

STREET TALK: REVITALIZING MAIN STREET

By

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B.A. Vassar College
1970

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Master of Architecture
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
May 1979

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MAY 4 1979

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To Willy, who was very, very patient throughout this
process and to Matthew, who helped teach me to be patient

with many thanks to friends Fudge,
Jenny and Pat for their support

ABSTRACT

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The Main Street of an urban area is its backbone, traditionally providing a place to shop as well as a place to meet. Activities ranging from commercial to business and housing are often mixed around intersection points, forming busy, dynamic places. While the automobile has downgraded such places and reduced their identity to merely a transportation role, there are indications that revitalizing Main Street and concentrating services related to pedestrian travel and community scale is an idea which would be widely supported. Certainly, as individuals, we need to feel an identity or association with something larger than ourselves, yet smaller than the often impersonal, corporate society to which we belong.

Making habitable streets and communities means building places which can be used and identified with. I believe we can study what kinds of physical forms have traditionally worked, both here and elsewhere, and what kinds of uses and dimensions are needed for a particular community. Then there must be a process to generate and control a positive overall image for the public domain. A physical structure must be designed which will have an impact, yet allow for addition and change; for individual decision and choice.

This thesis explores such a process, using Main Street in Charlestown, Boston as a site. Certain parts of the urban fabric are catalogued and a design for a public framework which would knit these pieces together is proposed. While many problems are unique and particular to this place, other concerns are universal. It is hoped that the process and ideas might be transferable.

Thesis Supervisor: Jan Wampler
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture

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We are one of too many, a very small part of these institutions such as the John Hancock, the Mother Church, the Hucksters football game, the Air Force Academy. We are small with respect to them, weak, inconsequential. Nor is one small part differentiated from another; rather they are regular, without an individual life in the sense that the capital of the Romanesque column became a wild and magical being with energy and individuality, a life of its own. And further, there is the small part and then directly the whole, as in the John Hancock Building. There is no intermediate grouping of things with which we might associate ourselves, . . . something, we might feel a bit bigger with respect to, in which we might become a known entity, not one of quite so many, and which might be part of a number of others that more reasonably could add up to the whole.

Jack and Mart Myer
Patterns of Associations

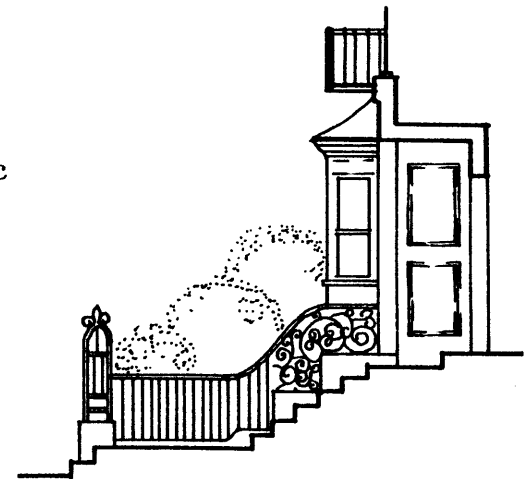
Chapter I

DEVELOPING FRAMES OF REFERENCE

Introduction

In any city or town, there exists a range of outdoor spaces: streets, sidewalks, parks, outdoor cafes, front yards on display, paths to people's houses, and back service alleys. These spaces are usually organized according to rules which people have agreed on formally or informally. An example of one of these rules is the treatment of transitions, those intermediate areas which are neither wholly public nor completely private, but which are in-between and invite movement from one to another. A short journey from the public street to a private house can be enriched by such transitions, by intermediate places which are built in a particular way and become associated with entrance or moving between public and private zone. Similar transitions are found in commercial property: covered entrances, public lobbies, reception areas bring people into an establishment before directing them to more private areas.

This hierarchy from the public domain to the private can be ordered and clear. Certain spaces belong to individuals and are under their control while other areas fall within the public domain of the town. Behind the arrangement of spaces, there is a physical structure or framework of the built environment which makes definitions,

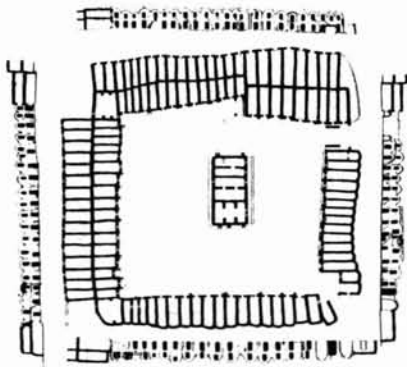


Dexter Row
1836

gives protection and creates territories for people to use either individually or collectively. In cities or towns, this structure forms a network which can act as a positive contribution to a rich urban life which fosters personalization, social interaction, and knits the lives of people and the environment together.

There are existing examples of this kind of physical framework. In the city of Bern, Switzerland the streetscape is rich in variety and bustling with commercial activity. Underlying this liveliness is a system of arched streets and double level shopping, initially built according to one Master Plan.

The Back Bay in Boston is an example in this country. The grid system was laid out when the swamp land was filled. Rectangular blocks were formed with houses having a public side and a private, or service entrance. A common party wall system was employed and dimensions were pretty much determined by wood joists spanning from wall to wall. Corner houses were special as they faced two public streets. Most houses were built of brick and a building code controlled heights and setbacks. Within the framework determined by the written codes, the organization of the street and the availability of building materials one finds richness and variation. Some things are the same and repeat, giving rhythm and continuity to the street while other aspects vary.



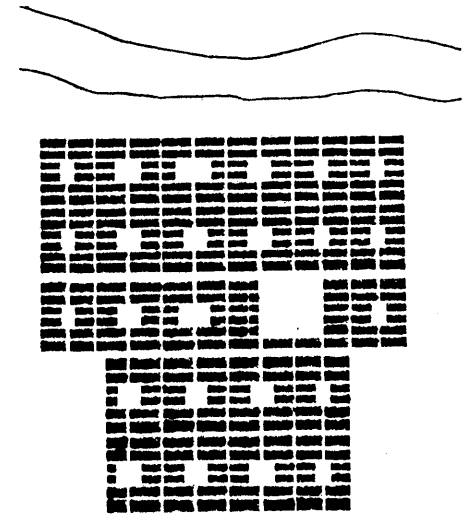
Party walls
Tunisia

Savannah is an example of a whole city based on a specific grid organization which provides major and minor circulation paths. Within this grid several dimensions are established and a framework set up which provides a range of uses: busy commercial streets, focal points, and smaller side streets.

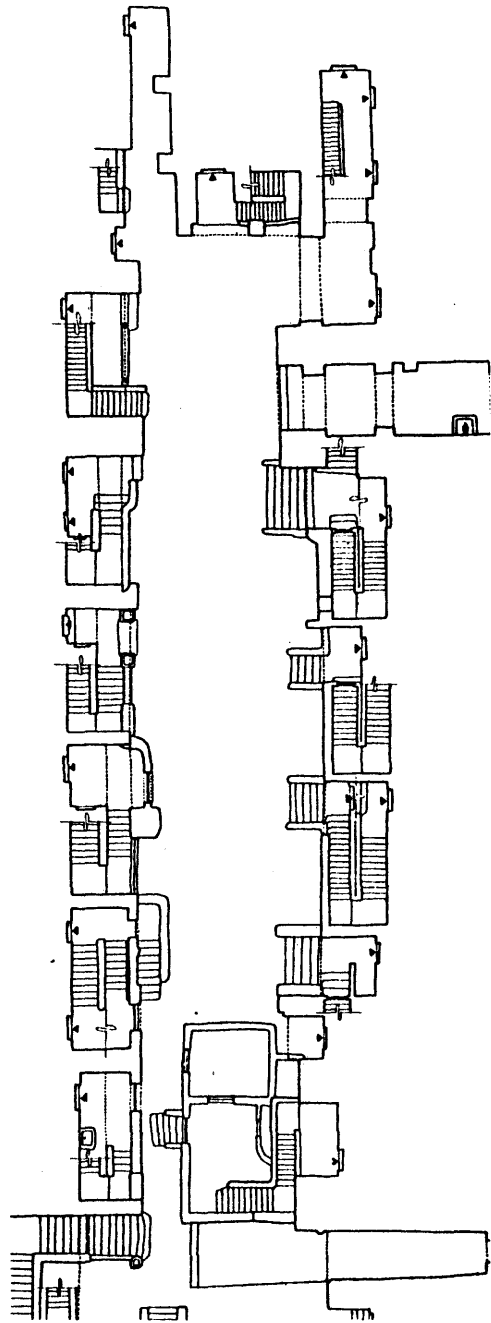
In all these examples, the streets and public spaces are as important as the private buildings. This belief in the importance of the public domain is evidenced in the work of Herman Hertzberger. The old people's home he designed in Holland is an example of a building generated by a public framework. Private rooms are oriented towards a central spine which is much more than the usual double loaded corridor and in effect becomes an "indoor street."

Jan Wampler talks about quilts as examples of a similar way of organizing individuality within an overall framework according to certain rules or patterns. The larger dimension is subdivided into smaller regions which individuals make. With a shared understanding of the overall design, the quiltmakers add many small pieces of material together to make the whole.

Many of the examples given, from folk art to buildings and cities, have not always been the product of architectural thought or practice. One may ask what the architect can learn from them. I believe that the common denominator of all these examples, large and small, is a



Savannah
1856



way of ordering and thinking about physical form which can be a basis for an architectural design attempting to create humane, inhabitable environments.

Connecting separate buildings with positive, usable and claimable open space can make more liveable cities. While the buildings themselves might be quite individual, continuity of the outdoor public spaces would give the community as a whole a greater identity. This frame of reference could be a natural or built landscape. Cities and towns which have grown up around strong topographical features: rivers, hills, or a coastline, have a strong edge which becomes a reference, orders the built environment and gives it strength. Without references, one does not know where to begin, one feels lost. Nothing binds together the disparate pieces of the environment. While individual buildings might be active inside, outside of them one feels isolated, alienated.

This is exactly the feeling one gets travelling around the beltways outside our cities. Industrial parks, shopping malls, convention hotels with grand atriums are all self-contained worlds existing on PR and advertising efforts to get them inhabited. The only connection between them relates to automobile travel.

We need to learn from the examples of older towns and cities what kinds of visual networks and built landscapes make them inhabitable. This knowledge can be applied

today as many downtown portions of our urban area and smaller cities are being studied and revitalized. Architects have participated in developing master plans, and writing urban design guidelines which control things like building heights and setbacks. Landscaping and lighting, pedestrian streets and public plazas have been designed. With an increased awareness of historic preservation, older buildings are reused and attempts made by physical design as well as programming and economic development to return streets to the important role they once had of connecting people and places.

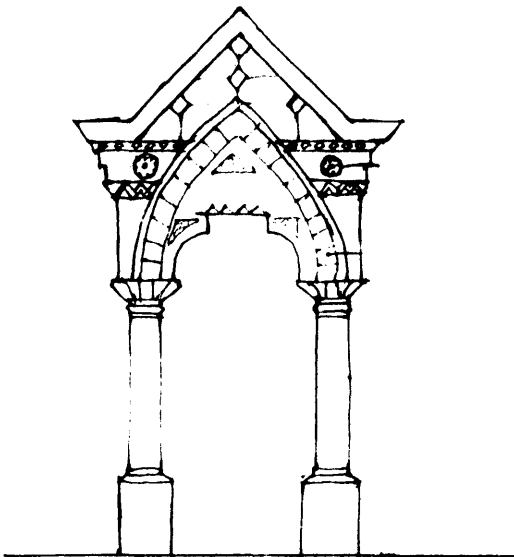
Often however the thrust of design and construction is towards "beautifying" a city, and the result is a place people might want to visit but still not want to live. While "beautification" may make a city clean, it often takes the city's soul by eradicating those delicate elements of framework essential to urban vitality. Revitalization must provide places for people to both work, live, as well as shop. Continuities to existing networks must be reinforced and infilling into the present physical and social life of the area must be the rule.



A Personal Process

In this thesis I have explored the design of a public framework for an existing urban environment. Using Charlestown, Massachusetts as a study area, I have looked at what is there and tried to design a building vocabulary of components which would form a continuous network through town. My designs are projections of an intuitive process based on several years association with this town. While I realize that a large part of such a design process would entail community input and a viable economic development plan, both of these things were simply outside the scope of this study. Accepting that other variables might have influences later on, I began with certain premises and merely explored their physical implications.

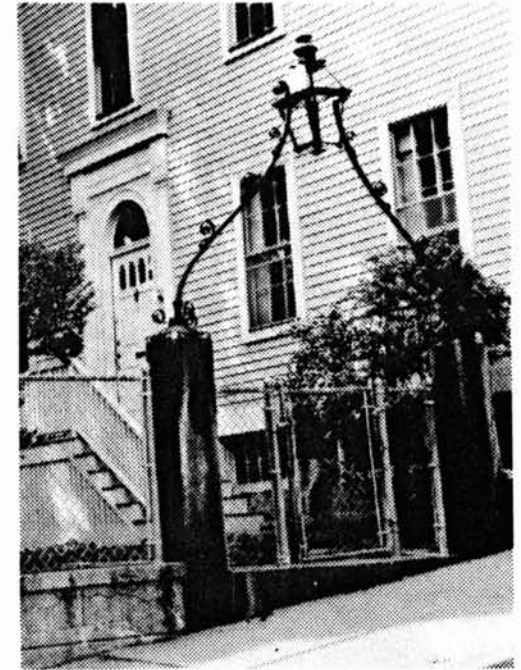
I thought the framework should both have an overall image and coherence, yet be made up of smaller segments, each distinct and with an identity of its own. Structure should be adaptable but permanent, solid, but not precious. Older elements of the street vocabulary should not be removed to make way for the new. The new order should be seen as an addition, an insinuation into the existing order, which itself might be added to at a later time. Focal points--places where a variety of activities and

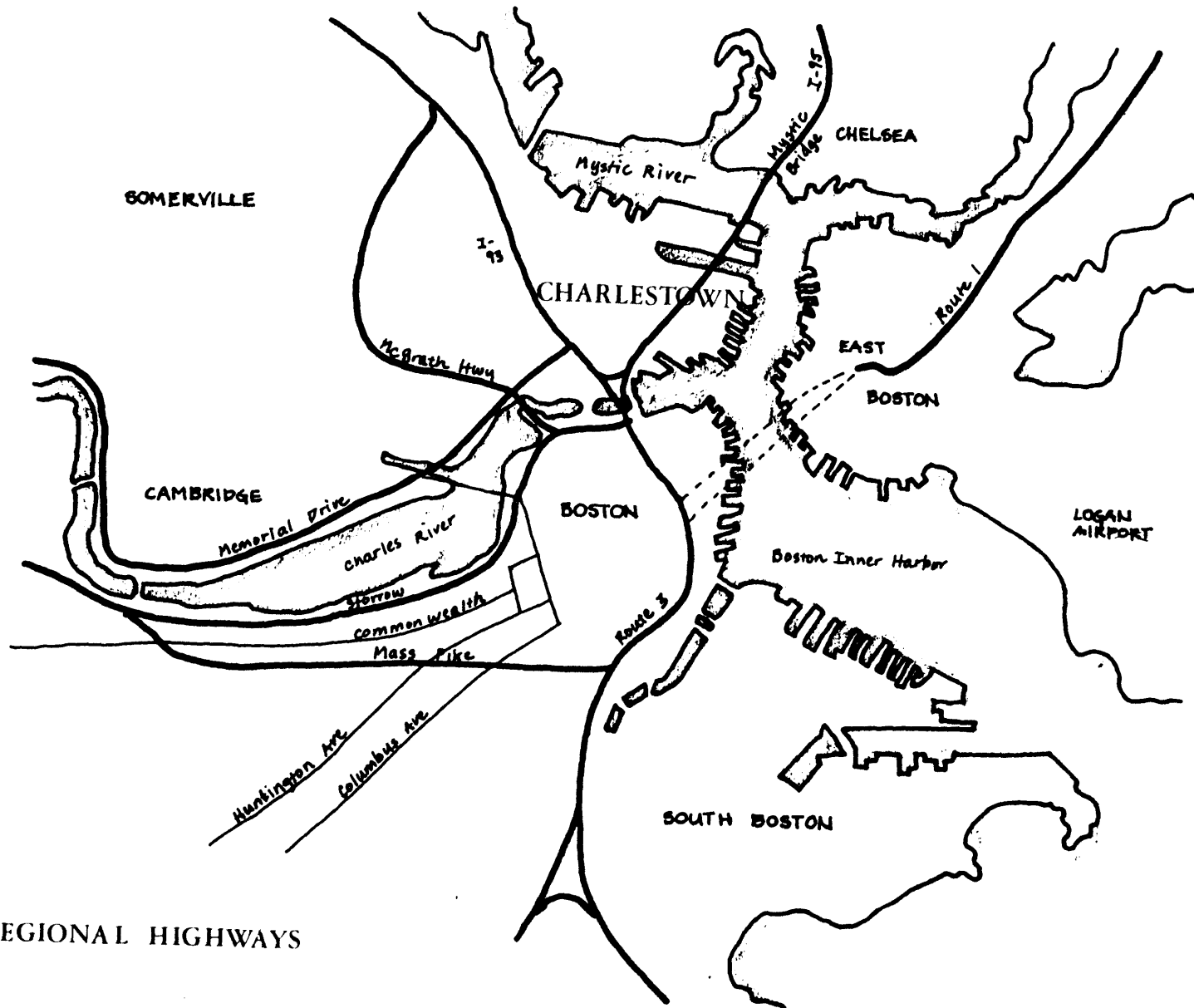


Masonic Hall
Charlestown

functions intersect--should be developed. The transition zone, the overlap between the public and private spaces, should be built with a particular vocabulary. Termination points, crossings and corners should be specially treated.

There should be a range of coverings--from being fully protected to being totally outdoors. The public framework should allow and encourage residents to add to it--to imprint their own personalities and claim space to take care of. Connections to the past should be emphasized. Existing dimensions and use of materials should be repeated without styles of the past being routinely copied. Each decision has to contribute something fresh to the whole. Finally the intermediate zone should not be viewed as just the space between two things, but should be developed into a positive important place.



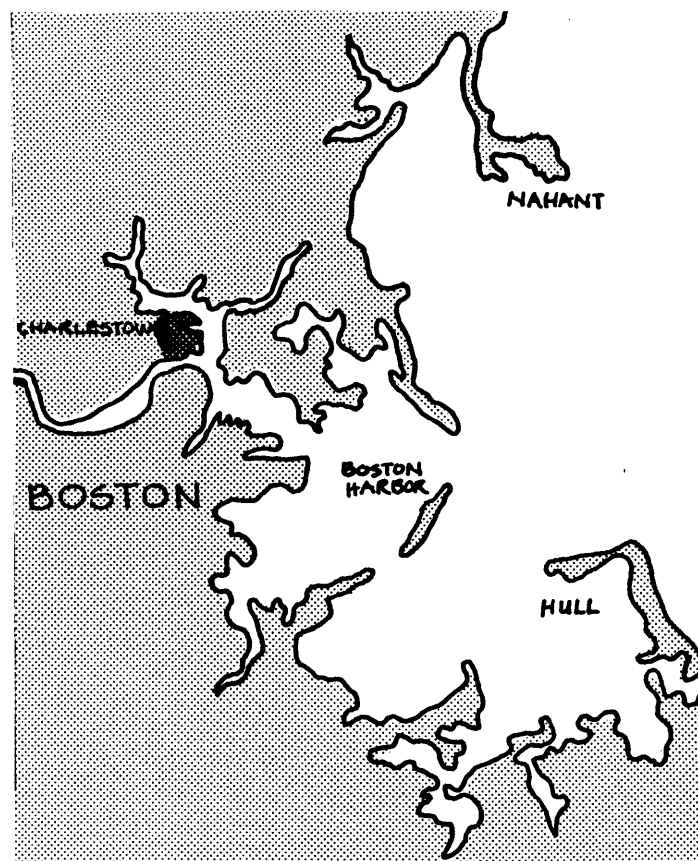


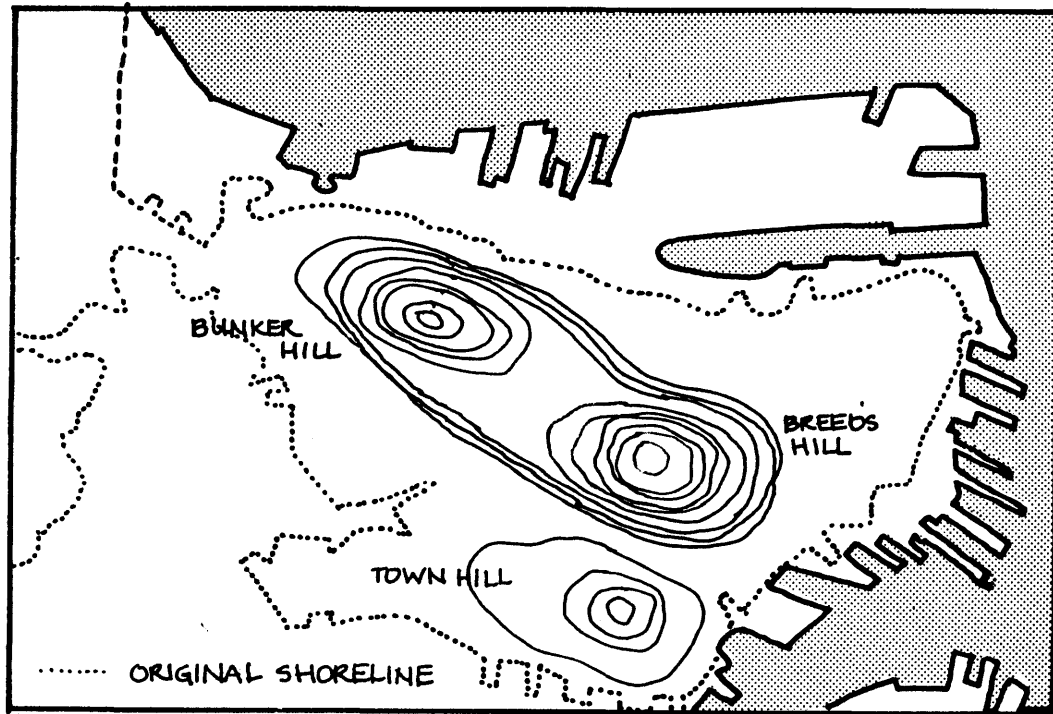
REGIONAL HIGHWAYS

The Site

Charlestown is a small, predominately working-class neighborhood of Boston. About one square mile in area, today it has a population of 16,000. First settled 350 years ago, it is a rare example of an American community with its strong history still evident in most of its residential and some of its commercial buildings.

The neighborhood is just across the Charles River from Boston and has waterfront on the Boston Harbor and both mouths of the Charles and Mystic Rivers. The three hills which form the backbone of the town give it an outlook towards the skyline of Boston and the open space of





Hills and Harbor

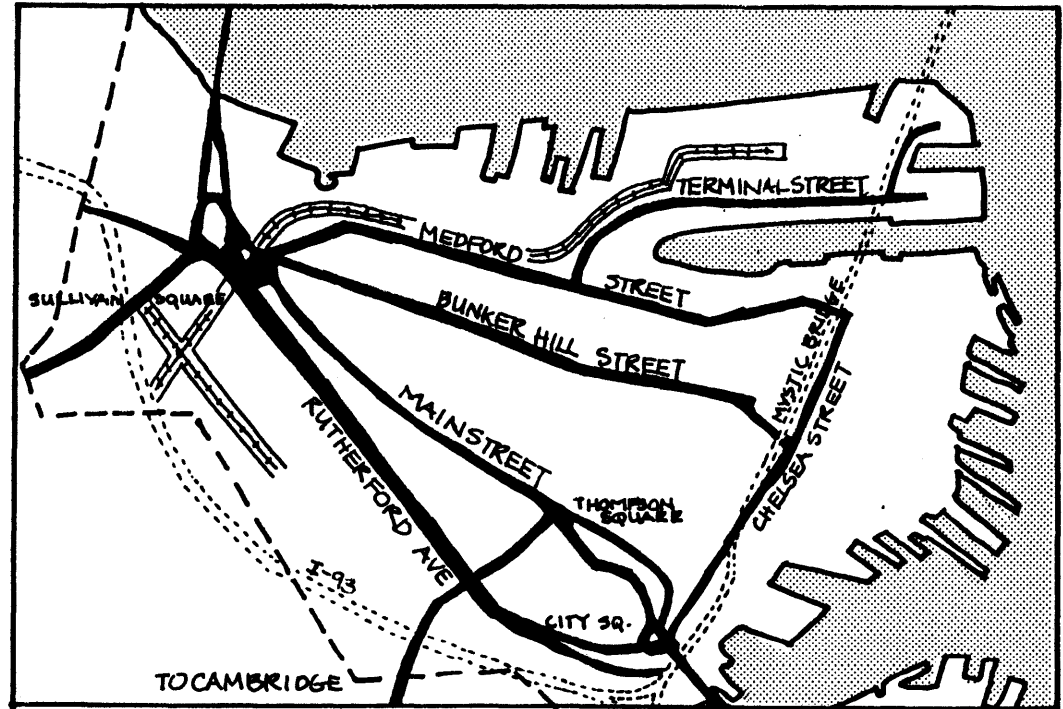
the Harbor. Originally these hills were higher but, like Beacon Hill, they were lowered to fill some of the surrounding lowlands.

Main Street and Bunker Hill Streets are the main commercial and through streets for the residential areas. Rutherford Avenue and Medford Street are both regional and industrial highways. Sullivan Square and City Square are heavily travelled intersections of residential and truck traffic. Crossing Charlestown from one side to the other is slow. School Street is the only through cross street. Within the triangle formed by Rutherford Avenue, Medford and Chelsea Streets, the traffic is local and not congested. Throughout Charlestown there is a rich hierarchy

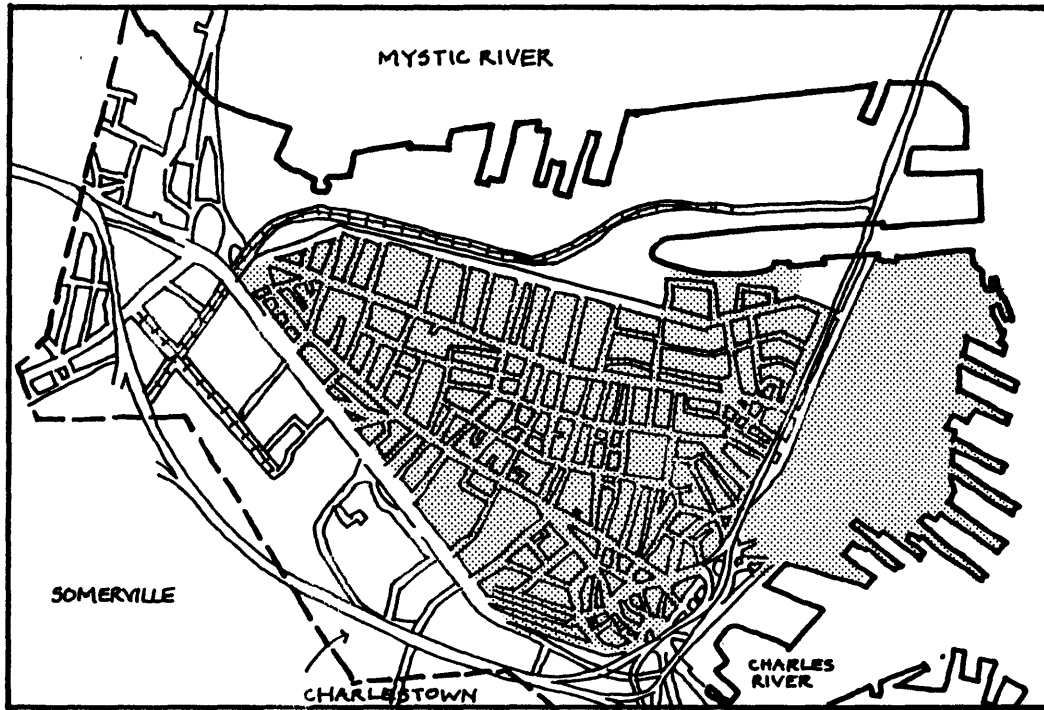
of streets and public spaces. From the busy Main Street to pedestrian courtyards, use, dimension, density, quality and ownership change from one type to the next.

The site for my thesis is a part of Charlestown where the hierarchy of streets and variety of building types and placement is especially rich and vivid. Of the two commercial backbones of town, I focused on a curving part of Main Street along with several side streets which come into it. This area has seen the ebb and flow of population and social activity throughout its history. It offers a challenging variety of open spaces, private use and public framework with which to work.

Because of my concentration on this particular



Transportation Networks

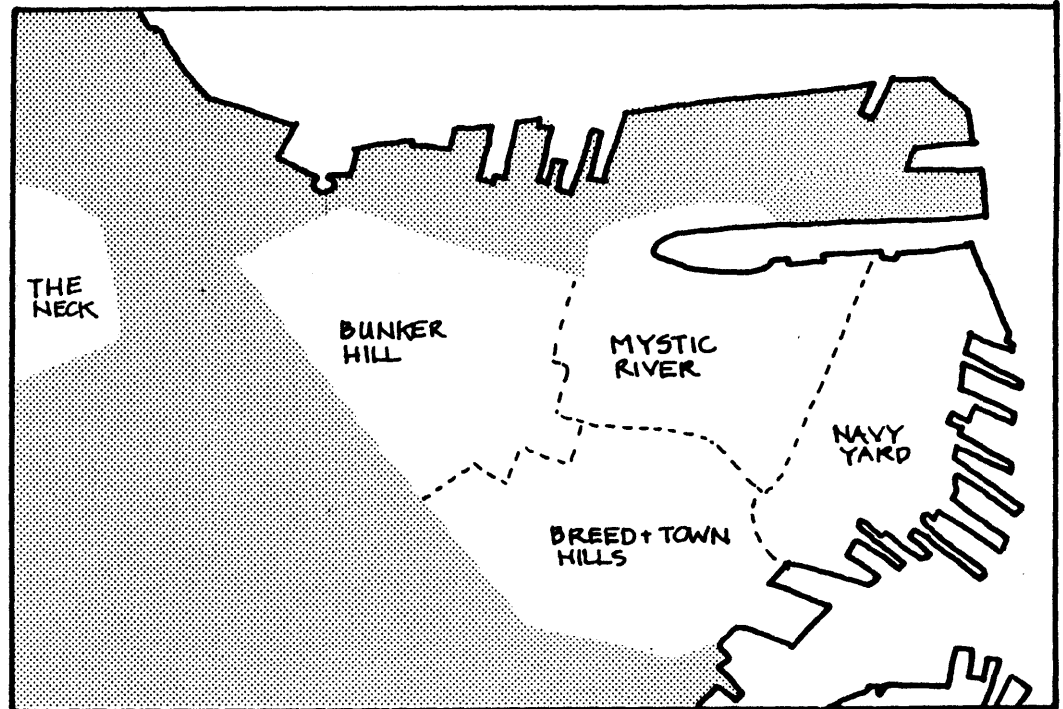


Residential Areas

section of the town and its internal spatial workings, I have obviously omitted many things which deserve thoughtful attention in the process of planning for Charlestown revitalization. I have not dealt with the link to the Navy Yard and downtown which occurs at City Square. At the moment, City Square is a noisy and congested traffic circle without many amenities for the pedestrian or surrounding community. Several engineering proposals are now being considered which will recess the bridge access and re-route truck traffic directly to Mass Port over a new bridge at the end of Chelsea Street. With these plans so uncertain, I decided to study Main Street up to City Square, but not the Square itself. Designing

easy and inviting access between the Navy Yard and City Square is a crucial problem in assuring that the rebuilt Yard will become part of town and not just an isolated satellite. In the other direction my study stops where Main Street becomes predominately residential. The street continues up to Sullivan Square with some occasional stores and is fairly well used and built up. Some potential exists for renovating storefronts and continuing a vocabulary of lighting, trees, sitting places and covered bus stops, but these improvements could be added to what already exists without major interventions or new buildings.

Based on talks with the BRA, I have assumed that parking can be handled by available on-street space.



Surrounding Industry



Scope of the Study

Some small lots associated with stopping at Thompson Square for a variety of quick errands have been considered, as well as parking for larger entertainment establishments which might locate there.

Finally, I recognize that I have selected an area of the town which is now experiencing a renaissance in terms of rebuilding and is receiving a large share of private investment and redevelopment funds dedicated to the community. It is also the interesting area architecturally and historically. But it is my hope that the observations and proposals made in this study can be applied to other areas of the town which badly need enlightened attention of planners and rebuilders. These include Bunker Hill Street

which, like Main Street, is a necessary and viable backbone of the community. Bordering Bunker Hill Street is the Boston Housing Authority housing project, which presently suffers from severe maintenance problems, rampant vacancies and vandalism. A public framework could also be designed for these areas, leaving some buildings and adding to them, while removing others so that residents can control the outside space.



America has been moving in unseemly haste, wiping out its backtrail as it goes. A degree of affluence has been realized but only at the cost of depersonalization and impoverishment of spirit. Like the mother with an alienated son, the nation is beginning to look back and wonder where it went wrong. Perhaps only in Northern New England does there remain living evidence of how it was. It is changing, but not yet has the past been plowed under and seeded over; here and there the old shows through the new like early coats of paint on a weathering barn.

Lew Dietz
Night Train at Wiscasset Station

Chapter II

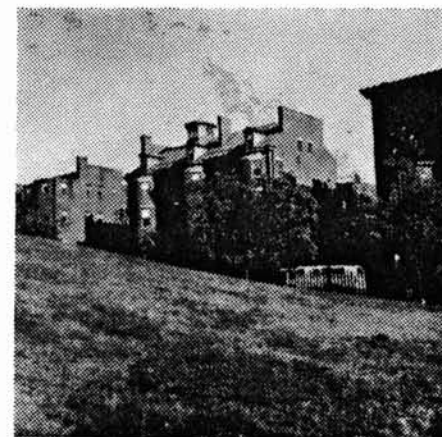
CHARLESTOWN PENTIMENTO

A Short History

This town of Charles is situated on the north side of Charles River, from whence it took its name, the river being about five or six fathom deep. Over against the town are many small islands lying to the seaward of it, and hills on either side. By which means it proves very good harbor for ships, which hath caused many seamen and merchants to sit down there. The form of this town, . . . is like the head, neck and shoulders of a man, only the pleasant and navigable river of Mistick runs through the right shoulder thereof, and by its near approach to Charles River, in one place, makes a very narrow neck, by which means the chief part of the town, whereon the most buildings stands, becomes a Peninsula. It hath a large market-place near the water side built round with houses, comely and fair, forth of which there issue two streets orderly built with some very fair houses, beautified with pleasant gardens and orchards.¹

From a history printed
in 1654

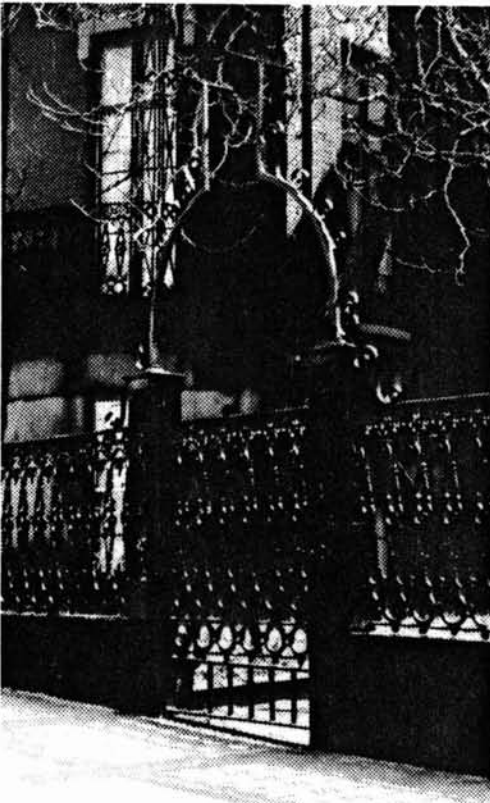
It was three brothers named Sprague and a blacksmith named Walford who settled in 1628 on a small hill overlooking Boston Harbor at the confluence of the Charles and Mystic Rivers. They had come down from Governor Endicott's colony in Salem and were joined a year later by other colonists. They settled in an area the Indians



called Mishawum, across the river from a place called Shawmut. Today Shawmut is known as Boston and the village of Mishawum has become Charlestown.

