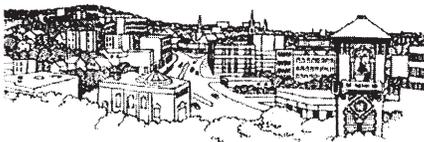


focus area 2
COMMUNITY CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



BROOKLINE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2005-2015

issues & opportunities report

INTRODUCTION

Through the well-managed, thoughtful pursuit of opportunities for local economic development, town government supports efforts by private citizens, area businesses, and community groups to sustain and create a physically attractive, commercially vital, socially vibrant, culturally rich, and economically diverse Brookline.

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Contemporary city planners and urban designers greatly value the community characteristics Brookline naturally possesses:

- centers of well-integrated commercial and residential life, actively served by public transportation;
- a wide range of housing types in generally good condition;
- ubiquitous parks and recreational facilities;
- public schools of superior quality;
- and a highly-educated, active, and engaged population.

Critical impacts of these desirable characteristics on the town economy include:

- high real estate costs, rents, and property taxes;
- limited availability of land for new residential or commercial development;
- and strong public demand for town services of high quality.

In recognition of these community characteristics and potential impacts, the Economic Development Office, in collaboration with interested citizens, has established foundations for effective community-building, as well as guiding, stimulating, and managing growth through planning and advocacy initiatives that:

- contribute to the vitality of Brookline's commercial areas;
- enhance the physical and social environments of town neighborhoods;
- provide jobs and other direct economic benefits to Brookline citizens;
- generate new tax revenues to support educational, social, and public services provided by the Town.

VITAL COMMERCIAL AREAS

Brookline is blessed with diverse character that is economically defined by a commercial base, which, though relatively small (according to assessor data, approximately 7% of Brookline's total building area),

helps define us as an active, vibrant community rather than simply a sterile, suburban collection of residences.

The Town's eight commercial areas - Coolidge Corner, Brookline Village, Washington Square, JFK Crossing, St. Mary's Station, Chestnut Hill, Putterham Circle, and Commonwealth Avenue - each present unique and lively characteristics. Each commercial district is part of a residential neighborhood as well.

In Brookline, the residential and commercial areas not only coexist side-by-side, they are mutually-reinforcing. The surrounding neighborhoods are an important source of customers for the stores, and give visitors an extra reason to come to each area. Importantly, the commercial areas offer a significant benefit to the residential neighborhoods by offering services and activities. In fact, according to local realty professionals, houses near commercial districts, especially Coolidge Corner (the largest and most significant of our commercial areas), are perceived as more desirable places to live due to the strong symbiotic relationship between residential and commercial uses.

Vital commercial areas offer many important benefits to the Town. The Town is committed to a pro-active commercial areas program to insure a thoughtful and focussed approach to economic development and a process that shapes projects to maximize positive outputs for our community.

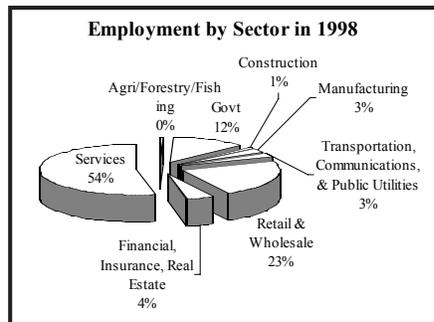


CHART 1 Brookline Employment Subsectors
Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Employment and Training (ES-202)

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF COMMERCIAL AREAS

Aside from providing a tax base, commercial areas have a strong economic impact on our community. They provide jobs, both skilled and entry-level. In 1998, more than half of the 17,000 jobs in Brookline were in the service sector, and additional 20% were in the retail and wholesale sectors (see Chart 1). Compared to neighboring cities such as Boston, Cambridge and Newton, jobs in Brookline are highly concentrated in medical offices (physicians, dentists, chiropractors etc.), food services, food and beverage stores, nursing care facilities, and personal cares (pharmacies, drug stores, and beauty supplies) (see Chart 2).

Subsector	Number of Employees in Brookline	% of Total (Brookline)	% of Total (Boston)	% of Total (Cambridge)	% of Total (Newton)
Ambulatory Health Care Services	2,334	21.5%	5.8%	3.7%	11.5%
Administration & Support Services	1,725	15.9%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Foodservices & Drinking Places	1,664	15.3%	13.5%	10.7%	n.a.
Food & Beverage Stores	744	6.8%	3.2%	2.7%	3.8%
Nursing & Residential Care Facilities	522	4.8%	1.6%	n.a.	2.0%
Health & Personal Care Stores	336	3.1%	1.2%	1.0%	1.3%

Note: n.a. = not available.

CHART 2 Employment in Selected Subsectors
Source: 1997 Massachusetts Economic Census

Many businesses in Brookline's commercial areas contribute significantly to our schools, sports, arts and cultural life, parks and open space, senior citizens and other important activities. Although the extent of support is hard to know, in early summer 2000, the Economic Development Office conducted a survey to uncover the extent of charitable contributions made by Brookline businesses. Each of the Town's 2,500 businesses was asked to report the amount and type of contributions made in one year to various causes-schools, Town events, local services, etc. The survey documented nearly \$500,000 in annual support. Since the response rate to the survey was only 5.4%, and of the survey respondents only 71/89 estimated the value of their contribution, we have reason to believe that the one-half million dollar figure considerably understates the level of support from our businesses to community institutions. The survey results, then, unmistakably underscore the connection between our business community and the quality of life in our Town.

TAX REVENUE

The fiscal implications of our tax revenue is an important consideration, particularly in a post-Proposition 2 ½ municipal context. This proposition, a property tax levy limitation measure, became law in the early 1980's and made economic development an important part of the municipal equation (a more detailed explanation follows). In Brookline, roughly 64% of our revenues come from property taxes. Fixing this amount severely hampers the Town's flexibility to raise revenues. State aid comprises 9.5%. Since the state income tax rate has just been cut via referendum, state aid is likely to decrease in the near future. Other revenues come from fees, some of which are stable (e.g., water and sewer, various user fees) and others which are cyclical with the economy (e.g., building permits).

Town budget policies and guidelines have established a framework to guide both the operating and capital budgets to insure that appropriate levels of services and expenditures are maintained. The Town has been aggressive in seeking state, federal, and private support for programs, and has attracted record levels of grants over the past few years.

The current forecast shows a deficit in Brookline's budget beginning in the year FY03. Tax revenue generated from development are added to the tax levy on a permanent basis, and thus are very important in allowing the Town to continue the high level of municipal services it currently offers.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Development is often feared as bringing in more density, more traffic, and producing a denigration of the quality of life of the neighbors. This can be true. Good development, however, can build on the values of the neighbors and make a place even more attractive than before. One example is Kendall Crescent, scheduled soon to open and replace the old Town garage on Cypress Street. Most residents of the area see this as a major improvement in the character of the neighborhood. The Webster Street hotel promises to improve the quality of life on Webster Street and Coolidge Corner by adding significant greenery, public spaces, and attractive design features to the new commercial community street and slowing traffic in the process. It will turn that street from a back alleyway to an appealing destination block. The hotel should also spur investments in the area to improve the attractiveness of Coolidge Corner overall, as businesses seek to capture the potential market from hotel patrons.

Development can also offer services that enhance the quality of life of neighborhoods. For example, the presence of assisted living facilities offers an important alternative to nursing home care for frail elderly. Affordable housing, which is part of any new construction over 15 units (developments between 6 and 15 units can either offer on- or off-site units or pay a fee into the Housing Trust), offers a place for residents who could not afford market prices to remain part of our community.

Background of Brookline Development

Historically, Brookline has conducted a number of planning studies to develop strategies for our commercial areas. However, many of the goals and recommendations advanced have not been realized, in part due to the lack of a focused Economic Development and Commercial Areas Program charged with action and implementation.

In addition to these numerous planning studies, Town Meeting has approved a number of incremental, but important, planning decisions through revisions to the Zoning By-law. For example, there was a major downzoning in 1971 which changed the highest allowable floor area ratio (the measure of density on a site) from 4.0 to 2.5 and from 3.0 to 2.0 - cutting the maximum allowable density almost in half.

Another important development shaping Town policy is Proposition 2 ½, a statewide property tax levy limitation referendum, passed in Massachusetts in 1980. As mentioned above, Proposition 2 ½ set a city or

town's property tax levy (the total amount the city or town can collect from all property taxes) at a fixed amount, allowing it to grow only 2 ½% per year plus new growth and property tax overrides. Proposition 2 ½ limited revenues but not costs. That means that if inflation exceeds 2 ½% per year, a municipality will unavoidably face a shortfall to maintain existing services.

Proposition 2 ½ gave municipalities only four options to deal with this structural shortfall:

1. reduce spending
2. seek more federal, state, and private grants
3. overrides
4. new growth (economic development)

By making new growth one of a very limited set of options, Proposition 2 ½, along with the need for more effective implementation strategies to maintain our vital commercial areas, made economic development an important part of the municipal equation.

Given this interest, in 1989 the Board of Selectmen formed a townwide Development Committee to explore what options there were for responsible development in the Town and to make recommendations for an economic development strategy. The Development Committee worked for three years, identified ten potential target areas for development, and proposed a series of zoning changes to promote development in key opportunity areas. Some of these zoning changes passed, and some of the target areas identified by the Committee may still be relevant, such as the Boylston Street and Commonwealth Avenue corridors. In addition, the two Brookline air-right parcels over the Massachusetts Turnpike (block 7) have been identified as a potential target area through a study completed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in the Summer of 2000.

A key recommendation of the Development Committee was the creation of an Economic Development Office. In 1994 Town Meeting approved the creation of the Office and in April 1995 the Town's first Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) and Economic Development Officer were appointed. The group was appointed with twin goals: promote economic growth and support existing businesses. A year later, development of affordable housing was added to the mission.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Since 1995, the EDAB and Economic Development Office have been working to change the climate for economic development by working towards two objectives.

First, work with developers to help clarify and facilitate the approvals process to make it more predictable, and, second, work with residents to understand what makes good development and promote meaningful resolution of neighborhood issues. In achieving these objectives, the Town encourages appropriate and sustainable economic growth while preserving and enhancing the character of neighborhoods.

WHAT IS GOOD DEVELOPMENT IN BROOKLINE?

In 1997, the Economic Development Advisory Board sponsored three public forums to present perspectives on economic development and hear citizens' views. Through these discussions, Brookline developed the following framework for good economic development, consisting of criteria regarding character, impacts, sustainability, and process:

Character

- reflects historic character of surroundings while offering new architectural elements of interest
- is pedestrian friendly, appropriate scale, and enhances the sidewalk/streetscape
- respects the context of the neighborhood and is visually enhancing

Impacts

- brings new services or opportunities to Town, such as assisted living, office spaces, hotels, lofts for artists, and affordable housing

- provides a net increase in new revenues for the Town (after accounting for new Town service demands)
- traffic impacts are manageable
- provides amenities such as open and/or public space, public art, public parking, preservation of historic structures and/or landscape, and locally-identified needs

Sustainability

- promotes use of mass transit
- environmentally friendly (e.g., green design, energy efficient)

Process

- follows a process that is predictable and open, and provides real opportunities to work out concerns of affected parties

These principles have shaped Town actions over the past four years and frame its mission going forward.

