

The Arlington Land Trust is a community-based nonprofit organization established in 2000 to protect undeveloped 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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Carol Kowalski: Our New Town Planner's Vision



As a resident of Arlington for 23 years, Planning Director Carol Kowalski is familiar with the Town's wide-ranging assets and challenges. As a professional planner with a background in video production and community television, she brings a valuable mix of skills and interests to her new role, which she began in July.

After graduating from Clark University she worked in the telecommunications field for about ten years before earning her master's degree in environmental policy at Tufts University. She held planning positions with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. In 2000 she became a town planner, first in Concord and later in Reading.

During the 1990s Carol served as a volunteer commissioner on the Arlington Conservation Commission, and as a member of the Open Space Committee. She contributed to the Town's first Open Space and Recreation Plan in 1996, and in 1999 she cofounded the Arlington Land Trust with Clarissa Rowe.

They were prompted to help establish the Land Trust because of increasing losses of wooded and open yards in long-established neighborhoods being subdivided into lots for large new houses. They also knew from past experience that the Town had limited options to control development, and that a nonprofit land conservation organization offered an alternative for landowners who wanted to protect their small parcels.

In her keynote presentation at the Land Trust meeting, Carol will examine the special needs of dense, older suburbs like Arlington that are already mostly developed and are struggling to protect and maintain existing parks and natural resources. State programs to promote land conservation are generally aimed at large tracts in semi-rural towns outside the immediate Boston region. Our needs and circumstances are vastly different, and deserve to be recognized. Even small open spaces bring value to every neighborhood.

One way to leverage support for conservation is to work with our bordering towns of Belmont, Winchester, and Lexington, each of which is facing similar challenges. Regional collaboration is crucial on proposed development projects that will impact Arlington, such as Busa Farm in Lexington, Locke Farm in Winchester, and the Silver Maple Forest in Belmont.

We also have special places to share, including the Minuteman Bikeway, Arlington's Great Meadows, the Reservoir beach, and many parks, playgrounds, and playing fields. Together we can enhance public appreciation of these regional resources, and work to ensure their protection and accessibility.

Making the Most of Open Space Where So Little Remains

10th Anniversary Annual Meeting

Keynote Speaker
Carol Kowalski

See back panel for more details

Envisioning a Mill Brook Linear Park

An ad hoc group organized by Arlington's Open Space Committee has begun to study the feasibility of developing a linear park along Mill Brook, an important ecological and historical feature that travels nearly three miles through the center of town, parallel to both Massachusetts Avenue and the Minuteman Bikeway. At one time there were nine mills and seven mill ponds along the brook, which flows from the Arlington Reservoir to Lower Mystic Lake and is part of the Mystic River watershed.

Ann LeRoyer



Some sections of the brook flow naturally through wooded areas that could be made more attractive and accessible.

Enhancement of and improved access to existing open spaces are key goals of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, and recent projects at Cooke's Hollow (see related article) and Wellington Park brought renewed interest to the linear park concept. These are just two of the Town-owned facilities that abut Mill Brook, thus offering public entry points for greater access to the corridor. Other properties are the Arlington Reservoir, Hurd Field, Arlington High School and fields, Buzzell Field, Mt Pleasant Cemetery, and Meadowbrook Park.

The study is looking into the feasibility of linking these properties together in a greenway with pedestrian facilities and other improvements to help restore the environmental and visual qualities of Mill Brook. This work involves reviewing parcel lines, lot ownership, and current uses, as well as photo-documenting the conditions of the brook and its nearby built neighborhood. There are 109 parcels of land along Mill Brook. The Town of Arlington owns 16 of them, accounting for about 35 percent of the land abutting the brook. The other 65 percent is in private ownership with a variety of residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

The Planning Department and Redevelopment Board are also getting involved in the Mill Brook study in conjunction with their ongoing efforts to enhance economic development opportunities in Arlington. Interspersed among the Town-owned parcels are numerous business and industrial zones where new kinds of brook-oriented activity could benefit from collaborative planning. Some of the other Town and private groups participating in early discussions are the Conservation Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Arlington Land Trust, Historical Commission, Historical Society, and Old Schwamb Mill.

