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BROOKLINE TOMORROW

Brookline Tomorrow

VISION OF BROOKLINE 2015

Heir to a rich historic, cultural and landscape legacy, Brookline in 2015 is a vibrant community unique for its complex character. Encompassing urban and suburban neighborhoods, Brookline is a prosperous, diverse, safe and well-managed residential community with thriving commercial districts.

Brookline in the twenty-first century shapes and guides change to promote the community's environmental, human, and financial sustainability:

- > as a community, protecting environmental, educational and cultural resources and providing excellent, cost-effective services and opportunities for all residents and business owners;
- > as a group of residential neighborhoods, maintaining local character and a high quality of life while accommodating change;
- > as a diverse place, where individuals enrich community life; and
- > as a responsible regional partner, actively collaborating with its neighbors to promote regional opportunities and solve regional problems.

The overall Town-wide vision shown above represents where Brookline residents believe the community should be in 2015. It is the basis for the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan - neighborhood and community character conservation, but also new initiatives and affordable housing supported by an expanded commercial tax base. The Plan imagines:

- Initiatives to enhance community connections and preserve neighborhood character
- Annual creation of at least 25 units of affordable housing townwide
- Commercial growth focused primarily in the Route Nine corridor

The Brookline Comprehensive Plan reflects the multi-faceted—and sometimes conflicting—perspectives that need to be addressed in developing solutions to the challenges facing the Town. Many of the challenges that the Town faces involve addressing community—and regionwide needs—while being sensitive to neighborhood perspectives.

Meeting these challenges must take into account the needs of the Town. Brookline must be recognized as:



...A COMMUNITY

Brookline’s vitality and cohesiveness as a community is based on the liveliness of its public realm, the strength of its internal connections, the health of its environment, the quality of its school system and the soundness of its management and finances.



...A GROUP OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Brookline’s neighborhood quality of life is based on its commitment to embracing and sustaining the character of residential neighborhoods, while accommodating and managing appropriate changes that grow out of Town needs and shared community values.



...A DIVERSE PLACE

Brookline’s longstanding diversity—in income, age, ethnicity, race, and able-bodiedness—depends on a continuing and meaningful commitment to diversity in its school system and in housing.



...A TOWN WITHIN A LARGER REGION

Brookline actively promotes the welfare of Brookline residents and the values they believe in by effectively coordinating with its neighbors on significant regional goals, including enhanced alternatives to the private automobile, ensuring a healthy environment, restoring and protecting greenways and open space, promoting economic prosperity, and advancing housing affordability.

The Brookline Comprehensive Plan is designed to get the community to the future described in the *Vision of Brookline 2015*. Each plan element has its own vision statement that connects the overall Town-wide vision to the goals, policies and strategies in that subject area. While it may be impossible to fully achieve all of these visions, the actions recommended in the Comprehensive Plan will allow the Town to get as close as possible.

While all nine elements of the Comprehensive Plan are important to achieving the preferred scenario, three of the elements are considered the most important ones. These three elements are chosen because they were identified during the development of the Comprehensive Plan as the most important planning issues in Brookline in the next 10 years. They also cross traditional discipline lines and present multi-faceted problems and solutions. Only when each of these facets of a problem is addressed is it possible to create real solutions that can attract broad community support. These key elements are as follows:

- > **Quality of Life: Neighborhoods and Districts.** Zoning alone does not always provide a sufficiently complete context for defining what kinds of changes are desirable in individual neighborhood contexts or what unique elements of a neighborhood should be preserved. These discussions most frequently occur when a particular project is proposed. Neighborhood or district plans could provide a better context for managing growth and change.
- > **Diversity: Affordable Housing.** A broad cross section of Brookline residents have expressed strong support for expanded efforts to support the development of affordable housing. Yet individual development proposals for affordable housing have sometimes been controversial because of concerns about the appropriateness of a particular project to a specific neighborhood context or the number of market rate units that are proposed as part of the development. Strong affordable housing advocates have sometimes found themselves reluctant opponents of proposals that would add new units.
- > **Balancing Regional and Local Needs: Route Nine.** Many neighborhood residents have expressed general concern about traffic congestion along Route Nine and anticipated continued growth in regional traffic. Yet many of these same residents have voiced support for carefully planned mixed-use development along Route Nine that improves the physical character

and identity of gateway village areas to the Town at Chestnut Hill and Brookline Village. In addition, the corridor itself is under state ownership and serves as a high-volume regional roadway. There is widespread recognition in the Town that real solutions will only be possible if they simultaneously address both regional and local goals.

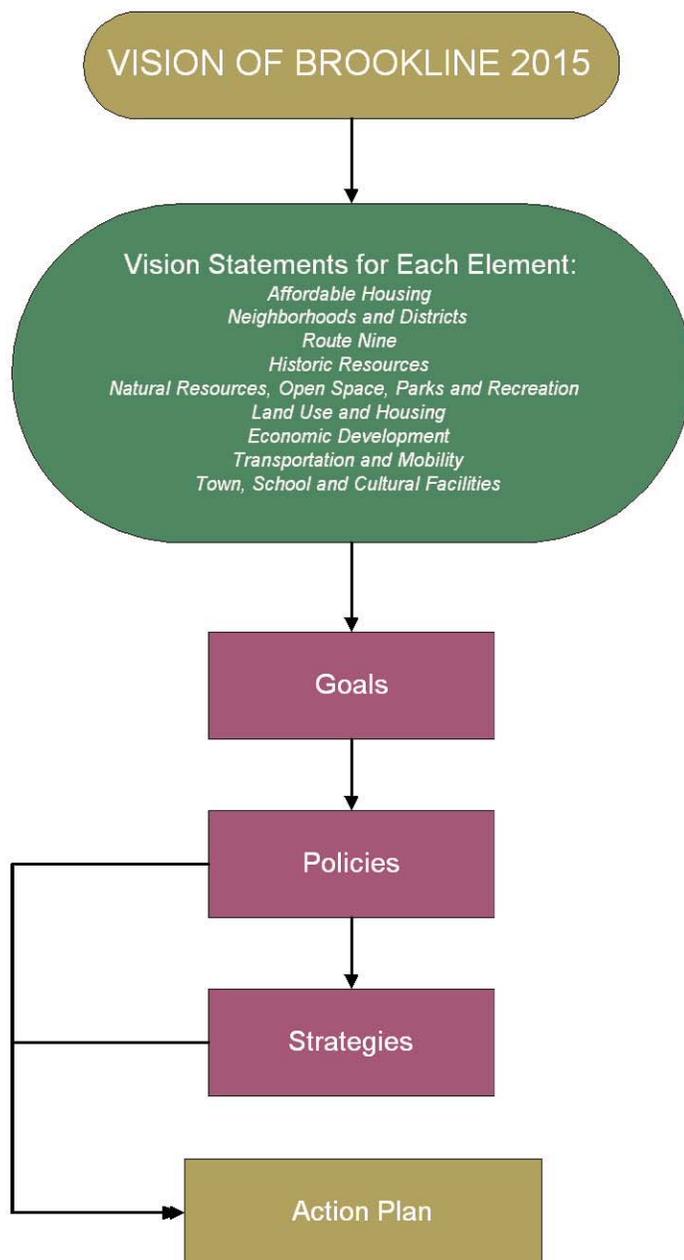
The other elements of the Comprehensive Plan are:

- > Historic Resources
- > Natural Resources, Open Space, Parks and Recreation
- > Land Use and Housing
- > Economic Development
- > Transportation and Mobility
- > Town, School and Cultural Facilities

These additional elements are described in Section Four. The Appendix contains a description of how these various elements, tailored to the needs of Brookline, are consistent with the required elements of a comprehensive or master, plan in Massachusetts state law.

Brookline Future: Visions, Goals, Policies, and Strategies

The *Vision of Brookline 2015* described above naturally evolves into a series of vision statements about each element of the Plan, which in turn are the basis for goals, policies and strategies that will guide Town actions in the next ten years. These goals, policies and strategies are described in the three key elements below and the six additional elements in the next section. They serve as the basis for the Action Plan that will be developed to implement the Comprehensive Plan.



Key Element: Neighborhoods and Districts

Quality of Life

SUMMARY

Brookline's enviable quality of life derives from the interplay of diverse neighborhoods and housing types with commercial districts and open spaces—all on the foundation of a unique historic, architectural, cultural and landscape heritage.

Protection of the character, attractiveness, safety, and functionality of neighborhoods—while accommodating desirable changes—is a top priority. Residents' access to the vitality of Brookline's commercial districts and to open space creates the mix of experiences that defines Brookline's balance of urban, suburban and semirural identity. The town's quality of life also depends on fiscal health and continuing excellence in delivering municipal services to residents and business owners.

Throughout the Plan process—public meetings, neighborhood forums, discussions by the Comprehensive Plan Committee—the need to protect what makes Brookline a good place to live and work was a continuing theme. In addition, a Working Group on Quality of Life issues included members of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, the Brookline Neighborhood Alliance and the Economic Development Advisory Board, and meetings were well attended by members of the public from different neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND DISTRICTS VISION

The unique and attractive qualities of Brookline's neighborhoods and districts will be maintained. Town actions and policies will enhance the livability of the Town for residents.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL: Preserve neighborhood and district character and manage change in neighborhoods and districts through planning, participation, and communication.

- > **Planning:** Create Neighborhood and District Plans with development and design standards and guidelines and coordinate those plans with townwide open space, housing, and historic preservation goals, policies and strategies.
- > **Participation:** Enhance neighborhood consultation in land use, density and design decisions through the planning and project-review processes and timely notifications.
- > **Communication:** Provide project proponents with development and design standards so that they know what is desired and acceptable, and enhance inter-board coordination and consultation.

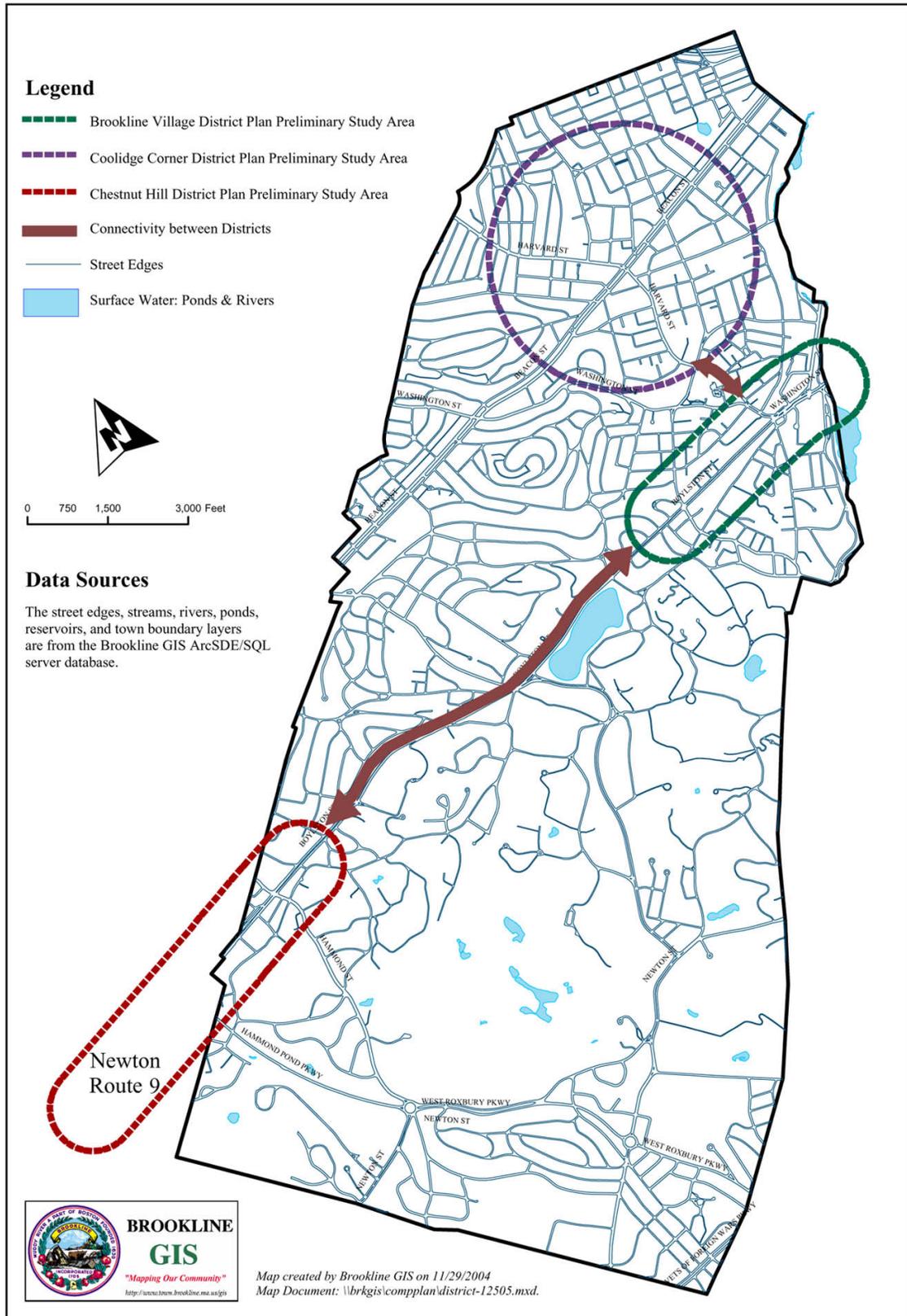
COMMERCIAL AREAS: Enhance commercial districts as lively, appealing, and functional community meeting places that attract customers and visitors, and support a mix of businesses.

OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES: Enhance and maintain green open spaces and natural systems, building on Brookline's Open Space Plan and Climate Change Action Plan

HISTORIC PRESERVATION: Protect Brookline's historic heritage through incentives for preservation and adaptive reuse, public education, and support for continuing research for historic designations.

MOBILITY AND PARKING: Manage parking and transportation to promote alternatives to private cars, provide appropriate parking for residential and commercial areas, and calm traffic.

Map 1: Districts and Neighborhoods



Neighborhood and District Planning

Brookline needs new approaches to protecting community character and managing—and accommodating, when appropriate—change. Only neighborhoods in the town’s three local historic districts and buildings along the town’s principal historic thoroughfares have standards to shape alterations and new construction. As a result, the current process of responding to development proposals tends to be reactive, very site-specific, and very time-consuming. By building on the Town’s current development review regulations, Brookline can create plans that outline a set of standards for changes.

These plans should be created for both *districts*, or larger commercial and residential areas such as Coolidge Corner, and *neighborhoods*, or smaller areas that generally have a more residential feel. These plans should be created through a community-based planning process, developed within the context of the townwide policies and goals of the Comprehensive Plan, and approved as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. These neighborhood standards will then communicate expectations to both residents and project proponents, making the development review process more transparent and efficient.

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

- Conserve neighborhood character while accommodating change and townwide needs.
- Make standards for development clear and consistent with local and townwide needs.

POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS

- Include neighborhood consultation early in the project development process.
- Identify standards of acceptable and unacceptable development for particular areas through neighborhood plans and make the development process more efficient by communicating these standards to project proponents.

STRATEGIES

Key Strategy

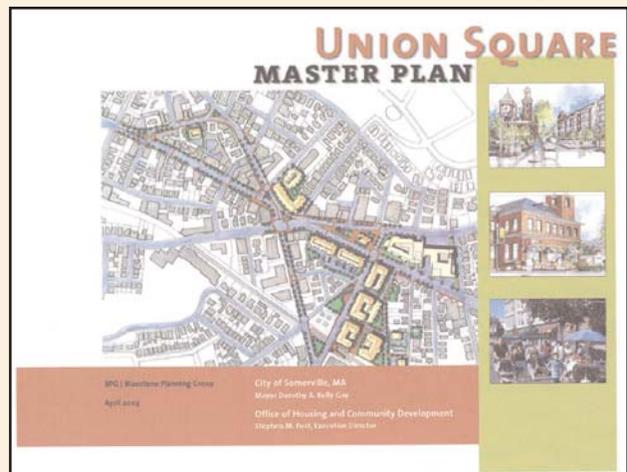
Create Neighborhood and District Plans with development and design standards to help guide new development in a more specific and appropriate way than is available under traditional zoning. District Plans should be developed for Coolidge Corner, Chestnut Hill and Brookline Village by the Department of Planning & Community Development in the next five years. The exact timing of these efforts will be determined in the Action Plan, based on the workload of the Department and funding availability. However, the Coolidge Corner District Plan would be an early Action Plan item, taking place in the next year.

These District Plans will look at the portions of Brookline where development pressure is more intense and the need for proactive planning is most needed. District Plans would each be developed

by a District Planning Council of neighborhood representatives, Town Meeting members, small business owners, property owners and Town officials. A study area would be defined for each district.

District Plans would conduct buildout analyses

and alternative development scenarios for each district, and then develop a vision for a preferred future of the district. The District Plans would then develop strategies for these areas in a variety of subject areas, including regulatory tools, development preferences, transportation issues, and open space priorities. District Plans would be managed by Town staff in the Department of Planning & Community Development, with the assistance of staff in other departments and consultants as needed and as funding is available.



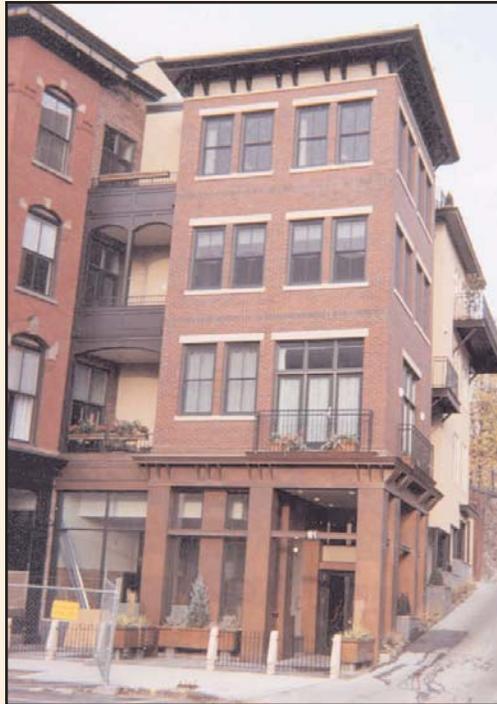
AN EXAMPLE OF A DISTRICT PLAN

Where necessary to achieve the goals of the Plan, District Plans might recommend specific zoning changes or other regulatory tools such as the creation of Neighborhood Conservation Districts, neighborhood visions for sites likely to be redeveloped, capital improvements desired by the neighborhood that might be funded by new development or the Town, and other planning goals. For example, the District Plan for Coolidge Corner might consider whether rezoning some of the M districts behind Harvard Street to three-family districts might be appropriate. Each District Plan would be adopted by the Planning Board as an integral part of the Comprehensive Plan and used in development review and other planning processes.

There are many neighborhoods that are smaller than districts but still have unique characteristics. Neighborhood boundaries may or may not be defined by the presence of a commercial district or public transit.

They are likely to be influenced by natural or man-made physical barriers (topography, geography, freeways and arterials, etc.), architectural and urban design character, as well as social, economic and cultural characteristics. History also plays a significant role in the self-definition of a neighborhood, establishing a sense of time and place.

For these neighborhoods, particularly ones that are experiencing a high level of development activity, the Comprehensive Plan recommends development of a Neighborhood Plan. Such a plan would provide an examination of what makes that neighborhood unique and set up clear development guidelines for any future changes.



INFILL BUILDINGS SHOULD RESPECT THE SCALE OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS

Brookline's Zoning By-law gives the Planning Board the authority to create design standards and guidelines for specific areas. The Neighborhood Plans should be consistent with overall Town Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives, include ways of dealing with projects that meet town-wide goals, and with projects that have impacts on town-wide resources. The purpose of these plans is to help the Town, neighborhood residents, and developers work together effectively to shape infill and redevelopment projects so that they have positive impacts on neighborhood quality of life. The plans will move Brookline towards what is called a "form-based" approach to development regulation. In contrast to traditional zoning, which focuses on what is not allowed, form-based zoning provides a guide to what is acceptable and desired in terms of building types, relationship to the street and other public areas, and mixtures of uses. Form-based approaches require a plan that sets out the vision for an area and graphic illustrations to communicate what is desired.

Typically, the guidelines from these plans would not be mandatory controls but would be used by the Planning Board, the Board of Appeals, and the Planning and Community Development Department to provide guidance to project proponents on preferred development and to make public improvements. However, the planning process may sometimes result in recommendations for zoning amendments. Neighborhood Plans should be focused first in neighborhoods most subject to growth and change, or where the existing zoning does not match the existing land uses. Some of the areas where Neighborhood Plans might be appropriate are defined in the *Issues and Opportunities* reports and in the element "Land Use and Housing," below. Residents of a neighborhood could petition the Planning Board for creation of a Neighborhood Plan in an identified area, or the initiative for a Neighborhood Plan could originate with the Town.

The Selectmen would appoint a Neighborhood Committee, including representatives of any neighborhood associations, park advocates, Town Meeting members and business associations in the neighborhood. This Committee would refine the plan area boundaries. The Neighborhood Plan would define the key elements of neighborhood, character and goals for the neighborhood, and important issues that need to be addressed in that neighborhood.

The specific issues studied would be tailored to the specific needs of the neighborhood being studied.

Neighborhood and District Plans would involve residents and businesses in outlining what is special about their parts of town. The Plans will also help potential developers by letting them know, before they begin designing a potential new development, what is considered acceptable and desirable in a particular part of town.

As part of these planning efforts, interim zoning districts might be enacted to insure neighborhood and open space protection during these important planning processes. An interim zoning district would be adopted for a specified period of time, no greater than twelve months, at an annual or special Town Meeting, in order to provide an opportunity to complete district or neighborhood level planning studies. The interim zoning regulations or design guidelines established during the study period will ensure that an area is not subjected to inappropriate development proposals. After the Neighborhood or District Plan is complete, the interim zoning might be replaced with new, permanent zoning consistent with the findings of the planning study.

District and neighborhood plans need to be consistent with the goals and policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. In some cases where a District or Neighborhood Committee concludes that it is unable to meet an expectation of the Comprehensive Plan due to limited resources or specific local conditions, the Committee may submit a well-argued case for seeking relief from doing so. Such a case will be considered by the Planning Board during the process of adopting a local plan. Any district or neighborhood plan—even with an agreed amendment—in all other respects will still need to be consistent with Town goals and policies.

OTHER STRATEGIES

There are a number of other strategies that the Town should pursue to accomplish the vision, goals, and policies of this element. These additional strategies are summarized below, and are described in more detail in other plan elements.

Commercial Area Strategies

Most districts and neighborhoods in Town center on a commercial area. The Economic Development element outlines the Town's overall approach to economic development and commercial areas, but there is a neighborhood benefit to commercial activity that goes beyond the overall benefit to the Town. Strategies for commercial areas that help protect districts and neighborhoods are:

- > *Advocate for businesses and facilitate communications with public and private entities.*
- > *Enhance visibility and promote business festivals, programming, and media.*
- > *Enhance the attractiveness of business areas through streetscape and other capital improvements.*
- > *Expand permitting assistance available to businesses.*
- > *Establish a design identity and design guidelines appropriate to each commercial area.*
- > *Attract customers to commercial areas by improving the business mix.*
- > *Attract customers to commercial areas through enhanced appearance, accessibility, and programming.*
- > *Retain and attract an appropriate commercial mix for each area.*

Open Space & Natural Resource Strategies

Brookline has notable examples of historic parks, greenways, sanctuaries, neighborhood pocket parks, and a sizable "urban forest" that define the character of the Town. These resources provide not only aesthetic value and opportunities for passive and active recreation, but also support the underlying natural systems that are needed for the sustainable future of the Town—such as clean air, clean water, protection from excessive heat, cold and noise, stormwater management, flood control and wildlife habitat.

