



# Alliance Update

Spring 2003

Newsletter of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance

## ON-STREET PARKING—A BROOKLINE DILEMMA

By Abby Swaine and Mike Sandman

Perhaps the most common concern we on Brookline's Transportation Board hear raised (other than the need for traffic calming measures to improve safety) is the scarcity of parking—on-street and off-street, commercial and residential, overnight and daytime, for residents and visitors. Angst about parking seems to have been exacerbated by increased fines and better enforcement. (We'll take advantage of the bully pulpit to point out that fine rates are still behind inflation, and that the purpose of enforcement is to uphold the regulations, not balance the budget.)

Some recent symptoms of parking angst: letters in the TAB calling upon the Town to end its prohibition of on-street overnight parking; similar questioning of the Town-wide 2-hour daytime parking limit; a flood of requests to establish neighborhood permit parking programs to override this limit; and developers justify-

ing the excessive number of units in their 40B proposals as necessary to compensate for Town Meeting having greatly increased the number of parking spaces required per unit.

Interestingly, though, we hear as many voices in favor of maintaining these restrictions, in effect since 1896, as we do advocating abolishing them. The Town's streets are public property, to be shared equitably—a sort of asphalt Commons, if you will. Those opposed to allowing unfettered access raise logistical concerns, such as the likelihood that if people can leave their cars on the street longer they will, whether they really need to or not. (That is, if they can find a space in the first place, hardly a sure thing since we do not have street space for every resident car.) If street spaces turn over less frequently, any individual will be less likely to find a space at any given time, a phenomenon that has been amply demonstrated in Cambridge,

Southie and Back Bay. In addition, our police express concern that officers in patrol cars will not be as easily able to detect suspicious behavior near buildings if their view is obstructed by parked cars, that muggers might hide in or between closely-parked cars, and that overnight on-street parking might lead to more car vandalism and theft, acting as a sort of vector for other crime.

And finally, those opposed raise aesthetic and environmental concerns; taken together, all these concerns conjure up a miniature Tragedy of the Commons that would seem comical but for its potential impact on our quality of life.

What does increasing parking on asphalt streets that already exist have to do with Green Space and the environment? Several things, some certain and some possible:

✓ If our streets are more continuously occupied by parked cars, street sweeping and snow

plowing will become more difficult, leading to more debris staying on the streets and traveling via storm drains to the Muddy River and other waters. The litter-clogged sidewalks and gutters along Route 9, which is not regulated by Brookline, but instead by Mass Highway, offer a vivid illustration of this.

✓ The "viewsheds" we value (of parks and other green spaces) will be more often blocked and cluttered by vehicles.

✓ If street spaces turn over less frequently, drivers may spend more time trolling for an empty spot; a 1999 Globe article revealed that Back Bay residents typically spend 45 minutes searching for a parking spot. Circling means more noxious exhaust and noise pollution.

✓ On the other hand, one might hope that more liberal access to on-street parking might reduce residents' incen-

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# Transportation and Open Space

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Newsletter Edited by Frances Shedd Fisher

## SAVING ST. AIDAN'S HERITAGE TREES

An Advocacy Primer

By Diana Lees Spiegel

At the end of January the Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals concluded six months of intense, jam-packed hearings regarding the proposed 40B development of the St. Aidan's Church site on Freeman Street. The process resulted in a final compromise plan that makes an important contribution to the Town's supply of affordable housing, while at the same time mandating preservation of the exterior of the historically and architecturally significant church building through operation of a preservation easement. In addition, and of great significance to the neighborhood and North Brookline, conservation easements provide for preservation, maintenance and public accessibility of the landscaped forecourt with its heritage trees. All of these outcomes were important parts of the balance that the neighborhood and the Campaign to Preserve St. Aidan's (CPSA) sought.

#### Advocacy Efforts

While eighteen months into the two year process the developer finally responded to the insistence of CPSA that the church not be demolished by submitting a proposal that included adaptive reuse of the church building as market rate condominiums, it was even later, toward the end of the process, that the decision to develop the open space and cut down or relocate the beloved trees, was reversed. Numerous open space advocates from the neighborhood, CPSA, Brookline GreenSpace, Preservation and Conservation Commissions, and from elsewhere in Town, signed petitions and spoke passionately and eloquently in favor of preserving the forecourt, in particular the 150 year old copper beech and other heritage trees. At a critical moment in January 2003, when the development proposal still included buildings and the removal of trees, 200 people participated in a rally in front of the church, organized by CPSA to express support for a smaller development with preservation of open space and of heritage trees.

#### Heritage Trees are Saved

In February the ZBA voted final approval of a new compromise proposal which included an additional \$1 million contribution from the Town (already at \$2.5 million to assure lower density in our already densely populated neighborhood), reduced the size of the project by 10 market units, and preserved the forecourt, including the copper beech and large maple. In March the ZBA issued their written decision with 21 conditions attached which include preservation and conservation easements to preserve the architectural integrity of the historic church building and to protect the open space.

The improved outcome was the result of sustained public advocacy by Brookline citizens and boards as well as recognition by Town officials and Selectmen (in particular Selectman Allen who helped to guide the process) of the strength of public feeling for preservation of precious open space, particularly in an area of town that the Town's Open Space 2000 report has cited as urgently deficient in open space.

