in the Boston area. The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) now requires projects over 50,000 square feet to be LEED certifiable [or equivalent] as part of the permitting process thus supporting sustainable design initiatives.

National Development, which took over the development of the property adjacent to Joslin Diabetes Center at the corner of Longwood and Brookline Avenues, presented the current version of the project to the LMA Forum in late February. The previously BRA-approved project included a 305' high residential tower, which has been eliminated in this proposal. While the proposed research building is 10' higher than the earlier version, the overall height [to 165'] and density reductions will significantly reduce negative environmental impacts such as ground level wind, shadows, and traffic. While some area residents are concerned that the 83 housing units that are being destroyed to make way for the project are not being replaced on site, the BRA and the Mayor's Office suggested that the Fenway and Mission Hill neighborhoods would be better places to build replacement housing.



Aerial view of the LMA. Photo BRA

Foundations for Dana Farber's new building at the corner of Brookline Avenue and Jimmy Fund Way are nearing completion and soon the steel framing for the 14-story research and patient care building will begin to rise out of the ground. This building replaces a 2-story building and surface parking that previously existed on the site. With all the new parking being housed below grade there is space created for a landscaped plaza at the building entry.

The steel framing for Wheelock College's 70' high/ 6-story Campus Center Student Residence building is nearing completion, filling the last vacant site along the Riverway. This urban edge creates a backdrop to the Muddy River park that is more appropriately scaled at the northern end of the LMA.

The LMA will continue to grow in the foreseeable future, despite the City of Boston's efforts to promote additional growth of various research activities into other sectors of the City such as the Crosstown development in lower Roxbury/South End. The reluctance on the part of some institutions to this move is related to the synergies that arise when researchers, educators, and practitioners can interact with each other and with patients.

The Urban Ring transportation system could encourage more dispersal, but is years from implementation.

Brookline remains a logical expansion zone for overflow activity from the LMA. The development of an office building at 2

Brookline Place by Children's Hospital has raised concerns that by meeting the current zoning parking requirements, this location could become "satellite parking for the Longwood Medical Area" (quote by John Bassett, Town Meeting member, in a March 30 Boston Globe article). In the same Globe article, Hugh Mattison, Town Meeting member and BGSA Board member, suggested that reduced parking requirements for a site served by two branches of the Green Line and four bus routes would be a sustainable idea. Mattison has submitted a warrant article to address the issue, scheduled for consideration at Annual Town Meeting this May.

Area residents and other Brookline citizens need to stay alert to the quality of the Children's development, including usable open space that can soften the addition of this very tall building to the edge of Brookline Village. If the building is well integrated into the surrounding area, providing new amenities, it can have some positive impact beyond the additional revenues it will bring to Brookline, but the height and the traffic impact will be continuing concerns.

*Deborah Rivers is an architect and a BGSA Board member*

**Editor's note:** In checking with Jeff Levine, Director of Planning and Community Development, we learned that Jeff and his staff do stay alert to development in the LMA area and regularly make comments to MASCO (Medical, Academic and Scientific Community Organization). But, according to Jeff, Brookline has no leverage to influence development in Boston – LMA or otherwise. According to Peter Ditto, director of Engineering and Transportation division, Brookline is doing its best to diminish the impact of development in Newton on Brookline, but has not pushed back where Boston is concerned. We understand that Brookline's efforts may fall on deaf ears but continue to believe that moral suasion and reasoned dialogue can have an influence, particularly where regional issues are concerned. We urge Town officials and citizens to keep the pressure on.

FSF

## Muddy River Project continued from page 6

Updates

Near-term, and not related to the multi-jurisdictional Muddy River Project, the installation of handicapped access ramps by the MBTA at the Longwood Riverside "D" line station, providing handicapped access to Riverway Park, will begin this summer. New plantings and removal of the flight of concrete steps will transform this shabby area. This will be an exciting development for park users, long anticipated by neighbors and others.