SUPPORTING EXISTING BUSINESSES

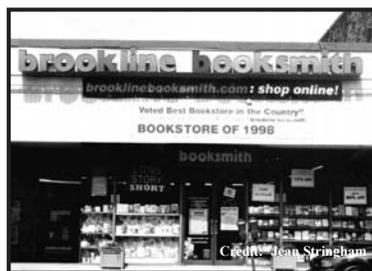
Additional direction came out of the Town Meeting vote to create an economic development program. "Support existing businesses" was included onto the mission of promoting growth. Brookline's commercial areas are characterized by a wide-range of small individual businesses, which is unique today for commercial areas. These businesses positively contribute to Brookline's scale, character, and diversity. Many citizens are concerned this character could be endangered by the homogenization of retail nationally ("the chains"). To address this issue, the Economic

Development Office began by meeting with business owners in each of our commercial areas, and learned many important things:

1. Small, independent businesses are worried about competition from the chains, but much more so about lack of customer parking, high real estate costs including rent and property taxes, cohesion of businesses in an area (getting the right mix of stores so that the area is an effective destination for shoppers), and overall visibility of the Town's shopping areas.
2. Despite major fears to the contrary, Brookline was still predominantly occupied by small stores. In fact, According to the current data from the Brookline Economic Development Office, more than 90% of our businesses are small and independent (including medical offices). Most independents valued some participation in their areas by chain stores, since these stores have wide consumer recognition and marketing budgets to draw shoppers to the area.
3. Businesses need more foot traffic to be successful. A common complaint is that they are busy in the evenings and on weekends, but dead during weekdays. Since many small businesses are staffed by their owners all the time, this puts a burden on owners and contributes to the inconsistent hours of operation in each area, which, in turn, makes the area less attractive as a destination.



B&D Deli, Washington Square, 1999



Brookline Booksmith, Coolidge Corner, 1999

4. Our business community is very connected to the larger community, in terms of participation in events and contributing to local causes, but doesn't always feel it gets the recognition it deserves.

5. Commercial areas would benefit from physical improvements to make them more visually attractive and welcoming to customers.

6. While some small business owners are incredibly intuitive and others are well-trained, there are some who find the new world of electronic commerce and changing finance requirements daunting and a barrier to growth and success. Many businesses witnessed the demographic change that occurred over past decades. In fact, more and more of Brookline's population tends to cluster in the young adult range of 25 to 44 years old (Chart 3). Around 48 %of Brookline's households are family households. These changes inevitably point to the necessity for business owners to adjust to new customer needs.

This knowledge helped us formulate the beginnings of a commercial areas program with several components:

- Monitoring opportunities to strengthen the mix of stores by identifying vacancies and advocating with building owners for new, complementary businesses.
- Sponsoring festivals, such as 1st Light and Taste of Brookline, to increase local awareness of Brookline businesses.

- Creatively advocating for business interests in Town Hall, such as developing the special merchandising program for the Ryder Cup, working to facilitate the "Adopt-a-Space" program to spruce up the commercial areas, and helping rationalize existing parking policies to maximize customer parking opportunities.

- Generating marketing opportunities, including negotiating Brookline's new presence in Boston-area visitor publications, sponsoring our own marketing program, and utilizing the town website to disseminate commercial area information as well as the business list.
- Working with the Chamber of Commerce to offer training courses for business owners on finance, marketing, the internet, etc.

Our commercial areas program has grown dramatically in effectiveness with the appointment of a Commercial Areas Coordinator in 1998.

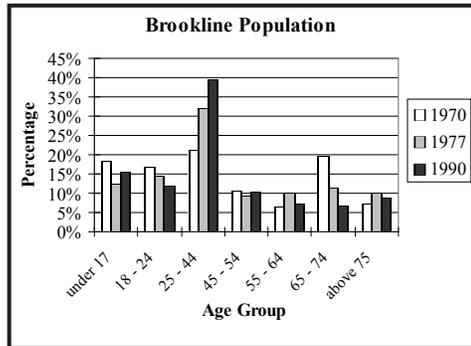


CHART 3
Sources: *Prospects for the Block in Coolidge Corner, 1979*
1990 U.S. Census

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

This topic will be addressed primarily in the Housing report in this series. We mention it here because it became a part of the Economic Development Office's mission in 1997. The rationale for this involvement is twofold. First, affordable housing deals use many of the same set of tools used to promote economic development and there would be efficiencies in drawing on experiences here. Second, the well-being and overall attractiveness of the Town for further investment is influenced by the diversity of its housing stock. However, the bulk of the discussion on the history and future of affordable housing production is in the Housing Report.

THE EXISTING SYSTEM

Brookline is a highly developed community. There are virtually no large tracts of undeveloped land that could come into play in the foreseeable future. Therefore, when we think of development opportunities, they will be largely of an infill nature. This makes the objective of "fitting in to existing conditions" extremely important as the basis for moving forward.

To watch the free market operating in Brookline, one would think that the only thing that could ever be developed here is luxury housing. With almost no exceptions, that is what the market is producing. However, there are many other elements to the

Brookline development landscape. Below, we describe the various components, which, in addition to residential development, include retail and restaurants, office space, institutional, civic and cultural space, and parking.

Retail & Restaurants

We have an interesting and rich set of businesses in each of our commercial areas, and a strong market with a very low commercial vacancy rate. All of our commercial areas are still overwhelmingly populated with small, locally-owned businesses which add a special character to the Town.

These stores offer a unique shopping experience, and the collection of so many is an important factor in marketing Brookline as a shopping destination. Some national and regional retailers are also important in building a healthy mix of stores due to their broad name recognition and marketing budgets which can help put our commercial areas on the map.



Credit: Jean Stringham

The Arcade, Coolidge Corner, 1999

COOLIDGE CORNER

With 125 retail establishments and 52 restaurants, Coolidge Corner is the biggest and busiest business district in Brookline. There are 116 offices and 168 medical offices as well. Coolidge Corner's most visible landmark, the S.S. Pierce clock tower, is housed in a Tudor style office building, anchoring the Town's major commercial center. Nearby is the historic 75-year old arcade mall, second oldest commercial arcade in the country.

BROOKLINE VILLAGE

Brookline's earliest shops and restaurants were started in Brookline Village, which retains a traditional "village" feel. The site of American's first municipal gymnasium and public bath, it is now home to 116 shops and 40 restaurants, as well as 77 business and 168 medical offices. The Village prides itself on being a small, eclectic blend of old and new. A mix of distinct restaurants and shops, Brookline Village has always had a special concentration of children's specialty retail and antiques.

WASHINGTON SQUARE

At the crossroads of Beacon and Washington streets, Washington Square is a small but very active com-

mercial area. The Square hosts 22 restaurants and 25 stores, 52 general, and 48 medical offices. Recently the site of significant investment, the Square has seen the addition of bright new storefront facades, new benches and flower barrels, and an 18-foot high Victorian-restoration clock.

JFK CROSSING

Around the birthplace of President John F. Kennedy, JFK Crossing represents a melting pot of ethnic stores and restaurants. A thriving Jewish community has long been the cornerstone of life in the area, and you can find kosher restaurants, specialty food stores, and a major Judaica book store and art gallery. To this cluster has recently been added Thai, Brazilian, and other ethnic footholds. The 29 stores and 17 restaurants, 20 general, and 5 medical offices, represent many small business owners with a commitment to the area.

CHESTNUT HILL/PUTTERHAM

While Chestnut Hill is largely a residential community, a significant concentration of offices and shops cluster around the busy intersection of Route 9 and Hammond Street. Deeper in the heart of the residential section, the Putterham shopping center is built in the style of a suburban strip mall and serves the surrounding neighborhoods in Brookline, Newton, and West Roxbury. In total, there are 24 stores, 10 restaurants, 23 general, and 7 medical offices.

ST. MARY/LOWER BEACON

A small but very visible business district, St. Mary's hosts a large number of medical offices - 55% (64 offices) of the area is comprised of medical uses. In addition, 21 stores, 15 restaurants, and 17 general offices share extra-wide sidewalks that offer a special quality to life there. Several of its historic town houses have been converted to bed-and-breakfasts, while other buildings offer lodging house accommodations for a variety of residents.

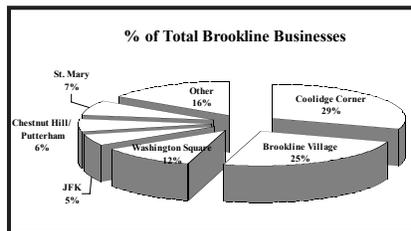


CHART 3

Source: Brookline Economic Development Office, 2000

	Retail	Restaurant	Office (w/out Medical)	Medical Office	Total
Coolidge Corner	27%	11%	25%	36%	100%
Brookline Village	39%	13%	26%	22%	100%
Washington Square	17%	15%	35%	33%	100%
JFK	41%	24%	28%	7%	100%
Chestnut Hill/ Putterham	38%	16%	36%	11%	100%
St. Mary	18%	13%	15%	55%	100%

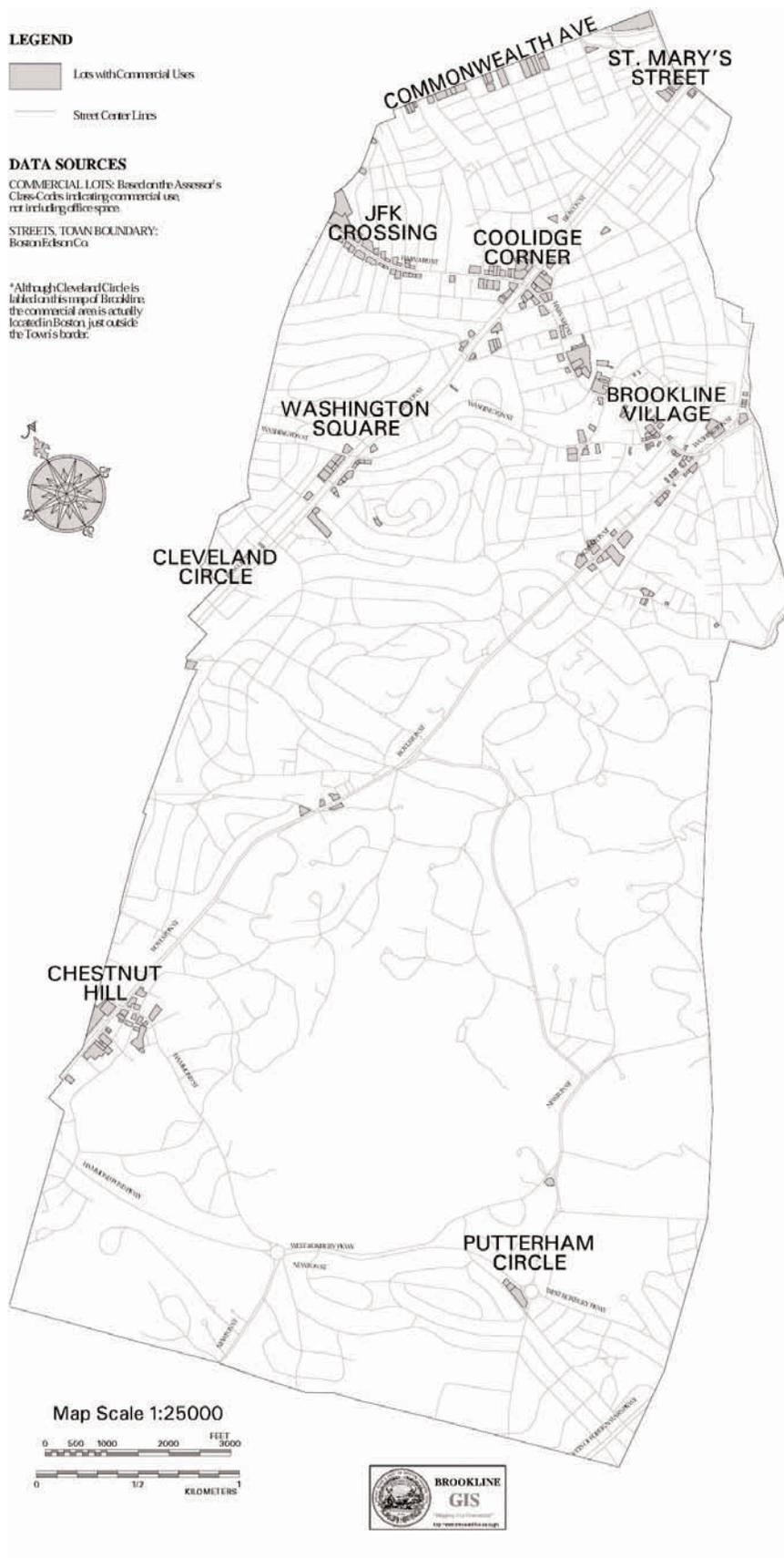
Note: The figures do not count all businesses that are unclassified.

