

The Arlington Land Trust is a community-based nonprofit organization established in 2000 to protect land in Arlington. As a membership organization, ALT accepts donations and welcomes volunteers to support its work.

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## Arlington Land Trust News

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The Dam of the Old Cutter Mill, Mill Street. Courtesy of the Historical Postcard Collection, Robbins Library, Arlington

## Revisiting the Mill Brook Corridor

**Arlington's Mill Brook has a notable history and a promising future. Traveling nearly three miles through the center of town and dropping about 150 feet, the brook once generated enough water flow to fill seven mill ponds that powered eight different mill sites. Now this once cascading brook is largely unseen and forgotten, but several current projects are trying to revitalize it as an important community resource.**

### Exhibit Highlights Mill History

The Old Schwamb Mill, one of the country's oldest mill sites still in operation, is a fitting location for an exhibit about Arlington's heritage. "A Brook Runs Through It: Arlington's Mill Brook Legacy" provides an historical overview of the brook, its mills and mill owners, and the amazing variety of products invented and produced here.

Mill Brook originates in East Lexington in the vast wetlands now known as Arlington's Great Meadows. Sickie Brook and Munroe Brook flow out of the wetlands and converge at the Arlington Reservoir, where the out-

flowing stream is given the name Mill Brook. It traverses many acres of Town-owned and private property before emptying into the Lower Mystic Lake.

From 1637 until the early 1900s, the brook bustled with industrial activity, ranging from early grist and saw mills to later large-scale manufacturing of tools, ground spices and medicines, wheat meal, turned wood frames, piano cases, and printed calico fabrics. The water power from the Mill Brook was a significant contributor to Arlington's growth from the colonial period through the late 1800s. Mill owners built dams and

at least seven mill ponds to harness the flow using elaborate systems of mill races, sluices, flumes and canals.

By the late nineteenth century, however, some of Arlington's small-scale mills could not keep up with the economic changes and competition from larger industrial operations around the state and country.

When the Town of Arlington decided to develop the Arlington Reservoir as a water supply system for its growing population, the diminished water flow further hindered the operation of the water-driven mills still located along the brook. Some mill owners closed their businesses while others converted to steam or electric power. Mill Brook's role as a reliable source of water power ended after more than 250 years.

Other local economic and development pressures also affected the mills as Arlington continued to develop as a residential community. Centuries of agricultural and manufacturing activity along Mill Brook had contributed to frequent fires, industrial waste, water pollution, and the general environmental degradation of the entire watershed and corridor. Demands grew for new housing on former farmlands and hillsides, along with more roads and bridges over the brook, sewer and water lines, schools and recreational facilities.

By the 1920s, only the two Schwamb mills in Arlington Heights remained in operation. During the mid-1930s, federal funding through the Works Progress Administration allowed the Town to hire unemployed workers for a variety of projects, such as channeling and culverting the brook, improving roadways and sewers, and renovating Town buildings.

By the 1950s, all the remaining mill ponds had been filled in and the brook was channeled and culverted to create parks and playing fields, house lots, or commercial projects. Over time Mill Brook fell out of public view and usage.

### Revitalization of Mill Brook Starts in Wellington Park

Visionary plans to protect and restore the Mill Brook corridor as an ecologically healthy linear park have been proposed for nearly 100 years, but few of these efforts have resulted in tangible changes, until recently.



Charles Schwamb Mill, 1873 (now the Old Schwamb Mill). Courtesy of the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc.



Aerial view of Wellington Park and the Mill Brook corridor. Courtesy of Weston & Sampson

Building on goals outlined in the 2015 Arlington Master Plan and in many previous studies and reports, the Mill Brook Corridor Study Group is revising a 2010 report with updated information on current conditions and an extensive set of recommendations to prioritize multiple needs and opportunities.

At the same time, a project funded by the Community Preservation Act Committee is focusing on the section of Mill Brook in Wellington Park on Grove Street. Led by the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), this project seeks to expand

access to passive recreational opportunities in the corridor between Brattle and Grove Streets, as well as to restore Mill Brook as an environmental and cultural resource for the Town.