Charlestown has gone through three distinct periods of development. The first period lasted from 1628 to 1775, when the British burned the town following the Battle of Bunker Hill. This period saw the building of the village and clearing of outlying farm areas. During the second period, which began with the rebuilding after the fire and ran to 1850, Charlestown grew into a prosperous urban community inhabited mainly by people of English descent. The third period of development covered roughly 1850 to 1940. Industrialization, population increases and changes due to immigration and a housing boom were some of the major forces. Since 1940, Charlestown has been in a period of transition, marked chiefly by the forces of urban renewal and transportation changes.

It is not the intent of this short history to deal equally with all the factors of Charlestown's development, but rather to touch upon those influences and attitudes which have contributed to the evolution of the physical forms which presently exist. The transportation networks, the hierarchy of streets, land use patterns, and sense of community and place must be understood, for these things are important when considering the re-development of Main Street.



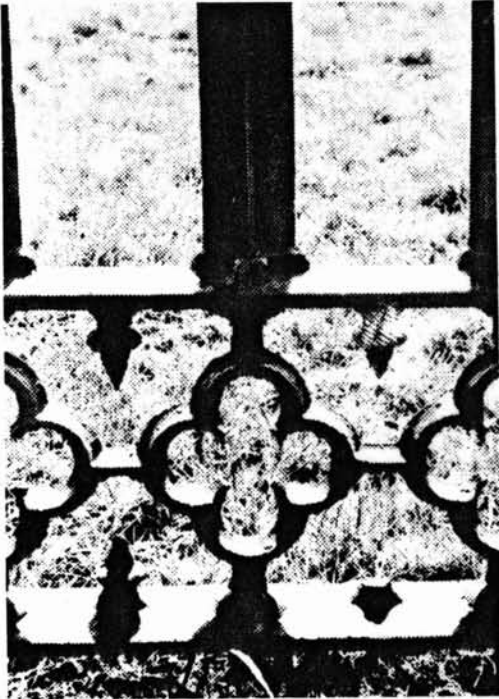
1628 - 1775

If there is one common thread running through Charlestown's history, it is geography. Joined to the mainland by only a thin neck of land, Charlestown is island-like, and has always maintained a separate identity from Boston. The first village was built on the southeasterly tip of the peninsula. Streets and a market place were laid out, lots fenced in, and land on the outskirts held for grazing and wood lots. But it was the common areas to which special attention was given. "The most important work is going on in the square," an early historian wrote, "where Mr. Graves, with a crowd of workmen, is building the 'Great House' for the governor and courts."² Other public amenities were added:

It was agreed unanimously by the generall Townsmen, that a Hous shold bee made and sett up upon the Windmill Hill: And the bell sufficiently hanged thereon; and a Sun-dial there; and to be done by a general rate speedily to be gathered of the inhabitants, who are to pay each in proportion in good and merchanable wheat, and Barley, and Peas.³

As the town grew, the eastern part of Main Street was laid out following the contours of the land, with merchants and craftsmen clustering along it to sell and





trade. Later Main Street was continued west from Thompson Square to Cambridge and it served as the major route for bringing goods to the market place where they could be sold or transferred to the ferry to Boston.

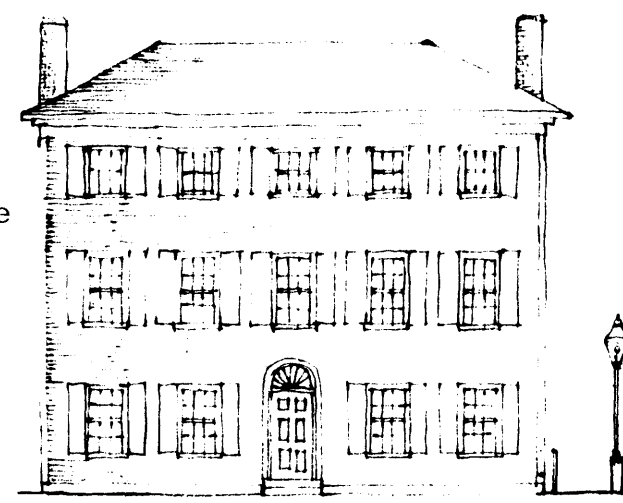
Access to the waterfront and proximity to downtown also made Charlestown a thriving colonial seaport and center for craftsmanship. "In 1640," it is recorded, "there were in town tailors, coopers, rope-makers, glaziers, tile-makers, anchor-smiths, collar-makers, charcoal burners, joiners, wheelwrights, blacksmiths; there was a brew-house, a salt-pan, a potter's kiln, a saw-pit, wind-mill, a water-mill near Spot Pond, and the old tide mill at the Middlesex Canal Landing."⁴

By the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, there were 400 dwellings and numerous small enterprises. Almost everyone had a shop, bake house, or brewery according to the lists of what was claimed after the fire (which may have been exaggerated). After the fire, which claimed all the buildings in town, only the street pattern and public open spaces--the Militia Training field (Winthrop Square today) and the Phipps Street cemetery--survived.

1776 - 1850

After the Battle, rebuilding began immediately. On individual lots, houses were hastily built, with out-buildings for horses, workshops, and garden space. The buildings were often temporary, simply framed and sheathed with clapboards. Today the oldest remaining houses are from the 1790s. Several examples of what is called the Federal Style have been restored on Main Street near Thompson Square. These buildings are three stories high with low sloped hip roofs and colonial detailing of double hung windows, central doorways, and decorative quoins. Some were built at right angles to the street with garden space in a transitional entrance zone. Builders repeated the pattern of separate detached dwellings along Main Street with shops on the ground floor and living space for owners and apprentices above.

From several historical accounts of this time, it appears that Charlestown was a strong community with a sense of pride and prosperity. Described as pleasant and comfortable, it was a place where many merchants and shipping executives, as well as local manufacturers chose to live. The estates of these prominent people were built with great attention to detail. Through their dwellings--



Federal

their entrances, richness of exterior design and gardens-- the leading citizens of the town expressed publicly their cultural heritage (they still considered themselves English) and aspirations to a grand and gracious life style:

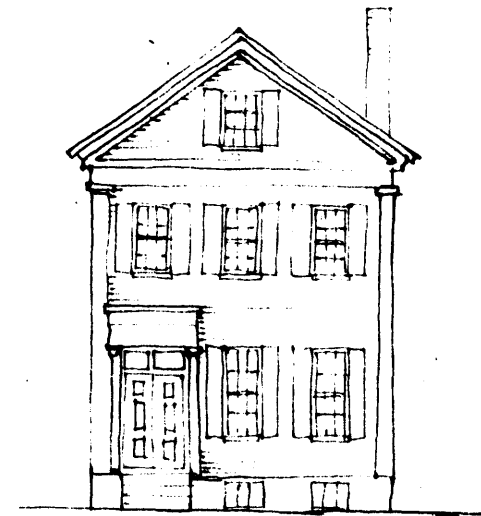
The Breed House was of brick, standing not quite so far back from the street, but with a front lawn and surroundings much the same as the other estates. Opposite the dwelling-house, on the other side of the roadway, was a greenhouse of very considerable proportions, in which were grown grapes, peaches, apricots, and the most admired tender plants and flowers of the day. Outside the greenhouse, on the front part of the estate, hardy trees, shrubs, and flowers were tastefully arranged, and cultivated with interest and care. The rear of the estate, in addition to convenient stable arrangements, consisted fo an orchard and quite extensive fields stretching away to Bunker Hill Street. Among the objects of interest about this place, at one time, was a pair of antelopes kept in an enclosure near the house. Altogether it was a homestead which its owner, Ebenezer Breed, who was a merchant having his office in Boston, must have enjoyed and looked upon with satisfaction and pleasure.⁵



While local histories tend to concentrate on the estates and mansions of wealthier citizens, one can find references to other structures; the more modest mixed-use buildings, larger commercial establishments and institutions. Many cut-granite business fronts lined Main Street, with shops of the ground floor and offices or housing above, a pattern still prevalent today. A

range of commercial and manufacturing establishments made Charlestown virtually a self-sufficient community. Like 100 years before, there were woodhouses, clay works, kiln works, orchards, bakeries, bolting mills, coopers, blacksmiths, stables, carriage houses, grocery and dry-goods stores, chocolate mills, savings banks, real-estate offices and numerous law offices.

Many institutions were built during this period, although only a few of these remain today. A large state prison, located where the Bunker Hill Community College has recently been built, was once a landmark. This and most other public buildings and charitable institutions have long since been torn down--once there was an asylum, a workhouse for the poor, an infant school, a Home for Aged women and a free dispensary and Hospital. Several larger commercial buildings and old school buildings have survived and are being reused, like the Harvard Elementary School and Charlestown Five Cents Savings Bank (also referred to as the Masonic Hall). The Navy Yard, recently closed, is also due to be reused.



Greek Revival

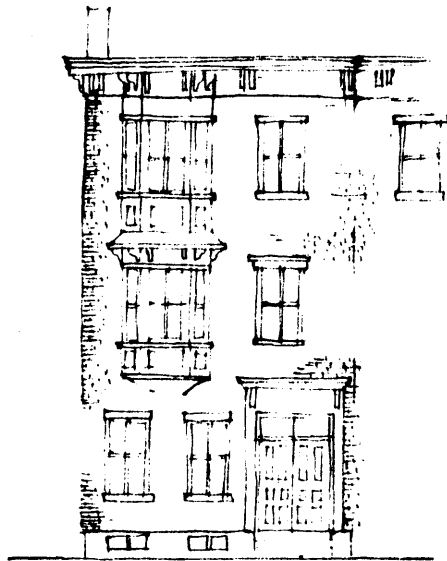
1850-1940

In the second half of the 19th century, industrialization, expanding transportation networks, and a major shift

in population changed the sociological mix and environmental quality of Charlestown. Bridges and trainlines were built to link Charlestown to downtown Boston. Goods were thereafter carried directly to the city, no longer being transferred at the ferry or traded in the market place at City Square. By the 1850s trolleys made it possible for workers to commute. The middle class moved out to suburban areas, and the immigrants who had begun arriving in 1845 moved to Charlestown. In a decade, the influx of Irish immigrants doubled Charlestown's population to 25,000.

The housing boom, begun in the first half of the century by the merchant class, continued throughout the 1800s.

To meet the immigrants' demand for housing, something had to be done. As in other American cities, housing in Charlestown had traditionally been single-family. People who could not afford their own home, boarded in other people's houses. The newly arriving working class could not afford their own houses and many rental units and tenements were built. Both existing housing stock and vacant land was sub-divided. Single-family units were made into multi-families. Other vacant land was divided into row house parcels. Around 1880, a new type of housing was developed--the triple decker, and this quickly became the prevalent house type for the rest of Charlestown. Previously the western and northern slopes of Bunker and



Triple Deckers

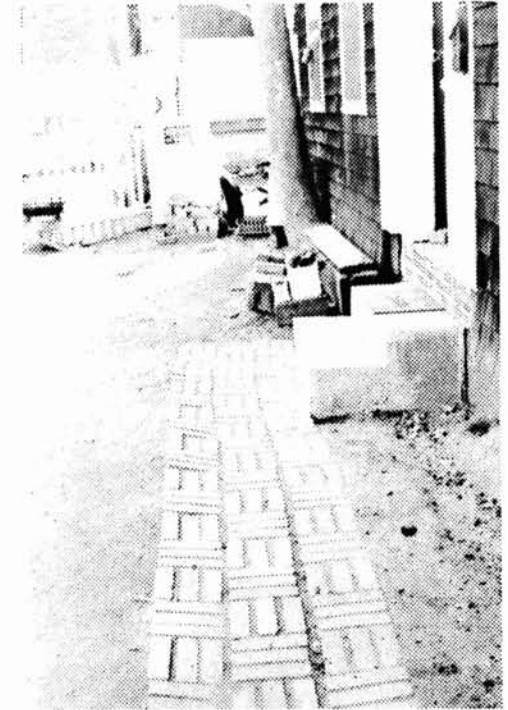
Breed's hills had been undeveloped but now wood clapboard triple-deckers were built up and down the regularly laid out blocks.

These small apartment houses, with their repetitive rhythm of regularly spaced windows and recessed doorways were stylishly painted in the Victorian palette of subtle colors contrasting the clapboards to the trim, the front door, the projecting cornice, and where present, the shutters and bay windows. If not of great architectural significance, these buildings provided the setting for lively and interesting streets and proud neighborhoods.⁹

The result of all this was a rich eclecticism of housing styles which gives Charlestown its character today. The architecture is a melée of many revived styles: Federal, Greek Revival, Italiniate, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, Georgian Revival, Federal Revival, and Romanesque Revival. While certain styles were particularly in vogue for a decade or two, they became overlapped, copied and combined so that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Main Street at this time still consisted of local shops and offices serving the new population. The immigrants may not have had the money of the residents 50 years before to purchase fancy hats, but they still needed to buy food, clothes and other necessities.

While the merchants flourished with the increasing population, the real change did not come until 1901.



In that year the single most dramatic event in the street's history happened when a two-way elevated railway was erected along the entire route from Sullivan Square to City Square and on to Boston. One student of the period has described the coming of the El as follows:

The El ran right down Main Street, which had always been the major commercial strip. The nerve-wracking noise of the trains drove away customer and shopkeeper alike. Store after store changed hands, until many closed down for good. Boarded up shop fronts became a feature of Charlestown landscape. Many of the old commercial buildings were used as warehouses for the wholesalers that stayed in the district. Stores could no longer draw customers from out of town, and so only regional wholesale suppliers, or the most locally oriented business such as groceries, laundries, and drug stores found a way to survive.¹⁰

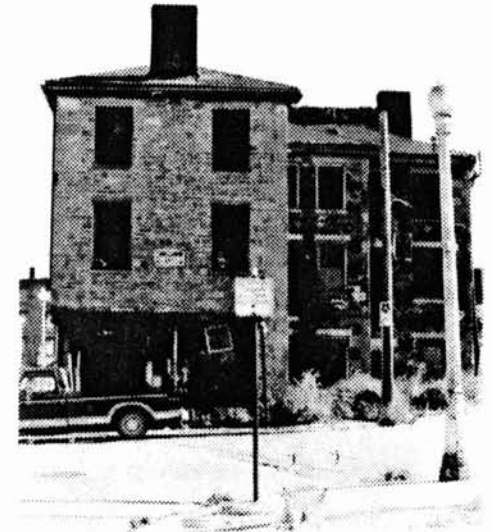


But while the El drove away many businessmen, in a curious way it helped others, as one oldtimer explains: "When the El was there, you'd come out from work, and, on payday, stop and buy a war bond at the bank, go to the shoe store for a new pair of spats, get a couple of stamps at the post office and do a series of errands between City and Thompson Squares. With the elevated down, no one bothers to come along here anymore."

1940-Present

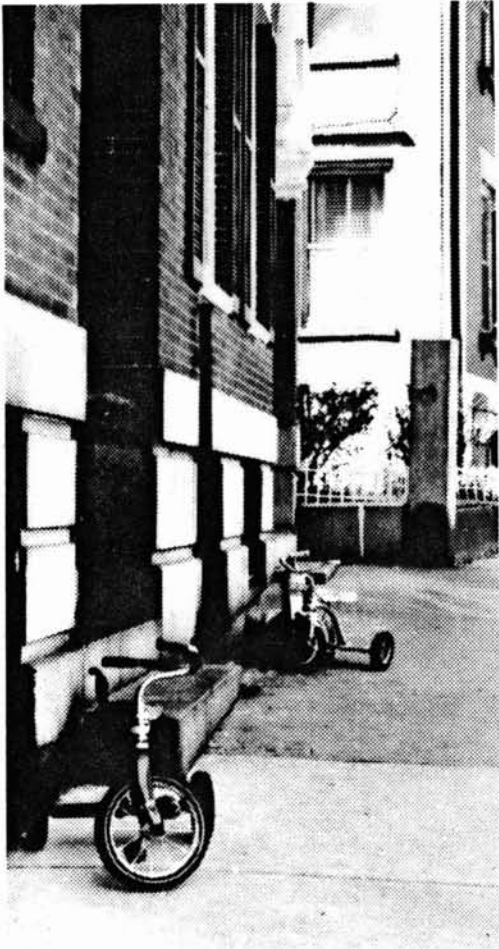
During the depression many of the businesses located in the lowlands around the town went bankrupt. Jobs were lost and the buildings deteriorated. The same was true of the housing stock, as people could neither afford repairs, nor were outside landlords investing money into what was considered a lower class neighborhood. A large area of town was condemned and bulldozed to make the public housing project in 1942. Nearby another 300 homes fell victim to the construction of the Mystic River Bridge. Again the suburbs drew away many families who were attracted by veteran's financed housing, and the new mobility of the auto. Population declined to 16,000, but the neighborhood still retained a strong identity. While younger families might have moved out, many chose to stay where their roots of several generations were. The sixties saw a third period of housing demolition leaving lots which are still vacant today. In 1975, the U.S. Navy Yard was closed down, and many jobs for local people were lost. Unemployment remains the community's most serious problem.

Meanwhile, however, over the last 15 years, a renewed interest in Charlestown has gradually been developing. Housing is being renovated by both newcomers and older



residents. While employment opportunities in town have diminished, the proximity to downtown makes it an attractive location for young professionals. When the Navy Yard becomes developed with new uses, there will be access to the waterfront for the first time. Main Street has changed dramatically. The elevated was removed in 1976, and improvements to the street have begun.

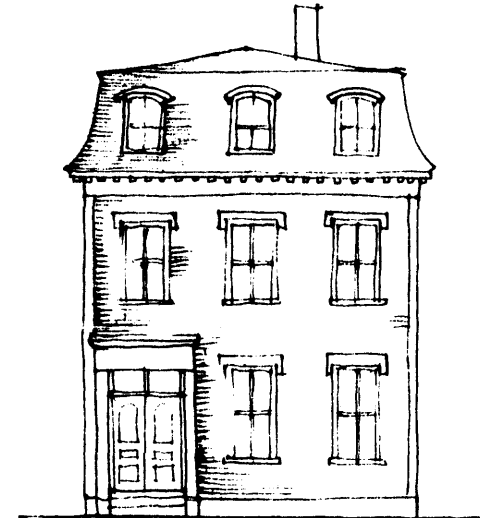
The most important issue is whether Charlestown can still be a neighborhood people feel responsible for and care about, and whether it will remain a neighborhood where all classes of people can afford to live. The pattern of rehabilitation also means real estate speculation, rising rents and evictions. Newcomers may like Charlestown for some of its quaint physical characteristics but it is the ties between people and the connections to a past which make a neighborhood in the truest sense. While the physical structure may reinforce the human qualities of an urban environment, it is never the sole determinant. Money may be spent on the streets and new housing built, but nothing can replace or create a neighborhood spirit which had taken generations to develop.



Program

In developing the design program, I considered the types of goods and services the community needed and the likely impact of future BRA projects on the area. My goal was to create a strong link to the Navy Yard, to insure that this resource became an integral part of town rather than an isolated enclave of luxury apartments. I believe that if the strip from Thompson Square to City Square were to become an area of mixed use, with housing, entertainment, shops, offices and attractive workplaces, then it would draw the new population of the Navy Yard to the older parts of Charlestown.

To create the type of mixed use that would serve the local residents as well as attract outsiders, several steps must be taken. The housing stock along Main Street, which is now isolated and under-used, must be supplemented. More community services could be developed to bind more closely together the existing neighborhood. There is great need, for instance, for a day-care center. A new neighborhood elementary or regional magnet school, built on the edge of the community, could serve as an important sponsor for additional activity and richness of community life. Similarly, higher educational facilities related to

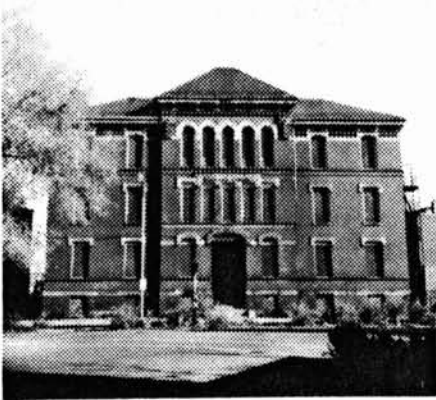


Neighborhood Housing

Bunker Hill Community College and the Mass College of Art might be located in Thompson Square.

Existing buildings should be recycled to fulfill specific community needs. This is happening already as evidenced by the renovation of the old Charlestown Savings Bank building. The ground floor contains offices for community service organizations and several small shops. The upper floors have been rented as office space, generally to professionals such as lawyers and graphic designers. With this new use and activity, the area of Thompson Square is returning to its historical role of a central focus for the neighborhood and a drawing card for outsiders. Another example of adaptive re-use geared to specific community needs is the old Harvard Elementary School, two blocks from Thompson Square, which is now being renovated into elderly housing. Eventually, as the population increases and the local economy grows, other projects might be feasible, such as a movie theater, entertainment hall (once the largest dance hall in Boston was located in the Roughan Hall at City Square) and specialty stores. There is already need in the area for a hardware store, clothing store, laundromat and appliance repair store.

In addition to changes in residential and commercial structures, the neighborhood could benefit from an infusion of some light industry. Charlestown has historically contained some manufacturing, and while the number of



plants have declined, the companies have provided much needed local employment opportunities and added to the economic worth of the community. As the town is re-developed and added to, outside businesses or cottage industries should be encouraged. Such development would be peculiarly suited to the public framework design program this thesis proposes. Many companies need only generalized systems of dimensions and building structure. A developer could build the basic structure with the mechanical systems, circulation, and egress networks. Final, personal adaptation could be done by the tenants or owners themselves. An overall framework which is specific yet contains space for a variety of users can result in the kind of mixed use which makes a real neighborhood and city.

These then are some of the community needs that I have identified in the study area. While decisions of particular buildings are important to the neighborhood, and I have dealt with some building choices in my thesis, I have concentrated on the arrangement of public space and the transition zone between public and private space and how this can serve to knit together a neighborhood and highlight its best qualities. The arrangement or framework I propose for these spaces is designed to draw out what is best, most neighborly, and most human-scale about the existing buildings and the built environment.

Existing Conditions

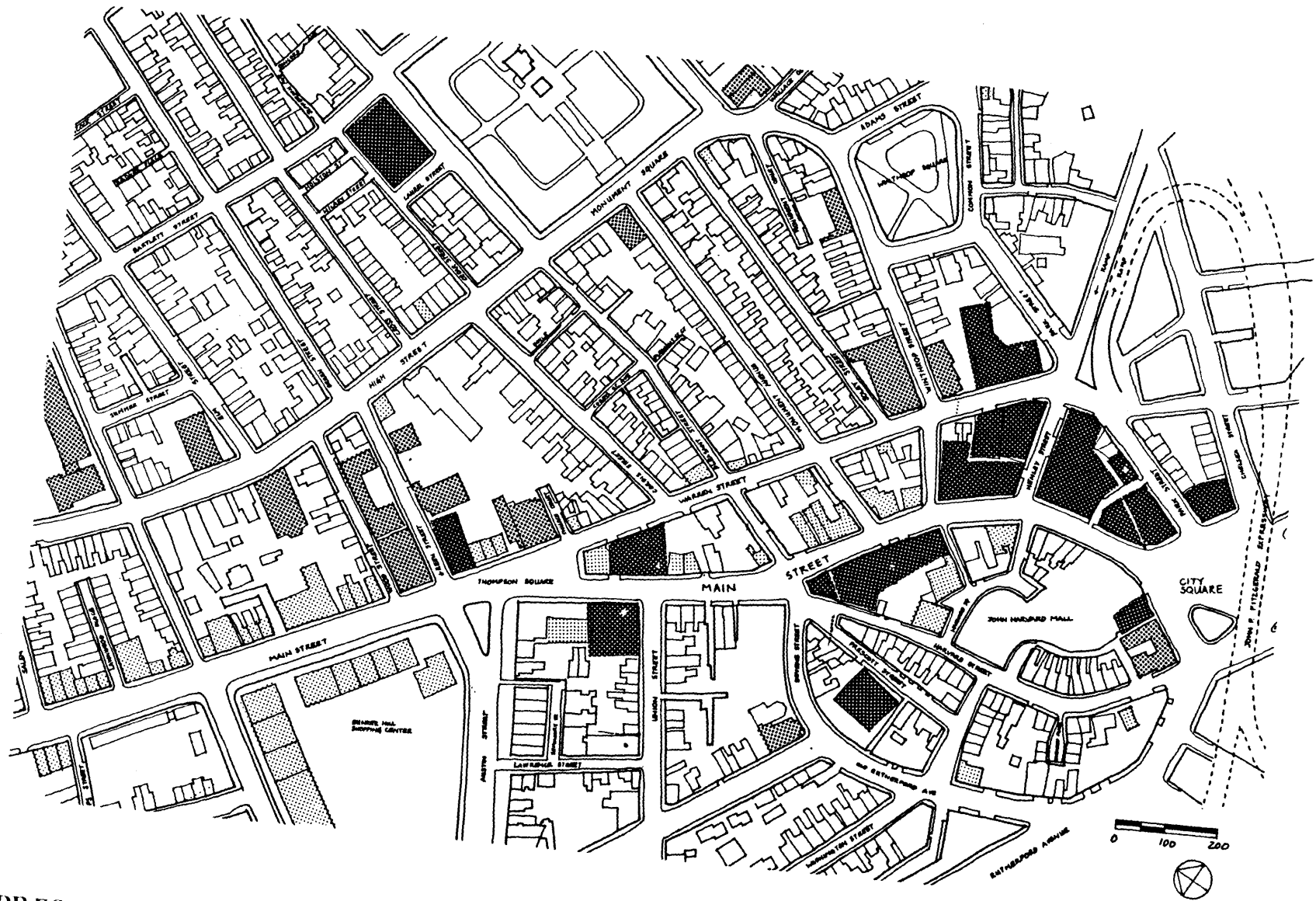
The present image of Charlestown is dominated by several factors. The first is an underused, underbuilt portion of Main Street which, from Thompson Square to City Square is wide and not heavily trafficed. The second is a variety of building types with some large landmarks, buildings of historical interest, and some quaint curiosities. Another quality is a "towniness"-- a series of smaller neighborhoods, all in Charlestown, yet physically defined from each other.

The following maps and photographs try to present information so that the reader might better understand how the present hierarchy of streets and outdoor spaces are used by the people.



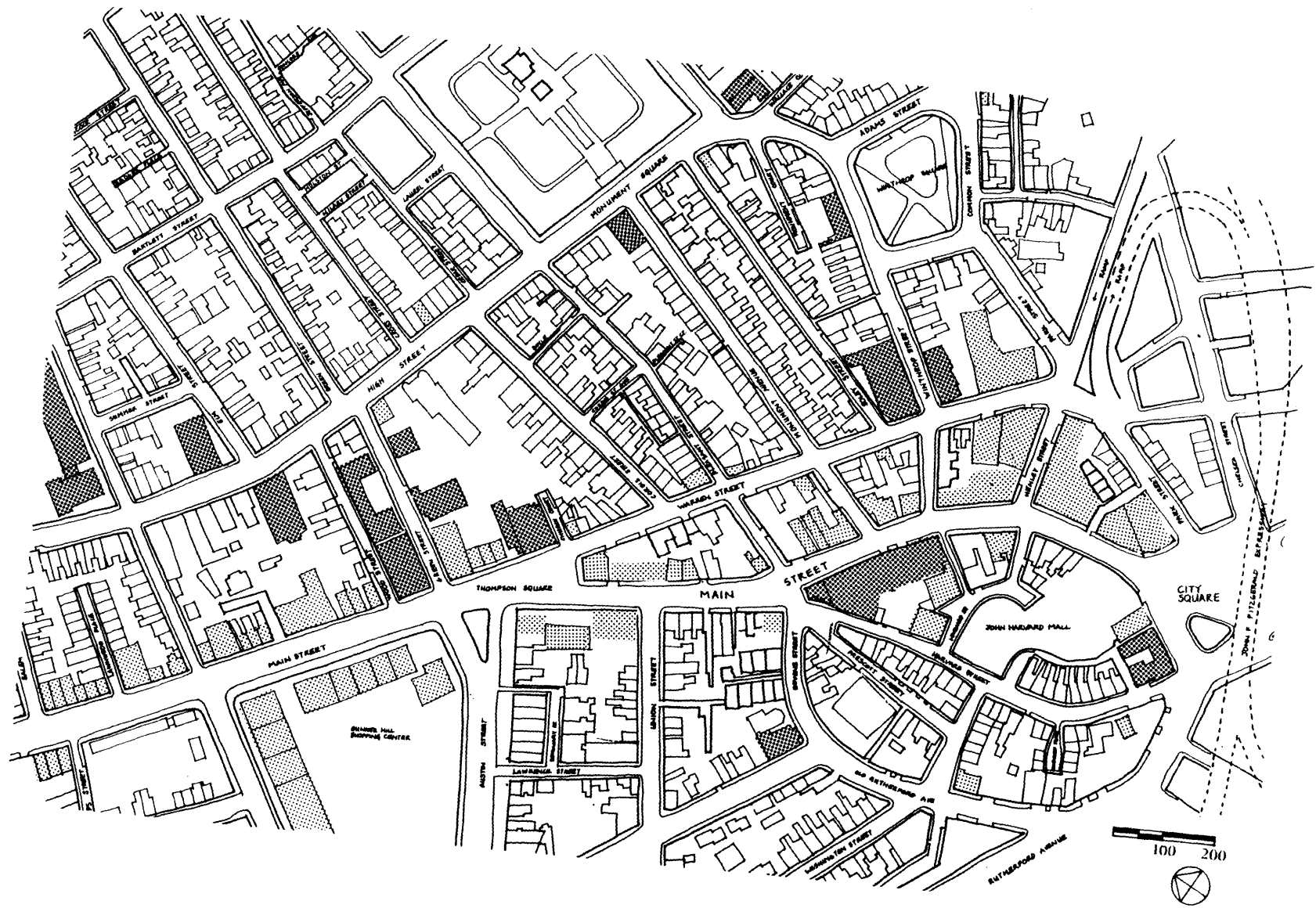


RELATIVE TRAFFIC FLOWS
and BUS STOPS



PRESENT LAND USE

- HOUSING
- ▨ COMMERCIAL
- ▩ COMMUNITY
- VACANT



PROPOSED LAND USE

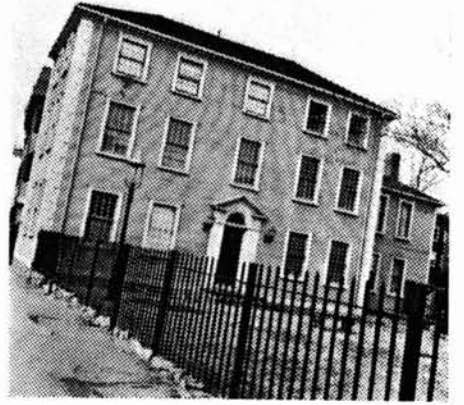
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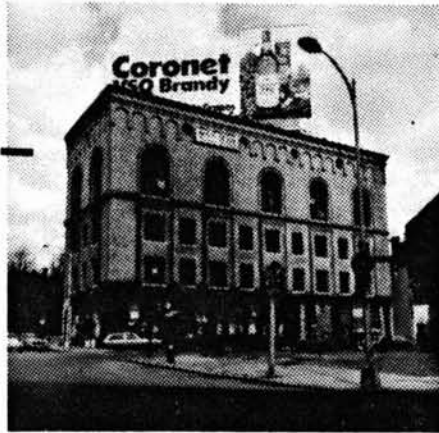
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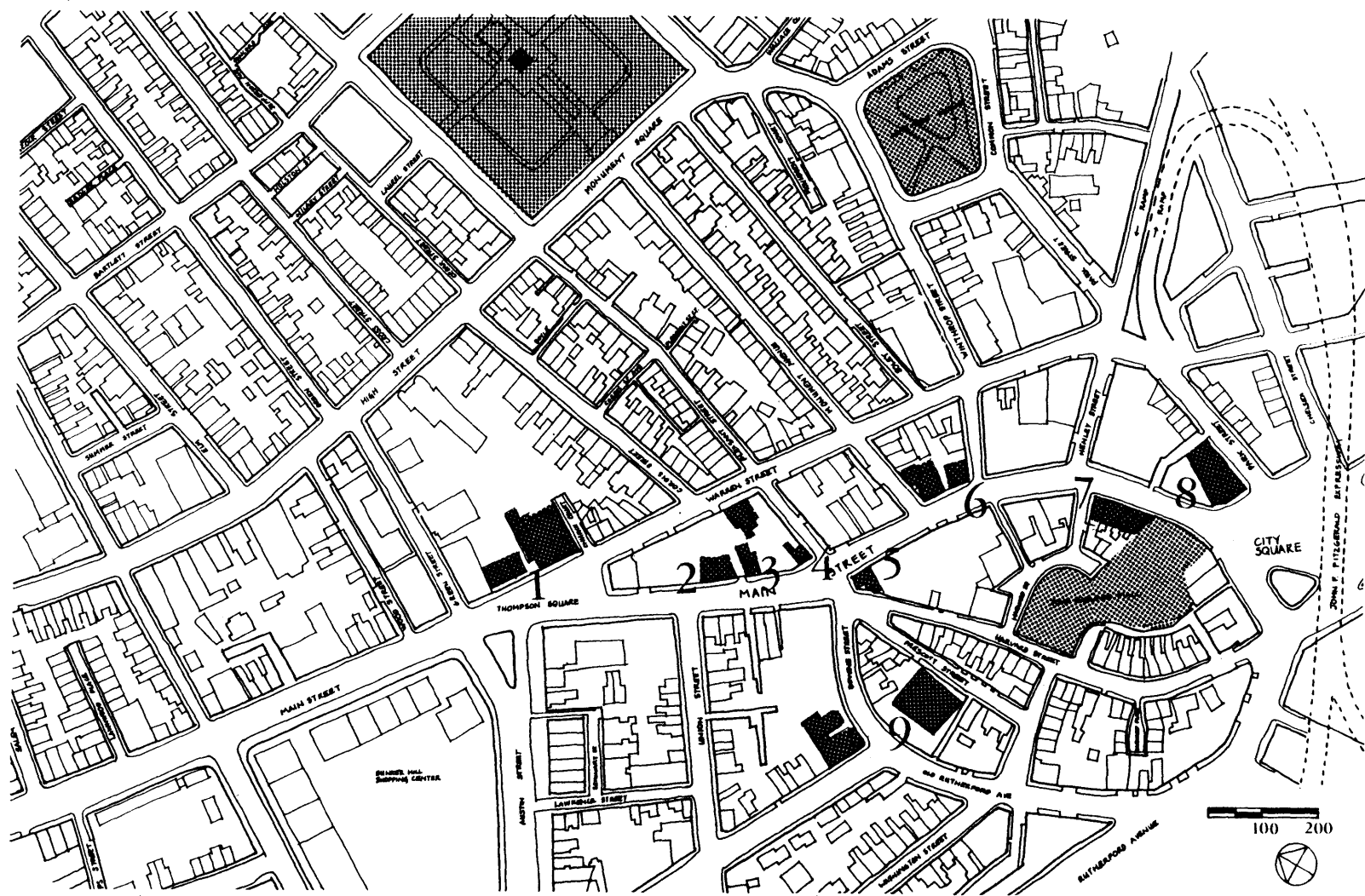