[Diana Spiegel, a Stetson Street resident and TMM in Precinct 2, is Co-Chair of the Campaign to Preserve St. Aidan's, an organizational member of BGSA. A more detailed version of Ms. Spiegel's report on the advocacy efforts to preserve St. Aidan's is included on the BGSA website.]



photo by Jean Stringham

# THE TRUE VALUE OF OPEN SPACE

By Tina Oddleifson, Executive Director, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance

It would be hard to find anyone who didn't appreciate how much our parks, sanctuaries, street trees, greenways and playing fields add to the quality of our life. But besides providing beautiful scenery and places for us to walk or play, did you know that these resources also play a critical role in public health and safety, flood control, and even the economic viability of a community? A green infrastructure in a town or city is as essential to a healthy community as its roads, schools, police, fire and other services.

Human activities such as driving cars, building houses and commercial spaces, and running air conditioning, lighting and heating, place a stress on urban environments that green spaces help relieve. Trees and other vegetation absorb ozone, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and other noxious air pollutants. They also remove dust and particles from the air, including dangerous heavy metals. The transpiration of water by plants helps control and regulate humidity and temperature. A single tree can remove as much heat from the

air as five average room-sized air conditioners. Trees and vegetation also protect us from the wind and sun and moderate temperature in the winter. The result is a decrease in energy consumption, along with its costs and associated pollution. According to the American Forestry Association, the average tree provides more than \$57,000 in environmental and economic benefits.

Americans spend more money on healthcare than any nation on earth. Today's youth are experiencing alarming health problems due to a sedentary lifestyle spent in front of a computer screen or television set, and traveling by car even when going short distances. Prevention has now become the most important strategy for counteracting these spiraling costs and trends. Access to parks, open spaces and bikeways, and the recreational activities they provide, helps to encourage a more physically active lifestyle, which in turn improves general health and wellness and saves on healthcare costs for communities and businesses.

According to a study conducted by the Trust for Public Land, one of the most important factors influencing a business location decision is quality of life. "In America's new service and technological economy, quality of life for our workforce has become a competitive imperative. Livability is at the top of the list when businesses look at where to invest and locate." (Will Rogers, President, Trust for Public Land)

Recent studies conducted by University of Illinois have also found that parks and open spaces can play an important role in reducing crime. Residents living near green spaces enjoy more social activities, have more visits with their neighbors and have stronger feelings of belonging. Common areas facilitate the development and maintenance of strong social ties, which are the very fabric of a healthy neighborhood. A study at the Harvard School of Public Health on urban neighborhoods in the mid 1990's showed that lower rates of violence occur in neighborhoods characterized by "collective

efficacy"—which is mutual trust among residents and a willingness to intervene in the maintenance of public order. Members of a successful neighborhood feel connected to each other—something that parks and open spaces help facilitate

Finally, parks located in stream valleys or urban wetlands, such as the Muddy River, absorb storm water much more economically than do artificial systems. Open spaces also allow rainwater to be absorbed slowly and to percolate into underground aquifers, reducing the danger of flash flooding or erosion due to rapid runoff, as well as making water available to trees and shrubs.

The true value of open space is immeasurable. Besides providing us with beauty and peaceful places to visit that inspire us and feed our souls, they also are an essential part of our Town's long-term economic and social well-being. The costs of maintaining these resources are an important investment in our future.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN—BROOKLINE'S FUTURE

by Arlene Mattison [Originally published in BGSA's GreenViews column in the Brookline TAB]

One of the first tasks of the Comprehensive Planning process in Brookline has been to determine a vision for the future of the Town. One of the traits of which Brookline is most proud is diversity; with this the case, is our vision also diverse? Do some citizens crave the con-

veniences of greater urbanization while others want to provide increased open spaces? Do we agree that excellent Town services and a location close to Boston are the major attractions of Brookline? Do our Town centers hold charm or are they an opportunity for high-rise buildings? Do some

want things to stay the way they are or at least to protect our heritage and history, and if so, are they obstructionists afraid of the change the future always brings?

It is almost certain that there will be growth in our future. But a lesson from the recent stock market boom and

decline was that growth is not in itself the determinate of value.

As this comprehensive plan attempts to guide change, it must address how growth impacts our quality of life. As the planning process considers streetscape improvements,

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# CARLTON STREET FOOTBRIDGE WARRANT ARTICLES

## ARTICLE 12 (Summary)

To see if the Town will appropriate and transfer from available funds \$30,000, to be expended under the direction of the Board of Selectmen, for determining costs, pursuing a feasible design to provide access for the mobility-impaired, and developing plans and specifications for the reconstruction and restoration of the Carlton Street Footbridge entrance to Riverway Park, and authorize the Selectmen to apply for, receive and expend state, federal or other grants, aid, loans or reimbursements for such project.

### Explanation:

Proponents of this article include residents of Precinct One, where the Carlton Street entrance to Riverway Park is located, as well as Brookline residents who support restoration of the entrance consistent with the Master Plan for restoring the Emerald Necklace Parks.

Riverway Park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted to be entered via a footbridge that brings the stroller from Carlton Street, over the tracks that divide the park from the neighborhood, into a carefully constructed vista. The bridge, constructed by the town in 1894 as the formal entrance to the park, has been closed for approximately twenty-eight years, and is now in need of action to prevent further deterioration or removal. Its restoration is specifically included in the Emerald Necklace Master Plan.

