The Brookline Comprehensive Plan will help Brookline make choices about its future.

## How do we want Brookline to look in 2015?

The Brookline Comprehensive Plan process established how residents want Brookline to look and feel in ten years. The Plan calls for balanced and carefully planned growth, accounting for neighborhood conservation and community diversity. It protects neighborhoods and community character and outlines new initiatives such as affordable housing supported by an expanded commercial tax base. It imagines:

- Commercial growth focused primarily in the Route 9 corridor
- Annual creation of at least 25 units of affordable housing townwide
- Initiatives to enhance community connections and preserve neighborhood character and
- Open space protection and enhancement

At its root, the Plan is based on the idea that the Town will continue to evolve and change. If the Town does not proactively plan for these changes, they will occur due to outside forces and the Town will not have any control over how they occur. On the other hand, taking an active role in shaping new development can improve the quality of life for residents.

## How will we get there?

The Brookline Comprehensive Plan, through several rounds of public

## *COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VISIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS*

**Neighborhoods and districts:** *The unique and attractive qualities of Brookline's neighborhoods and districts will be maintained. Town actions and policies should enhance the livability of the Town for residents. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Develop District Plans for Coolidge Corner, Brookline Village and Chestnut Hill
> Develop Neighborhood Plans in other parts of Town where needed
> Protect neighborhood character while accomodating change and Town-wide needs
> Enhance commercial districts for the benefit of residents and visitors

**Affordable housing:** *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. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Promote affordable housing Town-wide
> Produce 25 affordable housing units a year, preferably through conversion of existing market-rate units
> Be sensitive to neighborhood character
> Preserve existing affordable housing units

**Route Nine:** *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 Route Nine passes through more attractive for residents. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Develop a Route Nine Plan to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods along the corridor
> Advance mixed-use development in appropriate locations, including commercial development & affordable housing
> Create attractive gateways to the Town at the east and west

**Historic resources:** *Brookline will continue to respect and utilize structures and landscapes with historic significance that are part of its legacy for the future. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Evaluate the potential of a landmarks by-law or single building local historic districts to preserve historic resources
> Create incentives for adaptive reuse of historic buildings through zoning requirements
> Make the demolition delay by-law more effective

**Natural resources, open space, parks and recreation:** *Public open space throughout the Town will be preserved and enhanced, and every opportunity will be taken to add new open spaces and programming. To the extent possible, efforts will be made to preserve and protect private open spaces. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Protect significant, unprotected open spaces such as Allandale Farm
> Proactively plan for the future through the 2005 *Open Space Plan* and the *Recreational Facilities Management Plan*
> Adopt a local wetlands by-law
> Use zoning tools such as Greenway Open Space Residential subdivisions and open space zones to protect open space
> Adopt a Town conservation restriction program

**Land use and housing:** *Any new developments proposed in Brookline will demonstrate that they complement existing uses and the character of the Town as a primarily residential community with a particular range of building types and densities. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Make sure that existing zoning matches the desired land uses and densities throughout Town
> Include neighborhood residents in the development review process

**Economic development:** *Appropriate new mixed-use and commercial development will be encouraged. Businesses in commercial areas will be fostered. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Expand commercial tax revenues
> Promote commercial growth in appropriate areas along Route Nine
> Enhance existing commercial areas as lively, appealing and functioning community meeting places

**Transportation and mobility:** *The ability of Town residents and visitors to travel within Brookline and to other parts of the region will be maintained and alternatives to the automobile will be encouraged. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Improve the Town's capacity to develop a proactive transportation planning agenda
> Support transit-oriented development that will minimize the traffic impact on residential neighborhoods
> Identify bicycle and pedestrian priority routes

**Town, school and cultural facilities:** *The Town will continue to maintain and, where needed, improve its public facilities. To accomplish this, the Town will:*

> Continue to invest in Town capital facilities and infrastructure to address evolving community needs and information technologies
> Maintain excellent schools

