

THE BALLARDVALE GAZETTE

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARDVALE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Vol. 22, No. 2 BallardVale, Massachusetts Fall-Winter 2025-2026

Residents Weigh In on BVHDC Bylaw Updates

The Ballardvale Historic District Commission and town staff held a special public meeting on October 15 to gather feedback from residents as it prepares to modernize the district's 1995 bylaws. The discussion centered on how to preserve Ballardvale's historic character while making the approval process for exterior additions and renovations more transparent and efficient.

Assistant Town Manager Austin Simco joined the meeting, noting that Ballardvale's charm lies in its architectural diversity — from 1880s farmhouses to 1950s mid-century homes. The goal isn't to make every home look like it's from the 1800s, Simco explained. "It's to honor the period in which each property was built. Preservation should be collaborative, not punitive."

It has been 30 years since the Ballardvale Historic District was created under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40C, which empowers local commissions to protect the visual and historical integrity of designated areas. Currently, the bylaw requires review of all that is visible from a public way — including windows, doors, roofs, fences, siding, masonry, and demolition or new construction. Interiors, maintenance requirements, and areas not visible from the public way are exempt from review.

Residents discussed how the process could be made smoother, suggesting clearer guidelines and checklists to clarify which projects require commission approval. Some expressed frustration with the current process, while others acknowledged the importance of the bylaws to protect and maintain Ballardvale's unique neighborhood character.

Several suggested that the Town of Andover invest more visibly in Ballardvale, noting that improved street signs, sidewalks, granite curbs, and crosswalks with flashing beacons would reflect the district's historical significance. Many felt that as a designated historic district,

Ballardvale deserves attention consistent with its special status.

Overall, the audience expressed strong support for strengthening the sense of community within Ballardvale and working collaboratively toward thoughtful preservation in the months ahead. The Commission will be finalizing the bylaws for presentation and approval at the Annual Town Meeting in April 2026. From now until then, there will be additional public meetings for residents to add their input. — *Alexis Winnell, Commission Member*

Fun for Everyone at the Playground

More children are now able to enjoy the Ballardvale Playground thanks to the Fun for Everyone Accessibility Improvement Project completed in July. The town's Facilities Department finished the project in a record three weeks to be ready for the height of the playground's summer popularity.

Last updated in 2015, the playground was rededicated on July 15. Thanks to funding and advocacy from the Rare Road Foundation, the Andover Commission on Disabilities, and the Massachusetts Office on Disability, as well as the town's capital funds, accessibility at the site has been significantly improved.

New companion seating is in place, while for the children a rubber surface has replaced the old wood mulch and two new pieces of accessible play equipment — an adaptive spinner and standing chimes — make the Ballardvale Playground one that all small playful people can enjoy together.

Janet Nicosia, director of facilities for the town, pointed out that the poured-in-place rubber surface is both level and cushioned while allowing for drainage. "Our next project here will be the basketball court," she said. "And we are looking at constructing a track for the children who love wheeled ride-on toys."

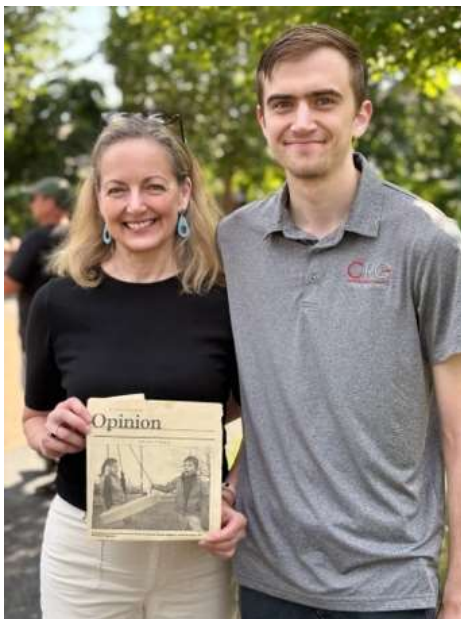
Especially excited to see the ribbon cutting were Angelica Tourkistas and Julee Armitage, co-founders of the Rare Road Foundation, which



Angelica Tourkistas and Julee Armitage

focuses on improving the lives of children with rare genetic disorders. Armitage, who is also a member of the town's Commission on Disability, came with her daughter Remy, who has a condition that affects mobility. Remy had trouble navigating the old mulch surface with her walker, but with the rubber surface, Remy is among the children who are now able to have fun unhindered on the newly accessible playground. "Now there is equipment that children with disabilities can enjoy with their nondisabled siblings," said her mother.