During the period 2000 - 2002 the Town hired five consultants to review feasibility, safe-

ty and historic issues related to the entrance. Each consultant has concluded the entrance can and should be restored. In April 2002 the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Administration (MEPA) concurred with the consultants.

The Brookline GreenSpace Alliance concludes it is time to move ahead with the restoration of this last signal symbol of the shabbification and neglect that took place in Brookline in the 1970's and 1980's, and earlier. Passage of this article will move the process forward and make it possible for the Friends of the Carlton Street Footbridge and the Town to seek grants and other funding, particularly from Federal sources specifically related to historic preservation and alternative transportation opportunities. Brookline GreenSpace urges constituents to contact your Town Meeting Members and ask their support for this article.

See [www.townofbrookline-mass.com](http://www.townofbrookline-mass.com) for names of Town Meeting Members listed by precinct. Call Town Clerk's office 617 730-2010 if you do not know your precinct.



Carlton Street Footbridge

## Warrant Article 13 A Resolution

In 1984, the Dukakis administration implemented a statewide Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program. A number of parks in Massachusetts designed by nationally renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (a Brookline resident) were designated for restoration. In April 1991, a Master Plan for restoration of the Emerald Necklace was presented to and approved by four Brookline Boards and Commissions, and then unanimously by the Board of Selectmen, concluding an extensive public process. Riverway Park had received little attention up to that time—or since then—but is now part of a Muddy River Restoration Project (the largest such project currently including Federal funding). The Carlton Street entrance to Riverway Park has been closed for years—a symbol of maintenance neglect dating back to the 1970's. While other neglected areas of the park and the Town are being, or have been, addressed, the principal entrance to Riverway Park has not been.

Today, the Master Plan remains a document worthy of implementation. Town Meeting Warrant 13 asks Town Meeting to honor the numerous agreements based on implementation of the Master Plan, and entered into by the Town with the Commonwealth. The Resolution simply asks that Brookline be true to its words and keep its commitments.

“WHEREAS, in 2003 the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Muddy River Project, prepared and submitted jointly by Boston and Brookline, makes the following statements:

‘Proponents [Boston and Brookline] will be required to maintain the historic and character defining features of the restored parks.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That it is the will of Town Meeting, and the Selectmen are directed to act accordingly, to fulfill the commitments made by the Town between 1986 and 2003 to the Commonwealth by taking the steps necessary to restore expeditiously the Carlton Street Footbridge entry to Riverway Park, including the preparation and submission of applications for outside funds to restore the bridge and provide funding from grants, aid, loans, tax revenue, or any other source, as necessary to restore the Footbridge.”

*(The full text of the resolution and accompanying explanation are available on the Town of Brookline website at <http://www.townofbrookline-mass.com>, click on the link for Town Meeting Warrant Articles.)*

The Town has received outside funding based on adhering to the Master Plan and is currently seeking additional outside funding. Honoring our commitment to implementation of the elements of the Master Plan, including restoration of the historic footbridge entrance to Riverway Park, will further our efforts to protect and enhance the entire Emerald Necklace, a national treasure and a symbol of democratic ideals.

It is uniquely appropriate that a portion of this great park resides in Brookline, a community known for its inclusiveness, high standards, and integrity. The Brookline GreenSpace Alliance urges citizens to contact their Town Meeting Members to voice their support for park restoration and this Resolution.

# CHESTNUT HILL VILLAGE ALLIANCE VISION FOR BROOKLINE'S FUTURE

By Marjorie Greville

The Chestnut Hill Village Alliance (CHVA) was founded in 1998 by representatives of local civic groups from Brookline and Newton to provide a forum for public discussion to develop design guidelines that will create a vision to influence future development in our area. The goal is to build a safe, viable, and aesthetically pleasing village center that supports and is linked to our existing residential areas and to our green and public open spaces. As participants in Brookline's Comprehensive Planning Process, we would like to see future growth directed towards transforming the Town into a connected series of vibrant and safe residential/commercial neighborhoods.

In our Chestnut Hill neighborhood at present, there are several new developments that, if completed as designed, will overburden an already congested road system and further isolate our residential areas. To avoid this fate we would like to have the following considerations become part of the conversation in planning our future.

**Traffic:** Because our commercial strip is divided by a state highway, our traffic problems are severe. We would like to see Brookline enter into discussion with the state highway department about transforming the Route 9 corridor into a residential scale connector that allows for regional traffic containment while permitting local vehicular access and use. Since our community includes both sides of the commercial strip, it is important to us to



have connections across the roadway to encourage 'one stop shopping,' reduce the number of vehicular trips, and promote pedestrian movement.

The CHVA has focused on the Hammond Street/Route 9 intersection. We feel this intersection needs to be re-engineered to accommodate safe local and pedestrian use. We sponsored a warrant article, approved at Fall TM, 2002, requesting metropolitan, state and federal planning organizations to develop a series of alternatives to improve Route 9 at the intersection of Hammond Street by November 2003. In keeping with our goals we propose the greening of Hammond Street from the Horace James Circle to Soule Playground. Hammond Street is 75 feet wide with four lanes of traffic, no parking and sidewalks and tree lawns planted with stately red oaks. Hammond Street already has underground utilities. But the street is too wide for comfortable or safe pedestrian crossing.