# 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.

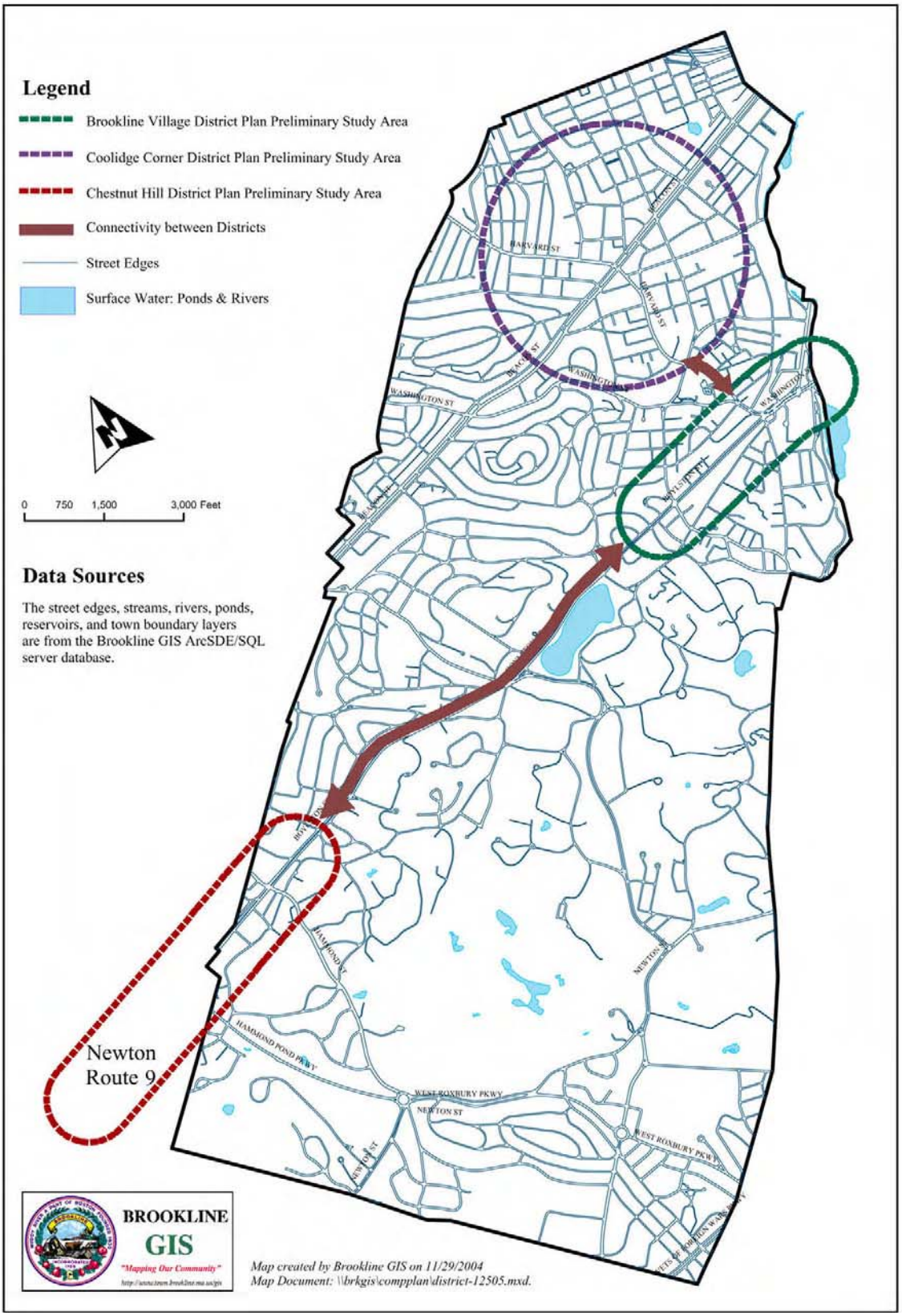
*COMMERCIAL AREAS: Enhance commercial districts as lively, appealing, and functional community meeting places that attract customers and visitors, and support a mix of businesses.*