CHART 4. % Business Type in Each Commercial Area

Source: Brookline Economic Development Office, 2000

COMMERCIAL AREAS

FIGURE 1



Residential

As mentioned, luxury housing is by far what the market wants to do in Brookline. With demand apparently infinite, and the market seeming to set no limits on the upper end of rents or sales prices, the temptation for developers to build to the high end is hard to resist. Add to that extraordinarily high land costs and a restrictive, expensive zoning code, and the production of only luxury housing is what will happen here barring Town intervention.



New Housing at 1146 Beacon Street, 2001

Affordable housing is happening as a by product of luxury housing, since the Town's set-aside provision requires developers of more than 15 units to provide on-site affordable housing of between 10-20% of the units. More affordable housing is desirable, and will be promoted by the Economic Development Office in collaboration with the Housing Advisory Board. However, the bulk of the discussion on affordable housing production will be in the Housing Report.

Office Space

The presence of office space in a commercial area is vital to the area's health. Offices provide needed services for business clients, and their inclusion makes the area more efficient. Professional services, such as doctors, bring in customers for other businesses and help make the area a destination. Office workers offer a potential source of daytime customers for our businesses.

Most Brookline residents work outside of Town (more than 80% according to the 1990 census), and therefore do more Brookline shopping during evenings and weekends. Since stores need a daytime customer base to be viable, office space is an important complementary use in commercial areas.

In terms of Brookline office workers, 22 % of total employees in Brookline are working in offices. (1997 MA Economic Census). Our small office workforce is associated with the lack of office space in Brookline. According to Town Assessor data, only 3% of total building area in Brookline is used for office, which is relatively low to support the existing retail activities in Brookline.

Not all of Brookline's office space, however, is located close enough to commercial areas for employees to shop at Brookline's stores. According to *Market Facts for the Downtown Kennett Square Retail Market*, employees limit their lunch break shopping trips to a two-block radius of the place they work.

Institutional Uses

These spaces, such as colleges, schools, religious establishments, and arts and music centers, do not contribute to the tax base directly, but add to the quality of life and make living in Brookline more attractive and fulfilling. In these ways, they indirectly contribute to the economic base by making the demand, and therefore value of property, high.

Brookline has a good balance of institutional space (approximately 24% of Brookline's total building area is attributable to institutional uses) However, a substantial increase could throw this balance off, therefore there is no need to advocate for any additional institutional development.

Civic & Cultural Spaces

Civic and cultural spaces visually illustrate our aesthetic and social values. For instance, common greens, outdoor plazas, and public art add value to the quality of life directly and indirectly to the economic base. People enjoy having places outdoors to gather, meet friends, or pause for a moment's reflection.

In this category, there is a shortfall of civic spaces. With no Town green or central plaza, there may be some lack of center for the Town's commercial areas. Smaller central spots in each area are also missing.

Transportation & Parking

All of our commercial areas are well served by mass transit - most areas have at least one green line T stop, as well as bus routes. Traffic flow is considered good in most areas. For example, according to a 1996 Intersection Capacity Analysis by VHB, the intersection of Harvard and Beacon Streets attains a level of service (LOS) of C in the morning peak hour and B in the evening. LOS is graded as a teacher grades a paper (F=failing; A=excellent).

An ongoing effort to study, adjust, and monitor parking conditions is underway. In addition, the per-

ceived situation on the ability to attract new commercial tenants should also be monitored. Parking is generally an adjunct to, rather than an objective for, development, but the level of public interest in the parking issue, and the complementary nature of the different demands suggests that the provision of parking as an end in itself may merit exploration. In doing so, this must be approached carefully and thoughtfully, being mindful of the impacts of additional parking on traffic, attractiveness of our retail spaces for the uses we want to promote, and public transit use.

ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Economic development, in its dual role as promoter of appropriate new development and supporter of existing businesses, offers the potential to enhance the things we collectively value about the Town - viable commercial areas, comfortable neighborhoods, and an overall vibrant community. In moving forward, we see exciting opportunities to add new uses and enhance our commercial areas through targeted public investments. We face some challenges in our regulatory system and resource conditions.

Economic Development can play an important role in shaping our Town's future. Given that Brookline is already an attractive place, with an array of services and amenities that make it a great place to live, the role of economic development is to bring in new elements to the Town that reinforce its basic character.

Economic development must play a critical role in preserving the Town services and programs we cherish - Proposition 2 ½ demands that. But it also can introduce some lively new spaces and uses that enhance our Town by maintaining vibrant commercial areas and

supporting the quality of life in our neighborhoods. The challenge is to do so in an inclusive yet efficient way.

Given the existing conditions and development patterns discussed above, the Town should actively promote the development of affordable housing, professional office space, and civic and cultural spaces. In doing so, we should consider generating these outcomes in a mixed-use setting, with development that yields additional public parking opportunities, stand-alone or as part of other development.

Market Forces

1

There are economic barriers to development in Brookline, both perceived and real. Extremely high land costs, typically small sites, and the difficulty of parcel assemblage are all impediments to new development. Without a redevelopment authority to intervene, the Town's role is limited to identifying opportunities and playing information broker. However, these functions should not be minimized. It is clear that the Town can have influence by virtue of information and willingness to assist in the development process, and should seize any opportunities to play a catalyzing role.

In addition, high occupancy costs are intimidating in advance and burdensome to existing businesses. Rents in our commercial districts are high, however the rent is usually related to sales potential and can be mitigated by increased foot traffic. Turnover of buildings raises the costs of operation for the building owners, who pass that on in rent. Furthermore, the market for these buildings pushes landlords to go with "credit-worthy", more established tenants (read, national or regional chains) as lenders are more anxious about unproven tenants on which to base a loan. There is probably little the Town can do to affect this.

Property taxes can also be a significant burden when coupled with high rents. The Town's propensity to load the maximum tax burden on the commercial sector needs to be examined in terms of impact on our ability to preserve the small business component we treasure. The Town's history here is to maximize the shift to commercial to save residential taxpayers, despite the potential impact this has on our businesses.

The 2000 Financial Trend Monitoring Report says: *Since FY91, the percentage of the tax levy residential property comprises for Brookline has actually decreased by 0.3% (from 80.99 to 80.75%). Recall that . . . Brookline's Assessed Value-Percent Residential has increased 1.9% since FY91. The fact that the residential portion of the tax levy has decreased while the assessed value of the residential property has increased proves that Brookline is shifting some of the tax burden to commercial properties in an effort to reduce the annual increases in residential tax bills.*

The reuse of Town-owned land offers a unique opportunity to address the market barriers and at the same time increase the influence of the public on the type and quality of development. When the Town disposes of public property, it has the opportunity to control the disposition (development) guidelines and process. For example, whether you agree or disagree with the outcome, few would argue that the amount of public input into the design and amenities of the Webster Street Hotel and Kendall Crescent (the old Town garage/Sewall School site) far exceeded that of any private project, even ones needing a zoning change which meant they also needed 2/3rds Town Meeting approval.

Since the Town has no truly surplus land, however, the reuse is more challenging in that the existing uses must be preserved or replaced. An examination of Town lands and their potential for reuse (including creative ways to replace the current services) to create priority development goals is worthwhile.

2 *Identification of Beneficial Development Opportunities*

One of the opportunities of an economic development function is to identify beneficial development, analyze its feasibility, and promote its execution. On one hand, the Office keeps track of commercial vacancies and works to broker new appropriate uses. On the other hand, gaps in the diversity of our commercial mix are remedied by creating development opportunities.

At this time, Brookline has a critical shortage of professional office space relative to the amount of retail. Without additional daytime foot traffic, our small and large shops will have a hard time surviving. There is an overall shortage of office space in the greater Boston area. The average vacancy rate for office space in the greater Boston area was 1.5% at the end of 2000, and expected to go down rather than up according to Banker and Tradesman. Meredith & Grew's Market Viewpoint Report argued that new office construction was worthwhile, "as the great expense associated with building is easily outweighed by the demand if a project can actually be brought to market." Reflecting the excess of demand over supply, the average office rent per square foot rose 13.7% in 2000.

Brookline is well-placed geographically and transit-wise to capitalize on the area need for office space in a way that could help our local economic base. In

fact, owners of current office space in Brookline report heavy demand. The recent releasing of the 100,000 square feet at 10 Brookline Place lends credence to the notion of demand for Brookline office space. However, the market alone is producing very few new office spaces. This is due to a perceived lack of sites, as well as a tendency for developers to follow development. In other words, they see luxury housing going up here, so they naturally look here when they want to build the same. However, when they think of offices, they do not think of Brookline.

This proved true for hotels as well, and it was only after the Town promoted itself as a hotel location that it was able to attract a hotel developer. The new hotel will offer some additional daytime foot traffic - an office building would add even more. This should be actively pursued by the Town. Offices have the additional benefit of being lucrative in terms of Town finances - they pay the higher commercial property tax rates while using virtually no Town services.

The Town should continue to survey the commercial landscape to identify further opportunities for other beneficial development.

3 *Promotion, Management, & Assistance for Commercial Areas*

While our commercial areas offer many unique opportunities, they could really benefit from some investments in their attractiveness. Increasing the overall visual appeal and comfort could make an enormous difference in promoting Brookline shopping.

PUBLIC UPKEEP

The streets, sidewalks, and alleyways all give an impression of a commercial area. The Town makes important efforts to maintain its property, but additional special efforts may be merited. Furthermore, in designing public spaces within commercial areas, special attention should be given to the quality of construction materials and detailing, so that the attractiveness can be enhanced over time.

The Town could be more pedestrian friendly - we want to make walking safer by making sure areas are clean and well-lit and offer pedestrian amenities, such as benches, that encourage foot traffic. Furthermore, we should recognize the strong flow we need to maintain across Beacon Street, and work to see that the Beacon Street improvements capitalize on the current permeability of the street rather than emphasize its potential to divide.

FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Town is about to invest in a facade improvements program. Through the Capital Improvements Program, the Town will offer incentives and assistance to private businesses to renovate their facades. The goal of the program will be to spark significant private investment in the upgrade of commercial properties.

The potential face-lifts we envision, when planned in the context of the more modern community aesthetic standards we discussed above, could provide a shot in the arm to the commercial areas. The challenge will be to take very limited private dollars and generate the maximum extent of impact possible.

SIGNAGE AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Discussed below is the need for modernizing the sign review process. However, we have a further opportunity here: public signage could contribute to a sense of revitalization as well.

For example, the banners that were installed to promote the relocation of the Farmer's Market in 2000 not only reminded people to look for the new market location, they also served to enhance the attractive-

ness of Coolidge Corner. The banners announcing the 1st Light Festival provided visual benefits in all commercial areas.

We need to go further: wayfinder signs pointing drivers to available parking, interesting maps and information centers could help shoppers find the many treasures we have, and, in general, an upgrade in the public signage system could signal a new level of commitment to our commercial areas. Hopefully, we can begin thinking about public information dissemination with our new kiosks demonstration scheduled with the FY2002 Capital Improvements Program mentioned above.