This project will also serve as a model for future projects within the corridor, and ultimately help turn a hidden, underutilized waterway into a linear pathway that connects people to the water and improves the ecological quality of the riparian edge. Other partners in this effort are the Town's Planning and Community Development



Department, Redevelopment Board, Park and Recreation Commission and Recreation Department, Conservation Commission, and Open Space Committee, as well as abutters and other residents.

The participatory planning process began in 2017 with the hiring of the design and engineering firm Weston & Sampson. After numerous public meetings, on-the-ground surveys, and environmental assessments, the firm submitted its schematic design report in August 2018. Additional CPA funding is now supporting further site analyses and final design and construction documents.

Another opportunity to focus on Wellington Park arose in the spring of 2018 when the Town of Arlington was awarded a state-sponsored Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant of nearly \$400,000 to develop and implement ecologically sensitive flood management measures along the brook. This project will build on the MyRWA initiative to improve public access and recreational opportunities, and will enhance efforts to address environmental conditions. Weston & Sampson designers and engineers are also working on this project, further strengthening the synergies of these related plans.

The MVP Action Grant was awarded by the State's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, following the successful completion of the Town's MVP planning process earlier in 2018. At the core of that process was a Community Resilience Building Workshop involving stakeholders from a broad cross-section of the community, coordinated by the Department of Planning and Community Development and funded through a \$23,000 MVP Planning Grant. The top priority identified in the workshop was to address flooding from Mill Brook, a regular cause of significant damage to homes, businesses, and other adjacent properties.

"Flooding along the Mill Brook corridor has been identified as a major vulnerability exacerbated by climate change," said Arlington Town Manager, Adam Chapdelaine, at the time of the grant announcement in June 2018. "This is a great example of the planning process and collaboration of all stakeholders to address this vulnerability and directly leverage CPA resources to reach common goals."

### Continuing Opportunities for Engagement

The Mill Brook exhibit at the Old Schwamb Mill will be on view through early June 2019 at 17 Mill Lane in Arlington Heights. It is open on Tuesdays and Saturdays 11am to 3pm, or by appointment. A variety of lectures, video presentations, and related events are being scheduled. For more information, visit [www.oldschwambmill.org](http://www.oldschwambmill.org) or call 781-643-0554.

Both the CPA-funded MyRWA project (<https://mysticriver.org/millbrook>) and the state-funded Town MVP project ([www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/all-boards-and-committees/municipal-vulnerability-preparedness](http://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/all-boards-and-committees/municipal-vulnerability-preparedness)) are well underway and the current phases of their work plans must be completed by June 2019. Public meetings will be held during the winter and spring for additional input and progress reports by both teams.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends,

**T**hank you for your continued support of the Arlington Land Trust! With nearly 300 individual and family members, our all-volunteer nonprofit organization had another busy year in 2018.

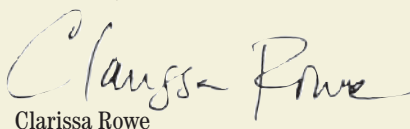
Spy Pond Fun Day in September was lots of fun and a great success. Once again, we had generous assistance from the Arlington-Belmont Crew, who provided boats and drivers to ferry more than 150 visitors out to Elizabeth Island. We're continuing our stewardship of the island itself, and of nearly eight acres of conservation lands surrounding the Arlington 360 housing complex on Summer Street. Please visit these properties—the views from the public parks on top of the 360 hill are fantastic!

Looking to the future, we've been monitoring the progress of potential development plans for the Mugar parcel in East Arlington through a convoluted procedural process. We've also been actively involved in discussions regarding a builder's proposals for new housing on Spy Pond Lane. Both of these projects threaten sensitive wetlands and floodplains which are under the purview of the Conservation Commission. We'll continue to collaborate on these efforts as we look to all of you to bring us your interests in and concerns about other local land protection opportunities.

I will step down from leading the Land Trust in January, and am pleased to introduce Christopher Leich, who will become our new president. Chris recently retired from practicing law at Ropes & Gray LLP in Boston. He and his wife Judy moved to Arlington in 1984, and raised their two children here. They are active supporters of Arlington and its outdoor spaces, and believers in the transformative power of land conservation efforts. Chris became involved with the Land Trust in 2006 at the beginning of the campaign to purchase and protect Elizabeth Island. He has served on the ALT Board since then, and is a member of the Investment Committee.

