

Promoting Synergy  
between New Hotel Developments and Established Communities

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 1999

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May 20, 1999

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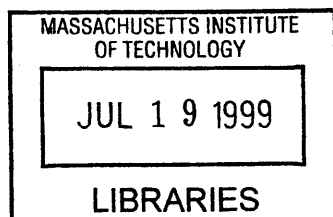
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# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family, dear friends and mentors for being so supportive of me during the past two years. To Dad and Mom, my sister Kate, Amy Schectman, Terry Szold, Mollye Wolahan, Eryn Deeming, Joyce Coffee, Kelly Davenport, Mamta Prakash, John de Monchaux, Langley Keyes, Patrick Thompson, Teresa Flynn, Courtney Diehl, Diana Panhorst, Greg Selkoe, Kim Summerville, Becky Vas, and to all my fellow DUSPers, thanks for having faith in me.

# Abstract

There is often a great hubbub when a municipality or a developer suggests the development of a hotel most anywhere in the US, especially in highly urbanized communities. Because of their often imposing shapes, standardized form and insufficient attention to the context in which they are set, hotels can easily overwhelm a community without intending to. American hotels, as distinct from European ones frequently provide an enormous breadth of goods and services to their guests, from restaurants, bars, athletic clubs, and hairdressers, to post offices and gift shops. This keeps a traveler from having to leave the premises during his or her stay. While this may be efficient in the suburbs, in cases where the hotel is surrounded by a commercial center, this can result in missed opportunities to coordinate hotel and local business activities. Because of the sum of room and property taxes, hotels generate large amounts of money for municipalities and increase the tax base. The limited-service hotel model introduces a concept that induces and invites integration with the community rather than rejecting it. This is done by creating a hotel structure with the most minimal of facilities, limited dining rooms, limited or no externally-focused meeting rooms, no gift shop, no entertainment facilities. This limited-service hotel provides only the basics, including a bed, private bath, and for extended-stay facilities, living area and kitchen, encouraging guest integration with the surrounding community and encouraging the hotel to reach into the community for its goods and services. This thesis studies the impacts of inserting a hotel development into a highly urbanized setting, including how these hotels can add to the urban design component of the town and benefit the surrounding commercial area by externalizing services and amenities. Case studies are taken from the northeastern United States and applied to a current hotel feasibility study underway in Coolidge Corner, Brookline, MA.

There is often a great hubbub when a municipality or a developer suggests the development of a hotel most anywhere in the US, especially in highly urbanized communities. Because of their often imposing shapes, standardized form, and insufficient attention to the context in which they are set, hotels can easily overwhelm a community without intending to. American hotels in particular, as distinct from European ones, frequently provide a considerable breadth of goods and services within the facility to their guests, from restaurants, bars, and athletic clubs to post offices and gift shops. This keeps the guest from having to leave the premises during his or her stay. While this may be efficient in the suburbs or out in the country, in cases where the hotel is surrounded by a commercial center, this can result in a missed opportunity to coordinate hotel and local business activities. Hotels often remain at the perimeters of the community, either literally or figuratively because of their apparent self-reliance. As a result, many communities do not get a chance to experience the positive aspects of hotels, further solidifying the stereotype that hotels isolate themselves from the surrounding business and residential communities and compete with the local community. Instead the hotel's services could be designed to complement those available in the neighborhood.

### **Reasons For A Hotel**

Because of the sum of room taxes and property taxes, hotel developments can generate large amounts of money for municipalities and increase the tax base. This is especially true in Massachusetts where Proposition 2 ½ limits the growth of the property tax levy in municipalities to 2 ½ percent over the previous year. This percentage limitation does not include hotel room taxes, however. Nevertheless, unhappy previous experiences with hotel chains and a general fear of such a large establishment that competes with many local businesses leave local areas inclined to give up many opportunities to receive the benefits and improvements that these developments can offer. For these reasons, I think it is

important to articulate the attributes that generate these benefits and improvements and what these possible amenities are.

So, how can a partnership between a developer, a community and a municipality reduce the impacts and maximize the benefits of a new hotel development in an established community both to further a community's vision of the area and contribute to the goals of the development team?

The first part of this thesis focuses on the externalizing of traditional hotel services and amenities, that is, taking the opportunity of partnering with local businesses to provide these amenities – food, meeting rooms, entertainment, and other services. This provides a larger variety of services to the guests, usually lower costs to the hotel, economic development to the neighborhood, and improved relations between the hotel and its locality. In the second part I focus on the wider context of issues related to the integration of new hotel developments into established communities. Externalizing amenities interacts, of course, with elements of this wider set of issues and clarifies new possibilities for increasing hotel capacity while at the same time pursuing community economic development.

This thesis will use the particular example of a potential hotel development in the Town of Brookline, MA, and several case studies in the Northeastern United States. It will identify specific ideas for consideration by the Town of Brookline as a contribution to the hotel feasibility process currently going on in Coolidge Corner, one of Brookline's five commercial centers. In addition, this document will suggest partnerships and amenities that can make the relationship between the hotel developer, the community, and the town work. Further, this thesis will then expand those insights into a sense of how the results can benefit other communities which are similarly "established."

### **Externalizing Services and Amenities**

One of the ways hotels can be integrated into the community is by externalizing amenities, which means that instead of the hotel directly providing certain services and amenities (dining rooms and gift shops) within the hotel to the guest, it can provide incentives for

guests to use the surrounding communities' offering of goods and services by making business directories, reservation systems and informational brochures available.

By designing a hotel with minimal services and facilities; limited eating areas, limited or no externally-focused meeting rooms, no gift shop, and by providing only the necessities, that is, a bed and private bath (plus living and kitchen areas in extended-stay facilities), one will encourage guest interaction with the surrounding area by drawing them out of the hotel and into the community for eating and shopping. This minimally outfitted hotel will also compel the hotel operator to reach into the community for many of its goods and services. Some of the ways in which integration can take form follow.

The hotel can use area institutions for meeting venues, i.e., churches, temples, and theaters (although I have not found any research saying that hotels will use churches and temples, there are examples of successfully using theaters as meeting venues). The hotel can provide incentives for the guest to use the goods and services provided in the city or town including providing a list of cooking classes, poetry workshops or fitness classes available. The hotel can support the local businesses by buying some of its goods and services from local merchants, from subscribing to the local paper and local cable to renting movies and VCRs from the local video store and providing a library stocked with books from area bookstores. The hotel can hire staff who are knowledgeable about the area and able to direct the guests around town.

### **Design and Visual Identity**

There is no reason a hotel cannot enhance a community with its presence, both economically and physically. Although there have been many failed ventures, there have also been many successes. New hotel developments can bring with them new and desired business and have the power to reshape communities, but they can also potentially detract from the atmosphere.



## **Traffic and Parking**

Hotel developments frequently bring with them additional traffic and need for parking. There is often significant energy being exerted by town officials, prospective developers and community-attended task force groups to determine ways to reduce the impact of the hotel on traffic and parking issues, but the fact remains that frequently the parking situation is tight. This is a perfect opportunity to partner the two. The hotel would benefit from the support generated by the surrounding residents and business owners desiring the amenity and the surrounding business and residential community will benefit from the additional parking.

## **Relocation of Displaced Activities**

In any new development in an established community there is often some activity displaced. The relocation of these often time-honored institutions of the town is another way to back the local community and generate support for the development project.

## **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter One opens by describing a common response to new hotel developments, then introduces the idea that hotels can be welcome and active members of any community. Chapter one also highlights the two main issues that affect a hotel's success in a neighborhood (externalizing of amenities and attention to design and other visual elements of the project), and ends with chapter summaries.

Chapter Two indicates what happens when hotels come into existing communities specifically in terms of the impacts (both positive and negative) on jobs, economic development, traffic and parking, community, aesthetics, municipal resources. It then addresses what is done to enhance the positive impacts and what is done to mitigate the negative impacts.

Chapter Three starts by introducing and describing Brookline at large and then focusing on the particularities of Coolidge Corner, what's there, what it represents, what are its resources, and includes the uses, visual character, accessibility, change in businesses, recent developments, etc. in the area. It then focuses directly on the Webster Street parking lot, the

site of the proposed hotel, currently undergoing a feasibility study, describes the site, the abutters, then the attributes of the specific hotel, its size, and issues that have been raised by the community. Chapter three will then proceed to summarize the process of the hotel feasibility study to date, identify the preliminary reactions to the idea of a hotel. It will identify aspects yet to be explored in the process, including the “Woonerf” or community streets concept and possible connection with the Coolidge Corner Theater and local places of worship. This chapter will conclude with next steps.

Chapter Four introduces the hotel development case studies I use and indicates why I chose the ones I did. It will give a brief description of each, including basic information, facilities, when the hotel was built, issues that arose during the development process, etc. It illuminates the relevant lessons learned from each case.

Chapter Five addresses reasonable expectations for Town officials, merchants, and residents concerning hotel developments. It will discuss workable accommodations of displaced activities, elements of the hotel including physical attributes, economic feasibility, provision of adequate light/greenspace, economic contribution to municipalities as a whole, to diversity of enterprise, and to neighbors as a result of a hotel development.

Chapter Six summarizes the lessons learned.

## 2 Impacts of Hotels

It is important to know the dynamics that occur when a new hotel enters such a community. Some of the impacts are positive things the municipality seeks to enhance and others are negative consequences the municipality strives to mitigate. The results of new developments can be classified in terms of impacts to the economic base, on employment, on aesthetics, and on traffic and parking.

### **Economic Impacts**

The economic impact of new hotels comes from three main sources, according to John Avault, senior researcher at the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA): those businesses from which the hotel "buys" products and services, those to whom the hotel "sells" its product, and those with whom the hotel goes into "partnership."

Hotels buy from a wide variety of sources, including:

- ◆ households from which the hotel hires labor;
- ◆ the service industry from which the hotel gets laundry, security, maintenance, and other services;
- ◆ firms from which the hotel gets services such as advertising, printing, and mailing; and
- ◆ local institutions such as theaters, churches, temples, and schools from which the hotel can rent space for meetings or other functions.

Hotels sell their product to:

- ◆ guests who rent their rooms; and
- ◆ people from outside the hotel who buy memberships to use the health facilities, if available.
- ◆ There are many more possibilities for hotels to sell their product including meals, catering, and the rental of meeting rooms. But I will argue that these services are best

separated from the hotel in order to promote use of the services in the surrounding business community. They are often not profit centers anyway.

Hotels tend to go into partnership with businesses that provide services that are desired by hotel guests including:

- ◆ restaurant services,
- ◆ business services,
- ◆ postal/courier services,
- ◆ liquor and gifts,
- ◆ book stores and video rentals

In fact, the amount of visitor spending in a community relies largely on the hotel's proximity to these businesses according to the BRA and the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority.<sup>1</sup>

According to the BRA, there were approximately 10.6 million visitors to the Boston area in 1996, 21% of whom were tourists and 38% of whom were business travelers,<sup>2</sup> a category which does not include convention goers.<sup>3</sup> As well as paying for the room, the average visitor spent \$62 per day on food and drink, \$38 in retail establishments and \$15 on entertainment.<sup>4</sup> These numbers indicate strong support of the local economy, assuming the percentages in each of the traveler market categories above and with the caveat that the spending is calculated inclusive of the spending by convention attendees, which is on average somewhat greater than what the average non-convention traveler spends. In Boston, convention attendees make up a large portion of the total number of visitors.

Under some circumstances, increased competition of businesses might be useful to jumpstart economic conditions. However, relations between hotel services and surrounding businesses, can instead be synergized if the proper type of hotel is chosen. An extended-stay, limited-service hotel offers the unique opportunity for the hotel to reach out into the community for most of the amenities needed.

In addition to the hotel and the business community, the municipality, of course, also benefits fiscally from this venture. Hotels yield property taxes as well as room taxes. Room taxes for hotels in Massachusetts are 9.7%, of which 4% is returned to the municipality. Therefore, a hotel with 175 rooms, an occupancy rate of 75% (the average in Boston is 78.4%), and an average nightly room rate of \$192.50 (the average daily room rate of the Holiday Inn on Beacon Street in Brookline), will produce revenues upwards of \$350,000 annually. A hotel development, it is safe to assume, would bring in significant amount of revenue to town coffers. In Boston, approximately \$2,463 is generated per room annually in property taxes and \$1,611 per room in room taxes. The average daily room rate in 1996 for Massachusetts was \$124,<sup>5</sup> \$145 for Boston, and ~\$65 for areas west of Boston (including Brookline).<sup>6</sup>

### **Employment**

The municipality not only benefits from taxes, but also from the number of jobs created by the development venture, especially if there are specific designs to solicit applications for those positions from within the community. According to the BRA, hotels in Massachusetts generate an average of 0.5 permanent jobs per room (from entry level to managerial/administrative positions), as well as 0.5 temporary jobs during the construction phases.<sup>7</sup>

### **Traffic and Parking**

High density urban locations are often seriously concerned about traffic and parking. Merchants worry that limited parking reduces the number of customers and therefore decreases their overall revenues. Residents are concerned about having adequate on-street parking for themselves and for their guests. The residents also fear increased traffic resulting from additional deliveries because of the noise and pollution they cause. As a result, municipalities will demand that if any parking is displaced due to the development, that it be relocated either on site or off in addition to the parking requirements for the new hotel. Since there is frequently a parking shortage at the outset of the development, the developer may be asked to increase the net supply of public parking.