Brookline's *2000 Open Space Plan*, which will be updated in 2005, is the foundation for the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations on open space and natural resource protection. Open space and natural resource recommendations encompass all parts of

Town and range from protection strategies for open space on large parcels or the creation of neighborhood pocket parks, and the protection of the urban forest.. The Plan element on *Natural Resources, Open Space, Parks and Recreation* provides detailed information on the Town's overall approach to these issues. In this section, the focus is on open spaces that are parts of neighborhoods or districts and serve as part of that local community as a place to play, shop, relax, and live.

Neighborhoods and districts need to tailor open-space strategies to address different conditions and needs. For example, in some of the more densely developed parts of Brookline, there are fewer than three acres of open space per 1,000 residents, far below what is considered optimal. In other neighborhoods, there is enough open space in terms of acreage but it is not physically accessible or programmed with events or playgrounds to make it usable. The Project for Public Spaces, a national thinktank, has stated that properly programming open space is a key to its success. Strategies for open space and natural resources that help protect districts and neighborhoods include:

- > *Pursue a variety of financing strategies for open-space protection.*
- > *Avoid or mitigate the loss of existing private open space in densely developed parts of Town.*
- > *Use a full complement of available protection tools and strategies to protect the most important open spaces and natural resources as identified by the Open Space Plan.*
- > *Enhance programming of open spaces in areas where a need is perceived, regardless of the amount of open space in the area.*
- > *Create vest-pocket parks and neighborhood community greens with existing public and private resources, where possible.*
- > *Create and improve streetscape and open spaces in commercial areas, particularly in northern Brookline and Coolidge Corner.*
- > *Require ground-level open space in new development (not just balcony or rooftop space).*
- > *Preserve the visual character and contribution of privately owned open space throughout Brookline, particularly in higher density residential neighborhoods where both physical and visual access to open space is limited.*

Historic Preservation Strategies

The Historic Resources element outlines the Town’s overall approach to historic preservation. However, the historic resources in a neighborhood or district can be an important part of what makes it unique and attractive. Brookline has numerous historic buildings and landscapes, most of which are located in National Register Districts outside Cottage Farm, Graffam-McKay, and Pill Hill, the three local historic districts. Outside of these districts the primary regulatory tool for historic preservation is the Demolition Delay by-law, which allows up to a year for negotiation on a request to demolish a structure that the Preservation Commission designates a “significant building.” Public education on the historic significance of buildings and landscapes—individually and as ensembles that make up “historic character”—can also be a powerful strategy for promoting appropriate treatment of private properties outside the local historic districts.

- > *Make the Demolition Delay by-law more effective.*
- > *Evaluate the potential of a local landmarks by-law or single building Local Historic District to give additional protection to historic sites outside of the existing Local Historic Districts.*
- > *Create incentives for adaptive reuse of historic buildings.*
- > *Consider inclusion of heritage trees, landscape elements, and other structures (e.g., signs, curbs, sidewalks) in designation of historic resources or the evaluation of changes in National Register and Local Historic Districts.*

Mobility & Parking Strategies

Transportation and parking are some of the most difficult issues in Brookline. Although Brookline is less auto-dependent than most communities—20% of households do not have a car and 45% of workers do not use a car to get to work—the volume of traffic on the town’s narrow streets and its parking needs and parking policies underlie concerns about neighborhood preservation and how the town should best manage change and shape development.

Brookline’s on-street parking policies have been under discussion recently, with advocates for varied policies, including retention of present policies, extension of resident sticker on-street parking during the day, and provision of overnight resident on-street

parking. Current policies have many positive results, but they also can make achievement of other town goals more complex. Strategies that relate to neighborhoods and districts include:

- > *Adjust parking resources and policies in commercial areas to support both business and residential needs.*
- > *Review parking standards for commercial areas to evaluate possible changes for mixed-use buildings, shared parking arrangements, and transit-oriented development.*
- > *Seek opportunities for additional off-street parking and shared parking, primarily in Coolidge Corner, Brookline Village/Route Nine, and Washington Square.*
- > *Design and implement a consistent townwide signage program for parking in conjunction with streetscape improvements.*
- > *Continue providing public parking spaces for car-share companies (such as Zipcar) and encourage the same in private parking lots.*
- > *Provide new bicycle parking facilities through public improvements, and require reasonable bike facilities in new private development projects.*
- > *Consider alternative strategies related to on-street and overnight parking policies in light of Comprehensive Plan visions, goals, policies, and strategies.*

PLANNING FOR BETTER DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Much of planning involves looking at the small picture: the physical appearance of a street or building, what uses people want to see on a piece of land, or how you can get to the store to buy groceries. These are issues of urban design, which looks at the physical layout of a place and how individual buildings form a community. A Comprehensive Plan can't ensure good urban design, but it can be an advocate for it and set standards that should be met.

For detailed analysis of specific districts or neighborhoods, a more detailed study is needed to look at how to design and manage growth and change. For large commercial and residential districts, District Plans should be completed that look in detail at issues of land use, transportation, design, housing, and economic development. For smaller neighborhoods, Neighborhood Plans should be completed that look primarily at land use, density and design.

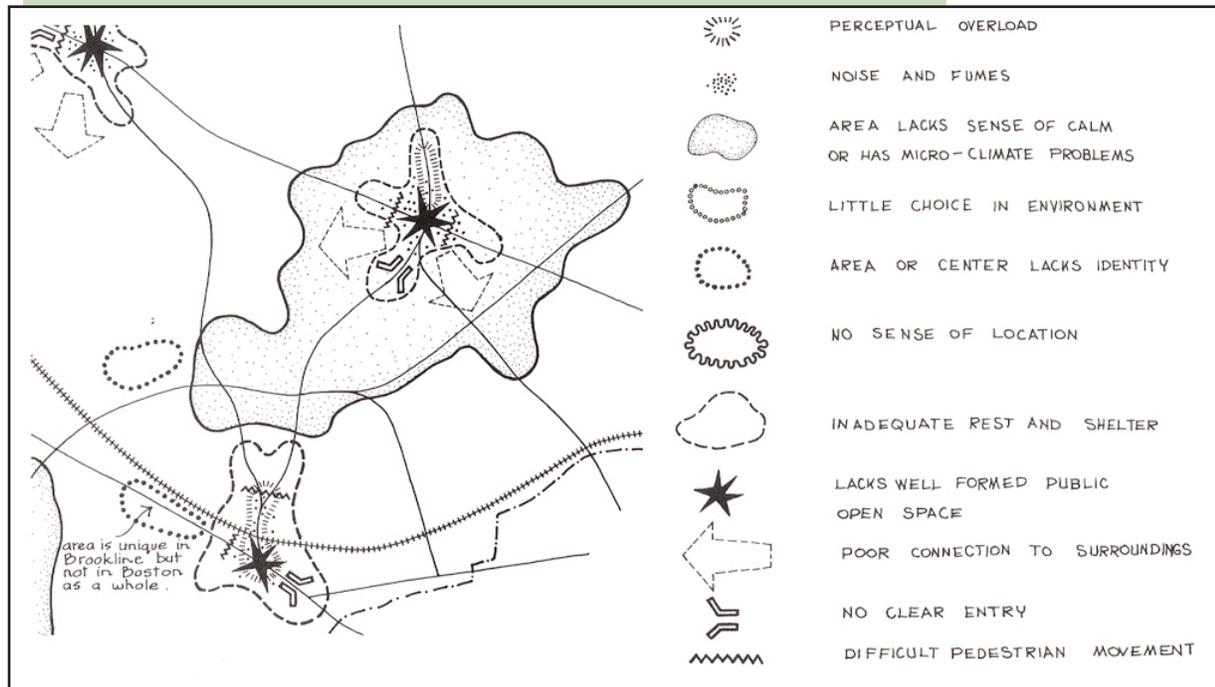
1 Brookline's Form

Issues of urban design are not new to Brookline. Kevin Lynch, a respected urban designer, conducted a detailed Visual Analysis of Brookline in 1965. Since that time, some things have remained the same. Many people still see the town as a grid, with Commonwealth Avenue, Beacon Street and Route 9 as the major east-west roads and Harvard Street as the main north-south road. This perception helps simplify the geography in a way that people find understandable. Note that, to many people, the roads of southern Brookline are difficult to understand.

In the diagram shown on page 40, he outlined some of the major challenges facing neighborhoods in Brookline in visual form. The section shown here is the corridor along Harvard Street from Coolidge Corner on the top right to Brookline Village on the bottom left. Generally, he found that some of the major districts suffer from a "lack of calm" and that some smaller neighborhoods have problems with "conceptual overload" or poor connections to their surroundings. In many ways the same problems remain today.

However, there are many ways in which Brookline has improved its urban design since 1965. Design review, sign regulations, and streetscape improvements have made many connections more understandable. The Town should be proud of the progress that has been made, while understanding that more remains to be done.

A 1965 DIAGRAM OF THE COOLIDGE CORNER/ BROOKLINE VILLAGE CORRIDOR BY URBAN DESIGNER KEVIN LYNCH



2 Great Buildings and Great Streets

Urban design is really about making pleasing places. Great places are about great buildings, great streets, and great public places. Here we will focus on the first two.

What makes a Great Building?

One part of a great street, and the one that is mostly developed by the private sector, are the buildings along the sides of the street. Making an attractive building can be a challenge that is sometimes made even more difficult by well-meaning regulations that unintentionally encourage poor design. Sometimes urban design can make such improvements without even reducing the density of a development or its number of parking spaces.

For examples of what good design can accomplish, look at the examples on the following pages. Each one represents a new development that is designed to respect its surroundings and create an attractive streetscape.

Streetscapes

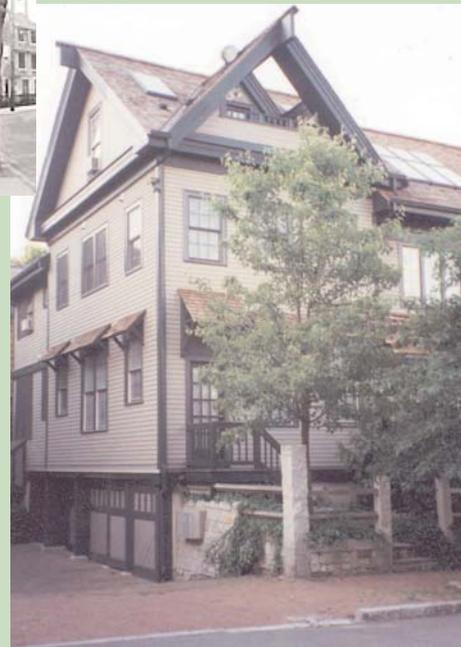
Buildings only form one part of the experience of being somewhere. When you walk down a street, you also experience sidewalks, roads, street trees, and other elements. These pieces of a public street form the “streetscape.”



BY RESPECTING THE EXISTING PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT, NEW BUILDINGS CAN BE ASSETS TO A NEIGHBORHOOD. IN THIS CASE, THE FIRST FOUR BUILDINGS FROM THE LEFT ARE 19TH-CENTURY ITALIANATES, AND THE LAST THREE ARE PART OF A RELATIVELY DENSE, NEW MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT.



IN THIS CASE, A SET OF NEW TOWNHOUSES PROVIDES A FRIENDLY FRONT TO THE STREET AND AN APPROPRIATE SCALE FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



THIS RESIDENTIAL IN-FILL RESPECTS THE STREET BY PUTTING ITS GARAGE ON THE SIDE

“The public streets are a strategic opportunity, since their form is the result of public decisions, and so are most of their details: paving, signs, light, landscaping, even fencing and street furniture. At the same time, they are a visual foreground experienced by almost every citizen several times each day.”