COORDINATED MANAGEMENT

A significant challenge to improving operations in our commercial areas is the diversity of ownership. The buildings are owned by different individuals, and the businesses have another set of actors. This dispersion of control has led to a lack of coordination of hours and conditions (i.e., sales, promotions, offering of incentives) of retail operation, and random filling of vacancies which can result in oversupply of some and undersupply of other elements in an ideal retail mix.

We need to identify what gaps exist in our retail mixes and find ways to improve coordination among building owners for filling vacancies in ways that enhance the overall attractiveness of the area. Similarly, we need to continue to work with business owners to improve coordination of operations to increase the attractiveness of the areas as a whole to potential shoppers.

The ability of landlords to attract the type of new stores we are seeking is limited by the perceived difficulties in conditions mentioned above (e.g., lack of coordinated operations, and high occupancy costs) as well as a perceived lack of parking and other public amenities.

Parking, and related traffic questions must be examined in terms of the positive and negative impacts more parking could have on our commercial areas.

We must recognize the differences in parking demand and impacts in each commercial area, and develop site-specific programs.

We also want to monitor the impact of the implementation of the Commercial Parking Committee recommendations to rationalize use of existing parking spaces by locating employee parking to nearby outlying areas and free-up short-term spaces for customer use, to see what level (if any) of shortfall still exists. We should also look at ways creation of additional parking in one location might free up land within that area for priority uses such as affordable housing.

Finally, many in Brookline see our commercial areas as already highly congested. New development is opposed because of a perceived traffic impact. The Town must understand the level of frustration of citizens, and do some analysis to put this issue in context.

- To what degree does Brookline have a traffic problem when measured by industry standards? Are these standards the right ones for us?
- Are there things the Town should be doing to mitigate traffic congestion?
- What are good mitigation measures developers might be encouraged to take to not only mitigate the impact of their own project but actually improve the flow of traffic overall?
- How can we increase the use of mass transit to our commercial areas, in specific, and the Town in general?
- How can we balance the needs of pedestrian users and automobile traffic in our commercial areas?

At a minimum, we need to answer these questions and analyze implementation strategies that could help solve some of the inherent issues in managing our commercial areas.

Enhancement & Expansion of Civic Spaces

4

In FY2002, for the first time in the Town's history, we will launch an effort to create public information kiosks in each of our commercial areas. The first year will involve the development of a prototype. Other, more significant (in terms of land) public spaces would certainly enhance the attractiveness of our shopping areas and our Town. Who doesn't believe that the Boston Common and Boston Public Garden are major attractions to shopping and working downtown?

Realistically, the Town budget may provide funds to catalyze investments in these amenities, but it is unlikely to fund them in the foreseeable future. Citizens, however, resent the presence of corporate

identities on their public spaces. The challenge, then, is to find ways to entice developers to create (and possibly maintain) appropriate public spaces without needing to promote their involvement with on-site identifiers. The creation of a pocket park next to the Centre Street West lot (new home of the Farmer's Market) and the maintenance of the Webster Street Community Street are models of this concept.

To generate more significant amenities, such as a Town center and smaller, local district civic spaces, however, we will need to attract a more significant scale of development.

The Zoning By-law defines the terms and conditions for development in Brookline. The interpretation and implementation of zoning provisions determine the quality of the development experience.

Brookline zoning sets forth various districts and the permitted uses, densities, heights, setbacks, and other conditions. It is widely seen as confusing at best, and potentially contradictory in places, at worst.

Furthermore, it treats all neighborhoods within a district the same - in other words, all "general business districts" are treated as if there were no special or unique characteristics we would want to recognize, preserve, or enhance. It has few bonuses for things the Town should encourage, and barely recognizes different parking requirements for sites that have good transit access versus those that don't.

There is a strong opportunity to create a set of clearly-defined development goals, strategies, and plans for targeted areas coupled with proper zoning incentives:

- Define a limited number of target areas for development over the next 10 years; and
- Recognize these opportunity areas by creating overlay or underlying zoning districts to facilitate good development.



Zaftigs, Coolidge Corner, 1999

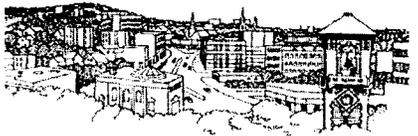
An additional area of concern with the Zoning By-law is the review of signs and facades in our commercial areas. This has traditionally been rigid and based on outdated standards.

Brookline must struggle to maintain critical review while recognizing the modern realities of retailing. The Main Streets program standards for signage and commercial image may provide a good starting place for beginning the conversation about Brookline-appropriate aesthetic standards.

Additionally, the implementation of the Zoning By-law is dispersed. The Planning Board and Department, Zoning Board of Appeals, Town Clerk, Building Department, and Engineering Division all have central roles. These are coordinated in terms of timing and sequencing, but not in terms of policy views and Town goals. This can make for a difficult situation for a developer, and can frustrate neighbors' abilities to get what they want from a development. Streamlining and simplifying the internal processes would be an extremely beneficial outcome of the Comprehensive Plan.

These changes would go a long way in eliminating the regulatory barriers to good development, and could be combined with some outreach efforts to notify developers and neighbors that the process is more efficient and predictable to address the perceptions as well as the reality.

HOUSING



BROOKLINE

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2005-2015

issues & opportunities report

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 300 years, Brookline has evolved from an agricultural community and streetcar suburb to an incredibly diverse community that provides a wide-range of housing types and lifestyle choices from the mixed use, transit-oriented neighborhoods near Coolidge Corner, Brookline Village, and Washington Square to the suburban neighborhoods of South Brookline.

Brookline offers a high quality of life to its residents. This, in combination with its close proximity and transit connections to Boston and Cambridge, creates an exceptionally desirable community to live in. Brookline, which consists of roughly six square miles of land, is home to approximately 54,700 people of diverse backgrounds, incomes, and lifestyles, including families, young professionals, and elderly.

This report explores the current state of housing in Brookline and defines preliminary issues and opportunities related to our housing stock, policies, and programs. The report also provides a brief background on housing in Brookline to foster an understanding of where we have come from, in terms of evolution of overall development, as well as the various programs and regulations related to housing.

Background of Brookline Housing Development

Brookline, which began as an agricultural community in the 17th century, became a streetcar suburb of Boston during the mid-19th century. At this time, Brookline's development opportunities were enhanced by the provision of strong public transit with direct linkages to Boston.

By 1900, most of the remaining farmland, particularly in North Brookline, had been subdivided into residential developments with density that was supported by the existing mass transit linkages. The early 20th century was marked by the growth of corridors that were directly served by mass transit, such as the Beacon Street, Harvard Street, Washington Street, Boylston Street (Route 9) and Commonwealth Avenue corridors.

In the early 20th century, Brookline began regulating the use of land with its first Zoning By-law, adopted in 1922. Brookline's early zoning created districts for residential and business uses, and established simple dimensional requirements such as minimum yard setbacks, maximum height, and building coverage (coverage of building footprint on lot).

By the mid-20th century, Brookline's citizens recognized the need to compensate for the lack of diverse housing that the market was providing by establishing the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) in 1948. The BHA initially focused on the need for housing

for veterans after World War II. As the BHA continued to develop housing, it added developments targeted to elderly housing to the mix.

From the late 1950s to the 70s, Brookline engaged in urban renewal of the "Farm" and "Marsh" areas of Brookline Village (on Route 9), adding approximately 1300 units including Brooke House, and public and privately subsidized housing. In 1970, Town Meeting adopted rent control, which at one point regulated approximately 11,000 rental units. In 1991, Town Meeting passed legislation to phase out rent control, and, in 1994, the enactment of State Referendum Question Nine eliminated rent control in Massachusetts.

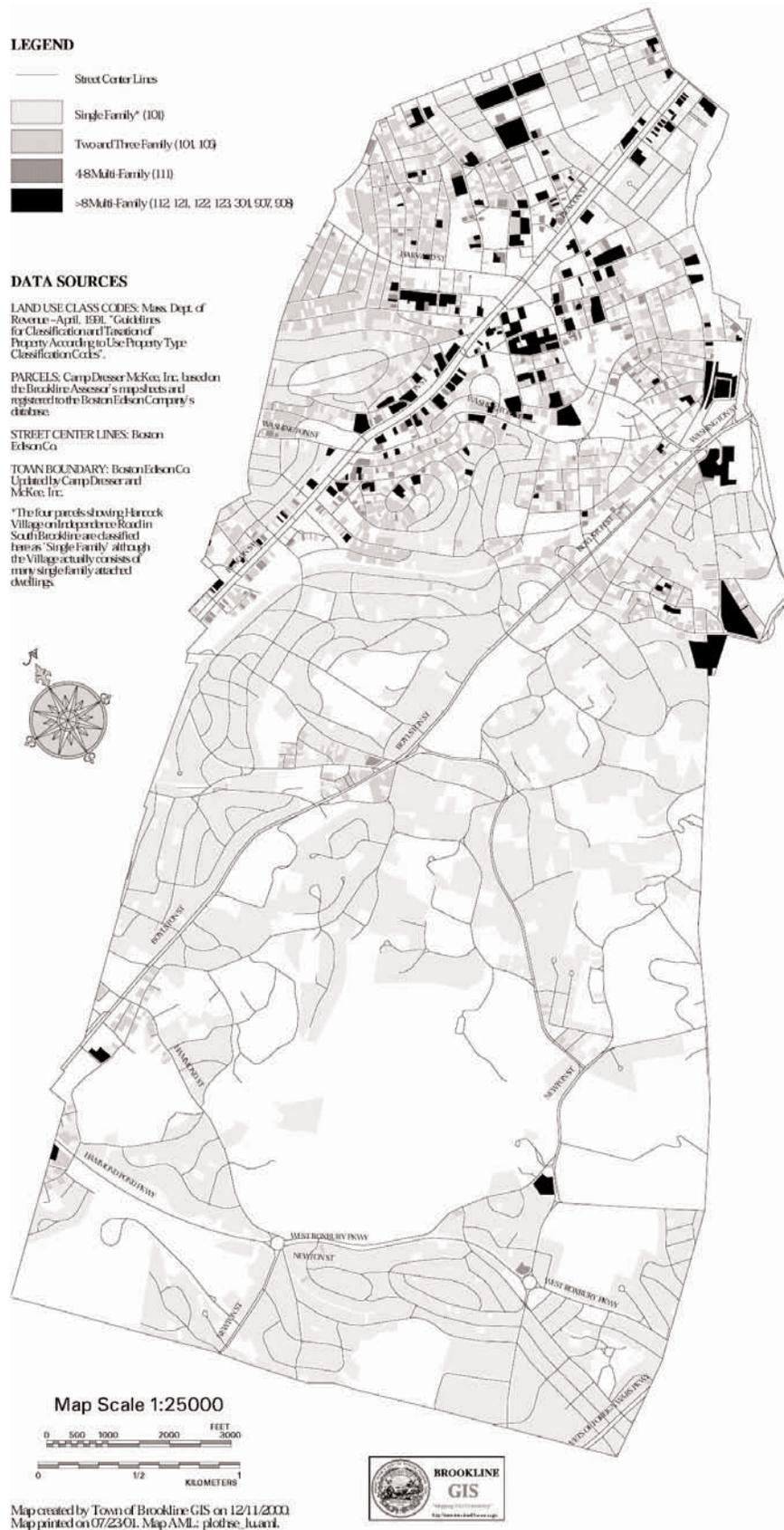
Today, Brookline's mix of housing types and densities creates a development pattern with defined and distinct neighborhoods. Figure 1 displays Brookline's residential land use pattern and illustrates the variety and pattern of housing densities throughout the town, with most of the multi-family housing located in North Brookline and most single-family housing concentrations located in South Brookline. Many of the mixed-density neighborhoods are within close walking distance to the MBTA's Green Line and Brookline's main commercial areas.