A Brief History

Mill Brook was originally a natural waterway. The English settled in the area in 1635, and by 1637 they began the first of many man-made changes to the brook. Captain George Cooke erected the mill dam near what

is today's Mystic Street to fill his grist mill pond. Mill Brook later supported a series of dams and mill ponds from Arlington Heights to Mystic Street that were used for grinding (e.g., grain, spices, material for drugs, paints, and dyes) and for other kinds of manufacturing (e.g., wood turning, cloth printing, knives, saw blades).

When the Arlington Reservoir was built as a water supply in the 1870s, the reduction of water volume in Mill Brook caused most mill owners to convert to steam power, or abandon their locations. All the ponds have been filled and Mill Brook has been channeled, diverted, and culverted in various ways over the centuries for purposes ranging from directing water flow for manufacturing use, to flood control, to the creation of playing fields.

Previous Planning for the Brook

Proposals for restoring Mill Brook and creating a park along its banks date back to the 1920s. The Town's Comprehensive Plan of 1926 recommended a series of pocket parks along the Mill Brook. Responding to that plan, the Town acquired the Wellington Park property (3.0 acres) in the 1930s and Cooke's Hollow (0.7 acres) in the 1970s. A 1977 study project for the Arlington Conservation Commission by then-Tufts University student Miriam Gutfreund de Lehrer prepared a general plan for developing a linear park, incorporating the pocket parks format. Her plan forms the starting point for this latest project to draw attention to the Mill Brook corridor.

Benefits of Creating a Linear Park

Five types of benefits could be realized from creating a linear park along Mill Brook with associated improvements:



However, Mill Brook is channelized and inaccessible in many areas.

Ann LeRoyer

1) Environmental benefits from improving water quality through better monitoring of more than 30 storm drains and other sources of contaminants; cleaning the stream bed and banks of trash; and designing landscape improvements to create a more appealing area with native vegetation.

2) Recreational benefits to provide safe and attractive walking and gathering areas for Town residents and to link existing parks with the Minuteman Bikeway.

3) Flood Control benefits from redesigning and enlarging the capacities of some culverted and channelized areas that restrict flow that create flooding during storms.

4) Economic benefits resulting from the creation of attractive views and amenities around which new or expanded businesses could be focused, with links to existing commercial areas on Massachusetts Avenue.

5) Transportation benefits from providing more and safer pedestrian access to the bikeway and links to public transportation facilities along Massachusetts Avenue.

The Open Space Committee will continue to work on this project and expand its outreach with other Town-based and private groups over time. The committee welcomes other interested parties to join our efforts. For more information, contact Lisa Decker at lisadec@gmail.com

Elizabeth Island

As we have reported previously, the Land Trust has a strong interest in protecting Elizabeth Island in Spy Pond. Fortunately, this interest is shared by the island's current owner, who has preserved the island as a wildlife refuge for more than 40 years.

Mass Audubon has generously demonstrated its support for this project by giving us the benefit of Bob Wilber's deep experience as director of land acquisition and protection. Together we are working with the owner to develop a plan to provide permanent protection for this unique resource. As is often the case in the world of land conservation, the process takes time. We are patient, and we remain optimistic.



David White

Cooke's Hollow is in need of landscape restoration.

Restoring Cooke's Hollow

The Arlington Conservation Commission and the Arlington Cemetery Commission have joined together to undertake a feasibility study for the restoration of the Cooke's Hollow Conservation Area, reports Nathaniel Stevens, chair of the Conservation Commission.

Bisected by Mill Brook, this almost one-acre parcel abuts the Community Safety Building on Mystic Avenue. Cooke's Hollow is named for Captain George Cooke, recipient of the original grant of a mill privilege on Mill Brook.

In recent years, the condition of Cooke's Hollow has deteriorated. The banks along Mill Brook have suffered erosion, paths have deteriorated, and invasive and other undesirable plant species have taken over to create an uninviting environment. The Conservation Commission sought and received some capital planning funds to help restore Cooke's Hollow.

Meanwhile, the Cemetery Commission has been looking for areas near the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery for additional space as the cemetery approaches its current capacity. Specifically, the Cemetery Commission wished to provide an area for the cremated remains of residents who wished to be interred in Arlington.