—KEVIN LYNCH, BROOKLINE VISUAL ANALYSIS, 1965

What is a streetscape?

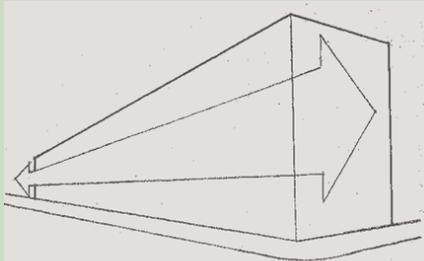
A streetscape is the space beginning at the front of a vertical element, such as a building (or fence) on one side of the street, and going to the front of a vertical element on the other side of the street. This is also referred to as the “building-to-building space.”

The development of a streetscape involves both private sector and public sector participation. The private sector generally contributes through the construction of buildings and street walls that define the edges of a street. Design elements that can affect the character and effectiveness of streetscapes include: building height, massing, scale, building materials, surface articulation, transparency, rhythm of solids and voids, and mix of uses. The public sector generally contributes to the streetscape by providing public infrastructure. This includes all elements within the public right-of-way: street width and capacity, street trees, sidewalks, lighting, signage, street furniture, and public spaces (plazas, parks, etc.).

What makes a great streetscape?

Elements of great streetscapes include:

- Definition (street wall and proportions)
- Visual interest and activity
- Transparency
- Surface articulation (opportunity for light and shadow)
- Street trees (filtered light and shade; enclosure)

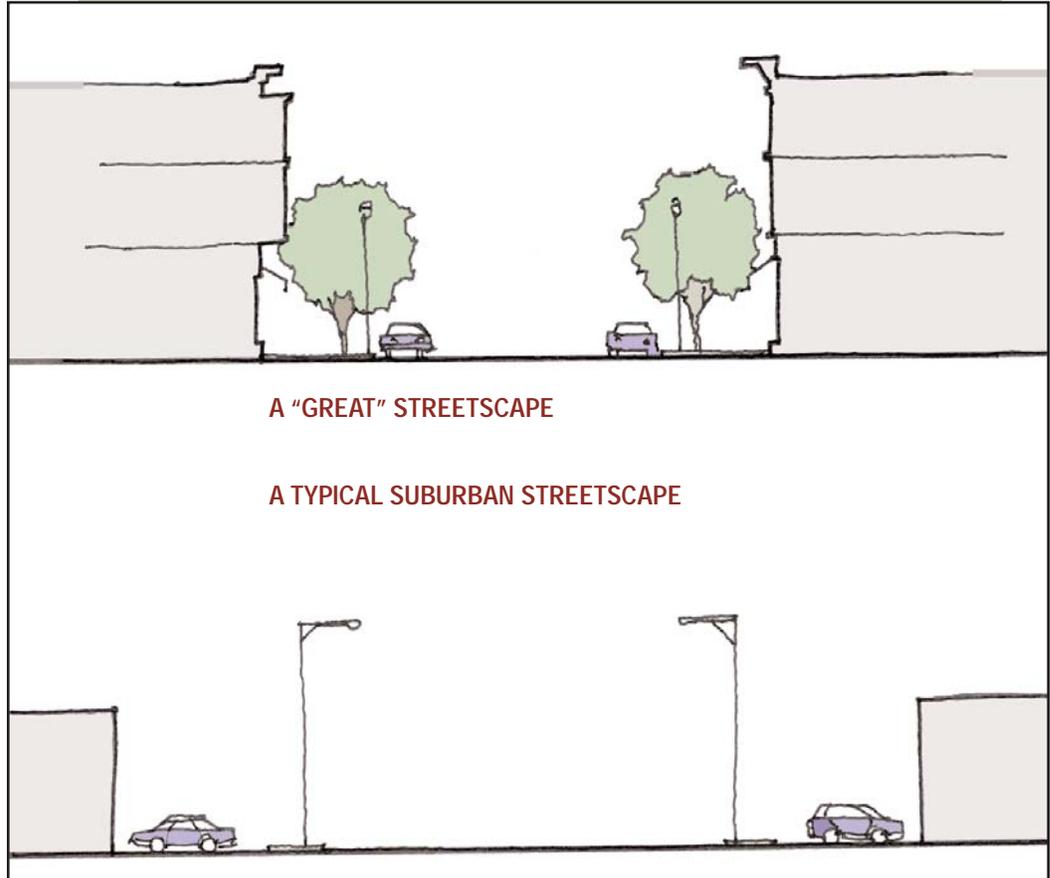


**A BLAND STREETSCAPE:
NOT MUCH TO SEE OR LOOK AT**



**MORE INTERESTING:
VARIATION IN THE STREET WALL**

The diagrams below show some of these elements in practice. The top diagram shows a “great” streetscape, with good definition and proportions and street trees. The second diagram shows a typical suburban strip streetscape, lacking most of these elements. In places where such streets exist, some re-engineering may be possible to at least add some of the elements of a great streetscape.



3 Applying these ideas in Brookline

On the neighborhood level, Brookline can use these ideas to make better places. In larger areas, Brookline can create “district plans” that set local goals that complement the Town-wide and regional goals discussed elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan. Where the neighborhoods are smaller, Brookline can create “neighborhood plans” that apply this same concept.

What is a district and what is a neighborhood?

District boundaries are most commonly defined by the presence of a concentrated commercial or institutional node and the relative walking radius to that specific node (generally a 10-minute distance). They are also defined by centrally located public transit stations, geography, landscape features, street patterns, architectural design, building form and orientation, and institutional facilities. Social, economic, and cultural characteristics also influence the definition of

districts and neighborhoods.

Elements that influence boundaries

1. Geography and topography (example: Brookline is defined by a series of hills, such as Corey Hill and Pill Hill)
2. Street pattern (traditional grid compared to a modern collector road system)
3. Architectural character and style (roof forms, prevailing building materials, details, etc.)
4. Building footprint, scale, height, and massing
5. Lot size, setback, and building orientation
6. Public transportation
7. Commercial nodes
8. Institutional facilities—schools, town halls, etc.

“There is magic to great streets. We are attracted to the best of them not because we have to go there but because we want to be there.... They are symbols of a community and of its history; they represent a public memory. They are places for escape and for romance, places to act and to dream. On a great street we are allowed to dream; to remember things that may never have happened and to look forward to things that, maybe, never will.”

—ALLAN JACOBS, GREAT STREETS

Key Element: Affordable Housing

Preserving Diversity

SUMMARY

A proactive and thoughtful affordable housing program is critical to preserving Brookline’s identity as a welcoming community that values diversity. In neighborhood forums, in discussions by the Comprehensive Plan Committee, and in meetings of the Affordable Housing Working Group, participants overwhelmingly recognized the availability of affordable housing as a pivotal issue for continuing the diversity in income, age, household type, ethnicity, and race that is a key element of Brookline’s identity as a cosmopolitan community. The Working Group, which met four times and focused on policies and strategies, included members of the Comprehensive Plan Committee and the Housing Advisory Board. Its meetings were well-attended by the public, including representatives of the Brookline Housing Authority and the Brookline Improvement Coalition.

The Comprehensive Plan Committee and the Working Group agreed that the Town should establish a numerical goal and timetable for affordable housing creation. Brookline housing policymakers had long identified 10% as a minimum goal for the proportion of townwide units with restrictions governing both rent or sales price and household eligibility. Furthermore, Brookline’s recent experiences with housing development applications under the state’s Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit Law have lent additional urgency to meeting the state’s 10% goal for municipalities, while being sensitive to neighborhood concerns.

Currently, 2,062 of the Town’s 26,224 dwelling units, or about 8%, are Chapter 40B-eligible. The deficit, from the state’s point of view, is 560 units. Between 1987—when the Town rededicated itself to affordable housing through the establishment of a Housing Advisory Board, Housing Trust, and inclusionary zoning policy—and 2004, the Town added a total of 172 affordable units, or an average of 10 affordable housing units each year. The Committee and the Working Group agreed on the importance of

working toward a minimum goal of 10%, and the need to more than double current production to achieve, through conversion and new construction, an average of 25 affordable units per year. While this rate would require 20 to 25 years to achieve state and local goals, it is also an ambitious goal that will require the commitment of additional resources to affordable housing.

This element of the Comprehensive Plan will serve as the basis of Brookline's submittal to the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development for its Planned Production Affordable Housing Plan. Its implementation will be a demonstration of Brookline's commitment to meeting the State goals and help the Town withstand appeals of denials, by the Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals, of inappropriate Chapter 40B projects

The Appendix to this Plan includes a *Housing Brookline* report, which provides additional information about the Town's general housing stock, and its affordable units, programs, and achievements. An *Issues and Opportunities* report on Housing is found under separate cover, providing background data on the issue.

In order to achieve the Plan's affordable housing goals in a way that is compatible with neighborhood character, Brookline must implement seven key recommendations:

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

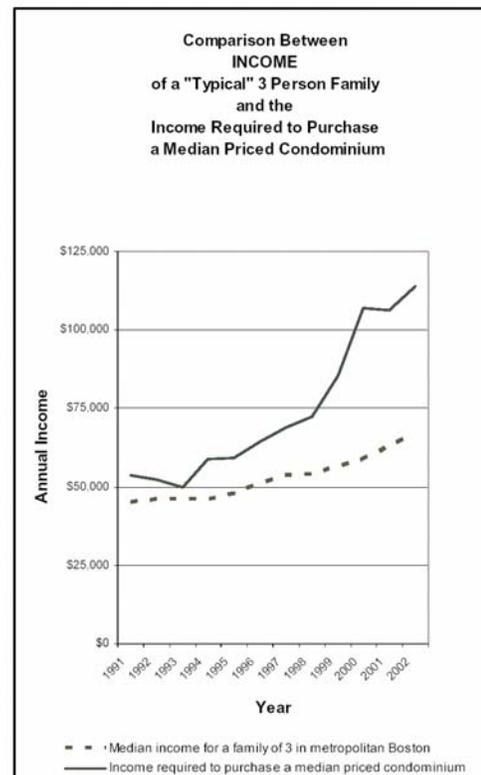
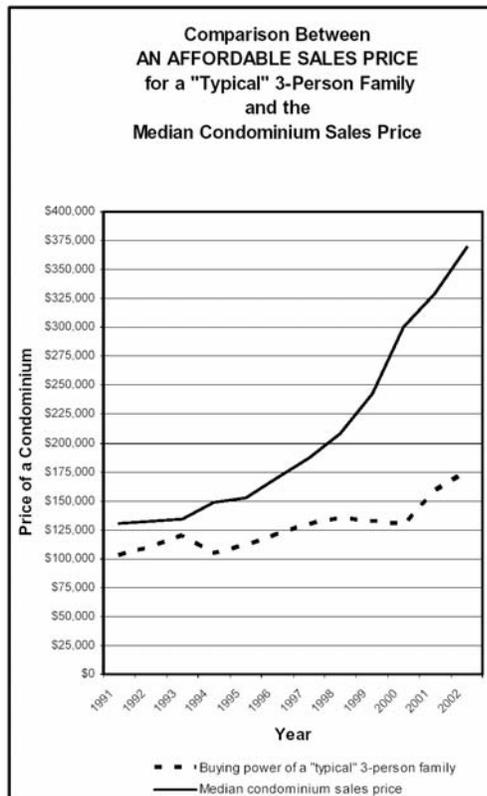
- > *Design in ways that are compatible with and sensitive to neighborhood character.*
- > *Preserve existing affordable units.*
- > *Convert existing market-rate rental units to affordable units.*
- > *Maximize the number of affordable units in new housing development projects.*
- > *Revise the Zoning By-law to enhance opportunities for affordable-housing creation in all parts of Town.*
- > *Identify and enact a predictable and dedicated local funding source for affordable housing.*
- > *Pursue legislative changes to promote state and federal affordable housing policies and programs that support Brookline affordable housing efforts.*

AFFORDABLE HOUSING VISION

To provide for the needs of residents and to help preserve and enhance the diversity of the Brookline community, an appropriate variety of housing by type and cost will be made available.