The increase in the amount of traffic generated by the development is more easily measured. Depending on the results of traffic studies, the developer may be required to improve

signalization, on-street parking controls, conversion of street sections for use by pedestrians, curb-line changes. The noise factor can be mitigated by stricter adherence to existing municipal health regulations that, for example, prohibit trucks from idling during deliveries and restrict delivery hours to between 7am and 11pm. These are all concerns addressed on the Webster Street site.

## **Design**

“Hotels also contribute to the city from an urban design point of view. They add to the vibrancy and street life, [and] weave together the fabric of the city.” (Avault et al., 8)

One way of evaluating a hotel’s success is by determining the extent to which it succeeds in complementing its surroundings. The hotel needs to respect the scale of the surrounding structures including their height and massing, and harmonize with their detailing. This is not to say that the structure should mimic the surrounding buildings and open spaces, but rather that it should blend in such a way that the new structure does not overwhelm the surrounding environment. This is critical if preservation of an existing streetscape is a concern. In addition, this attention to character and surrounding fabric will serve to further unify the neighborhood by strengthening the area’s visual cohesiveness.

The design of a hotel has as much to do with the success of the development as anything else the hotel can give to the town. The building may well have the power to guide the direction of development for the town and therefore it is important to reflect the elements valued by the community. A good design can inspire the surrounding businesses to improve the amount of attention focused on their buildings in order to draw new customers.

For example, this idea is particularly critical to the Brookline case because the street giving access to the hotel is also the back side of 20 businesses. If this development comes to fruition, and the businesses take advantage of the opportunity to address the back sides of their stores by painting, sprucing up windows, creating second entrances, making greater effort to remove trash from the sidewalk, perhaps adding street furniture such as benches or street plantings, the atmosphere of the Webster Street corridor would change dramatically

for the better. It would serve to welcome visitors as well as residents to enjoy Brookline, to linger and interact with the community.

One tool the town has at its discretion, to achieve results such as these is a design review committee. This committee can oversee the design process and help guide the result, assuring that even loss of sunlight is studied with the use of sun/shadow studies, used frequently in the development process, and avoid one kind of impact by imposing structures that may loom large in the minds of community members.

The impact of design on the surrounding neighborhood can be tricky and controversial. Sometimes drawing on the surrounding vernacular succeeds and other times it fails; it is more than simply transferring details. For example, the Inn at Harvard, further discussed in chapter four, although it has its supporters also has its critics who say that the building mimics the surrounding vernacular more than complements it.

### **Open Space**

Positive impacts can be further enhanced by assuring that the open space surrounding the hotel is sufficient and usable for the use that is anticipated (e.g., if planting a buffer of trees or shrubs, the site needs more than five feet width and three feet depth, and must have sunlight and air).

Unused open space should be avoided. Small incidental buffers can end up being used as public trash cans. Open space should complement the views and the use of open space around the rest of the site. The hotel management should make sure that someone is responsible for its upkeep, so it will not become abandoned or an eyesore. The evaluation of proposed open space should ultimately be the responsibility of the design review board.

### **Community**

Many problems between the developer and the community result from a lack of information or lack of timely information. Unfounded beliefs about the developer's intent or fears about what could conceivably be built may cause residents to resent the developer's initiative

before they have reliable information on it. To avoid this, the town needs to appoint committees responsible for articulating ideas and desires of the community to the developer as well as keeping in contact with the community to stabilize their sense of realistic expectations. This committee should identify the site's "niche market." How can the site reinforce the character the town wants to promote? This process can get ideas flowing within the group. The community would benefit from finding a project somewhere that could serve as a prototype, providing committee members with an image to share. The committee, though, must recognize the need to invest time and energy in the project. The result develops through continued interaction between the town, the community and the developer.

The result of this interaction can generate the support needed from the committee and ultimately Town Meeting, which needs to pass any required zoning change by a 2/3 vote. Discussions of realistic expectations can avoid the all too frequent assumption in the town that development is negative, huge and an imposition on community and town character. This interaction can also assuage developers' concerns and involve them directly with the residents and business owners participating in the process.

Because developers must engage in often lengthy public processes in order to get all of the necessary approvals and variances needed to push the project forward, the development process can take many months. On the one hand, it provides substantial time for the community, the municipality and the interested development parties to get into lengthy conversations and to tease out feasible solutions. On the other, of course, it costs the developer money and may eventually discourage development.

According to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), Boston is currently leading the metropolitan area and the state in the hotel market in terms of the highest occupancy rate and daily room rate.<sup>8</sup> By 2005 the number of hotel rooms in Boston will have increased by 7,908 over the number of rooms available in 1996. This is a 65% growth in hotel rooms available in the city in the 9-year period.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there are 1,014 hotel rooms currently planned for the City of Cambridge. This growth in the hotel industry is in large part reacting



to the construction of the new Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in South Boston's Seaport District, but the need for hotel rooms was identified by the City of Boston even before the Convention Center's emergence. The new construction has fueled the need for even more hotel rooms. Indeed, 2,400 of the 5,830 hotel rooms expected to be completed between 2001 and 2005 are in three hotels that have been proposed for the Seaport District.

Although Brookline is not close to the new convention center facilities, it has many draws of its own to attract visitors, among them the proximity to campuses of several major universities, high profile medical facilities, and a real community environment.

A balance needs to be struck between the benefits and burdens of a new hotel in this type of highly urbanized environment. It is possible to mitigate most of the negative impacts. A hotel can potentially generate significant income to the town by increasing sales and use of area businesses if the resources are properly tapped.

**History/Background**

With the influx of immigrants to add to the workforce, Boston flourished as a merchant capital in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wealthy merchants built “country homes” in the areas surrounding downtown Boston, including Brookline, while still maintaining a town house in the city.<sup>10</sup> With the development of the first streetcar lines in the 1870s, many more people could share the dream of the rural ideal that heretofore had been experienced only by the wealthy.<sup>11</sup> Families interested in leaving the city with its “physical deterioration of old neighborhoods, the crowding of factory, shop, and tenement in the old central city. . .” left the city to settle down in sparsely settled open land.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1870s Brookline was still a wealthy suburb filled with grand houses that stood on several-acre lots with sloping hills, providing spectacular uninterrupted views of the big city only a couple miles distant. Only a few smaller lots existed. With the increasing ease of transportation up these trolley “spines,” more and more people moved permanently to Brookline, building on smaller and smaller lots, leaving the townhouses, and city life, often commuting to work in Boston. One hundred and forty years later, still an island amidst the big city, Brookline has retained its Selectmen and Town Meeting form of government, and has a population of approximately 55,000. Brookline is proud of its diversity of ethnicity, age, and income levels, but is drawing more and more high-income residents. Partially due to the end of rent control in the mid-1990s, a wealth of market-rate accommodations has recently become available, displacing lower income residents, many of them families who have lived in Brookline for generations, to find new homes in the outlying cities and towns.

Coolidge Corner, at the convergence of Harvard and Beacon Street, has been one of the main business and social centers of Brookline since the early 1900s. Situated atop a hill, one of the identifying features at the corner of Harvard and Beacon Streets is the prominent S. S. Pierce Building, still known by the name of the locally well-known grocery, long since

replaced by other businesses. And it is the same Beacon Street that passes the State Capital on Beacon Hill some 3 ½ miles downtown. Together with the Corner's old-fashioned wooden transit shelters, the Corner is reminiscent of days when it was becoming an important town gathering place.

### **At a Juncture**

Brookline, in many ways has the best of both worlds; it has been able to hold onto its small town charm, while still being able to take advantage of the excitement of big city activities nearby. Brookline has a highly educated population with a highly regarded school system, including one of the top ten high schools in the Nation. The five commercial districts that dot the town are filled with small, locally owned businesses to which many residents are loyally attached. Coolidge Corner is the largest of these five districts, all of which boast treasure troves of galleries, boutiques, restaurants, and specialty stores. But there is only one hotel, which is fully booked most nights of the year. Coolidge Corner is the symbolic center of the Town, serving as the convergence of many uses and users, serving passengers from the light rail Green Line and arrivals from the intersection of two major thoroughfares – Harvard and Beacon Streets.

### **An Established Community**

Brookline is an established community in at least two ways: physically and in terms of how devoted the residents are to maintaining the existing atmosphere. Physically, the 6.5 mile area is largely built up; there are a few parks, a couple of ball fields and the town is dotted with parking lots, but there are no longer any great tracts of land to be developed. The Town is also established in that the residents like its character and want to keep their image of it alive, but as a result there is a resistance to change, which prevents good changes as well as the bad. Not only are they resistant to change, but they are vocal about it. This can have the effect of discouraging developers.

## **Development in Brookline**

When parcels become available for development in Brookline, the lots are generally viewed as prime real estate, independent of their suitability for a particular use. This allows the Town to be choosy, giving the Town the opportunity to be more specific about the results it wants from a particular development.

The entity responsible for monitoring and managing development in the town is the Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB). EDAB's mission is: to encourage appropriate economic growth while preserving and enhancing the character of neighborhoods; to foster the prosperity of businesses in commercial areas; and to promote the development of affordable housing to preserve the diversity of the Town's population. It is with this devotion to the betterment of Brookline that EDAB put forth the idea of possibly building a hotel in Coolidge Corner.

## **Uses and Resources**

From the Coolidge Corner Theater to a paint-your-own-pottery studio to a wealth of unique, locally owned businesses and a well known and well attended farmers' market, the resources within the town are many and varied. From the Temple Kehilath Israel to the First Parish Church, from restaurants, pubs, books, flowers and shoes, to art galleries and antique shops, the mix of businesses includes local, independently owned stores and regional and national chains.

Coolidge Corner boasts a wide mix of both residential uses and commercial establishments. The dominant structures today are late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century townhouses and apartment blocks which line the major thoroughfares and many of the side streets, interspersed with single family homes. The residents are predominantly families with small children, young single professionals and elderly. It is the densest area of Brookline with approximately 51 – 100 people per acre.<sup>13</sup> As with the rest of Brookline, Coolidge Corner has a large Jewish population, as well as large constituencies of Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Middle Eastern ancestry.

Despite all the richness Brookline exhibits, there are elements that it lacks. Although in general the business community is stable with a vacancy rate of approximately 5% in the commercial areas, strengthening the ability for the small business owner to survive would enhance the economy of the town. It would further the image of a social durability matching the physical durability displayed in several of the surrounding 19<sup>th</sup> century structures. Additional small, independent businesses would complement the several long-standing business like Pelham Drug, the Brookline Booksmith and The Pear Tree.

Coolidge Corner has not changed very much in the last 30 years. There have been only two major developments in the last ten years: The Coolidge House nursing home on Webster Street and Center Place, filled with retail businesses on Beacon Street. The greatest change has been within the buildings in terms of the swift turnover of businesses. Although the turnover rate is not excessive, frequent empty storefronts in and of themselves can create an image of decline, suggesting a place looking for definition.

### **Visual Identity**

There is a general lack of visual identity and sense of place in Coolidge. The pattern of stores without any well identified public space is not welcoming to the shopper who feels he or she must shop and leave. There is no place to sit and gather ones thoughts, regain energy and continue on. If there were such a place, the visual cues, interlaced with the activity pattern of the Corner would surely improve the sense of place, uniting the Coolidge Corner area.

When urban planner Kevin Lynch conducted a visual analysis in Brookline in 1965, he spoke of the undefined nature of the town. In his study, Lynch interviewed residents, asking them about aspects of their visual memory concerning the districts, centers, boundaries, form and character of the town. It was clear that Coolidge Corner was a center of life for many Brookline residents. However, he continued, "Coolidge Corner [unfortunately] bear[s] the mark of the typical American shopping area: ill-formed spaces congested with empty parked cars; noise, fumes [ ]; danger to pedestrians, and a lack of any public places of shelter or rest.

[Those interviewed are] often appreciative of the range of services available, but as often critical of the physical and visual connections”.<sup>14</sup> Many of these conditions are still true today and Brookline is searching for ways to improve its legibility and the safety of its streets, increase its vitality and support its local businesses. For Brookline a design that respects the historic fabric of the Beacon Street corridor lined with late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century apartment blocks, and complements the existing setbacks, massing and height can benefit Coolidge Corner by adding to the continuity of the streetscape and can actually be seen as filling a hole in the fabric. The development of a hotel may be able to address many of these issues, drawing the residents, business owners and Town officials together in a spirit of “community,” adding to the devotion to the town and instilling some trust in the development process. Also physically creating usable public spaces and revitalizing one of the commercial area’s streets.

