

# Cambridge Chronicle

## Leaders speak out on Alewife Reservation

By Ellen Mass  
CORRESPONDENT

Bioengineering firms and others, as well as Harvard University School of Design students, and Friends of Alewife Reservation, are submitting proposals and designs for protecting and enhancing the future urban wild development at Alewife Reservation.

Route 16 Greenway proposals also, have been submitted by many groups and individuals, up and down the subwatershed of Alewife Brook-Little River in the Mystic River watershed. Major reconstruction of these waterways has also been proposed.

In order to facilitate and advance public dialogue, a discussion will take place Oct. 30 at 6 p.m. at the Fitzgerald School auditorium. Panelists are local and state environmental leaders and elected officials. Key speaker Peter Alden is author of 14 nature books, e.g. "National Audubon Society Field

Guide to New England."

Other speakers are: Mayor Michael Sullivan, who advanced key environmental measures at the state attorney general's office, and advances park preservation and recreational opportunities. Craig Della Penna, head of Rails-to-trails Conservancy, is a national speaker, and author of four books on converting unused rail corridors to useful biking pathways. Dan Driscoll, senior planner and project manager of MDC parks such as Charles River development planning, is also MDC spokesperson for agency history of public land preservation. State Rep. Alice Wolf is initiator of funding for the Alewife MDC master plan. As mayor, Wolf helped pass the Clean Air ordinance of 1990. David Brown, lifelong naturalist and professional wildlife assessor in Maine, inventoried Middlesex Fells for the MDC and recently bird and mam-

mal reports for the Friends of Alewife Reservation.

For more biographical information, go to: [www.friendsofalewifereservation.org](http://www.friendsofalewifereservation.org)

### Alewife Master Plan

The Metropolitan District Commission will hold the final Alewife Master Plan public meeting on Nov. 20 from 7 to 9 p.m. Dan Driscoll from the MDC and members of the consultant team will be presenting the Preferred Alternative for Alewife Reservation and Alewife Brook Parkway and concept sketches to illustrate the recommendations. Following the presentation, time will be provided for public questions and comments. The meeting will be held at the Beth El Temple Center at 2 Concord Ave. in Belmont (on Cambridge line). For questions regarding this meeting contact Dan Driscoll at 617-722-5268.

# Saving our silver maple forest

By Ellen Mass  
CORRESPONDENT

"Americans are insensitive to wonders around them. They may not perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote.

The greatest threat to biological diversity is fragmentation of land and waterways, which destroys habitat, dispersing or eliminating natural populations. According to the land priorities of the Mass. Natural Heritage and Endangered Species of Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, the rare silver maple forest of Belmont and Cambridge's northwest MDC Reservation, known by some as part of the greater Alewife ecosystem, is a vital wildlife corridor and core habitat area for the region. The forest may be fully protected under the Wetlands Protection Act and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' Program of Stewardship and Restoration, depending on the agency's objective wetland designations and assessments of what is known as the "Belmont Uplands".

Biodiversity scientists such as Peter Alden are noting its special status as a completely unique forest in the Boston area. GIS maps by satellite and air photos identify our Boston Harbor Basin, which houses the Mystic River watershed, as the most fragmented in Massachusetts. EOE has biomapped all natural areas of Massachusetts according to characteristics of unprotected and protected land.

Belmont's silver maple forest's thick tree canopy and heavily inhabited alluvial floor has served to buffer and link core habitat patches throughout the richly vegetated reservation, allowing ecological patterns of diverse species to evolve and survive for hundreds of years. Forest landscape provides larger and healthier populations when connected between several feeding or breeding grounds which are protected. Plants disperse seeds. Genetic material is exchanged, and life forms perpetuate themselves.

Cambridge's Little River and its headwaters, Belmont's Little Pond, are on a 100- to 500-year floodplain. Inundation occurs close to silver maples cotton-

wood, American elm and quaking aspen, trees that can handle total soil saturation. Relocation and channeling of Little River years ago has reduced frequency of flooding, thus non-wetland vegetation also thrives such as grasslands, sumac orchards, etc., attracting a broad array of birds and rodents, which have attracted a variety of mammals, such as beaver and deer. Predators are fully present such as coyote, weasel and mink; and birds such as red tailed, cooper's and sharp shinned hawks. An American eagle has been sighted several times over the reservation by local naturalist Ralph Yoder.