*Hugh Mattison is a long-time activist for the restoration of Riverway and Olmsted Parks, and a member of the BGSA board.*

Muddy River at Longwood Avenue.  
Photo by Marian Lazar



- ① BGSA Board Member, Marian Lazar, leads BGSA Tour of the new Newton St. Landfill Park, Fall 2007.
- ② BGSA Board Member, Hugh Mattison, leads BGSA Fall Foliage Tour in Olmsted Park, October 2007.
- ③ BGSA President, Arlene Mattison and Executive Director, Edward Hsieh receive the PAX leadership award on behalf of the organization from Diana Spiegel, PAX Board Member, March 2008.
- ④ Executive Director, Edward Hsieh, leads BGSA D. Blakely Hoar Sanctuary Walk, March 2008.
- ⑤ Brookline Tree Warden, Tom Brady, leads BGSA Winter Tree Identification Walk in Riverway Park, February 2008. Photo by Jean Stringham
- ⑥ BGSA Table, Earth Day 2008, Coolidge Corner. Celebrate OUR Earth encourages park volunteerism.

Photos ① ② ③ ④ and ⑥ by Judy Wong

# Sustainability: Can We Just Forget About Nature?

by Gail McClelland Fenton

**D**uring a forum in February, Brookline organizations and individuals presented actions that they would take to increase the town's sustainability. Recycling, household energy efficiency, and bike trails were a few of the actions aimed at reducing our carbon footprint, decreasing other kinds of pollution, and using resources in a sustainable manner.

"Green" and "eco-friendly" practices have been getting much press lately. Often, they focus on human wants and needs, and deemphasize the wants and needs of the rest of the species on this planet.

In 2002, a working group convened by the United Nations Environment Program articulated a sweeping vision of sustainability, "To create environmentally healthy, vibrant and sustainable cities where people respect one another and nature, to the benefit of all." Only one of the ten resulting Melbourne Principles puts the benefits to nature on a par with the benefits to humans: "Recognize the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and protect and restore them."

This role of conservation as part of urban sustainability has been given short shrift.

Cleaning up our act will not necessarily save the other species. And without the other species, humans may not fare well.

People need natural ecosystems. The ecosystem is a highly complex interactive system. Species depend on each other within habitats that must meet all their life needs. Inter-linked habitats and the specific components of non-living nature associated with them, such as temperature, water, and mineral composition of the soil, comprise an ecosystem. An ecosystem is not just the sum of its parts; it is also the sum of



Conservation restricted land allowed to go wild to protect habitat. Photo by Frances Shedd-Fisher

all of the interrelationships of each of its parts.

What people know as "nature" does not work in isolation. We don't know if there are any components of the ecosystem that we can sacrifice and still save the components that are vital to our interests.

One way to think about the value of ecosystems to humans is to consider "ecosystem services," which have been categorized as provisioning us, enriching us, or regulating the various components of the ecosystem.

**"Parks are often assumed to be equivalent to conservation lands, but they are not."**

We do not get many of our provisions from within the town of Brookline. A few of us plant or harvest food here, or use fallen trees and twigs for fuel. We no longer drink our own well water. We don't quarry, we don't log, and we don't have enough space to farm. We are provided with good, fresh air, courtesy of the cleansing functions of trees and other plants that grace Brookline, despite auto emissions and air conditioner exhaust.

Ecosystem enrichment services include opportunities for aesthetic appreciation, education, and scientific knowledge. In Brookline, we are good at aesthetic appreciation, so our scarce nature serves us surprisingly well. School children study natural science in our conservation lands. For advanced knowledge, most of us go to other places, in other communities, where there is greater biodiversity and more complex habitats.

The ecosystem's self-regulatory functions mostly have an effect at the regional level. Within Brookline, an impressive suite of local organisms helps regulate the ecosystem. They are local. They are native. They are the soil-dwelling organisms, including fungi and bacteria. In intact soils, they serve as decomposers, recyclers, and for carbon storage. They keep the soil healthy and circulate air, water, and nutrients throughout the habitat. They harm some species and help others. When we leave native soil undisturbed, they work for us. When we bulldoze, pave, or poison it, they do not.



Redwinged Blackbird.  
Photo by  
Bruce Wolff

There are few remaining habitats in Brookline that have the level of ecosystem complexity that we need. The publicly-owned ones include the Hoar Sanctuary, Lost Pond, Halls Pond and Amory Woods, Dane Park, Putterham Woods, the old state-owned Fisher Hill Reservoir, DCR and MBTA land, the unlandscaped patches around the golf course, and other shreds of habitats. We have already lost so much; it is painful to contemplate what else we might lose. We should set goals for preserving and protecting more native habitats.