“[Beacon Street has [a] handsome and memorable character. . .” remarked Lynch, but “Not one of the shopping centers [three of which are along Beacon Street] has a well-formed public open space.” Having some well defined public space, claimed Lynch, would allow Coolidge Corner to be a visual focus instead of simply a functional focus.<sup>15</sup>

### **Accessibility**

Coolidge Corner is accessible both from the surrounding municipalities, from the north and south shores and from the west. Coolidge Corner is accessible by Beacon Street, which runs east and west, connecting eventually to Massachusetts Avenue and I-90 to the east, and by Harvard Street, which runs north and south, connecting with Route 9 to the south and Storrow Drive to the north. Brookline is also highly accessible by public transportation – the Green Line “C” train rides up the center of Beacon Street into the heart of Coolidge Corner and the #66 bus runs from Cambridge, through Coolidge Corner, to Boston.

Accessibility is currently being improved through two street improvement projects initiated by the Town: Beacon Street Improvement Plan and the Harvard Street Improvement Plan, where travel lanes are being widened to include turn lanes, parking is being reconfigured and

bicycle lanes are being added.

And although the town is very walkable and is highly accessible by public transportation, insufficient parking discourages many shoppers from choosing Coolidge Corner. In fact, a marketing study commissioned by the Economic Development Office in 1997, determined that as many as 65% of Brookline residents go outside of Brookline for their non-grocery shopping.<sup>16</sup> The primary reason listed? Lack of parking.

While accessibility to the town is easy, accessibility to developable land is a different story. Because of its scarcity and location, vacant or otherwise developable land comes at a premium. Rents in some areas of the commercial districts, for example, are as high per square foot as the more expensive property in the city, including Newbury Street in downtown Boston. The Corner's proximity to Boston, the Longwood Medical Area, one of the world's premier group of medical facilities (two miles distant from the town center), and several large and highly regarded educational institutions including Boston University, Boston College, Harvard and MIT, makes Brookline an ideal place to do business, but it's not easy getting in. For development on Town-owned land that is leased or sold, and for any project requiring a zoning change or special permit, there is an extensive public process in which a developer is engaged, and over which the residents have a significant amount of power. All zoning decisions and sale of public land must be approved by a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting.

Hotels rooms, however, are in short supply. The only hotel in Brookline is the Holiday Inn near Coolidge Corner, which is nearly always fully occupied. It is in this atmosphere that the idea of building a hotel in Brookline first emerged with the Economic Development Advisory Board.

### **The Webster Street Site**

The Webster Street parking lot is a 2.3 acre site located to the southwest of the main intersection of Harvard and Beacon Streets in Coolidge Corner. Surrounding the lot to the east is an 8-story brick and concrete Nursing Home (The Coolidge House), to the south

beyond another smaller parking lot is a 10-story apartment building, and to the west is a 13-story building with office space on the first four floors and residential on the remaining nine. Running along the northern edge of the locus is Webster Street to the far side of which are the back entrances and trash dumpsters for several of the businesses that face Beacon Street between Webster and Harvard Streets. Thus, the trio of Harvard, Webster and Beacon Streets forms a triangle, a small island in the midst of this commercial core.

Abutters to the site include those “triangle” businesses, including a baking company that sells cheesecake, a children’s shoe store, a bakery, a hair salon, a real estate agent, a manicure and pedicure boutique, a traveler’s treasure gift shop, a wine seller, a bank, a dry cleaner, clothing stores, an optician, and several restaurants from take out to sit down. The buildings within which they are housed are 4-story brick structures.

### **Specific Attributes of the Proposed Hotel**

The hotel proposal submitted by Carpenter & Co. and received by the Town of Brookline in May 1999, included the following attributes:

- ◆ 189 rooms in a limited-service hotel facility
- ◆ Limited service café/meeting space, two additional meeting rooms and small business center, an exercise room, lap pool, and a small lobby library
- ◆ An architectural character respectful of historic Beacon Street, with bay fronts and brick and stone as construction materials “punctuated with stone sills, cornices, and lintels.”
- ◆ An exterior courtyard, open to the public around which the hotel will be built.
- ◆ A “new urban edge” and a pedestrian-friendly community street/plaza. It will provide an “amiable urban setting” with pleasant views from adjacent properties and minimal impacts from traffic and shadows.
- ◆ Replacement parking for all spots currently on the Webster Street lot in a combination of on-site and off-site options. In addition, the project proposes 1-hr free parking for



farmers' market attendees on Thursdays.

- ◆ An allotment of money for use on Webster Street improvements, design services or landscaping beyond that needed for the hotel, farmers' market accommodation or additional parking.
- ◆ Business directories and brochures in the hotel rooms.

### **The Planning Process to Date**

The idea of a hotel was the result of a 6-month Hotel Feasibility Study process initiated by Brookline Selectmen in November, 1997, that identified a dearth of hotels in Brookline, especially of the extended-stay variety. The Town of Brookline then hired the Pinnacle Advisory Group, a well-known hotel consulting firm to further assess Brookline's market niche. The concept of the extended-stay hotel caters to those guests who spend more than 6 nights at a time and who desire separate living and/or working space in addition to sleeping accommodations and other amenities. The rooms generally have kitchen facilities within them. According to Amy Schectman, Economic Development Officer in Brookline, contrary to what one might be inclined to think, visitors to extended-stay facilities are less likely to rent a car than traditional shorter term stay hotels. If there is a good transportation system nearby, guests who stay longer are more likely to spend the time and effort to learn the transportation system than guests who stay for shorter periods.

The idea of an extended-stay hotel incited a significant amount of interest among members of the Economic Development Office, the Economic Development Advisory Board, the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Office, and the Department of Public Works. All agreed that, due to the proximity of several large universities, the Longwood Medical Area, and downtown Boston, coupled with access to public transportation, a hotel would be a very plausible and lucrative idea to explore. In addition to providing needed lodging, it could also bring a significant amount of additional foot traffic and taxes to Coolidge Corner. The hotel room tax income, which is outside the ceiling dictated by Proposition 2 1/2, is especially

important for towns like Brookline, which rely heavily on residential taxes (82% in Brookline as compared to surrounding localities, for example, 78% in Newton, 35% in Cambridge, and 30% in Boston).<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing this potential development activity as a opportunity to use a valuable asset, land, to improve the existing condition of the community, the Economic Development Office eagerly set forth assessing what the possibilities were. Since the parcel in question is Town-owned, the Town can impose conditions on the sale or lease of the land. This is an aspect that makes the Webster Street a high profile project, creating a good case to study. After looking into the possibility of such a development, the Brookline Economic Development Office conducted several town-wide meetings to determine what support, as well as what concerns, such a project might produce, especially given the extreme skepticism with which all development prospects are viewed by many of the residents of Brookline.

Preliminary reactions to the idea of a hotel on the Webster Street parking lot ranged widely; skepticism and opposition were the immediate reaction of some citizens, while the idea provoked curiosity and tentative support from others. For many residents and business owners in Coolidge Corner, the image of a hotel conjures up a large, imposing structure that would produce lots of unshielded noise and waste, not to mention increase traffic congestion. They worry about the possibility of losing parking for themselves, for employees, and/or visitors, which even temporarily would put a strain on the already tight parking situation. They also are wary of drawing in “ghost” visitors who rarely leave the hotel and as a result do not interact with the surrounding community, further supporting exploring the idea of externalizing amenities.

Many business owners welcome the idea of a hotel, eager for the increase in foot traffic and additional revenue. Whether or not the Webster Street parking lot and the surrounding community would support a hotel would demand significant study, but to initiate the feasibility process to determine the economic and social feasibility of the project, the Brookline community, including business owners, abutters, and other Brookline residents identified their main concerns and corresponding goals.

The main concerns of the community were identified at a town-wide meeting held in April 1998. These, added to previously identified concerns resulted in a list of concerns with which to approach the possibility of a hotel. The Town wanted to assure: that the design of a hotel respect the historic fabric of Beacon Street; that the farmers' market, which spends 20 Thursdays every year in the lot, be relocated to an appropriate and satisfactory location; that traffic not increase along the Webster Street corridor; that no parking spaces be lost; that Webster Street be addressed in terms of its life as a street, highlighting in particular the propensity for its use as a cut-through and a back alley; and that the vision of Coolidge Corner as a whole be addressed. In addition, the community meeting participants asserted a desire to keep night traffic to a minimum and as a result requested that no full-service restaurant or externally focused meeting rooms be built within the hotel. Since the location in question is surrounded by a veritable restaurant haven, the former is quite desirable. There is, however, a lack of venues in Brookline for meetings, or for that matter, wedding receptions, family reunions, or bar/bat mitzvahs. In order to address this lack of meeting venues, instead of allowing them in the hotel facility, some innovative solutions would have to be explored.

After the meeting, Amy Schectman, Brookline's Economic Development Officer, with the help of the Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB), facilitated the creation of five task forces (Design Issues, Farmers' Market Relocation, Traffic & Parking, Webster Street As A Street, and Coolidge Corner Vision) to address the issues raised. These task forces were made up of abutters, Town officials, citizens with specific, related expertise, and citizens at large; any Brookline resident was welcome to join one or more of the task force groups. After four months of meetings, research and deliberation, each group created a set of performance objectives.

In April 1998, Brookline Selectmen appointed a Hotel Screening Committee to review the proposals submitted to the Town. The Committee determined whether or not the proposals sufficiently addressed the needs and concerns of the Town, including its residents and business community, so that they felt confident in such a way that they view the project as enhancing the character of Brookline. The task of the Screening Committee was to write a Request For Proposals (RFP) incorporating the goals and concerns of the abutters and the

greater community, informing the development teams of the expectations the Brookline community has in order to support a hotel development in Coolidge Corner.

The performance objectives determined at the community meeting accompany the Phase I RFP, which focused primarily on qualifications of the developers in order to reduce the investment of the development teams so early in the process. The RFP was supported by Brookline Selectmen in late October and was distributed, by request only, to hotel companies and developers, by the end of November 1998.

Even after thirteen months of Screening Committee meetings, there are widely differing views among its members, as well as among other Brookline residents, business owners and Town officials, as to the impact of the development on Webster Street and on Coolidge Corner. Some Screening Committee members are still wondering whether a hotel is the best use for the site, while others are undecided, and still others are firmly, yet cautiously, pushing forward.

Phase II of the process ultimately will culminate in choosing a hotel proposal (or none as the case may be) to recommend to the Board of Selectmen, before putting it up for a Town Meeting vote. To further this part of the process, the original set of performance objectives was revised to reflect the activity of Screening Committee meetings, articulating issues of design, street benefits, traffic mitigation, service vehicles, parking, ownership, neighborhood benefits, restaurant, Coolidge Corner vibrancy, and environmental features desired by the Town. (See following page).

Design – the design should be linked directly with the urban context of this site, and continue to pay careful attention to the shadow impacts of the hotel building on all residential abutters.

Street Benefits – Brookline is interested in plans that provide benefits to the entire Webster Street corridor. The town is also interested in seeing an effort made towards coordinating service and delivery vehicles' access to the Webster Street lot in such a way that it combines the needs of the hotel with those of the adjacent Coolidge House Nursing Home.

Traffic – Brookline's goals in terms of traffic mitigation are to reduce speeds of vehicles along the Webster Street corridor and to reduce use of the street as a cut-through from Beacon Street to Harvard Street.

Service Vehicle – it is important to the Town and to the abutters of the site that the service areas not be visible, and their activities not be audible, by abutters.

Parking – it is important for the Town that all the public parking be replaced and at public parking rates. It is also important to increase the amount of parking since what currently exists is not sufficient to support the number of customers and visitors interested in coming to Brookline.

Ownership – in order to assure that the greatest amount of attention be paid to the development of the hotel, it is important to the Town to know that the developer they choose intends on owning and managing the property. This avoids the issue of the developer cutting corners to reduce total development costs just to increase profits on a speculative development.

Neighborhood Benefits – the surrounding neighborhood and especially immediate abutters will be impacted to some extent by the development regardless of the effort exerted by the development team. As a result, the Town would like to see benefits to the neighborhood that are consistent with the vision and goals of development in the Town, i.e., supporting the local business community and improving community relations

Restaurant –it is important to Brookline that there be no full-service restaurant in the hotel. This means there can be a breakfast room, room service, and kitchenettes in the rooms, but no large dining facilities provided. As well as being surrounded by restaurants, the hotel is also close to two grocers and a fruit and vegetable store.

Coolidge Corner Vibrancy – all the efforts to become involved in the community will help increase the vibrancy of Coolidge Corner

Environmental Features – the Town asks that the developers consider the option of building in an environmentally responsible way, as described by the “Checklist for Environmentally Responsible Design and construction.”

*Source: Performance Objectives, Phase II RFP, Economic Development Office, Town of Brookline, March 1999 (paraphrased)*

## Ideas To Be Explored

As with any project, there are also several ideas yet to be explored. The two I think are the most exciting and promising are the idea of “Community Streets” and that of combining hotel functions with activity at the Coolidge Corner Theater.