We invite you to attend the 2018 Annual Meeting on Tuesday, January 22, 2019, from 7 to 9 pm at Common Ground Bar & Grill in Arlington Center. After a short business meeting we'll be showing a new video about the Mill Brook and discussing the waterway's future. I hope you will join us and stay on after the film to enjoy some refreshments and meet other members.

Thank you, and have a great end to 2018 and a bright new year in 2019!

  
Clarissa Rowe





# Stewardship of the Symmes Woods

**T**he Land Trust and the Conservation Commission are continuing to monitor the conservation restriction in place to ensure that two parks on top of the hill at Arlington 360 and the Symmes Woods on Summer Street remain open and accessible for the enjoyment of the public.

One of our goals is the creation of a Friends of the Symmes Woods group, including residents of Arlington 360 and the surrounding neighborhood, to provide input—and hands-on help—to improve the health and appearance of the woods. Decisions will be guided by a Forest Management Plan created with the help of a certified arborist, and will include whether and where to locate foot trails and what new species of trees should be planted.

As part of this stewardship effort, we collaborated with the Town and 100 other communities in the Keep Massachusetts Beautiful campaign, held on Earth Day, April 22. The clean-up in the Symmes Woods brought about 30 people to help pick up litter and other debris, rake leaves and gather fallen branches. Department of Public Works staff later cleared away the piles. A second clean-up was held at Wellington Park under the auspices of the Mystic River Watershed Association.

The campaign was organized by the Town's Department of Planning and Community Development, and we're pleased to welcome Emily Sullivan as the department's new Environmental Planner and Conservation Agent to continue such projects. Emily will lead and coordinate a range of sustainability and environmental efforts for Arlington and will assist the Conservation Commission in its administration and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.

If you are interested in joining the Friends of the Symmes Woods, please send an email to [info@arlingtonlandtrust.org](mailto:info@arlingtonlandtrust.org) or contact Emily at 781.316.3012.



Some of the Symmes Woods clean-up crew rested at the end of the day.

## Spy Pond Fun Day

**T**he Friends of Spy Pond Park and numerous collaborators, including the Arlington Land Trust, presented the annual Spy Pond Fun Day on Saturday, September 22.

For the eighth year in a row, ALT led ever-popular boat trips to Elizabeth Island, with the able assistance of the Arlington-Belmont Crew Team, coordinated by coach Dave Deiuliis. This year 81 adults and 70 children were able to cross the pond and visit the island on a beautiful fall day. ALT volunteers and board members led tours along the island trail and helped people into the Crew's small boats at the park ramp and island landing site.

In addition, Fun Day musicians filled the park with a variety of musical genres, and a variety of children's activities, games, and art projects were offered throughout the event. Many participants and volunteers thought it was the best Fun Day ever!



ALT board members Nellie Aikenhead and John Page helped launch visitors going to Elizabeth Island during Fun Day.



# Land Protection through CPA Projects

**A**rlington voters approved adoption of the state's Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2014. Over the past three funding cycles (FY2017, 2018, 2019), many parks and open spaces have received CPA funding for capital improvements that contribute to the preservation, health and vitality of our community. Some of these and other sites will be considered for funding in FY2020.

We are pleased to highlight the following projects because they complement the Land Trust's mission to protect land in Arlington and make it accessible for all.

**Arlington Reservoir Master Plan** (Park and Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission and Reservoir Committee). Proposal for a master plan, ecological assessment and land survey, followed by phased construction projects to address priorities for recreational improvements and natural resources protection.

**Hardy School Playground** (Arlington Public Schools). A comprehensive recreational site study and plan for the playground needs at Hardy School in response to growing enrollment, limited space, and a classroom addition.

**Mill Brook and Wellington Park Revitalization** (Mystic River Watershed Association). Project to follow up on past recommendations for a linear pathway and environmental improvements along the brook, focusing on Wellington Park. Goals are to enhance views, restore public access, improve entrances and circulation, and restore the ecological value of the riparian edge of the brook.

**Old Burying Ground/Mt. Pleasant Cemetery** (Historical Commission and Cemetery Commission). A comprehensive preservation plan for the Old Burying Ground on Pleasant Street and survey of the condition of several historic tombs in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery for preservation planning and structural stability.