*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

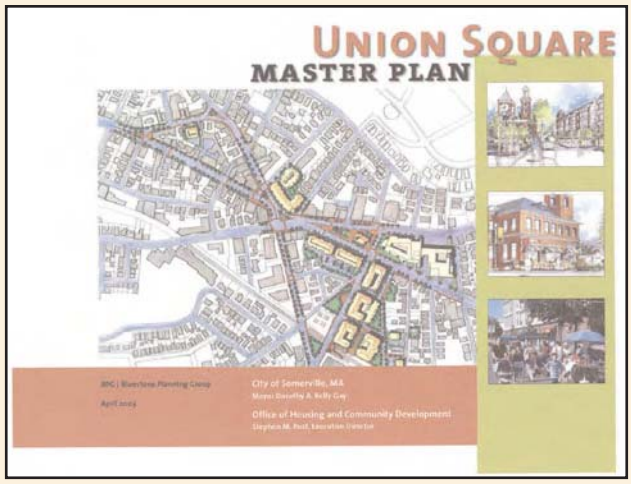
- Include neighborhood consultation early in the project development process.
- Identify standards of acceptable and unacceptable development for particular areas through neighborhood plans and make the development process more efficient by communicating these standards to project proponents.

## STRATEGIES

# Key Strategy

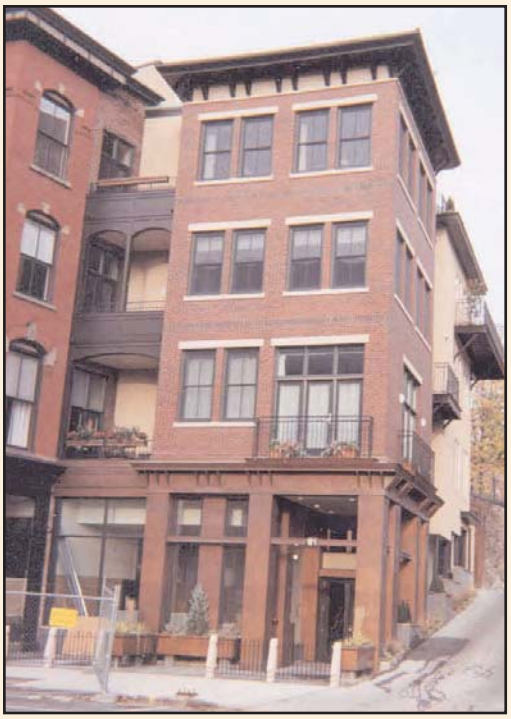
*Create Neighborhood and District Plans with development and design standards to help guide new development in a more specific and appropriate way than is available under traditional zoning.* District Plans should be developed for Coolidge Corner, Chestnut Hill and Brookline Village by the Department 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.



INFILL BUILDINGS SHOULD RESPECT THE SCALE OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS

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.

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 an Neighborhood Plan in an identified area, or the initiative for an 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 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 perservation. 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 incude:

> *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.