Census wildlife taker David Brown final inventory reports on birds and mammals states that the forest has become a "refugium" for mammals, and is a highly significant breeding area for around 40 birds, and migratory flyway for more than 90 that he was able to identify. In total according to Jainie Benyus' "Field Guide to Wildlife Habitats of Eastern U.S.," the greater Alewife contains the following habitat profiles now diminishing throughout the United States: lake and pond, river and stream, cattail marsh, shrub swamp, grassy field, shrub-sapling opening/edge, and northern floodplain forest which is our area's own "unique" silver maple forest.

The entire reservation ecosystem of 115 acres increases another 15 acres when counting the privately owned silver maple forest which may contain rare species yet to be discovered. At present, large pillared woodpecker borings are found in the silver maple forest, as are the Northern wood thrush and American woodcock and many other breeding birds as well as migrants. The 100-acre reservation floodplain attracts insects, both rare and common; which in turn, attract warblers, thrushes and other songbirds. When natural ecological process are allowed to take place such as flooding, ice storms, insect defoliation, brush fires (not feasible in populated areas), landscapes are altered to create a variety of ecosystems.

Without the silver maple forest (15 acres), the unprotected core habitat will likely disintegrate due to a new research and

development complex planned for more than 10 acres of the forest. The construction would eliminate hundreds of trees, a few more than 100 years old, large numbers of dens, nests, ground tunnels, burrows. Clear cutting would destroy what is now an animal "refugium," according to Brown, who inventoried all of Middlesex Fells for the MDC. At present there is an estimated 15-degree cooling factor in the forest. A building complex with cars would heat the area, uproot its canopy with much light, bring noise and increase existing urban runoff. Development in the midst of the forested floodplain will destroy this rare and complex urban ecosystem that directly affects Cambridge, Belmont and Arlington.

Belmont's Alewife Study Committee, made up of prominent citizens and civic leaders, in its report to the town's Selectman and Conservation Commission, March 2001, asked the town to reject commercial or residential zoning of the Uplands as inappropriate. It requested that the northern forest floodplain be purchased. The report strongly urged conservation of the property because of adverse hydrological, environmental and traffic impacts. Regional watershed planning was suggested with the three towns, a goal also stated by the Mystic River Watershed Association.

Purchase of the property would provide an invaluable environmental and recreational asset to the town, permanent conservation for the greater Alewife ecosystem, and planetary sustainability for future generations who would come to the Alewife Reservation to respect and appreciate our natural world. Natural Preservation, we are learning more and more, also sustains human life. As our climate warms, future generations will remember the decision made about a rare silver maple forest in our midst.

*Ellen Mass is president of the Friends of Alewife Reservation; the Web site is [www.friendsofalewifereservation.org](http://www.friendsofalewifereservation.org). FAR is a nonprofit agency and performs educational activities, cleaning, tours, maintenance and other projects throughout the year. Call 617 547-1944*

# 10/2/02 Cambridge Chronicle



# City of Cambridge

O-24

IN CITY COUNCIL

July 29, 2002

COUNCILLOR TOOMEY  
 VICE MAYOR DAVIS  
 COUNCILLOR DECKER  
 COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO  
 COUNCILLOR MAHER  
 COUNCILLOR MURPHY  
 COUNCILLOR REEVES  
 COUNCILLOR SIMMONS  
 MAYOR SULLIVAN

WHEREAS: It has come to the attention of the City Council that developers in Belmont may be planning to remove eight acres of dense silver maple forest abutting Cambridge; and

WHEREAS: The forest is made up of 100 year old trees, which are habitat for close to 90 bird species; the forest also provides a home for many species of mammals; and

WHEREAS: This forest, with its dense vegetation and huge vernal pool areas, provides significant protection from the upland flooding that Cambridge would experience if the forest were to be destroyed; now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Conservation Commission and the appropriate Belmont offices to request that all efforts be made to preserve this forest and protect Cambridge from the floodwaters that removal of the forest would bring to North Cambridge; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the City Council on this matter.

In City Council July 29, 2002.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*D. Margaret Drury*

D. Margaret Drury  
 City Clerk

# COMMENT

## Say no to commercial zoning at Alewife

hope that my fellow Town Meeting members will give a close read to the Belmont Uplands documents that we are being asked to approve next Monday, and consider carefully the negative regional implications of the Belmont Uplands proposal.

