An aerial photograph of the Wellesley Hills Square area in Boston, Massachusetts. The map shows a grid of streets including Elton Street, Middle Avenue, and various residential streets. Several buildings are visible, and the overall layout is a typical urban neighborhood. The text is overlaid on the map.

The Vision for Wellesley Hills Square

Submitted to the Wellesley Planning Board

by

Community Design Partnership
Boston, MA

June 2000

The Vision for Wellesley Hills Square

Survey – December 1999/January 2000



Forum – February 9, 2000



Recommendations for Phase II

Submitted to the Wellesley Planning Board

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1999 the Town of Wellesley began a planning process for Wellesley Hills Square as part of its ongoing implementation of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan recommendation to prepare master plans for each of the town's commercial villages. Wellesley contracted with Community Design Partnership in late 1999 to prepare Phase One of an improvement plan for the area. The Phase One program was to engage residents, business and property owners, institutional representatives and town officials in development of a vision to guide subsequent detailed planning for the area. The project included the following elements:

- A brief written survey distributed in December 1999 and January 2000 and returned by 77 respondents
- Review of existing documents, plans, and studies
- Analysis of the planning area
- Informal interviews with merchants
- A Visioning Forum held on February 9, 2000 with 33 participants
- Preparation of a Wellesley Hills Square Vision Statement
- Recommendations for the Phase II Action Plan

Wellesley Hills Square is a center for convenience shopping where residents and others can fulfill the needs of everyday life. Participants in the planning process value the variety of shops and services available, the large number of independent businesses, the public landmarks such as Elm Park and Sprague Clock Tower, the compact and human-scaled storefronts, and the special features of the area, such as the stonework used in several public and private buildings and sites. The most often cited concerns are:

- Traffic congestion and its effect on convenient vehicle circulation and on the pedestrian environment and safety
- Parking difficulties, especially in the eastern part of the commercial district
- Definition of the identity of the district, which lacks entryway markers and a cohesive design personality
- Store signage and building maintenance consistency
- Need for more streetscape greenery

The vision for Wellesley Hills Square includes the preservation of well-loved elements of the past and improvements in district identity, distinctiveness, cohesiveness, pedestrian environment, management of traffic and parking. Recommendations for the Phase II Action Plan include the following elements:

- *Transportation, circulation, and parking*

The Route 9 access changes proposed for Wellesley Hills Square by Mass Highway may exacerbate traffic congestion on Washington Street and would make the pedestrian connection on Washington Street bridge over Route 9 even more difficult that it is at

present. A parking deck over Route 9 in the eastern section of the commercial area may be a solution to the parking deficit in that part of the district.

▪ *Design*

Attention to the district boundaries, signage and building facades, landscape treatments along the street, design improvements to Elm Park, a lighting plan for attractive buildings, and other details can preserve and enhance the area's design character.

▪ *Zoning*

Zoning revisions are needed to ensure that future redevelopment will conform to the pedestrian-friendly neighborhood commercial district character of the area.

▪ *Business mix*

Consider a market study to identify gaps in offerings, prepare for a possible move by Bread & Circus, and improve turnover in locations where it may be a problem

▪ *Organization and programming*

Organize a business association to help sponsor events and joint promotions

The Vision for Wellesley Hills Square

In 2015, Wellesley Hills Square is a thriving commercial village serving the surrounding neighborhood, daytime business owners and employees, and members of the wider community.

- Its village character is reflected in the small and medium scale architecture of its 19th and 20th-century buildings located at the sidewalk edge, and in the many small independent storefront businesses.
- Its distinctiveness is expressed in the use of stonework throughout the district, attractive entryway signage, and careful maintenance of its landmark park and clock tower. In good weather, Elm Park attracts users throughout the day, including a lunchtime crowd enjoying the chance to be outside and surrounded by greenery.
- Its cohesiveness can be seen in the variety of thriving businesses, activity throughout the day and evening, seasonal round of plantings and other decorations, effective signage and lighting, well-maintained buildings, and an active business association that takes a strong role in promoting and managing the Square.

Although Washington Street remains an important arterial road carrying substantial traffic, Wellesley Hills Square has become more pedestrian friendly through effective management of transportation, circulation, and parking. New public parking, cooperative management of all public and private parking resources, neighborhood shuttles to serve the train, signal timing changes and modifications, and more pedestrian and bicycle amenities, are among the improvements that create an optimum balance between pedestrian and vehicle mobility.

I. PLANNING FOR WELLESLEY HILLS SQUARE

Setting the Stage

The 1994 Wellesley Comprehensive Plan called for studies and master plans for each of the Town's commercial villages. The Plan drew attention to a variety of issues that should be considered in planning for the villages:

- Establishment of a distinctive identity or design theme for each village
- Maintenance of a lively mix of businesses, services, and activities
- Creation of pedestrian links between residential and commercial areas
- Attention to transitions between residential and commercial areas
- Transportation and parking management, including easy bicycle access to commuter train stations
- Attention to landscape improvements

Following that recommendation, Wellesley has already completed planning studies for Wellesley Square and Wellesley Lower Falls and is proceeding with implementation. The village improvement programs are organized in three phases: a visioning process, an action plan, and implementation.

In 1999 the Town turned its attention to Wellesley Hills Square, contracting with *Community Design Partnership* (CDP) for Phase One of an improvement program for the area. The Phase One program was to engage residents, business and property owners, institutional representatives and town officials in development of a vision to guide subsequent detailed planning for the area. The project included the following elements:

- A brief written survey
- Review of existing documents, plans, and studies
- Documentation of existing conditions
- Analysis of the planning area
- Informal interviews with merchants
- Visioning Forum
- Wellesley Hills Square Vision Statement
- Recommendations for the Phase II Action Plan

A Linear Village

The Town of Wellesley was part of Needham until the early 1880s. The railroad's 1834 arrival in Wellesley Farms made the rolling hills of this farm town attractive to Bostonians for summer homes and made possible its eventual transformation into a well-to-do suburb. The present Wellesley Hills was first known as North Needham and then called Grantville when in the 1840s a separate parish was

created from West Needham (Wellesley Square). Controversies surrounding the separation of the two parishes lingered and the two villages developed separate identities during the nineteenth century.

Elm Park and the Putney Block (present Marathon Sports block) have long been the center of activity in Wellesley Hills. Even before the Civil War, Wellesley Hills attracted visitors who sought the "salubrious air" of the town. Sargent's Tavern became the popular Elm Park Hotel, later a school and once more a hotel in the 1880s.



The substantial Shaw School built in 1854 at the corner of Forest and Washington Streets, was another nineteenth-century landmark in the village. Remodeled in 1875 and demolished in 1928, the clock and bell from this school were saved for use in the Sprague Clock Tower. In the early 1880s, the notable Boston architect H. H. Richardson designed the present Wellesley Hills train station, and the founder of American landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, designed the station's landscape, which has been lost to a parking lot. A trolley line connected Wellesley Hills and Wellesley Square in 1896, enhancing contact between the two villages. "The center of social life had been in the Hills, where the gregarious but less affluent people lived, forming a closely bound neighborhood. Almost all the clubs in town were located there, dating back to when that section was called Grantville. Fashion, dinner parties, charitable activities and philanthropy had been located in its elegant neighborhoods. Wellesley itself tended to be more a center for business. Travel between the two centers had not been easy, and so was infrequent." (Elizabeth M. Hinchliffe, *Five Pounds Currency, Three Pounds of Corn: Wellesley's Centennial Story* (1981), p. 62).

An afternoon's traffic through Wellesley Hills in 1907 consisted of 2 bicycles, 29 horse-drawn vehicles carrying 71 people, and 74 cars carrying 263 riders. Businesses in the Hills included a grocery, hardware store, blacksmith, and laundry. The DeFazio store was a meeting place and waiting room for the train, open 15 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Within the first two decades of the twentieth century, Wellesley Hills began to take on the character it has today. By 1919 the Babson Reports building had been constructed and three years later Babson built a movie theater which became the Community Playhouse. Construction of the fieldstone buildings characteristic of the Hills occurred in the 1920s -- the Clock Tower, the Hills Library -- and the Babson Park campus opened.

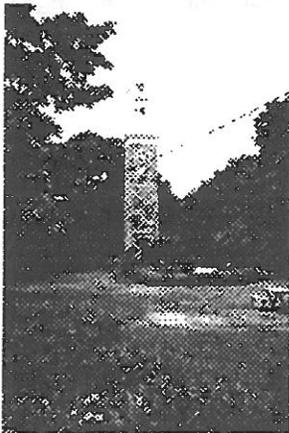
Trolley service lasted until 1932 and the next year the Route 9 highway was built on the old Worcester Turnpike, against the wishes of Wellesley Town Meeting. Over the years, the many cross streets on Route 9 have been eliminated as road improvements increasingly focus on limiting access, a process that continues with current plans for the road at Wellesley Hills Square. During the Great

Depression and World War II, the commercial district of Wellesley Hills Square did not change substantially. During postwar prosperity new traditions became established, such as the annual festival to cheer on the runners going down Washington Street on Boston Marathon Day. An established neighborhood shopping area, Wellesley Hills Square reinforced its town-wide importance with the construction of the Wellesley Community Center.