### Community Streets

“[T]he street, which is the public realm of America, is now a barrier to community life,” according to Andres Duany, urban designer and co-founder of the Congress For the New Urbanism.<sup>18</sup> The idea of community streets, also known as “Woonerf,” addresses this concern. The concept is based on the idea of taking advantage of the entire right-of-way between buildings along a street corridor and changing the landscape so that the street can be shared simultaneously by all users. The street would *look* different because the curb is removed, creating an open space right-of-way paved with brick or other material scattered with street furniture and bollards or other devices to direct the flow of traffic and to protect the merging users. Use of this concept creates a much safer environment for the community, reducing traffic speed and volume (while still leaving enough room for snowplows to get through). The end result is a more “livable” environment, an area that is truly useable, (perhaps even for markets or festivals). The curb is removed and the entire width and breadth of the street is paved in a single material with a second material inlaid to direct the flow of traffic. The idea is to create an open space that is set up for all users.

Some specific design requirements include:

- ◆ Avoiding the impression that there is a division between the throughway for cars and a footpath for pedestrians. This can be done by creating breaks along the right-of-way, approximately every 75 feet, clearly demarcating the existence of a footpath.
- ◆ Devices used to reduce the speed of traffic must not be more than 150 feet apart
- ◆ Devices should keep cars a certain distance (determined for safety by the Town) from edges of the right-of-way.

- ◆ Adequate street lighting should be required to ensure that all devices are visible at night.

(Source: Ben-Joseph, Eran. "Challenging the Residential Street Scene." *Journal of the American Planning Association*; 1995)

For Brookline this would mean creating a 38' right of way that would be more attractive, more efficiently used, safer, and would reduce use of Webster as a cut-through to Harvard Street. This technique would also potentially transform the image of Webster Street as a back alley since the current business owners backing on Webster will undoubtedly take advantage of the vibrancy of the new streetscape to focus more attention on the backs of their stores by creating additional entrances and lively Webster Street windows. This might recapture the essence of an earlier idea about finding some way to allot space along the Webster Street corridor for a neighborhood park.

This technique might be the solution to the lack of public space, incorporating the street in such a way that it is flexible and can accommodate a myriad uses even on short notice, while providing a missing link in the visual pattern of the Corner that can be enjoyed physically and visually on a daily basis.

There is reason to be optimistic about the success of the Webster Street corridor as a type of open space and potentially a new home for the farmers' market there. Originally Boston markets such as those at Haymarket, were nestled in between buildings creating a atmosphere similar to that along Webster Street, especially if a hotel fills in the only large gap in the streetscape. A 1987 *Boston Globe*, article referring to the decline of the markets along Blackstone Street in downtown Boston, supports the idea of providing market space along Webster Street. The author, Robert Campbell, wrote that, "[w]hen Blackstone Street was walled by buildings on both sides rather than one, it was an outdoor room that shaped and enclosed the market. Good cities tend to be made of such enclosed, roomlike street spaces. Today the market, lacking such a space to live in, seems merely a fringe along the edge of the [ ] block."<sup>19</sup>

## **Coolidge Corner Theater and Local Places of Worship**

The Coolidge Corner Theater (The Coolidge) began its life as the Beacon Universalist Church in 1903 and was transformed into a one-screen theater called “The Brookline” in 1933. The single screen was divided circa 1975 creating a second theater.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, The Coolidge is often on unsteady financial ground, uncertain of its life span, relying continually on the generous contributions of loyal supporters. In the 1980s, The Coolidge began leasing its ornate front entrance to an Au Bon Pain to pay the bills. The Au Bon Pain completely renovated the front into an anonymous box. Since then, patrons enter on the side of the building through flat glass doors set in a concrete facade half way down an alley between Harvard Street and the Centre Street municipal parking lot. Today it is the only operating Art Deco theater in the Boston area, showing art, foreign and independent films. There are many ways in which the hotel could integrate with the theater from buying blocks of tickets for guests and employees to holding occasional functions or meetings in the theater. This would reduce the need for the hotel to provide expensive meeting space and provide desperately needed income to the theater.

During the early part of most days the theater is closed. Although there are sometimes early shows, they are irregular. During the afternoon films are shown, but the small audiences frequently scarcely cover costs. The premises could be used during certain times of the day for meetings. Parts of the theater could be remodeled to extend this use to different varieties of settings. The art deco motif would be attractive to many meeting goers. The income would facilitate more adequate restoration of the rich decorations. Most of all, to the old-movie theater nostalgics of Brookline and the surrounding Boston area, who worry that it is only a matter of time before the demise of The Coolidge and decry its declining physical condition, this would certainly gain the hotel their enthusiastic support.

Among places of worship financial considerations vary a great deal, but in today’s secularizing society, many of them are also in dire financial condition. Several of the structures are quite old, for example, two located near the hotel site are the First Parish Church, built between 1871 and 1873, and the Temple Kehilath Israel, constructed between 1922 and 1924.<sup>21</sup> They occupy beautiful old structures whose ornate decorative details, stained glass, statuary and soaring physical dimensions make them expensive to heat,



maintain and repair.

The schedules of activity within these structures leave them unoccupied during much of the day throughout the work week. The physical plants include various meeting rooms as well as their main halls of worship. Here again we have adequate meeting space with decorative features. They could be occupied for rentals that would be reasonable in comparison with other commercial meeting space – even if it were available – and the income would be much valued by the church or temple. While serving good purpose for the hotel and avoiding its need to devote investment for meeting rooms, it could gain the hotel real appreciation from the surrounding neighbors and greater Brookline community.

### **Next steps**

Even in Phase II, there is both significant support for and significant opposition against the hotel project. Members of the business community are either concerned that the hotel will eliminate more of the already-scarce parking or are thrilled with the possibility of having increased foot traffic; residents are either afraid of the developer not addressing their needs, overwhelming them with an unattractive structure and providing a deluge of additional cars or curious to hear about the opportunities for investment in their community.

In other words, there is a simultaneous sense that no development is good development (that Coolidge Corner is already dense enough) and that development is the source for a lot of added investment in the community that will not come from elsewhere within the community. Part of this discrepancy is the result of the business owners enthusiastic about drawing in new customers and providing adequate parking for the customers who currently circle around to find parking and the residents who just want the circling cars to go away. The end result has the possibility of satisfying both parties in this regard, but it must somehow be made clearer to them.

The next steps for Brookline are to examine the Phase II proposal that was submitted and work with the developer (Carpenter & Co.) to determine what type of negotiation is possible to make the proposal the most beneficial to the entire Brookline community.

The following four case studies are examples of other hotel or related developments which address or explore issues previously addressed, such as the effect of externalizing amenities, inserting a new hotel into an historic urban fabric and recreating a sense of place.

Although the Brookline case is instructive, in order to begin to extend these lessons outside of Brookline, it is important to recognize that not all of the options perfect for the development of a hotel in Coolidge Corner will be useful or feasible or even desired in other communities. These case studies are important to extend the breadth of possibilities available and to address solutions that work in Brookline as well as in other communities.

The four case studies reviewed in this chapter are: the Regal Bostonian Hotel, in downtown Boston, MA, the Rosslyn Spectrum, in Arlington County, VA, the Inn at Harvard, in Cambridge, MA, and the proposed Hotel Commonwealth in Kenmore Square, Boston, MA.

### **Relevant Lessons**

Relevant lessons for a successful development can be enumerated in the following categories: strong design, high standards, good communication, giving back to the community, and creative property management

### **The Regal Bostonian Hotel**

The Regal Bostonian, hereafter referred to as The Bostonian, was chosen as an example because of its ability to blend into the existing fabric, while still maintaining an individuality that differentiates it from other “standard” hotels and complements the surrounding neighborhood. The 155 - room hotel developed by Winn Development Co., is a combination of new construction and rehabilitation of older structures. Two buildings were demolished and two were renovated on the site to complete the project.<sup>22</sup>

Although The Bostonian is a full-service hotel, the developer dealt with many of the same issues that the Webster site developer will face and therefore is an important case to review. The Bostonian is located in the heart of downtown Boston, on North Street, surrounded by Faneuil Hall, Boston City Hall, Haymarket vendors and the North End, nestled in the historic Blackstone Block. Full of meandering alleys, this block holds onto the last vestiges of 17<sup>th</sup> century Boston townscape that wind in and around the lot. Even their names, Scott Alley, Marsh Lane, and Salt Lane, hint at their historical beginnings.

When construction started, it became clear that the area being unearthed was of tremendous historical significance. On the site in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was Scottow's Dock, old Boston's City wharf which "once bustled with the wares of clipper ships. . ." which was named for the man who owned the land and for whom Scott's Alley is named. This discovery prompted a 2-day archeological dig. Several of the artifacts dug up are on display in the hotel lobby. This was one way in which Arthur Winn, principal of Winn Development Co., chose to respect and acknowledge the site's history. Additionally, in each of the guest rooms are paintings of Boston<sup>23</sup> and the entrance fountain holds a marble replica of a 17<sup>th</sup> century map of Boston.

The Boston Landmarks Society (BLS) felt very strongly that Scott Alley, which emerges onto North Street in the middle of the hotel block, should remain open to the sky to preserve the shape of the street. The maintenance of the alley, however, would preclude the original design that Winn wanted. Winn Development accommodated the desire of the BLS by installing light wells into the building and left the alley open, decreasing the size of the project, and protecting Scott Alley and pedestrians who choose to walk down the narrow alley. Above the alley, a 2<sup>nd</sup> story glass-enclosed walkway was constructed leading to the other portion of the hotel instead of blocking off the entrance to the alley with a wall. This preserves the alley from the outside, allowing people to look along the alley from the street, and allowing guests to see into the alley from above, getting a glimpse of yesteryear as they trudge off to bed. This also reduces the overall appearance of the size of the hotel.

Another effort to reduce the impact on the surrounding buildings was limiting the hotel to 7 stories. Where it approaches the neighboring buildings it steps down so as not to overwhelm

them. The project's preservation of the historic Boston streetscape and the sensitive exterior design has been lauded as a terrific success again and again. Then-mayor Kevin White spoke of the hotel as "a significant [ ] contribution to the city."<sup>24</sup>

The Bostonian was built in 1981 on a site that was approximately 25% privately owned and 75% owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), hence there was an Request For Proposals (RFP). Winn's vision was threefold: to create a building that looked as though it had always been there, nestled in the fabric; to have a restaurant with its own identity that would draw crowds of its own accord; and to create a sense for the guest that he or she was not staying at a hotel, but rather at a residence.

The property was zoned for commercial use when Winn purchased it and contained several vacant structures. Pushcart vendors lined the streets around the lot, especially on Blackstone Street, but also along North Street, says Winn. Winn was concerned that having the vendors in front of the hotel might discourage business since, he says, the vendors were not always very tidy. After some discussion, however, the vendors and Winn came to an agreement concerning the juxtaposition of the hotel and the markets. Vendors agreed to keep limited business at the far end of North Street and confine most of the market to Blackstone Street.

For Winn it was important to have a restaurant with its own identity. Winn wanted to let restaurateurs, who were passionate about running a restaurant, do the job right. This approach worked very well, in fact helping to establish the hotel in the city. Many of Boston's great chefs started out at The Bostonian's Seasons Restaurant, including Jasper White, Lydia Shire and Gordon Hamersley. However, although the restaurant is well regarded, it is not a major source of revenue for the hotel, according to Jeremy Brown, Front Office Manager of the Bostonian. Though Seasons has a monopoly on breakfast, Brown estimated that approximately 50 – 55% of guests go outside of the hotel for lunch and upwards of 85% of the guests go outside of the hotel for dinner.

One of the ways in which the hotel maintains its individuality is through its restaurant fare. Seasons Restaurant features products that are grown in or are associated with New England

and the menu changes with each season. The executive chefs are encouraged to use local vegetables and fruit, which are purchased from the markets around the hotel.

The Bostonian, the City of Boston and the surrounding community all benefited from the attention put into the design and development of the hotel as well as the good relations between all parties and their willingness to be patient and work together.

## **Design**

Although there are some who criticize the interior design of the hotel, primarily as being incompatible with the exterior, the outside is highly regarded. It was called “one of the most urbane works of architecture in years.”<sup>25</sup> In terms of setting, materials, size, and adornments, the hotel succeeds in respecting the fabric around it while still maintaining its own individuality. For Robert Campbell, *Boston Globe* Correspondent, “[the resulting design of the Bostonian Hotel also] restores some faith in the process by which development decisions and architectural reviews are made in our town. The development was also touted as a building “whose brick and granite façade is a comfortable fit” into the surrounding fabric.<sup>26</sup> This development further encouraged the pushcart vendors to spruce up their markets with the addition of colorful new umbrellas.<sup>27</sup> In turn, the bright awnings at each of the hotel room windows “relate [the hotel] to the festivity of the markets.”<sup>28</sup>

The Bostonian demonstrates that a design that complements the surrounding urban fabric will be appreciated and enjoyed by surrounding business owners and residents, encouraging further attention to the area by surrounding merchants and producing an area that people enjoy visiting. And although Brookline is not keen on having a large restaurant within the facility, making the hotel unique in some way, perhaps by promoting the history of Coolidge Corner, will add to the success of the hotel.