Fuller Street, 2000

EXISTING RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

FIGURE 1



EXISTING HOUSING

TRENDS IN POPULATION AND HOUSING

According to the U.S. Census, there were approximately 54,700 residents in Brookline in 1990. While the total population was no greater than in 1960, there was a 29% increase in housing units and a reduction in the average household size from 2.76 to 2.17.

The greatest increases in the housing stock were made between 1960 and 1970, with more modest increases through 2000. A conservative estimate based on US Census data and Brookline Building Department records, indicates that an average of approximately 50 units per year have been added to our housing stock over the last decade (including new construction, as well as additions and conversions).

In 1990, Brookline continued to be a diverse community. The number of foreign born persons, which comprised 20% of the population in 1960, was up to 21% in 1990. In fact, in the 1990's, the Brookline public schools were serving children from at least 63 different countries; 50 distinct languages were spoken in their households.

Brookline's non-white population during this period increased from .5% to 12.6% (or 14.8%, if including the Hispanic population). During the 1970's and 1980's, there appeared to have been a redistribution of population, with a decrease in several age groups, including senior citizens (to slightly over 15% of the population), while adults between 25 and 44, and children under five, had increased. Forty eight percent of all households were classified as families; 39% were persons living alone; and 13% were households which included unrelated individuals.

The diversity of Brookline's population has reflected both its mix of housing type and tenure. In 1960, 67% of all units were occupied by renters. The modest growth of rental units between 1960 and 1990 - from 12,757 to 14,853 - reflected both the construction of many mid- and high-rise affordable and market rate rental buildings,

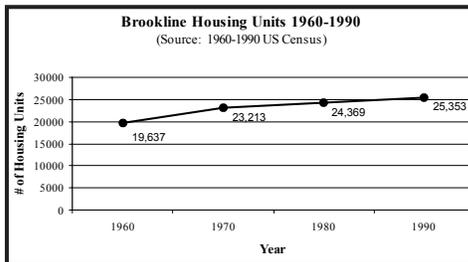


CHART 1

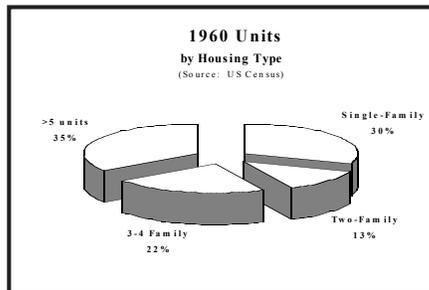


CHART 2

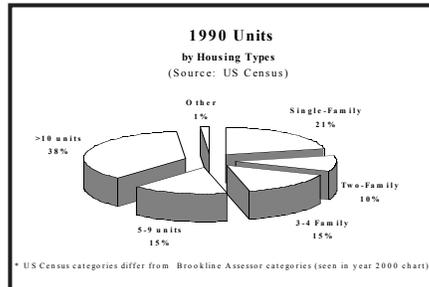


CHART 3

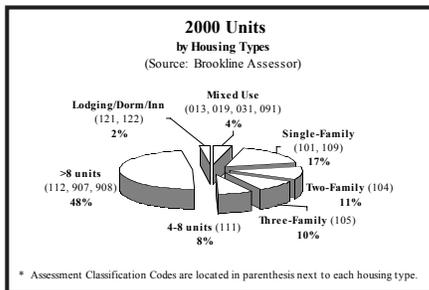


CHART 4

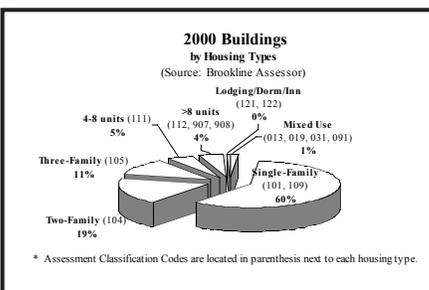


CHART 5

balanced by the inception of condominium ownership and the development of condominiums, principally through the conversion of rental properties. Condominium units, which numbered 2,074 in 1980 and 6,299 in 1990, increased at a slower rate during the past decade to 7,743 in 2000. By 1990, the percentage of renters to total households had fallen to 57%, a proportion which appears to be holding steady, despite the continued conversion of units. That the proportion of renters is still as high as it is may be explained by the rate at which condominiums, themselves, are used for rental. In 1990, 31% of condominiums were rented, and these households represented 14% of all renters.

The distinction between ownership and rental inventory is an important one, as rental units traditionally have housed smaller households of lower income. For example, while in 1990, median income in Brookline was 123% of the state average, there was a great difference between the incomes of owners and renters. At a time when about 13% of the rental stock was subsidized and a good portion of the balance was still subject to rent control, the median income of renters was \$38,817 compared to the median income of owners, at \$96,710. And, not surprisingly, because rental units tend to be smaller, the median number of household members was 1.6 in renter households, compared to 2.2 among owner occupants. When the 2000 census is available, the most dramatic changes in Brookline's demographic profile are likely to be noted in the renter population.

Charts 2, 3 and 4 show the changing makeup of the Town's housing stock. Between 1960 and 1990, according to the U.S. Census, the Town's housing units in one through four unit buildings had declined by about 1100 units or 8%. In 1960, these small structures contained 65 percent of the Town's units; in 1990, they comprised only 46 percent.

According to Assessing Department records 48% of the Town's housing units are now in buildings of nine or more units.

LAND USE PATTERNS

Charts 5 and 6 show that single-family houses still comprise 60% of the Town's residential buildings, and our single family zoning districts occupy 71% of the Town's land. In fact, 75 % of all the land zoned for residential use is zoned for single-family residences. According to Brookline Assessor's data checked against staff field observations, approximately 2% of land in Brookline is considered vacant (meaning undeveloped parcels that are not parks, conservation areas, or recreation facilities).

Figure 2 shows the overall densities allowed by the Zoning By-law in terms of lot size for single and two family districts, and floor area ratio for all other districts (multi-family and business districts). Figure 3 shows the proximity of multi-family and business districts to the MBTA transit lines. There is a strong correlation between Brookline's higher density zones (multi-family and business districts) and the availability of transit.

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Figure 4 shows the location and overall size of new residential development in Brookline since

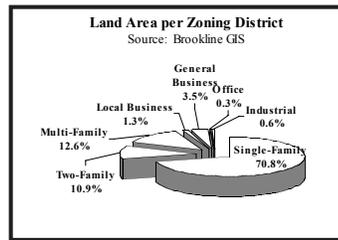


CHART 6

MARKET PRICE TRENDS

Brookline's strong housing market reflects both regional trends and the particular attractions of the Town. In 1996, when the last systematic study of

rents was done by the Brookline Housing Authority, a two-bedroom apartment rented for \$1,154 per month. Anecdotally, a typical two bedroom apartment now rents between \$1600 and \$3000 per month, and units do not remain vacant. Sales information from Warren Information Services, Banker & Tradesman (Chart 7) provides a clearer picture of market trends. During the five-year period between 1994 and 1999, the median sales price of condominiums priced under \$1 million increased 62%, a single-family home, 69%; a two-family home, 75%; and a three-family building, 86%.

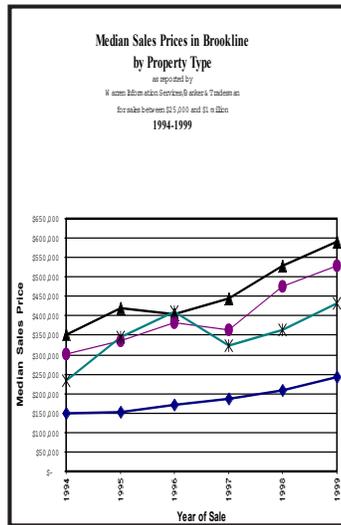


CHART 7

Affordable Housing

Brookline has long supported the development of affordable housing. Through the 1970's, this was achieved on the initiative of the Town mainly through the use of urban renewal and the construction of public housing; and on the initiative of private investors, through the development of publicly subsidized private-owned housing. Because of changes in both Federal programs and market conditions, and because the debate over rent control dominated discussion around affordable housing, there were few substantial initiatives by the Town during the eighties. In addition to providing home purchase and rehabilitation assistance, by the end of the eighties, the Town embraced inclusionary zoning as a tool for affordable housing.

CURRENT INVENTORY

Brookline currently has an inventory of 1810 affordable units controlled through regulation on the rentals or resale of units. Not included are about 120 households which, as of May, 2000, were renting privately-owned apartments with the help of federal Section 8 certificates administered by the Brookline Housing Authority, and 31 homeowners who purchased their units with Town assistance.

An affordable unit is one which is financed in such a way as to reduce occupancy costs, so that typical residents are paying no more than approximately 30% of their income on gross housing costs. Affordable

units are targeted to households who meet specific eligibility guidelines. Income eligibility is scaled to the median income of the metropolitan area, a standard which is updated annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Affordable units make up between 7% and 8% of the Town's housing stock. However, because almost half of the inventory lacks permanent affordability restrictions, at the current pace of affordable housing development - approximately 15 units per year - the inventory of affordable units could decrease to 5% of all units within the next 20 years.

The largest category of affordable housing is the inventory owned and mainly operated by the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA), which is governed by an independent public board. The BHA currently administers 921 units, subsidized by either the State or the Federal government. Half of these units - 458 - are in seven mid- and high-rise buildings which serve the elderly, as well as some handicapped residents. Another 432 units are in "family" developments. Thirty-one units are located in three small residences which are operated by private non-profits for special need populations.

While housing developments owned by public housing authorities have the greatest expectation of "permanent" affordability, and are expected to depend upon their respective sources for funding for operat-

ing subsidies and modernization, these sources often are not adequate. The Town has a history of partnering with the BHA by contributing Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to capital improvements, principally for landscaping, but also for energy efficiency and wheelchair accessibility.

The second largest category of affordable housing is the inventory of privately-owned, publicly-subsidized housing owned by for-profits and non-profits, and totalling 878 units. Most of these are located in six large developments built between 1965 and 1977, and these include the so called "expiring use projects". There already has been an attrition of 278 units at four developments which were originally offered at below market rents.

More recently, units with affordability restrictions have been added through small developments, including the acquisition and renovation of lodging houses by non-profit and for-profit developers, yielding 93 units. Finally, there are 40 units developed or under development under the Town inclusionary zoning (Section 4.40). These include 11 condominiums, 17 assisted living units, and 12 rental units. Despite the addition of about 158 newly affordable units between 1990 and 2000, there has been a net loss of 120 affordable units.

BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Town Meeting established the Housing Advisory Board (HAB) in 1987 as successor to the Town's Affordable Housing Committee. The HAB consists of seven members and is charged with addressing affordable housing issues and opportunities in Brookline, including recommendations with regard to use of Federal funding, implementation of the Town's inclusionary Zoning, and use of the Housing Trust.

In 1995, the Town's first Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) and Officer were appointed to promote economic growth and support existing

businesses. In 1997, following the report of a Moderator's Committee on Housing, the development of affordable housing was added to the EDAB mission, and the position of Housing Development Officer was created to encourage the development of new, and preservation of existing affordable housing opportunities.

In June 2000, the Board of Selectmen established a Housing Opportunities Task Force with a goal to seek out resources for affordable housing- properties, funding and development capacity - to achieve new affordable housing development. A Preservation Committee was also established to seek ways to preserve existing affordable housing.

FUNDING/PROGRAMS

The Town's major current sources of funding for affordable housing come from the federal HOME program, through which the Town receives approximately \$360,000 per year, the Housing Trust (see below), and repayments of loans to a revolving fund initially funded through CDBG monies. As stated previously, the CDBG program also has been used to support capital improvements at BHA developments.