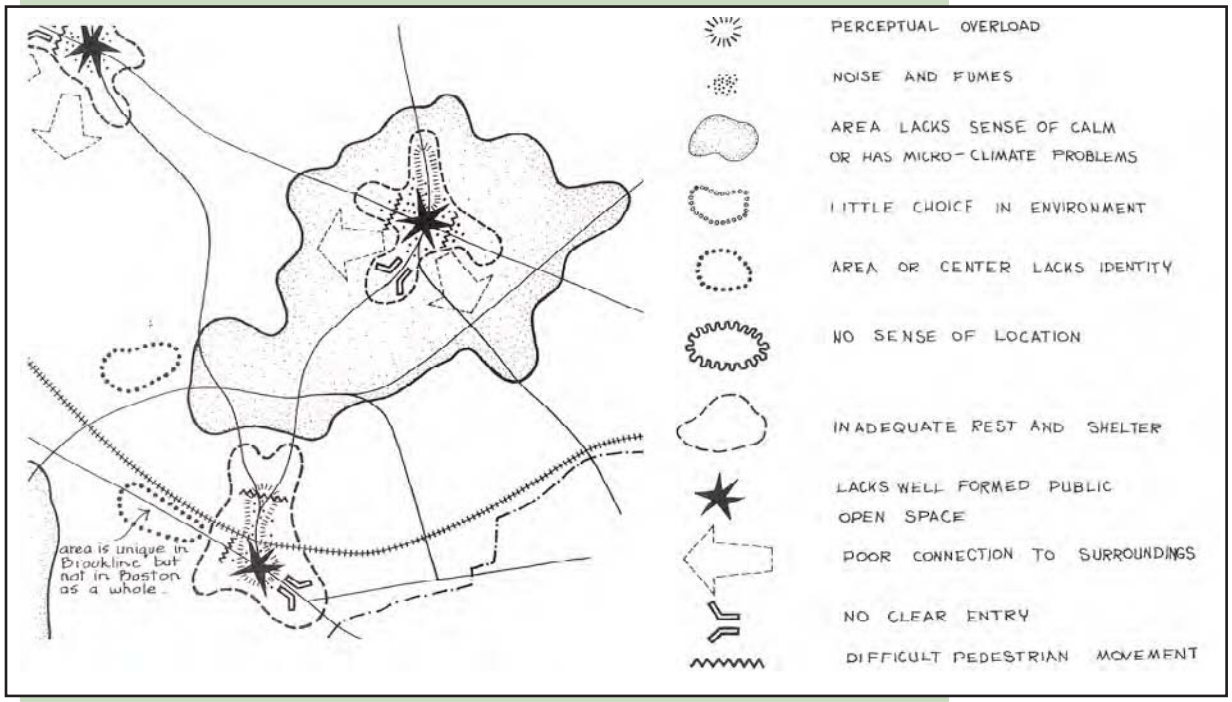
### 1 Brookline's Form

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."*

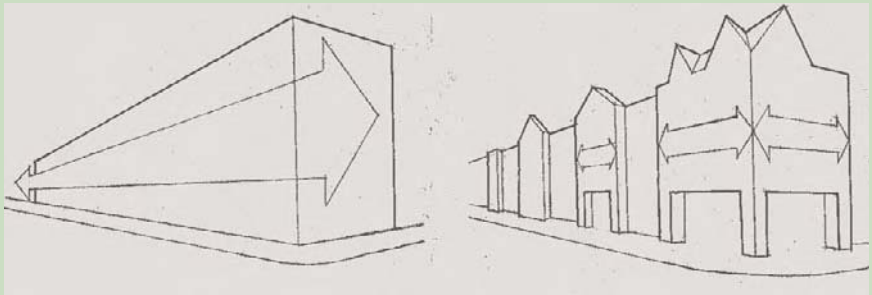
—KEVIN LYNCH, BROOKLINE VISUAL ANALYSIS, 1965

*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:

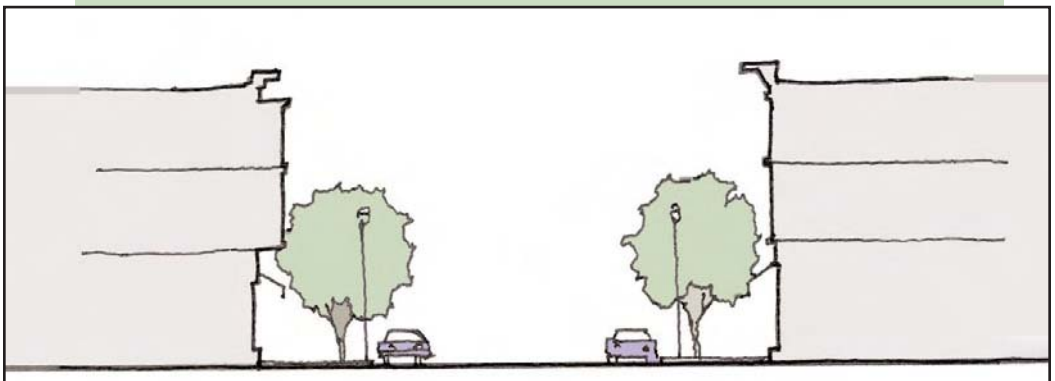
- Definition (street wall and proportions)
- Visual interest and activity
- Transparency
- Surface articulation (opportunity for light and shadow)
- Street trees (filtered light and shade; enclosure)



**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 exists, some re-engineering may be possible to at least add some of the elements of a great streetscape.



A “GREAT” STREETSCAPE

A TYPICAL SUBURBAN 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: 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.

