

The Design Subcommittee completed its observations of Newton Centre. We documented many of the existing conditions and identified many opportunities as well as a few constraints to be considered in the future development of Newton Centre. Although we documented so-called constraints, we are confident that many of these can be overcome with proper negotiation as a vision for Newton Centre is developed. Issues analyzed include massing of buildings, natural grades, pedestrian paths, streetscapes, open space, public amenities and potential gateways to the Centre. The findings are outlined in the following pages.

1. MASSING OF BUILDINGS

Observations of Existing Conditions:

- ⌘ The majority of the buildings in Newton Centre are one to two stories high. However, a number of taller buildings also exist in Newton Center. The most identifiable ones are:
  - Piccadilly Square, on Union St., 3 floors.
  - Apartments on Herrick Road, 3-1/2 floors. (See Photo 1)
  - First Baptist Church on Beacon and Centre Streets.
  - Former Post Office building on Sumner St., 2 floors.
  - Casselman House on Sumner St, 4 floors.
  - Former church that is now an office building, on Langley Road, 4 floors.

- Sweet Tomatoes building on Langley Road, 3 floors.



(Photo 1: Apartments on Herrick Road)

- In addition to their height and overall mass, many of these structures are appealing because they have architecturally-detailed facades, and combine a mix of materials such as brownstone, granite, brick, glass, and concrete.
- Those areas of Newton Centre with continuous storefronts (i.e., with no buildings set back from the street or driveway cut-throughs) offer pedestrians a very pleasant consistent experience. Even those tall buildings that are not set back from the sidewalk do not feel overwhelming.
- The Piccadilly Square building on Herrick Road/Union Street has an entrance to "basement" shops, which

adds visual/spatial interest on the street and provides additional commercial floor space.

#### Opportunities:

- ⌘. New three, four or five story buildings (or additional stories on existing, one-story buildings) would complement the existing taller buildings. These structures would not visually or spatially overwhelm the Centre, but would frame the streets, and anchor the corners of prominent intersections. New three and four story buildings along Langley Road and Beacon Street on the site of the existing City-owned parking lot would enhance the streetscape by framing the street with buildings on both sides, and generate more pedestrian activity. A tall building at the tip of the parking lot would particularly serve to mark the entrance to the core of Newton Centre.
- Facades of new buildings, particularly entrances, should be detailed with a variety of elements (awnings, columns, windows, thresholds, planters, window boxes, balconies) and materials (stone, wood, glass, concrete, metal and brick) to add excitement and diversity at the pedestrian scale. Consistent signage on buildings, along with an established palette of sidewalk paving, crosswalk treatments, benches, tree planting, and lighting, would provide an overall

cohesive framework and identity to the Centre in which the architectural diversity can play.

- New trees should be added to the existing trees in Newton Centre to balance the massing of new structures and add to the image of Newton as 'The Garden City'. Currently some of the trees along the parking lot side of Langley Road are 20-30' tall; larger buildings in the parking lot would complement this existing streetscape.

#### Constraints:

- Currently the majority of buildings in Newton Centre are one story with facades that don't fully engage the public or offer conveniences such as seating or shelter from the weather. Some of the buildings are older and in need of a face-lift. The lack of upper story housing also contributes to the empty streetscape.
- Those buildings set back from adjacent buildings along the sidewalk interrupt the pedestrian experience of Newton Centre.
- Those buildings with driveways or drive-throughs particularly impinge on the pedestrian experience in Newton Centre. Crossing pedestrian and vehicular routes is a safety hazard.

## 2. NATURAL GRADES

### Observations of Existing Conditions:

- There are a number of areas in Newton Centre that slope. These include:
  - The grade drops along Centre Street from the intersection of Beacon Street to the Dellaria Salon.
  - The grade drops along Langley Road as it meets Beacon Street from the south.
  - The grassed area that contains the MWRA water line drops from Lyman toward the firehouse and the Dellaria Salon.

### Opportunities:

- Sloping topography allows new structures to build a ground floor into the hill that will only be visible from the downhill side (similar to a walk-out basement on a house). From the uphill vantage point this lower basement story will not be visible, thereby lessening the visible mass of the building.