Andover Select Board Vice Chair Ellen Townson and Select Board Clerk Melissa Danisch came to celebrate the improvements and congratulate the



Melissa and Jack Danisch

people who made them possible. Danisch, who lives on Bradley Road, came with her son Jack. She brought a newspaper clipping from 2006 picturing a much-younger Jack on the tire swing. "Our family has been enjoying this playground for a long time," she said. "These improvements will be great for the community."

Speaking at the event, Town Manager Andrew Flanagan applauded the town's commitment to making community facilities available to everyone. "Andover is fortunate," he said. "Accessibility is important here, the community supports it, and we can all be proud of that."

Ballardvale Day Rescheduled

Ballardvale Day was moved from October to sometime next spring. Organizer Barbara Burke will keep residents informed of the new date.

Playground StoryWalk Ready for Readers

The Ballardvale Playground now offers an engaging "StoryWalk" thanks to Memorial Hall Library, which has installed signs with colorful pages of a children's book arranged in sequence along a playground path. Watch for new stories in the future.



Ballardvale Post Office Reopens

One Monday morning in June, the postal clerk arrived to open the Ballardvale Post Office only to discover that the ceiling had collapsed over the weekend.

No one was injured, and operations were relocated to the central post office while repairs were made.

But as the weeks ticked by, Vale residents were both inconvenienced by this village fixture's extended closure — which stretched from mid-June into October — and increasingly anxious that it would not reopen at all.

But reopen it did. Explaining the long closure, Steve Doherty, strategic communications specialist for the Postal Service, said, "We lease the space, so we had no direct involvement with



the contractors. Our concern was more about the quality and safety of the repairs than the timeframe, since our customers were being accommodated from our Andover office. But we are excited to be back in Ballardvale with a new ceiling in place.” So are the relieved patrons of the Ballardvale Post Office.

Meet Your Neighbor: Holt Hill Audio

Thanks to Brian Salazar and Brian Rossetti, the building that once sorted and stored wool for the Ballard Vale Mills Company at the turn of the 20th century has undergone a major rehab. And that is music to the ears of anyone who appreciates high-end audio equipment.

The two-story structure at 19 Dale Street is now the home of the reseller of vintage and new high fidelity sound equipment business Holt Hill Audio, which is owned and operated by Salazar and Rossetti. While the store’s spacious showrooms feature an impressive

collection of new and used

stereo receivers, speakers, and turntables for sale, their multi-faceted business also provides design expertise for commercial and home installations. Clients include restaurants, retail businesses, and homeowners, really anyone who wants to get the best sound from their audio systems.

Their audio fabrication workshop in the back is a testament to their commitment to keeping vintage equipment running and merging it with new technologies. Among the stacks of equipment displayed in their shop is a 1962 Fisher tube-powered receiver that sells for about \$2,000 and a pair of top-of-the-line Steinway-Lyngdorf speakers from Austria that, when new, were valued at \$250,000, but can be purchased now for about half that price from Brian and Brian.

“Music and repairing old speakers has been a passion of mine since I was 11, and now it’s

turned into a full-time business for Brian and me. Being in Ballardvale in an historic mill complex now is really the perfect location for us,” said Salazar, a former resident of Andover (now in North Andover) who began his audio repair shop from his Andover home and has since grown it into a national business.

Holt Hill Audio most recently relocated from the Everett Mill in Lawrence to its current Ballardvale location after buying and completing a major interior renovation of 19 Dale Street. Brian and Brian encourage their Vale neighbors to visit their website at www.holthill.com and swing by to say hello to check out their impressive inventory of used and new equipment. The shop is open six days most weeks, but Brian recommends calling ahead at 617-605-1922 just to make sure.