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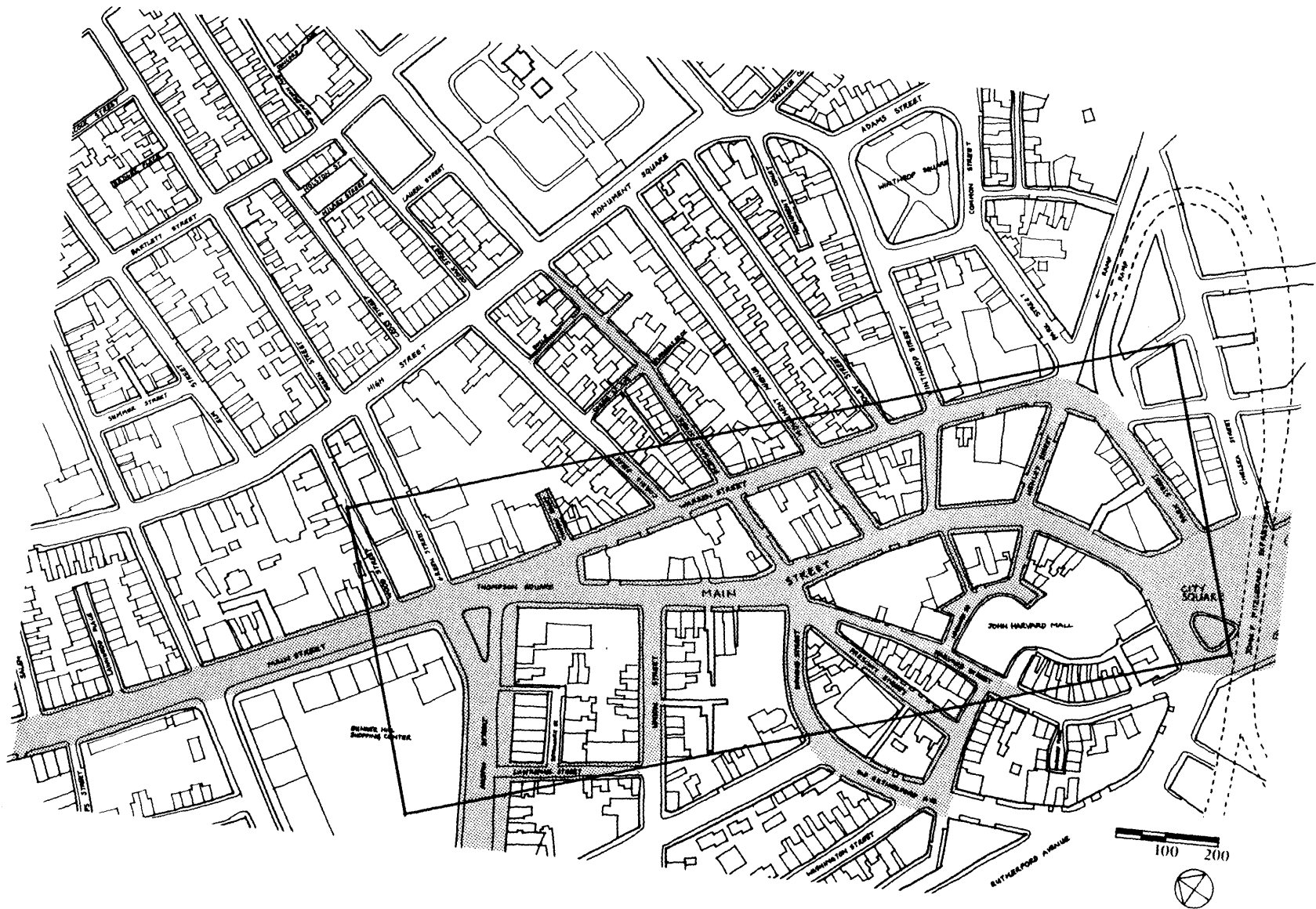


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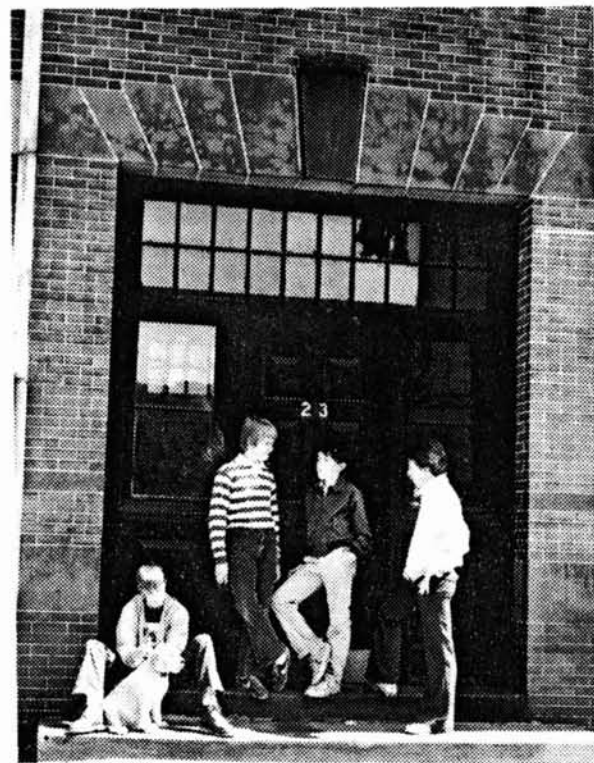
LANDMARKS AND PARKS

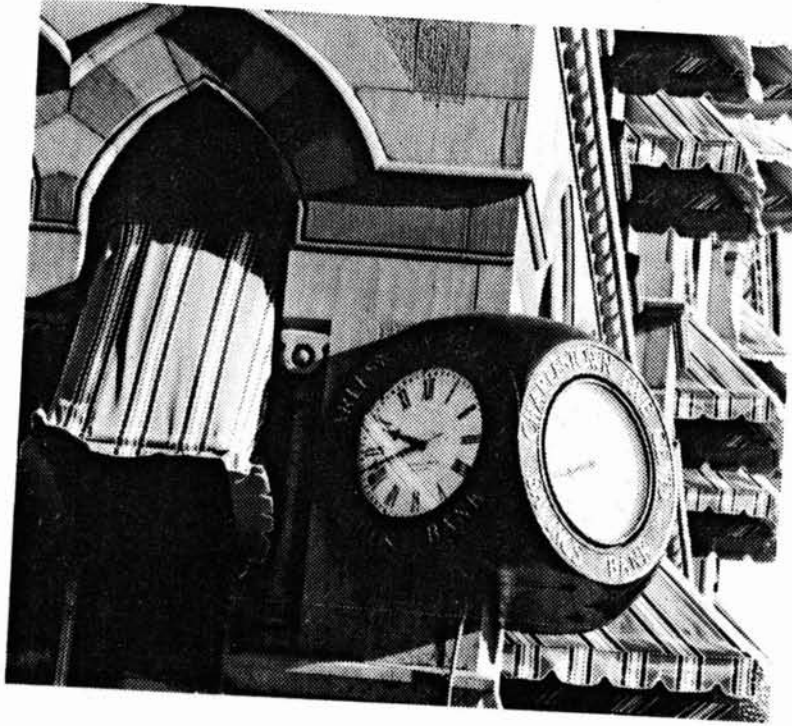




A critical look at this block of buildings will show the rare good judgement exercised in its elevation or location up on the lot of land, and that great care was taken in the selection of materials and workmanship in its construction.

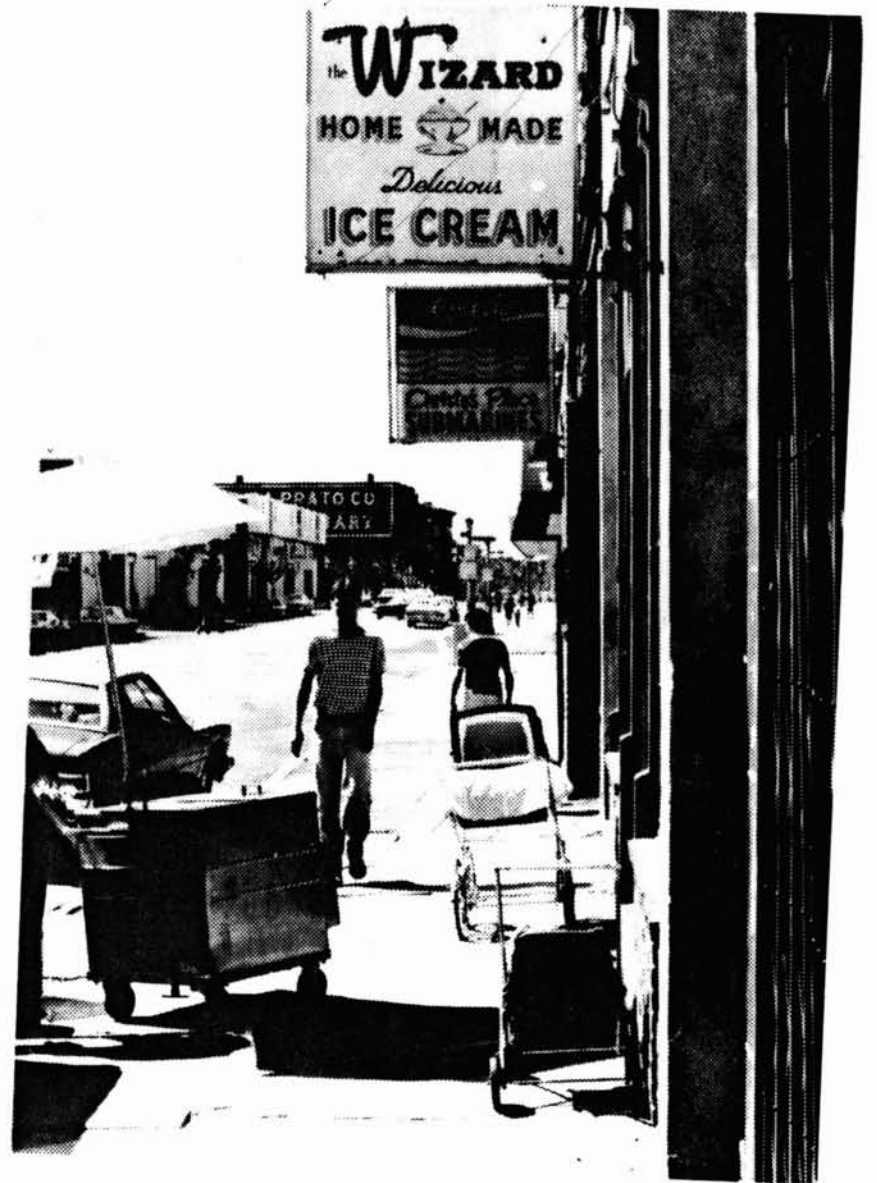
Timothy Sawyer
Charlestown Historian





The importance of the friendly object is that it manifests human relevance. What we make of the object is pretty much up to us. It activates our responses of practical need and associational participation.

Peter Pragnell
"The Friendly Object"

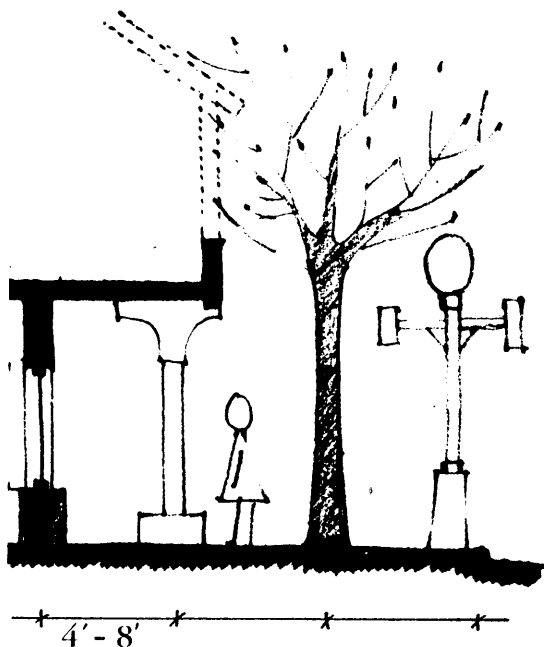


Several steps led up to the front door facing the garden, and over the door was a low-arched trellis covered with honeysuckles and roses. In the beds close by, lined with box, were as many old-fashioned flowers as had room to grow, tulips, peonies, Iris, Persian lilacs, London pride, larkspurs, pinks and more; and there were bits of hawthorne hedge, plenty of plums and grapes, and, in the sun by the steps, a fig tree that would bear something after much coaxing.

Charles Hunnewell
Charlestown Historian

Chapter III

PARTS TO MAKE A WHOLE



The Public Domain

Certain overall criteria and values apply to anything new which has been designed. Everything should be related to human scale and use. Even though some pieces are large, much larger than we are, there should be some dimensions in them which reflect our size. Paving patterns might be broken up into 4 or 6 foot segments; elsewhere a horizontal reference 6 feet from the ground could be articulated. All built things are made up of smaller components which can be expressed. Materials change, creating textural and color contrasts. Even poured concrete expresses its segmented formwork. Within larger pieces it is always possible to create these human scale dimensions, without losing sight of the larger, more collective dimension.

Materials themselves should be robust in quality and dimension and reflect the durability to withstand the outdoor elements. While the maintenance requirements of certain materials has been taken into account, it is accepted that abuse and vandalism could destroy practically anything. Those parts of the built environment in the public area should be of normal durability and as maintenance free as necessary and possible. Wood which needs painting, and trees needing special handling would be used in semi-public and private spaces defined as such and cared for by merchants and residents.

Pieces which could be mass-produced somewhat uniformly and economically have been designed. In the final assemblage and addition of more personalized and crafted items, richness and variation could be achieved.

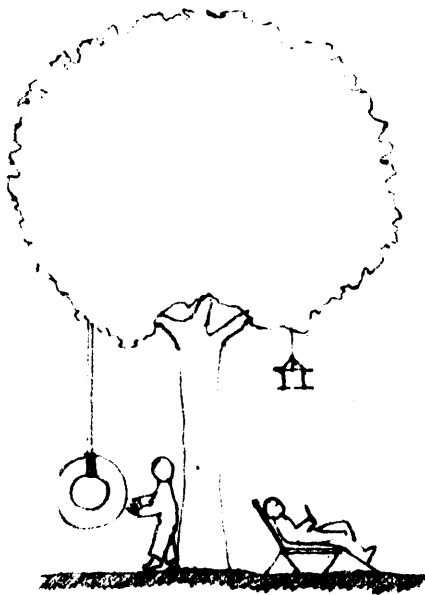
The intent was to make a system where parts would be interchangeable and the system flexible enough to meet different conditions. While each piece should be specific and contain information about its use, everything would not fit exactly. By building specific, but not complete definition, you allow for flexibility and change.

Overall, it was important to make a system which would not be institutional. Though some of it would be designed at one time and should have some impact and strength of image, it should not so dominate nor fit so well that it becomes a singular expression which cannot be added to. In essence a good framework has some permanence, but is not unchanging, is suggestive without dictating. It is something in and of itself, yet part of a larger structure.



Vegetation

Even though the range of vegetation in town is not what it once was, an appreciation for urban gardens and trees has persisted throughout the years. A scattering of large older trees exists, and recently the parks department has planted new maple trees along many of the streets. One also sees small private gardens here and there, some window boxes, and community garden plots were begun last year, all evidence of people's continued interest. Within private yards, trees serve a variety of functions. From building a tree house to the simple act of hanging a bird feeder, city dwellers, especially children need this contact with nature.



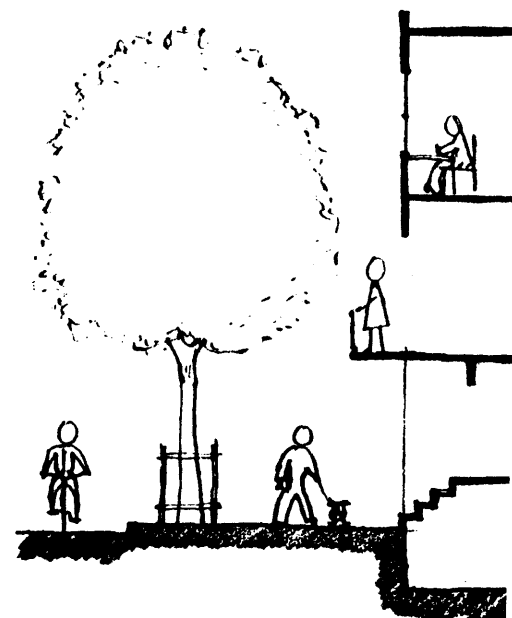
Backyard Structure

All of these uses, however, are barely noticeable on the large scale, and need support and help. In many places vegetation seems to be just barely surviving against great odds. Greenery is not part of the overall imagery of town.

I propose a major use of vegetation and a range of different trees and shrubs for both Main Street and side streets. As well as lining the streets to reinforce

movement and direction, trees can also define places, provide shade and protection. Flowering trees can be used in conjunction with standard street trees and a contrast can be set up whereby important places: corners, crossings, and termination points can be emphasized. Very special places might have a focal symbolic tree. The covered path is built in some places, and created by a canopy of trees elsewhere. The screening capacity of a form tree like lombardy poplar can be utilized as well as the partial definition of hedges.

The whole environment should be built systematically and specifically to allow for the infill of these trees and individual gardens. While hardy species should be chosen, as much help as possible is needed to protect trees from traffic, potential vandalism and give them ample room to grow and find water. A system of removable planters might be designed so that they could be regularly returned for replacement and care. Protective fencing and grating should be provided. We spend millions of dollars repairing roads, why can't the surrounding street environment be considered in this budget. I see huge crews resurfacing a street which might be bordered by cracked sidewalks, ill-cared-for trees and sooty buildings.



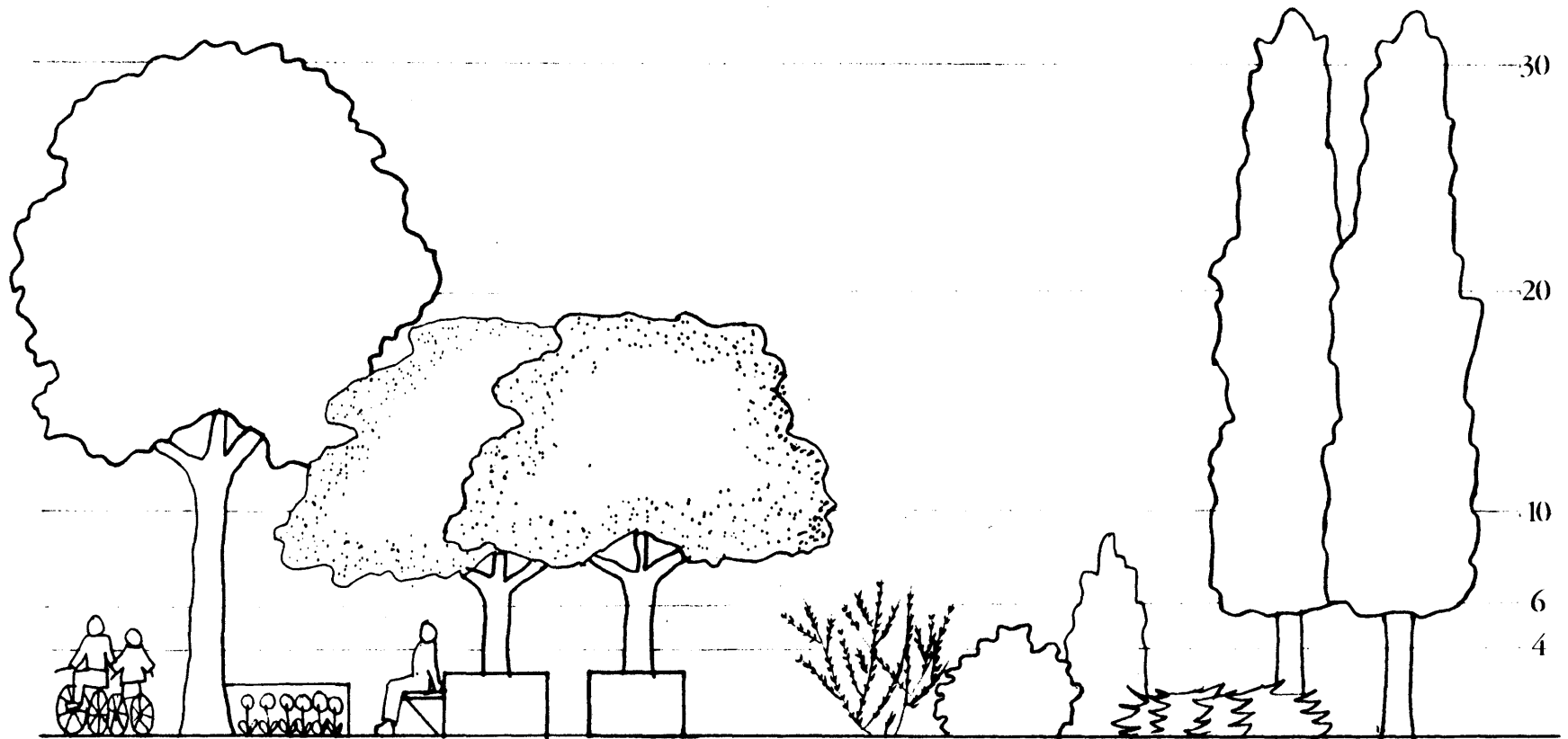
Tree-lined Streets

While it has not been commonly practiced in the United States, I also propose a much more architectural treatment of trees in this very urban area. More pruning and training might make trees into more structured and protective elements.

New England is special in the richness offered by the seasonal change. Children growing up in the city might not realize that April is the time when animals like lambs are born, but they can at least associate spring with flowering fruit trees and autumn with the rust and oranges of fallen leaves. Institutionalizing as many opportunities for natural vegetation to exist celebrates this very cyclical and associative pattern.

On three sides were rows of horsechestnut trees that for several months in the year formed a dense hedge Along green street the branches of the row there met those of a similar row on the Davidson estate and made, for a 100 feet, a sort of large arbor above the road way.

Charles Hunnewell
Local Historian

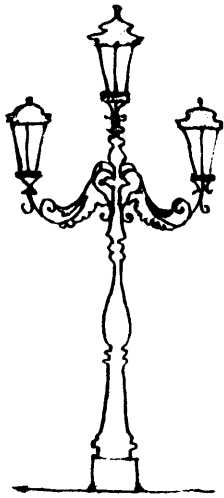


CANOPY TREES

PLACE-MAKING TREES

BORDERS, HEDGES, GROUND COVER

SCREENS



Lighting

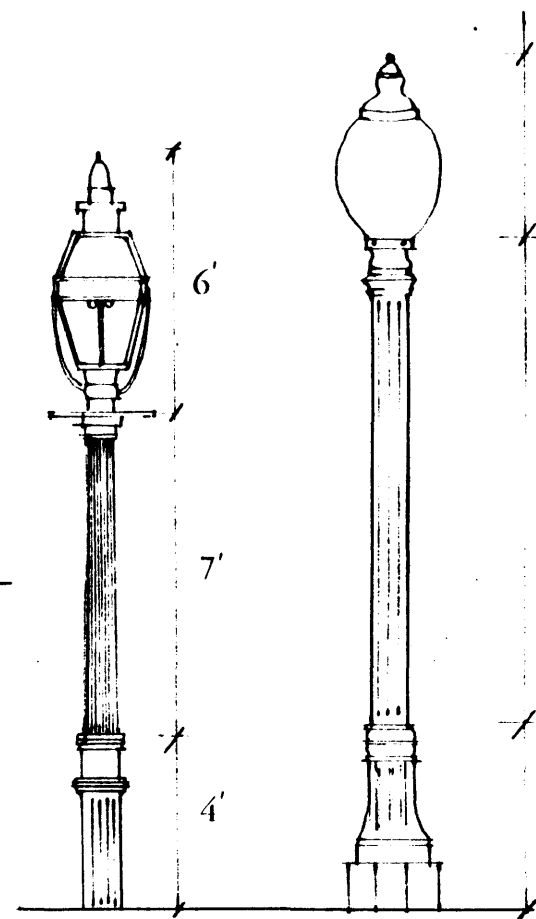
The most exciting images of cities are often those at nighttime, when glamour and romance emerge and the ugliness is hidden. From the glittering effect of Broadway with the neons and billboards, to the fanciful strings of lights at Tivoli Gardens, to the myriad of tiny bulbs on the trees at Paley Park, one can see how the possibilities of handling lighting range from the theatrical to the simple. While Charlestown is a low-key neighborhood, hardly to be compared with Picadilly Circus, there are ways to subtly employ light, beyond just the practical matter of providing adequate lighting at night, and beyond the simple solution of lining the streets with reproduction colonial gaslights. Lighting can play a whimsical effect in certain places, especially where nighttime entertainment is planned. It can highlight a historic building or downlight a textured wall, be integrated with seating and clustered in lively ways. Some places should have more light than others. The placement of shop windows or entertainment which might be busier at night should be considered. Termination points can be emphasized as well as other important places, crossings, bus stops, and corners where you might like to be able

to read the street signs. Lighting evenly spaced on one side of the street can create rhythm and movement. Light directed through openings creates anticipation and marks a path. Without flooding everything with mercury vapor lights, vital places could be warmly lighted to help provide security.

The elegant older cast iron street lights, the more robust and practical lights from fifty years ago, and the modern concrete standards with a simple light fixtures all are built up of three components: a base, a pole, and the actual fixture or globe.

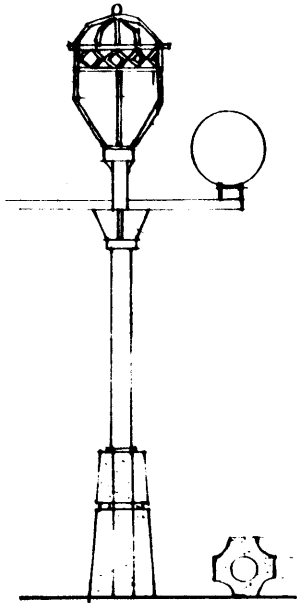
The base can be a prefabricated piece. The pole offers a flexible range in dimension and might have attachments to accept signage or other fixtures. The fixture itself should be more crafted and could have ornamental qualities. Several kinds designed by artisans could be available to throw light in different ways, perhaps sometimes breaking it up to give it the elegance of leaded glass.

The system as a whole would have some interchangeable parts so adaptations could be made for important places. Lighting in protected, semi-public places would be the

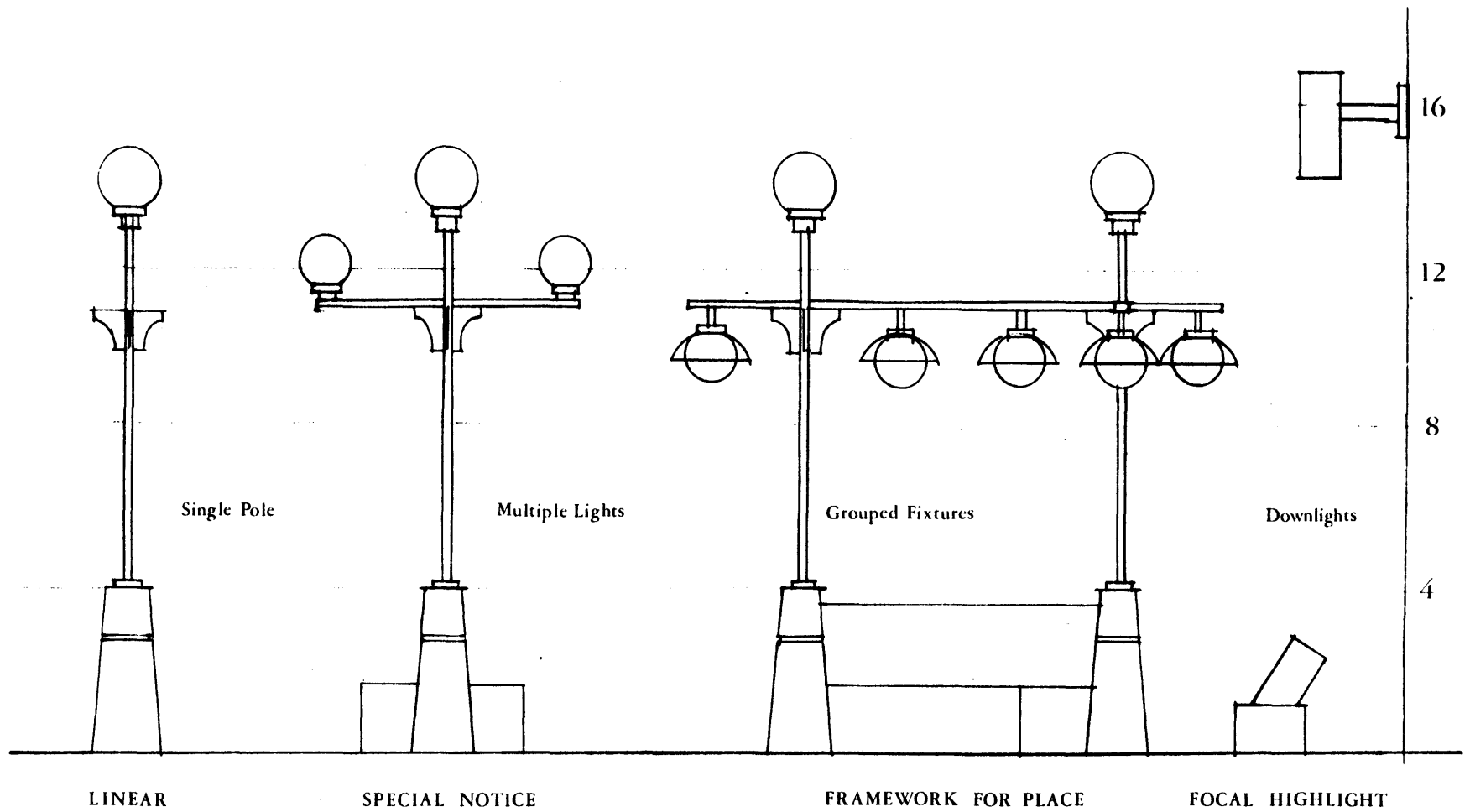


Existing Streetlights

responsibility of individuals or merchants, but the transition zone to private houses or stores should be built to easily accept lighting.

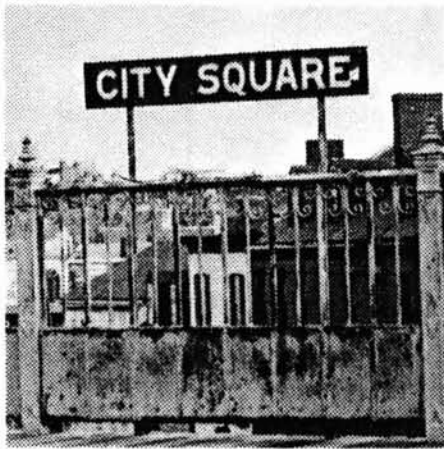


Study



LIGHTING

Signage



Nothing can give more vitality, more color, variety and activity to the streetscape than signage. A range of signage already exists along the commercial streets of Charlestown, although much of it is neglected and not as nearly effective as it could be. Neon signs, plastic letters, and metal coke signs are mostly of a temporary, tacked-up nature, and one is not left with a lasting impression of any particular part of the street. In the new shopping center the corporate logos of chain stores--MacDonalds, Fayva Shoes, the A&P are familiar but not terribly interesting. These minimal signs are mounted along the copper roofs in a uniform, low-keyed way, committed to not portraying the strip image that so many places have been associated with.

One also finds vestiges of older signs: brick walls painted with names and advertisements for businesses long gone. Mosaics with merchants' names have been inlaid in some of the thresholds. A few granite squares with the street names are built into corner buildings, and in some places, old wooden street signs still hang from buildings.

The hope is to improve and elaborate the extent to which signs are used and visible and incorporate them more into buildings. The commercial area should be rich with things to look at, signs should direct and attract your attention. They should not be all identical, like some rehabilitated areas where everyone has a hand-crafted wood sign or reproduction gold-leaf lettered sign. Likewise newer buildings and projects where ground floor merchants have neat, predesignated spots to hang their signs are monotonous and institutional. Signage reflects the passage of time--the additive process as businesses come and go. New signs are hung, graphic styles change, and the older signs show their age. A modern standardized system (even if it adopts a old type face) wipes out this layering effect that naturally takes place over time. People should be given several options for easily affixing signs, but any standard repetitive system should be avoided.

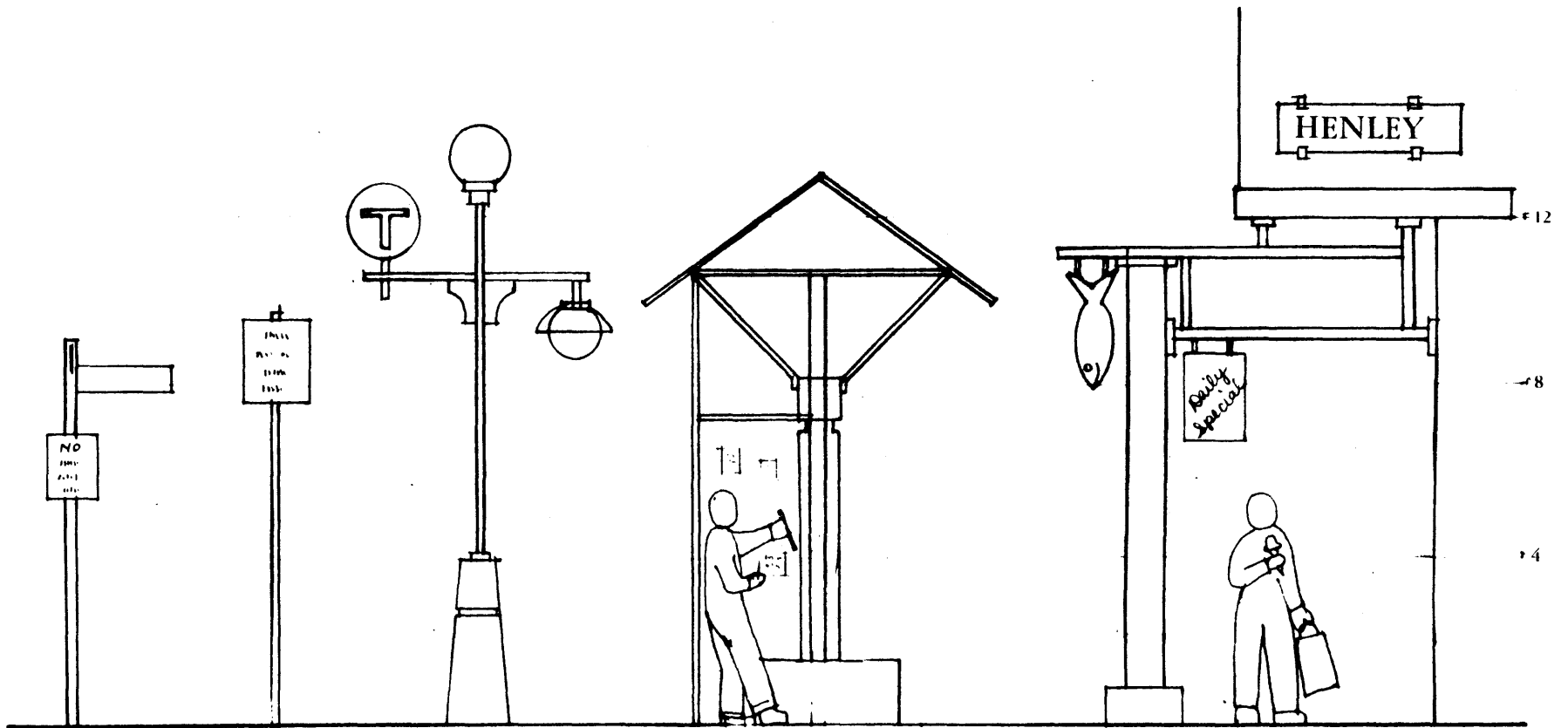
Residential areas should be clearly marked with street signs which have a quality of permanence to them. Most street signs today are minimal or missing. Individual houses should have a well-lit place to put their numbers or names if they desire.



Places to advertise should be developed, as well as some protected places for community notices. Wherever possible, the framework for signs should help give a three-dimensional definition to the outdoor space. The structure for signs has to be substantial to withstand windloads. Perhaps this structural capacity could serve a dual purpose.