Our conservation sanctuaries are small, yet they are habitats for surprisingly diverse animals. They are impacted heavily by humans, loved well, but not always wisely. We need more conservation sanctuaries just to serve our human needs. To serve wildlife, we need to conserve even more.

Properties owned by institutions or private citizens provide a considerable proportion of our local ecosystem services. Unfortunately, they could be degraded by landscaping or destroyed for building at the owners' discretion. Only those privately owned lands that carry conservation restrictions are protected. Conservation restrictions protect natural habitats for future generations. Even when there is no public access, conservation restrictions generate ecosystem benefits for all of us.

Larger parcels with intact habitats usually have more ecological value than smaller ones. It would be advantageous if the Town were to develop procedures, partnerships and funding sources to acquire any such parcels that should become available. However, to acquire such properties and then convert them to uses that destroy their habitats and their ecosystem values is counter-productive.

Parks, open spaces, and green spaces are often assumed to be equivalent to conservation lands, but they are not. Our parks are wonderful for people, but they are not good habitats for native species. Active people and pets disrupt

(continued on page 10)

# 'Sustainability' takes a step forward in Brookline

by David Lowe

**F**ollowing the November 2007 Brookline Town Meeting, a few environmental activists converged in recognizing the helter-skelter nature of local initiatives. Realizing how much more could be accomplished by speaking and acting with unified voice and coordinated vision, a group of community leaders met in December and settled on forming an umbrella network.

The initiative began with Sustainable Brookline, an open platform for local civic groups with compatible and coinciding environmental programs. Sixty participants braved a snow squall and gave up a Sunday afternoon to share their thoughts and plans at a gathering at Wheelock College on Hawes Street on February 10. Representatives of 13 local groups presented 30 action plans for discussion. The event was videoed by Brookline Access Television and shown on BAT in February. (For those who missed it, a tape may be secured for viewing. Contact BGS or BAT directly.)

'Sustainability,' as a concept, is broadly defined in terms of social and generational equity. The concept generally encompasses a concern for providing a respectable quality of life and health to all segments of society while managing resource use and environmental impact ("footprint") so that future generations have the means to achieve similar standards of living. While there is no clear

consensus definition, the one created by the Brundtland Commission, led by the former Prime Minister of Norway, is a good working definition: the concept of sustainability is one that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

It has long been clear – and not just to those in the "Sustainability" movement – that we are not meeting that standard, either in terms of global resource needs or in terms of environmental impact. With recent revelations about global warming impacts, sustaining our resource stocks is not enough. We need to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions (closely tied to energy use) by at least 80% in the next few decades to avert climate crises for our children. This is a daunting challenge that can only be achieved if we pull together and coordinate our efforts among civic groups, government departments, the private sector, educational institutions, and, very importantly, among developed and developing nations.

The breadth of the local Sustainability components is reflected in the presentations made to the February forum. We heard proposals favoring cleaner transportation options and alternatives to cars; initiatives to promote energy efficient buildings, protection of green open spaces and wildlife habitat, educational programs and outreach to

encourage individual responsibility, enhanced tree care, increased recycling and waste reduction, and others. Participants proposed working with the Town, the schools, and local businesses.

While there is much to be done, we are excited to have a forum for recruiting support and sharing information and momentum across institutions so as to make Brookline a better place to live and a leader in addressing problems facing our society as a whole. A report is being completed to summarize our collective vision. A steering committee has met twice and continues to convene twice monthly. A web site is in development. Visit [www.sustainablebrookline.org](http://www.sustainablebrookline.org) in coming months to find the report, view our progress, and to learn how you can join in our efforts.