## **High Standards**

Taking the time to rework the design of the Bostonian so as to preserve the old townscape and insert a design that fit sensitively in the Blackstone Block has paid off. It took seven years just to complete the deal, but it has been well worth it, according to Winn, and has

helped to make the Haymarket/Faneuil Hall area what it is today. The Massachusetts Historical Commission's acting director praised the effort saying, "what the Bostonian [archaeological] dig did was to show that we can cooperate with developers, get them to see the significance of preservation. In that sense, it was a landmark."<sup>29</sup> Winn agrees, after being initially skeptical, saying that "preservation is a risk worth taking" despite the fact that it could also have further delayed or even halted construction of the hotel.<sup>30</sup> The Bostonian is now planning to expand. Forty-five additional rooms are slated to open in May 1999.

Although Winn was determined to have a high class hotel restaurant with an individual identity, it does not draw the crowds that one might expect. Because the location is surrounded by restaurants and nighttime activity, many guests chose to explore the other restaurant options. The restaurant is rather a minor revenue generator. This is a strong indication that the Town of Brookline and a limited service hotel could both profit by the proposed Webster Street development. In addition, to learn that there are examples of hotel restaurants using local market produce is a positive indication that the same might be possible for the Brookline case.

### **Good Communication**

Winn says the best thing the City of Boston did for Winn Development Co. during the development process was trust them to build a great hotel. Relating his experience of the development of the Bostonian to the possibility of a hotel in Coolidge Corner, Winn, who lives in Brookline, says that in such a process-driven town like Brookline, it is critical for the Town to support and help the developer throughout the process. Winn suggested that the promotion of the historic elements of Brookline might indeed be one of the major attractions to staying there, rather than in downtown Boston.

The Bostonian succeeded not only because of its sensitive design in addition to its willingness to hold off development until preservationists had a chance to look at the site, but by working with a design that complemented the pushcart vendors as well as Faneuil Hall, fostering a collaborative atmosphere with area businesses, and preserving the history of the site to the great appreciation of the Boston Landmarks Society, the Bostonian created a

profitable development while satisfying concerns about the site and of the surrounding business community.

The developer of the Bostonian determined that there is a high value and feasibility of absorbing surrounding community functions into their projects. Giving the hotel the opportunity to be a 7-night a week hotel by locating it in an environment where there are activities to partake of and places to go every day (and night) of the week, is important for business that relies on outside interaction.

### **Creative Property Management**

The Bostonian made several attempts to give the hotel a unique feel. Mementos of the past in the lobby of the Bostonian give a personal touch to the hotel. To make the guest feel more at home, the Bostonian strove to create a residence feel within the hotel. Its attempt to create an oasis in the midst of the big city, allowing guests to either interface with the community or escape from it is quite successful. Especially by the hotel's use of the carriage entrance and open courtyard at the front of the hotel, one would hardly know one was in the heart of downtown Boston. In order not to lose connection with the community completely, the restaurant serves to draw the public in and the lack of a coffee shop draws guests out.

### **The Rosslyn Spectrum**

The Rosslyn Spectrum, which I will refer to as the Spectrum, was chosen because of its attempt to mix meeting space and non profit theater space in the same venue. The Spectrum is in Arlington County, Virginia. The County purchased a local theater and partnered its Cultural Affairs Office with the Marriott Hotel chain to create the Rosslyn Plaza development, a project which includes 5 buildings of mixed-use office, residential and retail space. Rosslyn is located across the Potomac River from Georgetown in DC and the project is located directly adjacent to a set of developments which boast a total of 8 million square feet of office space and approximately 2000 hotel rooms. The arrangement between the theater, now called the Rosslyn Spectrum, the County and the hotel provides nearby hotels with meeting space during articulated hours while also providing theater groups with free rehearsal and performance space. This model is appropriate for this study because of several

characteristics: it is located in a densely developed urban environment; the project focuses on the externalizing of hotel meeting space; and the creative mixed-use simultaneously as a theater and meeting venue, giving the community much-needed theater space. In addition, the partnership combines private developers and members of County offices, including the Office of Economic Development, and the project has been realized within the past 5 years, recent enough to have many similar issues, yet old enough that many of the unknowns have played themselves out.

The Rosslyn Spectrum is a renovation of a 1962 movie theater, redesigned to accommodate both plays and meetings. To realize this project, the developer partnered with the County's Arts Incubator Program, a program devised to find practice and performance space for non profit theater groups. Because of the approximately 2,000 hotel rooms adjacent to this project, the shortage of meeting venues in the immediate area, the lack of available performance space, and the similarity in needs for the two uses, the partnership seemed a good fit. The partnership agreement allowed meetings in the renovated Spectrum between 2am – 6:30pm Mon – Sat and 5pm – 2am Sun. Theater groups had the space the rest of the time, therefore: 7pm - 2am Mon – Sat and until 5pm on Sun.

### **Issues That Arose**

Despite the proximity to the hotel rooms, the meeting venue was discovered to be an awkward distance from the hotel. Although only a 7-minute walk to the bulk of hotel rooms, the walk is across two highways and is farther than the critical two block distance meeting attendees are generally willing to walk. Additionally, since there is only a holding kitchen in the facility, meeting planners had to hire caterers and accommodate the additional health regulations for every individual event. According to Jon Palmer Claridge, Program Director of the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Office, says that the 379 seats and 1,000 s. f. of lobby space (the only available 'break out' space) in the Spectrum is not sufficient for a successful meeting venue. Further, there were issues surrounding the tight leeway between the hour that one activity ended and another began, and making sure there was time to set up the venue for the next event. On the theater's end, scenery needed to be removed and



actors needed to change. On the meetings' end, there was need for some type of break-out space to accommodate discussions that were inspired by the event.

Although there were some difficulties with the particularities of the Rosslyn site, there are some positive aspects to the coordination as well. Meeting attendees, says Jon Palmer Claridge, especially enjoyed the atmosphere of the theater for their meetings. The two activities proved compatible in terms of their similar needs for lighting and sound. In addition the theater was thrilled to have this opportunity for rent-free practice space.

### **Creative Property Management**

Both The Bostonian and The Rosslyn Spectrum have shown that there is a high value and feasibility of absorbing surrounding community functions into their projects. Although Rosslyn was not entirely successful, the idea promoted is one that has been successful in other ventures, according to Robert Atkinson of the Arlington County Department of Economic Development. One example is in Crystal City, Arlington County, VA. One reason this idea should be considered for Brookline is that the Webster Street site does not pose the same problems as the Rosslyn site. Although the Rosslyn site proved too far from the hotel, the property owners were successful in combining the two different activities in the same venue. If it were not for the issue of distance, the partnership would most likely have been more successful. Although the Coolidge Corner Theater does not have a very large seating capacity, the town in thinking of this partnership, envisions smaller gatherings and therefore the theater does have the necessary elements for the purpose: a good sound system, a prominent stage, and proximity to the hotel site. It is possible that the hotel could explore several other venues to share the task including the Temple Kehilath Israel, Temple Ohabai Shalom, and the First Parish Church.

### **The Inn at Harvard**

The Inn at Harvard is another example of an attempt to integrate a hotel physically with surrounding historic fabric. The Inn at Harvard is also an example of a hotel that has a restaurant that does not draw in many customers who are not guests of the hotel. Set at the convergence of Massachusetts Avenue and Harvard Street, the hotel lot forms a point aimed

at, and just east of, Harvard Square in Cambridge. Designed by Graham Gund, the Inn at Harvard is a private development, owned and developed by Harvard University in 1991, and managed by Doubletree. There was no community “process” per se, but there was community “participation” in that the citizens of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood had a lot to say about the proposed development. From the beginning, the community, concerned about the size of the proposed 225-room hotel, requested that the city downzone the lot. This meant a decreased Floor Area Ratio (FAR), reducing the total square footage that the developer would be allowed to build on the site. The zoning amendment was granted and although this could have been challenged as unlawful spot zoning, since municipalities are not allowed to single out a parcel of land for differential treatment, Harvard chose to work with the downzoning and reduced the size of their proposal to fit the new, lower FAR. The hotel that was constructed has 113 rooms at which point Harvard anticipated only marginal market viability.

One of the major dissenters to the proposed project was an abutter, the Baptist Church. The church claimed that the construction would topple their 260’ tower because of the vibrations the construction would cause. The tower had already been identified in 1971 as “needing immediate attention.” The tower was more or less identified as merely a stack of stones piled on top of one another with nothing but the sheer weight of the materials holding them together because the mortar had long since eroded. Although it was technically the church’s responsibility to fix the tower, in order to avoid costly delays, Harvard took on the responsibility of stabilizing the tower and continued with the project.

Scott Levitan, of the Department of Harvard Planning and Real Estate in the University and Commercial Real Estate Division, says that Harvard feels very strongly about how the edges of its neighborhoods are addressed. The resulting hotel was worth the compromises of reducing the size and stabilizing the Baptist Church tower, assures Levitan.

Commercialization of this corner of the Mid-Cambridge district was of particular concern to the surrounding neighbors. The community was concerned that the hotel’s restaurant would draw in a lot of additional cars and asked that it be internally focused. So, as a concession to the neighbors, Harvard, which would have preferred a money-making restaurant, instead

specifically tailored the restaurant to focus on guests only. Ironically, Harvard was later accused by several neighborhood leaders of “excluding” the residents of Cambridge from the hotel restaurant.

### **Externalizing Amenities**

After speaking with Richard Carbone, Manager of the Inn at Harvard I learned that, similar to the Bostonian, that although most of the hotel guests have breakfast at the hotel, 95% eat lunch outside the restaurant and approximately 85% go out for dinner. According to Carbone, the hotel restaurant is really a very minor source of income. This further supports the idea that the Town of Brookline and a limited service hotel could both benefit by the development of a hotel on Webster Street.

### **Design**

The Inn at Harvard showed that if the structure draws from the vernacular of the surrounding area the result can be very successful, drawing praise and support from the city. There is often more than one opinion. In this case, although the architectural elements and ornamental styles come directly from the University’s campus, combined with surrounding examples of massing, the scale of the features is arguably inappropriate for the neighborhood.

In addition the lower Floor Area Ratio benefited the community, while still providing adequate revenue to the hotel operators. Aspects of the hotel development now appreciated by the community include the limited height, the residential character, and the setbacks, says Levitan. Another asset to the surrounding community is parking. Hidden from the casual passersby, there are levels of underground parking several stalls of which are rented monthly to business people for day parking. The 113-room hotel is a huge success and many of the neighbors regard the hotel as attractive and respectful of the surrounding fabric. The hotel is frequently used as an example by Cantabridgians for what they want for the City of Cambridge.

All in all the lessons here are that a hotel can conceivably provide a restaurant that succeeds in drawing primarily guests to the table. The Inn’s restaurant is not visible from the outside

and has a “distinctly hotel environment,” so, although it does not necessarily promote area restaurants, it does not directly compete with surrounding businesses. While it does not encourage non-guests to dine, the restaurant host or hostess will not turn anyone away who comes to eat.

### **Hotel Commonwealth**

The Hotel Commonwealth is an example of an opportunity to recreate a sense of place and sensitively insert a hotel development into a prominent historic block. This hotel is one part of a development envisioned for the 500 block of Commonwealth Avenue in Kenmore Square, Boston. A focus of activity for the Fenway neighborhood, Kenmore Square used to be more lively and vibrant according to Melisa Poulos, executive director of The Samaritans, a suicide-prevention hotline and one of the businesses which will not be invited back once the construction is completed. Within the proposed 149-room hotel will be 4,000 s. f. of function space, a fitness center, a walled garden and indoor terrace (available for seasonal rentals) a café, and 46,000 s. f. of retail.<sup>31</sup> The hotel claims it will provide 150 new full-time and part time hotel and retail jobs. The hotel is still in the development process, but is currently slated for completion by spring 2001.

The location is ideal for a developer. Kenmore Square is highly accessible via the Green Line subway system and several bus lines that criss-cross the city. It lies at the convergence of three major thoroughfares; Commonwealth Avenue, Beacon Street and Brookline Avenue, each of which connect to important educational, medical and cultural institutions west of the city. One can also easily access major highways from this location. The extended boundaries of this nexus include Fenway Park, the country’s oldest professional baseball stadium as well as Lansdowne Street, a Boston hot spot for bars and nightclubs.