Wellesley pioneered zoning regulation and careful planning in the 1920s, and that care with the physical fabric of the town has produced its unique sense of identity and character. This project on Wellesley Hills Square is part of that continuing tradition of attention to planning.

The Project Planning Area

The Wellesley Hills Square planning area contains a linear commercial district on Washington Street (Route 16) between Forest Street and Worcester Street (Route 9) as well as nearby residential areas, town properties (a Fire Station, Public Works yard, and library), and a portion of the MBTA commuter train line. A mix of office, retail, service, institutional, residential, and transportation land uses are evident on Washington Street, providing a lively mix of activities and attractions. Most business uses are located on the southeastern side of Washington Street. A notable landmark is the Sprague Clock Tower in Elm Park at the traffic-intensive intersection of Washington and Worcester Streets. The retail district is anchored by the Bread & Circus market and includes an eclectic mix of small independent merchants and service providers, restaurants and prepared-foods providers, and a few chain stores. Office uses include health care and other professional offices. Institutional anchors that bring people to the district include the post office, library, and several churches. On the east side of the bridge over Route 9, a civic center containing the Wellesley Community Center, the Historical Society building, and offices for many nonprofit organizations is located next to the Congregational Church and across Washington Street from the library.



Because the district is a significant transportation nexus with the intersection of Routes 16 and 9 and T commuter rail station, pedestrian safety and amenities, traffic congestion, parking, and overall circulation are very important issues. Residential uses along the street include a few single-family homes, apartments and housing for the elderly, while quiet neighborhoods of single-family houses are located just behind the commercial corridor.

Village Character and Current Zoning

Wellesley Hills Square has retained many of the nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that create a pedestrian-friendly and village-like character. Some newer construction is less friendly to the street, for example, through the use of building setbacks with front parking lots, tinted and reflective glass, and facades with few windows that provide little transparency to internal activity. A

review of current zoning and contemplation of worst-case buildout scenarios indicate that areas like the DeFazio and Maugus blocks could hypothetically be redeveloped with extensive front parking and prominent signage, destroying the vitality of the commercial street edge and pedestrian character of the district. (See Figures 1 and 2)

Business Conditions

The commercial district can be divided into three sections of varying intensity. (1) The eastern end of Washington Street has the most activity and congestion. Bread & Circus is a strong business anchor, along with several other businesses such as the pharmacy, Brighams, the video store and the gas station. (2) The post office is the center of a medium-intensity node on the street also marked by the train station, banks, and other businesses. (3) At the western end of Wellesley Hills Square, the businesses on Washington Street are doing well. Businesses at Playhouse Square, the newer development on Forest Street at the intersection of Washington Street, have had more difficulty. Although some have prospered, such as Bertucci's and the women's clothing boutique, there has been substantial turnover of retail and service tenants in that building. The provision of abundant and highly-visible parking in front of the building has not been sufficient to assure success for retail businesses located there.

II. THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS

The Wellesley Hills Square community includes residents who shop there regularly, business owners and employees, commercial property-owners, and institutional stakeholders. The community's experience of the Square and its preferences for continuity and change were elicited in several ways. A Steering Committee was convened to advise the consultants on local issues, a brief survey was distributed, the consultants interviewed merchants informally, and an interactive community forum was held to develop a vision for Wellesley Hills Square for the next five to fifteen years.

The Survey

A short survey was distributed in a variety of ways: publication twice in the Wellesley Townsman; availability in the library, post office, bank ATMs, and some shops; and availability at the Forum. (Please see Appendices A and B for the survey and responses.)

Who are the respondents?

There were 77 respondents to the survey, of whom the vast majority (72) were Wellesley residents. Fifteen respondents were business owners, managers, or property-owners, but of those fifteen, eight were also residents and also counted in the resident category. One resident also self-identified as an employee of a local business. Eighty percent of the respondents have lived, worked or owned business property in the Town of Wellesley for 10 or more years and 83 percent live, work, or own property in Wellesley Hills.

Do they shop in Wellesley Hills?

Everyone (100% of respondents) who filled in the survey shops in Wellesley Hills. Half of the respondents shop there two or more times a week, and another 36 percent shop there more than once a month.

What's the best thing about Wellesley Hills Square?

Responses to this question revolved around four basic characteristics of Wellesley Hills Square: convenience, commercial variety, village character, and public amenities. People value the variety of shops, particularly the independent businesses, and the small-town feel of the area. Many specific businesses were named in response to this question, showing that many businesses have a loyal clientele. The public buildings and spaces that give Wellesley Hills Square its specific identity are also highly valued: Elm Park, the clock tower, the library. Respondents saw the area as a distinctive, village-style shopping area where it is possible to complete many errands conveniently.

What's the worst thing about Wellesley Hills Square?

The most-disliked aspects of the area revolve around traffic, parking, and pedestrian-crossing difficulties. Ninety-one percent of the responses to this question fell into those categories. Respondents generally described traffic as too fast, too congested, and too dangerous. As a result, pedestrian crossing can be difficult in some spots. One merchant commented that traffic congestion complicates access to parking for customers, while another noted that Washington Street's high traffic count and slower vehicle speeds were good for business. The Abbot Road/Cliff Road intersections with Washington Street were singled out as exceptionally difficult and dangerous for cars as well as pedestrians. Parking concerns focused particularly around the Bread & Circus end of the shopping district, with complaints ranging from lack of sufficient parking to lack of enforcement and too rapid enforcement.

What are the top four priority issues for improvement?

Respondents were asked to rank the *top four* issues that need improvement in Wellesley Hills Square (where "1" is the top priority, "2" is the next most important priority, and so on).

	Priority Rank				Sum
	1	2	3	4	
availability of parking	27	15	11	4	57
pedestrian environment/safety, traffic flow	42	6	5	3	56
convenience of parking	11	13	11	9	44
appearance of buildings	0	10	8	9	27
business mix	2	5	6	9	22
appearance of streets and public spaces	1	2	5	9	17
pedestrian and bicycle links with neighborhoods	1	7	4	5	17
store signage	4	1	3	8	16
access to train station	2	2	1	4	9
public signage	2	2	1	2	7
business/residential transition	0	1	1	1	3
other (4 miscellaneous priorities)					

These responses once again emphasize the themes of traffic, pedestrian safety, and parking. Although the appearance of both the public and private aspects of Wellesley Hills Square (including signage) is not of the highest priority, respondents would like to see improvements. A number of respondents also see the need for some fine-tuning of the business mix.

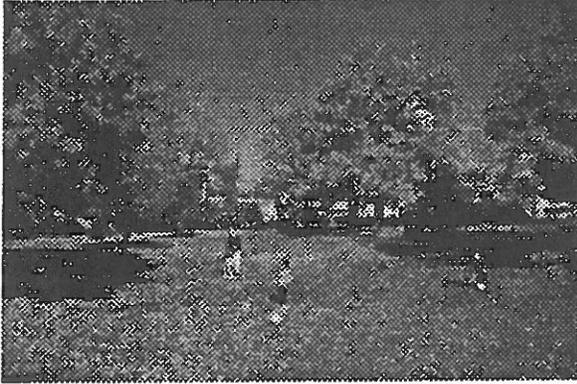
What's the one most important improvement that could be made, excluding traffic issues?

The largest category of suggested improvements, with mentioned 34 times by respondents, focused on parking, pedestrian issues, and traffic. These ranged from "get people out of their cars for short trips" and "build a parking garage" to rerouting traffic away from Washington Street and installing a traffic light at Abbott Road.

The next most important category of suggested improvements was aesthetic: 10 mentions of façade and building improvements; 10 mentions of amenities such as plantings, benches, brick sidewalks and encouragement to use the parks; and 8 mentions of improving signage.

Finally, a group of ten suggestions centered on improvements to the business mix , including limiting high-impact businesses.

What's the most important thing, place or attribute to preserve about Wellesley Hills Square?



Elm Park and the Sprague Clock Tower are the landmarks of Wellesley Hills Square and were mentioned more often (43 times) than any other aspect of the area. Other public buildings and public spaces were mentioned 12 times, ranging from the library to the train station and the Brook Path. The village character of the shopping area with a variety of shops and a unique mix of storefronts and residential buildings is another fundamental element of the area's identity and sense of place, attracting 31 mentions.

Merchant Views

The consultants informally interviewed a number of business owners along Washington Street about their experience and suggestions for improvements. Merchants in Wellesley Hills are generally very satisfied with their location, reporting that business is good and that relations with town government positive. Some were interested in creating a merchants' organization for the commercial village, while others felt they did not have the time or the need to create a merchants' organization for the area, though it might be a good idea in principle.

