

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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Spy Pond Fun Day

Saturday, September 10, 2011, was a beautiful and warm fall day for the Friends of Spy Pond Park's annual Fun Day, which offers many arts and nature appreciation activities for all ages. This year FSPP invited the Land Trust to participate in this event and to introduce visitors to Elizabeth Island. More than 150 people, including a wide range of residents of all ages, had the opportunity to visit the island for the first time that afternoon.

Several FSPP and ALT members loaned canoes and kayaks to transport visitors to the island, and ALT Board members Ted Siegan and Jen Ryan were stationed on the island to answer questions and offer guidance. At the boat ramp in the park Ann LeRoy from ALT and Lally Stowell of FSPP directed traffic. Two representatives of the Belmont/Arlington crew program also provided a launch for ferrying

visitors, and they stayed until after 5:30 to be sure everyone was off the island safely. Spy Pond neighbor and FSPP/ALT member Bill Eykamp generously shared his canoe and his knowledge of the island as well.

Many thanks to all who helped make this first public Elizabeth Island event a great success, and stay tuned for news about future activities on and about the island.



Photo: Ann LeRoy

The boat ramp in Spy Pond Park was the staging area for trips to Elizabeth Island.



Protecting and Enjoying Elizabeth Island

It has been nearly a year since the Arlington Land Trust purchased Elizabeth Island to permanently protect this two-acre natural jewel in Spy Pond. Our successful Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island was the culmination of several years of planning and negotiation, with assistance from our colleagues at Mass Audubon.

We could not have accomplished this important acquisition without the help of almost 500 individuals and families, local businesses, and foundations; the state's Conservation Partnership Grant Program; and Arlington Conservation Commission's land acquisition fund. We now have ongoing partnerships with Mass Audubon and the Conservation Commission, which co-hold the conservation restriction that governs the use of the property and ensures the island's permanent protection.

With all the legal and financial protocols in place, ALT is moving into the next phase of establishing a stewardship plan and providing opportunities for members, Arlington residents, and others to visit and enjoy the island. It offers a quiet place for nature study and reflection, with diverse plant communities, birds and other wildlife.

Stewarding Elizabeth Island for Future Generations

Now that Elizabeth Island is permanently protected, ALT is committed to building a strong foundation for its long-term stewardship, which can be defined as “careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” Elizabeth Island has been entrusted to us, and to you. It is open to the public, and our goal is to protect the ecological habitat of the Island while providing a unique natural experience in an urban environment. Working with Mass Audubon’s Extension Service, we now have a formal Stewardship Plan in place.



Elizabeth Island is a deposition of sand and gravel left behind by melting ice calved from the retreating Laurentian Glacier some 15,000 years ago. There is no bedrock. The island is lens-shaped, with four distinct vegetation zones — deep marsh at the water’s edge, shrubs and saplings, trees, and a grassy knoll near the center where the island rises to about 20 feet above water level.

The deep marsh on the southwestern and western sides of the island is dominated by invasive Phragmites, but members of the Vision 2020 Spy Pond Committee have been working hard to eradicate this invasive plant and much of it is already under

control. Sensitive Fern, Skunk Cabbage, and Nettles are also found in the deep marsh. Sweet Pepperbush, Buttonbush and Stag Horn Sumac are a few of the shrubs that encircle the island. Trees including Black Oak, Gray Birch, Red Maple, White Ash, and Black Cherry grow along the flat plateau and hillsides. One can see Goldenrods and Canada Rock Rose and pick raspberries around the grassy opening on top of the knoll.

More than 120 bird species associated with either woodlands or wetlands have been observed on and around the island: Warbling Vireo, American Goldfinch, Great Blue Heron, Eastern Kingbird, Green Heron, and Canada Goose. Though they are quite common

birds in this area, their presence is an indicator of the ecosystem function of the habitat, and gives further evidence for protecting the natural features of the island.

In fact, Elizabeth Island is included as a conservation target in BioMap2, a joint effort by the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and The Nature Conservancy. Its ecological significance makes the island one of the last undeveloped outposts in the greater Boston area.

Among ALT's stewardship efforts will be minimal signage welcoming visitors to the island and asking that there be no fires and that all trash be carried out. There are no sanitary facilities, so camping is not allowed, but visitors can pull up a canoe or kayak to enjoy the environs. Improvements to the two landing areas will include cutting back a few branches to ease access.