How much better to convert it into an avenue by creating a median planted with more red oaks, and possibly adding more on-street parking? Then two parks—Soule Playground and Dane Park—and Beaver Country Day School will be safely accessible by pedestrians.

**Pedestrian Access Plan:** We want a pedestrian access plan that will create safe pedestrian links throughout our community connecting residential areas, open space, schools, parks, shops and bus and T-stops. This plan should include the following: wide sidewalks; street trees; amenities such as residential scale streetlights, benches and trash bins; signage indicating routes to public transport, parks and fields; underground wiring (currently under study for all of Brookline); and bold crosswalks with clear pedestrian priority.

**Open Space:** We seek enhancement of our existing open space by providing clearer access, better maintenance,

improved signage, and safe pedestrian links to and from adjacent bus stops, the Chestnut Hill T stop, local schools and shopping areas. These spaces will only become more important as our neighborhood fills in with denser development. In the future we would like to add to these spaces, possibly creating a continuous walkway and/or jogging trail that extends throughout Brookline.

**Zoning:** Through our sponsorship of an MIT Senior Planning Seminar project, we have come to believe that our commercial areas as well as some residential developments along major streets will benefit from a mixed use zoning designation. This would allow for more complex and interesting projects that maximize the use of existing space.

We hope the Comprehensive Planning process will result in specific recommendations that highlight possible designs demonstrating the changes we propose. By creating a vision for our village and our Town, we hope to stimulate the transformation of Brookline into the successful mixed residential/commercial utopia it has the potential to become.

*For additional information contact members of the Chestnut Hill Village Alliance Steering Committee: Tony Andreadis, Chair; Stephanie Bacon, Marjorie Greville, Doris Hanna, Janice Kahn, Richard Nangle via Email: CHVA99@hotmail.com. CHVA is an organizational member of the Brookline Green-Space Alliance.*

## ON-STREET PARKING—A BROOKLINE DILEMMA *(continued from page 1)*

tive to pave their yards to provide parking, a practice that clearly demolishes green space and increases polluted storm water runoff. Alternatively, residents may respond instead by acquiring additional vehicles.

○ On the other hand again, streets more solidly parked with cars can induce drivers to slow down due to the perception of a narrower travel lane and therefore less room to swerve to avoid oncoming vehicles or opening car doors. And they can help pedestrians feel better protected from moving vehicles. Alternatively, a solid border of cars obstructs drivers' vision of pedestrians stepping off curbs to cross, and results in less wiggle room for bicyclists to avoid moving vehicles and opening car doors

Like every issue we deal with as a Board, the question of how best to allocate the shared public resource that is on-street parking is one where there is no purely right answer. The likely logistical consequences of liberalizing our on-street parking restrictions probably make an even more compelling case for caution than do aesthetic and environmental concerns. Let's look more closely at a dense neighborhood like Coolidge Corner or Washington Square, the sorts of areas where residents are feeling the parking pinch most acutely:

A typical four-story apartment or condo building with 120 feet of street frontage might have 8 units per floor, for a total of 48. If the residents of each unit own just one car, there will be 48 cars at that

building. A curbside parking space needs to be 20 feet long, so at best there would be space on the street for six cars, not allowing any space for fire hydrants and driveways. This means that at least 48 vehicles would potentially compete for these 6 spaces—or more, if we didn't limit the competition by allowing only residents with stickers to exceed the 2-hour limit, and thereby "park up" the street spaces, shutting out visitors. And, as those familiar with Boston's residential permit parking program know, such a program reduces the demand for off-street parking only fractionally; anyone who doubts this ought to check out the cost of off-street parking in Brighton.

The Transportation Board and Town staff have been researching many different ways to increase the supply of residential and commercial parking, while recognizing that we need to dampen demand if we are to avoid perpetual escalation in the number of vehicles residing in and traveling around Brookline. To cite a few examples:

○ We have already adjusted parking meter time limits to encourage better access, and established merchant permit parking areas to move employees away from spots that customers should use.

○ We have granted the car-sharing company ZipCar several off-street and median parking spaces in dense neighborhoods to encourage resi-

dents not to own cars if they don't need to, and to allow businesspeople to commute to their Brookline workplaces via public transit without fear of being stranded.

○ There is a clear, if expensive and no doubt contentious, possibility of building a municipal parking garage in Coolidge Corner.

○ The Transportation Department has conducted a detailed study of Brookline's resident permit parking areas and policy so the Board can



examine the effectiveness of the program and whether it should be expanded or modified

○ By the time you read this article, the Board will have taken public comment on the 2-hour parking limit at a hearing on April 29.

○ A prominent new Parking button on the Town's main

Internet homepage alerts newcomers to our parking limitations, with the potential to encourage them not to import their cars into Brookline, or do a better job of obtaining off-street parking

○ The Transportation section of Brookline's draft Comprehensive Plan outlines many of these issues, efforts, and potential actions, including encouraging transit-oriented development and the potential for providing more mass transit options for Brookline residents and cut-through commuters, such as through the Urban Ring Project

The time to lift or adjust Brookline's on-street parking restrictions, or tailor them to different parts of town, may have finally come, after over a hundred years of living within them. But because increased supply can induce increased demand, and because our tangled web of streets was designed largely before car ownership became ubiquitous, we should act carefully lest we do something that has unintended and adverse consequences for our asphalt-and-green-space urban ecosystem.