Our favorite things of all, however, are the ancient enamel plaques mounted on the inside of the deep-brown swinging doors of the entrance. They are models of clarity. They are white with blue borders and blue letters, and their message—devoid of color codes—is simple and, to us, oddly satisfying. They say:





EXISTING TRAFFIC SIGNS

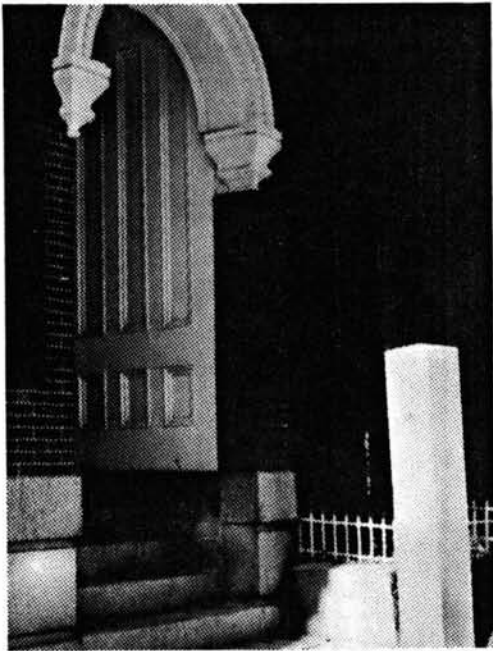
INTEGRATION WITH LIGHTS

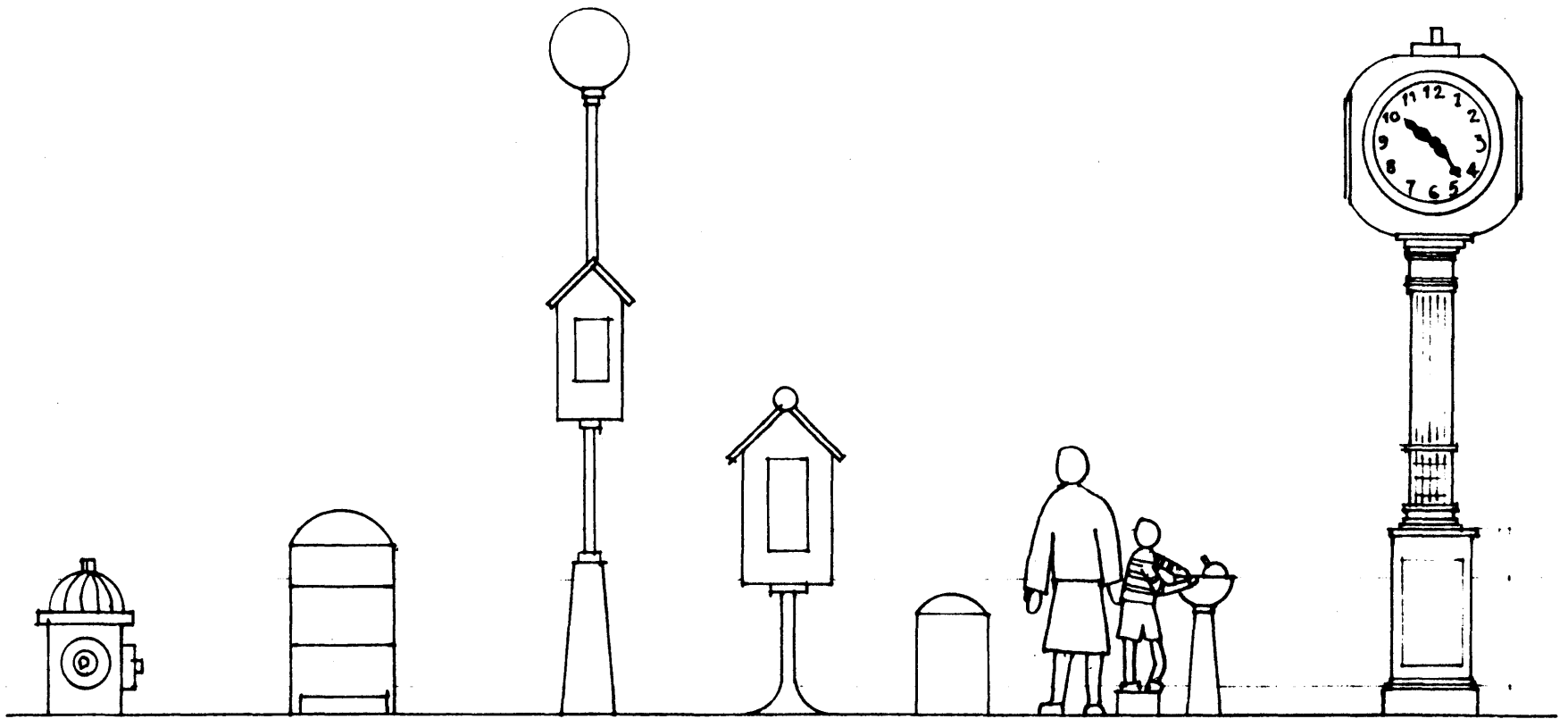
NOTICE BOARD

FRAMEWORK FOR IMPRINTS

Friendly Objects

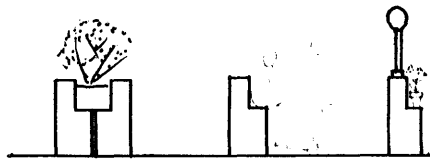
Objects should usually be smaller than we are. When they begin to get larger than us, they tend to dominate and control. Most things which I consider to be friendly objects are unpretentious and straightforward items; things designed to serve a practical purpose. Post Office boxes, fire hydrants, street lamps--the public domain is full of these ordinary objects we take for granted. Public drinking fountains, park benches, and the cast iron grating around trees are some outdoor things simply serving their useful function from day to day. A public clock, sundial, or bell-tower are similar symbolic, yet useful objects people associate and identify with. No one thing is being designed in this section. Instead the public domain should be seen as a stage on which these familiar characters can play their parts. It is in so many of our modern sterile urban environments that something like a fire hydrant gets efficiently reduced to a minimal outlet. Many objects of day-to-day city life have been mechanically or stylishly replaced by an efficient underground system. When we walk around such places, we feel meaningless as people.





FRIENDLY OBJECTS

Walls and Level Changes



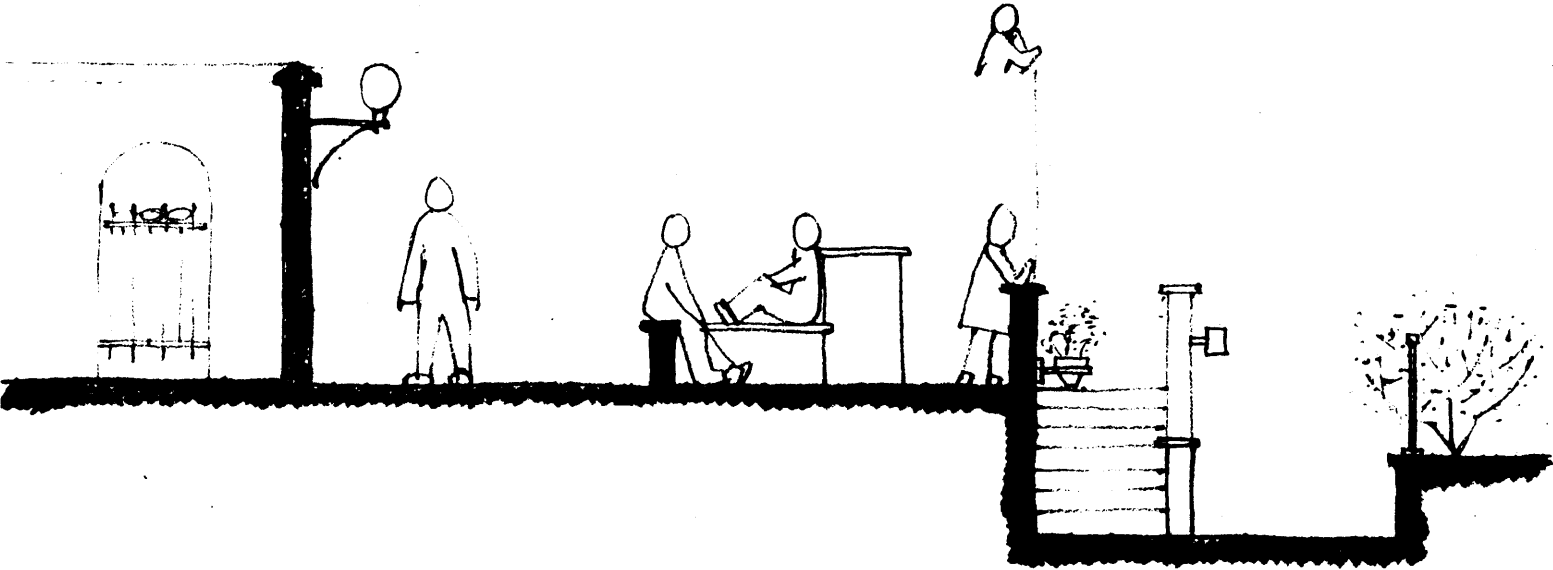
Pre-cast piece

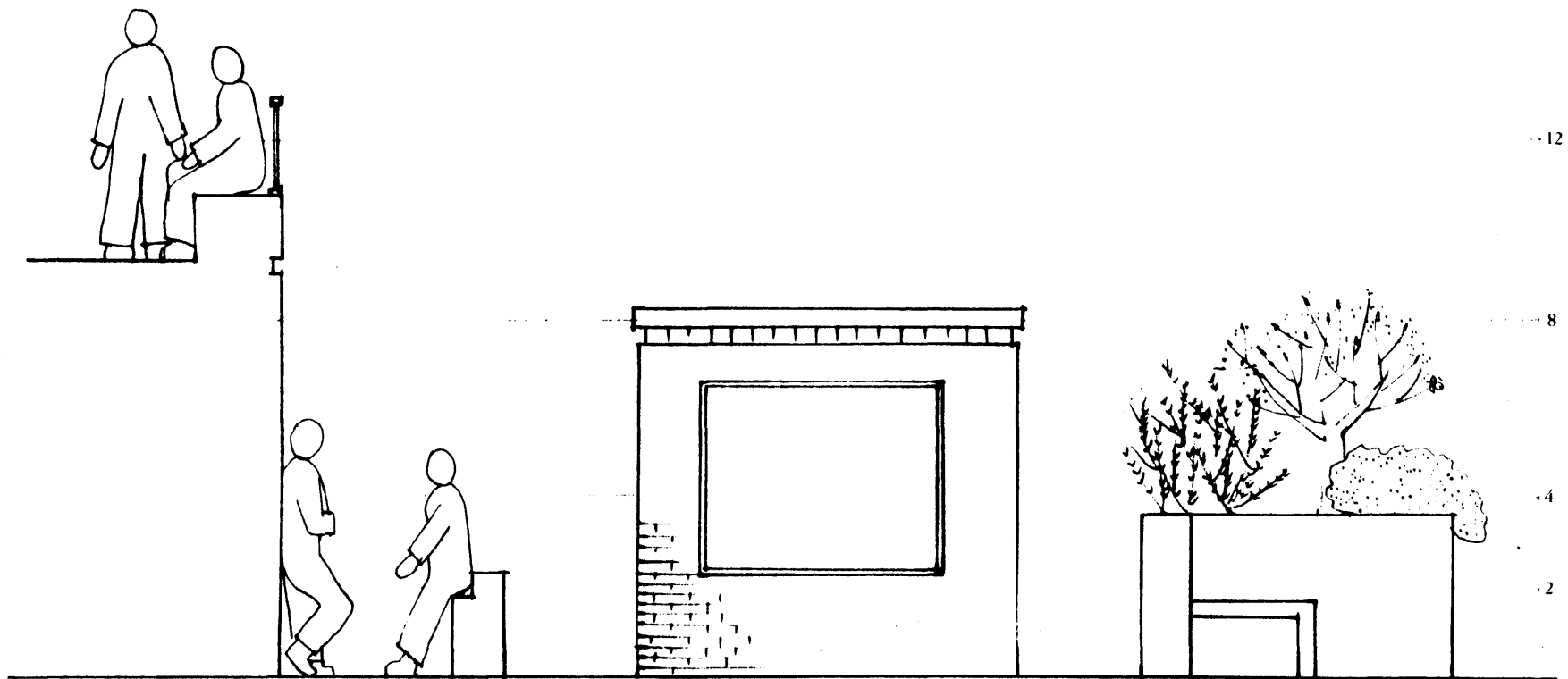
Together walls and level changes can create a rich range in the spatial relationships between the public and private worlds, between the street and the house, between the place to walk and the place to linger. A separation can be as simple as a threshold or as dramatic as an outlook. Walls provide varying degrees of enclosure. They can create privacies, collect people, define entries and mark major paths of distribution.

The stoops found all over town are widely used by people who like a place to sit and watch the activity, yet be slightly above it. This level change associated with entrances should be continued in any new construction. Alternative access for those not able to negotiate stairs could be provided as well as entrances grouped off a communal level change. Level changes should always mean something. They should not be employed arbitrarily, for they then become an obstructive aggravation.

Walls will be built of stone, unit masonry, and concrete. Several pre-cast pieces are proposed which would be used extensively. They are designed to make zones of

walls which can be used: either to sit on, affix other structure to, contain gardens, be planters, yet also define larger collective spaces.





OUTLOOK

WARMTH

SUPPORT

ENCLOSURE

DECORATION

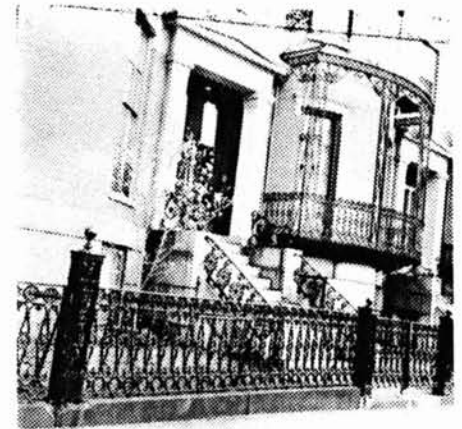
PLACE MAKING

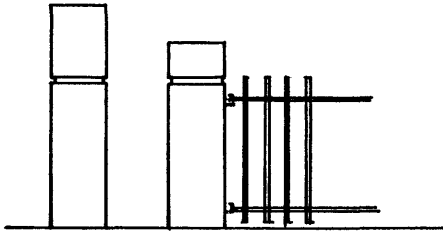
WALLS AND LEVEL CHANGES

Fencing and Screens

One of the most positive aspects of the building vocabulary of Main Street is the cast-iron work which is used both to define the semi-private spaces adjacent to the sidewalk, and build balconies. The elegance, craftsmanship, variety and decorative qualities of this iron-work are shared by both the inhabitants and the public alike. This rich vocabulary found throughout town begins to have an impact on the image of the town as an urban place where the streets are very much places for people walking and enjoying the city.

While this craft is no longer widely practiced and most people today could not afford what this decorative type of iron work would cost, both public and private buildings could emulate its original function using materials available today. For fencing I have designed a system whereby some concrete or granite posts would be part of the public sector. Individuals could fill in the spaces with simple iron fencing or heavy timbers. By having the end and intermediate posts built within the public framework, individuals are relieved of this difficult and expensive construction. Hardware attachments could be integrated

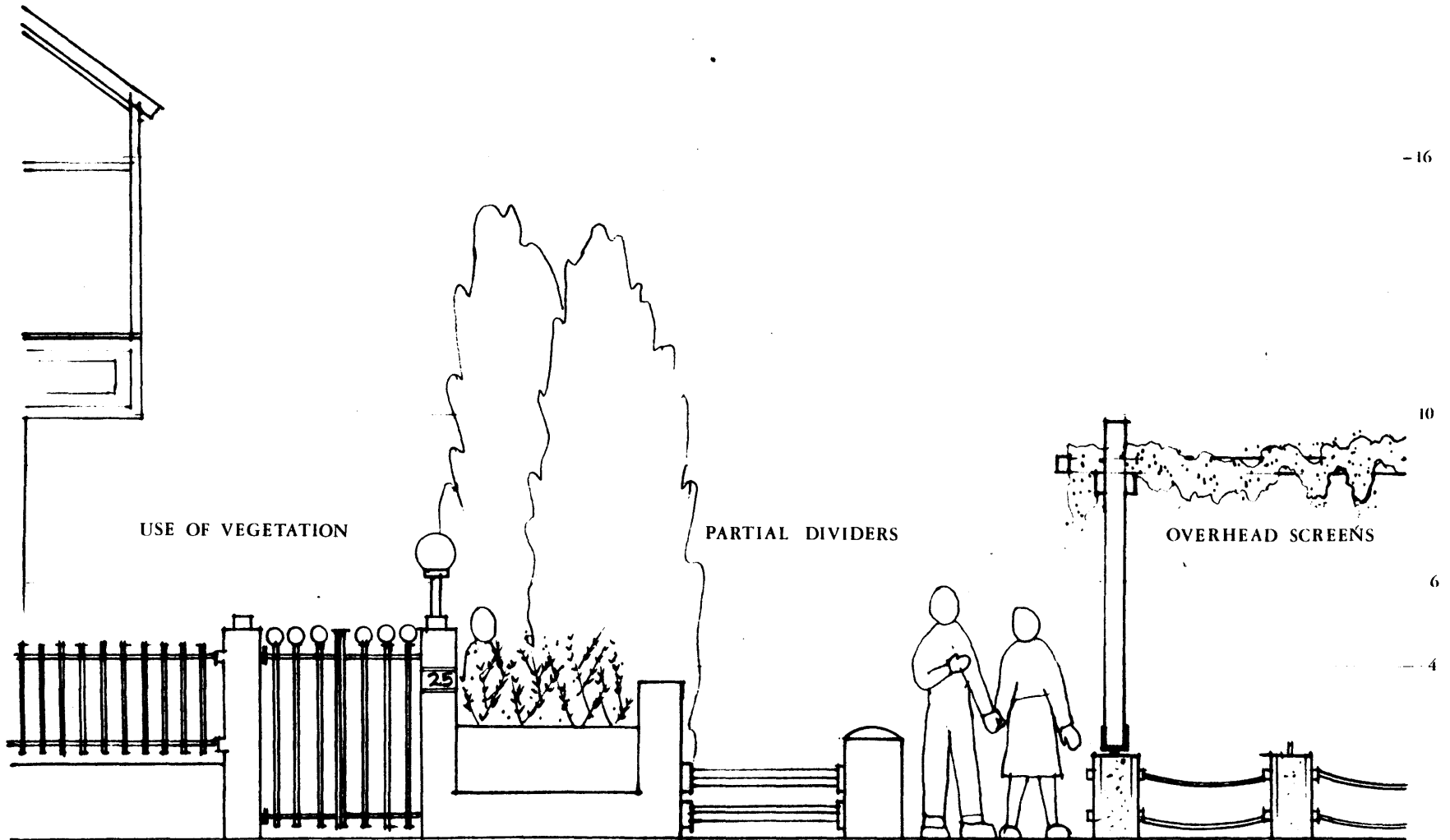




with the masonry. Larger commercial establishments or institutions might commission the design of more elaborate fencing.

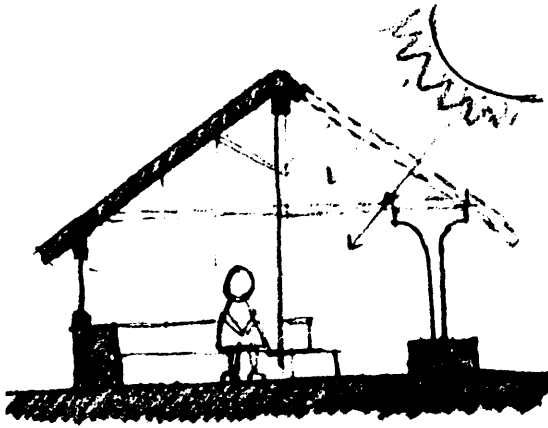
Some rules might be established to control to edge of the building and create the kind of transition zone represented by the numerous balconies in town. If a new multi-family housing were built, there is the possibility of either iron balconies, some kind of second-level circulation system, or designing these add-ons as a second-egress system. One might expect this outside edge to be used in the warmer weather and act as a sun screen, and place for people and plants..

More vegetation will be used to screen. Larger trees can add a kind of backdrop, and hedges can define privacies. A combination metal-work screen overgrown with vines or ivy will also be employed.



FENCING AND SCREENS

Seating



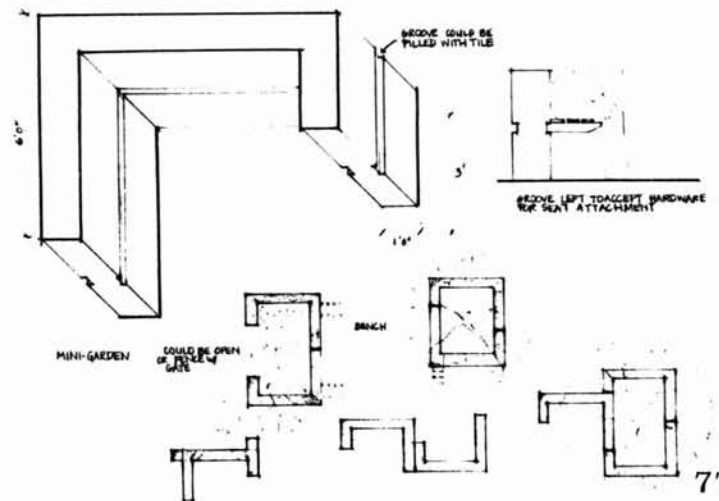
If you want and expect people to spend any amount of time outdoors, adequate seating has to be provided. This does not mean there should be benches everywhere. Low walls, stoops, and thresholds are often the most popular vantage points. People love to be part of the activity, to sit and watch the crowds go by, stopping those they know to talk. This kind of casual encounter usually happens where informal seating is provided.

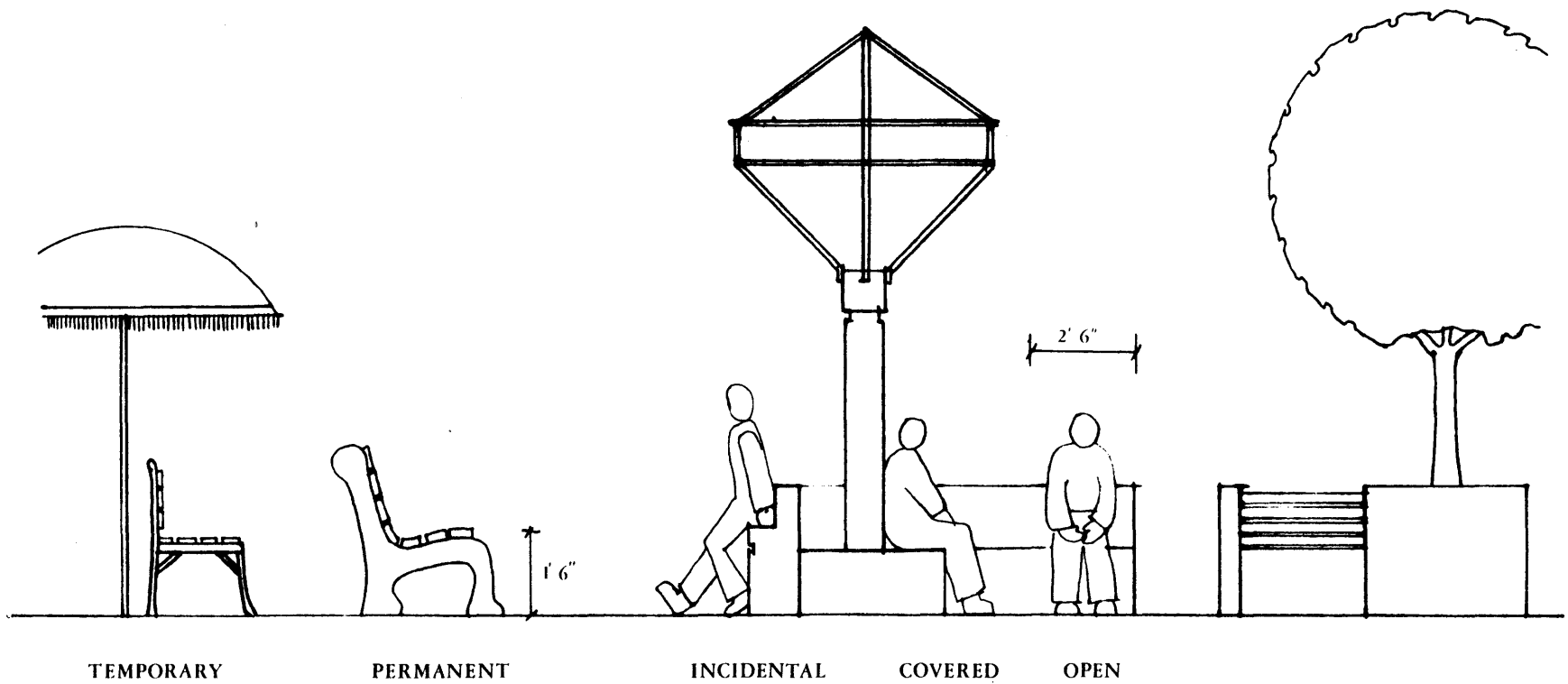
While it would be foolish to compare the level of activity on Main Street with the Rue St. Michel, there is need for more seating than is presently available. In some areas, actual park benches can be provided. In others, certain parts of the building or structure itself will be of dimensions convenient for sitting. The kind of formal sitting arrangement of Winthrop Square seems more related to a quiet, secluded and shady park. Protection from the traffic on Main Street is needed for any park or sitting arrangement where people might be expected to spend extended periods of time.

Seating requirements for different ages and uses should be reflected in a range of types. Some people might want to see the activity without themselves being on display. Others want to be visible. For different seasons and weather conditions both open and covered places should be provided. Quiet places should be developed, as well as very active and busy ones. Temporary chairs might be seasonally employed in some places. Opportunities for sitting both alone or with others should be provided. In all cases people should have protection, outlook, and be comfortable.

I have chosen a series of pieces . . . some would be precast, others might be granite. In the pouring process, recesses for decorative infill of tile mosaics or enamel information plaques can be left, as well as hardware attached to accept the addition of lighting, fencing and signage.

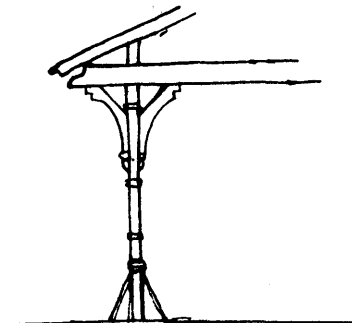
Study



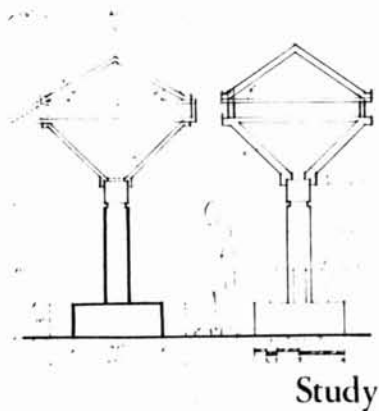


Covered Paths and Outdoor Shelters

Some elements of the street vocabulary are immediately associated with certain cities. This is particularly true when a place has outdoor shelters or covered paths where space is provided for collective social interaction. Paris is one example--from the subway entrances and outdoor cafes to the kiosks and bookstalls, the city has built and refined an urban landscape that one immediately associates with. In American cities a building system for outdoor shelters and covered paths might begin to have the kind of impact which could counterbalance that of the automobile. If we expect and need a density of people using and inhabiting the streets, making them lively, safe and interesting places to spend time, then certain amenities have to be offered--at the very least protection from the wind and rain. People should be able to do a series of errands, stop and get a cup of coffee, sit and wait for someone, all the time having the option of being out of the rain. This is not the same as saying we need more indoor malls--far from it. The more we build suburban malls, the less chances older commercial areas have to stay alive and compete.



A range of covering types are proposed for Charlestown. Where buildings do not form a continuous facade, individual awnings might be employed. A more continuous arcade might be built against existing buildings when they form a more continuous wall. Since the town does not have the level of activity of Washington Street, I thought a continuous arcade of major proportions was not appropriate. The built form is eclectic. Several buildings along Main Street are somewhat delicate in materials and of residential scale. Here canvas awnings for ground floor offices and shops could be used. Some of the brick buildings might have a metal space frame attachment with either glass or canvas covering. In new construction, the continuity of a covered way would be required. In this case it could be more integrated with the design of the building.

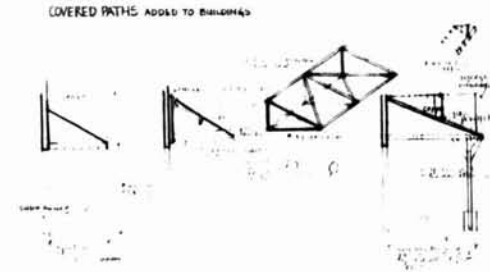


I explored a general system which could be adapted and partially used as the situation warranted. I wanted a column which itself offered protection and implied a sheltering quality. The light and diaphanous quality of early cast-iron and glass structures, pavilions and railroad stations might be duplicated with a kind of space frame. I wanted the actual column to have some presence and authority. The base should be ample and provide a place for people to rest on. In some places the roof will

be copper clad--reminiscent of the old El stations and a bit decorative and whimsical.

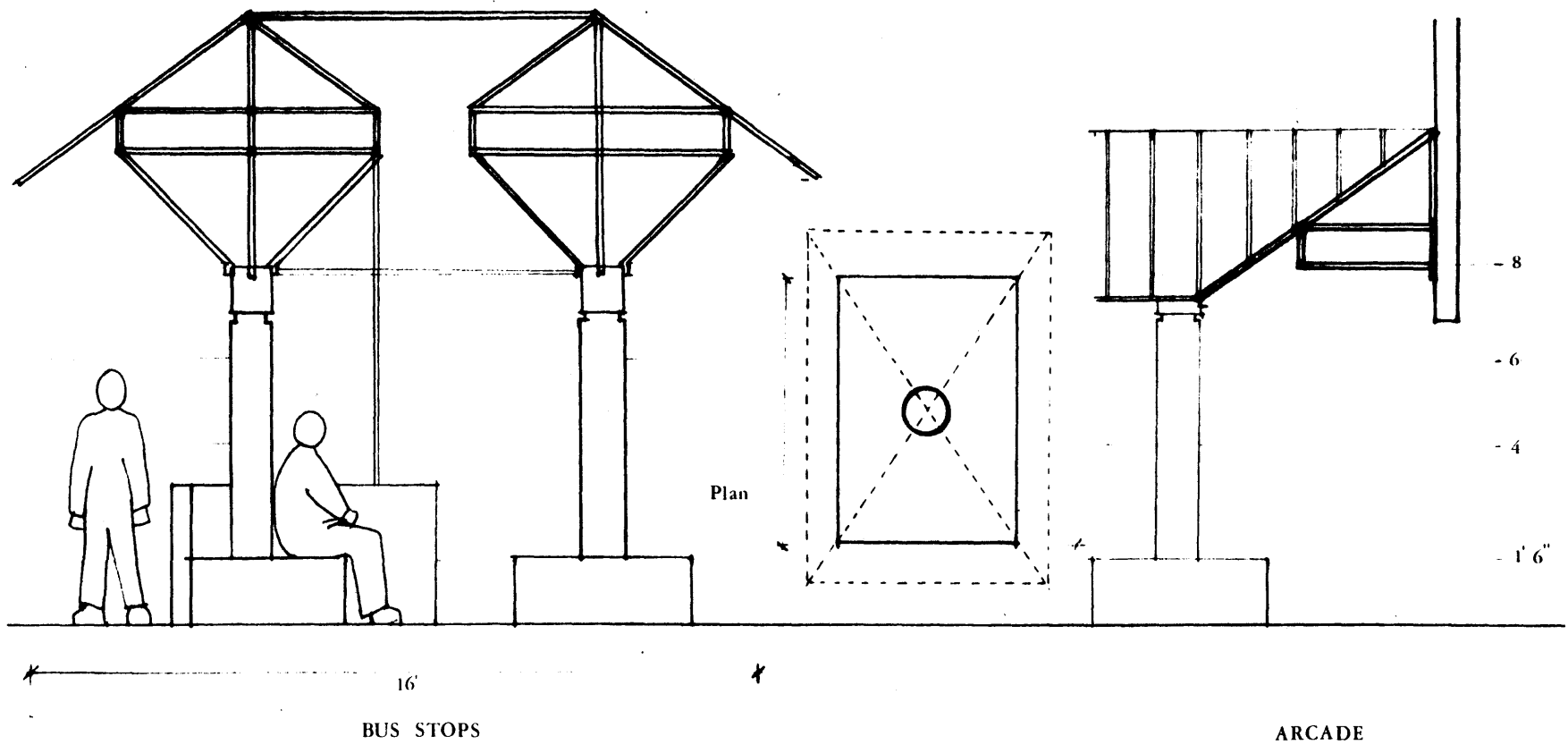
People would move along the direction of the path and sometimes the path would be part of an entrance zone which people would filter through. Outdoor shelters along the way serve as bus stops and small places, to sit, rest or socialize in. At this time things like magazine stalls or fruit and vegetable stands are not used, but eventually they might find ample room and definition in the framework being provided. In more important focal places the kind of structure being suggested could serve as an anchor and become a catalyst for activity. Perhaps someone aggressively pursuing community development could arrange for a small greenmarket once a week. The kind of flea market presently held in drive-ins and shopping center parking lots could make use of the regional location of Charlestown and the availability of parking. At one point firewood was brought in from the outlying woodlots and sold in Thompson Square--perhaps we will be seeing the return of these kinds of enterprises.

The orientation of the buildings is important in designing the covered way. Where glare and heat gain are a problem, the awnings could provide shade. Presently in the afternoons, the tellers in the Post Office cannot see



Study

who is buying a stamp from them, even when they are wearing sun glasses. Many other shops have to pull down unsightly yellow plastic shades to cut out the direct glare of the sun. The other side of the street however needs all the warming effects and natural light as possible. A solid continuous arcade on this side would not be a pleasant place to walk, and a glass or translucent plastic panel should be used instead.

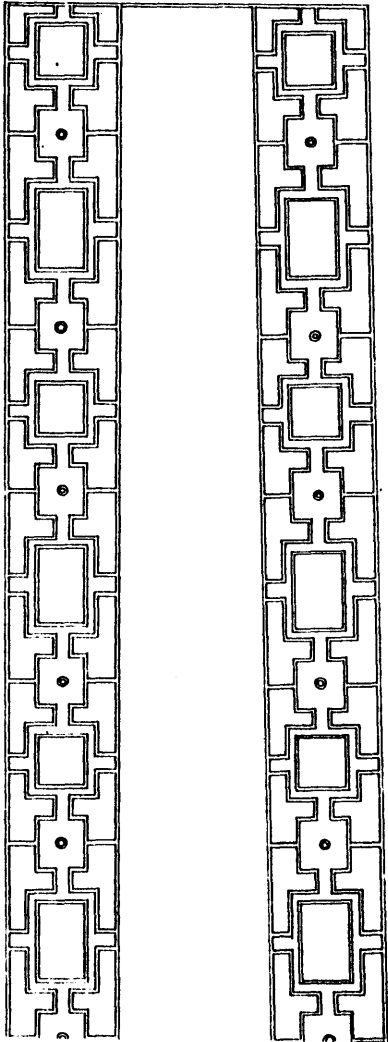


COVERED PATHS AND OUTDOOR SHELTERS

Paving

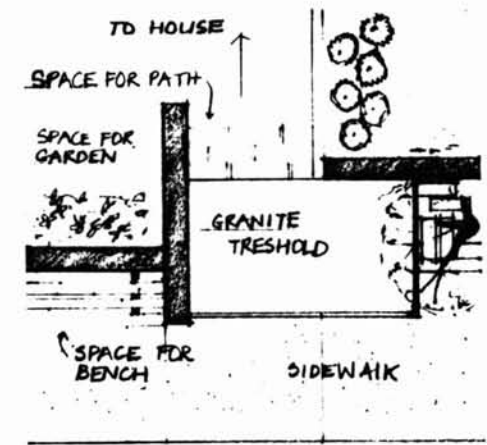
The existing paving materials in Charlestown are basically functional: asphalt roads, concrete sidewalks with granite curbs, some decorative brick, and remnants of mosaic entryways to stores. Manholes, drains and utility covers are cast iron, some quite decorative. Steps and thresholds are often slabs of granite. The overall condition of the sidewalks is poor in most places. They are cracked and uneven and wheeling a carriage can be difficult. Where the city is improving and widening the sidewalks, they are basically adding a continuous strip of brick to the outside edge. While this may be the only affordable thing to do, at the very least the dimensions of the brick could be varied.

