

## Annual Meeting via Zoom – Monday, January 23, 2023

The Board of Directors of the Arlington Land Trust invites you to join the 2022 Annual Meeting via Zoom on Monday, January 23, 2023 at 7 pm. We will elect Board members, hear a brief Treasurer's report, and provide updates on the Mugar property and other local conservation projects.

Our guest speaker this year is **David Morgan**, Arlington's Environmental Planner and Conservation Agent. David joined the Department of Planning and Community Development just over a year ago and has worked closely with the Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and other town groups on a wide range of land use issues. He is also the liaison with the Land Trust for oversight of the conservation restriction on the parks and woods at Arlington 360 and other projects.

Please save the date. We will send out additional information on the program and the Zoom link in January.



## Remembering Brian Rehrig

In January 2022, the ALT experienced a great loss when Brian Rehrig passed away. Brian was one of a small group who established the ALT in 1999, and he served as the Treasurer and guiding light for more than 20 years. It is impossible to recount all the wisdom and expertise that he contributed to this organization, and to the promotion of land conservation and community service in Arlington and beyond. For years, Brian focused tirelessly on efforts to protect the open space and wetlands on the Mugar property. Our continued work to ensure conservation of all or a major part of the 17-acre site honors his memory and his dedication. We are grateful to many members and friends of Brian who made contributions to the Mugar Protection Fund in his memory, and we will use those funds to pursue his legacy. *Photo courtesy of the Rehrig family*



## Recent Background on the Mugar Property

During late 2021 and 2022, several legal actions occurred regarding the proposed 40B housing development known as Thorndike Place, although no final decisions have yet been reached.

In November 2021, the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals issued a comprehensive permit with conditions for the development of the Mugar property in East Arlington. The Thorndike Place project includes six duplex buildings (12 ownership units)

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along Dorothy Road and a 124-unit, four-floor senior living rental building, together with accessory parking, landscaping, access drives, and a 12-acre “conservation parcel” that is set aside for permanent protection.

In December two lawsuits were filed against the ZBA decision: 1) the developers of Thorndike Place, Arlington Land Realty LLC, filed a lawsuit with the Housing Appeals Committee; and 2) three abutters of the Mugar property filed a lawsuit in Middlesex County Superior Court. In April 2022, the developers terminated their appeal, which means the abutters’ case is moving forward. The Coalition to Save the Mugar Wetlands is working on behalf of the abutters to advance their case, and has hired Attorney Daniel Hill to represent them. Hill met with the ALT Board of Directors in September to explain that a primary goal of the lawsuit is to present evidence concerning environmental damage, flooding, and related hydrological and stormwater problems that could be caused by the development. Although the Zoning Board of Appeals approved the project with extensive conditions, the lawsuit argues that insufficient data and analyses of groundwater conditions were available at that time.

Hill and several engineering and hydrological consultants are in the process of preparing their case and gathering such data. The ALT Board has agreed to underwrite some of the costs directly associated with these environmental studies. The analyses and reports will be available for the lawsuit and for the Conservation Commission and other Arlington officials to use in future planning for the Mugar property. Hill does not expect the court trial to begin until 2023 or 2024. We will continue to monitor this situation and provide updates as events warrant.

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#### A BELOVED CATALPA TREE



A catalpa blossom  
Photos by Brendan O'Day

Arlington lost an arboreal champion to old age recently. The Walnut Street catalpa tree (*Catalpa speciosa*) was about 140 years old when it succumbed to heart rot disease and had to be taken down to protect adjacent vegetation and structures. The tree had been dropping branches for several years and was about 75% defoliated. I counted 130 rings in the trunk at 15 to 20 feet from the base.

The tree was probably planted when the house was built in 1880, and it had been admired and cared for by a long line of homeowners. Current owners Brendan and Michelle O'Day have carried on the stewardship established by Sally Parker, the previous owner who worked with the Arlington Land Trust to place an “easement in gross” on her property to protect the tree and its historic landscape. This form of conservation restriction runs with the deed on the property and is held by the Land Trust.

*Catalpa speciosa* is the larger of the two species of catalpa native to the U.S. Both species are commonly found growing wild in woodlands of the Midwest, and usually live only about 60 years. Most of the catalpa trees in New England are escapees from cultivation. The oldest known living catalpa is in Britain and is about 150 years old. A catalpa was planted at the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain in 1876, four years after the botanical garden was established, and that tree is still alive.

Catalpa trees are recognized by their large heart-shaped leaves and showy clusters of white trumpet-shaped flowers tinged with purple and yellow. The seedpods look like long string beans that hang down dramatically. Settlers favored the catalpa for its rapid growth and resistance to rot. Railroad ties, fence posts and cabinetry were made from the wood.

*Ted Siegan is a horticulturist and a member of the ALT Board.*