

## Belmont Citizen-Herald

### Column: Be an environmental advocate

By **Jan Kruse and Heather Tuttle**/ Guest Perspective

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“We will be an environmentally responsible community and conserve our natural habitats.” This sentence is from "A Working Vision for Belmont's Future," adopted by Town Meeting in 2001. Sustainable Belmont, a task force of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, is working to make that vision a reality.

At its first meeting in February of this year, members of Sustainable Belmont laid out several goals for the group. First on the list was to collaborate with the community to develop a mechanism for green building design for municipal buildings and procurement practices for the town. As a starting point, the group is currently researching what other municipalities have done in this area.

The second major goal was to work with the community to develop and implement a climate action plan, which will reduce air pollution and gas emissions that lead to climate change. Toward this cause, Sustainable Belmont is working with the Municipal Light Department to develop a clean energy program, which would allow households and businesses the opportunity to contribute additional money toward their electric bills to support renewable energy.

The group is also negotiating with Tufts University about the possibility of obtaining free assistance from graduate students in the Urban Environmental and Planning Department to help develop a climate action plan, which would involve soliciting community input.

In July, Sustainable Belmont co-chairs Jan Kruse and Heather Tuttle met with the Vision 21 Committee and the Board of Selectmen and received general support for these goals as well as approval to join the Massachusetts Climate Action Network (MCAN). Sustainable Belmont will have access to MCAN staff expertise and potential grant money. Equally important, joining MCAN helps solidify a regional presence to work on common environmental issues: Nineteen other Massachusetts municipalities, including many MetroWest towns and cities, such as Arlington, Medford, Cambridge, Concord, Watertown and Lexington, are MCAN members.

Of course, to realize these goals, it will be necessary to involve town officials, employees, residents and business owners. To begin that process, Sustainable Belmont will present the first of a series of public forums about environmental issues on Oct. 18 at Belmont High School. The educational forum, co-sponsored by the Belmont Municipal Light Department, will discuss how Belmont residents can save money while conserving energy.

The goal of the forum? To show how energy conservation can be easy and cost-effective and inform residents about helpful local programs and incentives that can save even more, such as energy-efficient rebates and audits. Information will be presented in a fun, interactive way that will play on a Halloween theme. Sustainable Belmont welcomes suggestions about what other environmental issues people would like to learn more about for future forums.

Meanwhile, Belmont's town government is leading by example. For instance, the Belmont Municipal Light Department has converted traffic signals and streetlights to more energy-efficient models with increased life span. Selectman Paul Solomon has worked with town building committees to educate them about the cost- and energy-saving advantages of green building design. The new fire stations and Senior Center will include green design elements, and the town has hired an energy-services company to implement conservation measures (water, electrical, lighting, and heating equipment) throughout 12 municipal buildings over the next year.

So what can you do to lessen your impact on the environment? Little actions can make a big difference: For example, replacing just one incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent model can keep nearly 500 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and could save \$20 per year on your electricity bill. Also, tell the town's elected officials and department heads that you support their efforts in this area and want them to continue to do more.

Working together to be an environmentally responsible community is not only fiscally smart, it can also help make Belmont a healthier environment in which to live. To succeed, it's up to each of us to do our part.

Sustainable Belmont meets the first Wednesday of every month from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Flett Room of the Belmont Public Library and is open to all Belmont residents. Come join us on Sept. 7 to help plan the October educational forum.

For more information or to be added to Sustainable Belmont's e-mail list, contact Jan Kruse at

jan\_kruse1@yahoo.com; or Heather Tuttle at hat@deardorff.com.

Jan Kruse and Heather Tuttle are co-chairmen of Sustainable Belmont.