(Photo 2: Langley Road south of Beacon)

The Langley Road building above (Photo 2) adds a full floor on the downhill side

### Constraints

- ⊖ It may be difficult to build structures over the MWRA easement.

## 3. PEDESTRIAN PATHS

### Observations of Existing Conditions:

Other than the concrete sidewalks along the streets and the walkways in the parks along Centre Street, few pedestrian paths exist in Newton Centre. Segments of paths exist, but often a route is cut off at property lot lines.

- > Currently one pedestrian path cuts through from Union Street to Beacon Street. It varies from 4'-6" wide to 5'-10" wide. A new path branches off of this path to lead to an outdoor patio area behind one of the Union Street restaurants.
- > Pedestrians walk down a wide vehicular lane to arrive at the Union Street Restaurant.
- > Pedestrians use the Bank of America drive-through to walk between Union and Beacon Streets.
- > Pedestrians walk up to use the drive-through ATM at Bank of America.
- > There is an "unofficial" path/desire line between the Walgreen's parking lot and Sumner Street. At the time of the Subcommittee's initial observation, a chain link fence had been cut to allow people to walk from Sumner Street to the parking lot. This fence has since been fixed.

Opportunities:

- > There are several locations where pedestrian paths could be created or enhanced between Union Street and Beacon Street and amongst the existing shops. This will improve pedestrian access to the T and between the various businesses in the block. It also

provides the opportunity to add new commercial space and additional entries to existing buildings along pedestrian routes.

- > A dedicated pedestrian walk from Union and/or Beacon Streets to the Union Street Restaurant would be safer and potentially more interesting. The possibility of establishing a pedestrian path from Union Street Restaurant to Café Sol Azteca should be explored. This would encourage rear entries to some of the existing stores on Union Street.
- > Establish pedestrian paths through any development that occurs in Newton Centre; enhance any pathways that currently exist.
- > Meandering pedestrian pathways with varying widths would create a welcomed variety of experience.

Constraints:

- > Many of these potential pedestrian routes are currently impeded by privately owned drive throughs and parking lots.
- > Vehicular service access to shops and restaurants often conflicts with potential pedestrian paths and must be considered when planning new walks.

#### 4. STREETSCAPE

##### Observations of Existing Conditions:

- Average Total Road Widths (parking lanes measure 9'-wide and are included in the measurements listed):
  - Beacon Street (west of intersection with Centre): 36' wide, including two lanes of parking
  - Centre Street: averages 53' wide (in the three lane section, north of Beacon), including two parking lanes. Centre widens to 77' at the intersection with Beacon Street, in front of the Starbucks. South of Beacon, Centre measures 61' wide from the First Baptist to the parking island, and an additional 23'-wide turning lane lets cars turn right/east onto Beacon Street.
  - Langley Road: 37' wide, including two parking lanes.
  - Lyman Street: 24' wide. No parking lanes.
  - Sumner Road: 32' wide (in the one way section in front of the former P.O.), including two parking lanes
  - Union Street: 41' wide, including two parking lanes
  
- Most of the existing sidewalks in Newton Centre are 8'-10' wide, and are made of concrete. A 10' width is wide enough for light pedestrian traffic/window-shoppers, but cannot simultaneously accommodate benches, planters, or outdoor seating areas.

- Many of the street trees are planted in 3'x 3' planting pits and need more underground root space to thrive.
  
- The sidewalk in front of Betsy's on Union/Herrick Street widens to 17'. This allows stairs down to basement shops, and allows some outdoor seating on street level at the Big Sky Bread Company.



(Photo 3: Union Street streetscape)

##### Opportunities:

- Vary the width of sidewalks to establish a variety of spaces, from grand to intimate.
  
- Introduce a streetscape palette of materials to establish a consistent overall framework that will give an identity to Newton Centre. This should include:

- Brick or concrete paver sidewalks, perhaps combined with poured-in-place concrete.
  - Granite, brick or concrete paver crosswalks in the streets.
  - Benches, trash receptacles, bollards, tree guards, decorative streetlights, planters, bicycle racks, all in a coordinated style and color.
  - Hanging planters off the light poles, window boxes along storefronts, and planters along the street will add color, enliven the Centre, and reinforce Newton's status as 'the Garden City'.
- > Establish signage guidelines for businesses in the Newton Centre district.
- > Encourage/require businesses to add awnings or overhangs to add liveliness and color to the space and provide protection from weather.

