

UPLANDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Board of Selectmen appointed the Uplands Advisory Committee ("UAC") in April 2004 to advise the Board of Selectmen on the issues pertaining to the proposed O'Neill Development on the Belmont Uplands located in the northeast corner of Belmont between Acorn Park Drive and the Department of Conservation and Recreation ("DCR") Alewife Reservation. The Reservation runs along Little Pond, Little River, and Alewife Brook. The Uplands consist of 15.6 acres. Of the 12.9 acres in Belmont, 3.4 acres are wetlands.

In constructing Route 2 in the 1930s and later widening Route 2 in the 1960s, the former Massachusetts DPW relocated Little River and added to the historic filling of the wetlands previously located on the Uplands as shown on the 1903 USGS Map.

O'Neill Properties ("O'Neill"), a national developer located in Philadelphia, acquired the ADL property in 1998. In 1999, O'Neill sold the larger portion of the property in Cambridge known as Acorn Park to the Bulfinch Companies, Inc. ("Bulfinch"). However, O'Neill retained ownership of the smaller Uplands parcel.

O'Neill started with an R&D development which, after modification, was approved by the Town Meeting in 2002. With the decline in the commercial market, O'Neill changed its proposal to a larger residential development with 250 condominiums (with 25% affordable, in line with the Town's inclusionary housing by-law), and then altered that proposal to an even larger 300 unit residential rental development with 20% affordable under Chapter 40B.

The original mission of the UAC was to: study and comment on O'Neill's 40B development application to MassDevelopment; complete conceptual Route 2 access plans; evaluate need for flooding studies and identifying flood storage locations; study the feasibility of the swap of the old abandoned MDC rink site (the "Rink Site") for the Uplands; and confer with O'Neill on terms and conditions of the land swap. The revised mission is to: support Notice of Project Change; support flooding studies; continue to support alternative sites; coordinate efforts with other Town Boards; explore fundraising initiatives; support research for better understanding of environmental values of the Uplands; and participate in site visit by MassDevelopment and Notice of Project Change process.

The UAC assisted the Board of Selectmen and the Community Development Department in responding to MassDevelopment (the State agency that must decide on the issue of Site Eligibility for the 40B Project) and the filing of a Notice of Project Change to EOEPA, a necessary filing because O'Neill had changed its approved R&D development to a different and larger and more land-intensive residential proposal. The UAC is currently working with the Conservation Commission in support of the Commission's appeal pertaining to the Uplands.

Under the "land swap," DCR (successor to the MDC) would make the Rink Site available to O'Neill for proposed 150 units of mixed market and affordable housing while O'Neill would donate the Uplands to the DCR to become part of the adjacent Alewife Reservation. The acquisition of the Uplands by DCR would not only expand the Alewife Reservation established by the Legislature as part of the Olmsted/Eliot Metropolitan Park Plan in 1903 (thereby reversing the series of reductions and adverse impacts to the Parkland over the years), but would also reduce floods, preserve habitat, and strengthen the Greenway, all priorities under the DCR June, 2003 Alewife Master Plan.

The UAC presented the "land swap" approach to O'Neill, to DCR, to the Belmont Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Conservation Commission, to the Cambridge Conservation Commission, to the Arlington Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission, to abutters of Little Pond, and to Belmont and Arlington citizen groups. However, the Arlington Board of Selectmen objected to the "land swap" on the grounds that the Rink Site should be used for stormwater detention to lessen flooding.

Moreover, new information on flooding emerged. As reported by BSC (a consultant to Bulfinch, who is the developer of Cambridge Discovery Park), ENSR, consultant to FEMA, shows (on a preliminary basis) an increase of 28 inches in the 100-year flood elevation over the 1982 FEMA study (from 8.2 to 10.6 feet elevation). A higher 100-year flood level subjects a greater portion of the buildable area of the Uplands to the state Building Code requirement to place the lowest floor of any building above the 100-year base flood elevation and the Wetlands Protection Act requirement for compensatory flood storage to be located adjacent to the impacted areas and at the same elevation from which flood storage is being removed. The higher flood levels also impact the Rink Site.

