



To: Town of Belmont

Date: July 2025

Memorandum

Project #: 16592.00

From: VHB

Re: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Introduction

In late April and Early May 2025, VHB facilitated nine stakeholder sessions to inform the forthcoming Comprehensive Plan. Each of the nine sessions was focused on one of the nine Comprehensive Plan chapters, as follows:

1. Land Use
2. Housing
3. Economic Development
4. Arts, Culture, and History
5. Open Space and Recreation
6. Resiliency and Climate
7. Community Facilities and Services
8. Community Cohesion
9. Transportation and Mobility

These sessions brought together Town Staff, Town Meeting members, representatives of boards and committees, and active residents to discuss each topic in depth. Based on the discussion, VHB prepared a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis to identify Belmont's most salient strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

This memo begins with a Composite SWOT Analysis, synthesizing the discussion across all nine sessions.

Following this, we present detailed SWOT Analysis for each of the nine chapters.

Composite SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Civic Engagement & Volunteerism: Belmont benefits from an active, well-informed community with high civic participation and strong volunteer networks, particularly in support of schools, planning initiatives, and historic preservation. The town's unusually small population for an inner-ring suburb fosters a strong sense of community, where residents frequently connect with neighbors at events like the Farmers Market.

Quality of Life & Public Amenities: Strong public institutions (e.g., schools, library, recreation centers), robust emergency services, and rich natural resources (like Rock Meadow and Beaver Brook) contribute to Belmont's livability.

Zoning Momentum & Mixed-Use Potential: Recent adoption of MBTA Communities zoning overlays, a willingness to experiment with land use innovations, and strategic locations for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) lay the groundwork for more vibrant, walkable districts.

Cultural Assets & Events: Events like Porchfest, the Farmers Market, and Belmont World Film foster a thriving arts scene and intergenerational engagement, while the town's historic resources generate pride and identity.

Commitment to Sustainability: Belmont has made significant investments in energy-efficient infrastructure (e.g., geothermal high school, all-electric library) and is engaged in the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program to improve resilience.

Tree Canopy & Leafy Character: Belmont's street trees and mature vegetation on private properties contribute to a green, leafy environment that enhances community character and quality of life.

Desirable Location & Regional Access: Belmont's proximity to Boston, coupled with access to public transit and major roadways, makes it a highly desirable place to live.

Responsible Fiscal Management: Belmont has made significant strides in improving financial management capacity of professionalization (e.g., Finance, Treasurer, Accounting, Assessing) leading to stabilization of the budget and efficiencies gained in service provision.

Weaknesses

Staffing & Capacity Gaps: Critical departments lack sufficient staff (e.g., facilities, procurement, public works, and information technology), limit implementation of plans and pursuit of grants, constraining long-term effectiveness.

Outdated Zoning & Complex Procedures: Zoning bylaws are inconsistent, difficult to navigate, and reliant on special permits, which discourages both housing and commercial development.

Aging Infrastructure & Deferred Maintenance: While Belmont has made significant progress in upgrading public buildings, such as constructing a new middle/high school, renovating the police station, repairing Town Hall, and building a new library and skating rink, residents continue to express frustration with the condition of roads and sidewalks, which remain underinvested and strained.

Fragmentation Across Systems: Belmont experiences organizational silos in government structure, leading to inconsistent service delivery and limited coordination among initiatives.

Polarization & Community Tension: Generational and cultural disconnects, along with resistance to change and a lack of inclusive public dialogue, have eroded broad-based consensus on pressing issues.

Opportunities

Comprehensive Zoning & Policy Reform: Belmont has strong momentum for zoning modernization that can unlock mixed-use infill, missing middle housing, and greater commercial vitality while aligning development with sustainability and equity goals.

Transit & Pathway Enhancements: Planned improvements like the Community Path, Waverley Square upgrades, and regional collaboration on congestion management could greatly enhance mobility and connectivity.

Facility & Infrastructure Modernization: New projects like the public library and rink, combined with long-term capital planning, provide a chance to integrate features such as EV charging infrastructure, energy-efficient systems, and smart building technologies into town-wide upgrades.

Stronger Inclusion & Representation: Expanding outreach to marginalized and less-represented residents, especially low-income residents, newcomers, and youth, could deepen civic participation and ensure more balanced policy outcomes.

Creative Use of Underutilized Assets: Redevelopment of underutilized or vacant parcels offers opportunities to align land use with economic, housing, and recreational goals, especially when paired with innovative financing or public-private partnerships.

Threats

Rising Costs & Displacement Risks: Belmont's high housing costs, limited affordability, and reliance on residential property taxes threaten long-term socioeconomic diversity and fiscal stability.

Limited Tax Base: Belmont's reliance on residential property taxes for 95% of its property tax revenues threatens its long-term fiscal stability. In addition, the town's stringent requirement for special permits to undertake modest home renovations impedes the town's ability to collect property taxes that fall into the category of new growth, which is not subject to the Proposition 2 ½ limits.

Environmental Vulnerabilities: Pollution, invasive species, tree loss, and flood risks, particularly in eastern neighborhoods (Brighton neighborhood), pose growing climate resilience challenges without stronger mitigation efforts.