Town housing programs have recently been redesigned in order to assure that the investment of Town money achieves the greatest leverage, and that funding promotes the longest period of affordability appropriate to the use of the funds. The housing programs include home-buyer assistance, which has assisted two to five home buyers a year, emergency rehabilitation and lead paint abatement, and housing development by which the Town assists non-profits and for-profits to develop affordable units. The Town also works closely with developers who are subject to Section 4.40 to encourage the development of on-site affordable units, to structure the rental and sales prices and agreements, and to assure outreach to eligible Town residents most at risk of displacement.

Zoning

Brookline's Zoning By-law affects the development of housing by establishing regulations that control the following elements:

1. location of uses through various types of zoning districts (residential, business, office, and industrial),
2. development density through limits on number of units on a lot, lot sizes, and floor area ratios (ratio of building size to lot size),
3. placement of buildings and parking on a lot through various dimensional regulations, particularly yard setbacks, open space, and parking requirements,
4. and the appearance of buildings through dimensional regulations (such as maximum height) and design review.

Figures 5-7 compare the actual residential land use and densities to that allowed by zoning. These figures show where the number of units per lot is more or less than allowed (Figure 5), where lot sizes are both smaller than allowed (Figure 6), and where lot sizes are larger than allowed (Figure 7).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Zoning By-law also includes a variety of mechanisms intended to facilitate the creation of affordable housing, such as the Public Benefit Incentives and Affordable Housing Requirements. Adopted in 1962 and subsequently amended at least eight times,

Section 5.21 currently allows for increases in the maximum allowed floor area ratio for projects that provide certain specified public benefits, including affordable housing, open space, public parking, and street improvements.

In 1987, the Town of Brookline adopted Section 4.40 of its Zoning By-law, implementing inclusionary zoning. There have been changes to the By-law since that time, including a reduction of the threshold for required contribution from 10 to 6 units and increased emphasis on the provision of units on-site.

During the 15 years between 1987 and 2002, inclusionary zoning is expected to result in an estimated 55 units: 31 affordable units are currently occupied; five units are under construction; four units are permitted; and about 15 potential units are in the pipeline. The inclusionary zoning requirements also are expected to generate approximately \$3.6 million in payments of cash made in lieu of providing units. The Housing Trust received its first payment at the end of 1999; about \$1.8 million has been received to date. The first allocation of Housing Trust funds was made to an affordable housing project in January, 2001 - a bridge loan against federal HOME dollars to permit the local non-profit Brookline Improvement Coalition to purchase the building.

RESIDENTIAL ZONING

FIGURE 2

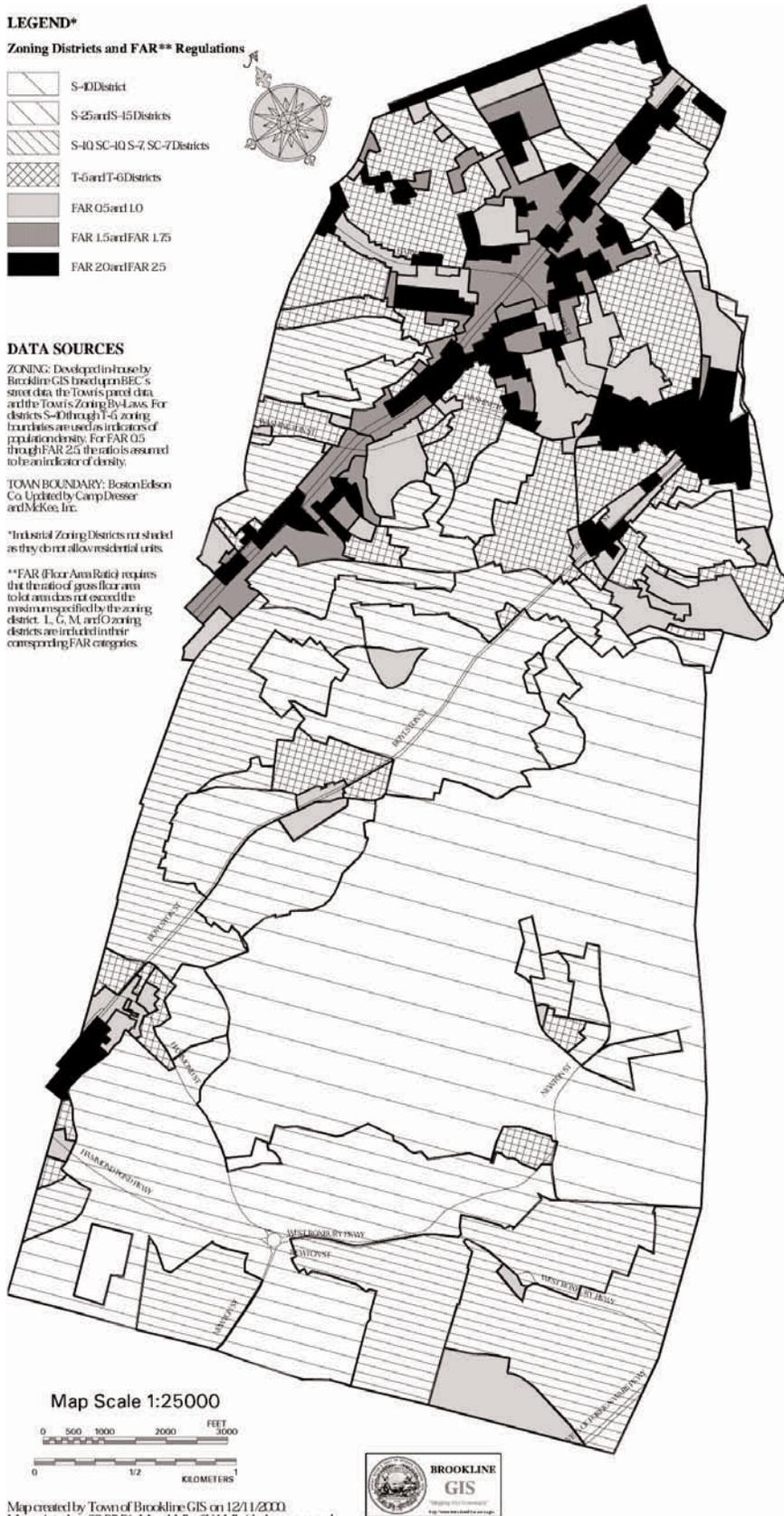
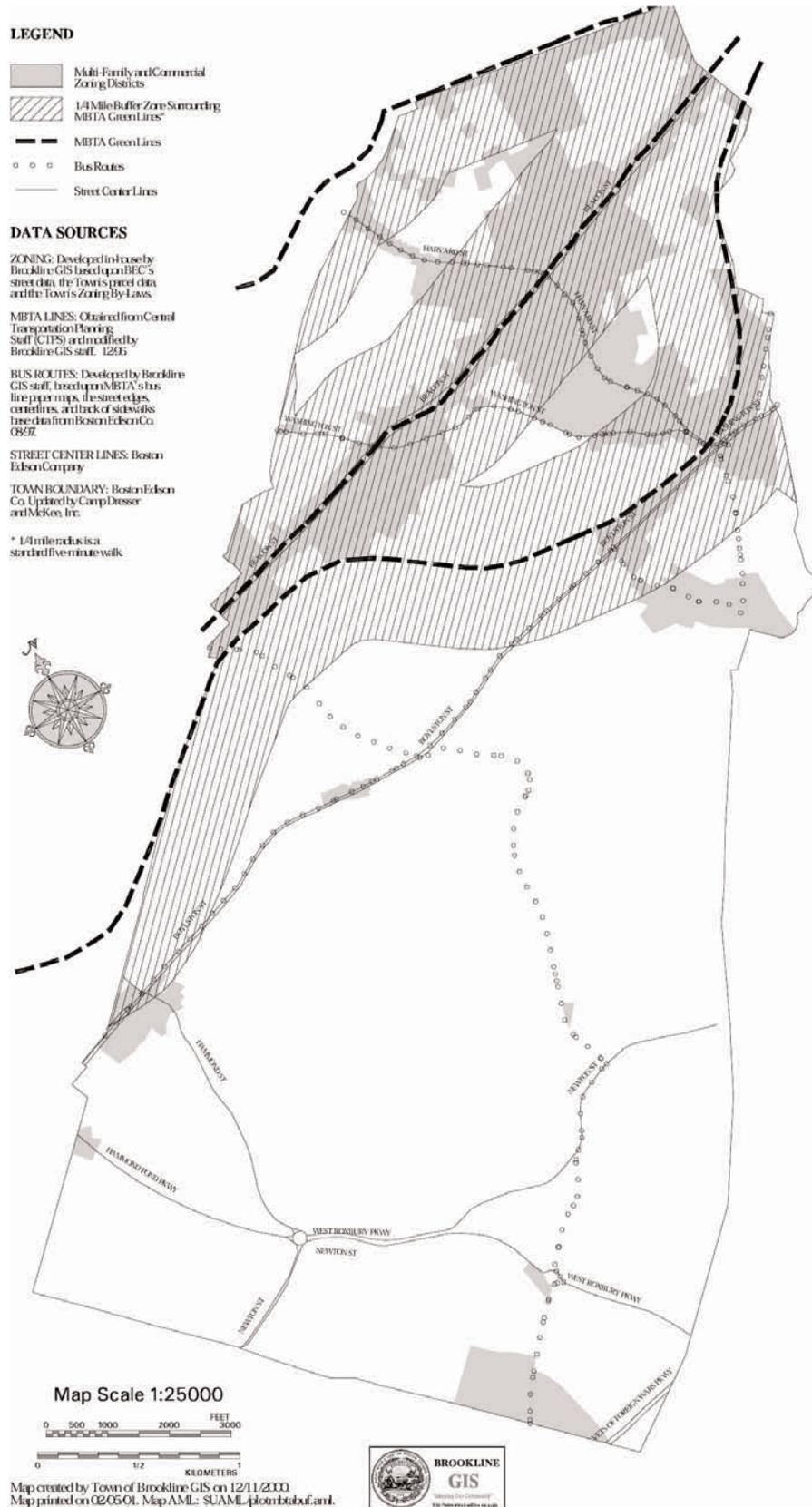


FIGURE 3

TRANSIT LINES & ZONING



LEGEND

- Multi-Family (>3) Developments since 1900
- One and Two Family Developments since 1900*
- ★ Approved New Development
- * Proposed New Development