The two commissions in late 2008 discovered that they had complementary goals and that by combining efforts they could work to achieve them sooner and more efficiently. With the help of the Planning Department and the Town manager, and input from the Historical Commission, the two commissions decided to hire a landscape architecture/engineering firm to help plan for the restoration of Cooke's Hollow as a conservation and historical area that would also include areas for placement of ashes.

In early 2009 almost a dozen firms submitted proposals to undertake this feasibility study. The Town awarded the contract to Waterfield Design Group of Winchester. In developing the feasibility study, Waterfield is also tasked with considering the broader objective of a Mill Brook Linear Park (see related article). This parkway would connect Cooke's Hollow and other parts of Arlington along a corridor parallel to Massachusetts Avenue and the Minuteman Bikeway.

Waterfield has surveyed and inventoried the current conditions of Cooke's Hollow and is in the process of developing a Preliminary Feasibility Study. Waterfield is also exploring the possibility of extending its design into a portion of the adjacent Arlington Catholic High School practice field to enhance pedestrian access. The preliminary study, which will be presented at a public hearing, will offer two to four possible design options, with rough cost estimates for each. The preferred option will be studied in further detail in the Final Feasibility Study, which also will be presented at a public hearing. The Final Feasibility Study will include more detailed cost estimates and plans, as well as permit and regulatory requirements.

Arlington's Great Meadows

This was another busy year at Arlington's Great Meadows. The most dramatic event was a fire in April that burned more than 100 acres, but was contained to mostly the wetland areas by the diligent efforts of firefighters from several communities, including Lexington and Arlington. The wetlands recovered very rapidly and now show few signs of the fire effects, although some of the drier upland sections have not recovered fully.

Public awareness and appreciation of AGM's 183 acres in East Lexington continue to increase. The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM) sponsored regular monthly nature walks led by Don Miller during the spring, summer, and fall, as well as other events such as a fungi and lichens walk with Harvard mycologist Donald Pfister. Other organizations including the New England Wildflower Society have held walks at AGM, and several graduate students are using the site for their scientific research.

An ongoing concern discussed in Frances Clark's *Natural Resource Inventory and Stewardship Plan* of 2001 is the natural succession of some upland meadow areas into woodlands. While that is a natural process, it creates a loss of meadow habitat and changes the



A meadow restoration plan is being prepared for parts of Arlington's Great Meadows.

overall diversity at AGM. In particular, the woodcock breeding and display areas will be overgrown if that process continues.

In 2009 FoAGM hired Jeff Collins of Massachusetts Audubon Society to develop a restoration plan for about six acres of upland meadow adjacent to the nursing home entrance off Maple Street in Lexington. The next stage in this project is to explore costs and possible options for carrying out the work with contractors and volunteers. His report is available at the Friends website: www.FoAGM.org.

Mugar Site in the News Again

The Mugar site was in the news again this fall when word circulated that a Cambridge developer had secured an option from the Mugar family to develop the 17-acre property adjacent to Route 2 in East Arlington.

Preliminary, informal presentations by Oaktree Development to Town officials reportedly entailed development of the higher-elevation portion of the site as a facility for a private school, together with some multifamily housing. The lowest-lying sections of the parcel were said to be preserved, but the scheme apparently calls for access from Route 2 by a new curb cut that would presumably pave over areas included in the most sensitive "floodway" zone under the newly revised FEMA flood maps.

The Arlington Land Trust will continue to advocate for the preservation of this site as open space, joining many other local organizations and residents concerned about the future of this flood-prone area. ALT has suggested to the Board of Selectmen that the Mugar Advisory Committee be reconstituted and charged with working with ALT to negotiate with the Mugar family.

The ALT board is encouraged by the support of our legislative delegation, especially Rep. Will Brownsberger and Sen. Ken Donnelly, who together wrote to the Arlington Advocate earlier this fall that "... the environmental and public safety costs of development on this site are extremely high. The last time a development scheme for this sensitive site was put forward, Arlington's 2001 Town Meeting set out the community's goal in a nearly unanimous vote: that the town wants to 'preserve the conservation, recreation and open space uses

of the property.' We support the town's objective of protecting this sensitive parcel, and pledge to work with town officials and residents to achieve that goal."