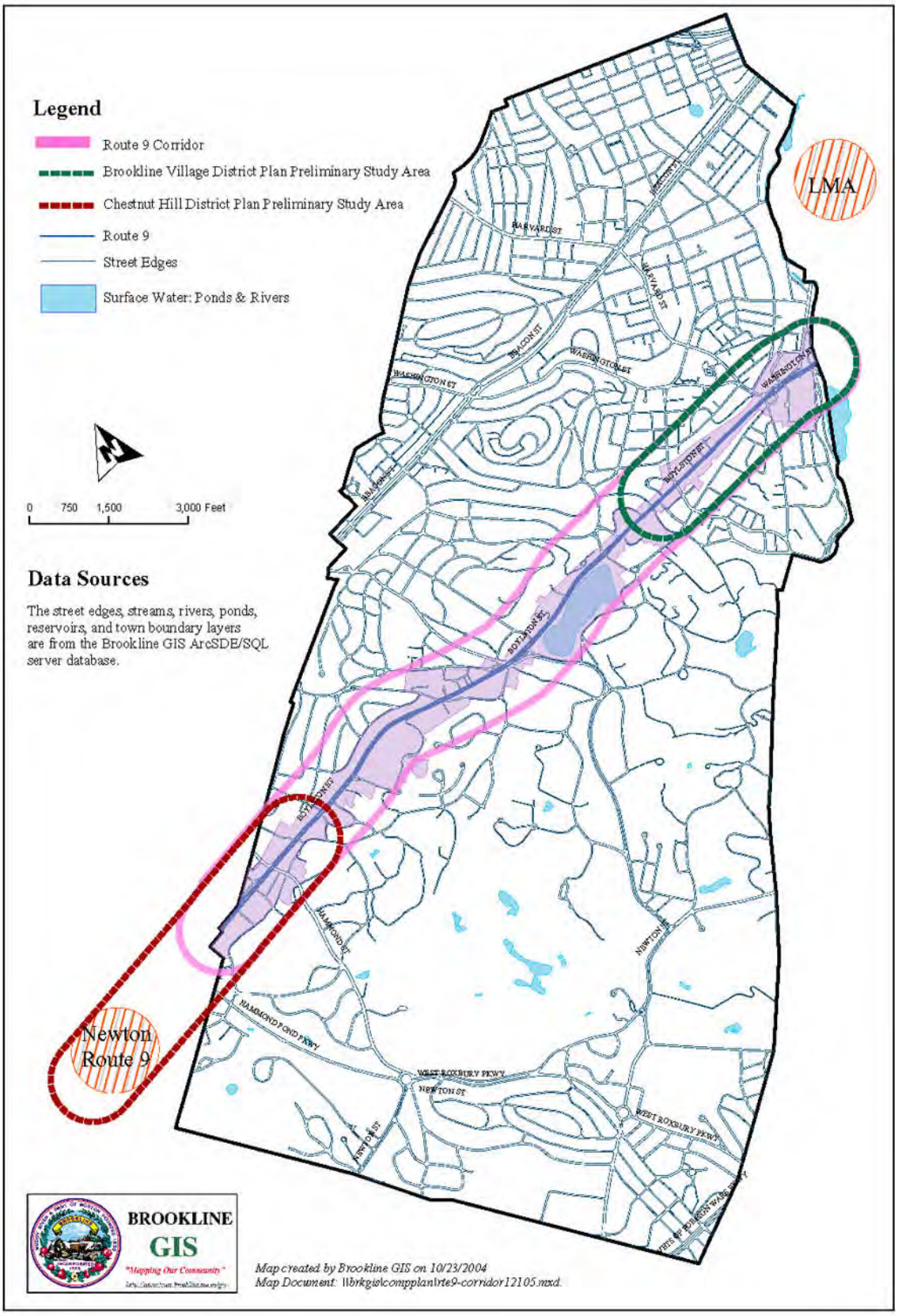
### ROUTE NINE: VISION

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 pedetrian 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 Chesnut 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 Chesnut Hill, and neighborhood plans in other areas if appropriate

## 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 Jamaicaway.
- 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.

**Parking Districts**
Parking Districts would be a zoning overlays in primarily commercial districts in which required parking could be reduced or waived in exchange for payment-in-lieu-of parking provision. Payments would be placed in a fund and used to fund parking improvements. In order for such a Parking District to work, a viable location and plan for such parking improvements must already be in place.

**Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay Districts**
A Transit Oriented Development Overlay District would be a zoning provision put in place over an existing zoning district in a location where transit access is very good. The TOD Overlay District would provide incentives for developments to take advantage of transit use.

**Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)**
In general, a municipality can reduce the value of land by changing the zoning on it, but cannot remove all value from it. Traditionally, municipalities will lower the amount of development allowed on sensitive land, but will not eliminate all rights to develop it. A TDR system creates a system by which, rather than developing sensitive land, the owner can sell the value of that development to the owner of a different parcel of land that is located in a less sensitive area.

In most cases, the Comprehensive Plan recommends that new tools be studied by the Department of Planning and Community Development. During such a review, the Department may determine that the tool will not help accomplish the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. However, in cases where they are seen to be helpful, the Department would submit lanaguage creating the new tool to Town Meeting, where it would have to be approved in order to take effect.

In addition to these new tools, the Comprehensive Plan also recommends exploring a number of specific changes to the Zoning By-law, such as a changes from one zoning district to another or the expansion of certain existing tools.

## Design and Density

Density is a numerical measure of the number of people or buildings per acre of land. Dense development can offer a number of advantages over less-dense development: it can be more environmentally friendly, it can promote transit use, and it can contribute to the health of a community by providing customers for local businesses. However, because it is so often used to illustrate levels of crowding, congestion, and overuse of land, density has acquired a negative connotation for many. This connotation overlooks the positive contribution that well-designed, dense developments can make to quality of life.

Increased density is sometimes inconsistent with improving the quality of life in a neighborhood. However, there are reasons why a neighborhood may prefer density to its alternatives. Terms such as "suburban sprawl" are generally thought of as negative terms—but they also refer to less-dense developments.

There are at least five things that should to be addressed in order to create a successful development, regardless of its density:

> PARKING AND ACCESS—The development should have an appropriate amount of space to store vehicles, and should provide for safe access to and from that parking.

> PRIVACY—The development should create a feeling among neighbors that their privacy is respected.

> PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT—The development should make it safe and pleasant to walk by and through the area.

> PUBLIC SPACE—The development must not detract from the public spaces nearby, and should seek to add public space of its own if it is going to add a lot of new residents to the area.

VARIETY OF COLORS AND MASSING CAN MAKE A DENSE DEVELOPMENT AN ATTRACTIVE ONE

> FISCAL IMPACTS—Some developments pay more in local taxes than they cost the community for provision of additional services. Others do not. The fiscal impacts of a development need to be examined, particularly in the case of relatively large developments where the impacts might be greater.

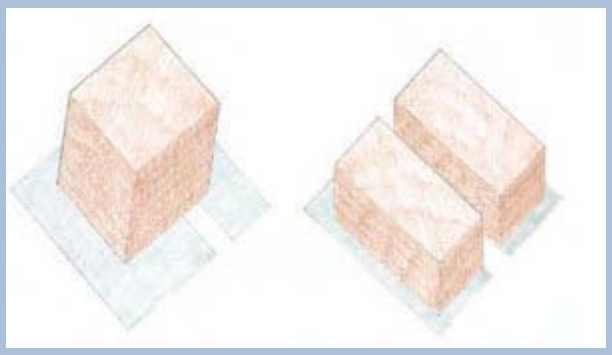
Think about what attracts people to Coolidge Corner. Generally, people like being able to walk from store to store, perhaps even from their own home. They like people-watching and being able to take advantage of cultural resources. They like being able to take transit. They also like looking at the attractive buildings and landscapes in the area. These characteristics that attract people to Coolidge Corner are only possible because it is one of the denser parts of Brookline. And while people may disagree about whether it should be allowed to become more dense—an issue that can be further explored during the Coolidge Corner District Plan—they also understand that without this density Coolidge Corner would be a less interesting place.