Although many mentioned traffic congestion and parking problems, particularly at the eastern end of the street, others acknowledged the value of a location on a major street. One small retailer said that the fact that traffic often cannot go very fast along the street is beneficial to him, because motorists are then more likely to notice his small storefront. In general, however, traffic and parking management were the major concerns of business owners. Several merchants remembered the period of streetscape and road improvements several years ago as being extremely difficult for businesses.

The Forum

The Wellesley Hills Visioning Forum was originally scheduled for January 13, 2000, but unfortunately had to be postponed because of a severe snowstorm to February 9, 2000, when thirty-

three participants gathered in the Community Center. Nine of the resident participants were also business owners. Bread & Circus provided cheese, fruit, and dessert trays, as well as coffee and other drinks, to fortify the group during the evening's activities.

Maps prepared by Mike Doyle, the Town's Geographic Information Systems specialist, were presented showing zoning, circulation and traffic issues, and natural features and amenities in Wellesley Hills Square, as well as 1930 and 1997 aerial orthophotos. CDP prepared boards illustrating the historical development of Wellesley Hills Square, hypothetical redevelopment build-outs of two commercial blocks permitted under current zoning. Plans for the proposed Mass Highway changes to Route 9 at Wellesley Hills Square were also displayed.



CDP provided a brief slide show with an analysis of current conditions and examples of streetscape and district identity elements from other communities. The participants were then randomly divided into three small groups to develop the elements of a Vision Statement for Wellesley Hills Square. At the end of the forum, each of the small groups presented its findings for discussion to the group as a whole.

The three small groups were asked to consider three issues:

- How residents and others use Wellesley Hills Square
- Identification of positive and negative elements or areas under the following topics:
 - Gateway experience and identity
 - Business mix
 - Public spaces and streetscape
 - Building character
 - Public and private signage
 - Transition between commercial and residential areas
 - Pedestrian and bicycle safety and access
 - Parking availability and convenience
 - Traffic issues
- Essential elements for a positive vision of Wellesley Hills Square in 5 to 15 years

How do residents and others use the village of Wellesley Hills Square?

Wellesley Hills Square is primarily an area of “convenience” shopping rather than “destination” shopping. Forum participants noted that it is a place where people can do a variety of errands to meet everyday needs and where shoppers tend to drop into shops to pick up an item or two – “mission-oriented” shopping. Even at Bread & Circus, which is one of the most important anchors of the

shopping area, the manager reported a similar, convenience-shopping profile. She sees the same customers come into the store several times a week for small purchases rather than doing large-scale, weekly grocery shopping. Although the majority of shops and businesses primarily serve the neighborhood, a few attract patrons from elsewhere, including Bread & Circus, the restaurants, the sports store, and the professional offices.

In addition to shopping, there are several community institutions that draw from beyond the neighborhood: the churches, community center, day care sites, and the counseling center. Informal recreational uses of Wellesley Hills Square include walking and jogging along Brook Path and unprogrammed activities at Maugus Park and the old playground.

Wellesley Hills is busy much of the day and early evening, with a strong lunchtime business, and there are also many shoppers on Saturdays. In the evening, after 6 or 7 p.m., some restaurants stay open while most other businesses close. As a result, parking is not a problem at night. Marathon Day is the biggest occasion of the year with a block-party atmosphere as residents and business owners crowd the sidewalks to cheer on the Boston Marathon racers. Summers tend to be the quietest times of the year.

Thematic concerns – Forum small groups

Issue	Positive	Negative	Vision Elements
Gateway experience and identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small center that comes by surprise - clock tower is a focal point, seen from every direction, very attractive - stonework on bridge, churches, library, etc. is very handsome - wide sidewalk with cafe tables at Forest St. corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - location unclear, people think it's the same as Lower Falls - poor access and identification from Rt. 9 - no entry signage - no unity on what the square is - no landmarks until you get to the clock tower - no hardware store - high turnover - small businesses need to grow - closing of theater - businesses at old theater block at Forest Street have difficulty succeeding - no bookstore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seasonal decorations for the entire area - planters with consistent design and plantings - entrance markers or signage
Business mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "the food court of Wellesley", diverse offerings - flexible space for diverse business types and reasonable rents - few vacancies and "business is great" - comprehensive mix - can fulfill many needs there - good number of independent businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elm Park underutilized - bus shelter at park, no longer used - bridge is not pedestrian-friendly - poor maintenance of bridge - poor maintenance at Wareland Street area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more restaurants (issue of 100-seat capacity for liquor license) and food variety - bookstore - community theater or cinema - hardware store - clothing store
Public spaces and streetscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brook Path is a beautiful asset - park at Seaward Road - areas with widened sidewalks at Putney Block and pizza shop with sidewalk tables - canopies - "civic center" (church, community center, historical society, etc.) - HH Richardson train station - Elm Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a few buildings need improved maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more outdoor dining - make Elm Park more attractive for use, e.g., lunch time; needs a landscape buffer against traffic on the Rt. 9 side, tables, benches - rebuild former columns flanking Eaton Court and also install at Babson Reports - lighting plan for the tower, library, fire station, other appealing buildings and sites - more trash receptacles - restore the railroad station - restore Olmsted gardens at the station - make Maugus Park into a community park; upgrade the playground with new tot lot equipment - more stone facades, walls, and columns - open stores and restaurants to the street
Building character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - village atmosphere - good basic collection of buildings - small and medium scale 		
Public and private signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sign bylaw has improved signage overall - signs generally smaller in scale now - diversity and eclecticism in signage is okay - "hunky" qualities should continue to be allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blockbuster signage and lighting is too big and too intense for some tastes - insufficient signage for Eaton Court parking lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more consistency, but not enforced uniformity, in storefront signage - more like Wellesley Square
Transition between commercial and residential uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - generally works well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fate of Babson lot not clear [subsequent purchaser has decided to continue office use] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - landscape elements can be buffer between zones
Pedestrian and bicycle safety and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - path system, especially used by children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - crossing over Rt. 9 from the DPW yard is very unsafe - stairs down from Eaton Court are difficult - Cliff Road sidewalk is very narrow - free right turn from Washington Street to Rt. 9 at community center is dangerous to pedestrians - pedestrian crossing is dangerous or difficult at many intersections - parking curbs at Bread & Circus area and B & C lot is hard to negotiate - train station parking too cheap, attracts out of town users - people are unaware of Eaton Court parking - parking lots at community center and church are hard to use because of traffic - Putney Block parking lot also difficult to use - no short term parking at post office 	
Parking availability and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parking at Forest Street end of district is adequate 		
Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - amount of traffic is positive for merchants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - difficult left turns from feeder roads - dangerous intersection at Cliff Road because people run red lights - some avoid the area because of traffic congestion and difficulty making return trips; use right turns to get around because only convenient to proceed one way - traffic at the bridge connection is dangerous; conflicts with turns to civic center, day care, pedestrians - Mass Highway plan for local reworking of traffic likely to increase problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manage traffic for a better balance with pedestrians - possible turning and circulation changes

III. WELLESLEY HILLS SQUARE: PLACE AND COMMUNITY

What Works

Wellesley Hills Square is a place that serves its surrounding community quite well in many ways. It is a very *useful* and *convenient* place, with a variety of stores and services that cater to the everyday needs of neighborhood residents, daytime employees, and others from the wider community. Survey respondents and forum participants expressed this very well:

- “has every type of shop you could need – one-stop errand running”
- “we can accomplish our daily tasks with the variety and good mix of quality shops”
- “close enough to walk to or ride my bicycle to”
- “pedestrian convenience to area”
- “the best thing is the variety of stores and restaurants”
- “merchants know their customers”
- “different from the center in that...the shops are ‘drop-in’ in nature...important, filling needs we all have”

People also like the fact that there are still many unique, independently-owned shops and services in Wellesley Hills Square. Many survey respondents showed a loyalty to their local merchants by naming particular businesses (both independents and chains). Neighborhood residents have a sense of ownership about Wellesley Hills Square as their neighborhood shopping area, and merchants report a high level of satisfaction. People mentioned a few missing elements in the business mix – a hardware store, a book store, a jeweler, a movie theater – but on balance find the offerings quite satisfactory. They like the many restaurants and the emergence of sidewalk café seating since the sidewalks were widened at the two ends of the commercial area.



In addition to valuing the lively commercial mix in Wellesley Hills Square, survey respondents and forum participants have a strong appreciation for the physical character of the commercial district, its public spaces, and its buildings. The small and medium scale commercial buildings, compactly arranged up to the sidewalk (with few exceptions), provide a “village” character to the area. Elm Park and the Sprague Clock Tower are the major landmarks of the village – its sacred space – mentioned numerous times by survey respondents as the best thing about the Square and the most important thing to preserve. The stone buildings and stonework bridges also contribute to the identity of Wellesley Hills Square. Several survey respondents and forum participants mentioned that the continuity of appearance over time is worth preserving. One respondent who has lived in Wellesley since 1948 commented: “The best thing about the Square is that it remains the same in appearance.... Friends of mine who



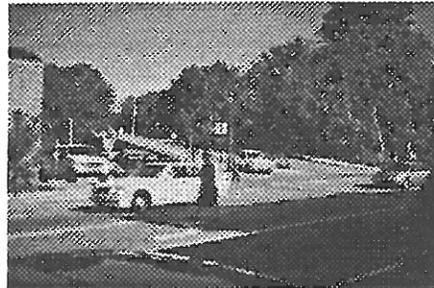
also grew up in Wellesley, but now reside elsewhere, always say how much they love to come back to visit the town and find it 'just the same.' Maybe the trees are higher, the lawns nicer, etc., but basically, the town isn't much different than it was when they grew up here." Although there is always change in any community, this comment points to the fundamental stability of the area's image, character, and identity.