The Need for Affordable Housing in Brookline

Brookline's location close to Boston, its excellent public schools, and its overall high quality of life make it one of the country's most expensive communities. At the same time, Brookline is a community that prides itself on its diversity and its family-friendly atmosphere, assets that are increasingly placed at risk by the cost of its housing. It has become a truism that many of Brookline's current residents could not afford today to purchase their own homes, and while the typical firefighter or schoolteacher might once have been able to save and buy a home in Brookline, that is no longer the case.



Those who are economically excluded from the housing market are not just the low and moderate income families which housing programs—and the vast majority of the Town's current affordable housing inventory—have traditionally served. They are also households with incomes at or above the median income of the metropolitan area. A recent study of 2001 housing costs in 161 cities and towns of Greater Boston found that Brookline had the third highest median price for single family homes, after Weston and Lincoln. According to the latest U.S. Census in 2000, it took a family income of about \$110,000 to purchase a typical two-bedroom condominium in Brookline, which was more than the family income of half of current residents. For a typical single-family home, a family income of more than \$200,000 was required, more than the income of four out of five Brookline families.

These prices leave many families, even those with two incomes or with jobs related to the high-tech or medical industries, unable to remain in or move into the community. And the mismatch between income and housing costs only gets worse. Between 1991 and 2002, the median price of a condominium, the entry point for homeownership in Town, increased by 184%, while the median income in the Boston metropolitan area increased by 48%. To purchase a median-priced condominium in Brookline in 1991 required an income of 119% of the area median income; in 2002, it required an income of 170% of the area median. While the majority of Brookline's units are rental, the readily available information on home prices may be a proxy to what is happening in

WHAT IS AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

Affordable housing is housing targeted to and affordable by individuals who meet specific eligibility guidelines. Income eligibility is scaled to the median income of the metropolitan area, a standard updated annually by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Most state and federal housing funds are targeted to households with incomes at or below 80% of area median income—\$66,150 for a family of four in the Boston area in 2004—although the Affordable Housing Requirements of the Brookline Zoning By-law also recognize a target group at or below 100% of median. “Affordable” does not refer to the design, type, or cost of construction, but rather to the cost to the housing consumer to purchase or rent, and typically assumes housing that costs no more than 30% of the income of the target population. Affordable housing also often assumes deed restrictions, in order to preserve affordability for future generations.

the larger market. A survey specific to advertised rents for two-bedroom apartments in Brookline confirmed an increase of 29% between 1998 and 2001—from \$1,400 to \$1,800.

While discussion of housing needs tends to center on issues of cost, a diverse housing stock—including accessible housing, assisted living opportunities, units that can accommodate larger families—is also critical to assuring that the needs of a diverse community can be met.

Affordable Housing Supply

Eighty-six percent of Brookline's inventory of approximately 2,000 affordable housing units were developed prior to 1980. Almost half—921 units or 46%—are owned by the Brookline Housing Authority, built and operated with the help of subsidies from either the federal government or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The balance of the units were developed by for- or nonprofit owners using local, state, and/or federal subsidies, with the exception of 58 units created entirely through cross-subsidy by developers of market-rate units under the Town's inclusionary zoning by-law. Owners controlled by nonprofit corporations now own almost 60% of the nonpublic-housing affordable inventory. A small but growing number of units—22 presently occupied and 33 in the development pipeline—are condominium units with permanent resale restrictions, developed through inclusionary zoning and offered to income eligible homebuyers. Slightly more than half of the

Brookline's Households by Income Group, Tenure, and Housing Cost Burden

Household Income	Renters		Homeowners		All Households
	Elderly	Other	Elderly	Other	
Total Households With Incomes Below 80% of Median	1666	4473	700	995	7834
% with Cost Burden > 30% of income	61%	68%	71%	6%	67%
%with Cost Burden > 50% of income	36%	49%	54%	46%	46%
Total Households With Incomes Above 80% of Median	673	7252	1946	7914	17785
% with Cost Burden > 30% of income	25%	17%	14%	15%	16%
%with Cost Burden > 50% of income	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%
All Households	2339	11725	2646	8909	25619
% with Cost Burden > 30% of income	50%	37%	30%	21%	32%
%with Cost Burden > 50% of income	27%	19%	17%	7%	15%

Source: 2000 Census and HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data

Chapter 40B (the Comprehensive Permit Law)

Chapter 40B, originally known as the “anti-snob zoning” act, was enacted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1969 in order to broaden housing opportunities by counteracting the exclusionary effects of suburban zoning. The statute sets a goal that at least 10% of the housing in each municipality be “affordable,” in accordance with state guidelines. As an incentive to develop affordable or mixed income housing, Chapter 40B enables a developer to apply for a “Comprehensive Permit” that overrides local zoning. Until the municipality has reached the state’s 10% affordability standard, the decision of the local zoning board about a Comprehensive Permit may be overturned on appeal to the State Housing Appeals Committee.

Chapter 40B provides developers an incentive to develop affordable housing by allowing greater density than otherwise permitted. Typically, the additional market-rate units help underwrite the cost of the affordable housing. If a 40B development is designed carefully and with regard to the surrounding neighborhood, it can be an asset to the community. In some instances, however, developers have proposed a 40B that does not fit in the surrounding neighborhood, either because it is poorly designed or because it is simply too large. In the long run, the best defense against such poorly designed projects is to have a preemptive housing policy that reaches the state’s 10% goal.

Other regulatory tools for developing affordable housing also exist. On the local level, Brookline’s Zoning By-law has an affordable housing requirement, typically referred to as “inclusionary zoning.” It also provides modest incentives for affordable housing under its public benefits section. On the State level, Chapter 40R provides municipalities with financial incentives to create zoning overlay districts that promote transit-oriented, mixed-income housing. More information on these tools are available in the Appendix.

entire affordable inventory specifically serves the elderly; about 5% serves individuals living in lodging houses; and approximately 2% serves individuals with special needs. Waiting lists for affordable rental housing are long, and some have been closed.

Among the Town's affordable housing developments are a number of so-called "expiring use" projects. These privately-owned developments have affordability restrictions with short remaining terms. Upon expiration of restrictions, affordable units typically are converted to market rate. The Town has worked with the owners of four developments during the past two years to significantly extend the length of terms affecting 368 affordable units (in buildings with a total of 602 units). The most critical outstanding expiring use development is the 116-unit Brookline Cooperative.

The Brookline Housing Authority currently manages 574 vouchers under the federal Section 8 program. This program provides vouchers to low- and moderate-income tenants to pay for rent in privately-owned units. Only 388 of these vouchers are used in Brookline, and of those, only 111 are used in privately owned housing that is not otherwise subsidized. The other vouchers are used in affordable housing developments. The federal government has recently explored changing the reimbursement provided under Section 8, lowering the amount that would be provided to landlords.

Current Strategies for Affordable Housing

Brookline's Housing Advisory Board (HAB) develops policies to encourage the creation and preservation of affordable housing. The Town employs a variety of strategies to do so, including negotiating the extension of affordability with the owners of "expiring use" affordable projects; collaboration with nonprofit developer/owners which acquire, rehabilitate, and operate rental properties as permanently affordable housing; collaboration with non- and for-profit developers of new affordable or mixed income housing on either privately- or Town-owned land; enforcement of the affordable housing ("inclusionary zoning") requirements of the Zoning By-law; and enabling, through financial and technical assistance, income-eligible households to purchase lower-cost condominiums.

Many of the recently developed affordable units are in private, mixed-income developments created as the result of inclusionary zoning. Under this requirement, adopted in 1987, developers of new projects with six or more units must offer 15% of the units at affordable prices or rents, except that developers of projects with six to 15 units may choose to make a cash payment to the Housing Trust in lieu of providing such units. Between

1987 and 2004, this requirement will have produced 72 affordable units. While inclusionary zoning produces affordable housing at no monetary cost to the Town, from the point of view of neighborhood conservation, it is seen as inefficient, typically requiring five to six new market-rate housing units for each affordable unit produced.

From a financial point of view, inclusionary zoning will have provided approximately \$4.5 million in contributions to the Trust during the same 18 year period. The Town also has demonstrated a commitment to affordable housing by enacting a policy of contributing a percentage of free cash to the Housing Trust in any year in which free cash exceeds \$6 million. In addition to these two sources, the Town presently receives an estimated \$500,000 a year from the federal government through its participation in the WestMetro HOME Partnership Consortium. Finally, the Town has committed varying amounts of its Community



Development Block Grant allocation to affordable housing. By using funds from these sources, with the additional leveraging that these have brought from state and private sources, the Town has been able to achieve a modest increase in affordable housing through new development, as well as the redevelopment of existing market rate rentals.

Challenges to Affordable Housing Creation

Creation of affordable housing in Brookline faces significant challenges related to sites, costs, predictable funding resources, and neighborhood character issues.

Sites

There is very little vacant or underutilized land in Brookline, especially in existing multifamily districts. In addition, there is limited turnover of existing multifamily buildings which might provide opportunities for redevelopment.

Costs

Both land and buildings in Brookline are very expensive, increasing the financial challenges of underwriting affordable housing creation

through either the development of new units or the purchase of existing units. Rental buildings that do go on the market tend to be priced at levels only justified by market-rate condominium conversion. The cost of underwriting a typical affordable unit in Brookline is estimated at roughly \$300,000.

Parking Requirements

Brookline does not permit on-street overnight parking, requiring dedication of scarce developable land in any development for parking. Furthermore, the number of on-site parking spaces required by any new residential project, even in multifamily districts well served by mass transit, increases the already high costs of construction and/or encourages developments with fewer, larger units. Current parking requirements also make the addition of housing above existing retail all but impossible in most instances.