*David Lowe is Co-Chair, Climate Change Action Brookline (CCAB)*



Don Weitzman, Betsy Shure Gross, Tommy Vitolo, Andrew Fischer, John Dempsey, Adam Mitchell, Werner Lohe, Arlene Mattison, planners of Sustainable Brookline Forum. Photo by Bruce Wolff

## Sustainability: Can We Just Forget About Nature? continued from page 8

wildlife. Bumblebees, rabbits, or robins can use a grassy park as part of their habitat, but they need more. Artificial turf does not provide habitat. Good park maintenance is substantially different from appropriate practices for conservation purposes. For example, in parks, leaves and dead branches are raked away rather than being left to fertilize the trees, preserve ground moisture, and provide a seed bed for other plants.

In less-functional habitats, it might be possible to help the ecosystem heal itself. This is not always practicable, as many native plant species have become too scarce to re-establish themselves. Available habitats may not be sufficient for any native animals that are able to

migrate to them. Some do arrive, but survive only by changing their behavior and living like urban pests. Turkeys and coyotes are becoming urbanized, perhaps domesticated. This is not the goal.

Gardens are not wild habitats. A "green" roof or a butterfly garden is not a sufficient habitat. Yet planting native plants is valuable, and it is the most readily achievable goal.

Native plants should be chosen for their wildlife value, such as food and shelter for native animals. Native milkweed is not favored by gardeners, but is just right for the caterpillar of a Monarch butterfly. Cultivars that are developed for garden appeal are not of equal value.

We should support native plantings in parks, schoolyards, and traffic circles, as well as planting them in our own yards or container gardens. We should do this, not as a justification for wiping out native habitat, but in addition to protecting habitat.

*Gail Fenton is a Brookline Naturalist.*



Spotted Salamander eggs in Brookline. Photo by Judy Wong

# Composting Is Good for the Environment

By Lauren Klatsky

**B**y now, most ecologically-minded consumers are familiar with the mantra: "reduce, recycle, reuse." Individuals devoted to minimizing their waste stream have found very creative ways to give new life to plastic yogurt cups, milk cartons and other packaging they bring home from the grocery store, which makes up a significant portion of the garbage that clogs landfills and blows around the city on windy days.

Salvaging and recycling food wrappers is a good first step; however, the waste stream could be further reduced if more consumers composted their food scraps and leftovers. Compost is an earth-like substance that is produced through the natural breakdown of organic materials, such as fruit and vegetable peelings, egg shells and coffee grounds, by microbes and worms. It can be used in landscaping, horticulture and agriculture as a soil conditioner and fertilizer.

Not only can food scraps be turned into compost, but so can paper and biomaterials made from corn or other natural fibers. Compostable garbage bags made from corn can be purchased so that the bag used to collect kitchen scraps may be thrown in the compost pile along with its contents. Environmentally-conscious food retail establishments, such as Whole Foods Market, now offer compostable salad bar containers derived from wildly harvested cattails, an abundant, renewable

resource. Customers who dine in the store can place these containers in trash cans designated for compost only. The compostable materials that are collected from both customers and team members who prepare food in the back of the store are hauled away to a commercial facility that produces fertilizer.

Anyone can compost at home. Vermicomposting is one type of composting that utilizes worms to break down food scraps into a nutrient-rich product great for improving the quality of soil. This type of composting



requires very little space and any old container made from wood or plastic can be used. The worms needed are available from nursery mail-order suppliers or fishing supply stores that sell bait. While a composting bin can be kept inside, most home owners choose to locate theirs outside due to the unsavory aroma that may be released, especially in warm weather. If do-it-yourself composting is not an option, some local farms are willing to accept food scraps from their neighbors and many cities and towns across the country now have compost drop off sites.

Once the resolve has been established, very little effort is required to reduce the quantity of garbage your household sends off to the landfill. It's only a matter of time before "trash bags" become a thing of the past.

*Lauren Klatsky is the Marketing Team Leader at the Whole Foods Market in Brighton. She can be reached at Lauren.klatsky@wholefoods.com.*

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance and Whole Foods partnered for Earth Day to produce reusable bags during BGSA's Celebrate OUR Earth week-long event. All proceeds from the sale of the co-branded bags go towards supporting BGSA advocacy and education activities; contact BGSA if you wish to purchase a bag for \$0.99 to support our activities.

Whole Foods is helping the environment and reducing waste by eliminating disposable plastic grocery bags at their stores. The transition was accomplished by Earth Day, April 22, 2008. Whole Foods is providing further incentive to use the reusable bags instead of paper bags by giving a 5 cent per bag refund every time the bags are used at the checkout.