*[Abby Swaine is a member of the Brookline Transportation Board and an environmental professional. Mike Sandman is Co-Chair of the Brookline Transportation Board and a Senior Vice President with Fuld & Company, a consulting firm in Cambridge.]*

# GREENSPACE QUESTIONS CANDIDATES FOR SELECTMAN

What can Selectmen do, and what will you in particular do, to further the open space goals being considered for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan, currently under discussion?

Here are some examples of open space goals currently being discussed:

- ✿ Greenway network to preserve wide open space buffers
- ✿ Creation of pedestrian friendly crossings
- ✿ Enhancement of usability with trails and pedestrian friendly connections to neighborhoods
- ✿ Improved neighborhood access to open spaces
- ✿ Assurance of continuation of scenic views
- ✿ Provision of conservation strategies for larger open space parcels

ROBERT ALLEN, JR.

Growing up in Brookline has provided me with a significant historical perspective on Brookline's parks and open spaces, and as co-chair of the Comprehensive Plan Committee I have drawn on that perspective in working to further open space goals for inclusion in the final plan. The committee has just about completed the working groups process on Route 9, neighborhoods, and affordable housing and will shortly be developing the preliminary plan for comment from the community. The working groups have provided great ideas and vision for the Town and its open space. I have been particularly excited about the proposals to connect the Town with a series of greenways, and the possible use of zoning tools to promote conservation of green space in institutional land that may be the subject of future development.

The Selectmen have been responsible for the direction and process of the comprehensive plan and they should be responsible for implementing the plan as well. The open space aspects of the plan provide Brookline with a framework for balanced growth and the continuation of our fine tradition of open space protection. As the final plan takes shape I will continue to advocate for the various open space aspects of the plan, but in both the short and long term the Selectmen will have to make decisions that will facilitate the implementation of the plan, and make the case to Town meeting when funding or by-law changes are needed. I believe my experience on the Board, my length of service on the Park and Recreation Commission, and my ability to bring groups with varied and disparate views to a consensus, makes me uniquely qualified to assure that open space issues are addressed in the future.

NANCY HUTCHINSON ERDMANN

Brookline must remain a green community for our quality of life, i.e., health, esthetics, historic preservation, ease of foot travel, and the ability to feel human amid the concrete.

A Selectman should support conservation restrictions to maintain greenway networks, views, and historic roads like Heath St. and Goddard Ave. I would emphasize the economic and esthetic value of such restrictions with owners and developers.

I have learned that changing traffic signaling might improve the safety of the dangerous crossings on Beacon Street. As a Selectman, I would work hard with Peter Ditto, Director of Engineering and Transportation, to improve pedestrian crossings.

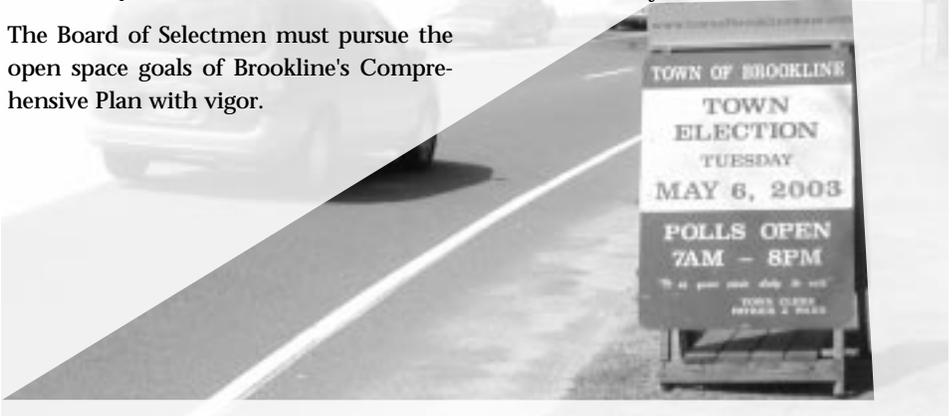
A small working group composed of the Director of Parks, the Director of Development, a Selectman, and one or two others with vision for the cityscape, could perhaps answer some questions about conservation strategies for, say, ten parcels of 5+ acres identified as needing protection, like Allandale Farm. Would a special Town Meeting be willing to purchase the farm? Could a small development on one corner fund such a purchase? Do we need huge donors? What can the business community do?

The Board of Selectmen must pursue the open space goals of Brookline's Comprehensive Plan with vigor.

MICHAEL SHER

Thanks to Brookline GreenSpace Alliance for carrying on the tradition of Brookline's founders who broke away from Boston in 1705, in part, to create a green oasis surrounded by a city. In this short space, I wish to focus on one, innovative means of accomplishing many of the open space goals that may be included in the Comprehensive Plan.