Kenmore Square has been in a state of flux for many years. In the 1980s it was a haven for nightclubbers and punk rock youth who would frequent the Rathskellar and Narcissus, two popular nightspots. Because of the proliferation of youth lingering on the sidewalks, many pedestrians opted to cross Commonwealth Avenue and walk along the north side to avoid the possibility of unwanted interaction. Many consider the recent demise of the Rathskellar

and Narcissus a good start towards a renaissance of the Square, relegating the club and bar night life to the Lansdowne strip, two blocks southwest of the Square. The addition of chain restaurants along the block (an International House of Pancakes and a McDonald's) further changed the atmosphere. Most recently, a fire in one of the buildings displaced several businesses and physically marred the facade of the block.

The plan for the 149-room Hotel Commonwealth calls for the renovation of 7 brick bowfront buildings along the block. The current design will increase the height of the block by two stories at its highest point and raise the surrounding buildings to meet that height to “provide a uniform façade along the entire site frontage.”<sup>32</sup> The question here is “how to refurbish [this] endearing but tattered neighborhood[ ] without erasing [its] character and history,”<sup>33</sup> especially when some people claim that the neighborhood’s character is already gone, and “to help elevate the quality of life in Kenmore Square,” according to BU’s executive vice president, Joe Mercurio.<sup>34</sup>

## **Design**

If the concerns about the size and design of the Hotel Commonwealth are addressed as residents are hoping, designers of the hotel will divide the structure visually into vertical elements from the sidewalk to the rooftops maintaining the same fine grained texture of retail activity as currently exists, leaving off any of the proposed projections. With the same amount of interior space, this structure has the ability to complement or overwhelm the surrounding community, just by the way the developers handle the exterior.

Great Bay Holdings LLC promise to “removing the incongruous mix of building add-ons” constructed throughout the years and provide an upgrade of “landscaping and beautification” of the open parking lot and public alley to the rear of Commonwealth Avenue. This will establish a new “front door” for the hotel on the Newbury Street extension, creating another opportunity for further revitalization on the south side of the development parcel. In addition, the project will provide what has been referred to only as generic “new sidewalk and street amenities.”

The existing buildings on the block are 25' wide, and less than 80' high with a texture that encourages lively activity, including many layers of retail. The hotel project as designed, however, is 4 times bigger than the next biggest building on the block, a total of 335' in width. In fact, as presently drawn, the Hotel Commonwealth would be the biggest building on Commonwealth Avenue. The projections (which will protrude 20' from the building for a length of 240') desired by Great Bay Holding LLC are also a problem; they interrupt the rhythm of the vertical bays in the existing buildings and narrow the sidewalk. "Fewer restless projections" and a design which is "less triumphal in scale" with compatible rhythm, color, materials while still expressing the 1990s is what is desired by the City. It is also felt that the French Empire design being proposed is too grandiose for the location; that the area would benefit much more from a design that "enhances the history of the area, not revises it."

The community is also concerned about the proliferation of chains in Kenmore Square and the loss of independent businesses, many of which are not being asked to return after the hotel is built. Residents want reassurance from the developer that an effort will be made to relocate some of these existing businesses to other Fenway locations. They are also concerned with traffic and pedestrian safety both during and after the construction takes place.

Other benefits will include enhancement of the pedestrian experience in Kenmore Square, improved lighting, shade trees, walking, sitting places, green spaces. Noise will be shielded, storage areas will be secured. There is a simultaneously emerging improvement plan being developed by the MBTA, Boston's public transit agency, that includes removing the existing bus transfer station, which lies on an island in the middle of the Square, replacing it with a glass enclosed structure (safer as well as allowing for views across the square) in addition to rebuilding and relocating of MBTA head houses.

### **Communication**

In the case of the Hotel Commonwealth, the fact that to date there have been good relations between the developers, the MBTA, the city and the business community is indicative of positive outcomes. Currently there are approximately 15 letters of support for the hotel on

file at the BRA from different businesses and resident groups. In a *Courant News* article dated February 23, 1999, Pam Beale, president of the Kenmore Association, a group of local business owners, said that even the mayor took an interest in the project and talked to the business community about what they could do.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that there is a dialog beginning with the Mayor and the business community and the fact that there are more than ten letters of support from area businesses is indicative of the fact that members of the community are involved in the process or are at least being informed. Additionally, there are attempts to reduce the overwhelming nature of the proposed hotel and related development and take advantage of the development prospect to recreate a sense of place in Kenmore Square.

### **Harvard Square Hotel**

The Harvard Square Hotel is an example of a hotel which has always externalized its meals. Located on Mount Auburn Street in Cambridge, MA, the hotel served guests for thirty-seven years before incorporating any food as part of its accommodations. Five years ago the management rented space in the hotel to a company that runs a café, providing a variety of wraps and baked goods, coffee and juices, available to the guests from 6am to 9pm. The hotel still provides only light fare.

## 5 Reasonable Expectations

What are reasonable expectations for a development project for the Town, its residents and business owners? How can one facilitate communication between the community and the developer so they have the tools to work with each other to achieve the best results? What can the hotel take from the community and what can it give in return?

Reasonable expectations for the community and the municipality begin with the assurance that there will be an open dialog and that all parties are willing to contribute. This will result in the most there will be workable accommodations for displaced activities, high quality of design and construction, and an identity compatible with the surrounding community.

### **Workable Accommodations**

Workable accommodations for displaced activities is paramount since there is almost always something displaced in “established communities.” In Brookline, it is the farmers’ market and public parking that would need to be relocated.

### **The Brookline Farmers’ Market**

The Brookline Farmers’ Market is one of the oldest farmers’ markets in the Northeast, it is also very well respected with a devoted following. The market has been a tradition in Brookline for 20 years. Although it currently sits cramped in half of the Webster Street lot 20 Thursdays a year, when the concept of possibly moving from the current site first arose, there was considerable uproar. The farmers who do not want to move fear that a relocation will sabotage the “good thing” they have with the market now. They fear that customers will not be able to find them. They fear that the atmosphere of the market will be irrevocably changed moving to a larger location, adding non-food items and creating more of a crafts fair feel. When the Hotel Screening Committee assured the farmers’ market manager that if the town decided to go forward with the development of the hotel, the committee and the town, in collaboration with the developer would certainly find a suitable, if not substantially



better site for the market, the market manager's response was horror. She believed the committee was bent on transforming the market into a circus, determined to destroy the atmosphere, and that sales and revenues would decrease and attendance would plummet. Upset with her response, the committee set about trying to find information about other local area farmers' markets that had moved. From discussions with managers and farmers at the surrounding Somerville, Cambridge, and Newton farmers' markets, all of which have relocated in the past 10 years, it was clear that relocations of markets is more of a perceived problem than a reality. Although relocation has its difficulties, there are ways to mitigate the risks. All of the managers and farmers said that if there was a decrease in revenue initially after the move, sales returned to normal or increased after the first few weeks.

On the other hand, the farmers who are eager for the move, albeit cautious, feel that there is danger in remaining static. Several farmers, including David Jackson of Enterprise Farms of New Hampshire, feel that it is about time for some kind of change, perhaps a change in location, perhaps some other form of change. David Jackson says he feels that this change can be resisted or guided and in his mind having the opportunity to guide the change is one he's willing to explore. Jackson's not the only one, he says, to be considering this as a potentially positive move, both literally and figuratively. But even those who welcome the dialogue to consider the new location are still hesitant to trust that the Town will do what it says it will. They are skeptical that the Town will supply the farmers with a terrific location on the Centre Street parking lot, on of several relocation options, in a structure built specifically with a farmers' market in mind, that their space will not be confined to an area with poor light, limited air circulation and no ambiance, or that the new location will not draw other vendors to feed off of the farmers' market crowds.

Several farmers' markets in the cities and towns surrounding Brookline have relocated at one time or another, including Brookline, which moved to its current location on Webster Street from a lot directly across the street from one of the lots being considered (Centre Street). In order to determine what happened during those moves, what worked, what didn't, and what could've made the move more successful, two longstanding members of the Brookline

farmers' market were interviewed who are also members of the Somerville and Cambridge farmers' markets.

From these interviews and conversations with the State Agricultural Office, in addition to learning about different experiences with those relocations, the interviews showed that a great portion of the concern regarding the possible relocation of the Brookline market was a result of hype. The farmers had received false information regarding the expectations of the Town in regards to this project. They had, for example heard, in regards to the possible decking of the Centre Street lot, that the structure would be completely enclosed and that they would be shoved inside. The other image that had been generated was one similar to a "Disneyfication" of the market. With these options as examples, it is no wonder the farmers were not eager to enter a dialog with the Town and the hotel developers.

The farmers spoke of wanting to make the experience of visiting the farmers' market easier and more enjoyable in terms of having sufficient parking, providing more room for the vendors, creating ease of access onto and off of the site, potentially increasing the number of vending days, integrating the market more into the surrounding community and promoting the market with specials and events, including music. Although they are always busy, the farmers expressed eagerness to participate in design charrettes if and when that time comes.

From conversations with the farmers' market vendors and managers, the following list of ideas emerged that might help improve the farmers' market experience. With all of the mammoth grocery stores for competition, there is still a quality that cannot be replicated; for one, at a farmers' market the shopper knows where the produce, flowers or baked goods originated. One of the ideas came from Stephanie Lesiska, of Wally's Vegetables and her experience with the Somerville farmers' market where Redbones, a local barbecue restaurant in Davis Square, comes once a season to the farmers' market with equipment and staff. The farmers donate vegetables the restaurant staff grills them up and sells them to farmers' market goers. The proceeds go to Project Soup. Stephanie Lesiska suggested it would be great to get one or several Brookline restaurants interested in coming to the market (perhaps each once a season or a single restaurant once a week) to set up a booth at the farmers'

market, to buy fresh vegetables from the farmers and grill them/julienne them/marinate them/sauce them/sauté them, whatever they do best, and provide tasters or sell plates to customers. The money made during this time could be accumulated into a market fund for hiring musicians, replacing signs, etc.

In terms of finding musicians, Brookline is filled with talent, as is clear by the numbers who fill Brookline's stores during 1<sup>st</sup> Light Festival, an annual festival of arts, entertainment, and shopping, celebrating the coming of winter. It might be possible to provide names of local musicians the farmers might be able to hire to play on market days, helping to articulate the social component of the market as well as to provide atmosphere.

Older customers have claimed that walking home from the market with any more than a light load of produce is not possible for them. An additional option to the delivery service idea emerges here. Providing shuttle bus service from the many retirement and nursing homes to drive elderly customers to and from the market, perhaps on a circuit, would help to increase the feasibility of their continued support of the market and would allow them to carry more.

Whether or not it is feasible for the market to come more than one day a week, it will be important to improve signage, especially at the Coolidge Corner transit stop, to encourage people to take the short walk to the market. Tripods (two-sided signs in the shape of an upturned "v") help somewhat in promoting the market, but they are easy to walk by for two reasons: people get used to them, and they are generally scribbled and therefore don't look professional. Additional promotions and advertisements in both in the local newspaper, the Brookline TAB and Boston Globe would be very useful.

David Webber at the State Agricultural Office told me about a matching grant program that Massachusetts provides, which this year has decided to open the process to allow farmers' markets to apply for funding. The state also provides in-kind services, funding allowing. This would be one way of mitigating the cost of moving the market should a relocation take place.

There is successful precedent for moving the farmers' market. In most cases it has been an improvement in terms of location and atmosphere. The locations being considered for the relocation of the Brookline Farmers' Market have all of the necessary ingredients for a successful move: accessibility, parking, visibility, spatial ambiance, even good demographics. For the move to be successful, it is important that the agreement between the town, the developer and the market manager assures thoughtful planning, implementation strategies, as well as risk and cost assessment. Depending on the decisions made in regards to the hotel development, the farmers' market will be relocated either to the Centre Street lot where it will be one element of a design for a parking deck or to the street corridor along Webster Street in conjunction with some community street concepts. Although not all of the scenarios can be anticipated, the end result could be not only an important physical move for the farmers' market, but also spurring a mental move forward.

### **Parking**

One of the projects the town is hoping the hotel development will generate is additional parking. Because of this recognized shortage of public parking, the Request For Proposal (RFP) itself states that all public parking displaced by the development must not only be replaced, but at public parking rates in perpetuity. As a result of the need to replace the public parking, the "Traffic & Parking" task force set about discussing the various possibilities available to the Town and the developer. One of the options that surfaced was the possibility of decking the Centre Street parking lot, a parcel one block distant from the Webster Street site on the north side of Beacon Street. Just how and whether to make it happen is still being discussed. A parking deck above the Centre Street lot, whether developed as a part of the hotel project or not, would help enliven the streets by increasing the numbers of pedestrians on the sidewalks and in the stores and reducing the number of cars circling to find parking, reducing the visual static of the Corner.

### **The Hotel Project Itself**

#### **Design**

The Town of Brookline has expectations in terms of physical attributes (design), provision of adequate light and open space (visual quality), and economics (externalizing of amenities)

are the bases on which an agreement will be made. The performance objectives resulting from the hotel feasibility study further highlight reasonable expectations of the Town of Brookline and its citizens.