DATA SOURCES

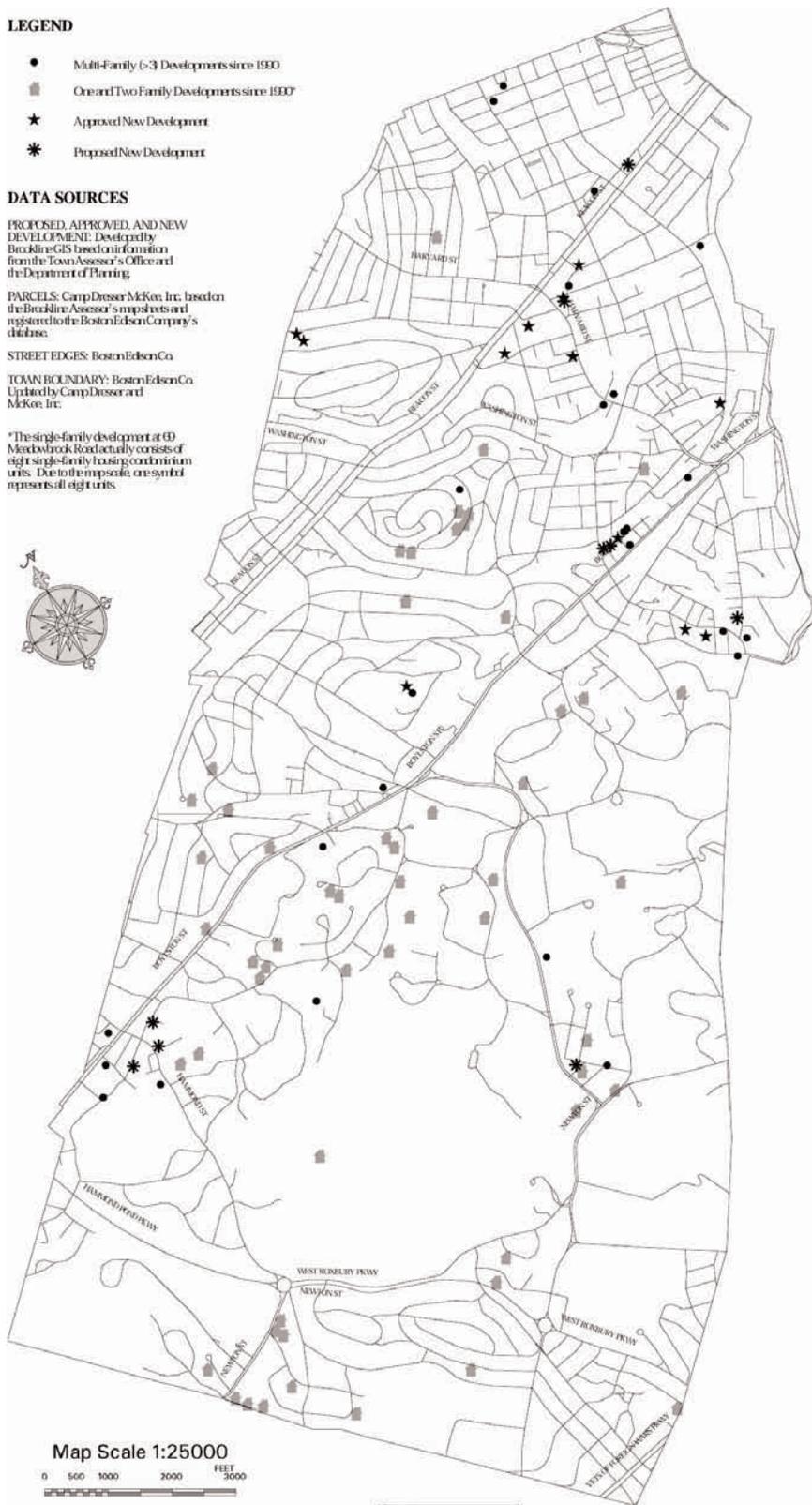
PROPOSED, APPROVED, AND NEW DEVELOPMENT: Developed by Brookline GIS based on information from the Town Assessor's Office and the Department of Planning.

PARCELS: Camp Dresser McKee, Inc. based on the Brookline Assessor's mapsheets and registered to the Boston Edison Company's database.

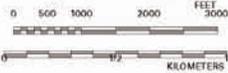
STREET EDGES: Boston Edison Co.

TOWN BOUNDARY: Boston Edison Co. Updated by Camp Dresser and McKee, Inc.

*The single-family development at 63 Meadebrook Road actually consists of eight single-family housing condominium units. Due to the map scale one symbol represents all eight units.



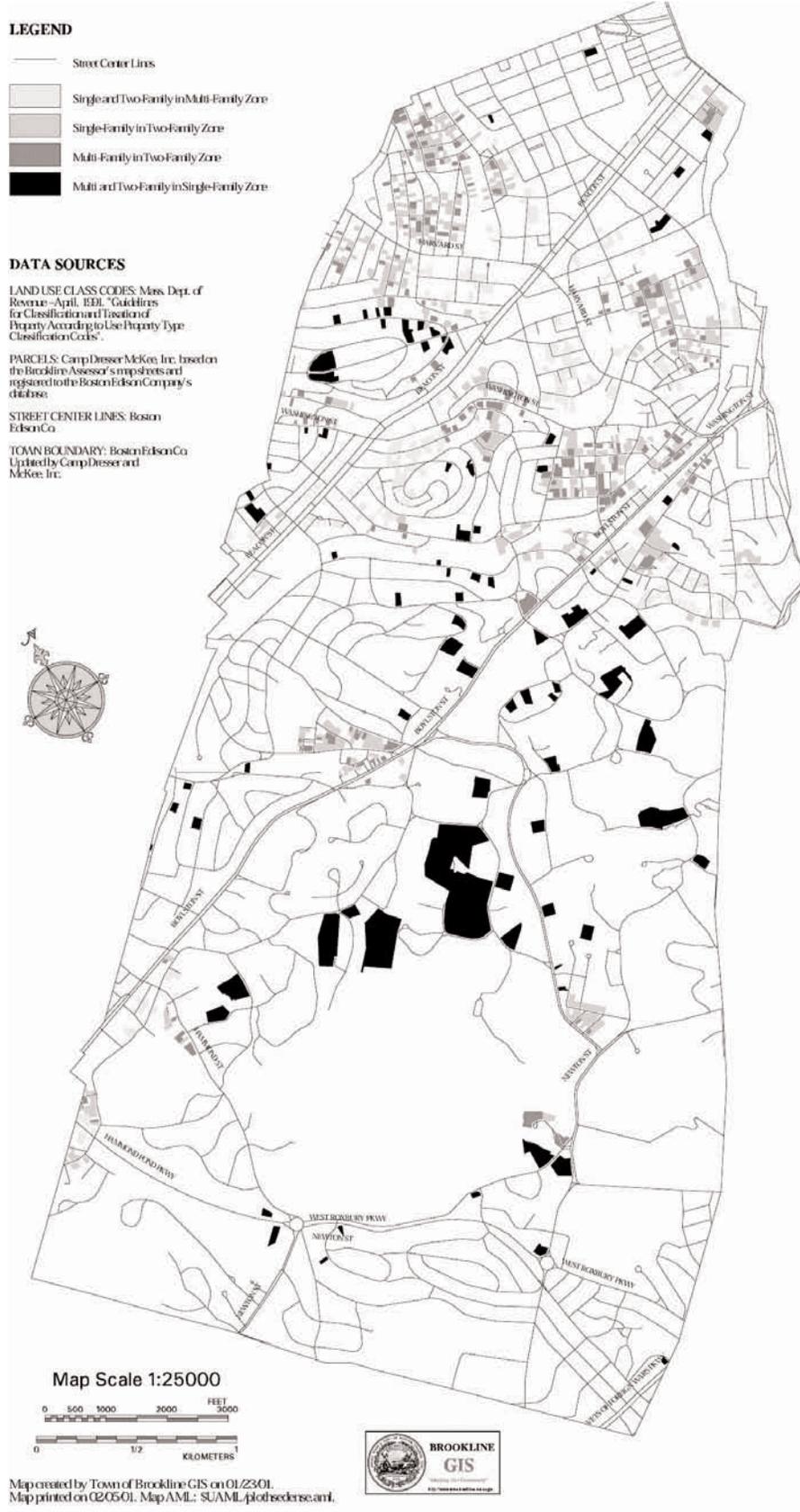
Map Scale 1:25000



Map created by Town of Brookline GIS on 1/16/01.
Map printed on 02/05/01. Map AML: SUAML.plt@townweb.net.

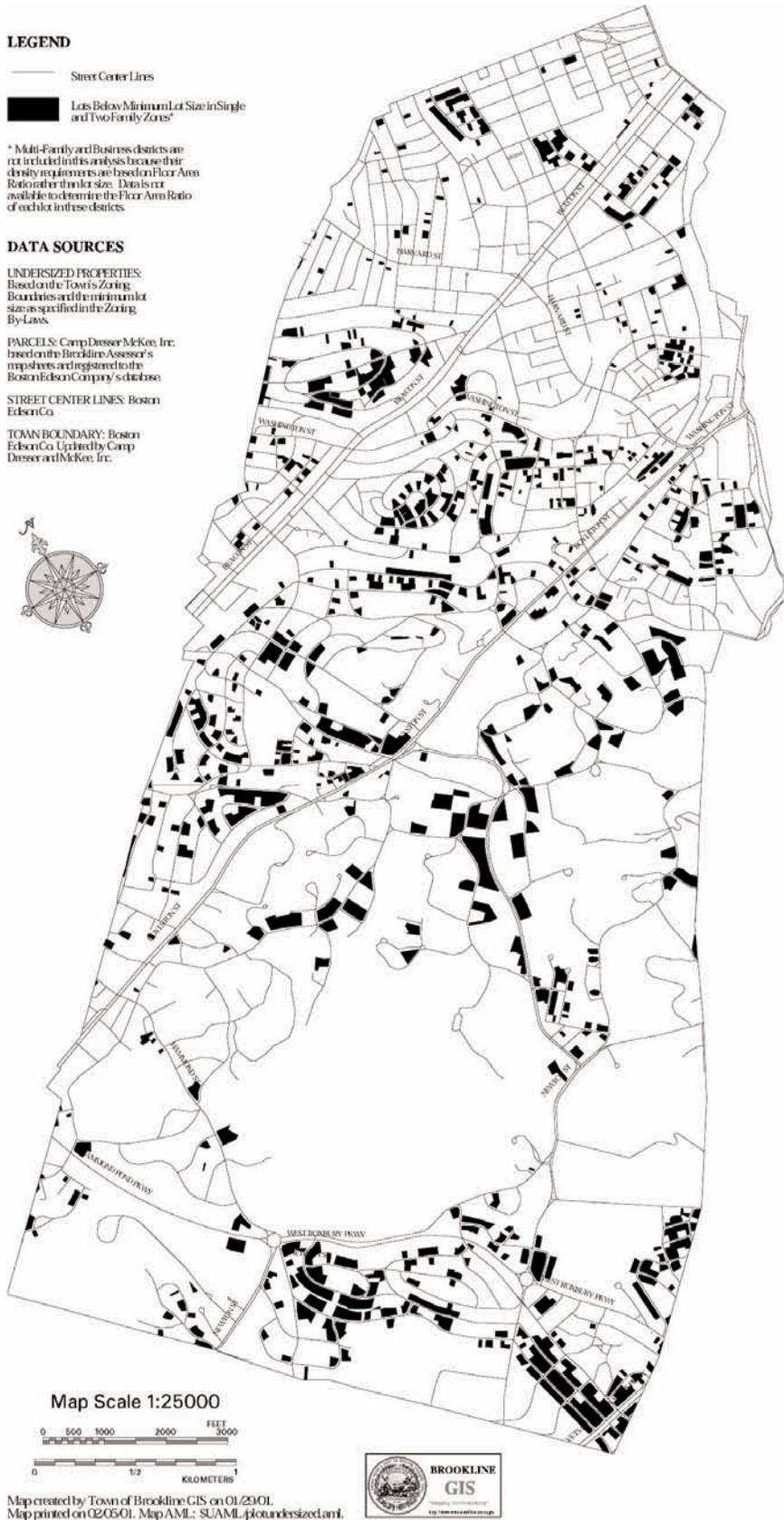
FIGURE 5

ACTUAL VS. ZONED RESIDENTIAL USES



LOTS BELOW ZONED LOT SIZE

FIGURE 6



ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

The residential make-up of an area, more than any other component of the built environment, determines the character of the community. The variety of residential landscapes, the location, the type, and the cost of an area's housing stock will ultimately determine who lives there, how they interact, and if it is, in fact, a "community".