We'll have clean-up days as needed, and this spring we hope to build a loop trail ringing the knoll, building on the existing path and adding erosion bars along the hillsides. We also plan to develop environmental education opportunities during special events, and in collaboration with Mass Audubon, the Friends of Spy Pond Park, the Boys and Girls Club, and other local groups.

ALT board member Jen Ryan is chairing the stewardship committee for Elizabeth Island, and we welcome volunteers to help monitor the island and work on maintenance and other projects. We'll post events and volunteer opportunities in our e-newsletter and on the website at www.arlingtonlandtrust.org. The Stewardship Plan is available at <http://arlingtonlandtrust.org/elizabethisland/>



Photos: Views on Elizabeth Island as documented in the Stewardship Plan.

Massachusetts Tax Credit for Land Conservation

The long-awaited Massachusetts Land Conservation Incentives Act—the state income tax credit for donation of conservation land—represents a sea-change in state environmental policy and a major commitment by the Commonwealth to support land protection.

In effect for the first time during the 2011 tax year, the act provides taxpayers with a direct state-level economic incentive for land protection, and serves as an additional tax planning tool for philanthropic individuals. The tax credit, equal to 50 percent of the appraised value of the gift, is available to landowners who donate certain qualifying conservation land to a municipality, the Commonwealth, or a land trust such as ALT.

The maximum credit is \$50,000 per gift, and not all donations of conservation land will qualify. The state has to certify a high level of public interest for natural resource protection, such as drinking water supplies; wildlife habitat and biological diversity; agriculture and forestry production; recreational opportunities; or scenic and cultural values.

If you have land suitable for conservation—in Arlington or elsewhere—and would like more information on how the tax credit might benefit you, please contact info@arlingtonlandtrust.org.

ALT Member Profile



We feel so fortunate to live on Spy Pond. There is not a day that we don't look at Elizabeth Island, and we are so grateful that the Arlington Land Trust now owns it. Not only do we love to look at the island, but it is responsible for the rich variety of birds that we see nesting and visiting in the area. We have watched the seasons change, tree by tree. Whether wind-swept, snow-covered, or leafing out, the island is a place we have loved and photographed it in all its guises. Thanks to the Land Trust, it will always be there for all of us to appreciate.

Bob and Harriet Noyes

Photo: Brian Rehnig

ALT Member Profile



Until this year my main involvement with ALT has been making annual donations and attending meetings. I live in East Arlington and still hope to contribute to efforts to preserve the Mugar property and other open spaces in Arlington. When I heard about the Wildlife Habitat Garden, I got involved because I wanted to feel more connected with my community. Through creating a garden of native plants with people from all over Arlington, I have felt a stronger connection in every sense of the word.

Lisa Fredman

Busa Farm's Future Still Uncertain

Located just over the Arlington/Lexington border and abutting the Arlington Reservoir, Busa Farm has been a family farm since the 1920s. For at least 10 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. The future of this agricultural legacy remains in doubt.

Lexington Town Meeting in May 2009 authorized the purchase of the nearly eight-acre farm property for about \$4.1 million, using 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 farm sale was completed in December 2009, and Lexington now leases the land to former owner and farmer Dennis Busa, who has continued to operate the farm stand and CSA each growing season.

The Lexington Board of Selectmen appointed a seven-member Busa Land Use Proposal Committee (BLUPC) to identify desirable

future uses of the land, and the committee held many meetings to gather ideas. The committee's report and local consensus continue to be in favor of a community farm with educational opportunities for all ages and some affordable housing on the site.

Members of the Arlington Board of Selectmen testified at a Lexington Board meeting and sent a follow-up letter stating that the Town of Arlington supports the proposal that the land continue to be used as a farm and CSA.

The Lexington Board is still evaluating various alternatives. For more information, visit <http://ci.lexington.ma.us/committees/busalanduse.cfm>, or <http://lexfarm.org/>, one of the groups advocating for community farming.



Volunteers prepared and planted the Wildlife Habitat Garden in the spring of 2011.