Town officials, abutters, and business owners all expect the design of the hotel and of the open space around it to be linked directly with the urban context of the site and to complement it. This may take on any number of meanings depending on the design and must be defined by the community and the municipality. In the case of the Bostonian Hotel, this meant to minimize the visual impact of the large structure. The fact that the architect stepped down the roof of the hotel by several feet when the building approached the surrounding structures served to reduce the impact of the hotel on the surrounding fabric. In addition, keeping Scott Alley open to North Street at the front of the hotel reduced the overall sense of size of the hotel. In the case of the proposed Hotel Commonwealth, it has been suggested to the developer to break up the building by bays, creating visual cues that give the structure the appearance of being smaller without reducing the interior floorplate. This will keep the hotel in line with the other structures that surround it.

The allotment of open or green space can be achieved in many ways and should complement the environment that surrounds it by clearly defining the space and assuring that it is useable and “defensible.” That is making sure that it is not “throw away” space, added to the design in little pieces scattered across the lot, or located in dark recesses. This may add up to a reasonable percentage of the lot left as open space, but won’t be useful creating any sense of open space. It should be easily accessible either visually or physically. That does not mean the open space has to be an open lawn and sunny. At the Bostonian, some of the open space is “visual,” for example, the front courtyard. This car turn-around gives the impression that there is more open space than there actually is. The fact that you can’t utilize the space to linger and drink coffee or read the morning paper does not negate the positive aspect it brings to the sense of space. The Rosslyn Spectrum has open space that might initially defy the viewer’s definition of the term. There are a couple of deeply inset wells, maybe 10 feet or so below the walkway, at the bottom of which are hearty, solid plantings. In Brookline, as in Kenmore Square, there is particular concern that special care to be taken by the developers

to present a design that does not obscure the sunlight, air, or views of abutters. In both cases the desirability of lingering along Webster Street or on the south side of Commonwealth Avenue could be diminished by increased shadows.

In all cases, visual cues throughout the project and other projects it generates should promote the mix of activities in the area and welcome or offer guidance to the resident and visitor.

### **Visual Identity**

Aspects in the environmental component of the RFP like “low maintenance landscaping” can arguably be used to help address the lack of visual identity. One could surmise that the lower the maintenance of the landscaping, the hardier the flora, and the more likely the landscaping to remain looking attended to. In addition, the checklist gives tips on how to design for durability, which could effect the lasting power of architectural details and overall appearance. How to design for future reuse and adaptability leaves open the possibility that the building will outlast the use and giving the next owner the option of reusing the structure.

Another of the abutters’ concerns related to the visual quality of the neighborhood is in regards to the insufficient policing of the back sides of the businesses along the Webster Street corridor. There are often bags of trash left to be ravished by skunks and raccoons and leaving tell-tale stains on the sidewalk, further detracting from the draw of the street. In the interest of cleaning up the corridor and improving the appearance of the neighborhood, while recognizing the limits of the geometry of the street, the town is encouraging addressing such issues as the consolidation of trash and recycling removal for all businesses (as well as residences) along the street.

The surrounding neighborhood and especially immediate abutters will be negatively impacted to some extent by the development regardless of the effort exerted by the development team. As a result, the Town would like to see benefits to the neighborhood that are consistent with the vision and goals of development in the Town, which include

encouraging appropriate economic growth while preserving and enhancing the character of neighborhoods and fostering the prosperity of businesses in commercial areas.<sup>36</sup>

### **Externalizing Amenities**

In summary, the hotel could buy:

- ◆ goods and services from the surrounding community, including having available local newspapers (Brookline TAB);
- ◆ using farmers' market products for Thursday breakfasts, and encourage its visitors to do the same.

The hotel could provide several benefits for the guests such as

- ◆ paying for take-out food delivery costs;
- ◆ paying for delivery to guests of the hotel of any items bought in the town;
- ◆ having movies available for viewing, rented each week from the local video store (VideoSmith);
- ◆ subsidizing the cost of T passes for employees, and perhaps the cost of transit ("T") tokens (or at least having them available).

Hotel could have a knowledgeable concierge prepared to:

- ◆ direct people to different places in the Town, from where to get a cup of coffee to where to buy stamps and to suggest venturing to some of Brookline's hidden treasures like Clear Flour Bakery; and
- ◆ make reservations for guests, i.e., dinner, hair cuts, manicures and laundry pick up
- ◆ have available a list of resources, including fitness and adult education classes, as well as historical sites, such as the birthplace of JFK.

In order to make the most of all the daily options, the town, with the help of the Chamber of Commerce could provide information to the hotel (and to the other businesses as well) via fax, similar to Somerville's "Monday Morning Fax" or on a webpage so that the hotel can

receive information about town happenings regularly, including special events, entertainment, special interest meetings and news.

The Chamber of Commerce could make available business directories for every room in the hotel.

In terms of “niche,” due to Brookline’s proximity to Longwood Medical Area, many educational institutions, and downtown Boston, it makes sense to choose an extended-stay hotel. Because of the location in Coolidge Corner, surrounded by a wealth of businesses and services, the site is ideal for a limited-service hotel. As well as its commercial setting, Brookline can also rely on some of its history, as did the Bostonian, including Lars Anderson Park, the Transportation Museum and the childhood home of John F. Kennedy for advertising.

### **Communication**

Listening is probably the most important factor here. There is always a lot of talking, but if the talkers can also listen, you’ve got a good climate for discussion. Abutters should be able to expect neighborly behavior from the developers, and vice versa. It is essential that there be good working communication and that parties be willing to compromise. In the case of the Bostonian, the result would probably not have been so successful without the willingness of Winn Development Co. and the Boston Landmarks Commission to come to a compromise, and if there had not been a satisfactory agreement arrived at between the developer and the pushcart vendors.

### **Good Practice Examples**

Specifics in the case studies have supported the ideas that thoughtful planning, and thinking about outcomes that benefit the broader community in the long run help the process move along. Examples such as considering the impact of conducting versus not conducting the archaeological dig at the site of the Bostonian helped not only to preserve the physical artifacts but gain the hotel and its developer respect and support from the surrounding community, in this case specifically the Boston Landmarks Society. Timely information as in



the case of the Hotel Commonwealth has allowed time for the Mayor (Tom Menino) to get involved talking to the business owners throughout the block, given the property owners a chance to become familiar with the proposal in order to send letters of support to the City as well as allowing for the opportunity for dissenters to give their opinions. Seeking out creative solutions allows for freedom and flexibility in the outcome. In the case of the Inn at Harvard, due to the flexibility of the development team, they were able to construct a hotel that is profitable, and appreciated by many neighbors, despite the snags of a suddenly reduced maximum floorplate and the threat of delay due to concerns about the impact of their construction.

### **Continuing Dialog in Brookline**

Brookline has shown these attributes throughout the process thus far. There has been significant thoughtful planning in terms of inviting community input, open discussions lasting as long as any member has anything to say. The town has made available information in a timely manner, and has sought out many creative solutions for the project. The majority of the Brookline Hotel Screening Committee is committed to following through on the process. This means they are willing to engage in a dialog with a specific developer to discuss what is, in essence, the externalizing of amenities, design of the hotel, and additional features, especially the community streets idea. One of the major selling points, the latter idea has drawn the willingness of the business community to do whatever it takes to support the project.

There are those, however, who are still staunchly opposed to the idea of a hotel, making it difficult for the process to proceed as smoothly as it could, for one, just days ago, two of the three finalists dropped out of the race, citing that the doubt was too big that the project would get passed what has the appearance of being a development-hostile population and receive the mandatory 2/3 vote.

The process by which the development of a hotel will pass Town Meeting skepticism is through negotiating the concerns of the town with those of the residents and the developer.

The lists that follow sum up many of the pros and cons of each aspect discussed either as argued in the Brookline case or what one of the Brookline players might argue.

### **Externalizing Hotel Restaurant Services**

The argument for externalizing the hotel restaurant is that:

- ◆ Externalizing the hotel's restaurant services benefits restaurants and grocers in Coolidge Corner, produces variety to the guests, and reduces cost to the hotel.

However, it could be counter argued by the hotel that:

- ◆ A dining room could, potentially, be a significant source of revenue for the hotel that would be foregone by not having one.
- ◆ Business people and other travelers are often tired at the end of the day and want to know exactly where they are going to eat.
- ◆ Some people, women in particular, are uncomfortable sitting in commercial restaurants by themselves, resulting in need for restaurant services.
- ◆ The hotel might feel obligated to have a hotel restaurant to attract guests.

To this the town might respond that:

- ◆ Dining rooms, according to managers at the Bostonian and the Inn at Harvard, do not tend to be very busy and are not generally profit centers of the hotel, in fact the kitchens are labor-intensive and high cost to maintain.
- ◆ The hotel could provide a dinner reservation service for guests and could pay for delivery service for take-out from area restaurants.
- ◆ Since the hotel could have kitchenettes, the guests would be able to cook their own food.

Suggestions:

The hotel would still want:

- ◆ to provide guests with a limited menu and room service throughout the day.

The town might suggest that:

- ◆ the hotel buy fresh pastries and bread, wraps and smoothies from some of the local food establishments to complement the line of food available. Guests who enjoyed the smoothies might then be encouraged to the places these items were bought at another time.

### **Externalizing Other Hotel Amenities**

The town would love to see the hotel dip into the commercial cauldron of Coolidge Corner by purchasing some of its goods and services at local retail establishments, such as:

- ◆ food from Takeshima, a Japanese restaurant, and The Daily Bread,
- ◆ books and magazines from the BookSmith,
- ◆ videos from the VideoSmith,
- ◆ flowers from Kabloom! or Jeanne's Greens, etc.

### **Traffic and Community Streets**

In terms of who should pay for the benefits, the town might initially say that:

- ◆ Ideally the hotel should pay for the implementation of the elements of community streets because having the amenity would cause the adjacent businesses to spruce up their back street facades, which would be beneficial to the hotel.

The hotel might counter, however, that:

- ◆ Since the improvements also benefit the surrounding businesses that those businesses should help pay for the cost of the street improvements.

As regards making improvements to the street at all, the hotel might argue that:

- ◆ The community streets idea would bring in kids who would “hang out” in front of the hotel, because of the proximity to Pierce and Devotion schools, detracting from the pleasant atmosphere of the street
- ◆ The availability of car access would be decreased, discourage those attempting to access the hotel by car or especially tour bus.

Suggestions:

It is possible to create a scenario where the businesses, the town, and the state can be involved both financially and/or in maintaining. In addition, if the farmers' market is involved, it too, can bear some of the burden.

## **Design**

The town wants:

- ◆ A high quality design that respects the surrounding urban setting in terms of size and massing as well as materials and details.
- ◆ Most of the displaced parking to be replaced on-site.

The hotel would counter that:

- ◆ High quality designs and materials cost a lot of money.
- ◆ To replace all of the displaced parking on-site would require a significant amount of underground parking, which costs twice as much as surface parking per stall.

Attention to design is important because:

- ◆ The neighbors', and hence, the town's concern is that the building of a hotel will decrease the sunlight and views of the abutters.
- ◆ The town is also concerned that the hotel respect the surrounding historic fabric.

The hotel's response has been to:

- ◆ agree to build the building in such a way as to minimize the impacts of such losses. The developers can conduct shadow studies and can place the building on the site so as to leave the most room available for views.

## **Farmers' Market**

The proponents of the hotel argue that:

- ◆ it is necessary to move the farmers' market to make way for the hotel.

Several Farmers' Market supporters, however, feel that:

- ◆ the market is currently in an excellent central location proximate to public transportation, with great accessibility, visual and spatial ambiance, an inviting and social atmosphere, desirable consumer demographics, and great visibility from the Beacon Street corridor. They feel they would not be satisfied with any other location.

Some of the current Webster Street vendors on the site counter that:

- ◆ in actuality, the location is NOT ideal, that the site is too small and the vendors are overly confined.

The town would chime in that:

- ◆ They are looking into the possibility of decking the Centre Street lot and designing the structure with the farmers' market as an occupant, giving the market vendors a substantial increase in the amount of space available for vendors.
- ◆ Another possibility being to create room along the Webster Street corridor for the vendors in conjunction with elements of the Community Streets idea.

The response to this is varied:

- ◆ Some members of the farmers' market are excited about the possibility, others are concerned that this "improvement" will instead destroy the atmosphere, turning the respected farmers' market into a flea market of sorts. This might happen if vendors, selling goods other than those grown in Massachusetts, including crafts, attracted to the new, improved market location are given permits to sell their wares on the same day as the farmers. This is not desirable because, for one, the farmers make their livelihoods from this one day a week, 20 weeks a year market. If other vendors are competing for their business, the farmers are fearful that they would not survive.

## **Parking**

The abutters to the Webster Street site are concerned that:

- ◆ There will be a large increase in traffic and net decrease in parking as a result of the hotel project.

Town responded to this concern by:

- ◆ Soliciting proposals for a type of hotel that generates the least amount of traffic, an extended-stay hotel.
- ◆ Requiring the developer to replace the parking displaced by the hotel as public parking at public parking rates in perpetuity.
- ◆ Strongly suggested that a project proposing additional parking to the Brookline community would be favorably received.
- ◆ Suggesting the possibility of decking the Centre Street lot regardless of whether the farmers' market gets relocated there.