The proposed materials are chosen to both complement and contrast existing materials. While a built pedestrian path will be continuous, there will be places to stop off of it. In some larger collective spaces, the surface has a separate pattern. Other spaces are left for infill by individuals, both merchants and residents alike.



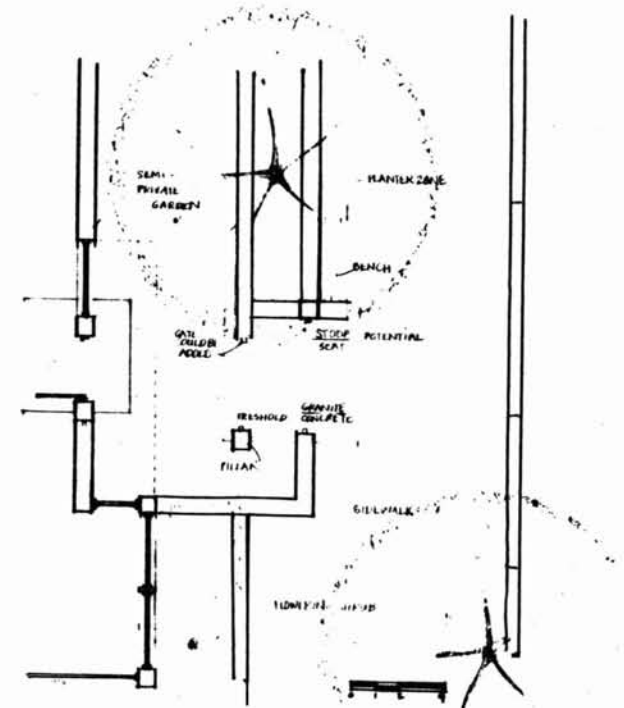
Venice

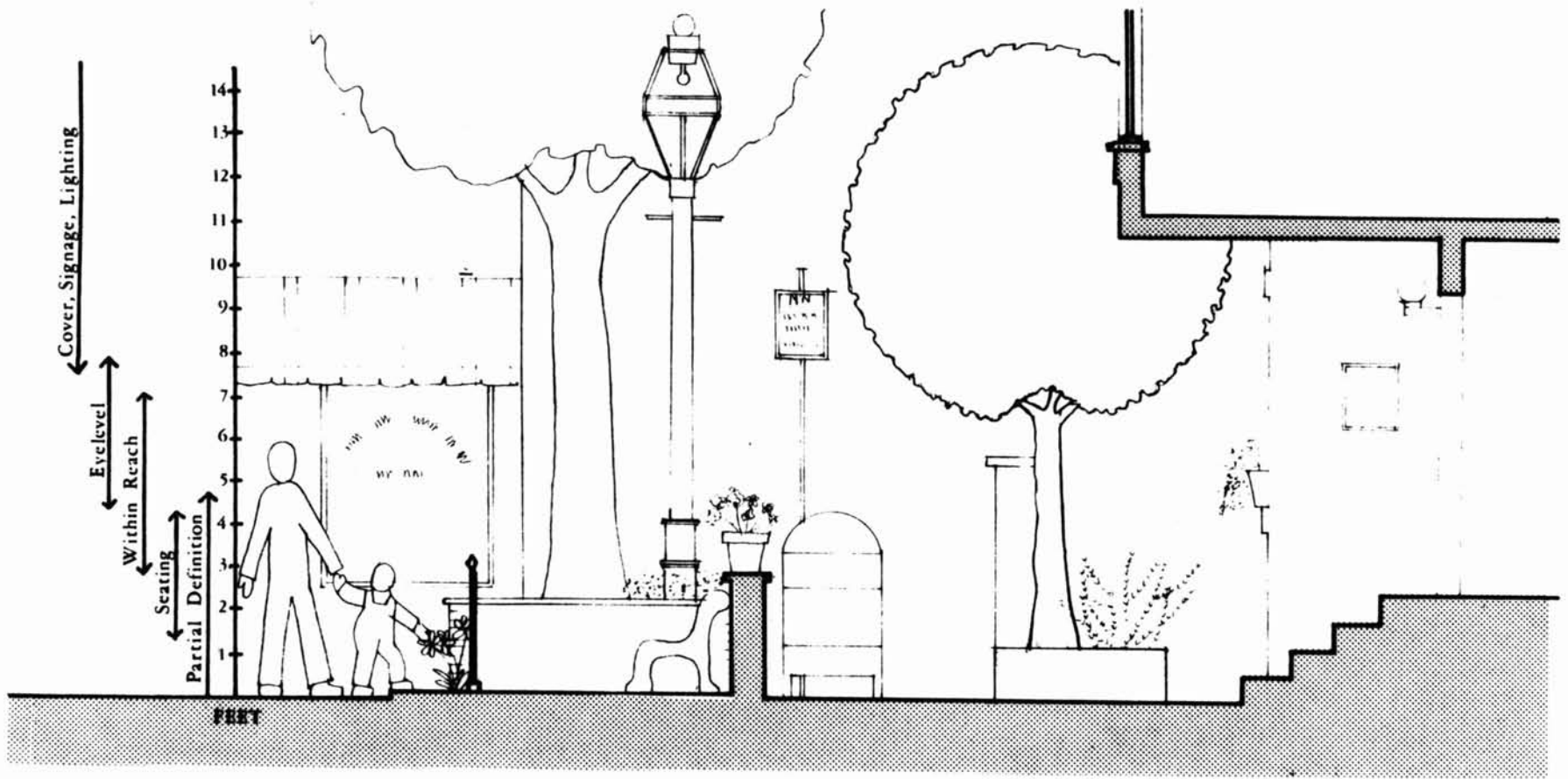
The paving helps delineate where cars should go and where they should be excluded from. The change of surface materials might signal the motorist to slow down. While I have not thought it appropriate to close major street to cars, making large malls for pedestrians, I do think that cars should not be allowed everywhere indiscriminately. Some parts of streets which are already infrequently used might become places for pedestrians and outdoor community use, like the short stretch of Pleasant Street in front of the Warren Tavern, and in the rear of the elderly apartments on Prescott Street.



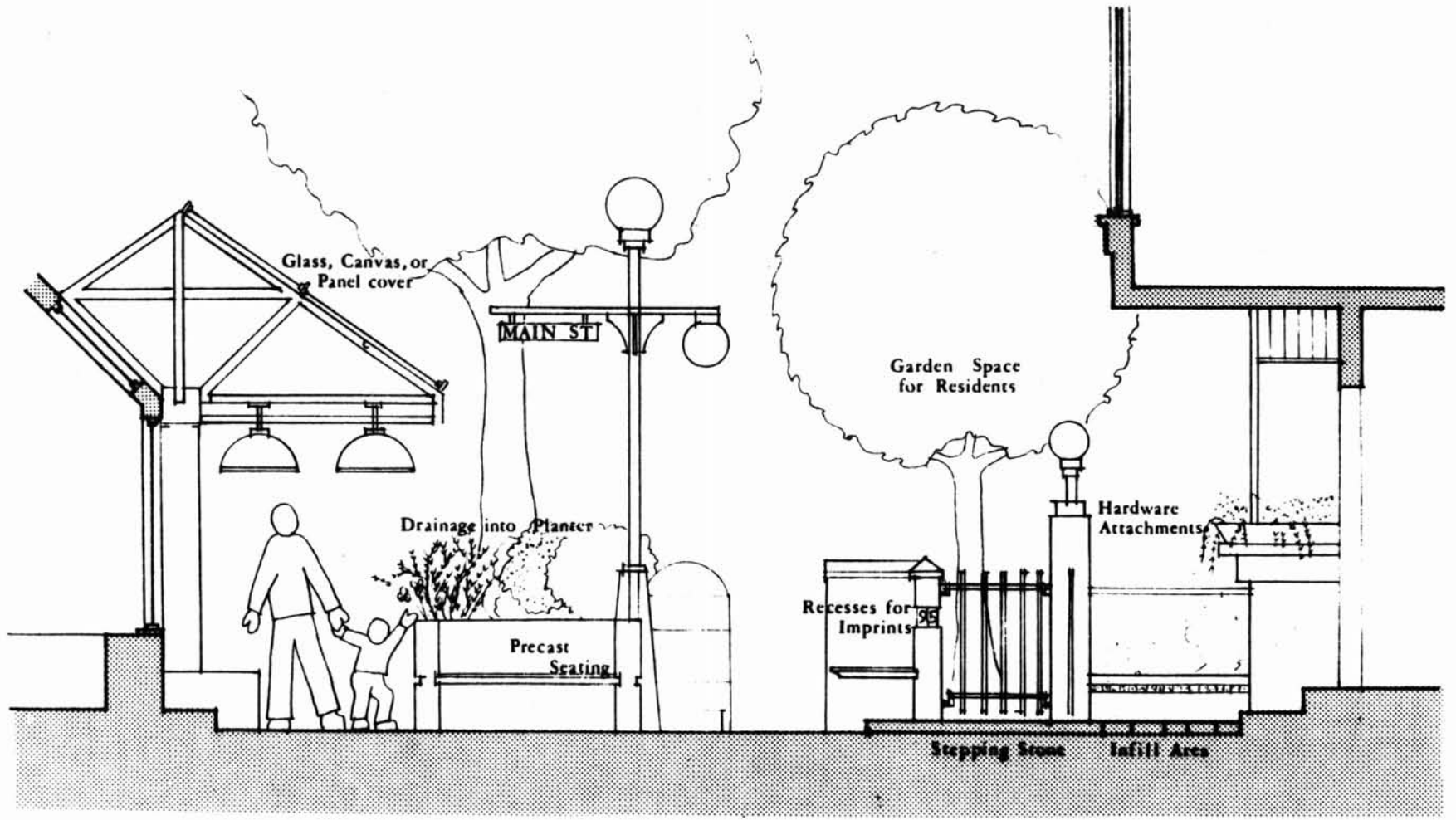
In front of the mansion was a broad walk paved with checkered marble tiles; around the garden were paths covered with dark Medford gravel, and bordered with box as well as fruit trees; while beside green street was a noble row of horsechestnuts.

Charles Hunnewell
Local Historian



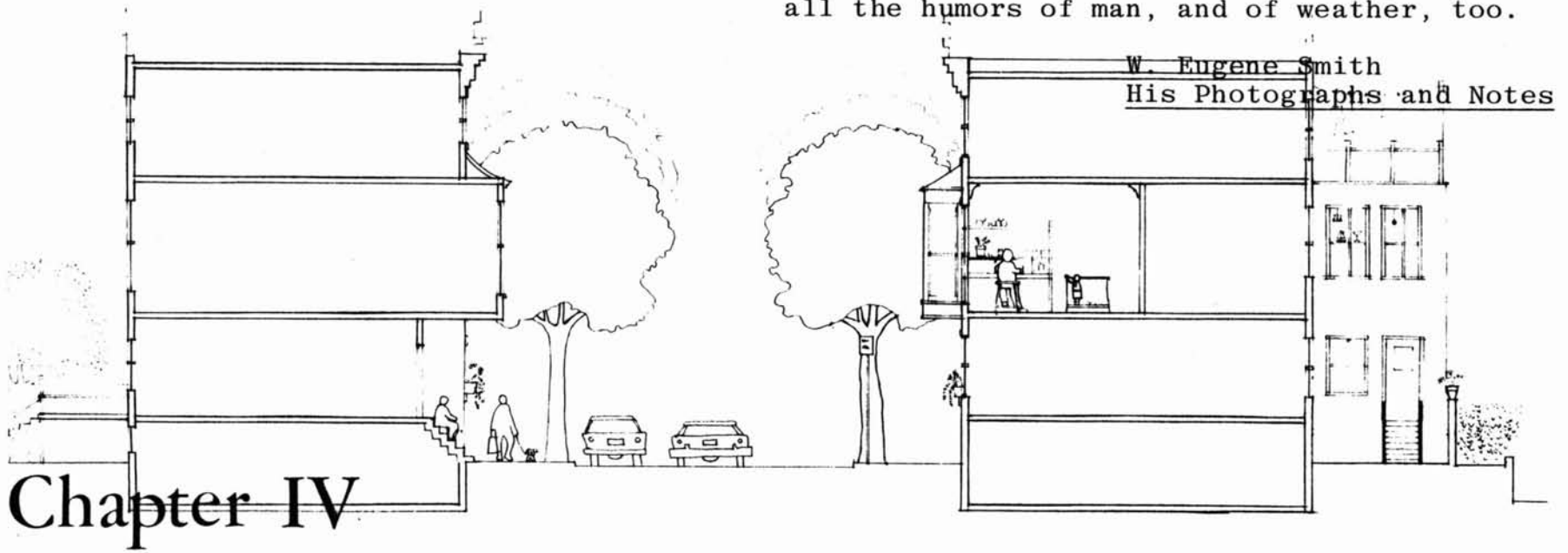


EXISTING STRUCTURE



PROPOSED ADDITIONS

As from my window I sometimes glance. The loft I live in, from inside out. A dirty, begrimed, firetrap sort of a place, with space. It has claimed--together with another view, one of "inside in"--more film than I have ever given to any project. The reasons: on the outside is Sixth Avenue, the flower district, with my window as proscenium arch. The street is staged with all the humors of man, and of weather, too.

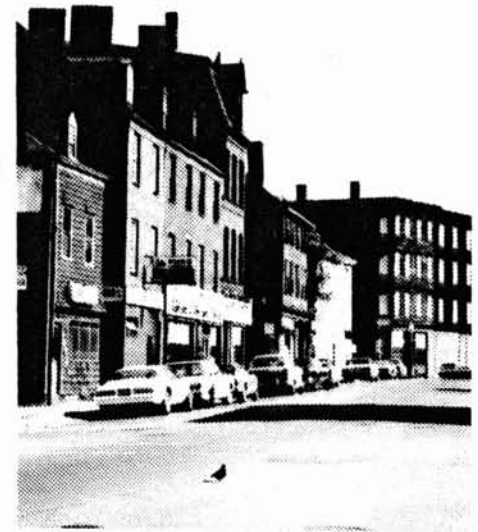


A General Plan

Thompson Square and City Square are important nodes where regional traffic converges. They should become landmarks, gateways, places where entertainment, business and shopping are located. Special paving patterns should characterize these collective spaces. Trees, lighting, seating, places for community notices, phones, and perhaps something larger, like a public clock, should be built here.

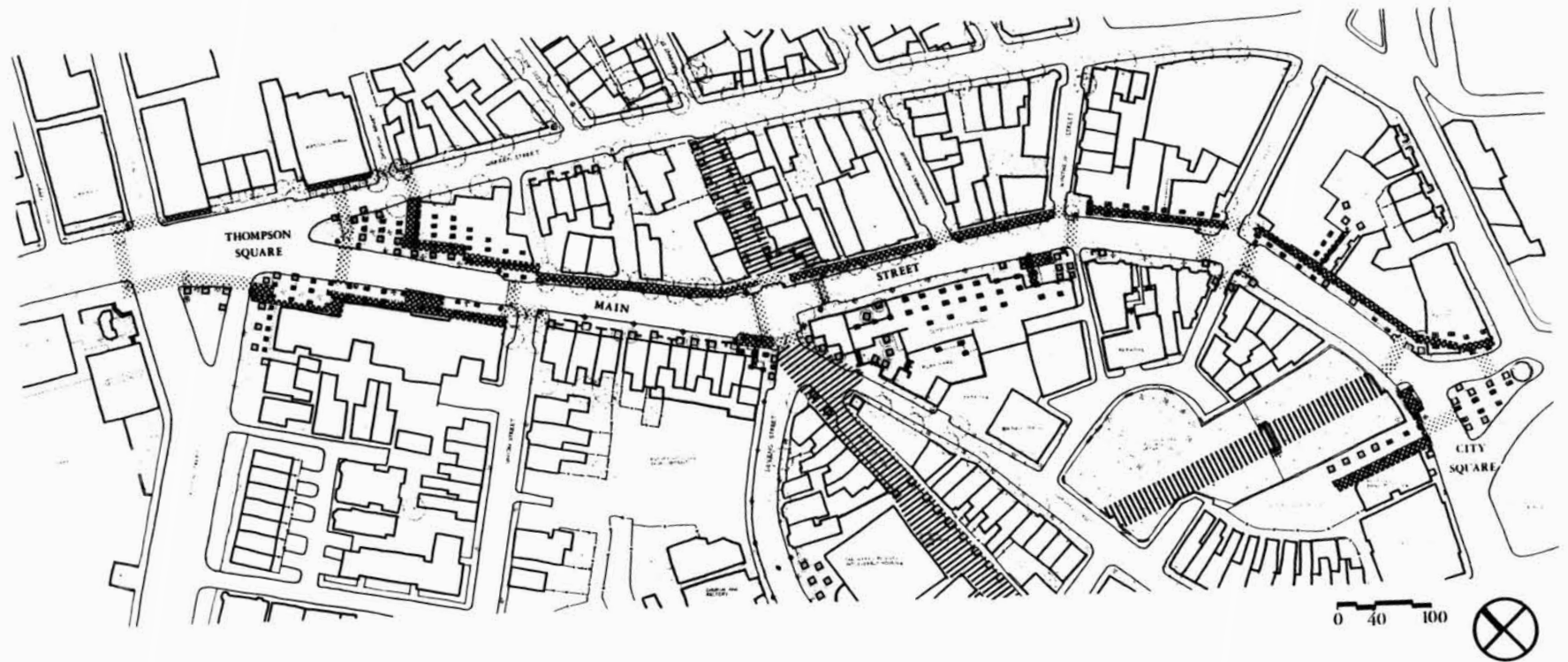
The triangle of land bounded by Main and Warren Streets approaching Thompson Square should be developed as an identifiable piece of lively mixed use. Small-scale housing, shops and professional offices would be appropriate. The short stretch of Pleasant Street could be closed to cars, and shops could front on a pedestrian way.




This pedestrian street leads into the Main Street where a pleasant place is created as Town Hill rises up to the right. Prescott Street is not a busy through street. Perhaps this too could be closed to through traffic and become outdoor space for collective use by the elderly.



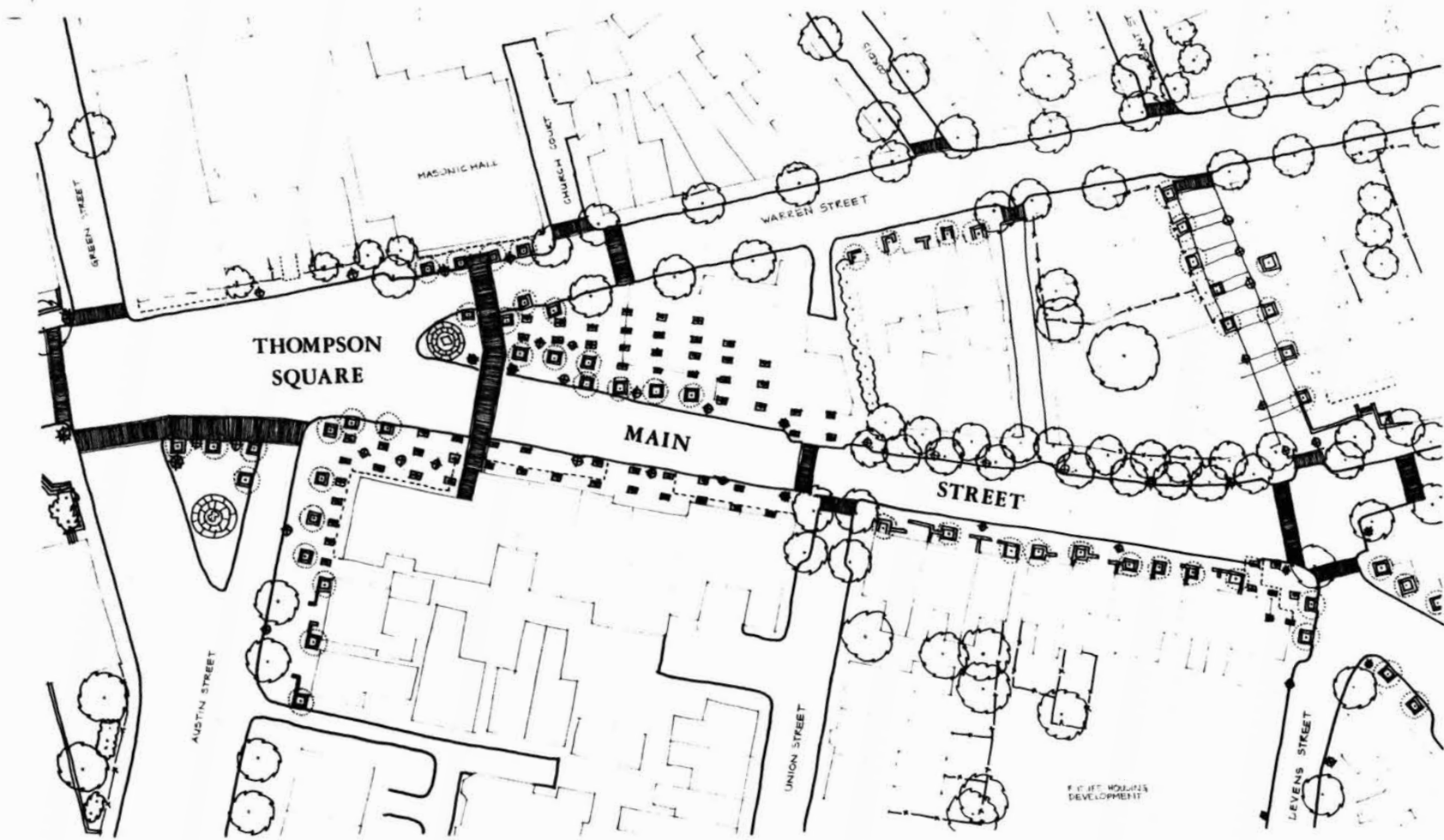


MAIN STREET TODAY



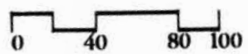
-  Crossings
-  Covered Paths
-  Pedestrian "Streets"

PEDESTRIAN NETWORKS







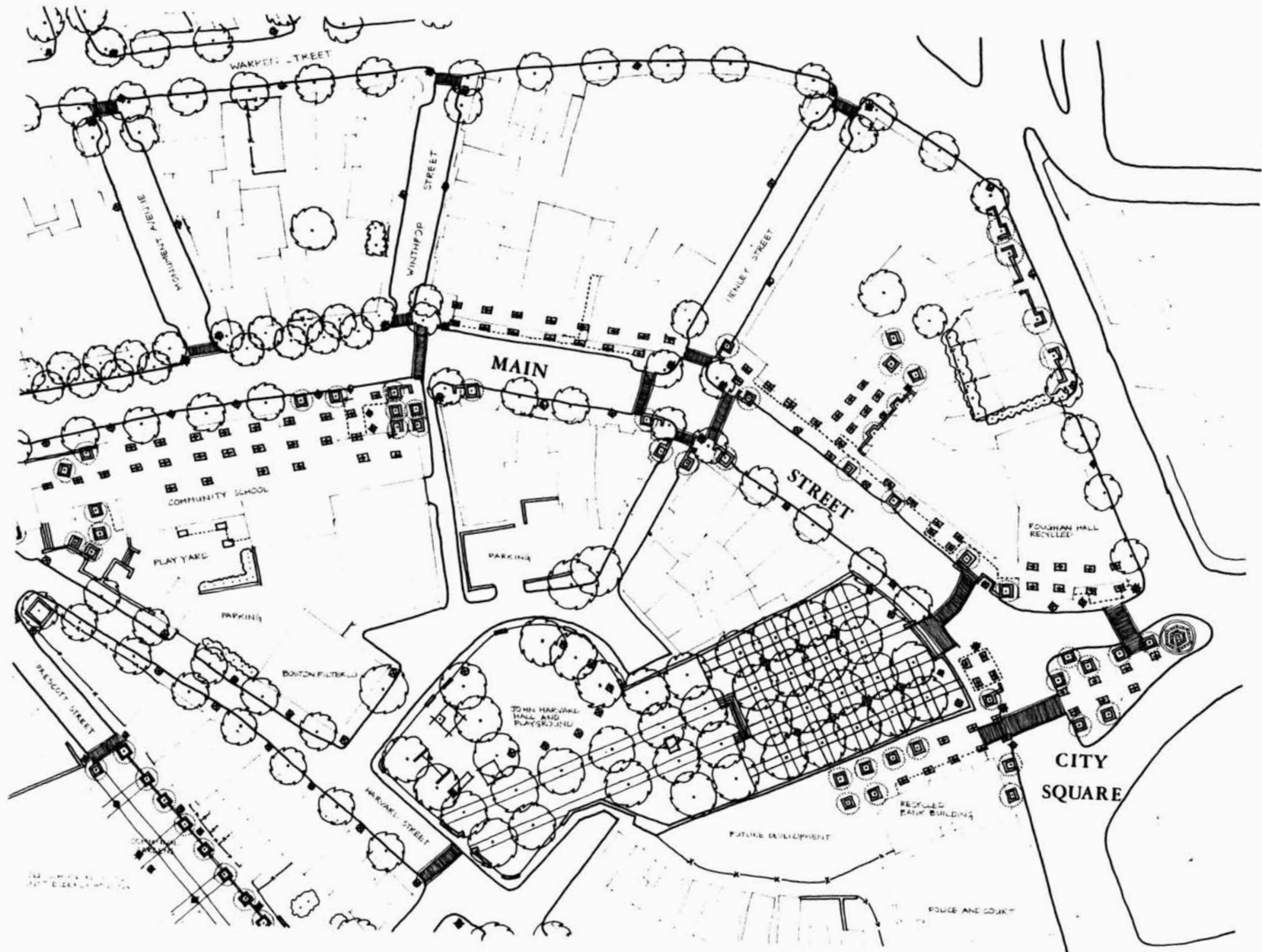
A PLAN FOR MAIN STREET

Scale: 1" = 40'



Legend

-  Canopy Trees
-  Planters with Flowering Trees
-  Single, Multiple pole Streetlights
-  Framework

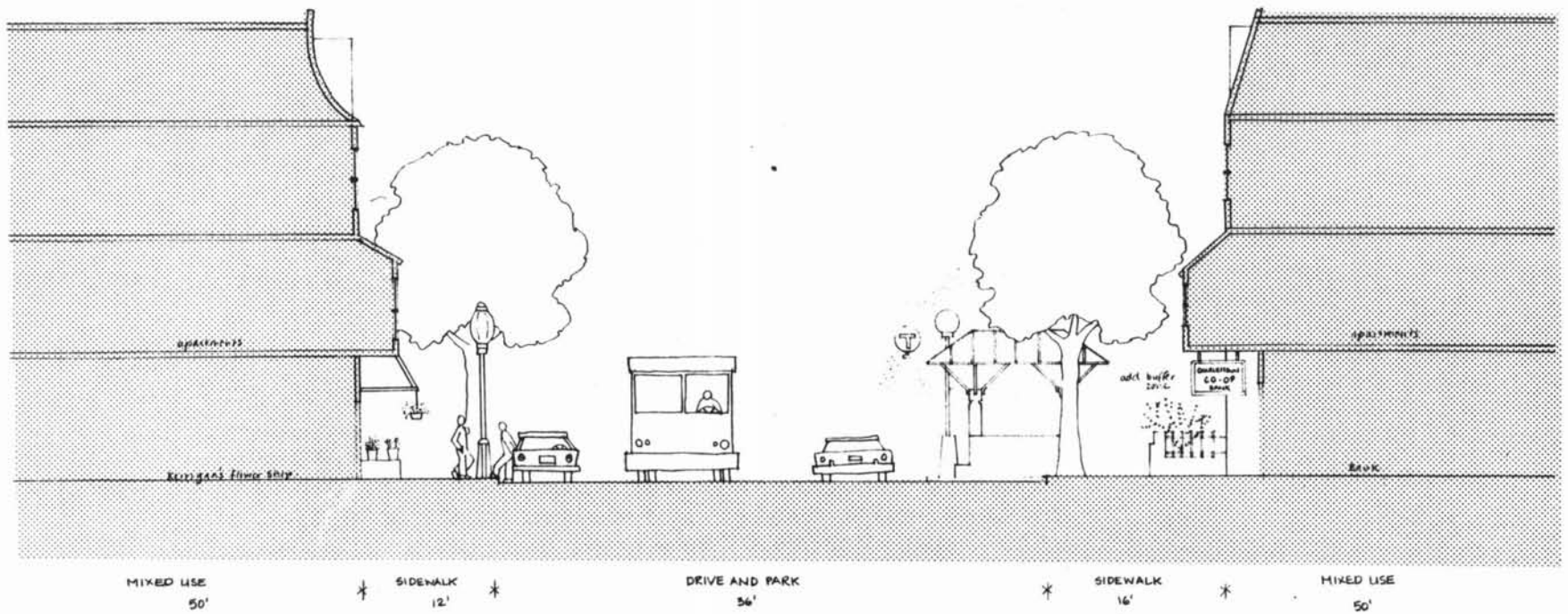




SECTIONS

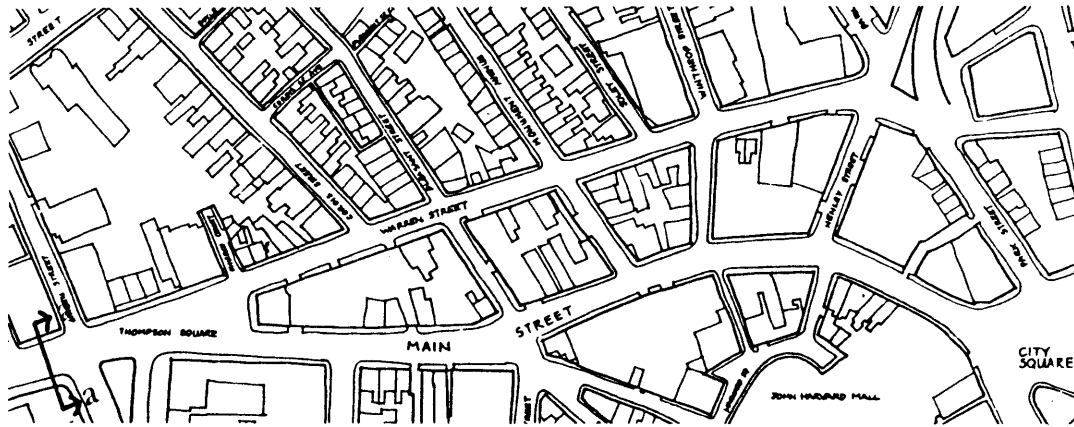
A series of sections follows. In them I have explored different ways to use the framework to create a range of uses and conditions. Together the sections are not meant to represent the final design but to be a forum for testing how the major components could be manipulated. It was not possible to represent everything. Major trees, some lighting, the framework structure, and seating are suggested. Ultimately there would be additional signage, more street furniture (like phone booths and drinking fountains), and specific buildings.

These sections also provide the opportunity to discuss different aspects of the public domain which might be controlled by urban design guidelines. How the framework responds to existing conditions can be seen, as well as the progression which one might experience travelling along the street.



A Typical Section



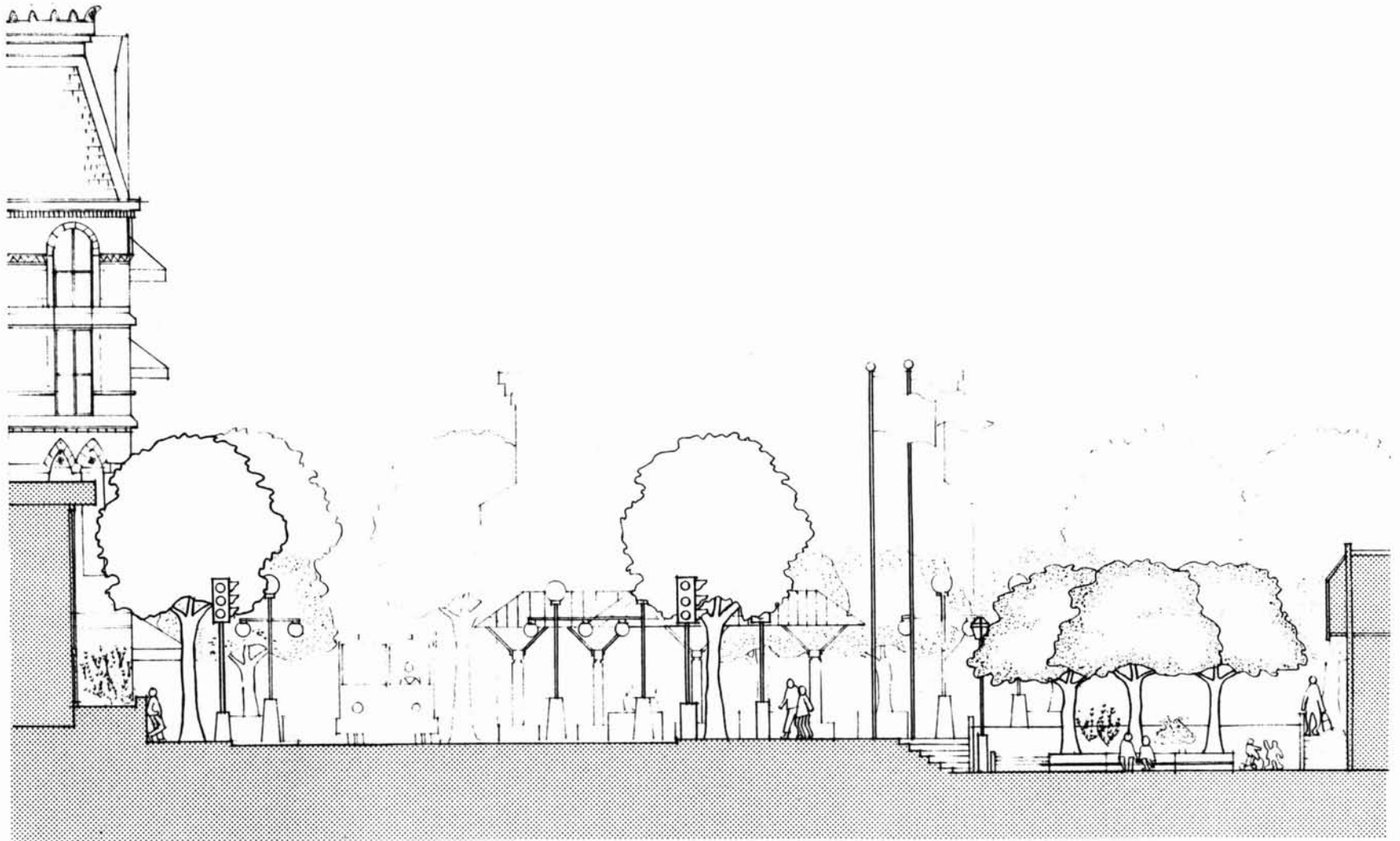


A-A

Here, some existing conditions are seen. A recessed corner park was built with the new shopping mall and provides some traditional park bench seating, although it is a bit removed for street watching. Sitting against the library wall across the street is more popular, especially with teenagers. The low, set-back shopping center does not define the street and adds to the scalelessness of Thompson Square.