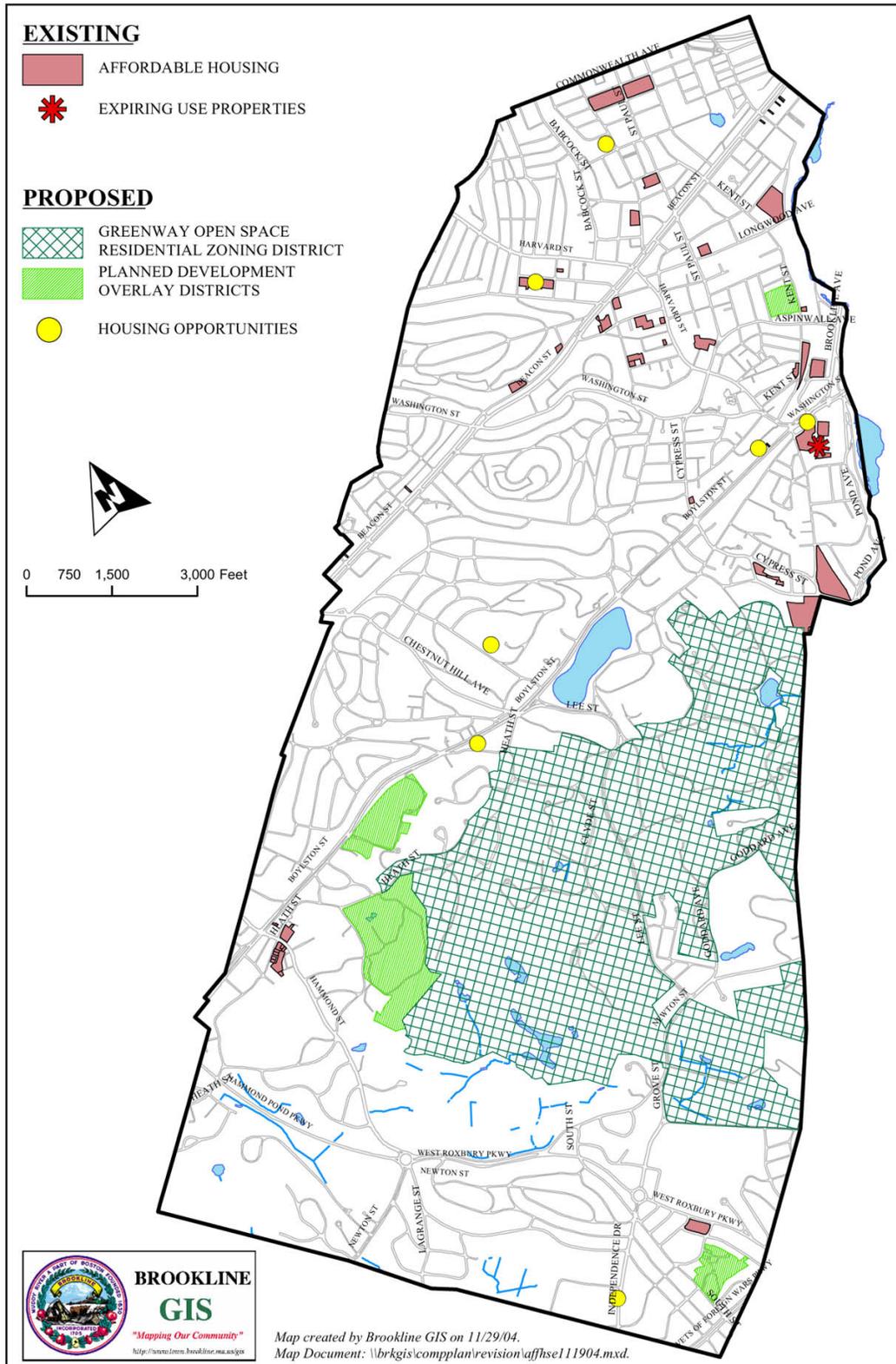
Financial Resources

The Town does not have access to sufficient and predictable funding for affordable housing creation, depending as it does on developer and free cash contributions to the Housing Trust, and annual allocations of federal HOME and CDBG funds. None of these funding sources is guaranteed in any year, while development is currently driven by opportunities that arise.

Issues of Neighborhood Character

Residents in all parts of Town are concerned about increased density and the appropriateness of new development with regard to number of units, overall project scale, and design. While the variety of housing types in many Brookline neighborhoods is largely seen as a positive attribute, it can also be used as a justification for proposing projects under Chapter 40B, or otherwise, which use the largest scale buildings as the standard. Keeping affordable housing developments, like all developments, in context with the character of a neighborhood, is essential for their acceptance as community assets.

Map 2: Affordable Housing



GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

- Work toward a minimum goal of 10% of the Town’s housing units being permanently affordable to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median.
- Work towards meeting or exceeding the Chapter 40B affordable housing goal.
- Continue to add housing permanently affordable to households with incomes between 80% and 120% of the area median income.
- Work toward a goal of adding a minimum of 25 units of housing to the affordable housing inventory every year for the next 25 years.

POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS

- Preserve existing affordable housing.
- Create affordable housing in all parts of Brookline.
- Encourage design of affordable housing that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood context.
- Add new housing to the permanently affordable inventory by making existing units affordable and by creating new units.
- Include access to affordable parking in conjunction with affordable housing to the extent possible.
- Seek creation of affordable housing for Brookline's diverse households, especially those with the least access to existing affordable housing, such as families and seniors requiring assisted-living units.
- To the extent permitted by law, give preference to Brookline residents and people with ties to Brookline.
- Seek the maximum time period permitted by law for affordability restrictions.
- Use Brookline dollars in ways that best leverage other public and private funding sources.
- Insure ongoing compliance by owners with affordability requirements.
- Work with the Brookline Housing Authority, the Brookline Improvement Coalition, and other nonprofit and for-profit affordable housing developers to encourage the development of local capacity, where appropriate, with regard to the role of sponsor, developer, owner and/or manager, as well as to maximize resources for specific projects.
- Site affordable housing in ways that do not significantly increase discrepancies in socioeconomic composition or class size among Brookline schools.

STRATEGIES

Affordable units in existing housing stock

> *Preserve existing affordable units.*

The difficulty of identifying sites and financing affordable housing underscores the importance of preserving affordable housing that already exists through negotiation of the longest possible terms of affordability with owners of housing with expiring restrictions, such as the 116-unit Brookline Cooperative.

> *Convert existing market-rate housing into affordable units.*

Using the existing rental housing stock creates affordable housing within existing buildings without impacting the fabric of neighborhoods. The Town should continue to:

- Work with nonprofit and for-profit developers to purchase and rehabilitate existing rental properties.
- Explore an affordability “buy-down” program with owners of existing rental properties to make some portion of the units affordable.
- Explore the purchase of scattered-site condominiums for affordable rental or resale with permanent affordability restrictions.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to low and moderate income homebuyers.

> *Evaluate the feasibility of a program to promote the creation of affordable accessory units.*

The promotion and permitting of affordable accessory units, a strategy being tested in other communities, may create affordable housing without changing neighborhood character.

Although the absolute number of affordable accessory units that could be created in Brookline may not be large, each unit would contribute in a seamless way to affordable housing in Town.

Affordable units in new development

> *Provide zoning incentives while being sensitive to neighborhood character.*

Zoning incentives need to be carefully tailored to particular sites and neighborhood contexts. Any new special permit incen-

tives for affordable housing creation must require explicit findings with reference to design and development standards.

- > *Support the development of small- to medium-scale projects that are compatible with neighborhood context and that include high proportions of affordable units.*

Affordable housing which does not require the addition of significant numbers of market-rate units, as well as typical projects developed by for-profit developers under Chapter 40B, or projects developed in compliance with inclusionary zoning, help achieve the goal of creating more affordable housing more efficiently from a land use perspective. A high affordability ratio may make an affordable housing project more competitive for state and federal housing resources. While requiring more financial resources from the Town, these could leverage more outside funding while creating a greater number of affordable units and minimizing neighborhood impact.

- > *Use Town and other publicly owned land as potential sites, where appropriate, for new affordable, mixed-income and/or mixed-use projects.*

Affordable housing should be considered in any planning process for development of surplus land such as the Fisher Hill reservoir. Town parking lots should also be considered as possible sites for developments that replace lost parking while achieving affordable housing and other Town goals.

- > *Make affordable housing incentives compatible with design and development standards in the recommended Neighborhood and District Plans.*

Incentives for affordable housing creation should be consistent with these plans.

- > *Include affordable housing in the "Public Benefits" sections of the Zoning By-law.*

Revise the public benefits section(s) of the Zoning By-law as they apply to the public benefit provided by affordable housing creation, extending their application town-wide, and to smaller sites. Clarify specific density, height, dimensional, and parking incentives, subject to performance standards, as appropriate to particular zoning districts and specific contexts.

- > *Establish Greenway/Open Space cluster zoning as of right in large-lot residential zones.*

Cluster zoning discourages subdivision of large lots into conventional, large-lot single-family properties, allowing the same number of units sited on smaller individual lots, and thereby preserving open space for the use of the entire subdivision or the public. Cluster zoning could provide an additional opportunity to apply inclusionary zoning, while providing the option of bonus market-rate units in return for the creation of affordable units that exceed the 15% requirement of inclusionary zoning. See the *Land Use and Housing* element for more information on this potential tool.

- > *Create Planned Development Districts as zoning overlays for institutional properties.*

Planned Development Districts would give the Town a greater role in shaping potential future development on institutional or other nonresidential properties through a special permit process. The districts would require the creation of an overall master plan that would include open space and affordable housing, and would be governed by specific design guidelines. See the *Land Use and Housing* element for more information on this potential tool.

- > *Establish targeted affordable housing overlay districts in commercial areas.*

Density bonuses, parking relief or flexibility, and other incentives should be made available in commercial districts to attract affordable housing above street-level retail and/or in new and existing mixed use buildings. Findings on area and site-specific development and design standards should be required.

- > *Consider creation of a standing task force representing open space, affordable housing, and commercial interests to balance these competing interests and set priorities with regard to specific parcels.*

Such a joint committee could enable the Town to respond proactively in a coordinated way to some of the difficult choices about trade-offs between these important public goods.

Funding for Affordable Housing

The addition of an average of 25 affordable units annually, combined with an emphasis on creating some of those units through conversion of existing market-rate rental housing to affordable housing, will require the Town to identify more predictable funding sources. The current policy of applying a percentage of free cash to the Housing

Trust under certain conditions is not a predictable source of funding.

> *Fund affordable housing through a formula in the Capital Improvement Program and by an increased allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds.*

> *To the extent that these sources are insufficient, pursue alternative Brookline-based programs.*

While the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting have demonstrated their reluctance to pursue the Community Preservation Act (CPA), it is worthwhile to consider Brookline-based programs that might provide sources of funding for affordable housing. For example, the Town should consider the creation of a condominium conversion fee, payable to the Housing Trust upon the conversion of a rental property, that excludes a fee for the unit, if any, occupied by the current property owner.

> *Adopt the option made available by recent legislation to abate taxes and penalties owed on tax-title properties that are converted into affordable housing.*

Although such properties are rare in Brookline, the Town should add this as a potential tool.

> *Designate commercial areas as Urban Center Housing areas that qualify for Tax Increment Financing.*

Recent state law allows municipalities to designate areas where they can grant tax exemptions for up to 20 years to developers of housing that meets a 25% affordability threshold. The Town should explore using the “UCH-TIF” to facilitate the development of mixed-income housing in specifically designated commercial areas.

> *Explore partnerships with institutions in the Longwood Medical and Academic Area to finance the creation of affordable units in existing or new housing.*

> *Advocate for maintenance of and increases to the funding for affordable housing provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the federal government.*

> *Explore the possibility of creating overlay districts under Massachusetts General Laws chapter 40R..*

Such overlays would require that 20% of housing in the district be considered affordable. In return, the state would provide the Town with funds from the state to pay for services. The interest of the Town in pursuing such overlay districts will be determined

by the regulations that are drafted for this new law, neighborhood interest in such overlays, and if and how the law is amended in future legislative sessions. See the Appendix for more information on 40R.

State and Federal Laws and Regulations

> *Seek amendments to Chapter 40B that take into consideration the accomplishments and challenges of costly, built-up communities like Brookline, which already have significant amounts of land zoned for multifamily housing, and which already have made significant progress towards the goals of Chapter 40B.* Such amendments include a change in the basis for measuring the rate of progress toward the 10% affordability goal from 0.75% of the community's total housing inventory per year to 10% of the community's affordable housing deficit over two years; inclusion, in the community's affordable housing count, of affordable units that serve households with up to 100% of area median income, accessory units with appropriate restrictions, and 100% of the units in condominium developments that meet the 25% affordability threshold; and inclusion of impacts on adjacent sites when project appeals are under consideration by the Housing Appeals Committee.

> *Monitor federal rental subsidy policy under the Section 8 program and advocate to keep Section 8 subsidies at current rates or higher.* The federal government provides rental vouchers to some low- and moderate-income tenants under the Section 8 program. These vouchers can substitute for rental payments in privately-owned units. In order to ensure that landlords participate in the program, it is important that the vouchers provide as much rent as that provided by the market. Recently, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development has discussed revising the formula by which the amount of these vouchers is calculated, reducing the amount a voucher would be worth in Brookline. Such a change would reduce the number of landlords willing to participate in the program in Town, exacerbating the affordable housing shortage.

Key Element: Route Nine

Balancing Regional and Local Needs

SUMMARY

The Route Nine corridor serves multiple functions: it is a regional transportation corridor providing access to Boston and the Longwood Medical and Academic Area; the primary link between the east and west portions of the town; an important civic space; and a corridor with the potential to support planned commercial and residential growth. The corridor experiences congestion in peak and off-peak hours, and regional traffic is expected to continue to grow. Despite the corridor's importance, the character of the corridor adjacent to Brookline Village and at Chestnut Hill falls short of community expectations. In the several public forums within the Comprehensive Plan process, including the Route Nine Working Group, improvements to the Route Nine corridor have been identified as a significant priority for the community. Creating an effective plan for the corridor's future will involve addressing each of its functions and creating integrated solutions.