The way a development is designed can have a great impact on how it is perceived by its neighbors. Tall buildings set back from the street are generally less inviting than lower buildings that are located closer to the street and con-

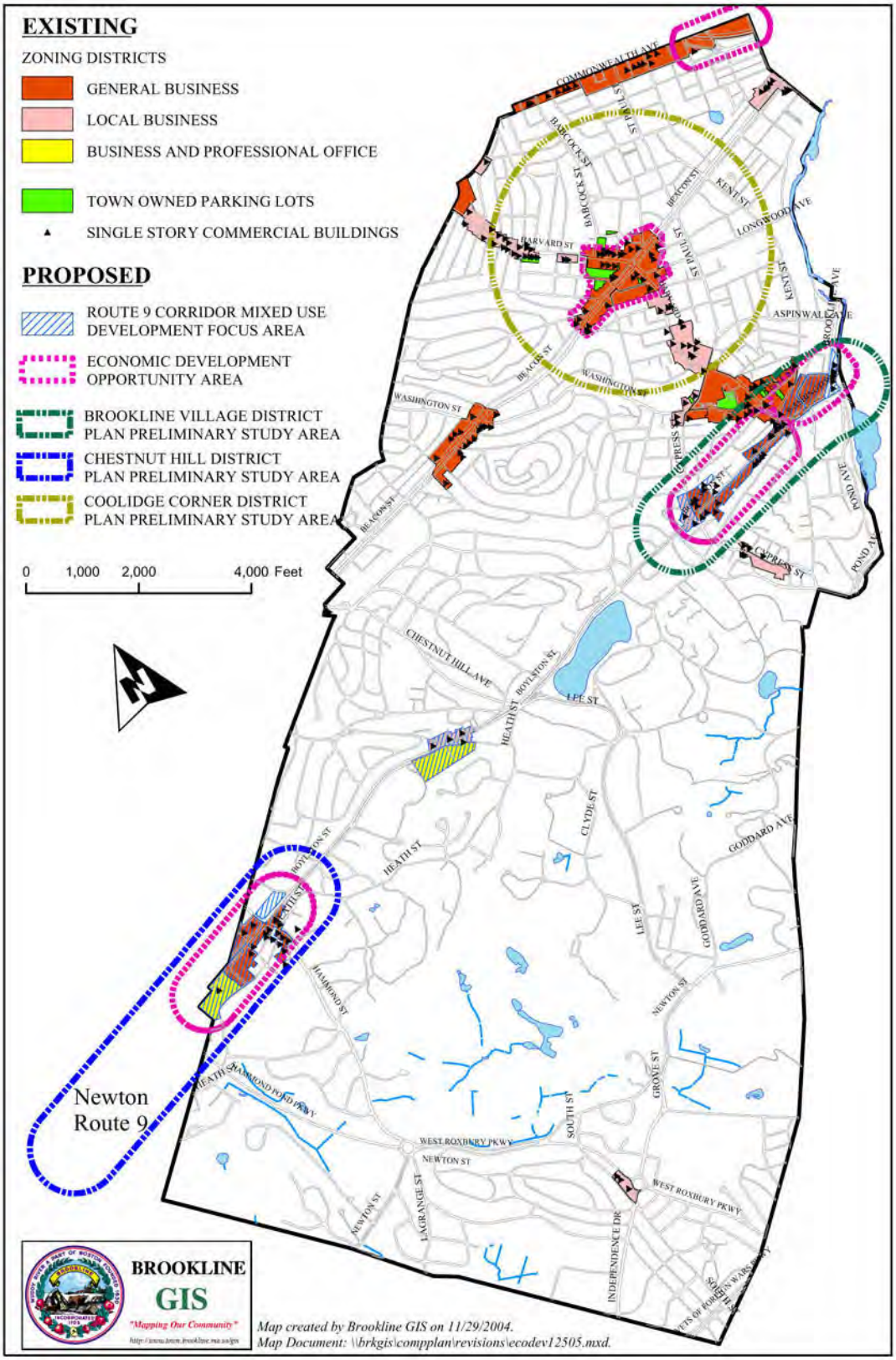
tribute to the local streetscape. For example, look at the following sets of drawings.

TEN DWELLING UNITS PER ACRE

FIFTY DWELLING UNITS PER ACRE



Each set shows a specific density of development in two different ways. Within each set, the nature of the design is totally different. In one, the density is placed in a large building, leaving lots of open space around the edges. In another, the density is placed in lower buildings, closer to the street. Each design has some advantages; however, the experience a pedestrian would have on a nearby street is almost certainly better in the right hand drawing. It is not always just how dense a development is, but how it is designed to respect and fit in with the surrounding neighborhood, that really counts.

DENSE NEIGHBORHOODS INCLUDE SOME OF THE MOST DESIRABLE PARTS OF THE BOSTON AREA

# Map 8: Economic Development