Traffic Congestion & Mobility: Increasing traffic congestion contributes to air pollution, reduces productivity, and undermines safety and access, particularly to small businesses, as residents may choose to shop or dine elsewhere due to travel delays and parking constraints.

Capacity Strain from Growth: New zoning and demographic shifts will increase demand for public services and infrastructure, potentially overwhelming existing systems if not addressed with robust planning and staffing.

Fragmented Governance & Planning Execution: While Belmont is rich in plans and advisory groups, overlapping responsibilities and conflicting pressures from external constituencies have undermined implementation and accountability across sectors.

Communication Gaps & Accessibility of Information: Residents who are not connected through schools or Town Meeting often struggle to find and understand information about available town services, limiting civic participation and creating barriers to equitable access.

Fiscal Fragility & Displacement Risks: Belmont's high housing costs, limited affordability, and overreliance on the residential tax base threaten long-term socioeconomic diversity and financial stability. The town's fiscal constraints limit its ability to provide the level and quality of services that many residents expect.

Recreation Facilities Uncertainty: Recent concerns over the condition and responsibility for field maintenance, particularly at the athletic fields east of the Middle School and west of the new skating rink, highlight broader issues around capital planning, interdepartmental coordination, and long-term stewardship of public assets. Disagreements over responsibility and unclear project scopes may delay improvements and exacerbate community frustration.

Underutilized Redevelopment Opportunities: Properties such as the Methodist Church and adjacent Imler House, located near Cushing Square and transit access, represent significant redevelopment potential. However, uncertainty around ownership, coordination, and planning priorities may result in missed opportunities to advance housing or mixed-use goals in walkable areas.

01. Land Use

Strengths

- › **Recent Zoning Overlays Passed:** MBTA Communities zoning overlays adopted in key areas (e.g., Town Center, Waverley Square, Pleasant Street Corridor), enabling more multifamily and transit-oriented development.
- › **Community Appetite for Commercial Growth:** Elected and appointed officials including Town Meeting Members support expanding the commercial tax base, recognizing the need for more sustainable revenue streams.
- › **Civic Engagement in Land Use:** Strong community involvement has led to initiatives such as residential and commercial zoning reform and successful passage of new zoning tools like overlay districts and ADUs.
- › **Pleasant Street & Belmont Center as a Zoning Testbeds:** Town is experimenting with new uses (e.g., cannabis retail, senior housing), indicating openness to innovation, and new tools such as Form-Based Codes.

Weaknesses

- › **Disappointing Level of Commercial Growth:** Over the past 25 years, commercial development has lagged behind what has been anticipated, leading to an over-reliance on residential taxes and fiscal strain.
- › **Outdated & Inconsistent Zoning Bylaws:** Current bylaws are difficult to interpret, internally conflicting, and incompatible with modern planning best practices.
- › **Bureaucratic Permitting Process:** Homeowners face strict and discretionary processes for modest changes, particularly on nonconforming lots, creating frustration and inequity.
- › **Underutilized Transit Assets:** MBTA commuter rail stations have limited accessibility and are perceived as less than effective and convenient due to infrequency of service and rising cost.
- › **McLean Zone Approaching Full Build Out:** Limits future development opportunities in one of the town's previously available large land areas.

Opportunities

- › **Corridor & Commercial Node Densification:** Corridor areas like Trapelo Road and Concord Avenue offer potential for mixed-use and multifamily development, especially near bus lines, often calling for rezoning. Nodes such as Brighton/Blanchard and Upper Pleasant Street offer densification and use increase opportunities.
- › **Comprehensive Zoning Reform:** Momentum is building for a full bylaw overhaul to improve predictability, encourage appropriate development, and streamline approvals and there will be an opportunity to educate stakeholders and train staff in the use of these tools.
- › **Transit & Pathway Enhancements:** Waverly Square and Belmont Center Station upgrades and Community Path connections could improve accessibility and align land use with mobility goals.
- › **Development Opportunity Sites:** Key sites such as Purecoat, Hill Estates, and the Brighton/Pleasant Street area present opportunities for rezoning and targeted mixed-use development. If the 1999 McLean agreement can be revisited and revised, portions of the McLean Hospital property may also offer long-term potential for thoughtfully scaled residential or mixed-use growth aligned with community goals. In addition, there are opportunities to support small-scale, context-sensitive commercial or mixed-use “micro-developments” in strategic neighborhood locations to enhance walkability and meet local needs.
- › **15-Minute Community:** Belmont has an opportunity to advance the vision of a “15-minute community,” where daily needs can be met within a short walk or bike ride. This could serve as a guiding principle for economic development efforts and inform the mission of the Economic Development Committee.