Upland Meadow

The most significant recent activity for the ten-year-old Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM) has been the restoration of a portion of the upland meadow area near the nursing home entrance in East Lexington. A study conducted by Mass Audubon's Ecological Extension Service had recommended that this area, which in recent years had been rapidly changing to forest, be managed as open grassland to preserve a diverse habitat. In the fall of 2010 a large group of volunteers cleared away woody vegetation from about two acres. That work continued into 2011 and in the early spring, with a permit from the Lexington Fire Department, the resulting brush piles were burned.

Much of the meadow needed only exposure to sun to thrive but a lower, shadier area needed more help. With advice and assistance from Arlington landscape architect Sarah Carrier, the Friends ordered native meadow seed and, with the help of Waldorf High School students, planted the seed in early May. By mid-summer the area had abundant wildflowers and emerging grasses. The remainder of the meadow needed ongoing maintenance as some of the cut trees continued to send up new shoots. A dedicated volunteer group is keeping up with that work,



Photo: David White

FoAGM Steering Committee member Don Miller points out a stump sprouting new shoots in the restored meadow.

and the area is now much more attractive than it was before this project began. FoAGM thanks the meadow maintenance volunteers: David Markun, Jenny Ta, Michael Ratner, and Evelyn Margot.

To learn more about this project, please contact FoAGM Steering Committee member Sandra Ruggiero (Sandra.ruggiero@comcast.net) or visit the website www.foagm.org

Wildlife Habitat Garden at the Arlington Reservoir

What is a wildlife habitat garden? It is a garden planted with native shrubs, trees, and perennials that attract local wildlife. Native plants provide the foliage, pollen, nectar, and seeds that many species need to survive and thrive. The garden attracts birds, small animals, like rabbits and chipmunks, and insects, such as bees, butterflies, and wasps. A successful wildlife habitat garden must provide food, water, cover, and places to raise young.

Inspired by an anonymous donation from an Arlington Land Trust member and subsequent contributions from many other ALT members and local residents, along with support from the Conservation Commission, the Wildlife Habitat Garden came to life this spring and summer after several years of planning and design work.

A dedicated garden team organized through the Vision 2020 Reservoir Committee has worked on planning and planting the garden. The overall design and selection of native shrubs and wildflowers were coordinated by landscape designer Martine Gougault. Among the regular volunteers who shared their garden knowledge and

helped plant, weed, and water the garden are Lisa Fredman, Cathy Garnett, Jane Howard, Rachel James, Elizabeth Karpati, Ann LeRoy, Jim Marzilli, Stephan Miller, and David White, chair of the Reservoir Committee.

A special debt of gratitude is due to the Arlington Department of Public Works, whose staff provided critical assistance and support by initially preparing the site and later installing the water pipes and spigots that helped sustain the garden through the dry spells.

Tax-deductible contributions to support this project and assist with garden maintenance can be made to the Arlington Land Trust, with a note indicating "Reservoir Garden." For more information, email reservoirgarden@arlington2020.org or visit the website at www.arlington2020.org/reservoir

NOTE: In early December, Reservoir Committee members discovered that a significant number of native shrubs and plants had been stolen. Please help us monitor the garden and report any suspicious behavior.

Thanks to you!

The Arlington Land Trust thanks its members and friends for their generous contributions in 2011.

Patrons (\$200 or more)

Eric Hall Anderson
Peter Belknap & Jennifer Snodgrass
George Blaszczynski
Lisa Fredman
Christopher M. Leich
Ann LeRoy
David Markun
Stephan Miller & Terry Dash
Cathleen Pfister
John & Sara Sharp
Ed & Louise Tsoi
David White & Mary Gilbert

Friends (\$100-200)

Eric Ammondson & Amy McElroy
Amy, John & Megan Anderson
Sue & Henry Bass
David & Monica Bernstein
Lisa Bielefeld
Michael Burns
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Maryanna Foskett
Nora Frank & Walter Houseman
Catherine Garnett
Sally & Richard Goldberg
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George & Carolyn Parsons
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Brian Rehrig
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Mary & Bancroft Poor
Stroker Rogovin
Jean Rosenberg
Jeff Salocks
Robin Schoenthaler
Dolores Schueler
Alan Schweitzer
Susan Stamps
Lally Stowell

ALT MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have not already renewed your ALT membership for 2012, please to go the Web site (www.arlingtonlandtrust.org) to download a copy of the membership form, or sign up at www.networkforgood.org to renew online.