Pole Hill Blueberries

Who needs Maine blueberries when we have our own along the trails in Pole Hill? With the landscape transformation of Pole Hill after the major storm of September 2023, the interior trails



leading to the hilltop are spectacularly covered with blueberries. Clearly the downed trees have opened the canopy for the sun to shine down and help the plants mature and multiply. I’m not a blueberry expert, but I think the two types here are low bush and Aronia.

I have also noticed an increase in backyard birds. The downed vegetation has created a habitat for birds to nest and hide, and now there is an abundant food supply of blueberries! Not only are the birds are feasting on the blueberries, I have found many instances of scat with berries in it, indicating coyotes and foxes eat the blueberries too. I have to admit I did not try the blueberries, but maybe next season when they are another year older.

Another benefit of these plants is the colors — they are a beautiful green during the spring/summer growing season, then they darken with ripe berries. Now in the fall the berries are gone and their leaves are changing to a vibrant red, making a carpet of red on the hillside.

So enjoy a fall walk in Pole Hill, and you may see wildlife and blueberry bushes along the trails. Be sure to stay on the marked trails, and remember that it is hunting season, so wear bright colors.

— Teresa Padvaiskas

Food Pantry Expands Access



The 24/7 food pantry at the Ballard Vale United Church on Clark Road is growing both in scope — and vegetables. Four raised,

irrigated beds, constructed as an Eagle Scout project by 17-year-old Tejas Basavarajappa, will provide fresh produce for the Village Food Hub. Also new is a system of lockers that implements a live inventory shopping platform allowing families to specify food needs while expanding access and equity. For Thanksgiving the pantry will be providing 300+ meals for families in need, and they are looking for volunteers from the Sunday before through Wednesday, including delivery drivers. To volunteer contact Shari McLeod, smcleod@villagefoodhub.org. To donate, visit the website or use this QR code.



Funding the Village Food Hub

Two fundraisers in November, both at the Ballard Vale United Church, will support the Village Food Hub, which operates a food rescue program and an increasingly popular 24/7 food pantry. Harvest and Harmony, a dinner cabaret held jointly with the Voices of Hope, entertained patrons on November 8. On Saturday, November 22, look for the Village Food Hub's brunch food concession at the church's Holiday Craft Fair.

Halloween Parade Spooks Villagers

The Sunday before Halloween is traditionally a scary time at the Ballardvale Playground. Excited goblins gathered by organizer Jan Holden and her husband, Seth, showed off their costumes, paraded around the Green, and went home with a treat or two.