We applaud our legislators for speaking out on behalf of conservation, and are grateful for their support of the community's objectives.

ALT Member Profile



Walter Phillips (with Woody)
Crescent Hill Avenue

"I enjoy spending time outdoors, especially in Arlington's open spaces like Mt. Gilboa, the Arlington Reservoir, and the Great Meadows. I care about conservation and worry about the pace of development in the town." That's why Walter Phillips has been one of the Arlington Land Trust's most loyal members, joining the organization and helping it grow since its founding.

Busa Farm's Unknown Future

Located just over the Arlington/Lexington border and abutting the Arlington Reservoir, Busa Farm has been a family farm since the 1920s. Over the past five years the farmers have offered their produce through memberships in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and at farmers markets in Arlington and other nearby towns, as well as at the long-established farm stand on Lowell Street. Now this agricultural legacy is threatened.

Lexington Town Meeting in May 2009 authorized the purchase of the eight-acre farm property for about \$4.1 million through the use of the Community Preservation Act funds. This state law permits land purchased by eligible cities and towns to be used for open space (including agriculture, conservation, and recreation), historic preservation, and affordable housing.

The Town closed on the sale on December 4, but former owner and farmer Dennis Busa will be leasing the property for the 2010 growing season, and the farm stand will reopen in the spring.



Ann LeFoyer

Busa Farm fields abut the Arlington Reservoir.

Whatever ultimately happens at the farm will affect the Reservoir (including the beach area and potentially the water quality) and the adjacent walking trails. Plans for the use of the farm land are not finalized, but several informal groups and appointed Town committees in Lexington are beginning to discuss its future. The Arlington Board of Selectmen appointed Clarissa Rowe to be its representative on this issue.

The recently established Lexington Community Farm Coalition seeks to ensure that farming activity continues on the Busa land through a community effort to provide fresh, local produce and hands-on educational opportunities. More information is available on their website, www.lexfarm.org, including a petition that reads "I support using the Busa land for a community farm."

Updated FEMA Maps

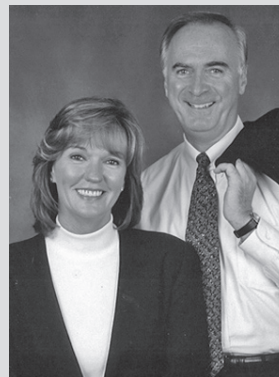
The Town of Arlington will vote on updated FEMA maps at the 2010 Town Meeting in the spring. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is "tasked with disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery planning." Former state representative Anne Paulsen had asked FEMA to consider studying the Alewife/Route 2 region and redrawing the maps because the towns of Arlington and Belmont were experiencing many large storm events over the last decade. It was hoped that the revised maps would inform new development on both sides of the Route 2 corridor in order to prepare for the flooding that occurs in these low-lying areas.

As anticipated, the updated maps show that many more properties are affected by a 100-year storm and other weather events than in the past. The redrawing of the maps means that more affected property owners will need to buy flood insurance for their homes before the maps are adopted. The FEMA process has been ongoing for two years, and now the appeal period is over for homeowners who do not agree with the new findings.

Several large public meetings were held last year to inform the affected homeowners about the location of the floodway and what they could do to purchase flood insurance. The cost of the insurance is a burden on homeowners but, in the long run, it will be better for these homeowners to have some protection against the flooding hazard. The expanded area of potentially flood-affected homes is primarily in East Arlington near Alewife Brook and in the Maynard Street area.

Even before the FEMA maps become final, the information on them will be used by the Town as new projects are reviewed and permitted. Town Engineer Mike Rademacher has said "Permitting agencies are allowed to use 'the best available data' when determining resource delineations. If the proposed maps are considered the best available data, which I would argue they are, then they could be used instead of the current flood maps." This determination would apply to any development proposals that might be planned for the Mugar site in East Arlington.

ALT Member Profile



Bob and Elaine Bowes
Lakeview Street

As realtors in Arlington for over 40 years, Bob and Elaine Bowes know every acre of the town. They value the conservation land and understand the importance of taking good care of the few remaining areas of open space. Bob says, "We are thrilled that neighborhood organizations, like the Arlington Land Trust, have been working to maintain and care for these local treasures."