First, while some embrace the Uplands commercial development proposal out of concern for the fiscal impact of 40B affordable housing development, the documents do not limit the owner's rights to pursue 40B development. Moreover, the developer's own scenario analysis shows 40B as fiscally neutral or slightly positive for the town.

Second, the documents allow a high-traffic professional office building as an alternative to the general office or R&D building that has been the subject of most public conversation. This flexibility could allow a tripling of traffic volume from 2,300 to roughly 7,000 cars per day based on Institute of Transportation Engineers standards.

There is no fund for traffic improvements and no binding traffic cap as we negotiated for McLean. The agreement obligates the property owner to continue all efforts to implement traffic improvements suggested by a study done last March, but this is a vague requirement.

Third, the developer is not parting with much of value in return for the proposed upzoning. The town receives \$507,700 and a conservation restriction on approximately 8.7 acres of land, but of the 8.7 acres, 4.8 acres are

unbuildable wetlands. The rest of the protected land lies on the marginal slopes around the wetlands. The total area of the site is 15.6 acres but, even in the developer's most aggressive residential build-out scenario, the site yields only 6.4 acres of residential lots.

Fourth, the proposed bylaw allows a 250,000-square-foot structure up to 114 feet high (including roof-mounted structures like exhaust pipes). The highest buildings in the McLean district are limited to 68 feet, and the Hill Estates apartment buildings are limited to 60 feet (excluding roof structures).

Given the potential large size of the allowed building, it is troubling that the proposed site plan review language for the Uplands District omits the provision applicable in the McLean District which requires a specific determination that the height and bulk of the proposed buildings will not be injurious to surrounding property.

Fifth, while the package includes a provision to prevent loss of revenues for the town if the property is sold to a tax-exempt entity, this provision is dependent on legislative approval. Powerful nonprofit entities may oppose the bill because of the precedent it would set.

I do not believe that the town can afford to buy the property. However, if we zone the land as commercial, we will increase the value of the land and harm any prospect for a purchase for conservation or recreational purposes.

I believe that we would be better off to just say no and allow several important processes to move forward:

a) The MDC's park planning process for the

Alewife reservation which abuts and could include the Uplands.

b) The MDC's hydrological study of the Mystic River (which will shed additional light on local flooding and drainage issues).

c) The town's regional negotiations with Arlington and state-level conservation efforts by our joint legislative delegation.

d) The Belmont Hill School's thought process about their athletic field needs.

If these processes do not lead to protection for the land and the developer does pursue residential development, at least residential development won't have the negative traffic impact of commercial development. And, according to the developer's most pessimistic fiscal analysis, two-family development (permitted as-of-right under the current zoning) adds only 70 children to the school system.

In making this decision for Belmont, it is appropriate for us to give some consideration to the wishes of our neighbors. The Arlington Board of Selectmen has voted to oppose the Belmont Uplands development. Much of the traffic impact of the proposal will be felt in East Arlington.

If we are to credibly advocate regional cooperation, we cannot adopt a narrow definition of our self-interest. Solving the drainage problems of the Winn Brook neighborhood will take regional cooperation to reduce high storm-water levels in the Mystic Watershed.

Given all of the considerations above, I believe strongly that a no vote is most prudent.

*Selectman Will Brownsberger is a Stella Road resident.*

### Guest Perspective

WILL BROWNSBERGER

This article represents the original position of Belmont Selectman Will Brownsberger. After the developer, O'Neill Properties Group, indicated that they would build housing on the site (as of right under the old zoning), Mr. Brownsberger reconsidered his position and voted with the other Selectmen to change the zoning to allow the construction of a large R & D building and garage...which promised to bring in new tax revenues and linkage funds of \$472,000 to plan or build moderate income housing.