Threats

- › **Demographic & Income Imbalance:** Rising home prices are pushing out lower- and middle-income residents, threatening diversity and long-term community stability.
- › **Community Resistance to Change:** Fear of losing “community character” or negative revenue uses can stall or dilute necessary zoning changes and housing diversification. The perception that local zoning initiatives are driven by special interests rather than professional planning can further undermine trust and effectiveness.
- › **Displacement of Long-Term Residents:** Older homeowners or graduating students may be priced out, weakening intergenerational continuity and civic cohesion.
- › **Limited Mixed-Use Success:** Despite recent zoning changes, resistance to progressive zoning reform and new zoning tools remains high, slowing initiatives with high potential for needed change.
- › **Perception of “Trojan Horse” Reforms:** Some residents fear hidden agendas in zoning reform, risking backlash that could derail needed changes.

02. Housing

Strengths

- › **Use of CPA Funds for Affordable Housing:** Belmont effectively leverages Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and other public sources for predevelopment planning, including architectural, land use, and marketing studies. However, though the overall effectiveness of these investments has been mixed and could be strengthened.

- › **Partnership with Cambridge Housing Authority:** This collaboration brings high-level planning and funding expertise to Belmont's affordable housing initiatives, supporting grant applications and strategic development.
- › **Diverse & Integrated Housing Stock:** Belmont's mix of single-, two-, and three-family homes (some of which are well integrated into neighborhoods) lays a foundation for expanding "missing middle" housing types.
- › **Positive Housing Dialogue & Public Support:** Town Meeting has shown strong support for affordable housing, public-private partnerships, and the establishment of local housing trusts.
- › **Successful Development Models:** Projects like McLean and The Bradford demonstrate how thoughtful partnerships and inclusionary zoning tools can advance affordable and mixed-income housing goals.
- › **Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing:** Older units, such as those at Hill Estates, provide affordability without subsidies but are currently at risk, highlighting a need for preservation or thoughtful redevelopment.
- › **Public Housing:** Belmont's housing authority owns Sherman Gardens, Belmont Village, and Waverly Oaks to provide housing for those in need.
- › **Housing Production Plan:** Belmont recently updated its Housing Production Plan and identified critical goals.
- › **Inclusionary Zoning:** New large housing developments in Belmont are required to provide 10-15% affordable units.
- › **Recent Policy Advances:** The successful passing of ballot question 3A and the adoption of the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw represent important strides toward expanding housing options, particularly missing middle and infill housing.

Weaknesses

- › **Implementation Gaps in Planning:** Numerous housing-related plans exist but overlapping responsibilities and limited staff capacity have hindered effective follow-through.
- › **Reliance on Special Permits:** Frequent special permit requirements discourage development, especially nonconforming lots, and create unnecessary bureaucratic burdens for homeowners.
- › **Noncompliant Aging Housing Stock:** Older homes that predate zoning face barriers to reinvestment or redevelopment, limiting modernization and densification.
- › **Limited Deep Affordability:** While some projects serve households at 50–60% AMI, there is still a lack of deeply affordable housing and rental assistance options.

Opportunities

- › **Infill in Village Centers & Transit Nodes:** Areas like Belmont Center, Waverley Square, Cushing Square, and Trapelo Road are well suited for walkable, mixed-use housing developments with access to retail and transit.
- › **Zoning Overlays to Encourage Commercial Development While Maintaining Town Character:** Pending overlays (e.g., Brighton Street, Belmont Center) offer opportunities to integrate inclusionary zoning and multifamily housing near underutilized land.
- › **Creative Approaches in Single-Family Areas:** Design guidelines and incentives could support duplexes or other gentle density options that maintain neighborhood character while expanding housing.
- › **Redevelopment of Public Housing:** Plans to redevelop Sherman Gardens and Belmont Village represent a significant opportunity to modernize and expand the Town's public housing portfolio.

- › **Policy Momentum for Mixed-Use & Inclusionary Zoning:** Recent zoning and policy initiatives show community and political support for aligning housing development with commercial vitality and affordability goals.

Threats

- › **Disconnect Between Policy & Project Execution:** Belmont has embraced progressive housing policies but struggles to implement them at the project level due to limited capacity and continued resistance from some sectors of the community.
- › **Housing Access & Income Homogeneity:** Rising housing costs and limited affordability options have led to declining income diversity, creating a town where long-time residents and younger adults struggle to stay.
- › **Aging Population Without Housing Continuity:** Without expanded options for aging in place or downsizing, Belmont risks losing long-term residents and reducing generational diversity.
- › **Zoning Complexity & Inconsistency:** Patchwork zoning tied to dense historic development makes it difficult to apply consistent, modern standards that encourage equitable growth.

03. Economic Development

Strengths

- › **Strong Civic Amenities & Appeal:** Belmont has a high-quality school system, new library and rink investments, and appealing public services that contribute to a desirable quality of life. These amenities are major draws for families and skilled workers.
- › **Belmont Center's Regional Draw:** While arguably underdeveloped, small, and lacking a residential component, Belmont Center still functions as a charming and walkable town center, attracting regional customers and serving as a potential cornerstone of the local economy.
- › **Mixed-Use & Transit Potential:** There is community and professional interest in mixed-use development near transit nodes, particularly along corridors like Trapelo Road and near Waverley Square.
- › **Established Economic Development Committee:** The Town has an established Economic Development Committee (EDC) and professional economic development staffing which offers the Town an opportunity to be proactive in economic development policy.