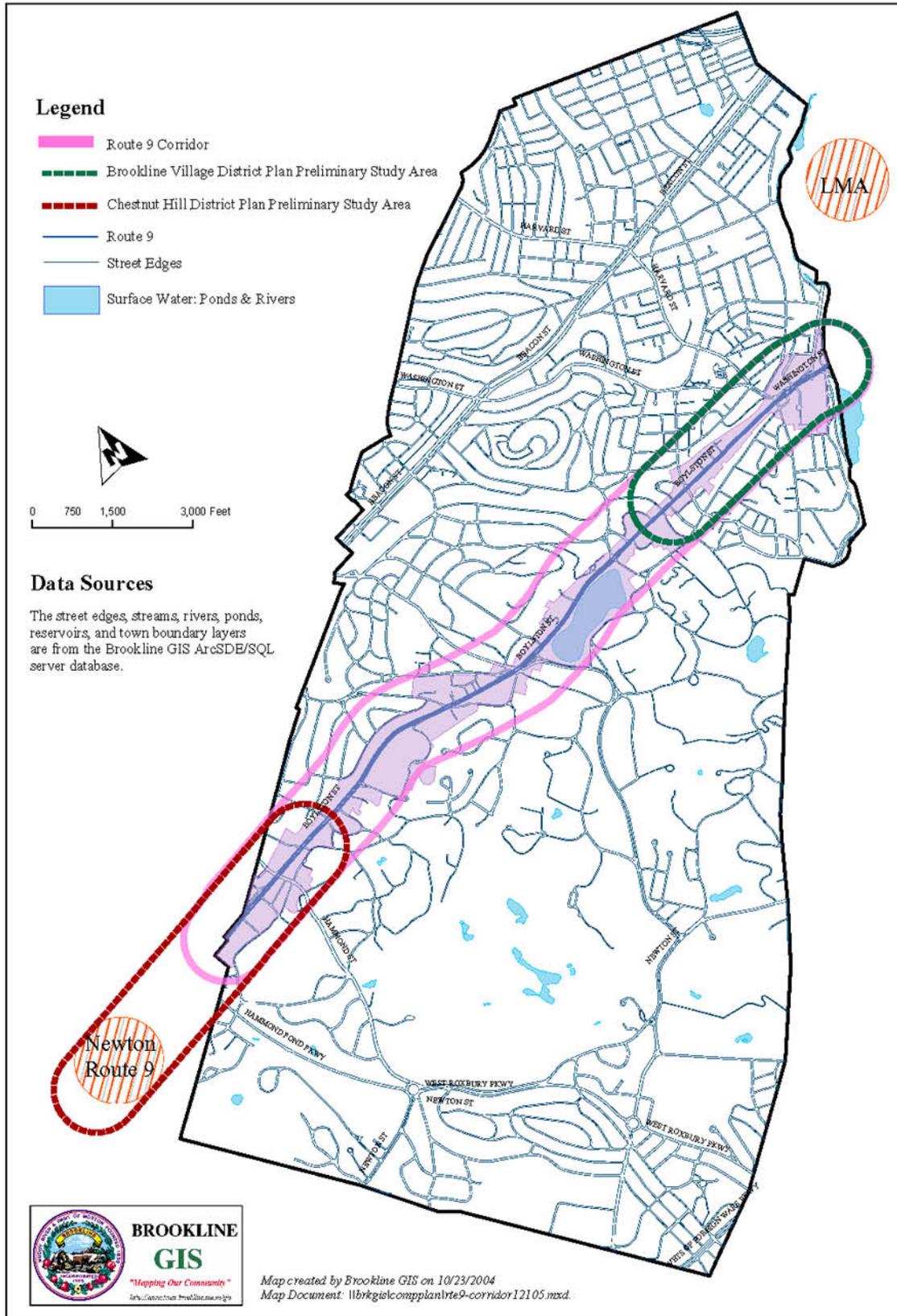
ROUTE NINE: VISION

Route Nine will not divide Brookline. The Town will work with all appropriate parties to minimize this division, both physically and in terms of perception, and to make the areas through which Route Nine passes more attractive for residents.

Key Recommendation

- > *Develop a Route Nine Plan that looks at the corridor from a regional perspective with a focus on increasing the attractiveness and livability of the corridor.*

Map 3: Route Nine Corridor



Route Nine: Corridorwide Issues

The future of the Route Nine corridor is of major importance to the Town of Brookline from a transportation, urban design, and growth perspective. Each of these issues ties into other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. However, key issues that relate to Route Nine are highlighted here. In addition, the *Issues and Opportunities* reports include background information pertaining to Route Nine.

Transportation

Areas of the corridor experience congestion in both peak and off-peak hours today as regional traffic flows continue to increase. Much of this growth is the result of significant development outside of the town's boundaries. This development is expected to continue, with major new projects planned in Boston and Newton over the next several years. Traffic volumes on Route Nine are large—with approximately 30,000 vehicles per day in the Cypress Street area and as many as 50,000 vehicles at Chestnut Hill. Regional traffic on Route Nine continues to grow, resulting in significant peak and off-peak hour congestion at key intersections. Delays are most significant at locations where important cross streets intersect the corridor—at Brookline Avenue, Washington Street, Cypress Street, Chestnut Hill Avenue, Hammond Street, and Hammond Pond Parkway. Regional traffic is anticipated to continue to grow based on continued employment growth in downtown Boston, in the Longwood Medical and Academic Area, in the City of Newton, and beyond.

Recent traffic studies by the state have focused primarily on potential improvements in Newton and other communities to the west, and have only minimally addressed issues related to the Town of Brookline. The Town of Brookline has initiated discussions with the state and regional bodies regarding undertaking a sub-regional corridor study for Route Nine in conjunction with surrounding communities. Such a study represents a significant opportunity to identify a regional approach to the future of the corridor. Brookline will be in a much better position to advance its agenda with the state if it presents its vision and goals supported by urban design and transportation data. As of the completion of this document, \$200,000 has been allocated in the state's 2004 Transportation Bond Bill for this study.

Urban Design and Open Space

The overall character of the Route Nine corridor has been cited by the Brookline community as one of the most persistent planning challenges facing the Town. Prior planning efforts aimed at enhancing these areas have focused primarily on creating zoning and associated design guidelines to shape future development. The Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity to create an overall urban design vision that integrates streetscape design, development, and transportation considerations. Accomplishing this goal will require an effective partnership with the state to identify improvements that are consistent with the town's overall vision and address the state's transportation goals for the corridor. Key urban design goals are:

- To create an attractive new gateway to the town at Brookline Village; strengthen connection to the Emerald Necklace
- To enhance the character of Route Nine between High Street and Smythe Street as an urban street; consider removing or enhancing the median
- To create Cypress Village, an attractive pedestrian-oriented node at Cypress Street to incorporate mixed-use development, including affordable housing
- To enhance the landscape character of Route Nine between Cypress Street and Chestnut Hill, with a particular focus on enhancing pedestrian safety and amenities and improved pedestrian and bicycle crossings at key intersecting streets, such as Chestnut Hill Avenue
- To strengthen the character and identity of Chestnut Hill Village through streetscape improvements and appropriately-scaled new development; strengthen the character of the village through provision of complementary new uses

Commercial and Residential Growth in the Route 9 Corridor

In the early 1990s, Town Meeting enacted several zoning changes within the corridor recommended by a Townwide development study. Several development projects have advanced within this framework, and other developments are now anticipated. In prior planning efforts within the town, Route Nine has primarily been envisioned as offering an opportunity for commercial development that can help to expand the community's tax base. Recent concerns have been expressed regarding residential expansion within the corridor, and the extent to which this limits the Town's potential to advance commercial development. Given the limited number of locations within the Town that can support either significant commercial or residential growth, however, development in the Route

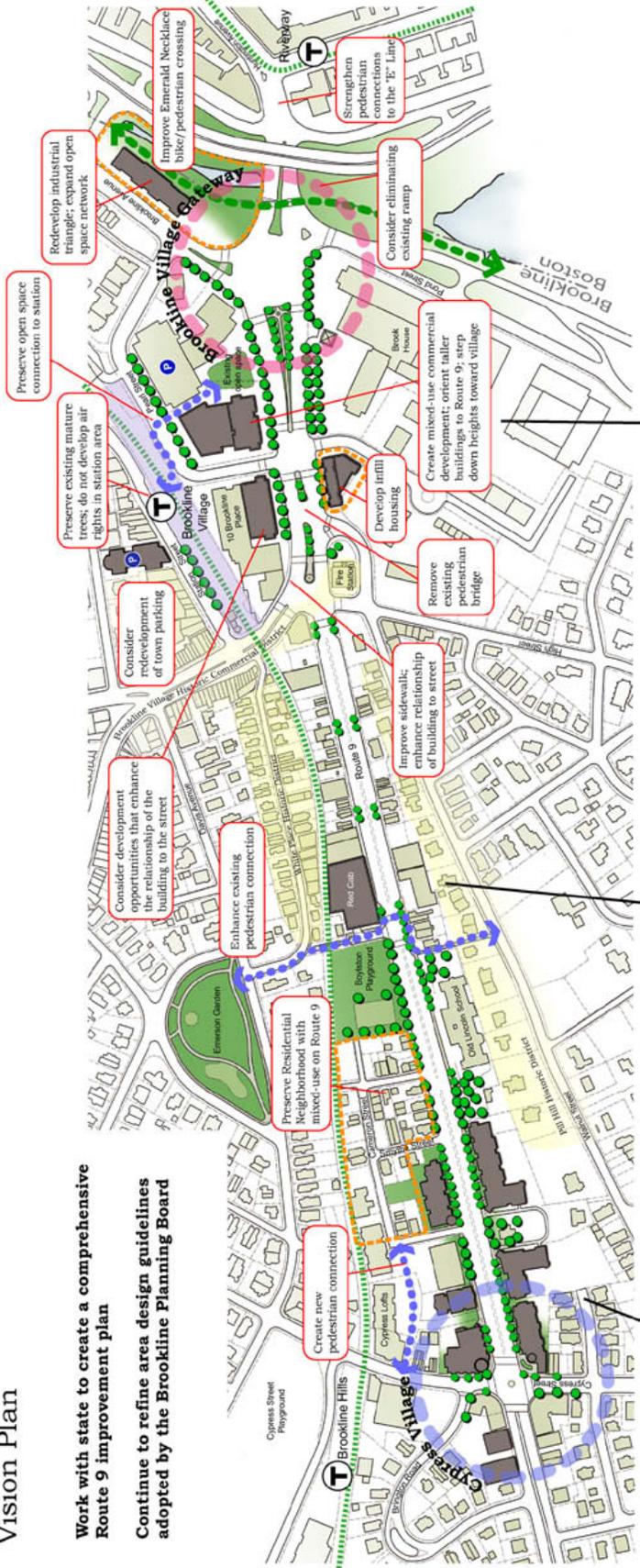
GATEWAY EAST: VISION FOR ROUTE 9 NEAR BROOKLINE VILLAGE



Gateway East: Brookline Village/Cypress Street Vision Plan

Work with state to create a comprehensive Route 9 improvement plan

Continue to refine area design guidelines adopted by the Brookline Planning Board



Create Cypress Village (Brington Road to Smythe Street)

- Redevelop key parcels near Cypress Street
- Encourage mixed-use development with a residential focus
- Include substantial affordable housing
- Promote shared parking -- enhance existing retail
- Widen sidewalks and enhance streetscape
- Improve pedestrian crossings of Route 9
- Eliminate cut-through traffic on Brington Road
- Establish transit oriented development district overlay

Create a safe and attractive pedestrian environment; incorporate compatible infill development (Smythe Street to High Street)

- Continue to support mixed-use infill development
- Consider removal or modification of median to change street character, reduce speeds
- Widen sidewalks where possible/include bumpouts
- Include new pedestrian-oriented lighting
- Add street trees
- Retain on-street parking
- Expand off-street parking to serve Lincoln School
- Consider town involvement in any Red Cab site redevelopment; Possible Site for affordable housing and/or mixed use

Redefine Brookline's Gateway (High Street to Emerald Necklace)

- Extend the Emerald Necklace to High Street
- Work with state to explore alternative long-term roadway options
- Encourage additional development to increase critical mass
- Promote mixed-use with office/retail/restaurant focus; incorporate other public amenities/uses
- Incorporate active uses at street level
- Create wide, attractive sidewalk along Route 9
- Locate taller buildings along Route 9, stepping down to Village
- Enhance Pearl Street character/improve station environment
- Remove Route 9 pedestrian bridge and provide improved at grade pedestrian crossings
- Establish transit oriented development district overlay

Nine corridor should incorporate a balanced mix of both uses. Residential projects that contain significant elements of affordable housing are particularly desirable along the corridor.