Thank you again for your support. If you have any questions, please contact ALT at info@arlingtonlandtrust.org.

Herb & Lil Swanstrom
Robert Jr. Tosi
Alice Trexler
Robin Watkins
John & Patricia Worden
David Wright & Lisbeth Gronlund
Roger & Roberta Wrubel

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Re-envisioning the Mugar Site

What would we want the Mugar site to be, and how could its natural resources best improve our community—if we could control its destiny?

That's a big "if" because the land is owned by the Mugar family, but we are ready to start a conversation that could lead to a new vision for the site.

For over five decades public discussion about this low-lying 17 acres in East Arlington has been largely reactive, responding to whatever development proposal was the threat of the moment. From a Star Market-anchored mall in the 1970s, to a 350,000 square-foot office complex in 2001, to a 2009 scheme involving a private school campus and a large multifamily housing complex, each project has engendered passionate discussion of what the community does not want—loss of open space, increased flooding, and traffic safety issues with a new Route 2 interchange.

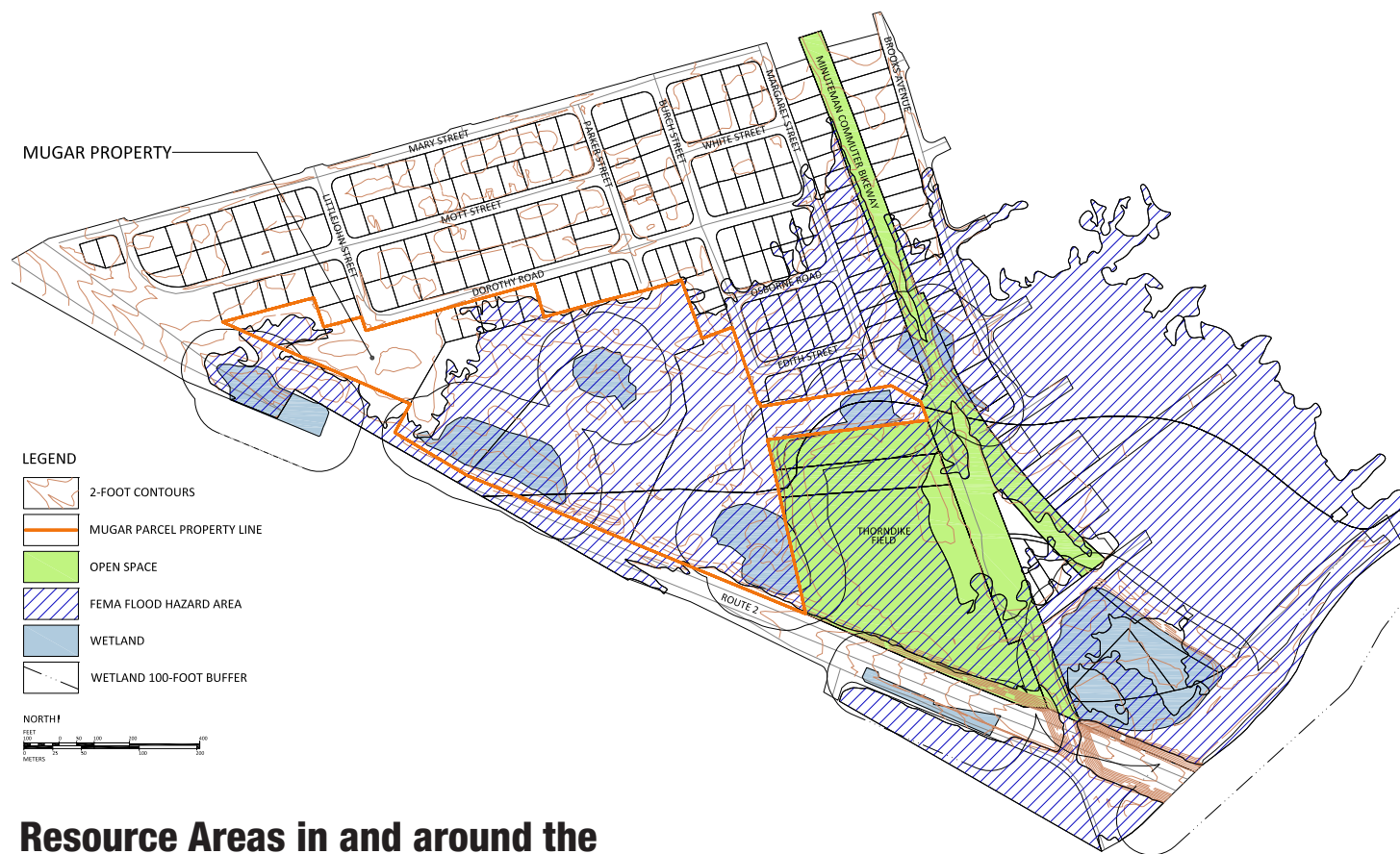
Arlington's 2001 Town Meeting set out the community's goal in a nearly unanimous vote: that the Town wants to "preserve the conservation, recreation, and open space uses of the property." We strongly agree, of course. But what would that look like? And how can we get there?