**Robbins Farm Park** (Park and Recreation Commission). Renovations and upgrades of the playing fields with irrigation, drainage improvements and associated amenities, as well as ADA access improvements throughout the park and in the community garden.

**Robbins Town Garden Water Features** (Historical Commission with Friends of the Robbins Town Hall Garden). Restoration of the historic landscape, reflecting pool and fountain in the Town Garden between the Robbins Library and Town Hall.

**Spy Pond Edge and Erosion Control** (Conservation Commission). Study of options for shoreline preservation and erosion mitigation along public portions of Spy Pond and subsequent work to preserve four town-owned parcels of failed shoreline through stabilization improvements, new plantings and educational signage.

**Whittemore Park Revitalization** (Department of Planning and Community Development). Planning for the revitalization of the small landscaped park located at the center of town in front of the historic Jefferson Cutter House and Cyrus Dallin Art Museum.





# Thanks to you! The Arlington Land Trust thanks its members and friends for their generous contributions through mid-November 2018.

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A very cold winter in 2015 offered access to Spy Pond and Elizabeth Island.

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## ALT Membership Renewal

If you have not yet renewed your ALT membership for 2018, please respond to our annual mailing, go to the website ([www.arlingtonlandtrust.org](http://www.arlingtonlandtrust.org)) to download the membership form, or sign up at [www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org) to renew online. Thank you again for your continuing support. If you have any questions, please contact ALT at [info@arlingtonlandtrust.org](mailto:info@arlingtonlandtrust.org).

## Update on the Mugar Parcel

Does affordable housing occupy at least 1.5% of the land area in Arlington? That seemingly arcane question was debated in November 2018 at a long-delayed hearing before the state's Housing Appeals Committee. Its decision will shape the next steps in the proposal to develop East Arlington's Mugar parcel.

In December 2015 Arlington's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) made an important assertion: The Town has met one of the "safe harbor" thresholds available under Chapter 40B, that of having 1.5% of eligible land area devoted to affordable housing. If achieved, that status gives the Town more control over 40B housing projects and limits the developer's ability to override local zoning and wetlands protections.

Oaktree, the would-be developer of the 17-acre Mugar site, disputed the Town's findings, and in a November 2016 decision the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) agreed with Oaktree. In early 2017 the Town appealed that decision to the next level, the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). After many months of administrative wrangling, a hearing was held before HAC in November 2018.

The Town's experts presented a detailed analysis of highly technical land use data to support its position and demonstrate that it is properly applying state regulations. Oaktree relied on ambiguities in the wording of the regulations to argue against the Town's position.

HAC is expected to take several months to rule. Its decision, whenever it comes, cannot be appealed immediately to a court of law by either party. The full Zoning Board-led hearing process on the project itself would have to continue to a conclusion (either an approval, a rejection, or an approval with conditions). At that time, whichever party continued to dispute the 1.5% calculation could raise it as an issue in a court challenge.

*Arlington Land Trust continues to advocate for the permanent protection of the Mugar parcel as conservation land. The site lies almost entirely in the 100-year floodplain, is subject to regular and significant flooding, and is a critical stormwater buffer for the surrounding neighborhoods of East Arlington.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ALT Annual Meeting

#### Revisiting the Mill Brook Corridor

Tuesday, January 22, 2019, 7–9pm

Common Ground Bar & Grill

319 Broadway, Arlington

Join the Arlington Land Trust for its Annual Meeting featuring a short business agenda and a multi-media presentation about Arlington's historic yet largely forgotten Mill Brook.

Video producer and Arlington resident Glenn Litton has worked with representatives of the Old Schwamb Mill to create a short video that complements the exhibit "A Brook Run Through It: Arlington's Mill Brook Legacy." Following introductions and the screening, Glenn and exhibit planners will share additional "fun facts" and welcome questions about the brook and its legacy. For more information, see the cover story in this newsletter.

### 29th Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

#### Enhancing Community through the Land

Saturday, March 23, 2019, 8:00am–4:00pm

Worcester Technical High School

One Skyline Drive, Worcester, MA

The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition coordinates the annual Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference, the largest statewide land conservation conference in the country. Numerous workshops are offered, with topics ranging from conservation techniques to communications to fundraising. The keynote speaker will be Gina McCarthy, former Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information, visit the website at [www.massland.org](http://www.massland.org).