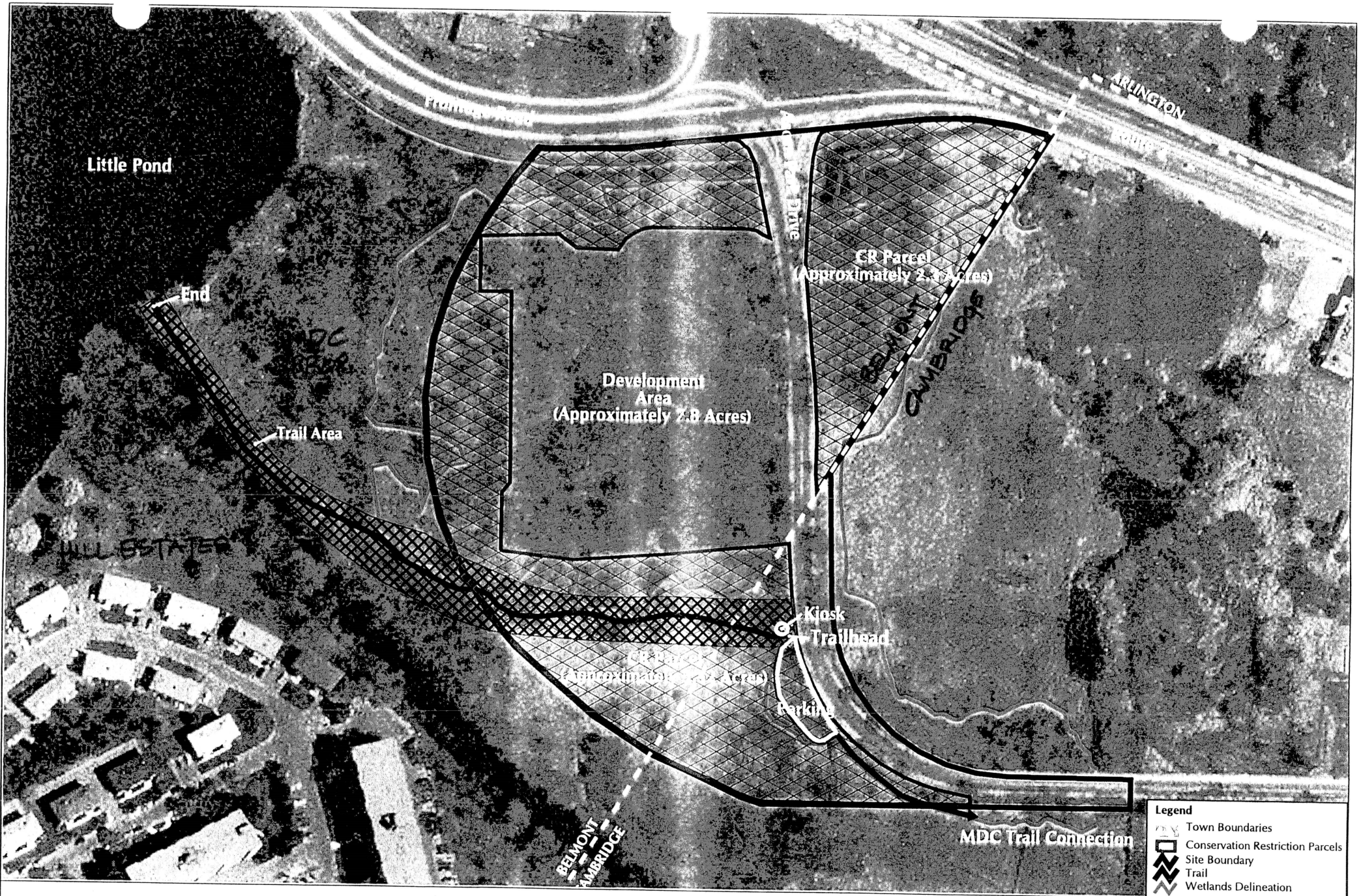


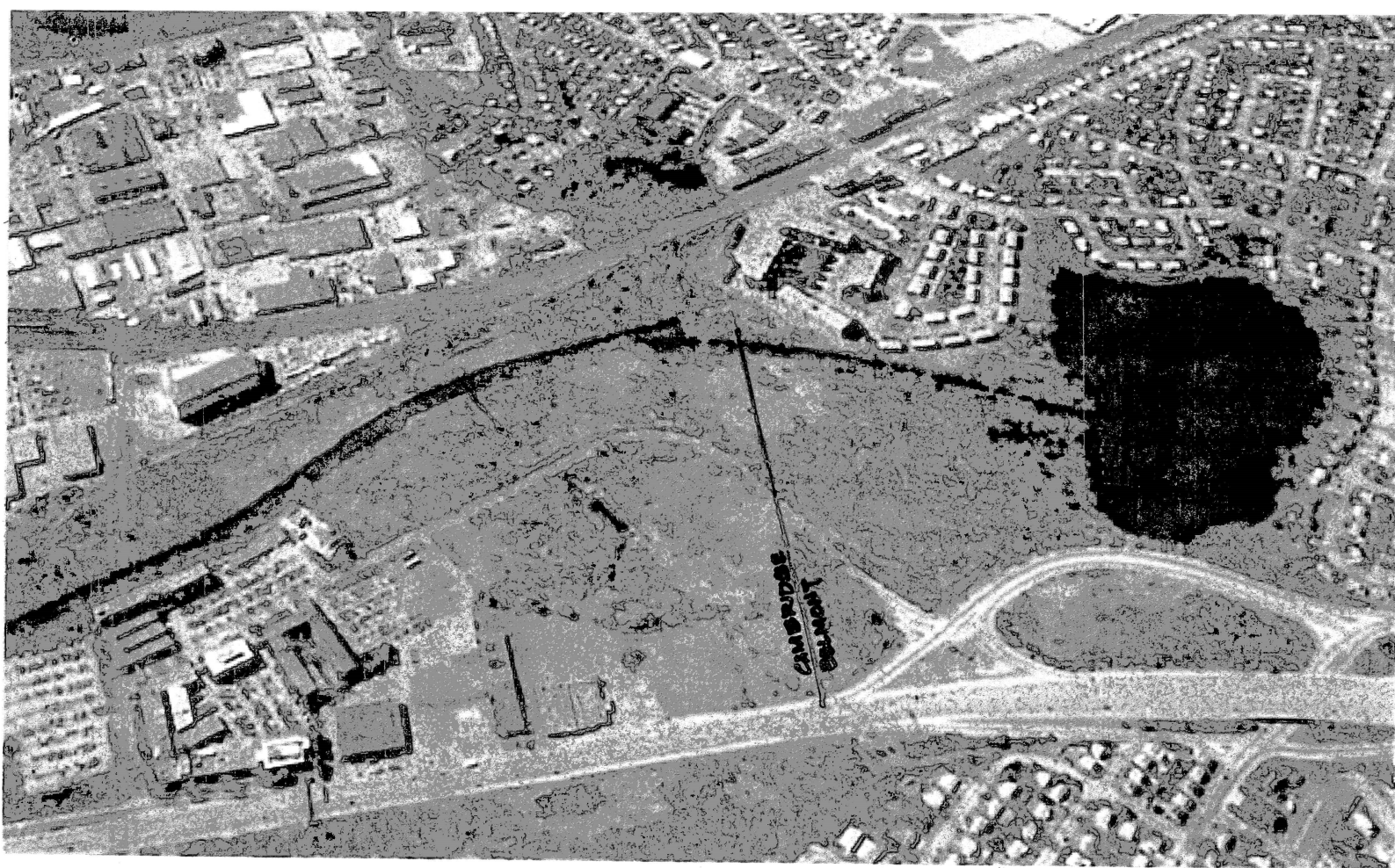
Figure 1A  
 Conceptual Conservation Restriction Plan (05/17/02)  
 Belmont Uplands Site  
 Belmont/Cambridge, MA

Not to Scale



- Legend**
- Town Boundaries
  - Conservation Restriction Parcels
  - Site Boundary
  - Trail
  - Wetlands Delineation

1994 MassGIS Orthophotography  
**ONEILL PROPERTIES**  
**EPSILON** ASSOCIATES INC.  
 Engineers — Environmental Consultants



Computer aerial view looking south - existing silver maple forest in right center of photo



Computer visualization of building & garage - adapted from developer's ENF submission  
(Vertical scale is accurate on proposed buildings - but is not to scale on existing buildings)

**Save Our Forest Committee....."What would you rather see on this site ?"**

**E. Utilities, Drainage and Traffic Conditions.**

- The only **sewer and water lines** in the area are in Acorn Park Drive so the developer has asked the City of Cambridge to allow them to hook-up to it's system – a questionable matter since the City Council unanimously voted on July 29, 2002, requesting that the City Manager confer with the Conservation Commission and to try to **save the forest**.
- All drainage from the area now flows naturally into Little River and Little Pond. Floodplain and wetland delineation have not yet been done by **independent survey**.
- Existing 15-acre forest provides valuable drainage area to prevent flooding downstream which could **damage** the functionality of the future Cambridge CSO stormwater basin.
- Traffic volumes in adjacent Lake Street and Concord Avenue are **extremely heavy** now and problems will increase with the intensive development of this parcel.
- Vehicular trips on-site (2642/day) will introduce **air and water pollutants** directly into the heart of the Reservation, immediately adjacent to Little River and Little Pond.
- The prevention of flooding will require a **series of concrete drainage structures** under & around the proposed buildings, further reducing the natural drainage capacity of the land.