To facilitate thinking about the site, ALT is teaming with Ginna Johnson, the principal of Esker Company, a landscape architecture firm in Lexington, on a schematic plan that envisions the site as public land. We want to explore opportunities for trails, environmental education, and connections to other Alewife resources; for restoration of wetlands and meadow habitats; and for increasing the site's effectiveness in flood control and neighborhood protection.

Ginna will be the featured speaker at the ALT annual meeting. She will present some initial concepts and lead a public discussion to gather ideas about many possible visions for the site. Later in 2012 we will sponsor other opportunities to expand this re-envisioning process with others in the community.

A critical issue, of course, is how to secure the permanent protection of the site. If the community cannot protect the entire site at a feasible cost, what tradeoffs are possible? Is there any level of development on any portion of the site that would be acceptable if it enabled permanent protection of the vast majority of the parcel? These are tough questions, and consensus may be elusive, but a serious effort at protection will require a serious debate.

Please join us to begin this conversation at our Annual Meeting on Wednesday, January 25, 7:30-9:30 pm, at the Senior Center, 27 Maple Street, Arlington.



Resource Areas in and around the Mugar Site in East Arlington

Source: Ginna Johnson, Esker Company Landscape Architects, LLC

UPCOMING EVENTS

Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

The 22nd Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference offers workshops for land trust volunteers and staff; open space committee, conservation commission, and watershed association members; agency staff; elected officials; and others committed to land conservation in Massachusetts. The conference is co-convened by the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and The Trustees of Reservations' Putnam Conservation Institute.

The 2012 conference theme is "Food, Farms, and Conservation" with a focus on farm and forest stewardship, current hot topics in agriculture and renewable energy, and community-based garden and farm projects. Agricultural and conservation work in rural, suburban, and urban contexts will examine topics such as: community conservation; land management and stewardship; land protections tools and techniques; legal, tax, and compliance matters, and organizational management and fundraising.

When: Saturday, March 24, 8 am–4 pm

Where: Worcester Technical High School, Worcester, MA

Information: www.massland.org/

EcoFest: Focus on Local Food

Food is also the theme of this year's EcoFest, an annual event co-sponsored by the Town of Arlington's Department of Public Works, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, Vision 2020/Sustainable Arlington Committee, and the Arlington Garden Club, as well as other committees and local businesses.

When: Saturday, March 31, 10 am–2 pm

Where: Arlington Town Hall

Information: www.sustainablearlington.org

Benefit Concert for the Silver Maple Forest

Singers and musicians Jim Scott, Stan Strickland, Elke Jahns, and Fred Small will perform a benefit concert to support local and regional efforts to preserve the silver maple forest (also known as the Belmont Uplands), located mostly in Belmont close to Route 2. \$20 ticket, with donation option.

When: Saturday, February 4, 7:30 pm

Where: First Parish UU Church, Mass Ave., Arlington

Information: www.belmontcoalition.org

Proposal Committee
Member of the BUSA Land Use
Principal, Esker Company, Lexington
Gina Johnson, Landscape Architect

Guest Speaker

Wine & Refreshments

27 Maple Street, Arlington
Arlington Senior Center

7:30–9:30 pm

Wednesday, January 25

Annual Meeting

P.O. Box 492
Arlington, MA 02476

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