What Needs Work

Traffic and Parking Management

The very thing that people who use Wellesley Hills Square like most about it – its village character for convenience shopping – is to some degree threatened by the difficulty of managing the traffic that flows through Wellesley Hills. The commercial village grew up along Washington Street at the intersection of Worcester Road, both arterials, more than a century ago and its linear character makes it particularly susceptible to traffic and parking-related problems. The business area is hemmed in on both sides, by the railroad and Route 9 to the northwest, and by steep hills and residential blocks to the southeast. (See Map – Circulation and Traffic Issues)

Numerous survey respondents and forum participants complained that the high volume of traffic made many intersections unfriendly to pedestrians and difficult for vehicles wishing to make left turns. Some people said that if they take their cars to do errands in Wellesley Hills Square, they worry about being able to get back conveniently – to the extent that they avoid the area if possible. Pedestrian connections between the library area and the commercial village are difficult and unsafe, particularly for children but also for adults. The traffic also makes bicyclists feel insecure. Survey respondents reported dangerous conditions at Cliff Road, with cars running red lights. Other intersections of particular concern included: Abbott Road; Rockland Street; the train station exit; Bread & Circus parking lot exit.



Most survey respondents and forum participants experienced parking as insufficient and inconvenient. On further analysis, however, it became clear that most of the parking difficulties are in the eastern part of the commercial district. This is the same conclusion reached in the 1997 Wellesley Hills Parking Study, which identified a shortfall of approximately 30 parking spaces between Maugus Avenue and the bridge. It is equally clear from the overwhelming desire of survey respondents and forum participants to retain and enhance Elm Park that the parking solution suggested in the study – turning part of the park into a parking lot – is unacceptable.



Parking problems result from several circumstances. Because the Wellesley Hills Square commercial district is used for convenience shopping, people want to run in and out of stores to pick up a few items in the minimum amount of time and with the minimum of effort. The Eaton Court public lot suffers from lack of visibility,

difficult vehicle access, and poor pedestrian connections. Most of the parking areas behind storefronts are reserved for individual businesses. Although many forum participants maintained that the train station lot is used by outsiders, MBTA surveys have found that most of the parkers are Wellesley residents. (Whether they live in Wellesley Hills specifically is unknown.) Another area where parking is difficult is in the church and community center lots just east of the Washington Street bridge over Route 9. These lots have plenty of parking, but it is difficult and dangerous to make left turns into or out of these lots.

Finally, Mass Highway's proposed reconfiguration of access to Route 9 would close the median on Route 9 in front of the Fire Station with a mountable curb for emergency vehicles only. Drivers could no longer go west on Route 9 from Worcester Street but instead would turn left from Route 16 onto a ramp to Route 9. This turn would be located on Route 16 at the eastern end of the bridge over Route 9. (See appendix for a drawing of the intersection.) The local impacts of this change on traffic congestion and the commercial district are not yet clear.

Defining Identity

Where does Wellesley Hills Square begin and end? One forum participant commented that people from outside Wellesley do not know. She reports that when giving directions to business clients, they often identify it with the location of Papa Razzi, i.e., Lower Falls. For many local people, the village begins just east of the bridge over Route 9, where the Wellesley Hills Branch Library, the Congregational Church, and the civic center are located. However, they will acknowledge that for travelers going westbound on Washington Street, the commercial village is hidden until they are on the bridge. For that reason, some participants in the forum said that the real beginning of Wellesley Hills Square is the high-intensity area defined by the Bread & Circus block, the Putney Building, and Elm Park. Other gateways that are not well identified are the turn off from Route 9 to Washington Street, and the medium-intensity intersection of Cliff Road with Washington Street at the post office. Most people identify the block just west of Forest Road as the western end of Wellesley Hills Square. Although there is no entrance marker, the widened sidewalk at the commercial block does give some sense that a commercial area is ahead.



Improving Appearances

Many survey respondents would like to see more consistency in store signage and building maintenance. However, forum participants were emphatic that this does not mean a highly uniform, mall-like look. There was a strong interest in using planters, greenery, and a program of tasteful seasonal decorations as a unifying element. (Dissatisfaction was expressed with the current Christmas lighting scheme.) Strengthening the green spaces within the commercial district and on its periphery (the Brook Path and Maugus Park) were seen as important ways to link and buffer the business area with the residential neighborhoods. Other suggestions included a lighting plan for attractive buildings and sites, and more use of the stonework characteristic of many of Wellesley Hills Square's most valued sites. (See Map – Natural Resources and Amenities)

IV. THE VISION FOR WELLESLEY HILLS SQUARE

In 2015, Wellesley Hills Square is a thriving commercial village serving the surrounding neighborhood, daytime business owners and employees, and members of the wider community.

- Its village character is reflected in the small and medium scale architecture of its 19th and 20th-century buildings located at the sidewalk edge, and in the many small independent storefront businesses.
- Its distinctiveness is expressed in the use of stonework throughout the district, attractive entryway signage, and careful maintenance of its landmark park and clock tower. In good weather, Elm Park attracts users throughout the day, including a lunchtime crowd enjoying the chance to be outside and surrounded by greenery.
- Its cohesiveness can be seen in the variety of thriving businesses, activity throughout the day and evening, seasonal round of plantings and other decorations, effective signage and lighting, well-maintained buildings, and an active business association that takes a strong role in promoting and managing the Square.

Although Washington Street remains an important arterial road carrying substantial traffic, Wellesley Hills Square has become more pedestrian friendly through effective management of transportation, circulation, and parking. New public parking, cooperative management of all public and private parking resources, neighborhood shuttles to serve the train, signal timing changes and modifications, more pedestrian and bicycle amenities, are among the improvements that create an optimum balance between pedestrian and vehicle mobility.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE II

Transportation, Circulation and Parking

Route 9 project

- Work with Mass Highway to obtain a traffic study to identify local impacts such as congestion and relative delays on feeder routes to the highway and take these into account in modifying the project design to minimize negative impacts to the district

Parking

- Revisit the 1997 parking study to implement management recommendations
- Study, design, and fund a parking deck span over Route 9 (next to the Marathon Sports block), ideally as part of the Route 9 enhancement project
- Prepare a parking management plan for Bread & Circus including consideration of circulation changes; valet parking; delivery service
- Prepare a parking management plan for Washington Street on-street parking providing for optimum use of short and long-term metering and for enforcement changes, if necessary
- Prepare an area-wide parking management plan to coordinate public and private parking resources through e.g., shared lots, designated employee lots, improved directional signage for public and customer parking, redesign of lots for more spaces and better circulation
- Design Eaton Court parking lot improvements including review of short and long-term spaces; access improvements including handicap accessibility
- Prepare a feasibility study for creating new spaces at the Eaton Court lot through excavation or a deck

Train Access

- Prepare a feasibility study for new train station parking, drop-off and pick-up options: jitney or van service throughout the neighborhood or to and from a satellite parking area

Washington Street

- Prepare a plan for intersection control: fine tuning of signals (especially at Cliff Road and at the Putney Block location)
- Consider further traffic calming elements at key pedestrian points, such as raised intersections, lighting, and signage, as well as enforcement action

Design

Identity and Gateways

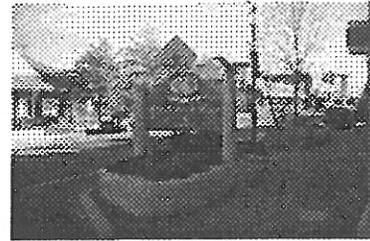
- Provide gateway signage to identify the Wellesley Hills commercial village with a Wellesley Hills symbol or logo
- Provide a program of changing seasonal decorations

- Organize a moveable planter program with common planting design, purchase, installation, and maintenance to assure a cohesive look
- Design and construct permanent, on-street planters for perennials at key points on Washington Street



Landscape and Pedestrian Amenities

- Enhance the appearance and use of Elm Park:
 - landscape improvements such as buffering of Worcester Street side
 - remove bus shelter to an active bus stop or other location
 - if possible, reposition the cable attached to a tree which intrudes on the view of the clock tower
 - design a focal point -- such as seating, sculpture, a fountain -- at the current location of the bus shelter
 - provide clear and safe crossing options for pedestrians to access the park
 - install tables and seating to encourage lunchtime use of the park
- Provide bicycle amenities such as racks, especially near the train station and other high-traffic destinations
- Provide more benches and outdoor café seating where appropriate
- Improve the pedestrian experience on the bridge through cleanup, landscape, and other elements
- Provide additional directional and interpretive signage for the Brook Path connection with Washington Street
- Renovate the tot lot in Maugus Park behind Washington Street and maintain the park better