**Create Zoning Overlay Districts:** If elected, I will work hard to create zoning overlay districts to help preserve and make more accessible green spaces in all parts of Brookline. What is an overlay district? Imagine an acetate overlay on top of a map of Brookline. The overlay would highlight in green certain districts and parcels. Some of these large parcels feature treasured open space that is owned by non-profit institutions but, under the town's Zoning Bylaws, could be converted as of right to residential use. In an overlay district, residential development could go forward, but only subject to conditions, including setting aside parts of parcels for accessible pocket parks, playing fields, and passive green space. Developers would pay for these amenities in return for permission to build a limited number of homes that fit in with the neighborhood. Public and private interests are thereby served in a balanced way.



# WEBSTER STREET IS JUST THE BEGINNING

By Werner Lohe

**B**ig changes are underway on Webster Street. The new hotel may be the first thing that most people notice, but there's also something more subtle that may alter our way of thinking about our streets.

The old Webster Street is gone. In its place will be a "Community Street." The space in front of the new Webster Street hotel is too valuable to be given over entirely to cars—particularly to cars cutting through to save a few seconds by missing the traffic light at Beacon and Harvard Streets. Instead, the area that used to be an ordinary street will be something new.

The Community Street was invented twenty-five years ago in Holland, where—as in Brookline—space is at a premium. It depends on two simple

changes to normal street design. First, a plaza is created by raising the roadway to sidewalk level. Second, "obstacles" are set in place to prevent cars from traveling at much more than a walking pace. Ideally, these "obstacles" are assets carefully chosen to enhance their surroundings—elevated flowerbeds, trees, and attractive segments of fencing, park benches. Parking areas are clearly marked, or better yet, delineated by attractive paving stones instead of asphalt. At the same time, sufficient clearance for emergency vehicles, garbage trucks, and snowplows is always maintained. The physical layout of the street requires drivers to proceed more slowly and carefully, while the ambiance encourages civility. Cut-through traffic decreases, pedestrian injuries drop dramatically, and the area becomes an engaging, truly "livable" environment.

Though Community Streets have been in use for years in Europe, Israel, and Japan, they are new in this country. The plan for Webster Street is slightly less ambitious than one might see in those places, but it will give us our first glimpse of the potential for this new idea.

People's attitudes and behavior concerning traffic are not fixed. Have you noticed recently that cars will stop for pedestrians in crosswalks where five years ago they would have sped right by? It's high time that we reconsider our way of thinking about streets in general. We can begin to view the streets we live on as "home zones," which is what Community Streets are called in England. See [www.homezone-news.org.uk](http://www.homezone-news.org.uk). There, small residential streets have been changed from places used only

by cars to valuable resources in their neighborhoods. Residents in cars can still drive through them—slowly—on the way to and from work, but they now share the space with neighbors talking, with children riding bicycles or playing ball, and with people walking to school, to worship, to the corner store, to public transportation, or just for exercise or recreation.

Most of our streets will continue to be reserved for cars and bicycles. But certain streets—in special locations like Webster Street or selected residential streets—can be shared by everyone. Where should our next Community Street be?

*[Werner Lohe is a member of the Conservation Commission, the BGSA Board and Climate Change Action Brookline (CCAB)]*

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN *(continued from page 3)*

transportation considerations, cultural preservation and open space protection, opportunities to strengthen community and promote design excellence while providing a variety of housing affordability, it needs to factor in how various degrees of growth impact each of these areas. Objective analysis of impacts of growth patterns must be an integral part of our planning.

BGSA believes the beginning of our vision of the future must be a decision about the amount of growth we think Brookline can support. If we are to preserve those special open spaces that provide respite from urban living, that provide natural beauty and clean air, then our deci-

sion-making must be guided by principles of restrained growth. How important is it that we have the opportunity in our own community to get lost in nature, to sit by a babbling brook or watch a heron skim a pond? While we may think we need growth to broaden the tax base; are we thinking of the immeasurable value that this type of experience adds to life—and to our current real estate values? Should we need to go on vacation to commune with nature or relax in its restorative effects? Are we being pro-active in protecting the natural spots and heritage trees our forbears left for us? How much building can take place before we must provide additional schools, firehouses,

etc? Where will we put them? We are already short of playing fields—how many more will we need to meet increased future demands? Is it possible that the associated costs of these and other services will absorb whatever additional revenue growth generates?

Our planning for the future cannot meet every need, but if it does not protect open space, we will change the character of Brookline forever. Once an area is built upon, it is seldom, if ever, returned to park or nature sanctuary. We at BGSA believe it is our responsibility to do conscientious planning that leaves Brookline the kind of place that is itself diverse, that offers proximity to the city,

people of many nationalities and backgrounds, charming town centers, and natural beauty that is accessible to all its citizens so that we might meet and share the common bond of experiencing well maintained natural places.

Our comprehensive planning and zoning bylaws have to be written to encourage these values. Our focus has to be clear and our analyses sharp or, as we discuss all the things that we want Brookline to be, we may lose vision of what once lost cannot be replaced. And then we can just remember what it was like, and if we are fortunate, we can go on vacation to get away from home and experience nature.

# CYCLING AS A TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE

Two major projects within the town will, when finished, increase the ease with which cyclists can use Brookline streets. These projects involve the renovation and rebuilding of Beacon Street, and the construction of a safe Route 9 crossing at Brookline Avenue.