Diversity & Affordability

1

An urban community located within minutes of the central city, Brookline's diversity has long been one of its most valued characteristics. From bricklayers to bankers, cooks to corporate executives, the diversity of the Town's population has reflected its varied housing stock, from modest triple-decker flats to glorious mansions. In its schools, which have launched generations of immigrants, students have learned not only their ABC's, but an appreciation for other classes and cultures. The Town's ability to draw from its own population to patrol its streets, to teach its children, and to operate its commercial establishments has made Brookline more than just a suburb, it has made it a community.

Brookline's strength has become its Achilles heel: a well-managed Town with an attractive housing stock, a diverse population, a strong sense of community, and a convenient proximity to downtown has fueled a real estate market which is putting these very qualities at risk.

In addition, Brookline's historic diversity has been eroded by the loss of rental units through condominium conversion and the end of rent control. Finally, since half of the Town's affordable housing stock is owned by private investors, the expiration of controls on that housing will significantly erode the inventory over the next 20 years.

Despite the lack of current information on income trends, the change in the composition of Brookline's population can be inferred by changes in buying power over the past decade. This is illustrated in Chart 8, using the ability to purchase a condominium in Brookline as a gauge for affordability in the market as a whole. Between 1991 and 2000, the median price of a condominium in Brookline increased by 120% (from \$133,000 to \$292,000) while the median income in the Boston metropolitan area for a 3 person family increased by 30% (from \$45,000 to \$59,000).

Looked at from a different perspective, in 1991, a family of 3 with the median metro area income (\$45,000) could afford to pay \$116,000 for a condo in Brookline, or 88% of the median price (\$133,000). The family would have needed \$52,000 to purchase a median priced condominium. In 2000, a family of three with the current median metro area income (\$59,000) could afford to pay \$148,000 for a condominium in Brookline, 51% of the median price (\$292,000). The

family would have needed an income between \$90,000 and \$100,000 to purchase a median priced condominium.

While information is less available for rental housing, if rentals for two bedroom units tend to be within the range of \$1600 to \$3000 (including utility bills, etc.), the incomes required to lease these are \$68,000 to \$124,000; and move-in costs - from two to four months rent - would range from \$3,200 to \$12,000. Anecdotal information is that families and the elderly are increasingly being priced out of the private rental market, and replaced by households of unrelated young persons.

At this rate, Brookline will continue to become a very different community than it is today. Displacement of lower-, moderate-, and middle-income renters will continue. And many of the existing lower- and middle-income home owners are likely to be replaced by households with considerably higher incomes and assets than the sellers had when they moved to Brookline. Families are justifiably concerned about the ability of their children to live in the community where they grew up, and older renters are concerned with being able to age in their own community.

The Town's housing policy is directed to preserving existing regulated affordable housing. It also aims at identifying existing rentals which come on the market

and which may be acquired with the intention of achieving affordable or mixed-income housing. To date, this effort has focused on lodging houses, but, in the future, could include larger, conventional rental properties as well.

The scarcity of land available and suitable for development or redevelopment is a particular opportunity: it challenges the Town to identify publicly-owned properties and begin the public discussion concerning alternate compatible uses; to identify privately-owned properties and work with property owners and potential developers towards the goal of mixed-income housing. It also challenges the Town to make maximum use of its zoning powers to shape the use of land in the public interest, which includes maintaining the diversity of the community.

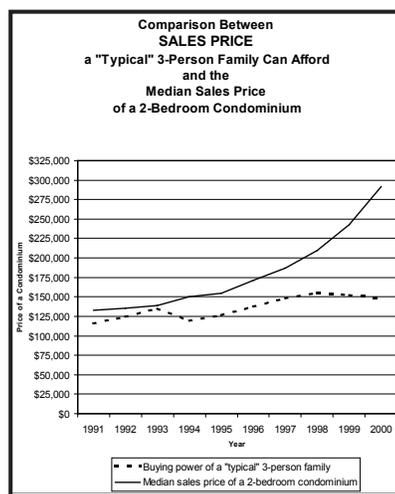


CHART 8

An appropriate density of strategically-located housing can strengthen the livability of our community in many ways. Compact residential development located within walking distance of our commercial centers supports those areas, and, in turn, supports the diversity of services available to all residents. Residential development near mass transit lines fosters transit ridership, and this, in combination with walkable and bikable commercial areas, can reduce automobile dependency - lessening traffic congestion and environmental pollution.

Ultimately, in communities with high land costs and housing prices, density is a critical tool to achieve affordability. Increasing density (to the extent that it is not implemented across the board and thus capitalized into land costs) results in lower land cost per unit. It also contributes to greater economies of scale, both through savings in construction costs and development overhead. Projects of greater scale can become more feasible and require fewer public subsidies with income from market units to help underwrite the cost of providing the affordable units.

While discussions of density often raise difficult issues, particularly in relation to neighborhood scale, this need not be the case. Indeed, in many parts of

Brookline, the current level of density varies from the density permitted through the Zoning By-law (see Figures 5 & 6). This could provide an opportunity to create effective zoning incentives for various public benefits, including affordable housing (see #5 Zoning to follow).

Furthermore, “density by design”, as the current trend has been called, seeks to achieve density in ways that reinforce historic development patterns and, where appropriate, encourage open space and other public amenities. There are many opportunities in Brookline to provide additional housing:

1. Convert historic buildings to housing, such as St. Mark’s Church on Park Street which was converted to 43 units in 1979;
2. Convert accessory structures, such as carriage houses, to housing;
3. Convert existing attics and basements to new units
3. Utilize appropriate vacant lots for infill development;
4. Investigate subdividable lots for appropriate development sites;
5. Research potential redevelopment opportunities, such as the recently approved proposal at 20 Cameron Street to replace industrial uses with a 14 unit residential building.

The phrase “transit-oriented development” describes a type of development that has a reciprocal relationship: it is development that both supports and is supported by mass transit. Although this is a fairly new term, promoted by architect Peter Calthorpe to describe the development of newly planned communities, it is based on the traditional concept of streetcar suburbs.

Brookline was one of the Boston area’s first streetcar suburbs. The density of development that occurred here in the mid to late 19th century and throughout the 20th century would not have been possible without reliance on mass transit. In fact, the most dense development patterns in Brookline have occurred in North Brookline where three of the MBTA’s green lines provide direct connections to downtown Boston (see Figures 1 & 3).

With the prevalence of automobiles in our lives, these transit connections to Boston are no longer as strongly relied upon, particularly with reverse commutes (that is, Brookline resident’s working in outer suburbs as opposed to downtown) becoming more common than in the past. However, Brookline is one of six inner core communities considered part of the urban ring corridor. According to the *Urban Ring Major Investment Study*, March 2000, this corridor is growing faster than the regional average, and will contain over 250,000 residents and over 240,000 jobs by the year 2020. Therefore, it is clear that mass transit

availability in Brookline will continue to have a strong reciprocal relationship with development.

Encouraging the continuance of transit-oriented development is an important opportunity for

Brookline to preserve its historic patterns of development, enhance the diversity of housing and lifestyle choices, as well as to lessen reliance on automobiles, thereby reducing traffic congestion and environmental pollution, and increasing our sustainability.

According to *Creating Transit Supportive Land-Use Regulations*, PAS Report #468, the maintenance and

creation of transit-oriented development relies on four basic concepts:

1. ensuring pedestrian and bicycle-friendly site and streetscape design;
2. balancing the need to accommodate automobile parking with the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users;
3. encouraging mixed-use development;
4. fostering appropriate development densities.

Brookline has the opportunity to review its development policies and land use regulations to encourage the continuance of our historic patterns of development by fostering transit-oriented development.



Credit: Brookline Public Library Collection
Coolidge Corner, ca 1910

Combining the themes of transit-oriented development and density by design, as well as the benefits of additional foot traffic as related to the health of local commercial centers, mixed-use neighborhoods and buildings can strengthen a community's livability. Many of Brookline's neighborhoods already exemplify the ideals of mixed-use. Further mixed-use opportunities exist, particularly with our single-story commercial buildings. These buildings, of which there are approximately 180 in Brookline, can provide valuable development opportunities that not only increase housing opportunities, but also contribute to the continuance of Brookline's historic mixed-use and transit-oriented development patterns.



Mixed-Use Building
Corner of Beacon Street and Winchester Ave, 2000



Single-Story Commercial Building
Washington Street, 2000

Adding additional stories on existing single-story commercial

buildings raises several issues related to parking, historic preservation, building code and structural capacities, and potential coordination by multiple owners of contiguous buildings. Encouragement of building-up in support of affordable housing also requires appropriate incentives and controls which may differ from the Town's standard inclusionary zoning requirements.

A "build-out" study regarding this issue could assist the Town in analyzing alternative incentives and provisions to encourage this mixed-use development. It could target appropriate blocks of Beacon, Boylston, Harvard and Washington Street, and address permitted and potential density where such buildings exist, as well as issues related to context, design and parking.

Zoning 5

Traditionally, zoning has been used as a tool to separate different land uses and to delineate the density of development within neighborhoods. Brookline's land use pattern consists of mixed uses and mixed densities. One can walk down a street, such as Fuller Street, and see various but compatible uses, from the commercial uses at JFK Crossing to residential uses, and various densities, from single-family houses to multi-family buildings, existing side-by-side. This variety is valued as an important and unique component of Brookline's livability.

Brookline Zoning has attempted to make sense of this pattern by creating various districts and regulating allowed uses and densities. However, actual land uses and densities often do not comply with the standards that our zoning sets forth (see Figures 5&6). In order to preserve the diversity of densities and the strength of mixed use neighborhoods, it is important to analyze the impact of our Zoning regulations, and to make adjustments where necessary to preserve the defining elements of existing neighborhoods in terms of allowed uses, densities, open space, and the placement of buildings on lots.

PUBLIC BENEFIT INCENTIVES

Although Brookline's Zoning By-law creates public benefit incentives by allowing bonuses in FAR (Section 5.21), this section of the By-law is rarely used to create additional affordable housing, due to the minimum lot size requirement of 20,000 s.f. as well as limit on the aggregate bonus allowed. These issues present an opportunity to re-think the structure of the By-law to include zoning tools which are more flexible and which will more effectively increase our affordable housing supply. According to Marya Morris *Incentive Zoning*, PAS Report 494, the zoning incentives (bonuses) offered by a community should be proportionate to the cost to the developer of providing the desired amenity (such as affordable housing). There are numerous standard evaluation meth-

ods that can be used to appropriately calibrate the bonuses. They can include increased FAR and height allowances; modified open space, lot size, and parking requirements; as well as a predictable development review process. The Housing Advisory Board and Zoning By-law Commission are currently focusing on the portions of the zoning by-law which directly impact affordable housing, and most importantly Section 4.40. There is a clear interest in improving the effectiveness of the by-law to encourage affordable housing. In doing so, it is important to consider the feasibility of incorporating bonuses that produce public benefits without increasing land values.

Finally, Brookline can consider following the lead of other communities and invite the "friendly" use of Chapter 40B to achieve development at a density which exceeds that allowed by right, yet is designed within a neighborhood context. "Chapter 40B" refers to a state law enacted in 1969 which provides incentives to developers of affordable and mixed income housing by:

1. requiring a community-coordinated "comprehensive permit" process, potentially including waivers to zoning and other local regulations;
- 2) in communities where less than 10 % of the housing stock is already dedicated to low and moderate income households, establishing a State Housing Appeals process by which the State can review an adverse local decision. A minimum of 20% to 25% of the resulting units must be affordable.

Thus, despite the scarcity and cost of land, the Town can use a combination of a strong real estate market and all available local and State land use tools to maximize the development of affordable housing. The Town's Housing Trust Fund by itself, and to the extent that its use can leverage State funds, can provide additional incentives to willing developers to exceed the minimum affordability requirements under those laws.