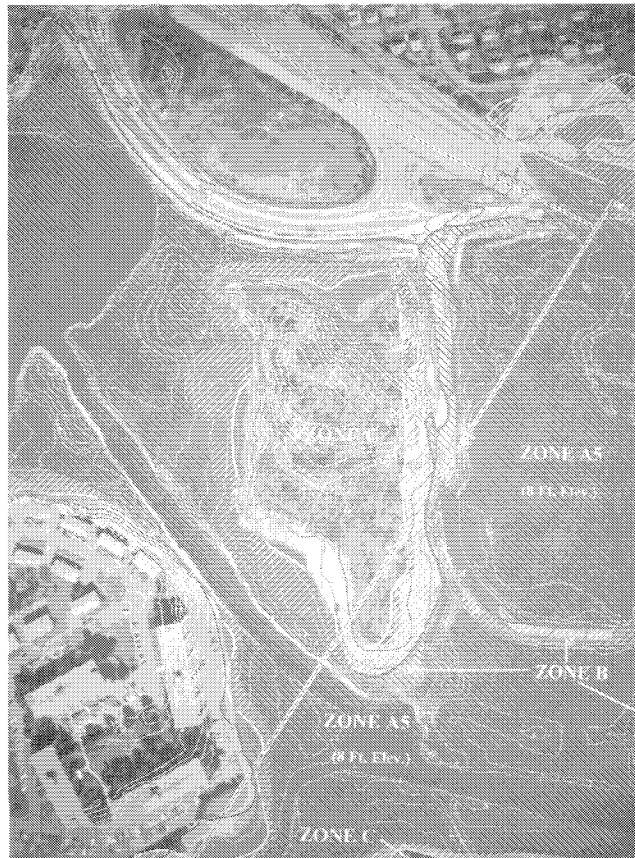
As a result of the new flood data, the UAC, assuming support from the Board of Selectmen and other Town Boards, proposes to work with O'Neill to acquire the Uplands with funding from a variety of public and private sources and through the use of charitable tax deductions to benefit O'Neill. This includes Open Space Acquisition Funding as well as other DCR Grant programs. Ultimately, any new proposals affecting the Uplands must be approved by the Town Meeting.

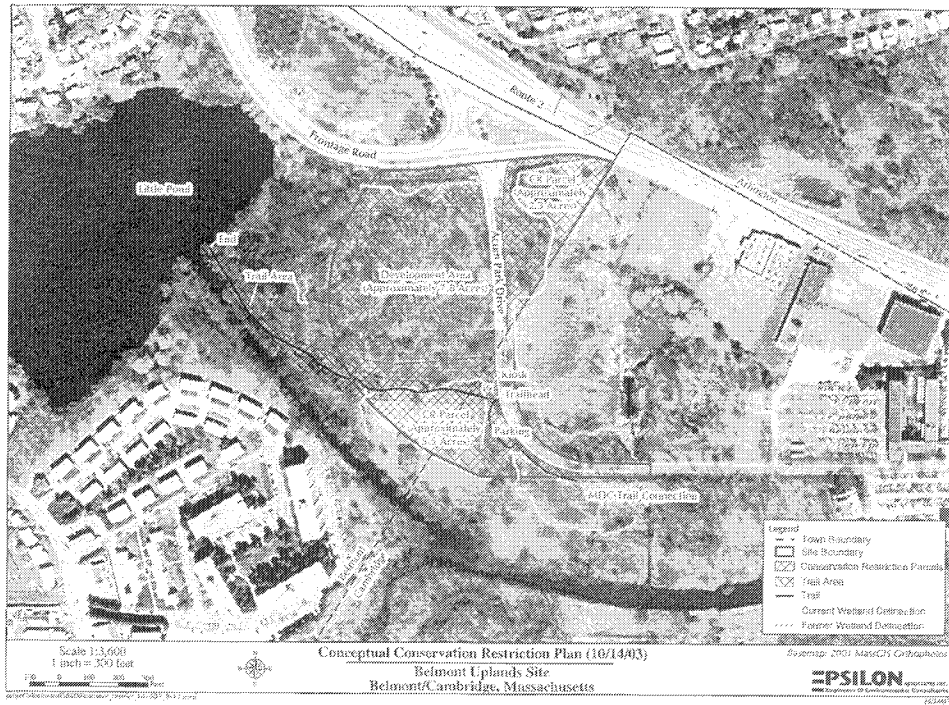
Under this approach, the benefits to the Town, Arlington and Cambridge and the larger Metropolitan community include the following:

1. The retaining of the natural drainage on the Uplands and surrounding area will mitigate the increasingly frequent flood events harmful to health and public safety.
2. The enhancement of the Alewife Reservation parkland for recreational purposes will benefit the dense urban/suburban population living and working near the Reservation.
3. The preservation of the Uplands will protect the present diversity and health of wildlife populations.