## Beacon Street

The Town of Brookline is involved in a multi-year project to rebuild and improve Beacon Street. (See related story on funding the improvements.) The restoration of Beacon Street consists of two separate projects: Roadway and Signal Improvements and Streetscape Enhancements. The roadway improvements are of special interest to cyclists. The MBTA tracks on Beacon Street divide the street into a narrower side and a wider side, which change over at Washington Square and at Coolidge Corner. The current plan provides for a designated bike lane on the wide parts of the street. On the narrow side bikes will be sharing the road with cars. Wherever feasible, striping will be adjusted to create space for bicyclists.

From the cyclists' point of view this is not an ideal solution. Some thought has been given to a parking ban on the narrow side of the street during rush hour (on the east-bound side in the morning, on the west-bound side in the afternoon). This would create an extra lane designated for bicycles. No decision has been reached on the practicality of such a scheme. The absence of a continuous bicycle lane creates an especially unsafe situation for cyclists at those intersections where the wide lane shifts from one side to the other.

No matter how good the Beacon Street bicycle accommodations, at the Boston border cyclists will be left with no connection to another safe bike route. An alternative to this (which avoids Coolidge Corner) is to route bicycles heading east-bound from Beacon Street onto Webster Street, to Sewall Avenue, to Colchester Street, to Carlton Street. With the re-opening of the Carlton Street Footbridge cyclists will be able to access the Muddy River bicycle path

going north or south. Carlton Street also allows travel north to the B.U. Bridge and Cambridge.

## Route 9–Brookline Avenue

The second project important to cyclists is the creation of a safe crossing at the Route 9 – Brookline Avenue intersection. For pedestrians and bicyclists Route 9 is a major barrier cutting across the Emerald Necklace. Ideally, repairing this break would include closing the River Road entrance to the Riverway and making River Road one way (south) using the resulting space for a bicycle lane and additional parking for area businesses.

Residents of Brookline are fortunate to live in a town that is small enough to make cycling a practical alternative for anyone. Streets that are safe for bicycles are decisive in convincing commuters to leave the car at home. The completion of these two projects is indispensable to this end.

## FUNDING THE PROJECTS

### Beacon Street

The Beacon Street project is on the Commonwealth's list of Transportation Improvement Projects (TIP), indicating a commitment to fund the project. Federal funds granted to Massachusetts under the Federal Transportation Bill make up 80% of the state's contribution to the project. The Federal Transportation Bill is currently being re-authorized—this occurs every six years—which makes the amount of the federal contribution uncertain. Design work for the project has reached the 75% point and is awaiting state approval.

### Route 9 – Brookline Avenue

State Senator Cynthia Creem inserted \$250,000 request in the recent state environmental bond bill to start planning for the reconstruction of the Route 9 – Brookline Avenue intersection. The request has been approved but the money has yet to be appropriated. Congressman Barney Frank has asked for \$750,000 in the Federal Transportation Bill currently in process of re-authorization.



Coolidge Corner—dangerous terrain for bicycles



# GREENSPACE, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND CARS

By Stephen Burrington, Esq.

The following article by Stephen Burrington, recently appointed Deputy Chief of Commonwealth Development for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, was written for Brookline GreenSpace at a time when Mr. Burrington was with the Conservation Law Foundation. In addition to serving as general counsel to CLF and as an expert in transportation and energy issues, Mr. Burrington served for several years as Chair of the Brookline Conservation Commission, resigning those posts to serve as deputy to Douglas Foy in the newly created Executive Office of Transportation, Housing & Community Development, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, in the Romney administration. The article is reprinted with Mr. Burrington's permission. Editorial comments inserted by BGSA.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the automobile took a heavy toll on parks and neighborhoods. Storrow Drive brought four lanes of high-speed traffic to the Esplanade, a parking lot claimed a piece of the Emerald Necklace, and highway projects almost cut a swath from Fowl Meadow through Roxbury and the Cottage Farm neighborhood to Cambridge. Acres of parking lots illegally encroached on public land along the Charles River.

The public fought back, defeating some of the worst highway projects and winning new limits on where road builders could go. Congress and the legislature enacted laws curtailing the destruction of parks and historic properties for road construction.

Unfortunately, changes in transportation policy that would attack the root of the traffic problem have been slower in coming. As a result, between 1970 and the present, the average number of miles each person drives annually in Massachusetts almost doubled. Neighborhoods and parks that once faced bulldozers now confront rivers of traffic.

[Since Mr. Burrington wrote this, BGSA notes that the number of cars per household has also continued to rise.]

Many Brookline residents know about plans to build a multi-story parking garage at the Brookline Village MBTA stop and adjacent wooded slope. [The mid-'90's project along Station Street was stopped by strong and determined advocacy, including that of BGSA.] But few people realize that the garage would have been merely an island in an archipelago of new parking garages that are planned or under construction along the Brookline-Boston border. The former Sears building on the Fenway, for example, has since been converted into a shopping center and parking garage that, with about 2,000 spaces, is one of the largest in New England. [BGSA notes that the mixed use project now under discussion for the Omni Foods site in Chestnut Hill on the Newton-Brookline border plans parking for 1,200 cars and is projected to bring about 10,000 new vehicle trips per day to the area. And several large projects are currently in the development or planning stages in the Longwood Medical area.]