Building and Storefront Improvements

- Develop guidelines for storefront and window display lighting
- Develop guidelines for store signage improvements
- Investigate establishing a loan program to provide an incentive for store owners to improve signage, facades, and make other improvements

Zoning

- Review and revise zoning to assure that any future redevelopment of storefront buildings will adhere to the village and pedestrian-friendly character valued by the community, while maintaining the eclectic mix of uses and structures

Business Mix

- Consider a market study to identify gaps in offerings
- Plan for a possible move of Bread & Circus, an important anchor business which attracts shoppers who also patronize smaller merchants
- Investigate the possible reasons for perceived high turnover of businesses at the Forest Street node of businesses and take any actions that are warranted

Organization and Programming

- Organize a business association for joint promotions such as advertising (using a Wellesley Hills logo or symbol) and special programs; possible support and organization of a planter and seasonal decoration program
- Organize a program of seasonal decorations and sale days
- Program another active community day like Marathon Day
- Program family and senior activities for Elm Park

APPENDICES

- A. Survey
- B. Survey Responses
- C. Forum Participants

FIGURES

- DeFazio Block Buildout under current zoning
- Maugus Block Buildout under current zoning
- Mass Highway planned reconfiguration of Route 9 at Wellesley Hills

MAPS AND ORTHO-PHOTOS

- Map - Zoning
- Map – Circulation and Traffic Issues
- Map – Natural Features and Amenities
- 1997 Ortho-Photo
- 1930 Ortho-Photo

[GIS maps and ortho-photos provided by Town of Wellesley.]

A. Survey

Wellesley Hills Square Vision Survey

The Town of Wellesley is planning improvements to Wellesley Hills Square, the area on Washington Street between Rice Street and Woodlawn Avenue. The Planning Board wants to know what YOU think – what's good, what's bad, what your vision is for the future of this area. *Please share your ideas by completing and returning this survey and by attending the Wellesley Hills Square Vision Forum to be held on Thursday, January 13, 2000 at 6 p.m. at the Wellesley Community Center, 219 Washington Street.* **Survey return:** Please return this survey by putting it in a deposit box at the Hills Branch Library or the Wellesley Hills Post Office, or by mail, fax, or e-mail to the Town Planning Department at Town Hall, 525 Washington Street, fax 781-237-6495 or to the Town's consultants on this project: Community Design Partnership, 369 Congress Street, 8th floor, Boston, MA 02210, fax: 617-542-6266, e-mail: cdp@mindspring.com.

Deadline for survey return: January 10, 2000.

1. Are you a Wellesley resident, business owner or manager, business property owner, representative of an institution or government agency, employee of a Wellesley business, or other _____?
2. How long have you lived, worked, or owned commercial property in Wellesley? Less than 5 years
 5-9 years 10 or more years
3. Do you live, work, or own property in Wellesley Hills? Yes No
4. Do you shop in Wellesley Hills Square? Yes No. If yes, how often? Two or more times a week
 Weekly Several times a month Monthly A few times a year Never
5. What's the BEST thing about Wellesley Hills Square?
6. What's the WORST thing about Wellesley Hills Square?
7. Please rank the *top four* issues that need improvement in Wellesley Hills Square (where "1" is the top priority, "2" is the next most important priority, and so on).

___ pedestrian environment and safety traffic flow	___ business/residential transition
___ business mix	___ access to train station
___ availability of parking	___ convenience of parking
___ appearance of buildings	___ appearance of streets and public spaces
___ public signage	___ store signage
___ pedestrian and bicycle links with neighborhoods	
___ other	
6. Excluding traffic issues, if you could do ONE thing to improve Wellesley Hills Square, what would it be?
7. What is the most important thing, place or attribute that should be *preserved* in Wellesley Hills Square?

B. Survey Responses

Total number of respondents: 77

1. Are you

Wellesley residents	72
business owner or manager	12 (of whom 7 are also residents)
business property owner	3 (of whom 1 is also a resident)
representative of an institution or government agency	0
employee of a Wellesley business	1 (also a resident)
other	0

2. How long have you lived, worked, or owned commercial property in Wellesley?

Less than 5 years	7
5-9 years	8
10 or more years	62

3. Do you live, work, or own property in Wellesley Hills?

Yes	64
No	11
No answer	2

4. Do you shop in Wellesley Hills Square?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	77
<input type="checkbox"/> No.	

If yes, how often?

<input type="checkbox"/> Two or more times a week	40
<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	15
<input type="checkbox"/> Several times a month	13
<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	4
<input type="checkbox"/> A few times a year	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Never	0

5. What's the BEST thing about Wellesley Hills Square?

Variety of stores, independent merchants, specific businesses mentioned	64
Village, small -town, old-style character	9
Public buildings and amenities (e.g. park, clock tower, library)	24
Convenience	12
Other	3

6. What's the WORST thing about Wellesley Hills Square?

Traffic-related (too much, too congested, too fast, too dangerous, etc.)	43
Parking-related (not enough, no enforcement, too rapid enforcement, at Bread and Circus, etc.)	40
Pedestrian crossing problems	6
Various other	9

7. Please rank the *top four* issues that need improvement in Wellesley Hills Square (where "1" is the top priority, "2" is the next most important priority, and so on).

	1	2	3	4
business mix	2	5	6	9
appearance of buildings	0	10	8	9
business/residential transition	0	1	1	1
convenience of parking	11	13	11	9
appearance of streets and public spaces	1	2	5	9
pedestrian environment and safety traffic flow	42	6	5	3
pedestrian and bicycle links with neighborhoods	1	7	4	5
availability of parking	27	15	11	4
public signage	2	2	1	2
access to train station	2	2	1	4
store signage	4	1	3	8
other: boarding house on Maugus Avenue; litter on Route 16 near bridge; T- parking lot needs more efficient parking design and more parking needed at station; replace gas station with parking lot; people's attitudes				

6. Excluding traffic issues, if you could do ONE thing to improve Wellesley Hills Square, what would it be?

Circulation issues (pedestrians, traffic, parking) – 34 mentions including:

- More train station parking
- Traffic light at Abbott Rd
- Get people out of cars for short trips
- Pedestrian safety
- Crosswalk in front of convenience store and get people to use them
- Route traffic better or send through traffic elsewhere
- Manage Bread & Circus traffic better
- Pedestrian bridge over Route 16
- Build parking garage
- Enforce parking restrictions
- Safer crossing to north side of Route 9
- Traffic management at the Community Center and Church entries on Route 16
- Parking
- Nicer walkways
- Left turn out of Bread & Circus
- Crosswalk at Blockbuster
- Traffic flow
- Bigger parking lot for Bread & Circus
- No flashing pedestrian lights (like in Wellesley Center) that distract drivers
- Designated pedestrian walkways

Façade and building improvements – 10

Signage improvements – 8

Improve design cohesion and identity – 3

Amenities such as plantings, benches, brick sidewalks; encourage more use of parks – 10