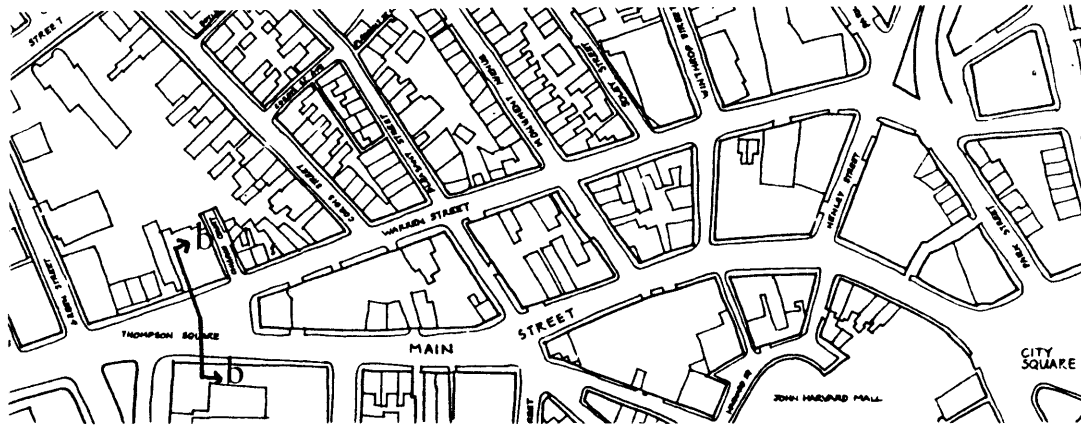
Ahead is the more ornate Charlestown Bank building, but the other buildings which exist are inappropriate in scale and quality for what could be a strong neighborhood focus. I've suggested a larger building straight ahead as one approaches Thompson Square. Some physical closure is needed to stop one's travel and define the place of the square where the proposed framework begins.

The square, seen more in the next few sections, can become a lively place where traffic converges, buses stop and a variety of services are concentrated. Perhaps eventually some outdoor markets or individual vendors could find their way here.



A-A

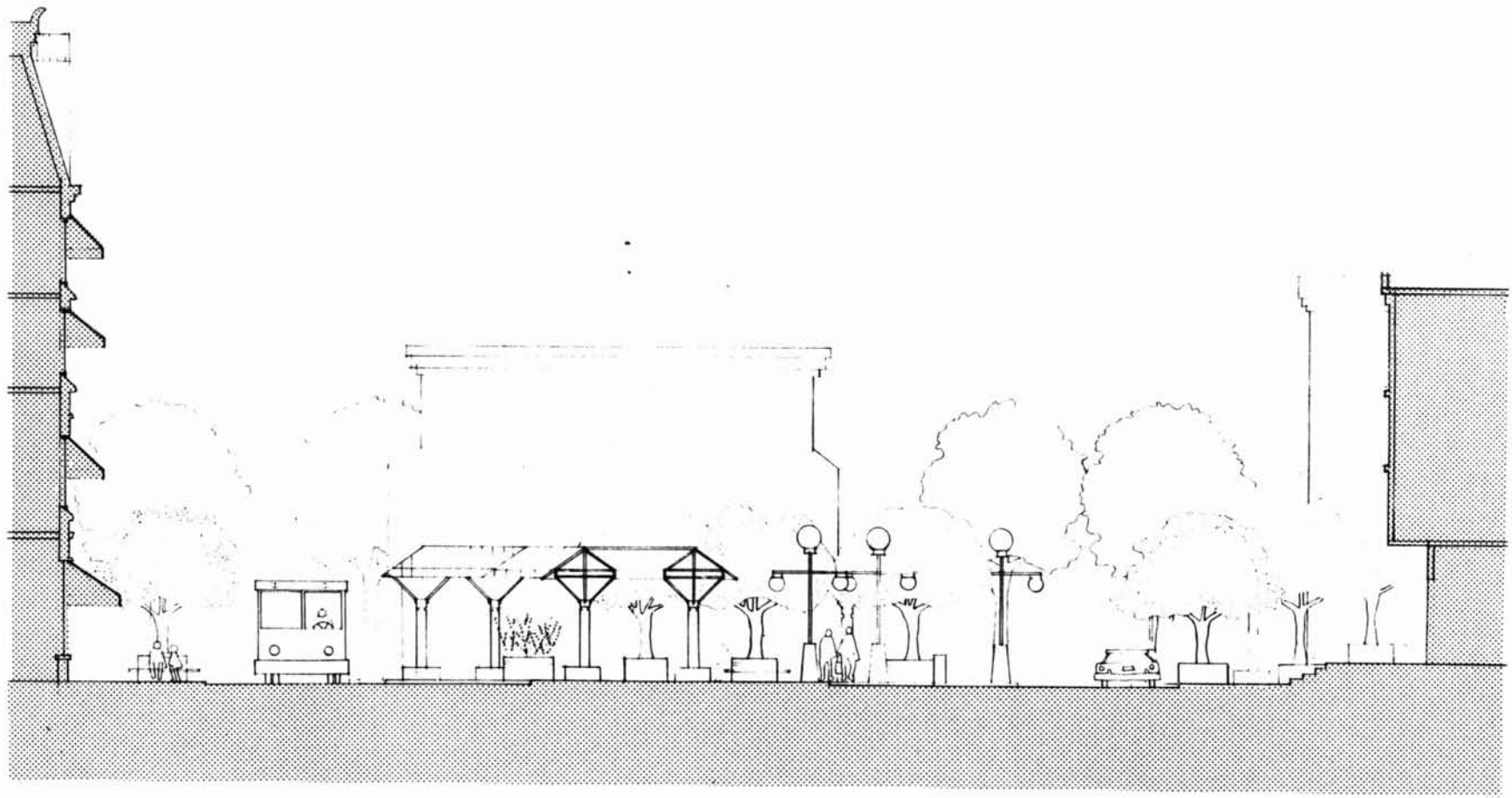




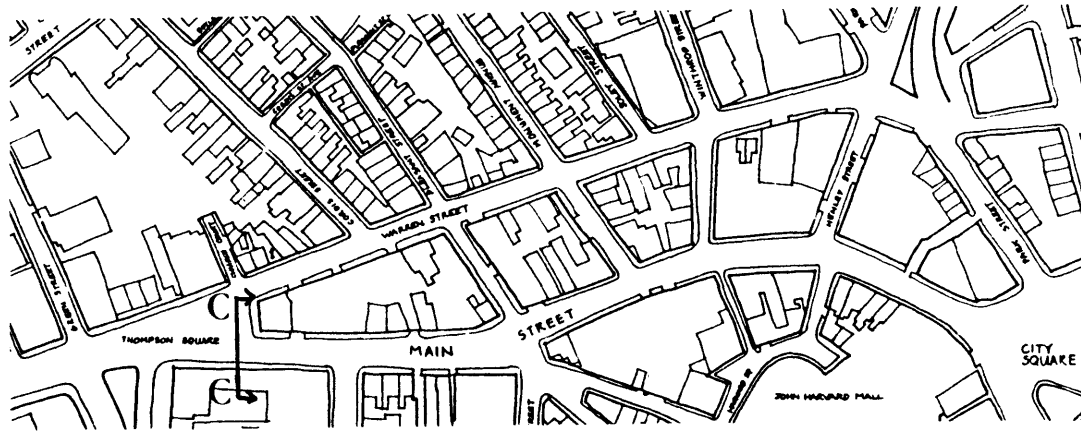
B-B

The facade of the Savings Bank Building is dominating. It is an ornate plane which comes straight down to meet the sidewalk. Widening the sidewalk, planting several flowering trees in a simple row would, with the awnings which provide cover, begin to make the space outside of the building a place to stand or sit and talk.

A continuity of paving patterns and a crossing linking the rest of the square is important. On the right is an entrance to what might be some kind of educational facility. Where a more gradual transition is needed, more dimension should be given and a level change. The inside use becomes more private than the public commercial space across the street. The outside space can be part of the collective use of the square.



B-B

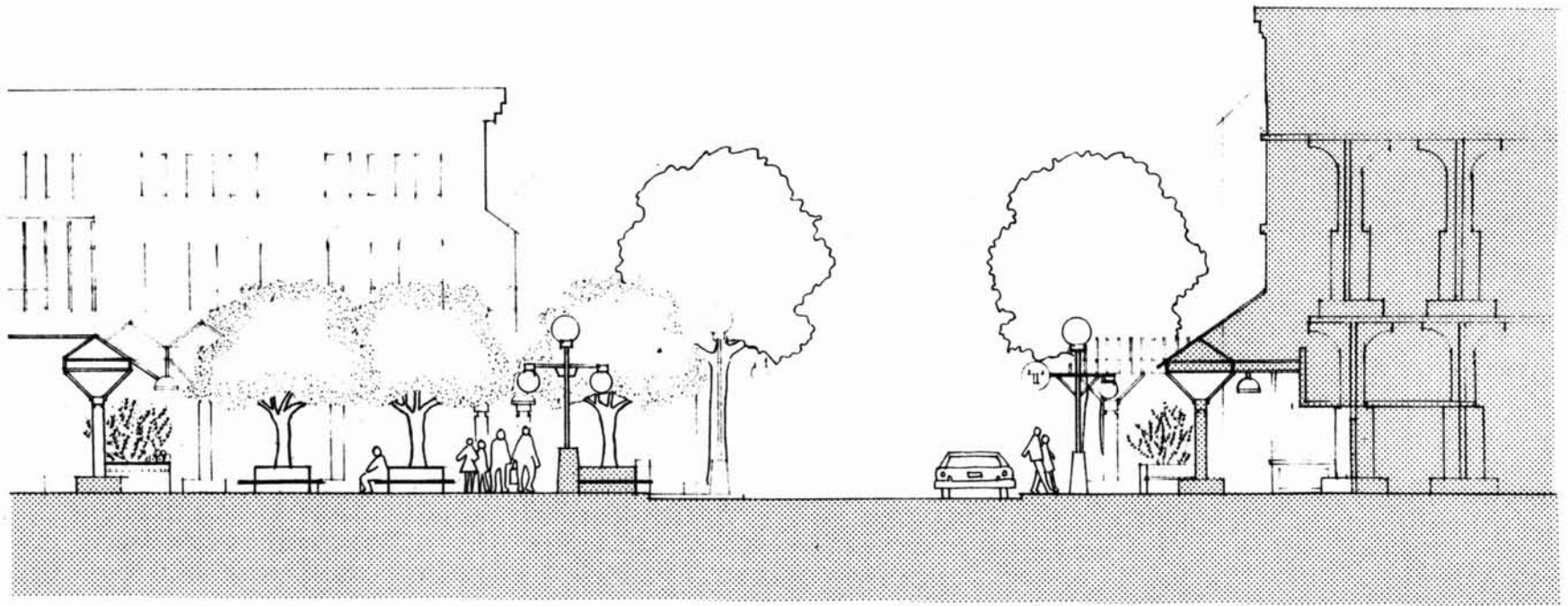


C-C

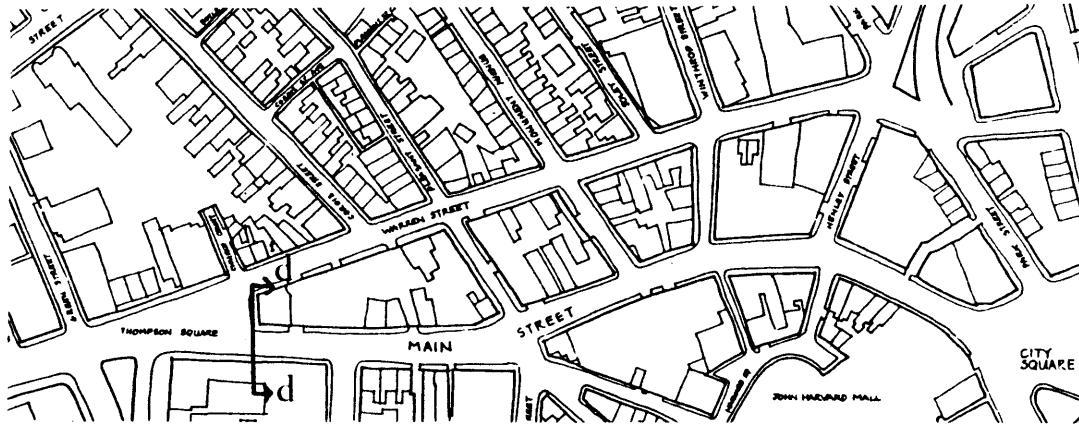
The new construction on the right might have a building system which would be used for all new mixed commercial and office space. The zone between the interior of the building and the sidewalk edge is a place where a variety of things could happen. Partial covering, lighting, and signage could be hung. Shops might have space for temporary displays. This edge does not get as much direct sunlight as the other side of the street and cover here should be transparent.

Ahead, bus stops should be easily identified and provide shelter. The canopy trees delineate the paths, the flowering trees places to stop, with seating being provided.

The image of Thompson Square is a busy place, full of activity. Entertainment establishments might be encouraged to locate here.



C-C

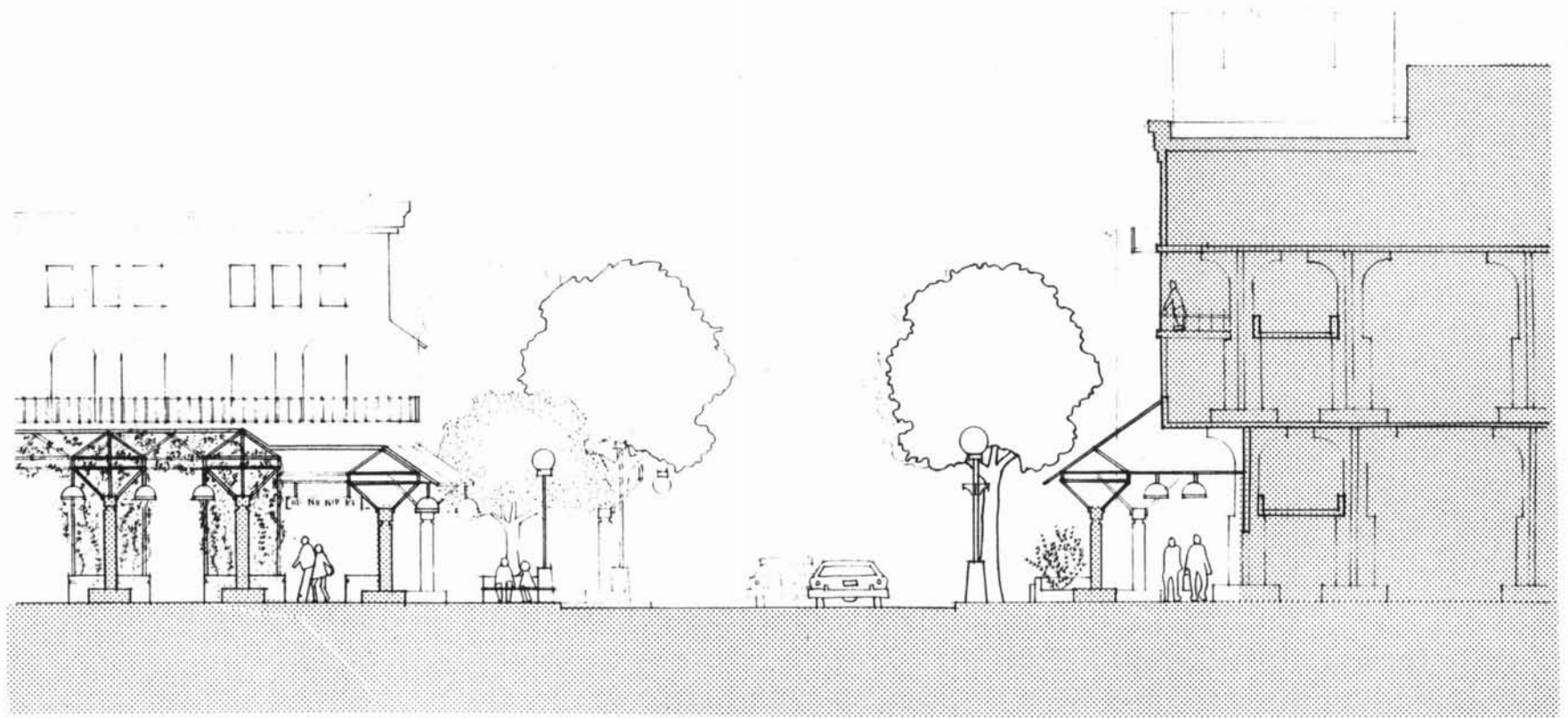


D-D

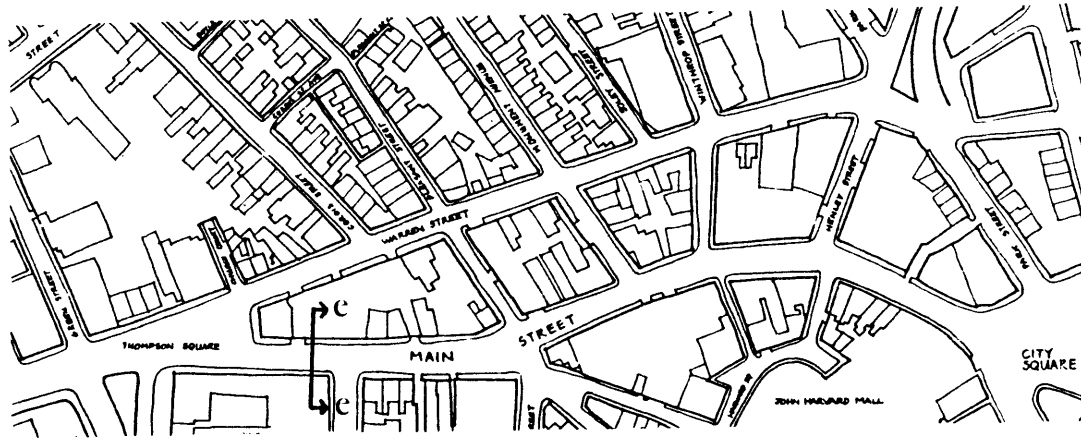
The exact form of new buildings might fall within a range established by building heights, rooflines, set backs, and such things as the relationship of solids to voids in the elevation. Careful thought should be given to what kinds of controls should be exercised. Guidelines written for historical districts are examples of the physical qualities controlled.

Dictating a building system might have implications for the elevation and organization of the buildings. Percentages of glass to wall area are already the kinds of things the new energy code controls.

Deciding where distribution happens inside a building can be a decision which controls all subsequent uses of space. Perhaps a double loaded corridor system would not be able to be over a certain length before it had access to the edge.



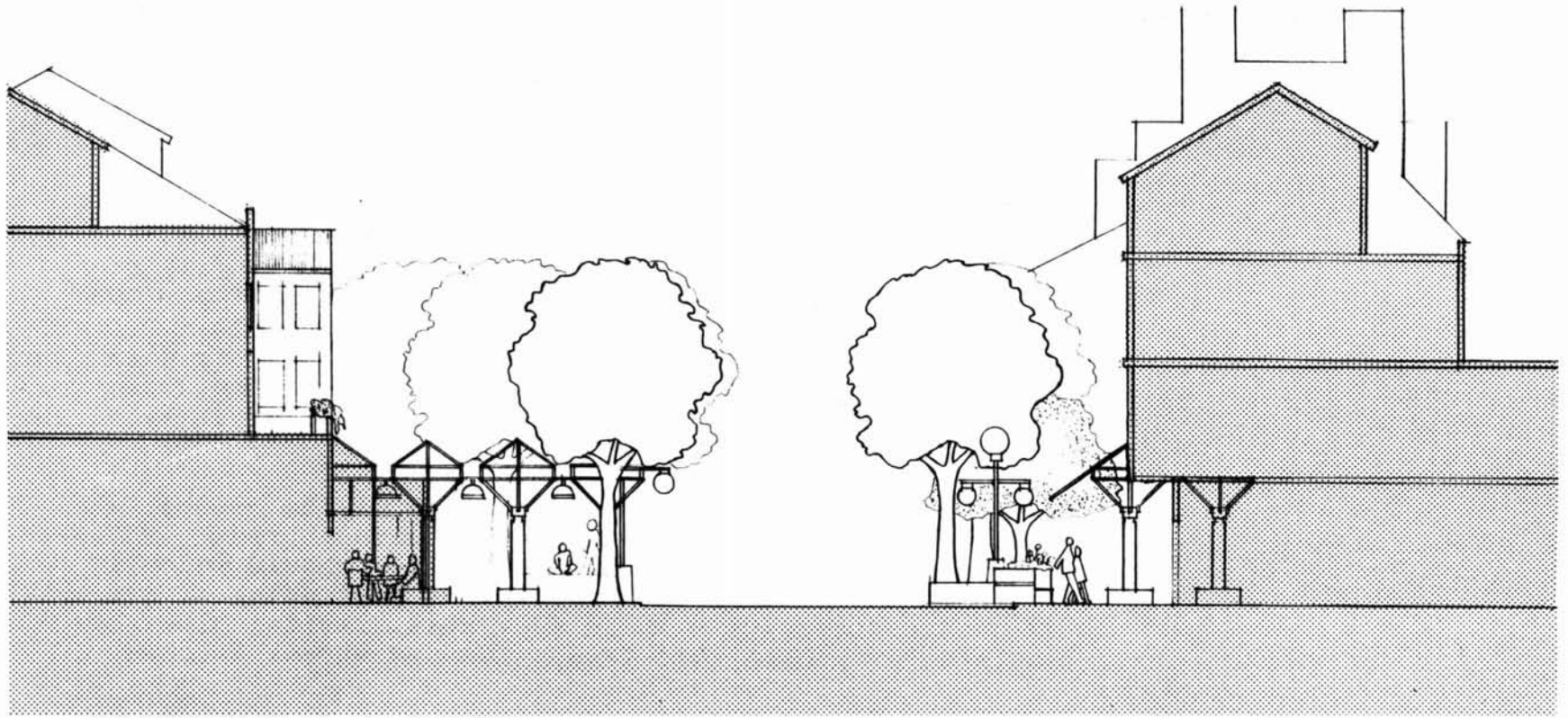
DD



E-E

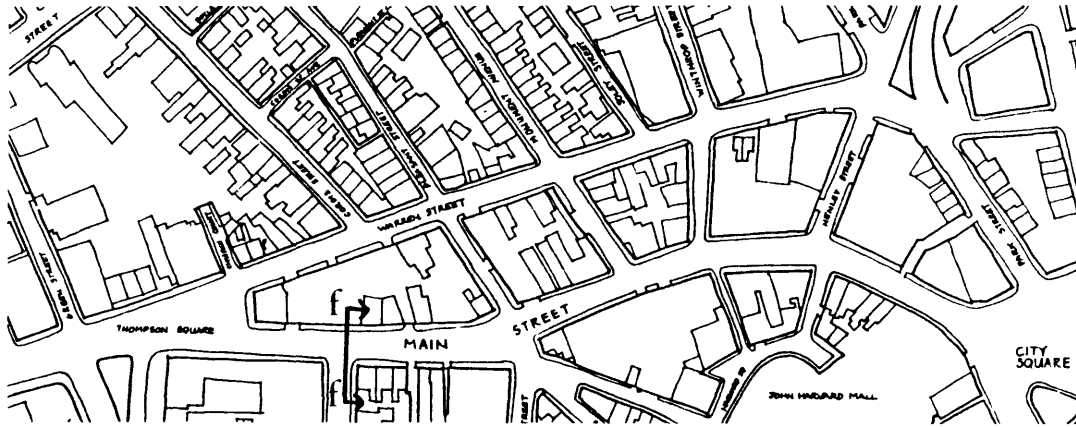
Like Parisian cafés which are actually built into the sidewalk and can be glassed in in colder weather, parts of the column system could be similarly used. There should be places where a whole territory is defined by a grouping of these columns. Likewise, in other places, the columns should be employed in a simple, straightforward way.

Usually different things should be happening on each side of the street. In places one side would be more commercial and active, while the other side might serve more of a background or supportive role. As use on one side changes, it would overlap for a short distance with the use on the other side. In such places, one might expect to find a street crossing and activity associated with intersections.



4 8 16

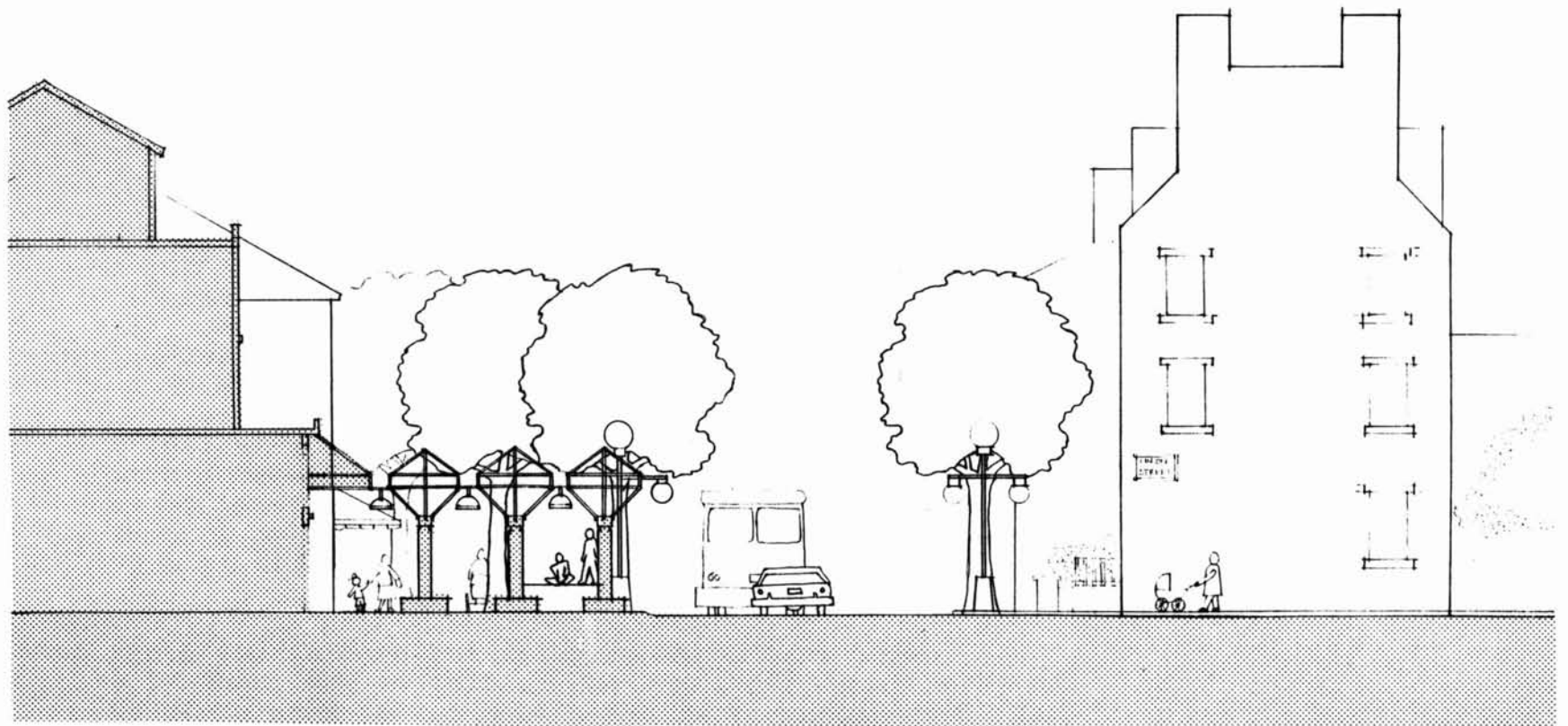
E-E



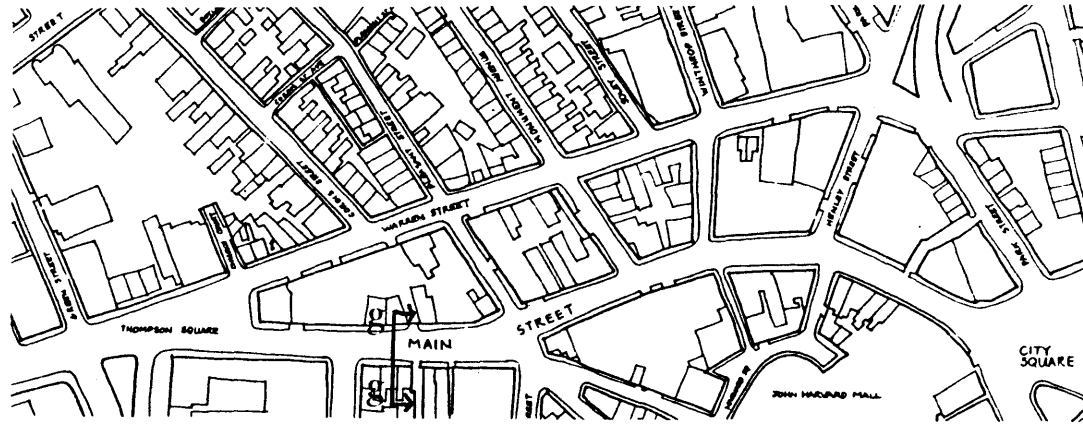
F-F

A crossing ahead is signalled by a more three-dimensional light standard. This added level of light would enable one to read street signs more easily. The interruption of the rhythm of single poles would cause one to realize something different was happening. In plan, there would be a textural change in the surface of the street. This would inform both pedestrian and motorist alike of the special condition.

Beyond one sees the covered path of the column framework changing to a double arcade of canopy trees. Wherever there is a major transition, some place should be built to provide people with the option of continuing or stopping to change direction. Ahead is a small resting place associated with both this transition and street crossing.



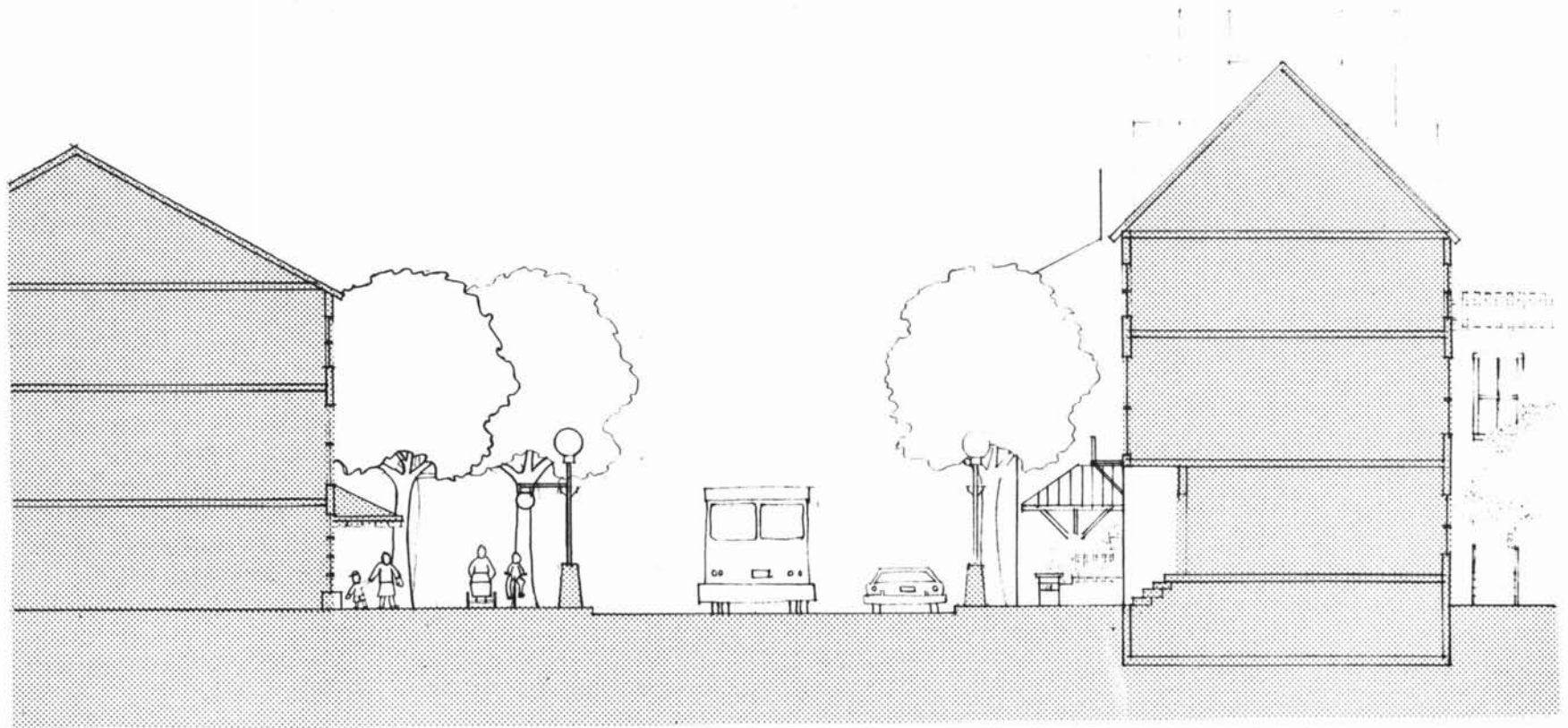
F-F



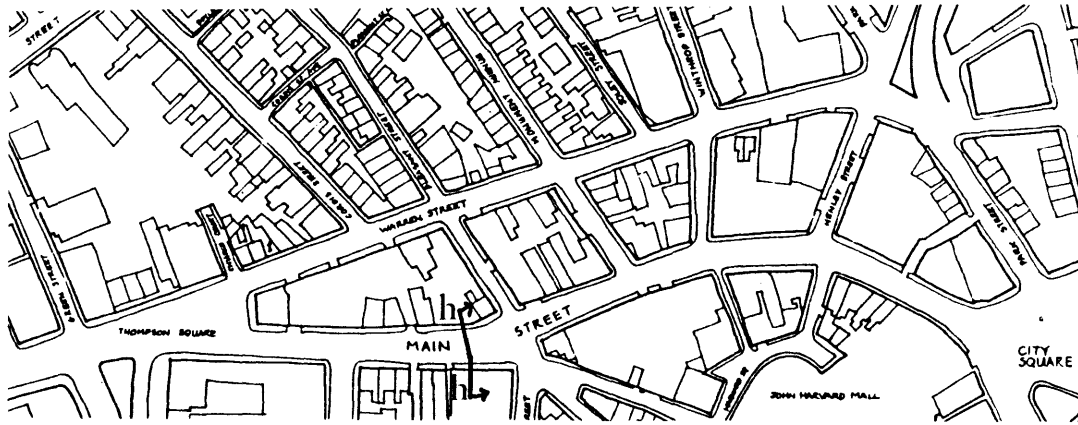
G-G

The vocabulary of double columns has been picked up and continued by more sedate rows of trees. This treatment was thought more appropriate for the Thompson Triangle area where the buildings are residential in scale. This small historic area is an identifiable place in the neighborhood and something the community is proud of. As such it should be given boundaries and made more of a place. New additions should not dominate but reinforce this tiny area. Present commercial activity is low-key--a lawyer's office here, a restaurant there--and should be bolstered by very small-scale enterprises. Here is the place for a specialty shop or two. Perhaps another eating or drinking place. Colored canvas awnings would be appropriate.

A row of four handsome brick residential buildings from the 1840s is on the right and reinforces the image of a small 19th century town. A garden buffer zone could be added here.