# The Importance of Buying Local

By John Lee

If it is spring in New England, it is time to refocus attention on food, feed and where we gather our nutrient. In other words: locally. From a farmer's humble perspective the bumper sticker of choice should be "Think Locally; Act Locally." But first, a definition of terms. 'Food' is what is fresh, unrefined, unadulterated with added anything, and good for you. 'Feed,' on the other hand, is what all too many of us consume for all too much of the year: highly processed, ready-to-eat, deli-style, canned, from god-knows-where, not good for you, arguably comestible. Feed is what makes us fatter, food is what keeps us healthier (unless we smoke or drink too much).

That being said, local in this context has an enormous ripple effect. Consider what life might be like if your supermarket were to become your farm (i.e. source of fresh produce). How much confidence do you have in the produce manager's knowledge of what really is on display (never mind the meat/poultry manager!)? Most have little or no investment in satisfying you much beyond what their product looks like in their displays. Their principal interest is in moving product out the door. On the other hand, your local producer/purveyor certainly does. This is a critical difference. From a farmer's point of view, selling a head of lettuce is not just the transaction. It is about quality, about the

local hirees involved in the production, the management of open space, about education, customer relations and a huge amount of personal investment in every head that goes out the door.

From a purely societal point of view, buying local means knowing the grower and having confidence in their skill and cultural practices. In an ideal world, it means knowing the grower personally at least to the extent that s/he is the on-the-farm individual who is invested in your well-being.

In Brookline, local means supporting your farmers' markets in whatever neighbor-

*(continued on next page)*

## The Importance of Buying Local continued

hood may be convenient. Similarly it means supporting your local farm, CSA or other fresh producer/vender. It also means seeking out the appropriate personnel at your other shopping venues and leaning on them to buy from 'local' producers whatever that may mean given the product or the season. It means leaning on the schools to provide better meals for your children by contacting groups like the MA Farm to School program.

In short, buying local, means injecting a little more thought and energy into the food choices that need to be made to feed yourself and/or your family. It means making conscious choices about keeping your food dollars in the greater Brookline neighborhood because by doing so you are helping to keep open spaces in private hands and off the town's maintenance budget. Open space (public or private) is far more cost effective than residential development from a taxation point of view and it is a cultural, social and economic amenity.

Lastly, 'local' does not differentiate between organic and otherwise. Given the paucity of agricultural opportunity in the metro-Boston area, supporting your farmer of any stripe is the first priority. Certainly, one should make their choice of which farmers to patronize based on personal preference if the choice is available. But you should also feel free to express your interests (if you are well-informed versus simply opinionated) to any farm you wish. Farmers want your business and if they want to stay in business will give you an ear.

It is particularly germane in this season of very high energy and transportation costs to support local agriculture. Not only will you be minimizing your carbon footprint but you will be injecting your market dollars where they will be doing the most good: here at home. Farmers are already saddled with high land and labour costs. Energy costs this year will drive a few farms who already operate on the margins of profitability out

of business. Almost no-one will keep open space in agriculture for eleemosynary reasons. To remain in operation, sales must keep pace with increasing costs, at least. This is where you, the consumer, become the make-or-break cog in the economic chain. Your investment in your personal well-being is what will keep the ripple that is successful production farming a viable enterprise and thus keep scarce open space from becoming house lots.

*John Lee is manager of Allandale Farm.*



Photo by Judy Wong

## RAFFLE

Buy a \$20 raffle ticket for a chance at the following wonderful prizes! Only 250 available! All proceeds go towards funding BGSA's advocacy and education efforts. Tickets are available via [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org) or call 617-277-4777. Drawing to be held June 22nd.

- ▼ 2 tickets for Field Box seats at Fenway Park + Signed photo of Mike Timlin
- ▼ 2 tickets for Field Box seats at Fenway Park
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- ▼ Wine tasting for ten at Westport Rivers Winery + Bottle of Sparkling Wine
- ▼ Four rose bushes from Mahoney's Garden Center

Join BGSA via our website, [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org) or mail coupon to: 370 Washington Street, Brookline MA 02445

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