Improve business mix and variety – 8

More destination businesses; limit high-impact businesses – 2

Other - 5

No answer - 5

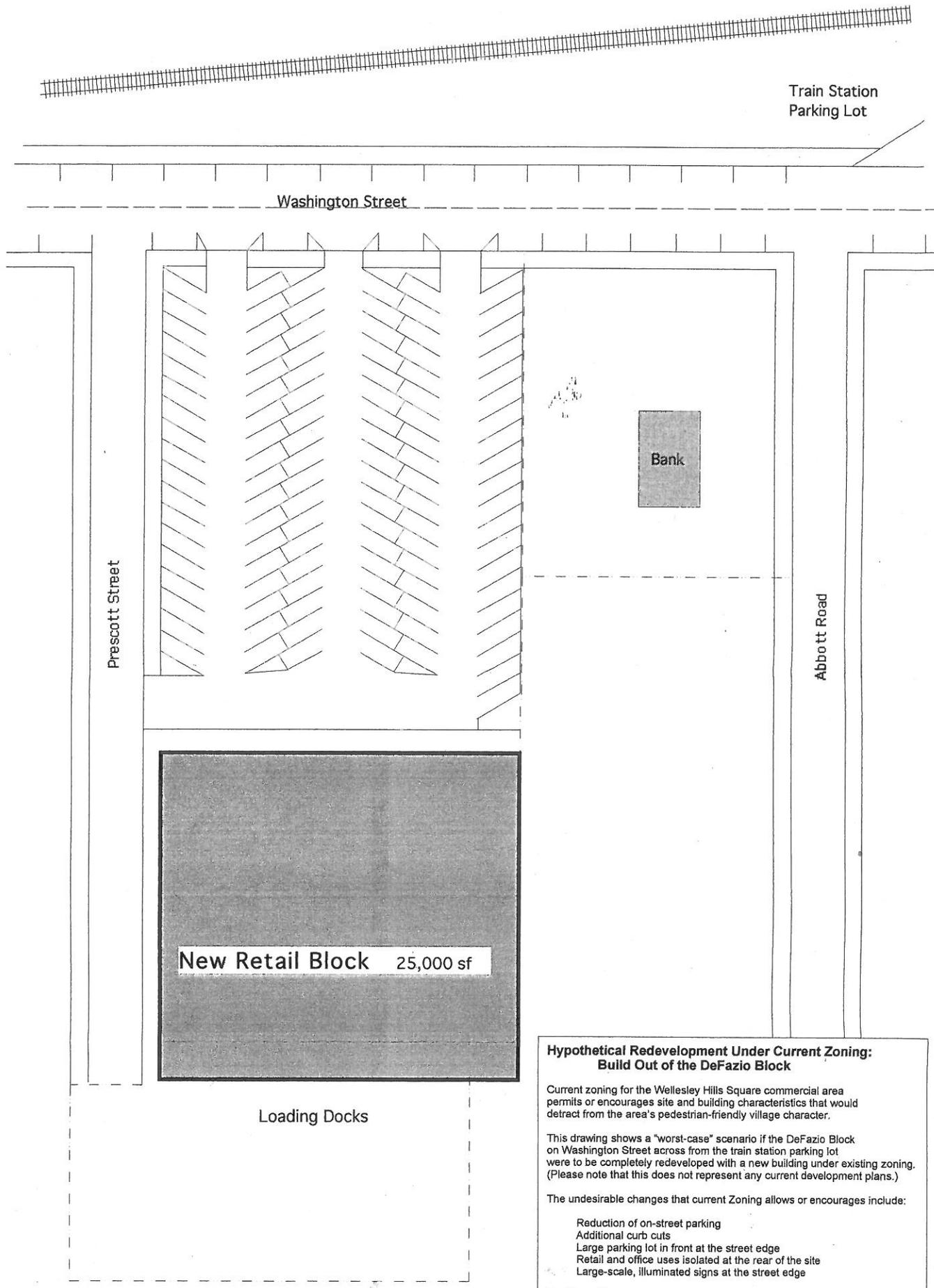
7. What is the most important thing, place or attribute that should be *preserved* in Wellesley Hills Square?

- Park – 24
- Clock Tower – 19
- Library – 4
- Bread and Circus
- Village character and neighborhood shopping – 13
- Public spaces – 2
- Variety of shops – 11
- Trees – 1
- Uniqueness of storefronts and residential buildings – 7
- Brook Path – 1
- Friendliness – 1
- Historical Society – 1
- Old School House – 1
- Pedestrian-friendly – 1
- Fire station – 1
- Train station – 2
- Don't widen Washington Street - 1

C. Forum Participants

Mark Berger
Rick Brown
Edmund Campana
Tom Cummings
Tory DeFazio
Rose Mary Donahue
Jill Dube
Owen H. Dugan
Lindsay Ellms
Steve Fader
Barbara Gard
Joan Gaughan
Abbie Goodman
Susan Graham
Jennifer Lieberman
Gail Lockberg
Gary Lockberg
Jeanne Lukas
Bill More
Bill Murphy
Lorraine Murphy
Irene Palmigiano
Edi Pergitsas
Linda Powers
Paul Powers
Erin Randall
Greta Sarginson
Richard Sarginson
Robert Sechrest
Edmund Sheahan
Royal Switzler
Janet Swarden
Arnold Wakelin

FIGURES



**Hypothetical Redevelopment Under Current Zoning:
Build Out of the DeFazio Block**

Current zoning for the Wellesley Hills Square commercial area permits or encourages site and building characteristics that would detract from the area's pedestrian-friendly village character.

This drawing shows a "worst-case" scenario if the DeFazio Block on Washington Street across from the train station parking lot were to be completely redeveloped with a new building under existing zoning. (Please note that this does not represent any current development plans.)

The undesirable changes that current Zoning allows or encourages include:

- Reduction of on-street parking
- Additional curb cuts
- Large parking lot in front at the street edge
- Retail and office uses isolated at the rear of the site
- Large-scale, illuminated signs at the street edge

Revision of the zoning regulations is advisable to preserve the attractive, pedestrian-friendly character of Wellesley Hills Square.

DeFazio Block Build-Out Analysis

Route 9

Unitarian Church

Elm Park

Washington Street

Loading Docks

New Retail Block 15,750 sf

Eaton Court

Bread & Circus

**Hypothetical Redevelopment Under Current Zoning:
Build Out of the "Maugus" Block**

Current zoning for the Wellesley Hills Square commercial area permits or encourages site and building characteristics that would detract from the area's pedestrian-friendly village character.

This drawing shows a "worst-case" scenario if the Maugus Restaurant Block on Washington Street across from Elm Park were to be completely redeveloped with a new building under existing zoning.
(Please note that this does not represent any current development plans.)

The undesirable changes that current Zoning allows or encourages include:

- Additional curb cuts
 - Large parking lot in front at the street edge
 - Retail and office uses isolated at the rear of the site
 - Large-scale, illuminated signs at the street edge
- Revision of the zoning regulations is advisable to preserve the attractive, pedestrian-friendly character of Wellesley Hills Square.