Parking garages can damage neighborhoods by stimulating unnecessarily large increases in traffic. Study after study has shown that the availability of free parking is the major reason commuters choose to drive alone rather than use transit or other alternatives. Thus the number of drivers who zip along our streets each day to a building like 10 Brookline Place West is not a function of the number of employees there—it varies greatly depending on whether employers provide free parking. When employers stop providing free parking, about 30 percent of employees who previously drove alone choose to leave their cars at home and get to work another way. Conversely, thousands of new parking spaces in an arc extending from Brookline Village through the Longwood Medical area and Fenway to Boston University would draw excessive traffic through surrounding neighborhoods, make our streets noisier and more dangerous, and contribute to a host of regional and global environmental problems.

Building too much parking creates unnecessary conflicts between development and

neighborhood quality of life—usually it's not a new building or the people who would use it, but the amount of traffic it would generate that threatens the most harm. Brookline has choices. It can ask developers and employers to minimize traffic by following the lead of their counterparts in places from Hartford to San Francisco who have reduced the amount of parking they provide, or have discontinued free commuter parking, or both. Brookline can also join forces with those working for construction of the "Urban Ring," a circumferential transit line that would serve many thousands of new riders each day. And the Town can minimize the conflict between cars and neighborhoods by its "traffic calming" program to reduce speeds on local streets

One thing hasn't changed since the road construction boom of the 1950's; we can't rely on any state or federal transportation agency to make our neighborhoods livable.

It's up to us.



# SCHOOLYARD GREENING AT THE LINCOLN SCHOOL

By Randolph Meiklejohn and Liz Vizza Hines

Lincoln School has been the setting of a number of “schoolyard greening” projects and special events, thanks to the Lincoln community’s response to the efforts of its recently formed PTO Landscape Committee.

In the fall of 2000, with their children inching ever closer to 8th grade graduation and the high school, a few Lincoln parents told themselves “now or never” and launched the new Lincoln Landscape Committee. Among the parents forming the committee are two landscape architects whose firm had designed the grounds to which the school relocated in 1994. Others soon joined up, and together they developed a series of goals, including the determination to develop a collaborative master plan that lays out a vision for phased landscape improvements, and to establish a sustainable landscape maintenance plan.

Spring 2001 saw a school-wide planning and visioning effort, conducted in hallways and classrooms, where students, staff and parents were asked to imagine, write and draw. Their contributions became the basis for a master plan of physical improvements, development of educational and social areas, and tree plantings. An Arbor Day observance and tree planting rounded out the year in May.

Planning work was interrupted by September 11, 2001, but within a few weeks the school and the committee had agreed on a way to acknowledge the tragedy: a flower bulb planting across the Lincoln

grounds. During one week in November, every student in every class planted a bagful of bulbs—six thousand in all, and in spring 2002, crocuses and daffodils bloomed for weeks and weeks as a quiet, beautiful memorial. Students at two grade levels also created art works related to the bulb planting, which are on display in the school.

Over the past year and a half, the “greening” projects have continued and expanded as committee members try out new collaborations with teachers, Town staff, students and parents. The school leadership and community have welcomed each initiative, and the Town Parks & Open Space Division has both supported the master plan of physical improvements and begun to contribute its labor resources to make them happen. The growing list of current projects

includes:

- New benches at kindergarten playground installed in summer 2002 (1st master plan project)
- Environmentalist guest speaker program in January 2003
- A tree inventory project, coordinated with Town GIS and forestry management standards, will debut in 7th grade science classes in April 2003
- An on-site garden for classroom use (in planning stage)

The ongoing task for the Landscape Committee is to keep projects integrated with the school grounds and curriculum: to create opportunities for students to participate, to develop materials and events that teachers want to use, to help the community see the potential of open spaces at the school and around the neigh-

borhood. It takes a great deal of communication—both within the school and with the Town—to make these things happen, but the return on the effort has been wonderful so far. Lincoln has just begun building a few of its new landscape projects, but it has already built up its sense of community through working together on its open space, and has expanded its vision of how that open space can support, teach and be cared for by all who have a stake in it.

*Visit the BGSA website ([www.brooklinegreenspace.org/programs.html#toolbox](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org/programs.html#toolbox)) for more information on citizen directed green advocacy projects such as this one at the Lincoln School. Or call Tina Oddleifson at (617) 277-4777 and ask about our Toolbox for Park Friends Groups.*

photo ©Marnie Crawford Samuelson



**Yes!** I want to protect Brookline's GreenSpace heritage for generations to come.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

As a member of the Alliance you'll receive our newsletter, periodic e-mail alerts to keep you informed of timely meetings and events affecting open space in Brookline, as well as invitations to educational forums and events on open space issues in our community.

- Acorn (\$25)
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Contributions are tax deductible. Neighborhood Associations and Friends groups are invited to join the Alliance as Organizational members. Please call 277-4777 for information.

## GET CONNECTED!

Visit our website at [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org) and find updated information on hot topics, events and other information about open space issues in Brookline. You'll also find an open space map, directions to sanctuaries, and contact information for all the Park Friends Groups in Brookline.

Join our email list serve and you'll receive important updates and information on events, meetings, and other time-sensitive information pertinent to open space in Brookline. Just send us an email at [bgsa@world.std.com](mailto:bgsa@world.std.com) to let us know you want to join.

THANKS TO SOFTWARE TOOL AND DIE FOR HOSTING THE BROOKLINE GREENSPACE WEBSITE -  
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