Weaknesses

- › **Overreliance on Residential Tax Base:** Belmont's tax base is heavily weighted toward residential properties, creating fiscal strain and limiting investment capacity for economic development.
- › **Limited Commercial Land & Zoning Constraints:** With little undeveloped land, current zoning (including height restrictions and special permit requirements) inhibits commercial growth and repurposing of existing sites.
- › **Fragmented Commercial Districts:** Belmont lacks a centralized economic hub. Its small, decentralized commercial areas dilute the potential for catalytic development.

- › **Special Permit Uncertainty:** The opaque and unpredictable special permit process discourages businesses from locating in Belmont.
- › **Missed Growth Opportunities:** The Town has failed to capitalize on earlier lab or office development opportunities, and ongoing legacy development agreements (e.g., McLean Hospital) restrict commercial leverage.
- › **Inadequate Medical & Professional Services:** Belmont residents often leave town for services like healthcare, indicating unmet demand in critical service sectors.

Opportunities

- › **Targeted Business Recruitment:** There is interest in attracting health care, research and development (R&D), engineering, science, and technology firms that align with the town's character and support growth of the commercial tax base. Complementary placemaking efforts offer opportunities to engage residents in economic development initiatives, strengthening community identity and support for local business growth.
- › **Adaptive Reuse & Infill Development:** Underutilized properties could support creative infill or mixed-use redevelopment with zoning reform.
- › **Modernize & Clarify Zoning:** Revisiting outdated zoning rules, including restrictions on building height, units per lot, and special permits, could unlock economic potential.
- › **Transit-Oriented Development:** Improved accessibility to commuter rail stations and focused TOD strategies can better connect Belmont to the regional economy and support new mixed-use development.
- › **Revitalize Trapelo Road & Village Centers:** These corridors offer opportunities to link transit, housing, and retail, especially through updated zoning, streetscape improvements, and active placemaking.
- › **Improve Business Retention Tools:** Offering incentives and clearer permitting could encourage business growth and long-term local investment, particularly from healthcare, hospitality, or professional services.
- › **Hotel Development:** There is a documented demand for and interest in one or more hotels in town.

Threats

- › **Workforce Availability & Housing Affordability:** Belmont struggles to retain municipal and service employees due to a range of reasons including the high cost of housing.
- › **Revenue Limitations from Large Institutions:** The Town lacks enforceable tools to collect voluntary contributions from tax-exempt institutions and receives limited tax benefits from some large parcels.
- › **Regional Competition:** Neighboring communities with more capacity, a wider array of development attracting tools and policies, and clearer development processes may draw potential investors and employers away from Belmont.
- › **Aging Infrastructure & Parking Pressures:** Limited parking and lack of third spaces hamper the success of local businesses and restrict the ability to introduce new commercial uses.
- › **Unclear Economic Identity:** Belmont has not defined its modern economic draw, reducing its ability to market itself or align development with community and business needs.
- › Belmont has not clearly defined its contemporary economic identity or development strategy, which hinders marketing and planning efforts. While there is interest in recruiting small-scale tech, engineering, or professional services that align with Belmont's character, some stakeholders question whether this alone will meaningfully grow

the commercial tax base. Without consensus on direction, the town may miss opportunities to align land use, zoning, and economic development goals.

04. Cultural & Historic Resources

Strengths

- › **Historic Home Plaque Program:** The Historical Society's initiative to recognize homes over 50 years old has fostered strong community pride and engagement. It encourages local interest in architectural heritage.
- › **Momentum for Preservation:** Growing townwide support for historic preservation, backed by successful grant funding for condition surveys of key buildings such as Town Hall and the Homer House.
- › **Cultural & Arts Vibrancy:** Belmont hosts several thriving arts and cultural events, including Porchfest, the Belmont Farmers Market, and Belmont World Film, contributing to a dynamic cultural scene.
- › **Public Engagement:** Cultural organizations are succeeding in engaging diverse residents, including youth, through events like Porchfest and the Belmont World Film festival, strengthening community ties.
- › **Establishment of & Support for the Homer Art Gallery:** Establishing the Gallery has provided a dedicated space for local artists to display and market their creations.
- › **Generous CPC Support for Historic Preservation:** The Town has historically provided substantial funding for a range of historic preservation projects through Community Preservation Act funding.

Weaknesses

- › **Lack of Centralized Coordination:** There is no dedicated office or centralized system for promoting and coordinating cultural and arts events in Belmont, leading to fragmented visibility for independent organizations.
- › **Limited Cultural Spaces:** The loss of venues like the Kendall Center and Belmont World Film's relocation highlights a shortage of venues for cultural events. There's a need for more indoor and outdoor spaces for arts programming.
- › **Event Promotion Challenges:** Outreach for cultural events could be more robust. While local platforms like the Belmont Voice are valuable, their reach is limited, and there is a lack of a coordinated promotional approach for arts and cultural activities.
- › **Silos in Arts Education:** Youth arts programs are not well integrated into community-based arts efforts, creating a disconnect between school activities and independent cultural programming.