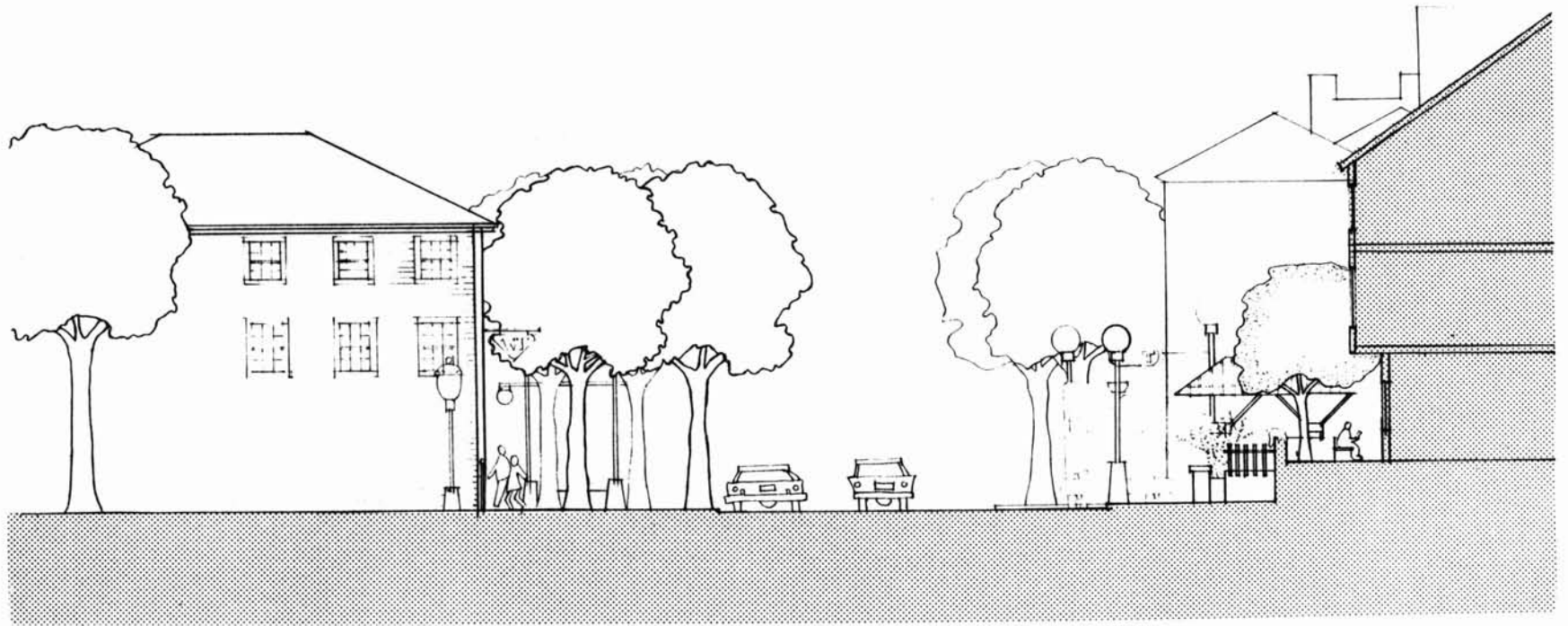
G-G



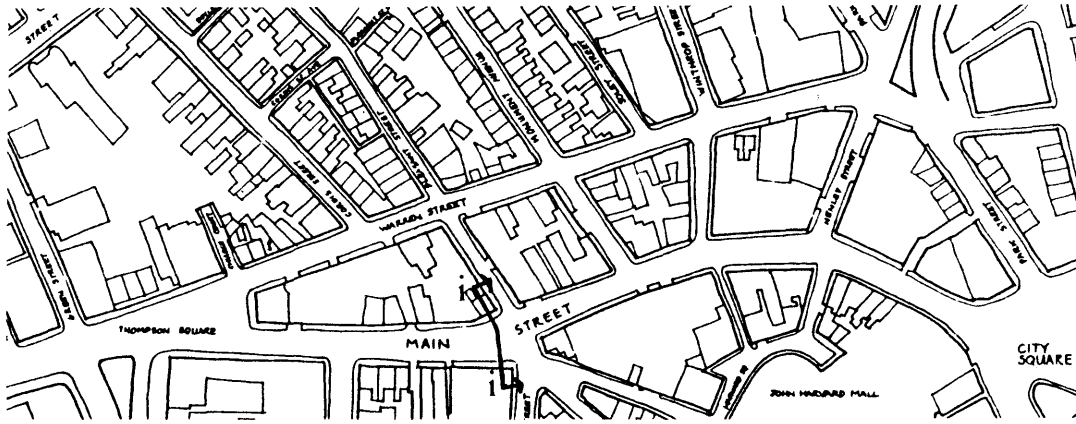
H-H

The new housing should be built with a party wall organization to continue the pattern set up by the older row houses at the beginning of the block. In this particular place a small, raised, shared entrance would help provide a transition space between busy Main Street and individual dwellings. Collective entrances also give people a place between the whole town and their own houses to identify with and use. Older people may want to sit together outside and watch the activity. Small children can play while being supervised by older folks who want to socialize themselves. Any shared space such as this should clearly belong to a group of residents who will care for it.

On the opposite side of the street, the promenade continues, with the well-frequented Warren Tavern ahead.



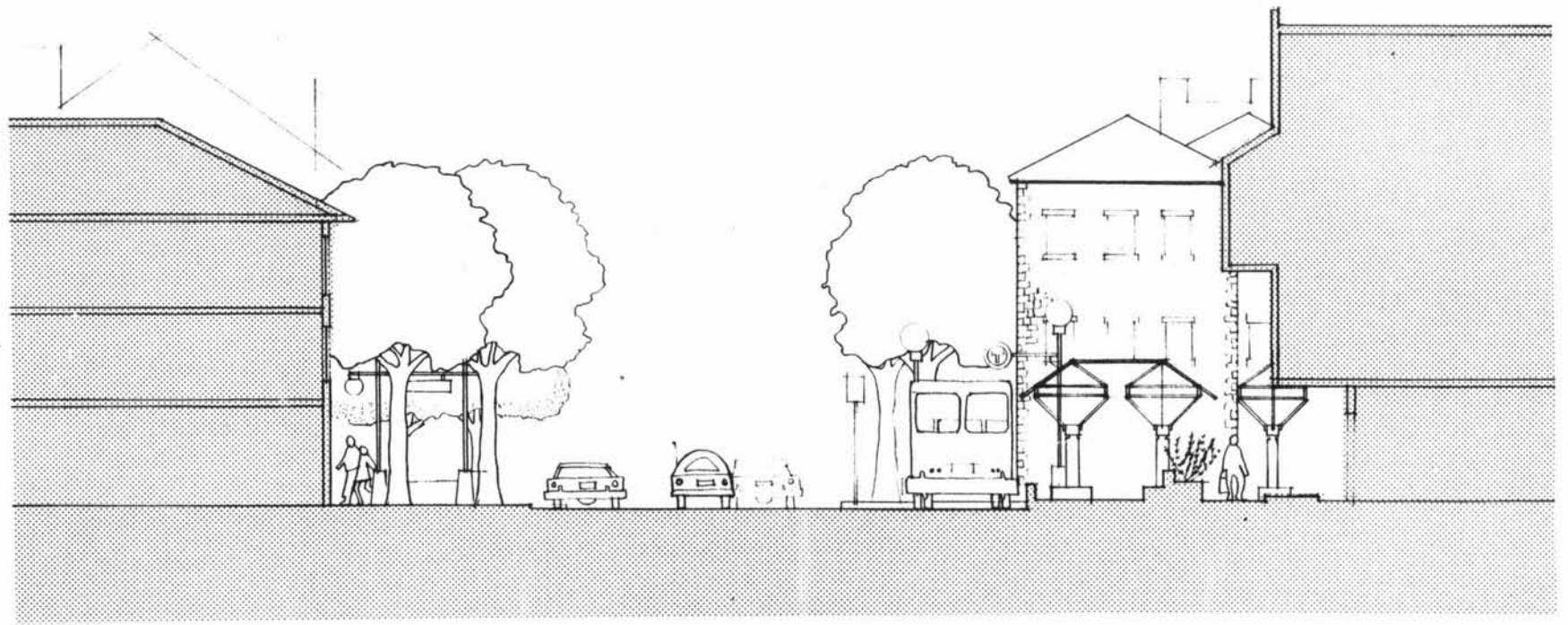
H-H



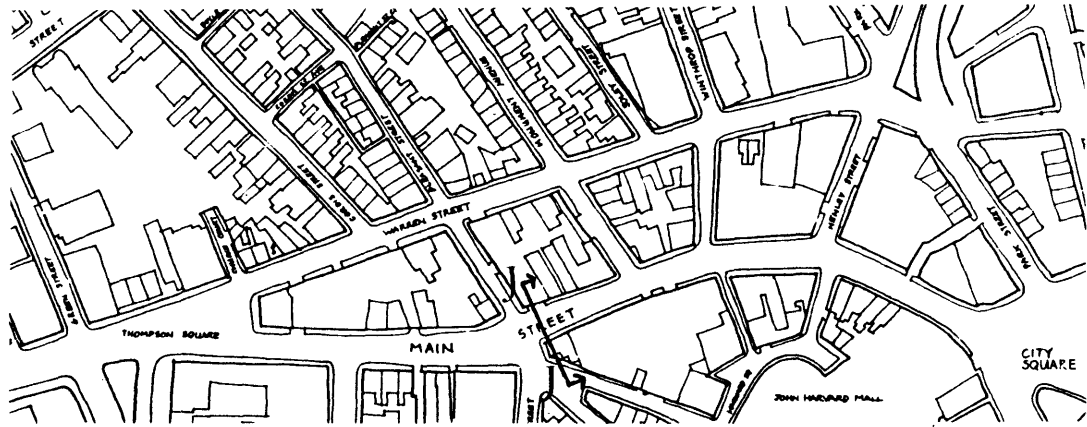
I-I

Harvard, Prescott, and Devens Streets come down from Town Hill and converge with Pleasant Street at this intersection. There is a spatial sense of opening up as Town Hill rises to the right, and the skyline of Boston is seen ahead. The Custom House Tower is framed behind the Austin Stone House ahead which serves as a landmark and important termination point.

The sub-community of Town Hill meets Main Street where a tiny square by the stone house could be developed. The corner bus stop is conveniently located for the elderly apartments soon to be developed in the old Harvard Elementary School. A corner store with hang-out space and sheltered bus stop is shown here.



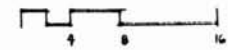
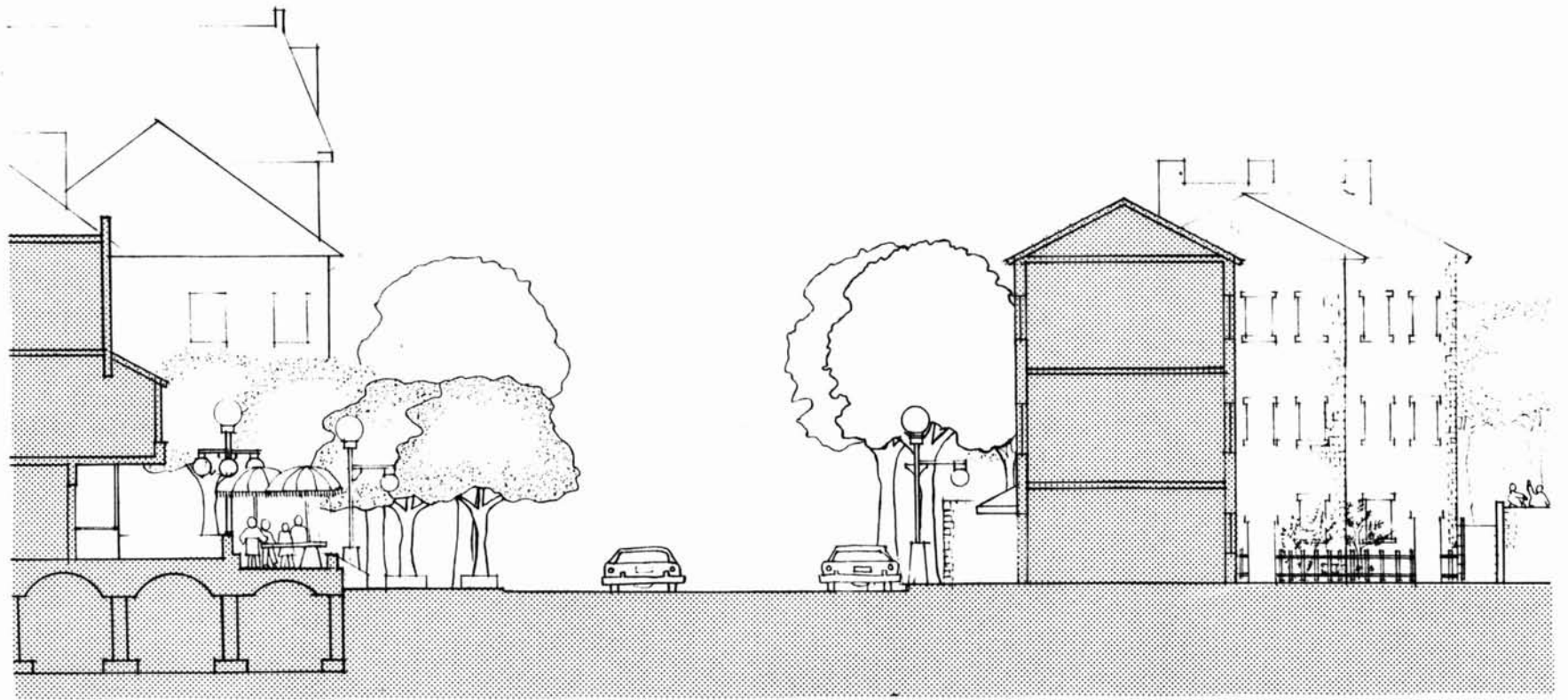
I-I



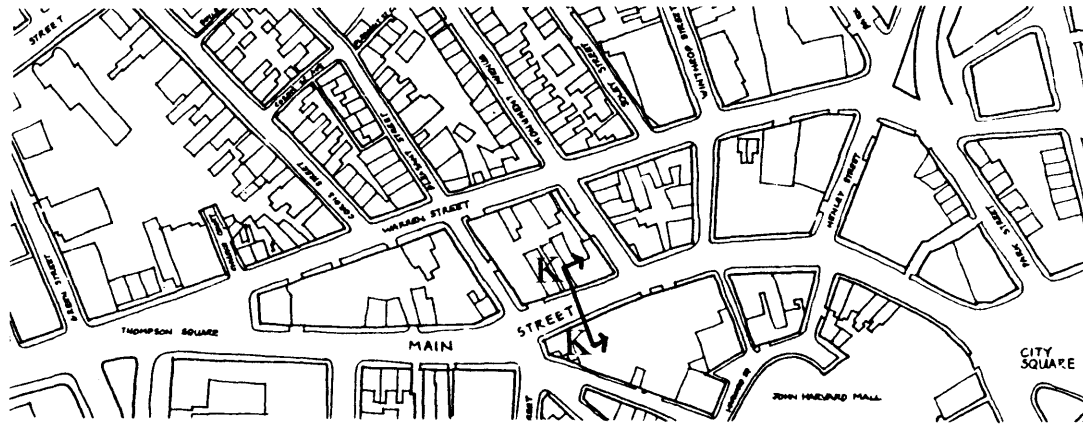
J-J

The stone house could be incorporated into an exciting new school between Main Street and Town Hill. The sidewalk curves out and around a level change ahead accentuating the serpentine nature of the street. My feeling is that a street which winds around creates a feeling of anticipation for what is ahead. Wherever possible, this situation should be capitalized upon.

On the other side a new building, set back, and across from the Wareen Tavern creates a space which can be shared by several commercial enterprises on Pleasant Street as was described on the overall plan. Slight level changes define places to linger and be separated from, yet be close to, the activity of the street. Lower level space could be utilized for commercial purposes.



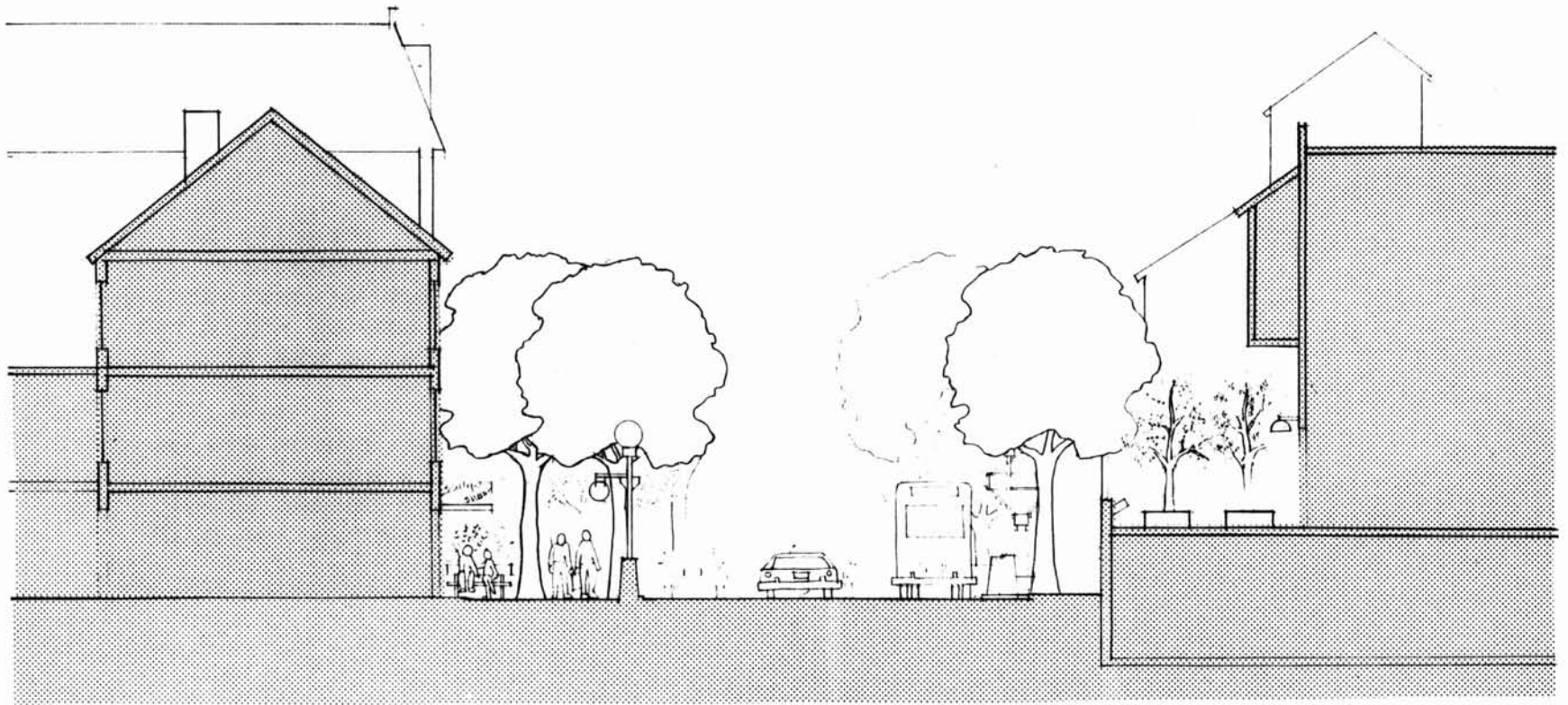
J-J



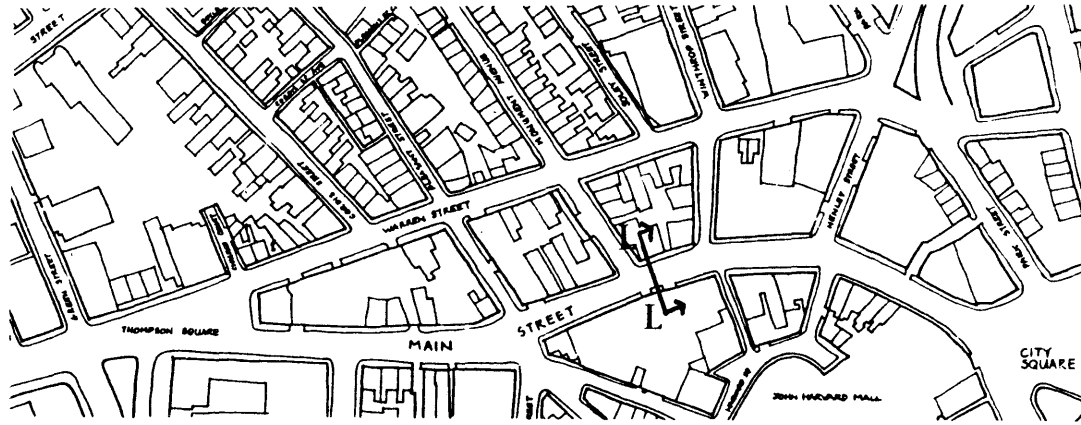
K-K

The major level change in the school provides an overlook and collective outdoor space for classrooms to use. On the street level, a wall to walk against can be a break along an otherwise busy, changing street. Ahead the column structure picks up again and will continue to City Square.

Existing shops are across the street. This side of the street is bathed in sun, and standing outside of the sub-shop against the warm brick is very popular. Some small seating places might be provided.



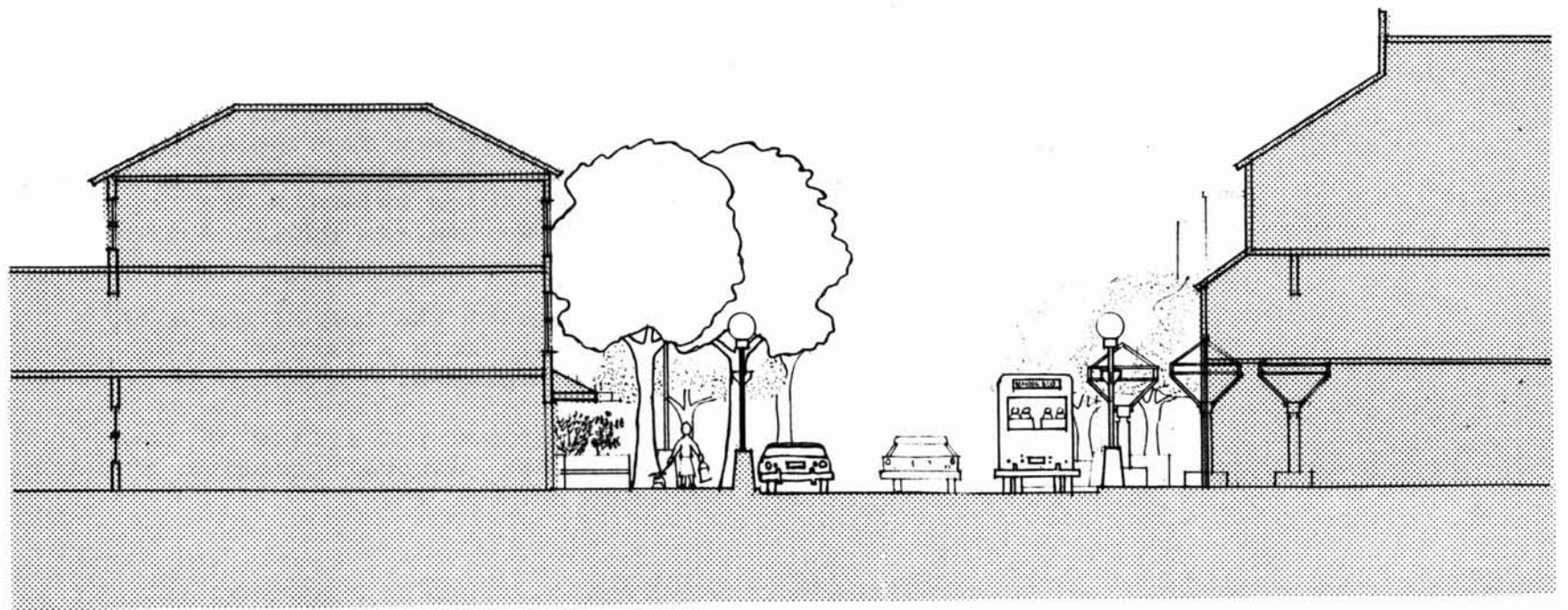
K-K



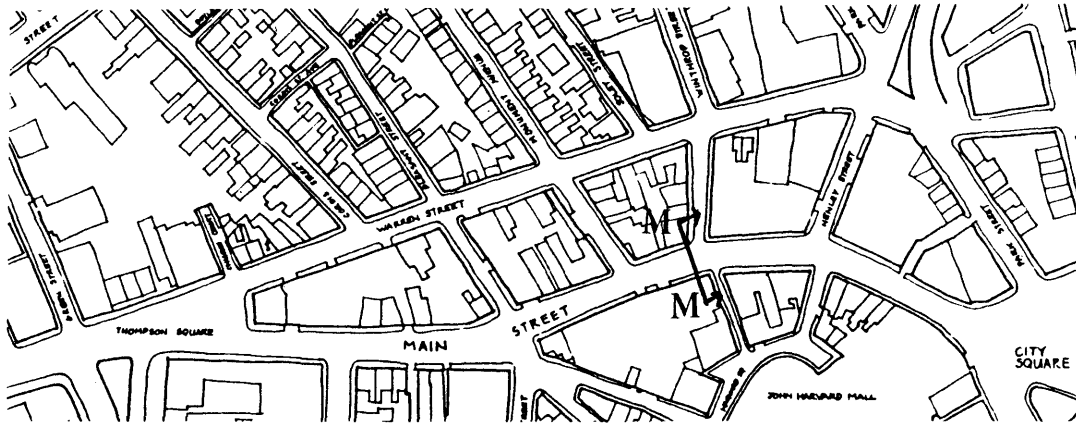
L-L

In some places the building might actually be built over the sidewalk and one would pass through it. This side of the street however does not get much direct sunlight, and a long stretch of a continuous built arcade would not be a pleasant place to walk. Ahead one sees a bus stop and lower trees grouped together to make a place.

The last two of the older Federal Houses are on this block. They are wooden clapboard with shops on the ground floor and apartments above. The treed arcade should continue pass them to a termination and transition point.



L-L

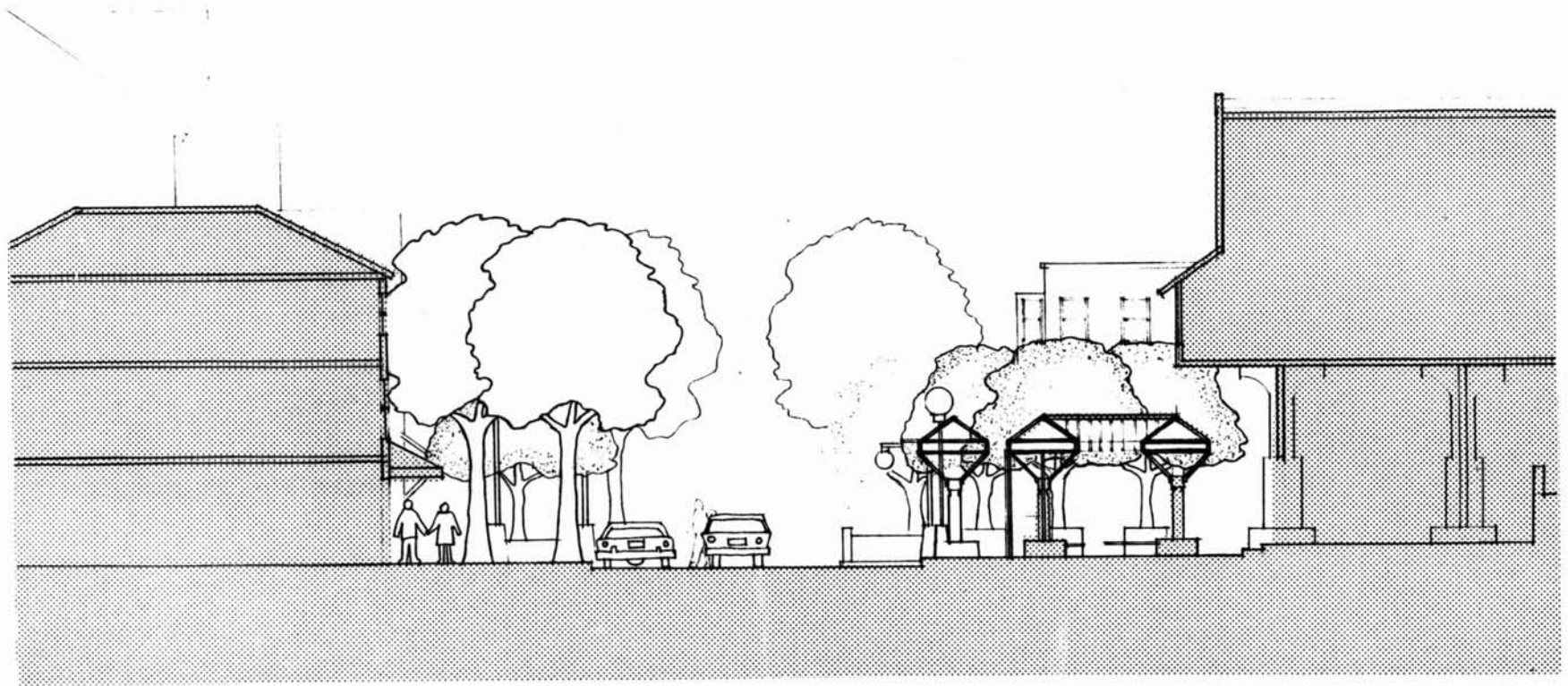


M-M

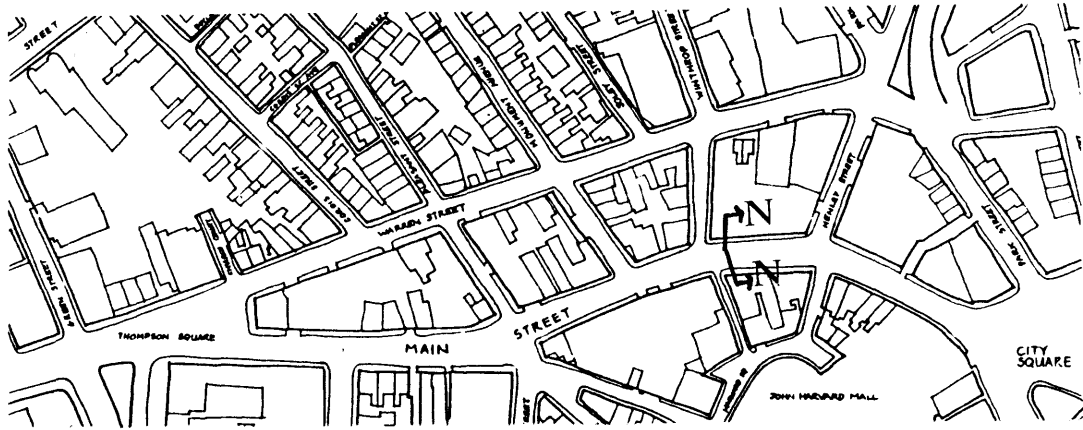
The corner bus stop connects to a covered entrance into the school. This might be the entrance for the community, after-hours, part of the school. The placement of primary entrances and organization of service networks are the kinds of decisions which might be made when the public framework is designed.

Inside, the building system of the school might be related to the column structure. Here a larger column allows for intermediate levels to be employed.

On the other side of the street the arcade of trees will change into the column structure. Another crossing is ahead.



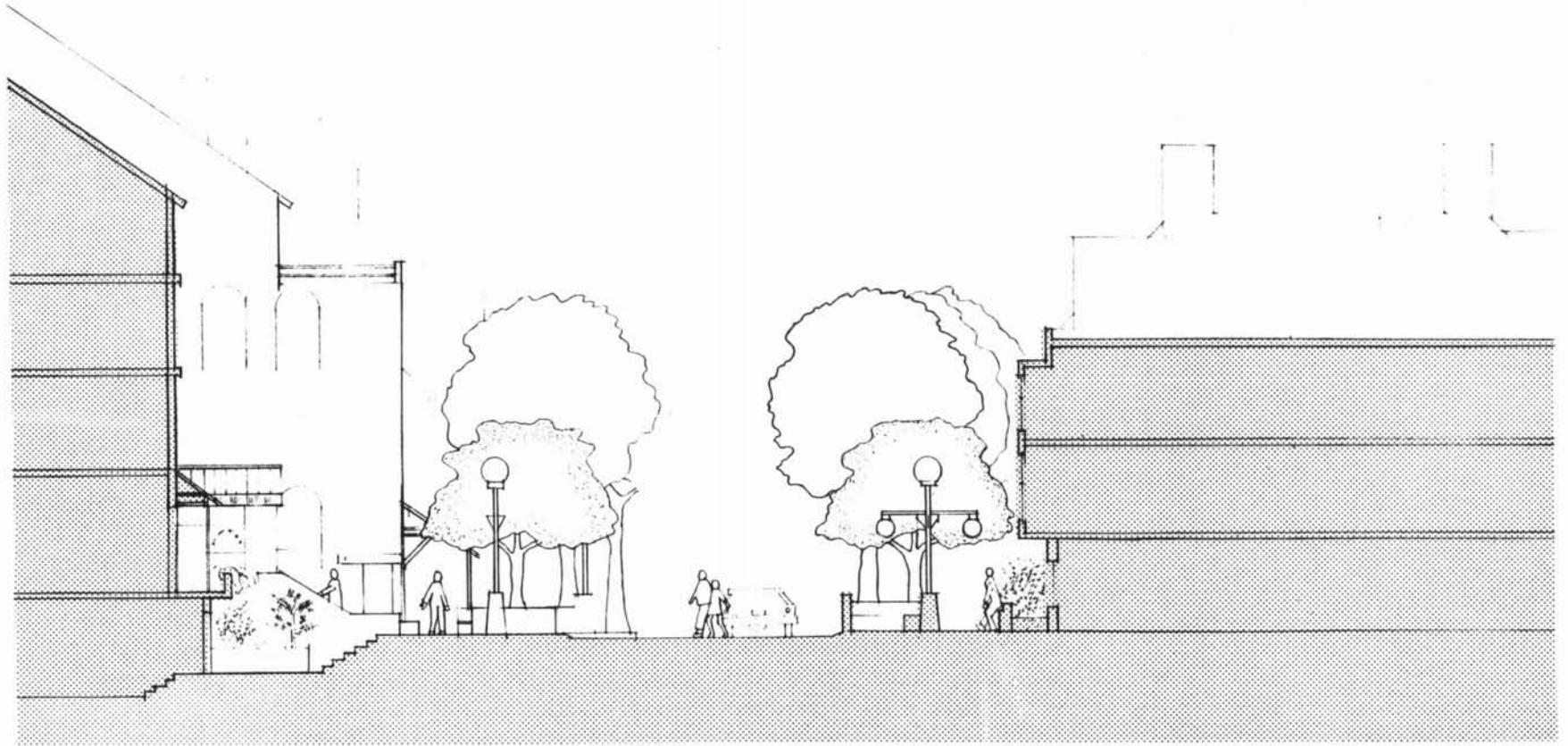
M-M



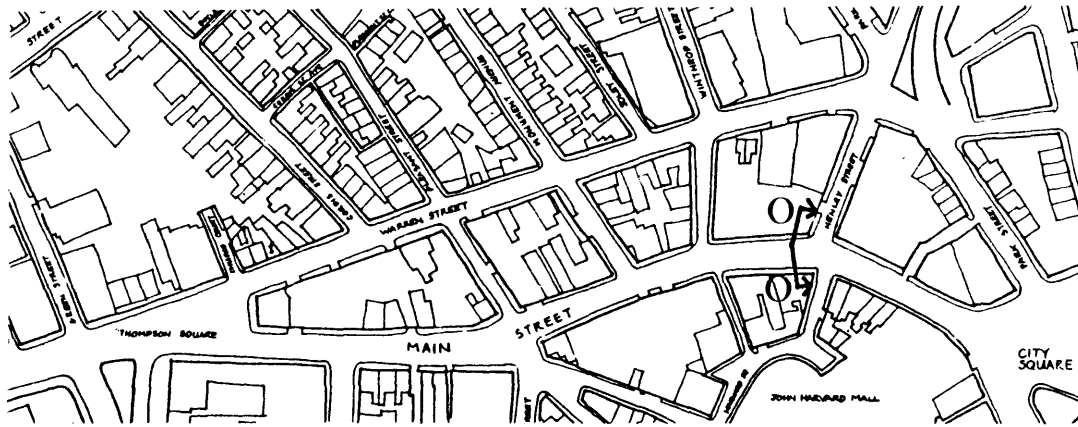
N-N

The building on the left is set back to reveal the beginning of a major piece of arcaded commercial property extending to City Square. The corner piece is a split entry which creates a small recessed shared entrance to some retail facilities one half level down.

The street curves around to the right. Repeating elements such as trees, streetlamps and building bays should rhythmically emphasize this. In front of the existing apartments a buffer zone could be added. The repetition of this planted buffer zone would begin to have an impact on the overall image of the town.