'Maugus' Block Build-Out Analysis

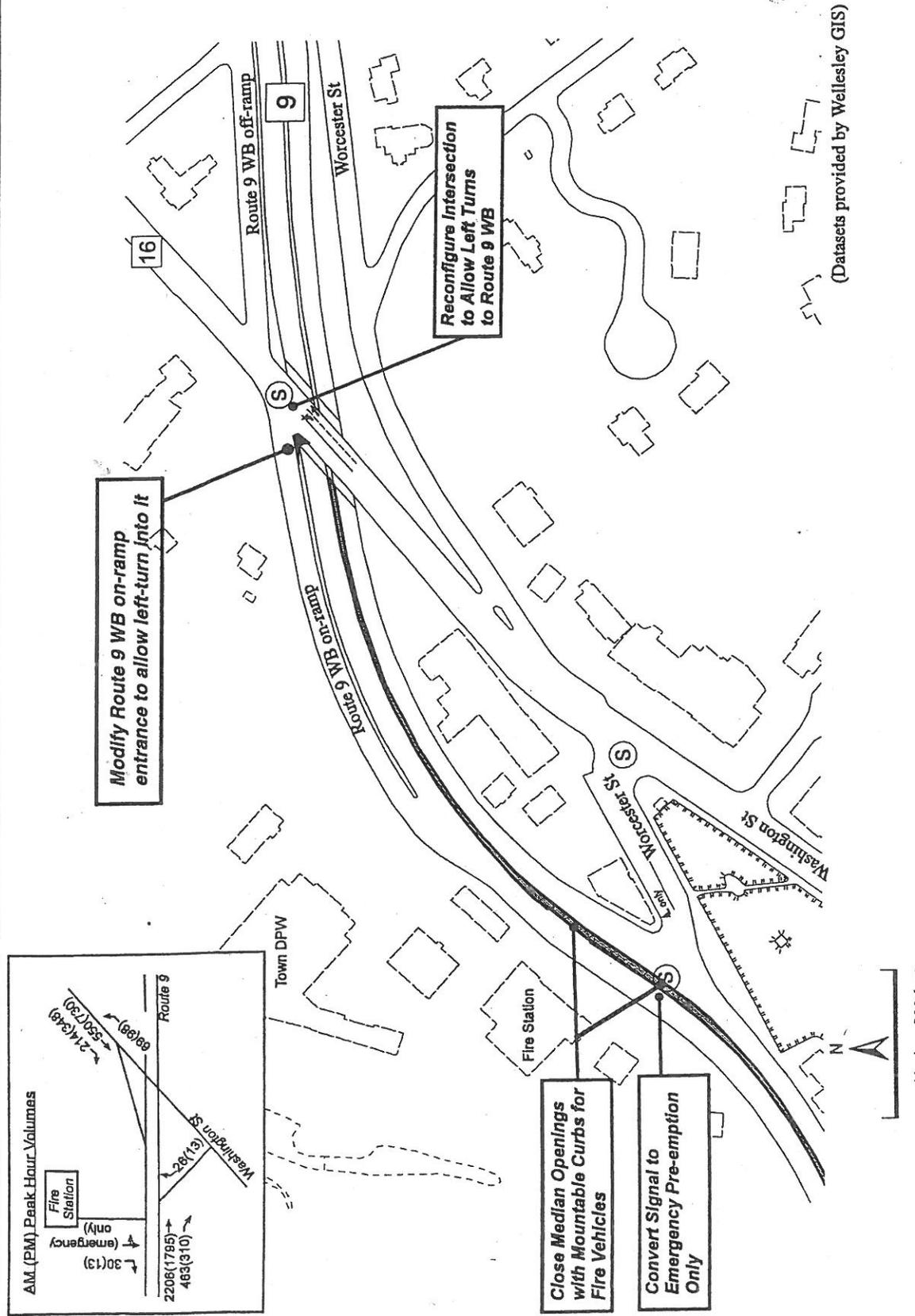
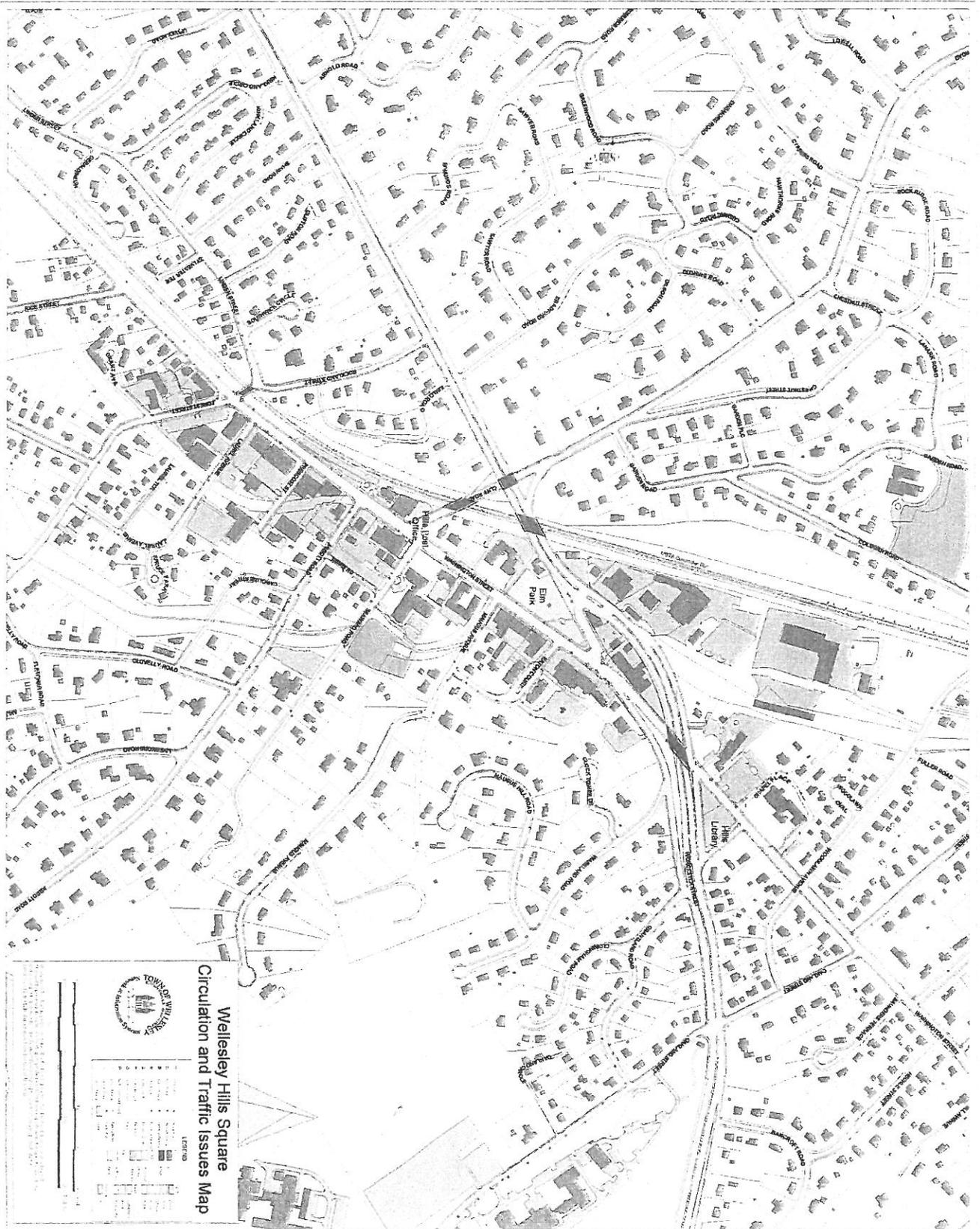


FIGURE 3-13
Worcester Street Intersection

MAPS AND ORTHO-PHOTOS

The maps and ortho-photos were produced by the Town of Wellesley GIS Specialist, Mike Doyle. Large-scale versions of the maps and ortho-photos are available for review in the Wellesley Planning Department.



Wellesley Hills Square
Circulation and Traffic Issues Map

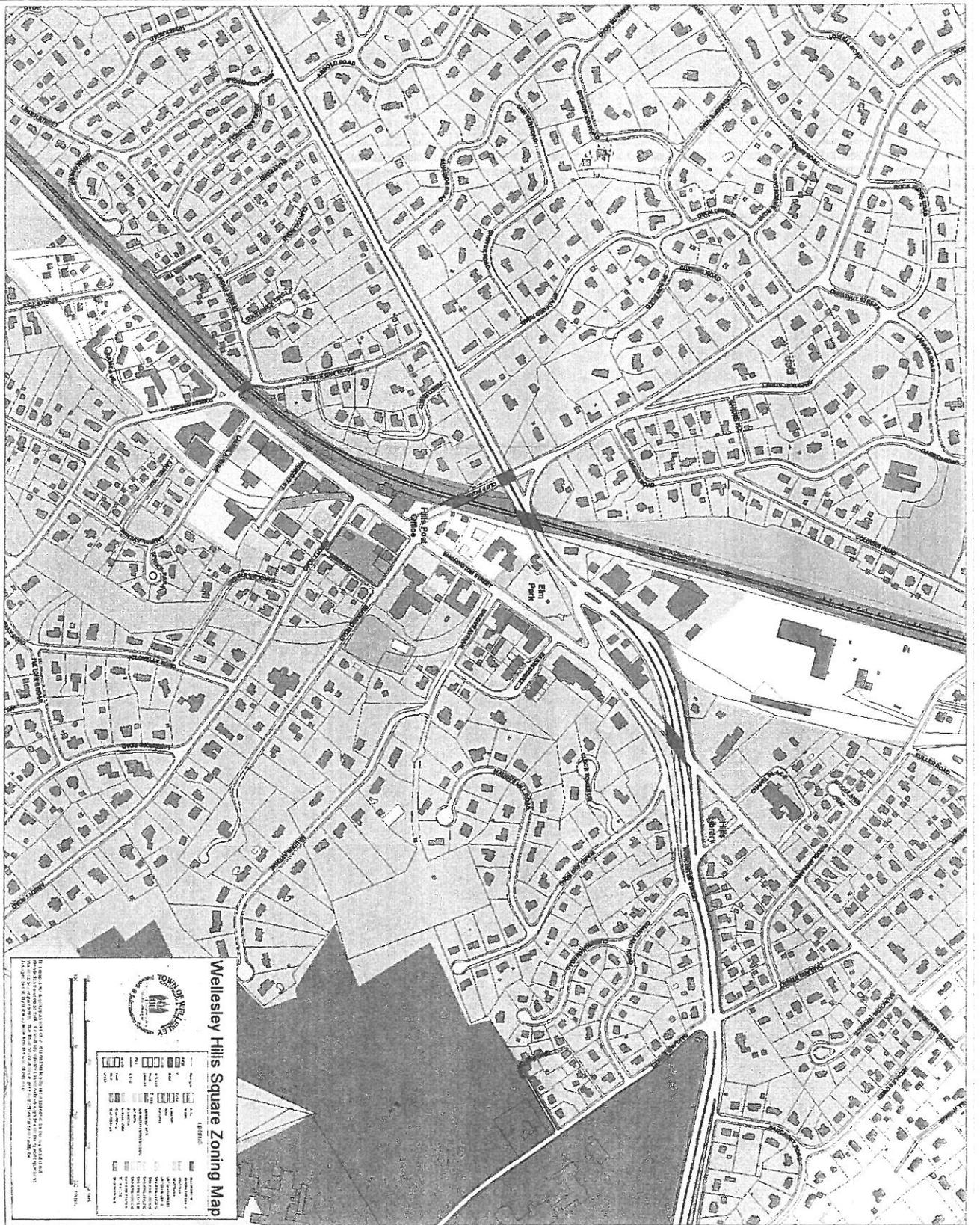


Legend

[Symbol]	Highway
[Symbol]	Major Street
[Symbol]	Minor Street
[Symbol]	Commercial Building
[Symbol]	Residential Building
[Symbol]	Public Building
[Symbol]	Park
[Symbol]	Water
[Symbol]	Topography

Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet





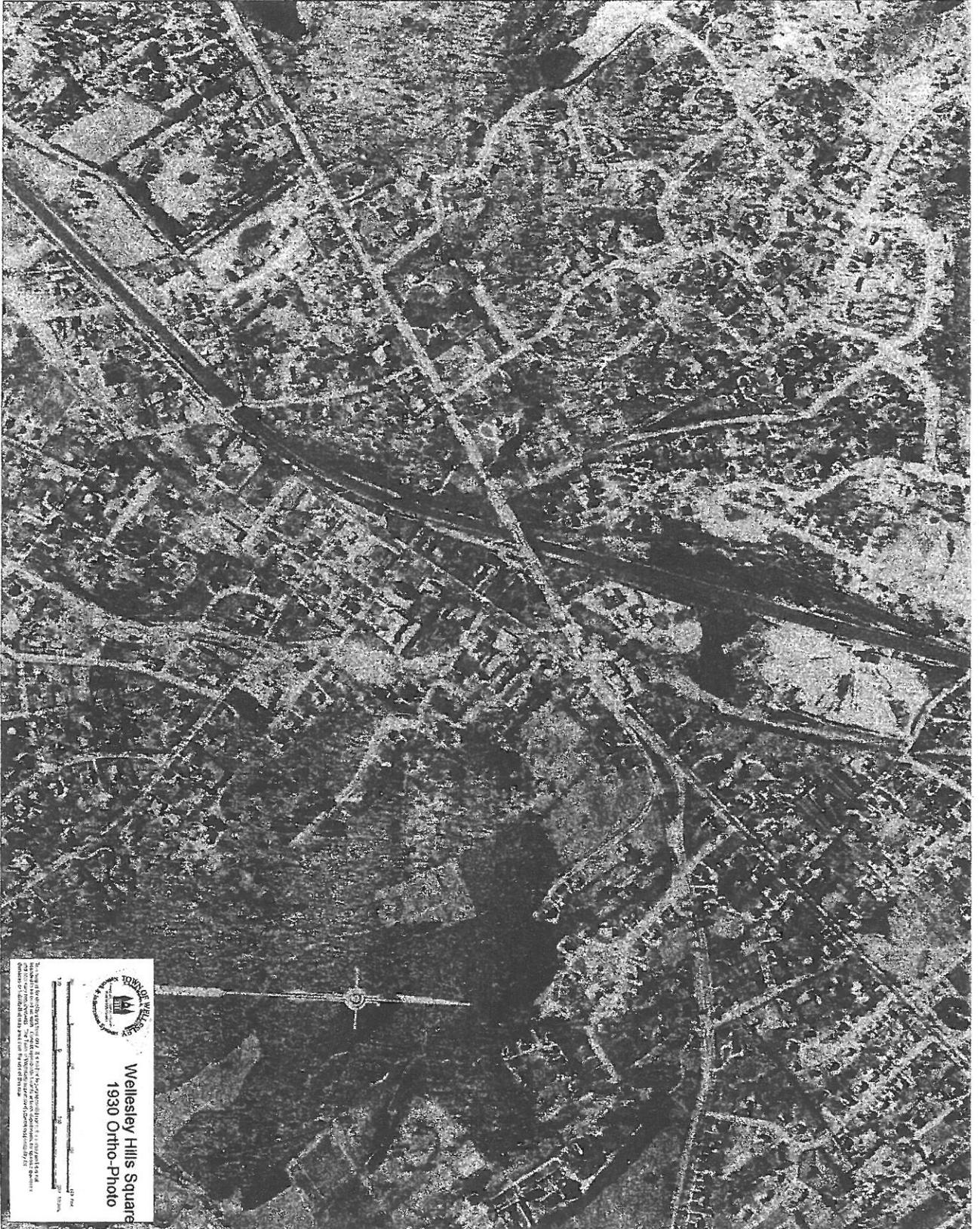
Wellesley Hills Square Zoning Map



THE TOWN OF WELLESLEY HAS ADOPTED THIS ZONING MAP AS PART OF ITS ZONING REGULATIONS. THIS ZONING MAP IS A LEGAL INSTRUMENT AND IS SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE ZONING REGULATIONS. THE TOWN ENGINEER HAS REVIEWED THIS ZONING MAP AND HAS DETERMINED THAT IT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ZONING REGULATIONS. THE TOWN ENGINEER'S REVIEW IS LIMITED TO THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE ZONING MAP AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A GUARANTEE OF THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION SHOWN ON THIS ZONING MAP.

Symbol	Description
[Symbol]	Single-Family Residential
[Symbol]	Two-Family Residential
[Symbol]	Multi-Family Residential
[Symbol]	Community Center
[Symbol]	Office
[Symbol]	Business
[Symbol]	Industrial
[Symbol]	Public Use
[Symbol]	Open Space
[Symbol]	Water
[Symbol]	Other

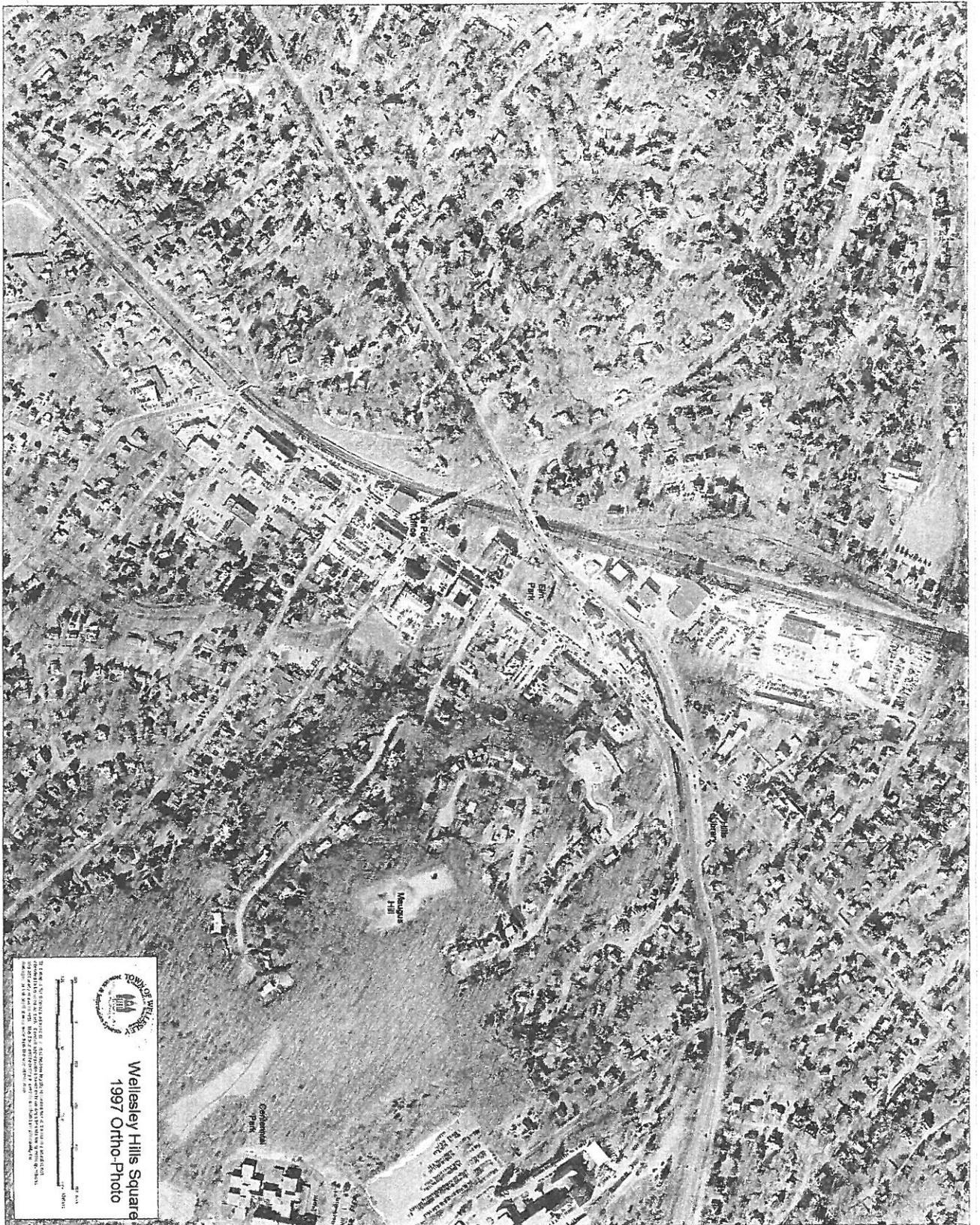




Wellesley Hills Square
1930 Ortho-Photo

Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet
0 50 100 150 200 Feet

This is a reproduction of an aerial photograph taken in 1930. It is not a map and does not show the current boundaries of the City of Wellesley. The City of Wellesley is located in the Town of Wellesley, Massachusetts. The photograph is a black and white orthorectified image.





Wellesley Hills Square
1997 Ortho-Photo

1:10,000
 1" = 100'

0 100 200 300 400 500 Feet
 0 100 200 300 400 Meters

This map is a reproduction of the original map prepared for the Town of Wellesley. It is not a substitute for the original map. The original map is on file in the Town of Wellesley. The original map is the only authoritative source for the information shown on this map. The original map is the only authoritative source for the information shown on this map.