**F. Natural Resources.**

- The Reservation ecosystem of 115 acres would be **expanded** by another 15 acres – if a way can be found to acquire the unique forest preserve – from a private development group.
- The silver maple forest's tree canopy and alluvial floor has created a sustaining habitat for many plants and animals and provides for a **balance of species** in the Reservation.
- Wildlife expert David Brown's Census Report states that the forest is both a refuge for mammals and a valuable breeding ground for many species of birds and insects. Heat, noise and light from the new buildings will inexorably **destroy and disperse habitat**.
- Site area contains extensive wetlands and "vernal pool" areas which are also important in providing natural drainage/ runoff purification as well as enhancing biological diversity.
- The forest area is absolutely necessary to create the "**critical mass**" of undisturbed land for natural ecological processes to function and to buffer the Little Pond residential area and the improved MDC Reservation plan from the noise and air pollution from Route 2.

**G. Summary.**

- Before further approvals are granted for development, **an updated survey** of wetlands and floodplain in the Belmont "uplands area" should be done by an independent consultant.
- Results of this survey and the benefits of a "no-build" scenario should be widely published & discussed among the leaders of Arlington, Belmont and Cambridge, so that the long-term interests of the citizens are protected. At this juncture, we might each ask ourselves; **"What would you rather see happen on this beautiful site in the future?"**



Computer aerial view looking east - existing silver maple forest in center of photo



Computer visualization of building & garage - adapted from developer's ENF submission  
(Vertical scale is accurate on proposed buildings - but is not to scale on existing buildings)

**Save Our Forest Committee....."What would you rather see on this site ?"**

**A) Goals.**

- Preserve the uplands forest from destruction for proposed R&D building/ parking garage.
- Integrate the silver maple "uplands area" with the MDC master plan for the Reservation.
- Work with Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge and State officials toward a fair resolution of this very important matter for the health of our communities...and our planet.