Event Organizers Seth and Jan Holden



First Responders Belle and Archer



Make Way for Duckling Lindsay



Artfully Scary Annaleise

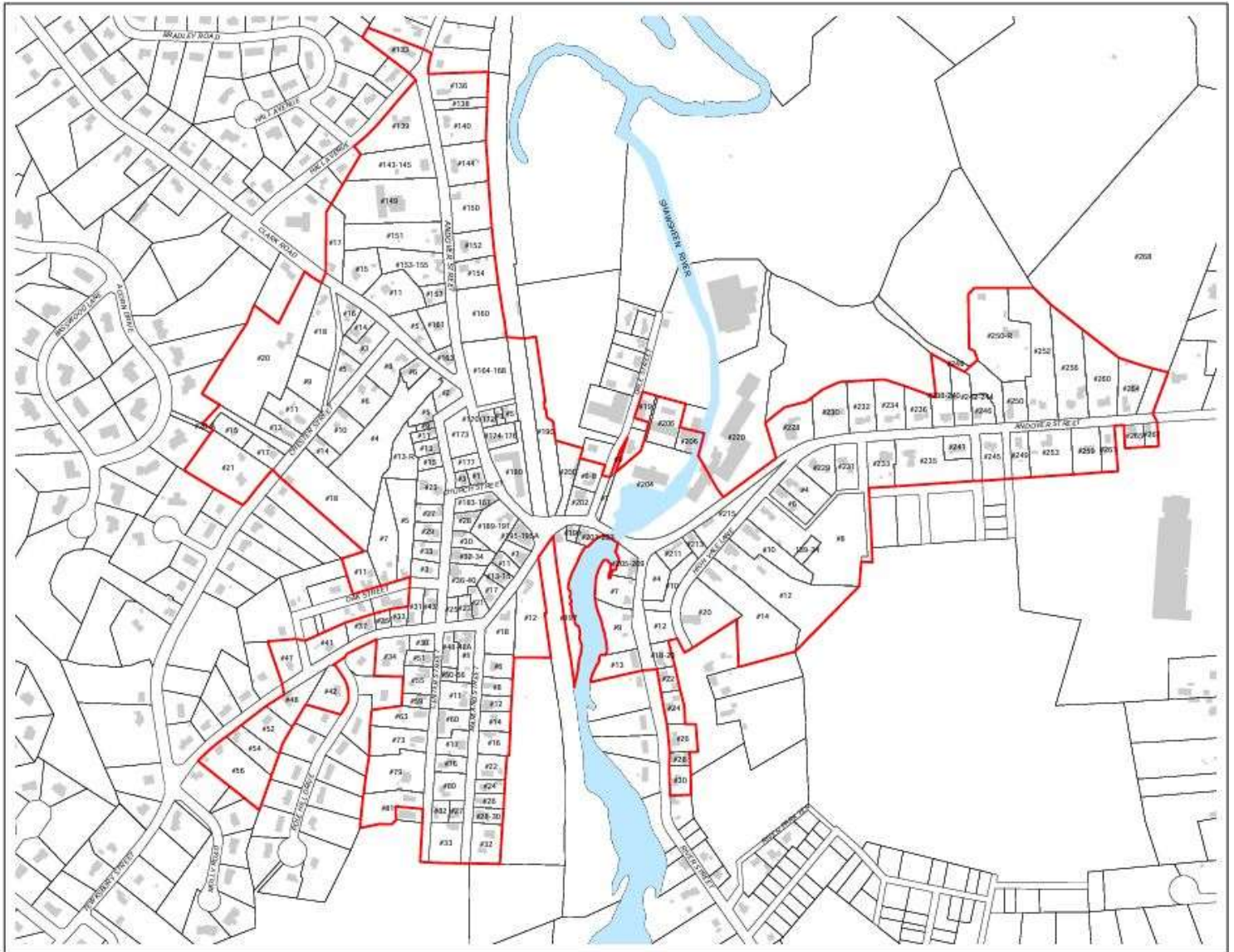
Questions? Suggestions? Feedback?

If you have a suggestion for a topic you'd like to see covered in a future issue of the BallardVale Gazette, please contact the editors: Joe Halpern / joehalp@gmail.com and Karen English / kfeenglish@gmail.com

Go Paperless! As an email subscriber you'll be among the first to receive the *BallardVale Gazette* — complete with **color photos** — while saving money for the town. Just send your name, street address, and email to Karen English: kfeenglish@gmail.com

BallardVale Historic District Map

The map below shows the outline of the BallardVale Historic District.



BallardVale Historic District Commission

Andover Town Offices
36 Bartlet Street
Andover, MA 0181

US POSTAGE
PAID
ANDOVER, MA
PERMIT NO . 41

CALENDAR

- TBD Public Meetings to Discuss BVHDC Bylaws**
Ballardvale Fire Station conference room
- December 3 BallardVale Historic District Commission Monthly Meeting**
Ballardvale Fire Station conference room — 7:00 p.m.
- December 7 Annual Tree Lighting and Carol Sing**
Ballardvale Green — 5:00 p.m.
- January 7 BallardVale Historic District Commission Monthly Meeting**
Ballardvale Fire Station conference room — 7:00 p.m.
- February 4 BallardVale Historic District Commission Monthly Meeting**
Ballardvale Fire Station conference room — 7:00 p.m.