Opportunities

- › **Growth in Historic Preservation:** With a multi-million dollar need for repairs in the Town Center and continued momentum for historic preservation, there is a significant opportunity for further development of Belmont's historic resources as both a cultural asset and economic driver.
- › **Expanded Collaboration for Arts Events:** By creating a centralized platform or calendar for arts and cultural events, Belmont could increase visibility, coordination, and participation in cultural programming. This could also optimize resources and reduce scheduling conflicts.

- › **Youth Engagement & Intergenerational Programming:** Bridging the gap between youth arts programs and community-based organizations could create a more inclusive and continuous arts culture. Integrating these programs could foster stronger intergenerational engagement.
- › **Regional Collaboration:** Collaborating with regional entities for cross-town events and sharing venues or resources could benefit local organizations and expand Belmont's cultural footprint beyond its borders.
- › **Diverse Cultural Events & Placements:** Organizing a range of events, such as an "arts walk," "tour of homes," or themed cultural festivals, can attract both residents and visitors, showcasing Belmont's unique cultural and historic assets while fostering community pride and economic activity.

Threats

- › **Funding & Resource Constraints:** While programs like the Belmont Art Association have revitalized post-pandemic, there is still a struggle to secure consistent funding and support from the town. This threatens the long-term sustainability of arts initiatives.
- › **Resistance to Change:** As Belmont continues to grow, new cultural initiatives or infrastructure expansions may face opposition from residents who resist change, limiting the town's ability to create new venues or expand existing cultural facilities.
- › **Competing Priorities:** The town faces multiple pressing needs, which may limit funding and focus for cultural initiatives, funding and focus for cultural initiatives, the constraints which are structurally limited by Proposition 2 1/2.
- › **Space Limitations for Growth:** The lack of space for new cultural venues, such as performance or exhibit spaces, and the inability to easily convert existing buildings (e.g., zoning restrictions, real estate limitations) can stifle the growth of the arts scene.

05. Open Space & Recreation

Strengths

- › **Rich Natural Assets:** Belmont offers a variety of natural assets, including town cemeteries, Beaver Brook, Lone Tree Hill, Waverly Oaks, and community gardens at Rock Meadow. These spaces provide opportunities for passive recreation, wildlife viewing, and community gardening, though awareness and access could be improved.
- › **Strong Community Partnerships:** Active partnerships with organizations such as Mass Audubon, Belmont Land Trust, and the Belmont Citizens Forum contribute to successful conservation efforts, invasive species management, and land stewardship.
- › **Popular Recreation Facilities:** Belmont is home to well-utilized recreational spaces, including Higginbottom Pool, Underwood Pool, and planned amenities like the new ice rink. The town also has significant community interest in expanding recreational programming and facilities.
- › **Inclusive Recreation Programs:** Belmont has strong initiatives that support inclusive recreation, including offerings for individuals with disabilities, and partnerships with other communities (e.g., Watertown) to enhance programming.

- › **Comprehensive Fields Maintenance Strategy:** Implementing a comprehensive fields maintenance strategy to address chronic overuse and improve the health and safety of athletic fields presents an opportunity to meet the growing demand for sports facilities and enhance recreational offerings.

Weaknesses

- › **Fragmented Recreation & Trail Network:** Belmont lacks an integrated, town-wide trail network, which limits accessibility and cohesive recreational experiences. There are also gaps in essential facilities, including indoor recreation space, leading to user dissatisfaction.
- › **Capacity Issues & Underdeveloped Facilities:** The town's athletic fields and other facilities are overused and under-maintained. This contributes to overcrowding and unmet demand and leads to frustration among residents.
- › **Lack of Strategic Planning & Resources:** Belmont struggles with strategic planning for funding and consistent resource allocation for maintenance and environmental stewardship and much of this work is volunteer based. The town lacks a comprehensive approach to seeking external funding for open space projects.
- › **Environmental & Infrastructure Challenges:** Belmont faces environmental concerns such as invasive species, littering, and surface water pollution, especially in areas like Claypit Pond and Little Pond. Infrastructure gaps, such as limited access for people with disabilities at Lone Tree Hill, Rock Meadow, Underwood Playground and other open spaces, hinder the full public enjoyment of open spaces.

Opportunities

- › **Comprehensive Fields Maintenance Strategy:** Implementing a comprehensive fields maintenance strategy to address chronic overuse and improve the health and safety of athletic fields presents an opportunity to meet the growing demand for sports facilities and enhance recreational offerings.
- › **Expand Community Gardens & Recreation Facilities:** There is a strong interest in expanding community gardens, with potential for increasing capacity and inclusiveness for Belmont residents. Additionally, building a dedicated indoor recreation facility would provide a year-round space for programs, reducing reliance on school facilities and improving scheduling conflicts.
- › **Improved Funding & Stewardship:** Belmont has an opportunity to pursue more strategic funding for open space and recreation initiatives. This could include leveraging local partnerships, applying for grants, and building long-term stewardship plans for critical areas like Rock Meadow and Lone Tree Hill.
- › **Environmental Remediation & Nature-Based Solutions:** Addressing pollution in Belmont's surface waters and utilizing nature-based solutions (e.g., rain gardens, stormwater management) offers an opportunity for both environmental and recreational improvements. This could also help the town meet its stormwater compliance goals. The Town has created a Stormwater Assistant Engineer in the DPW to address stormwater compliance.