There are a few key insights to a successful development process that are often overlooked as a result of entering a dialog without provision for flexibility or sense of the neighborhood in which the development will occur. The following insights resulted from personal experience interacting with the Town of Brookline on the matter of the proposed hotel development, experience sitting in on the Hotel Screening Committee meetings, talking with Webster Street neighbors and business owners, interviewing developers, hotel consultants, and members of hotel management.

### **Location**

Siting is critical both in terms of physical location and in terms of the constituency that surrounds it. But there are several other factors that influence choice of location.

- ◆ Is the lot proximate to the amenities from which you want to draw? Is it easily accessible? This critical piece is exemplified in the case of the Rosslyn Spectrum where the meeting space developed was in seemingly close enough proximity to the hotel rooms it serviced. Since similar projects have been successful, according to Robert Atkinson, at the Department Economic Development, it is clear that awkward accessibility across two highways, and not the combination of uses, jeopardized the success of the venture.

### **Special Needs**

The Town should determine, and the developer must seek to find, the special needs of whatever community he or she is entering, allowing the greatest amount of flexibility for all parties. This includes:

- ◆ knowing the neighborhood and having dialogs with the abutters, the merchants, and members of the broader community.
- ◆ understanding the needs and desires of both the business and resident communities. In the example of the Bostonian, Winn Development Co. was successful because of the effort they put into working with the surrounding businesses to get the project

completed from the palm reader in one of the ground floor storefronts to the market vendors at the end of the street.

- ◆ meeting the special needs of the Boston Landmarks Society was also important to the success of the development of the Bostonian.

### **Externalizing Services and Amenities**

This is a viable opportunity for any highly urbanized community searching for ways to integrate new developments in limited space. Specifically this is suggested through conversations with managers at the Inn at Harvard and The Bostonian, and the director of the Rosslyn Spectrum project. Brown and Carbone both indicated that 85% of their guests go out to dinner, despite the availability of a hotel dining room. The strongest suggestion came from speaking with Richard Carbone, Manager of the Inn at Harvard and the Harvard Square Hotel. The Harvard Square Hotel has survived for thirty-seven years in Harvard Square without a dining room or even room service. Only in the past five years has it offered any food to its guests. The hotel leases the café space to a company that provides rollups and baked goods, coffee and juice, all of which are also available to the Coolidge Corner visitor. Though the hotel provides food, it serves more as an alternative for snacks and lunch. The hotel guest are still going out for dinner.

Hotels, as opposed to other development opportunities, have particular benefits to the surrounding area. They add to the urban design component of the town, they have the capability of externalizing services, *and* they bring additional foot traffic into the business area.

### **Trust**

The developer and the Town must strive to instill trust in the community. Especially in communities that tend to be hostile towards development, this is critical. Arthur Winn, on the development of the Bostonian Hotel highlighted the fact that the City of Boston trusted Winn Development Co. to build a great hotel. He remarked that it was the most important thing that the City did. The residents and business owners want to trust that the Town will inform the community in a reliable and timely way, that it will be straightforward and not go



back on its word, and that it will forego development options if they overly impact the surrounding community.

One way to initiate this trust is for the developer and the Town to demonstrate to the community that they are familiar with many of the concerns and are interested in their input. This can then be shown by adapting the design (or the project objectives) to fit into the existing physical and social fabric. Although it is desirable to have an implicit trust, a solid contract between the community and the Town would help to generate greater confidence in the goals of the project.

### **Time**

This process necessarily takes a significant amount of time, including long hours of discussion and deliberation with community members. This communication has the capability of generating a higher level of agreement among the parties involved and of tempering expectations because there is a greater sharing of information, producing a group dynamic that results in the maturing of a joint view. Because of the extensiveness of this part of the process, it is important to develop a realistic schedule to reflect the time needed to interact with the community. At the same time, it is critical not to slow or complicate the process to such a degree that developers decide that it is not worth muddling through. Note that in May two out of three development teams dropped out of the race to develop a hotel on the Webster Street parcel in Brookline.

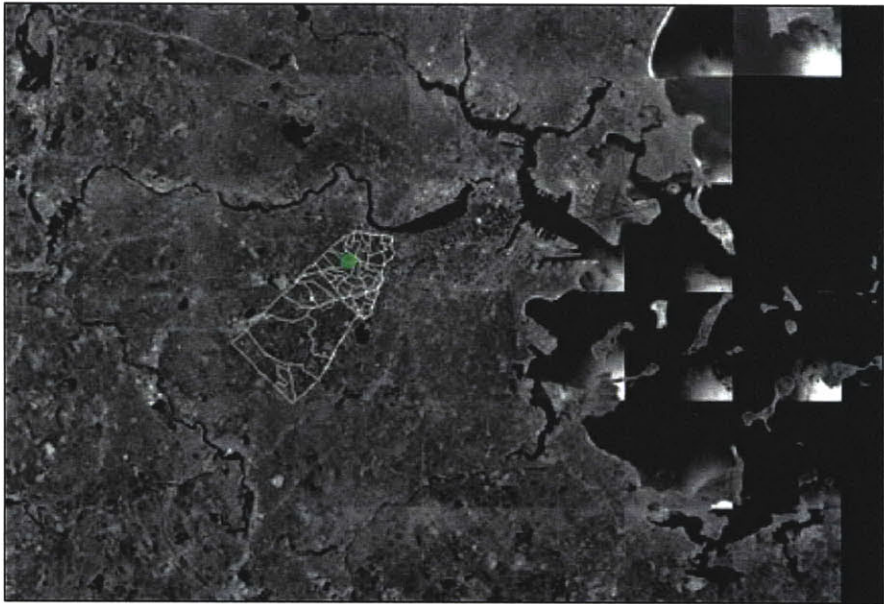
### **Bringing It All Together**

The tricky part is bringing all these elements together. A great design on its own is not what the Town of Brookline is looking for. The same is true for the externalizing of amenities or developing visual identity. Bringing the process together requires assuaging fears and tempering the expectations of each group and getting community participants to engage in perhaps lengthy discussions of what the most important elements are. It is clear that new hotel developments can draw interest in communities even in those which are often hostile towards development, like the case of the Inn at Harvard.

### **Tailoring the Process to the Town**

The issues presented here are not specific only to Brookline. They are, however, particular to highly urbanized settings where residents are holding out against the development threatened by the encroaching city. What does this say about the Town's process? Does the fact that two of the development teams dropped out of the designation race indicate that there needs to be a new approach in Brookline?

Maps



Brookline and Coolidge Corner in the Northeast



Webster Street Parking Lot in Coolidge Corner

Coolidge Corner, Brookline



Beacon Street North



Intersection of Harvard  
& Beacon Streets

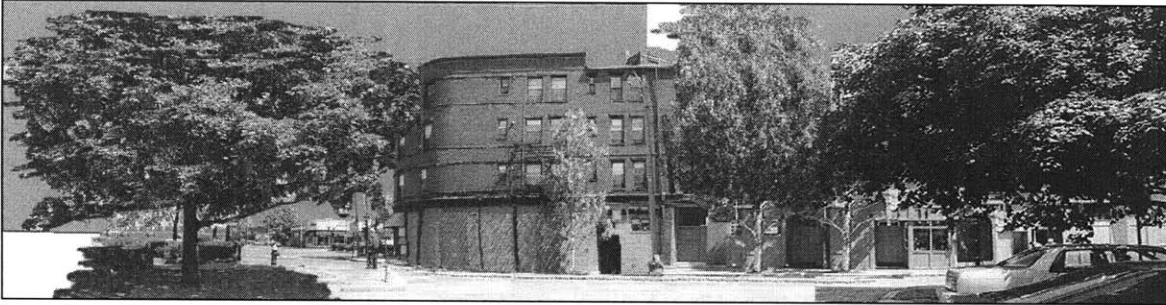


S. S. Pierce Building

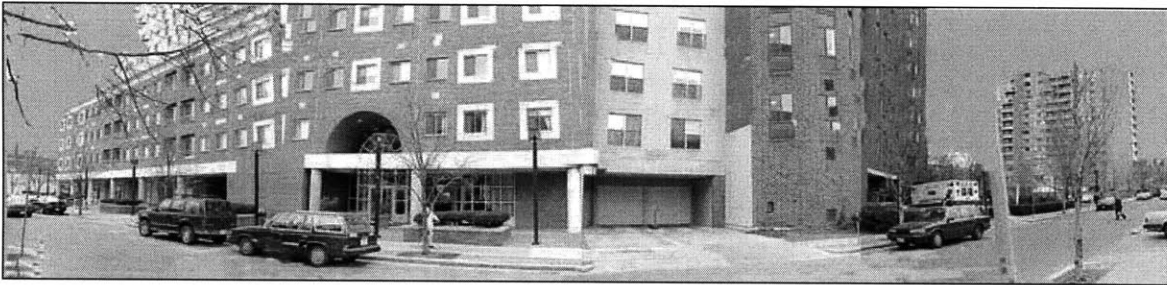
Beacon Street South



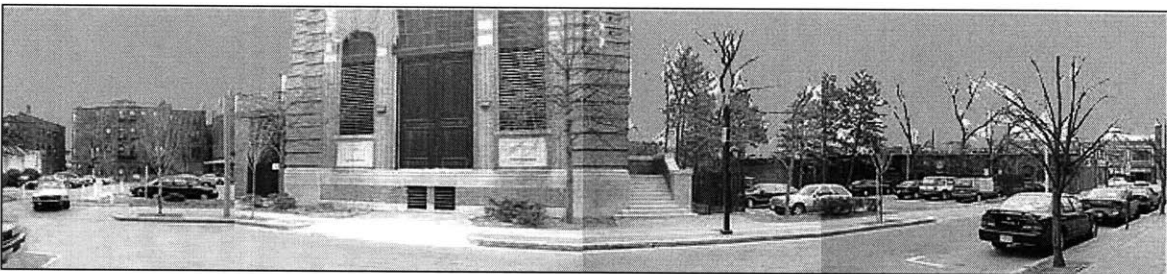
Webster Street, Coolidge Corner, Brookline, MA



Webster Street corridor from the parking lot

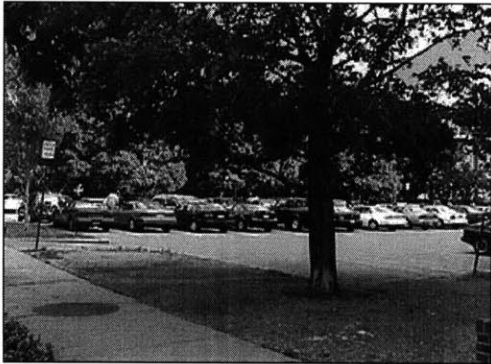


Webster Street South



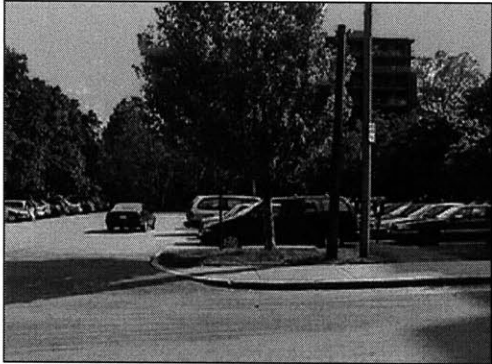
Webster Street North

Webster Street Parking Lot, Brookline



Facing Southeast

Facing Southwest

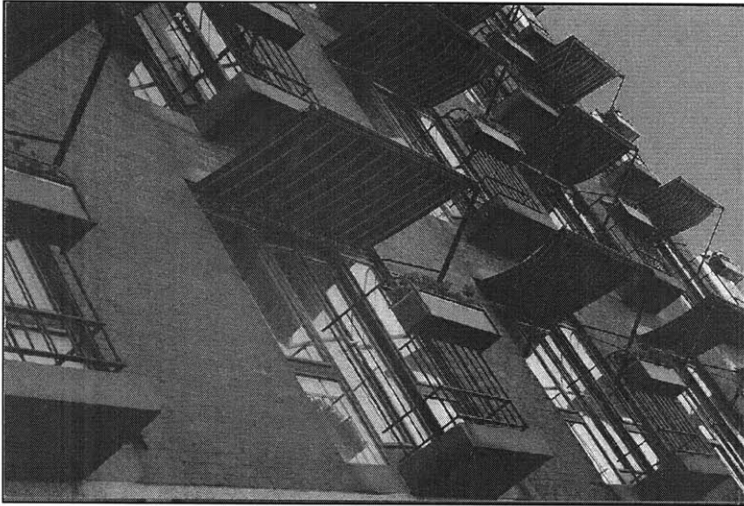


Facing South

Facing South



The Bostonian Hotel, Boston, MA



The Inn at Harvard, Cambridge, MA





500 – 528 Commonwealth Avenue



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