**B) Background**

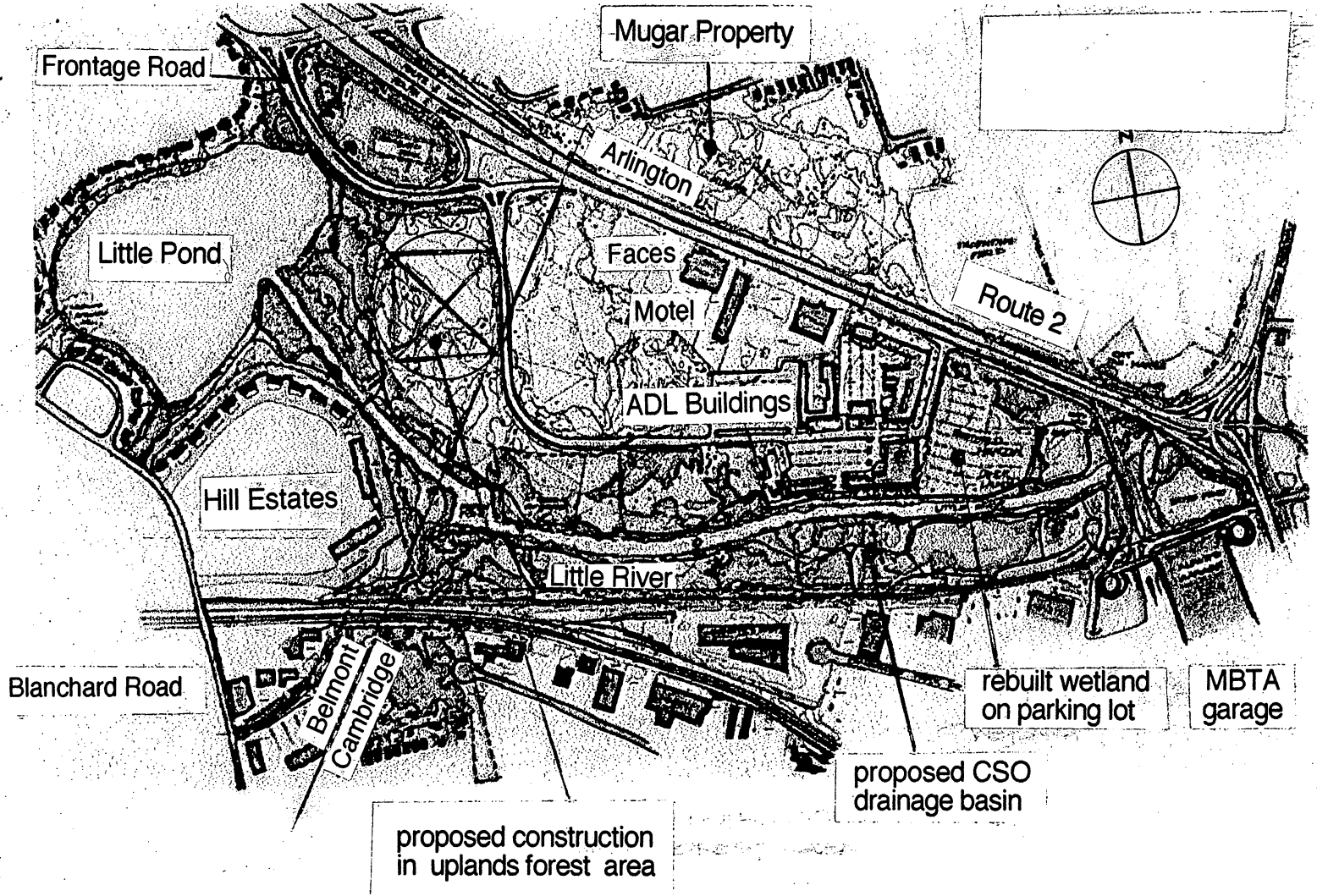
- Rezoning of parcel clearly violates **Smart Growth** principles - allowing an industrial-type facility to be built in a nature preserve is an egregious example of **industrial sprawl**.
- Developer -O'Neill Properties sold ADL property to Bulfinch Co. for a very good profit; Is now attempting to "max out" the parcel by building on the fragile forest area.
- Buildings remove approx. 7 acres of forest; add 4.4 acres of impervious area & 796 parking spaces on-site & in 4 level garage; height of 90' - 98' will be plainly visible from wide radius.
- Located in a flood sensitive area, directly adjacent to wetlands, streams and pond violates the general **intent** of both state and federal environmental protection acts.
- Effect on overall ecosystem could be **devastating** to plant and animal life; also creates a risk of hazardous spills or leaks leading to open water at Little River and Little Pond.
- Belmont-Alewife Advisory Group appointed by Town recommended **against** the project. (see original position of Belmont Selectman Will Brownsberger, news article attached).
- Other groups expressing serious concern are: Cambridge City Council & Conservation Commission, Arlington Land Trust & Arlington Conservation Commission.

**C) Regional Importance of the Alewife Reservation**

- The 115-acre site is one of the largest **untouched urban wilds** in the greater Boston area.
- Provides a **rare opportunity** for conservation & recreation in crowded urban setting - for citizens of Arlington, Belmont and Cambridge and surrounding communities.
- \* Great educational resource for teaching ecoscience at local schools and colleges.
- \* Excellent access to site from many points - pedestrian, cycling and public transportation.

**D) Local and State Master Plans**

- The City of Cambridge is completing design of its court-mandated **CSO** project; includes a stormwater drainage basin with many positive environmental benefits to the area.
- The **MDC** has just released a comprehensive plan of improvements for the Alewife area; compatible with the upper Charles River in Watertown & Newton (see attached article).
- \* The proposed building and garage, no matter how well-designed, will **negate** most of the creative efforts and investments (our tax dollars) going into improvements programs !



## Site Plan of Alewife Reservation and Surrounding Area

Save Our Forest Committee....."What would you rather see on this site?"

In order to provide a focused effort on saving the uplands silver maple forest, a new action group has been formed called **Save Our Forest**. It is a direct outgrowth of the effort to preserve and improve the 115-acre urban wild by the Friends of Alewife Reservation, the Coalition for Alewife and other conservation groups.