Threats

- › **Overcrowding & Underutilization of Resources:** Despite the growing interest in recreational activities, Belmont's open spaces and facilities are struggling with overuse and underutilization. Several facilities like grass playing fields face high demand but limited availability, causing dissatisfaction among users.
- › **Environmental Challenges:** Issues such as invasive species and urban stormwater runoff continue to affect the ecological quality of local resources. For example, Claypit Pond receives stormwater from approximately 75% of the

Town's catch basins, with limited treatment or control, contributing to ongoing concerns about water quality. These are long-standing issues that underscore the need for improved stormwater infrastructure and coordinated stewardship. There are also differing perspectives among Town boards about how best to manage the pond, which has historically been a point of tension.

- › **Lack of Unified Leadership:** Fragmented oversight and management of open space resources, coupled with insufficient coordination between Town departments, could hinder the development of a cohesive, town-wide open space and recreation plan. This threatens the long-term vision for improving access to quality parks and recreation.

06. Resiliency & Climate

Strengths

- › **Sustainability in New Infrastructure:** Recent projects (e.g., all-electric library, rink, geothermal-powered high school with solar energy and LEED Gold certification) demonstrate commitment to sustainability.
- › **Belmont Light's Changing Stance:** As a municipal light plant, Belmont Light has shifted to promoting sustainable energy, including initiatives like electric school buses and charging infrastructure.
- › **Existing Green Space & Tree Canopy:** The town has a solid tree canopy and interconnected green spaces that support climate resilience efforts. The Town hired a part-time Tree Warden to better address tree canopy.
- › **Energy Committee Engagement:** Actively working on the Climate Action Plan-Roadmap, with a focus on building electrification and community-wide vehicle electrification.
- › **Climate Resilience Planning Capacity:** While the Town has participated in the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program in the past, the status of ongoing participation and action plan implementation should be confirmed. The MVP framework remains a potential avenue for grant funding and coordinated climate adaptation planning.

Weaknesses

- › **Lack of Capacity:** The Town does not have prioritized a dedicated sustainability or energy director/manager which limits effective coordination, oversight, and grant pursuit.
- › **Challenges in Tree Canopy Management:** The loss of trees outpaces replacements, and the town's tree regulations are outdated, leading to a loss of tree canopy.
- › **Insufficient EV Infrastructure:** Lack of comprehensive electric vehicle infrastructure and municipal fleet electrification.
- › **Limited Grant Administration Bandwidth:** Belmont does not currently possess the administrative capacity to manage grants for climate and energy projects, limiting the number of grants that may be pursued.
- › **Climate Leader Community Program:** Participating in the Climate Leader Community Program might be beneficial to the Town but lacks staff capacity to help administer such a program. This will require more creative solutions to unlock this potential opportunity.

Opportunities

- › **Modern Energy Uses for Underutilized Sites:** The former incinerator site presents a significant opportunity to host solar installations, battery storage, electric vehicle infrastructure, or other sustainable uses aligned with Belmont's climate goals.
- › **Proactive Tree Canopy Planning:** Developing a Tree Management or Master Plan could support the long-term health and expansion of Belmont's already-strong tree canopy. Drawing on best practices from neighboring communities would help ensure resilience to storms, pests, and climate stressors.
- › **Alternative Transportation Support:** Strengthening infrastructure and policies that promote biking, walking, and other non-motorized transportation options aligns with Belmont's climate goals by reducing emissions, improving public health, and enhancing community connectivity.
- › **Repurposing MVP Framework:** If the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program is still active or re-engaged, Belmont could leverage its framework to guide resilience initiatives and unlock additional state funding opportunities.
- › **Decarbonization Roadmap:** Establishing a decarbonization commitment and roadmap would guide Belmont toward more targeted, long-term sustainability efforts as part of a climate action plan. The Town should consider whether such a plan is a worthy goal and whether the resources are in place to commit to it.
- › **Energy Committee & Town Officials Collaboration on Data and Policy:** Town officials and the Energy Committee have an opportunity to be more effective in sharing data and aligning on policy with more effective communication and collaboration.

Threats

- › **Vulnerability in Lower-Elevation Areas:** The eastern part of the town lacks the green space and resilience resources seen in higher-elevation neighborhoods, potentially exacerbating climate impacts in these areas.
- › **Potential Flooding & Waterway Issues:** Although current culvert capacity is generally adequate, increased storm intensity linked to climate change could pose future flood risks. Ongoing maintenance of waterways, including invasive species control and sediment management, is critical to prevent localized flooding and preserve ecosystem health.

07. Community Facilities & Services

Strengths

- › **Facility Management:** Belmont's Facilities Department is recognized for its skill and responsiveness, effectively handling maintenance issues in-house when possible. The Town has completed a Capital Resource Plan and has a Long-Term Capital Committee to guide future investments across various departments. The Belmont Light utility provides flexible financing and strong infrastructure, which supports future needs.
- › **Strong School & Emergency Services:** Belmont's school buildings are generally well-maintained, and the police station was recently renovated. Fire and police services are supported by dedicated facilities, although some challenges exist with staffing and ongoing repairs.