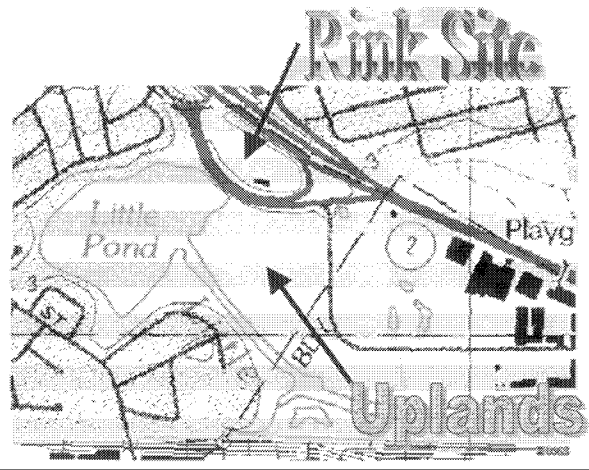
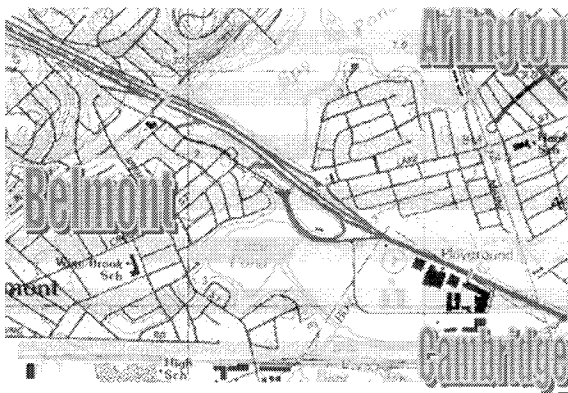
In summary, Arlington, Belmont and Cambridge could achieve permanent flooding storage and abatement. All the communities would benefit from an improved and expanded Alewife Reservation.

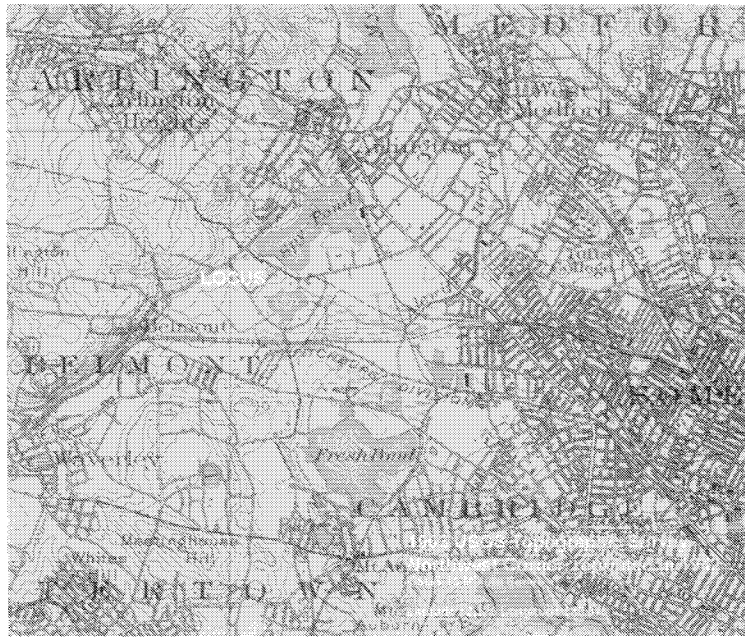
The following maps are: (1) the 1982 flood plain with the 100 year flood designated as Zone A5, (2) the Epsilon aerial photograph showing the R&D development area in relationship to the Alewife Reservation, (3) the Topographical Map showing the proximity of the Rink Site to the Uplands, and (4) the 1903 map showing the historic extent of wetlands and the former location of Little River.





Topographical Maps of the Area





Respectfully submitted,
Fred Paulsen, Chairman