The market for commercial and residential development within the Route Nine corridor is strong, and represents a unique opportunity to support new commercial and residential growth within the town. As change is likely to occur through acquisition and/or redevelopment of existing real estate, and sites are generally small by regional standards, development is likely to occur in multiple steps over the next decade. Planned development could be accommodated on multiple sites in the Brookline segment of the corridor, especially near Brookline Village and Chestnut Hill.

Such development has the potential to result in additional property tax revenues to the Town. However, the level of growth that may be achievable in Brookline is likely to be quite modest compared with anticipated new development in Boston and Newton over the next several years. A recent proposal in Newton included almost one million square feet of development at a single site, and several projects of this size are contemplated in Boston's Longwood Medical and Academic Area, where more than 2,500,000 square feet is being developed. The Brookline Village and Chestnut Hill areas are expected to accommodate the most significant portions of growth. Fortunately, both are served by good transit. In particular, the Brookline Village area offers good quality transit service from two branches of the Green Line. The Town should seek development proposals that maximize use of transit service, and consequently have lower off-street parking needs and avoid over-reliance on the roadway network in peak hours.

One site that is likely to be redeveloped in the next few years is the Infant Jesus-Saint Lawrence Church in Chestnut Hill. That church is slated to close under the Archdiocese of Boston's reconfiguration plan, and would be sold by the Archdiocese to a public or private entity for development. The site is currently zoned for residential use. The Town should seek redevelopment of this site that is consistent with the character of the neighborhood, the characteristics of the site, and the townwide needs identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

Major new growth in the corridor will need to be supported by:

- A regional transportation plan for the Route Nine corridor
- Provision for public benefits
- Transportation demand management strategies to reduce vehicular travel on Route Nine
- Development of district plans for Brookline Village and Chestnut Hill, and neighborhood plans in other areas if appropriate

GATEWAY WEST: VISION FOR ROUTE 9 AT CHESTNUT HILL VILLAGE



GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

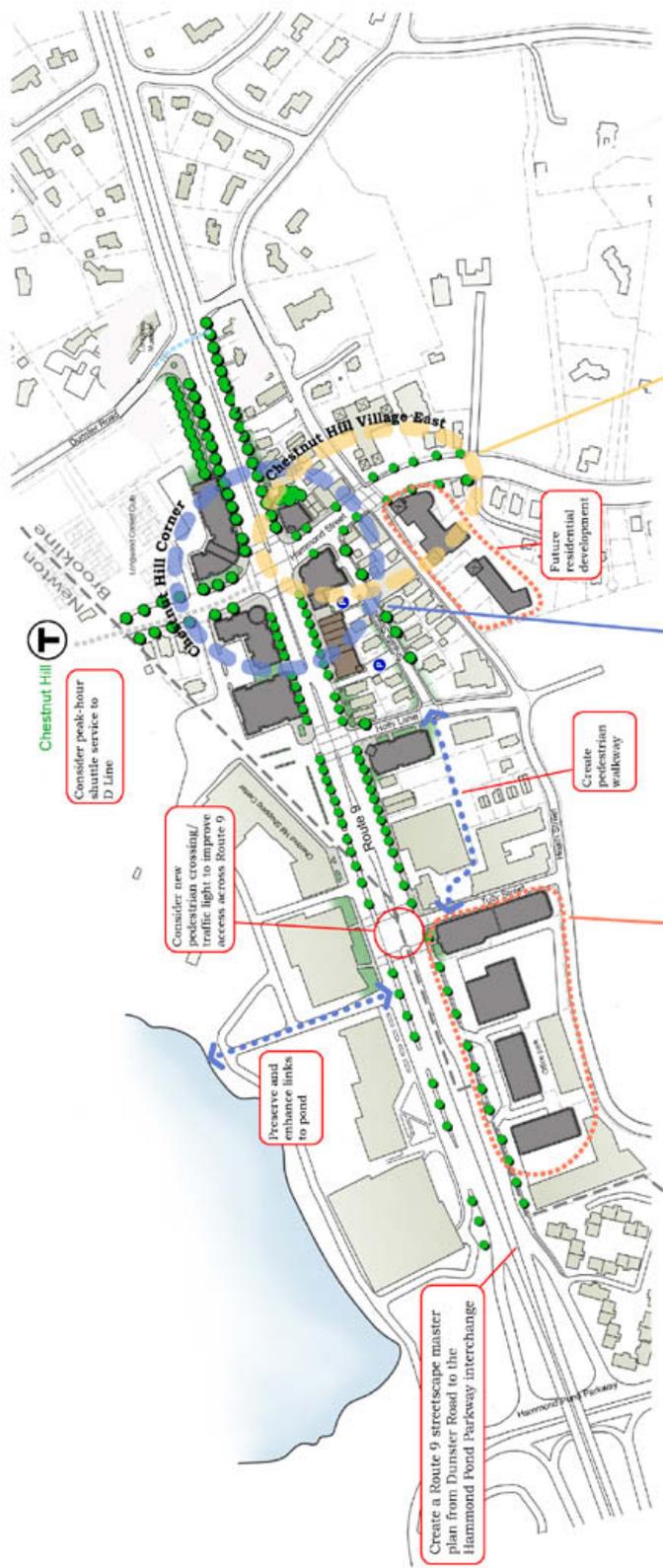
- Integrate neighborhoods such as Chestnut Hill that are divided by Route Nine.
- Convert Route Nine into an urban boulevard that has an active pedestrian and commercial frontage.

POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS

- Seek opportunities to create connections across Route Nine.
- Seek new commercial and mixed-use development opportunities on Route Nine.

Gateway West: Chestnut Hill Village

Vision Plan



Work with state to create a comprehensive Route 9 improvement plan

- Realign street to expand sidewalks
- Enhance streetscape (sidewalks, street trees, lighting)
- Relocate utilities below grade
- Enhance intersection operations without widening roadways
- Rework Hammond Pond Parkway interchange to enhance southbound connections

Work with City of Newton to shape long-term vision and residential uses that complement Village area

- Coordinate development plans
 - Advance Route 9 improvements
- #### Continue to refine area design guidelines adopted by the Brookline Planning Board; create guidelines for rezoned areas

- Amend 0-2 zoning to allow residential use
- Create pedestrian walkway between Tully Street and Holly Lane, linking uses

Support development of new commercial and residential uses at the Hammond/Route 9 intersection as the core of the Village

- Promote redevelopment of corner sites on west side of Route 9 for mixed-use commercial development and amend existing zoning to G-2.0
- Improve pedestrian connections across Route 9
- Consider elimination of peak-hour left turns to Hammond Street southbound

Strengthen the identity of the Village along Hammond Street east of Route 9 as a cohesive place

- Improve streetscape (trees, sidewalks, lighting) along Hammond Street
- Develop and strengthen a pedestrian network of alleys, pathways, and sidewalks
- Attract new uses to the Village area that serve the local market and are complementary to existing businesses
- Promote infill development of key sites
- Promote development/addition of upper floors for residential or commercial use

STRATEGIES

- > *Work with state government, regional organizations, Newton, and Boston to create a regional transportation improvement and planned growth plan for Route Nine east of I-95—the **Route Nine Plan**.*
 - Assess the overall capacity of the corridor to support long-term growth in Boston, Brookline and Newton.
 - Encourage alternative modes of travel.
 - Assess the impacts of regional growth on the functioning of Route Nine within the town.
 - Gather data on current Route Nine deficiencies within Brookline to be addressed and considered through a regional study.

- > *Work with state government to incorporate urban design and open space improvements as integral elements of the Route Nine Plan.*

- > *Ensure that the physical character of the corridor is enhanced as part of the Route Nine Plan.*
 - Advance streetscape improvements that enhance village centers and other key locations throughout the corridor.
 - Improve pedestrian amenities and safety throughout the corridor; incorporate consideration of pedestrian issues in any regional transportation study; seek funding to advance improvements.
 - Consider relocation of utilities below grade.

- > *Advance planned mixed-use commercial development and affordable housing along Route Nine in targeted areas.*

Route Nine represents one of the few opportunities for the Town to advance significant growth in its tax base and affordable housing. Prior studies have focused on the potential of the corridor to support commercial development alone. This plan envisions mixed-use development with a major element of mixed-income housing. Key next steps include:

 - Amend zoning to support additional commercial and residential development in selected locations.
 - Amend O-2 zoning to allow partial residential use within the zone.
 - Amend zoning at the Chestnut Hill Benevolent Association to allow the development of residential uses within a campus environment.

- Revise zoning around the Route Nine/Hammond Road intersection.
- > *Create **Gateway East**—an attractive new gateway to the town at Brookline Village and reshape the overall character of the corridor between the Emerald Necklace and Cypress Street.*
- Create a visual gateway to the Town of Brookline at the Boston line with a signature new open space combined with new mixed-use development projects.
 - Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to and along the Emerald Necklace; consider the feasibility of closing the ramp from Pond Street to the Jamaica way.
 - Plan for the long-term redevelopment of the industrial triangle.
 - Promote redevelopment of key parcels adjacent to Cypress Street to create “Cypress Village” on Route Nine with a mixed-use residential focus.
 - Explore planned development and potential Town acquisition of the Red Cab site or cooperative efforts with owners to ensure redevelopment accommodates mixed-use development and parking needed to support use of Lincoln School as a “swing” space for Town use during building renovations, or other sites.
 - Redesign the streetscape with new lighting and street trees planted close to the roadway; consider elimination or modification of the median between High Street and Cypress to slow traffic speeds.
 - Adjust lanes, intersections, and signals to improve peak hour traffic operations.
 - Revise and illustrate design and development guidelines for Village Square and Route Nine between Cypress Street and Washington Street.
 - Advance planned development of 2 Brookline Place and 10 Brookline Place; revise zoning and design guidelines for this area.
- > *Create **Gateway West**: Strengthen the character and identity of Chestnut Hill Village as an important community and commercial destination.*
- Create a District Plan for the village area (see the “Neighborhoods and Districts” Key Element).
 - Work with the state to accomplish significant improvement in pedestrian character and safety; widen sidewalks; consider an adjustment to the right-of-way alignment to create an enhanced pedestrian environment.

- Consider options to improve vehicular operations at Hammond Street; consider the possibility of eliminating peak hour southbound left turns at Hammond Street and diverting these movements to a reconstructed Hammond Pond Parkway.
- Strengthen the character of the Route Nine/Hammond Street intersection through streetscape improvements and planned development.
- Prepare a plan for residential and commercial development that adds to the strength of the village as a community center.
- Develop a community consensus around reuse of the Infant Jesus-Saint Lawrence Church if it does close, with a focus on commercial or affordable housing uses.
- Improve pedestrian connections across Route Nine and links to area open spaces.
- Allow limited residential use in O-2 zones.
- Work with the City of Newton to coordinate city and town plans for the Chestnut Hill area and Route Nine.

> *Develop amendments to the Zoning By-law that permit the development of Route Nine as envisioned in this section and in the Route Nine Plan*

VISION FOR CYPRESS STREET AT ROUTE NINE