- › **Proactive Community Facility Development:** A new Belmont Public Library is being built to replace the previous facility, addressing years of underfunding. Fire department upgrades, including roof repairs and garage door improvements, are moving forward.
- › **Capital Planning & Preventive Maintenance:** The recent completion of a Townwide Building Assessment report positions the Town well for Capital Resource Planning which will help move Belmont from a reactive to a more proactive approach in maintaining and upgrading its public facilities. Adopting preventive maintenance strategies will improve system reliability and reduce long-term costs.

Weaknesses

- › **Staffing Shortages & Capacity Gaps:** There are significant gaps in staff capacity across various departments, including DPW, Facilities, and IT. Critical positions such as a dedicated grant writer and sustainability planner are currently lacking, hindering proactive efforts in securing funding and managing climate resilience projects.
- › **Aging Infrastructure & Deferred Maintenance:** Although the town made great progress in upgrading and rebuilding town facilities (e.g. new middle/high school, library, rink and renovated police station), there are still town buildings, including fire stations and elementary schools, that have deferred maintenance needs. Limited resources make it difficult to address the scale of repairs needed for transportation infrastructure, including roads and sidewalks.
- › **Inconsistent IT & Smart Technology Systems:** Legacy IT infrastructure remains a challenge, impacting the ability to modernize and efficiently manage community services. There is a lack of formalized remote work policies, which could hinder municipal employee retention and performance, especially as the demand for smart city technologies grows.

Opportunities

- › **Facilities Planning:** Belmont is positioned for growth due to new 3A zoning requirements and other district overlays, creating an opportunity to plan proactively for expanded public facilities and infrastructure needs. With the new Middle School coming online, restructuring the school system could provide space at the Chenery and elementary schools for phased renovations. Demographic shifts, including a growing school-age population and aging seniors, present an opportunity to innovate facilities planning, such as flexible transit solutions and expanded emergency services.
- › **Capital Planning & Preventive Maintenance:** The completion of the Capital Resource Plan and long-term planning efforts can help move Belmont from a reactive to a more proactive approach in maintaining and upgrading its public facilities. Shifting to preventive maintenance strategies can improve system reliability and reduce long-term costs.
- › **Investment in Sustainable & Smart Infrastructure:** There is an opportunity to integrate sustainable practices and technologies, such as smart cities infrastructure, into the development of new and existing public facilities. This includes improving IT systems, power infrastructure, and expanding capacity for remote work models. Investing in energy-efficient upgrades for municipal facilities, such as electric vehicle charging stations or solar installations, could provide long-term cost savings and environmental benefits.
- › **Sustainable Practices:** Integrating sustainability into new and existing facilities, combined with smart city technology, could provide long-term resilience.

Threats

- › **Resource Limitations & Competing Priorities:** Limited resources may result in delayed or ineffective responses to urgent facility needs, particularly as new developments and changing demographics place additional pressure on public services. Competing interests among departments, combined with a lack of capacity, could lead to challenges in prioritizing which facility improvements or additions should be pursued first.
- › **Aging Infrastructure:** Belmont's older school facilities and transportation infrastructure, particularly inconsistent sidewalks (e.g., around Claflin Street and schools) and dead or dying street trees, continue to require attention. The deferred maintenance backlog for public buildings and sidewalks continues to strain town resources and may lead to further deterioration if not addressed.
- › **Staff & Technology Gaps:** The lack of specialized staff in some sectors may hinder Belmont's ability to effectively plan for and implement long-term goals. Persistent IT issues and inadequate infrastructure for hybrid work models may challenge the town's ability to modernize, adapt to changing demands, but the creation and retention of a new Chief Innovation Officer should begin to address these issues.

08. Community Cohesion

Strengths

- › **Strong Community Spirit:** Belmont exhibits a strong sense of pride, particularly among long-term residents. The community shows its support for veterans, seniors, and local initiatives.
- › **Civic Engagement:** There is a high level of participation in civic activities, such as the Diversity Task Force and the MBTA Communities Advisory Committee. The passage of Belmont's 3A plan highlighted the town's ability to mobilize around shared goals.
- › **Generosity & Volunteerism:** Residents are highly altruistic when engagement is voluntary, and many contribute to community-driven efforts when they feel it aligns with their values.
- › **Support for Age-Friendly Initiatives:** Belmont is making strides to become more inclusive and accessible for all ages, including support for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and improvements to public spaces and transportation.

Weaknesses

- › **Fragmented Cohesion:** While individual groups within the community are tightly knit, there is a lack of broader cohesion across different neighborhoods, demographic, and interest groups.
- › **Generational Disconnects:** Tension exists between long-time residents and newcomers, with some resistance to change and a "bedroom community" mindset that hinders active civic participation.
- › **Polarization on Key Issues:** Divisive issues, particularly around housing, taxes, and fiscal responsibility, fragment the community. These issues are compounded by regional and national political polarization, which plays out at the local level.
- › **Limited Dialogue Across Groups:** Online forums and social media amplify divisiveness, with unmoderated spaces allowing for hostility and exclusionary behavior. These dynamics hinder constructive community conversations.