Constraints:

- > Utility wires and poles greatly detract from the current and potential aesthetics of the streetscape and conflict with existing and potential tree canopies.
- > The sidewalk along the south side of Beacon Street is narrow with too many curb-cuts and building set back from the street. This disrupts the pedestrian experience.

- > Other than the 17'-wide sidewalk at Betsy's on Union Street, none of the current sidewalks are wide enough for outdoor cafes.

5. OPEN SPACE

Observations of Existing Conditions:

Current open spaces include:

- > The park between Centre Street and the parking lot. This park contains some specimen trees and a border of flowers maintained by Newton Pride.
- > The grassed area along Centre Street, which lies to the north of the Newton Pride park. This lot currently accommodates occasional outdoor concerts and fairs.
- > The MWRA strip of land along the north side of Lyman Street is grassed only.
- > Lawn area between the Fire Headquarters and the Dellaria Salon.
- > The Newton Centre Playground diagonally across from the MWRA lot. While the playground is not included in our study area, it is important to note its close proximity for potential linkage to open space in the Centre itself.

- > The Samuel Francis Smith memorial across from the MWRA property on the west side of Centre Street. It is raised above street level by a stone wall and is not prominent from the street.
- > The sloping triangular parcel bordered by Langley, Beacon and Union Streets.
- > The 15'-wide median strip in front of Rosenfeld's along Centre Street.

Opportunities:

- > The adjacencies of the existing open spaces establish a substantial thread of green open space that should be improved and extended throughout the Centre.
- > The existing park and flower border maintained by the Newton Pride Committee could become the centerpiece of Newton Centre. Extending it into a portion of the potential parking lot development could further enhance the park. This might take the form of a planted pedestrian walkway.

Constraints:

- > The development possibilities of the MWRA site are uncertain at this point.

- > Too few benches, trash receptacles and other site amenities in the existing open spaces do not maximize their current potential.

6. PUBLIC AMENITIES

Observations of Existing Conditions:

- > Few public amenities currently exist in Newton Centre. There are a couple of benches in the flower border at the west edge of the parking lot and along Langley Road, and a few trash receptacles scattered along Langley Road and Union Street. Johnny's Restaurant and Big Sky Bread Company are able to squeeze a few tables outdoors for its patrons.
- > There is little available meeting space (both indoor and outdoor), and no public bathrooms. The green space currently used for summer concerts is inadequate for this purpose.

Opportunities:

- > The grade of the MWRA easement lends itself to an amphitheatre where summer concerts and outdoor meetings could be held.

- D Picnic tables and additional benches would provide a place for employees to gather and socialize during lunchtime.
- D 16-18" high planters could double as seating areas (several people were observed sitting on the curb in front of Cold Stone Creamery eating their ice cream).
- D Kiosks situated close to the T as well as in the Langley Road area would attract people, allowing them to gather and read notices for upcoming city events.
- D A small plaza/patio with seating would encourage small groups to meet outdoors.
- D A gazebo could provide a space for public events.
- D A municipal building could contain rooms for indoor meetings.
- D Public restrooms could be incorporated into a new parking garage and/or municipal building.
- D Interpretive signage about the history of Newton as well as about available citywide resources could be incorporated into a plaza and/or municipal building.
- D Public art could be integrated throughout the parks, sidewalks, and plazas.

## 7. GATEWAYS TO NEWTON CENTRE

### Observations of Existing Conditions:

Currently no identifying structures exist to mark the entrance into Newton from the east and west on Beacon Streets, and from the north and south on Centre Streets. The most noticeable entry markers are the Dellaria Salon on the north, the fork of Centre and Parker Streets on the south, and the video store on the east edges of the Centre.

### Opportunities:

- D 10'-wide raised treed medians along Centre and Beacon Streets would begin to mark the entrance to the Centre. Medians would also enhance the safety of crossing pedestrians, as well as convey the message that Newton is the Garden City.
- D A new structure on the triangular corner of the current parking lot could serve as a landmark signifying the entrance to the core of the Centre.

### Constraints:

- D Adding a 10'-wide median means losing a lane of street parking.