We are strongly opposed to the plan of the O'Neill Properties Group to construct buildings on the "uplands forest" site, which will severely damage the fragile ecosystem by removing the only large stand of trees in the area as well as disturbing the natural drainage of the land.

There are many good reasons to develop vacant properties for new job-creating industries – if the property is located in an appropriate area - one which does not detract from the overall environmental health of its community, or diminish the effectiveness of major public improvements such as the promising new MDC Master Plan for the whole Reservation which will be built **with tax-payer dollars**.

We are preparing detailed studies of the existing site area and will be seeking support from a broad constituency to **preserve** the site, to work with all parties to find an **alternate location** for the proposed facility and to seek out a method to **compensate** the owner-developers, O'Neill Properties Group of King-of-Prussia, PA, and Cambridge Partners II, LLC, a limited-liability firm registered in Delaware, for the fair value of the property.

Save Our Forest Committee. Arlington; Jennifer Griffith, Ed Koenig. Belmont; Sue Bass, Jim Graves, Mark Kirk. Cambridge; Bryan Hamlin, Ernest Kirwan, Ellen Mass.

January 12, 2003

To: Members of the Cambridge City Council  
From: The Save Our Forest Committee  
Subject: Cambridge Involvement at the Alewife Reservation

Dear Council Members,

We are strongly opposed to the O'Neill Properties Group plan to construct a large R & D complex in the center of the silver maple forest at Alewife. The proposed development violates most of the principles of **Smart Growth**. It builds on open space – in a critical spot adjoining public conservation land; it increases traffic in an area already gridlocked and it will inevitably increase the probability of flooding.

Cutting seven acres of trees from this rare northern hardwood forest will destroy the land's natural drainage capacity. The 191,600 SF of blacktop and concrete will require extensive holding basins below the buildings to handle runoff – yet engineers clearly alert us that no engineering solutions will work as well in all storm conditions as Mother Nature's solution – growing super-absorbent trees like the silver maples.

This small upland forest is also the core habitat for many species of birds and mammals. Its destruction will surely harm the wildlife across the whole Reservation - because many wetlands mammals must live in the uplands for part of their life cycle.

There is something that can be done to clarify the situation. We understand that the developers may require a hook-up to Cambridge's sewer and water lines to service the building. Since the City Council has gone on record in several earlier resolutions to save the upland forest, we ask that you take another significant step - at this juncture.

Before the City approves any sewer or water connections to Cambridge systems, we urge the City Council to authorize a diligent fact-finding step – and request that the council's Committee on Health and Environment **conduct a public hearing** on the matter.

This is very important, since we do not know who the tenant for the building will be, nor the true nature-extent of their effluent or emissions, nor the actual configuration of below-grade drainage structures, nor the updated measurements of the floodplain. More information and public dialogue are clearly needed.

As part of our effort, we plan to meet with the Cambridge and Arlington Conservation Commissions, the Arlington Selectmen, Mystic River Watershed Association and others and will make the results of our findings available to interested local news outlets.

Attached is an information packet with background data, a map and aerial photographs of the beautiful forest, before and after. **What would you rather see there in the future ?**

- Save Our Forest Committee is an outgrowth of the long struggle to preserve the Alewife urban wild by Friends of Alewife Reservation, Coalition for Alewife and numerous other groups. Committee Members; Arlington: Jennifer Griffith, Ed Koenig. Belmont: Sue Bass, Jim Graves. Cambridge: Bryan Hamlin, Ernest Kirwan, Ellen Mass.



# City of Cambridge

O-12

IN CITY COUNCIL

January 13, 2002

VICE MAYOR DAVIS  
COUNCILLOR MURPHY  
COUNCILLOR DECKER  
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR MAHER  
COUNCILLOR REEVES  
COUNCILLOR SIMMONS  
MAYOR SULLIVAN  
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

ORDERED: That the matter of water and sewer connections to the development at the silver maple forest site (Alewife) be referred to the Health and Environment Committee for a hearing and report back to the City Council prior to any arrangements for hookups to the proposed development.

In City Council January 13, 2003.  
Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.  
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk

S-19

**ORDER #12**

The matter of water and sewer connections to the development at the silver maple forest site (Alewife) be referred to the Health and Environment Committee for a hearing.

**Vice Mayor Davis, Councillor  
Murphy and entire membership**

**In City Council January 13, 2003**

**ORDER ADOPTED.**