Opportunities

- › **Promote Inclusion in Decision-Making:** There is an opportunity to extend outreach to underrepresented voices, particularly seniors, new residents, and marginalized groups. Engagement efforts could be more inclusive, ensuring a balance of perspectives in policy discussions.
- › **Foster Informal Dialogue Opportunities:** Creating more informal, open-ended discussion spaces can help bridge divides between different community groups and create a less polarized environment.
- › **Leverage Community Events:** Belmont's community events, like the Memorial Day parade, could be used to raise awareness about engagement opportunities and promote unity.
- › **Engage Diverse Voices:** Efforts should be made to reach out to people who are not typically involved in civic life, especially through targeted outreach methods such as flyers and tailored social media content.
- › **Promote Structured Community Dialogues:** Belmont could explore replicating or adapting successful engagement programs like Watertown Community Conversations, which create structured, facilitated forums for residents to discuss shared concerns and foster community cohesion.

Threats

- › **Resistance to Change:** There is significant opposition to changes in the community, particularly in the form of development or infrastructure updates. The "not in my backyard" or NIMBY mentality, especially regarding housing, continues to be a source of tension.
- › **Fear of Speaking Freely:** Many residents self-censor due to fear of backlash, which undermines free expression and community dialogue. The potential for social or professional repercussions discourages candid conversations about key issues.
- › **Fragmented Policy Representation:** Certain voices are more prominent in policy discussions, while others feel sidelined. This can lead to decisions that do not reflect the full range of community needs and priorities.

09. Transportation & Mobility

Strengths

- › **Complete Streets Community:** Belmont is a Complete Streets community and has received related grants, offering the potential for improved walkability and safety.
- › **Public Transit Access:** The town is well-connected to regional transit options, including the commuter rail, with future improvements like the Community Path enhancing regional connectivity.
- › **Commitment to Pedestrian Safety:** Efforts such as Safe Routes to School have led to key intersection improvements.
- › **Ongoing Traffic Studies & Resources:** Belmont has technical resources, including traffic modeling and the MA Chokepoint Grant, to address congestion issues.

Weaknesses

- › **Traffic Congestion:** Significant congestion exists in key areas like Belmont Center, Brighton Street, and Concord Avenue, exacerbated by both local and regional traffic.
- › **Limited Parking Solutions:** Space constraints and zoning issues make it difficult to expand parking solutions, creating a mismatch between demand and availability.
- › **Road Safety & Pedestrian Issues:** Many roads lack adequate infrastructure for safe biking and walking, with some intersections identified as high-risk areas for both pedestrians and drivers.
- › **Limited Transit Options:** The lack of an internal townwide bus system restricts local mobility options. Additionally, commuter rail stations are not fully ADA-compliant, limiting access.
- › **Underdeveloped Bicycle Infrastructure:** Belmont's existing bike lanes are minimal, and many areas lack bike safety features, discouraging cycling as a mode of transportation.

Opportunities

- › **Complete Streets & Traffic Calming:** The town can enhance its Complete Streets efforts by improving connectivity between residential areas and destinations, and implementing creative traffic calming measures (e.g., island-based traffic control, neckdowns, or chicanes).
- › **Transit-Oriented Development:** By improving public transit options, Belmont could better align its development strategies with TOD goals, encouraging more sustainable land use and reducing car dependency.
- › **Community Path:** The planned Community Path offers a major opportunity to enhance bike and pedestrian connectivity, connecting to regional paths like the Minute Man Path, with construction set to begin in 2026.
- › **Senior Transportation Services:** Expanding transit options specifically for seniors, including electric, ADA-compliant shuttles, could fill an important gap in the town's transportation network.
- › **Regional Traffic Solutions:** Addressing cut-through traffic and regional congestion through investments in transit infrastructure and collaboration with surrounding communities could alleviate some of the local pressures.
- › **Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Development:** There is strong potential to further develop and enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, improving safety, accessibility, and sustainable transportation options throughout the town.

Threats

- › **Traffic Growth & Congestion:** As Belmont grows, congestion in business centers, along major arterials, and during school drop-off/pick-up times may worsen, straining the existing infrastructure.
- › **Resistance to Change:** Public opposition to traffic solutions (e.g., road diets, traffic studies) creates challenges in implementing necessary improvements.
- › **Parking & Zoning Constraints:** Existing zoning and parking regulations may hinder the town's ability to adapt its infrastructure to current needs, including balancing parking availability with pedestrian and bike-friendly design.
- › **Inadequate Bicycle Safety:** With few bike lanes and mixed infrastructure, Belmont's transportation network poses a safety risk for cyclists, especially in key areas like Trapelo Road and Cushing Square.

- › **Inaccessibility of Transit Facilities:** The lack of ADA-compliant infrastructure at commuter rail stations limits access for people with disabilities, affecting the broader population's ability to rely on transit.