Support Land and Water with a New License Plate

You can help fund land conservation in Massachusetts by signing up for the new Land and Water license plate from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust.

Like the other Trust plates (right whale, fish and wildlife, Blackstone Valley) whose proceeds fund important environmental work, this plate will specifically fund the permanent protection of watershed lands in the Commonwealth.



Before the Registry of Motor Vehicles will produce the plates, 3,000 people must order a plate (numbers 1 to 3,000!) and actually send a check. (If M.E.T. is not able to place 3,000 orders, your check will be returned.)

Go to www.masslandandwater.info, print the application, mail it in with your check, and get your friends to do it, too. These great-looking license plates are the Trust's primary source of revenue, and through them M.E.T. has distributed \$16 million to hard-working environmental organizations across the state for projects that enhance and protect water quality.

This Land and Water plate will allow the Trust to fund its new land conservation program in wetland and watershed communities across the state. And, your vehicle will proudly display your commitment to the environment with an attractive, low-number plate!

Subdivision Control Legislation Enacted

Arlington Town Meeting passed changes in local subdivision control as home rule legislation in spring 2008, but it took fifteen months, until July 2009, before the state legislature finally approved the revised Board of Survey process, shifting authority from the Board of Selectmen to the Arlington Redevelopment Board. The final regulations to be adopted by the Redevelopment Board under this new law will allow more thorough review and consideration of neighborhood impacts from small-scale subdivisions of two- to six-units that require road access. This new procedure will offer additional scrutiny to proposed construction projects in residential areas.

Symmes Hospital Site

After a long period of inactivity and neglect at the Symmes site by the current developer, JPI, interest in the project is now increasing. The Town manager and planning director have recently met with the bank holding the note for the project. The Town has discussed the importance of keeping the current Land Disposition Agreement, as signed by the Arlington Redevelopment Board, and amending it only if necessary later. Several development teams have shown interest in the site, even in an era with very tight credit for projects like this one. At least one team has been actively soliciting the opinion of the project's appellants and the neighborhood representatives.

The Symmes Hospital abutters have also been pursuing their desire to keep the project on track. Some neighbors have asked the Town if they can start working on the cleanup of the Symmes Woods part of the project, which will eventually be part of the area under a Conservation Restriction to be held by the Land Trust and the Conservation Commission. We are working with Town management on this project and hope to have permission in place for a cleanup initiative in the spring.

ALT Member Profile



MaryAnna Foscett
Brantwood Road

MaryAnna Foscett loves living near Arlington Center, but firmly states, "People need open space to renew their spirit and connect with their communities. Our lives are enriched by parks and green areas." She has put her beliefs into action for years by spearheading key conservation efforts in Arlington and through her long-time membership in the Arlington Land Trust.

Thanks to you!

The Arlington Land Trust thanks its members and friends for their generous contributions during 2009. Some of these donors also support dedicated funds for the Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows and the Arlington Conservation Stewards Fund.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

10th Anniversary Annual Meeting

Making the Most of Open Space Where So Little Remains

Tuesday, January 26, 2010

7:00–9:00 PM

Senior Center

27 Maple Street

Arlington, MA 02476

Keynote Speaker

Carol Kowalski

Director of Planning and Community Development

Town of Arlington

Cofounder of the Arlington Land Trust

Annual Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

The 20th Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference will be held on Saturday, March 27, 2010, at the Worcester Technical High School in Worcester, Massachusetts. This day-long training and networking event provides people who care about protecting and stewarding the land with the information, skills, and connections needed to be most effective. The conference theme is “The Next Generation.”

- What does the next generation of land conservation tools, policies, funding, and laws look like?
- Who will be leading land conservation organizations and agencies in 2030?
- What other questions do we need to be asking now?

Workshops will be offered on the following topical tracks:

- The Next Generation of Land Conservation in Massachusetts
- Funding, Fundraising and Organizational Development
- Land Conservation Tools and Techniques
- Stewardship: Land Management and Conservation Restrictions
- New to Land Conservation? Welcome Aboard
- Particularly Legal Matters

Learn the nuts and bolts of what it takes to conserve land. Join novice and long-time conservationists for a wide array of workshops in the legal, financial, political and social realities of land conservation. For more information, contact the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition at www.massland.org