N-N

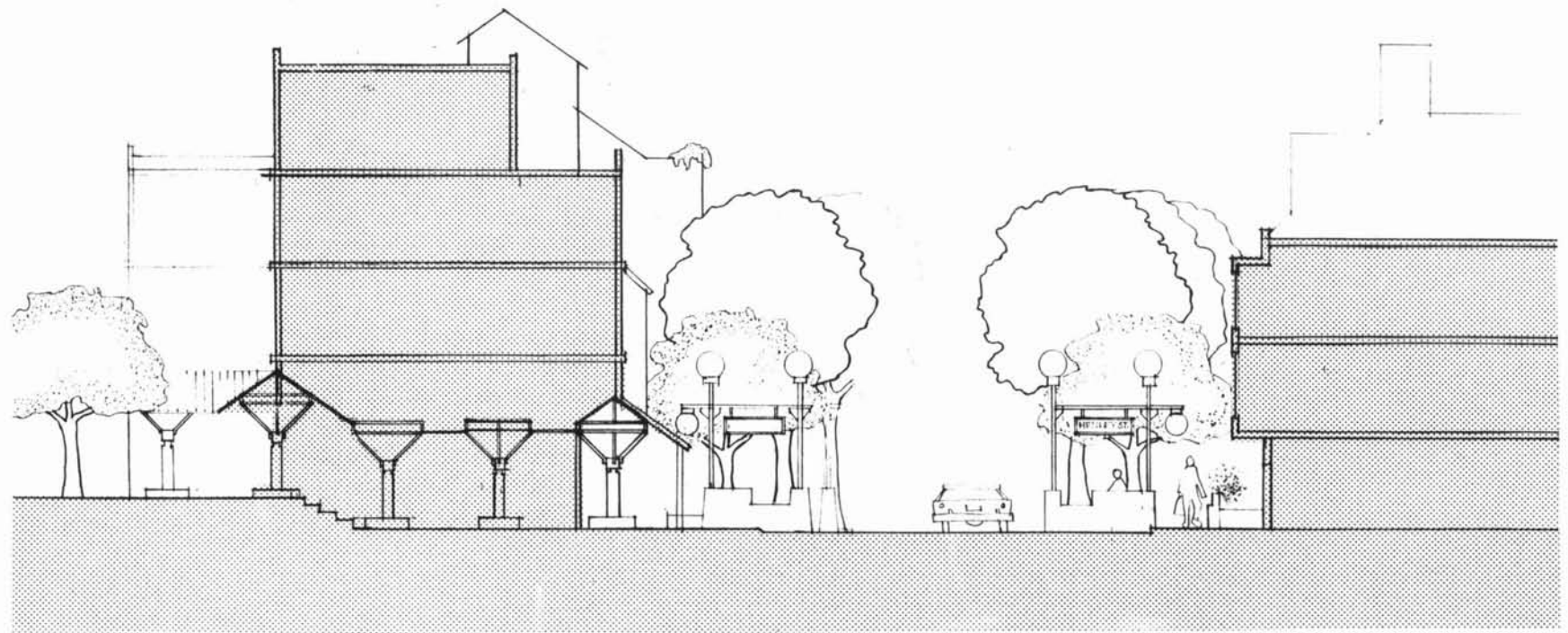


O-O

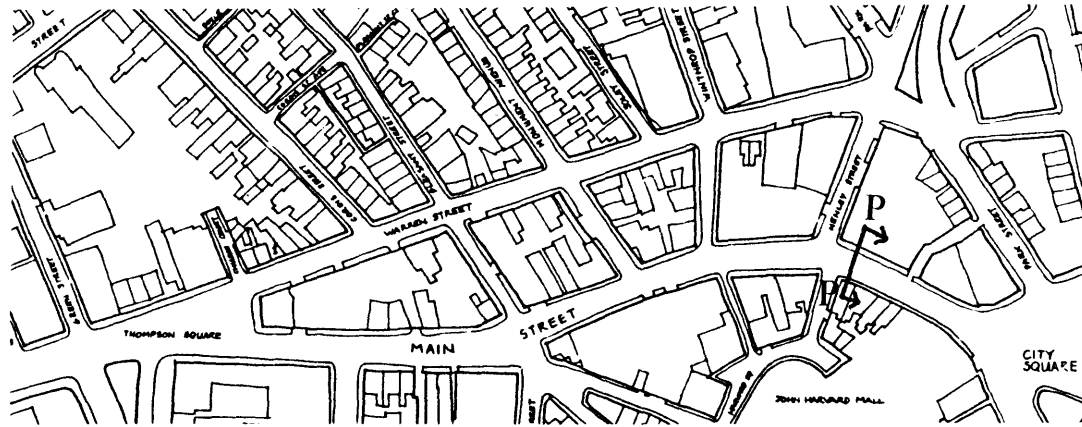
The planter buffer zone on the residential side continues. A crossing ahead shows the possible incorporation of street signage into the lighting standard.

A large space exists in the rear of the abandoned garages fronting Warren Street. My thought was that a generalized loft kind of building could be added for retail as well as work spaces and housing. A shared courtyard space would be in the center and accessible from the street.

Although the column is usually working to define some territory along the edge of the building, in places it might become the structure of the entire ground floor and be built up more than one story. An initial image for the column came from the mushroom top columns which are the structure of the existing garages here.



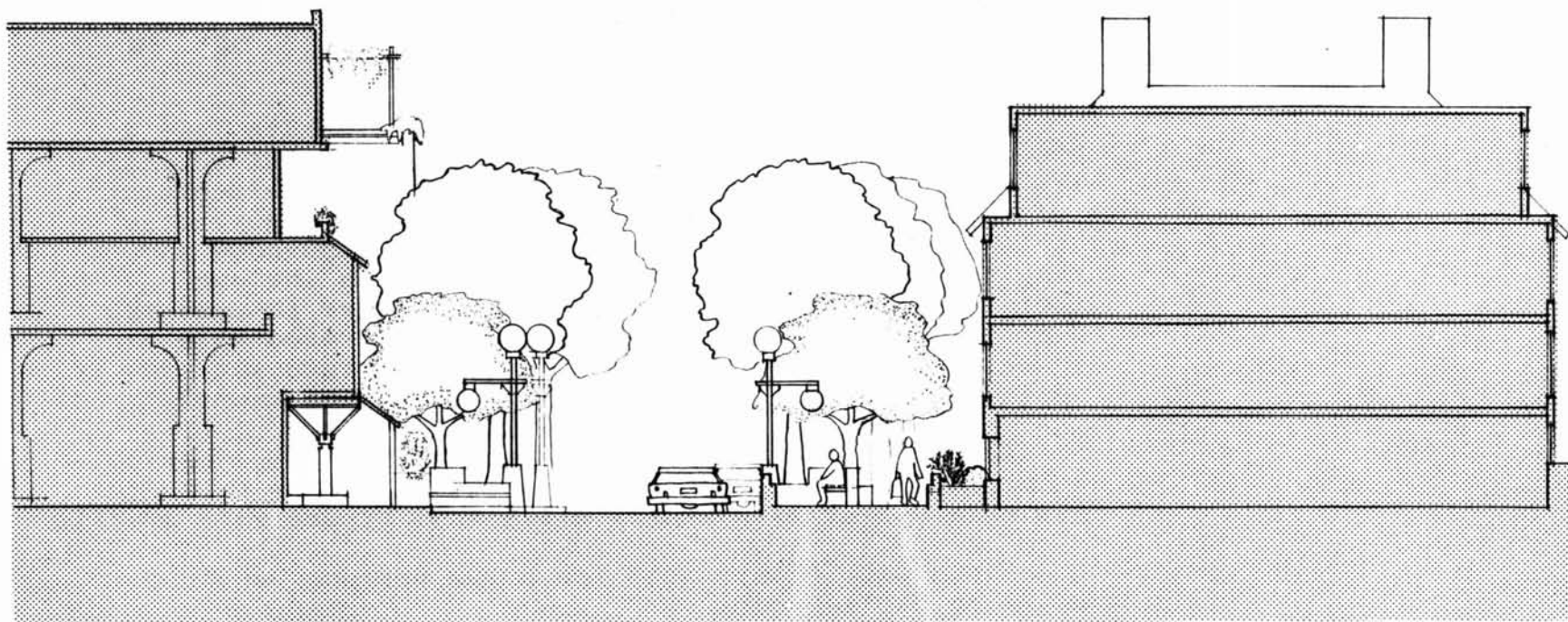
O-O



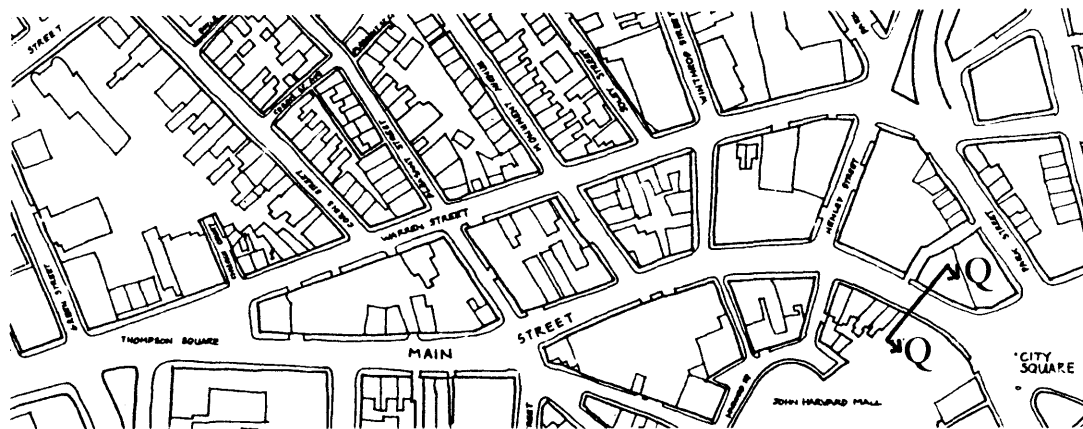
P-P

The commercial arcade continues towards City Square. A gas company building used to occupy this piece of land. Today it awaits the decision of what will happen with off-ramp from the Mystic River Bridge which deposits heavy traffic at this intersection.

The crossing is signified by lower "place" trees on both sides, with some small seating accommodations combined with the planters. Ahead these same trees again signify a change in direction where circulation into the building site intersects the sidewalk. Roughan Hall ahead is an imposing structure. Perhaps a new use can be found for what was once the largest dance hall in the city.



P-P

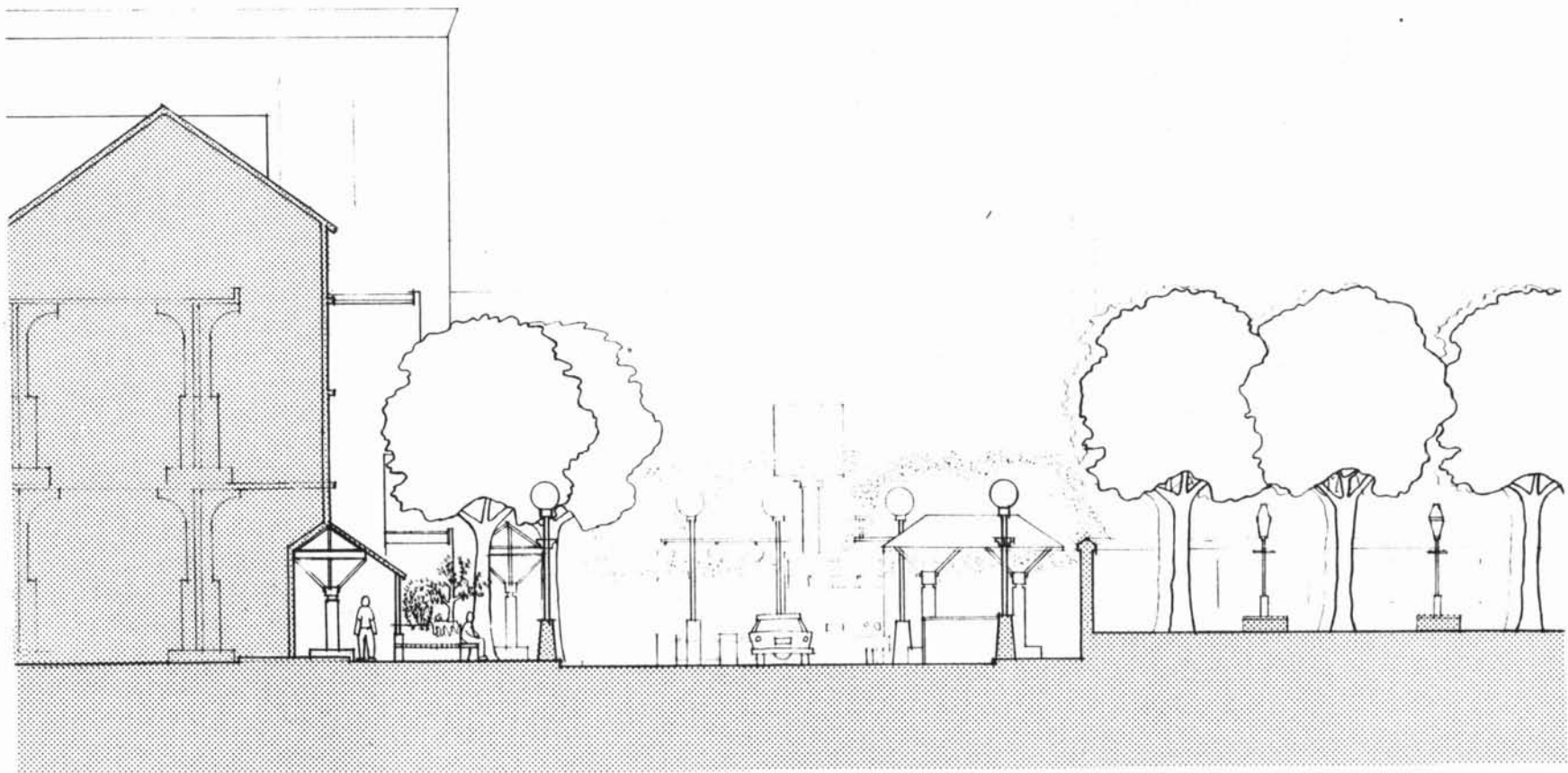


Q-Q

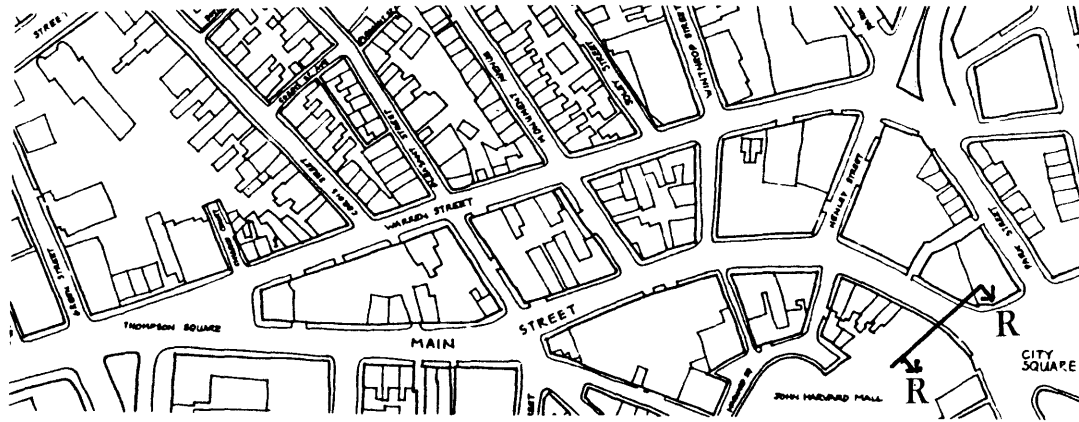
I thought the arcade, which is structurally like a three-dimensional space frame on a column, might be filled with solid panels in some places, clear glass elsewhere. A moveable canvas system could be employed to work like shades. I was interested in creating a diaphanous and changing quality of light and shadows, like the sun filtering through leaves of a tree. Another thought was to make a roof structure which could be covered with copper. This material is used throughout town and provides a rich and, in places, fanciful roofing material.

The John Harvard Mall is sedate and formal, leading up to the residential area of Town Hill. It is protected from Main Street by a sturdy brick wall capped with granite.

Ahead many people wait for buses and some shelter should be built here.



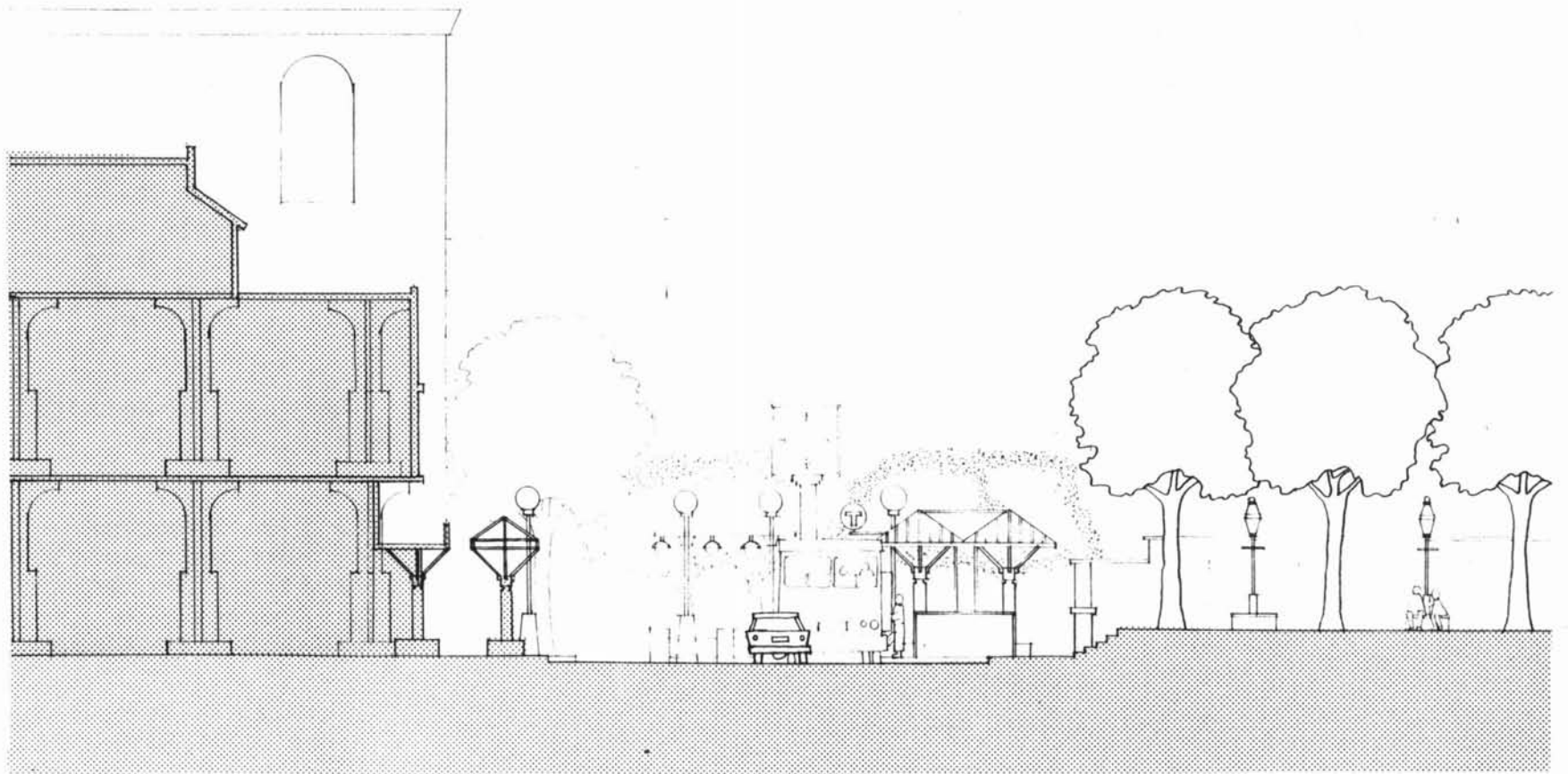
Q-Q



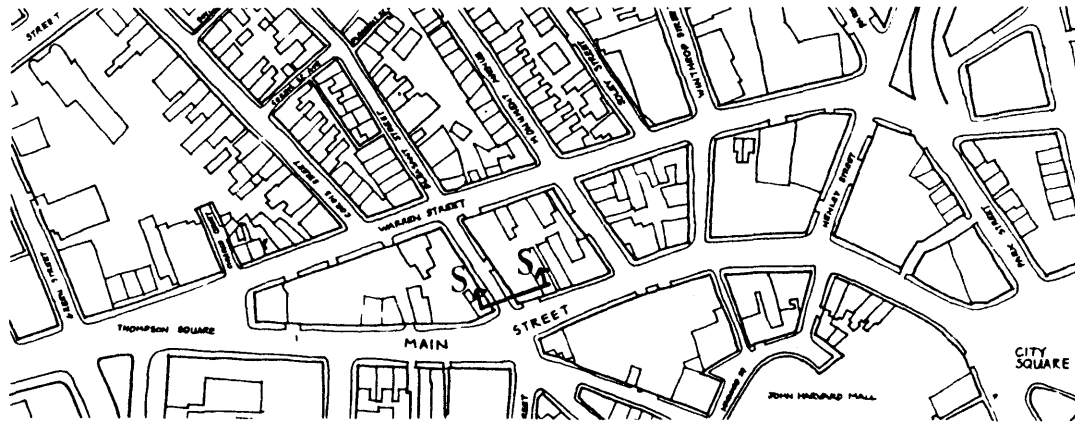
R-R

City Square: once an important termination point with links to downtown and the waterfront. Grand public buildings and a City Hall once fronted the square. Today only the Police and Court building and the Servicemen's YMCA are occupied. The skyline of Boston rises ahead, but between here and there the Charles River coming into Boston Harbor creates a sense of openness and space.

If the heaviest truck traffic were re-routed, City Square might again be an important, well-used link to the City and Waterfront. Something major, even grand and urban could be built in City Square to mark the entrance to Charlestown and the gateway to Boston.



R-R

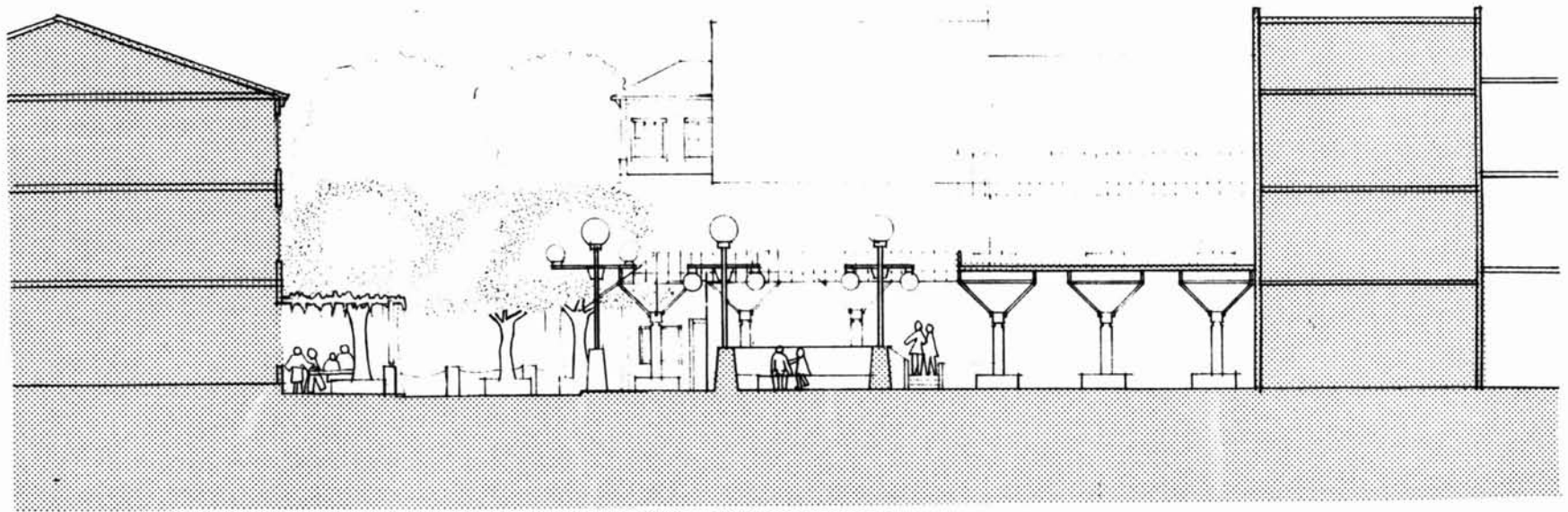


S-S

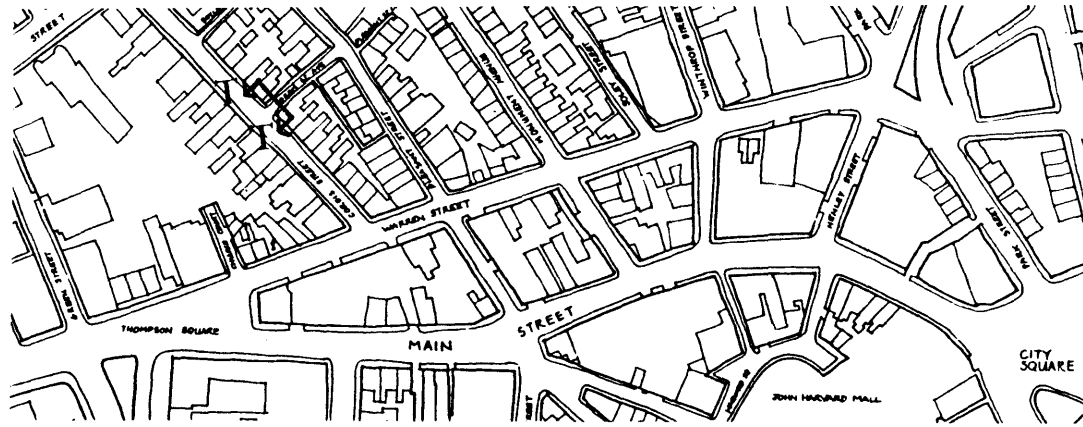
I thought the section of Pleasant Street between Main and Warren Streets might become a pedestrian place. More retail and housing would be built making this area a very vibrant place. Perhaps the Warren Tavern could use some outdoor space.

A paving pattern would be designed, and many flowering trees added. Lighting, as in Thompson Square, will be multiple lights symbolizing activity.

One aspect of Main Street is its quality as a screen. As you travel along, you can constantly see through openings to the residential areas behind. I thought it was important to recognize this quality, building up Main Street, yet preserving sitelines and making gaps through which to glimpse the town.



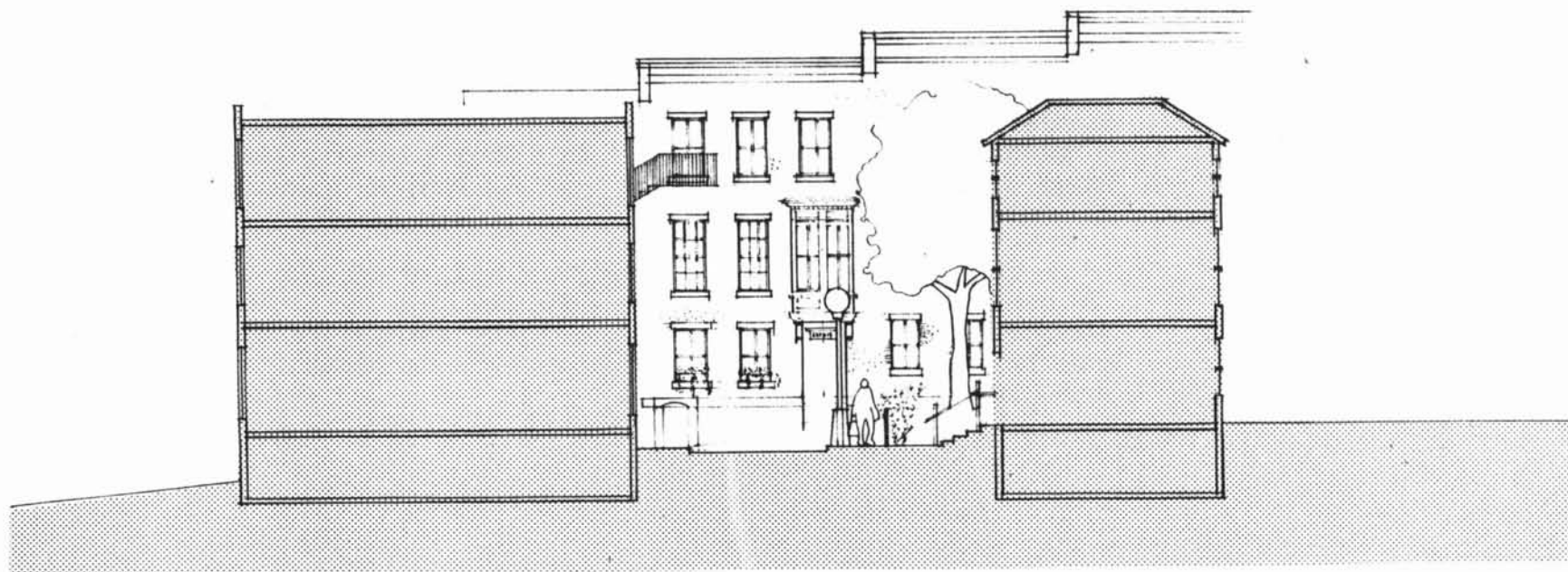
S-S



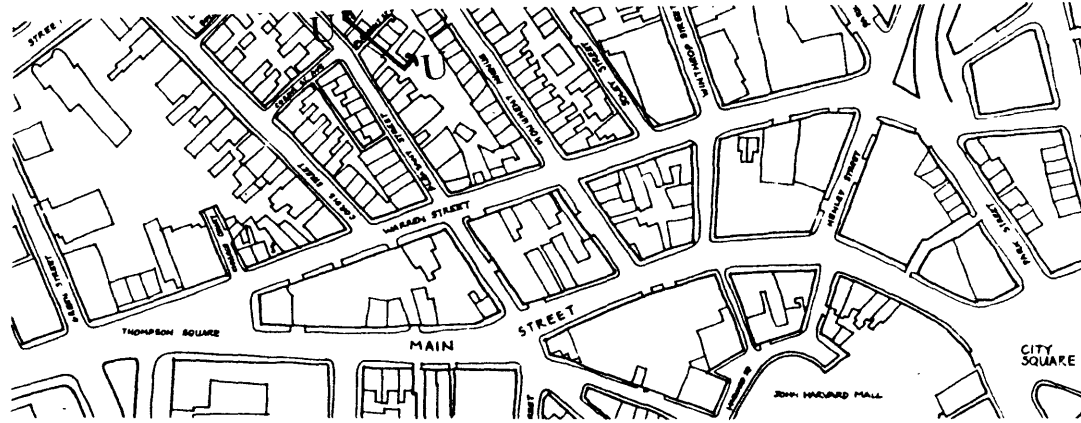
T-T

There are many streets in Charlestown which dead-end into other streets. Rarely does a street continue more than a few blocks before it ends or jogs across Main or Bunker Hill Street. School Street is the only through cross street in town.

This condition slows down the course of traffic and creates a dense urban quality to the town. Ahead is a row of brick houses, which, with the older Federal house on the right and apartment building of the late 1800s, make a street space with human scale.



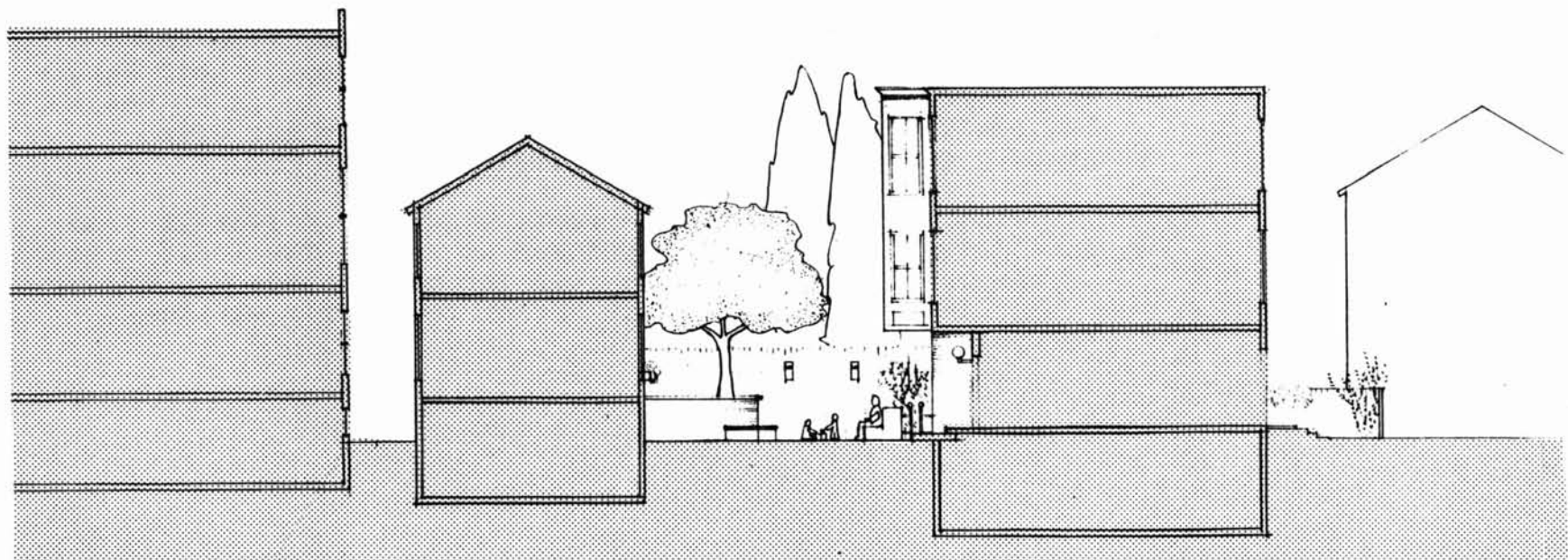
T-T



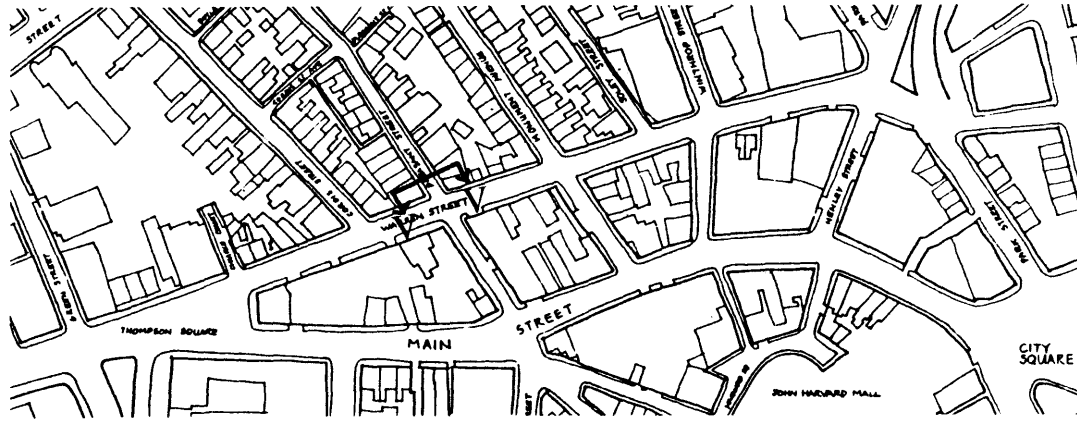
U-U

Another condition found in several places is a small court around which several entrances are grouped. Sometimes the space is large enough to use and could be landscaped, as in this example. In other places, the space is more like a series of garden paths, beyond a gate, leading to several different houses.

These spaces are the responsibility of the individuals sharing them to plant, light and pave as they desire. The number of entrances off such a space should be small, otherwise people would lose the sense of identity which fosters this responsibility.



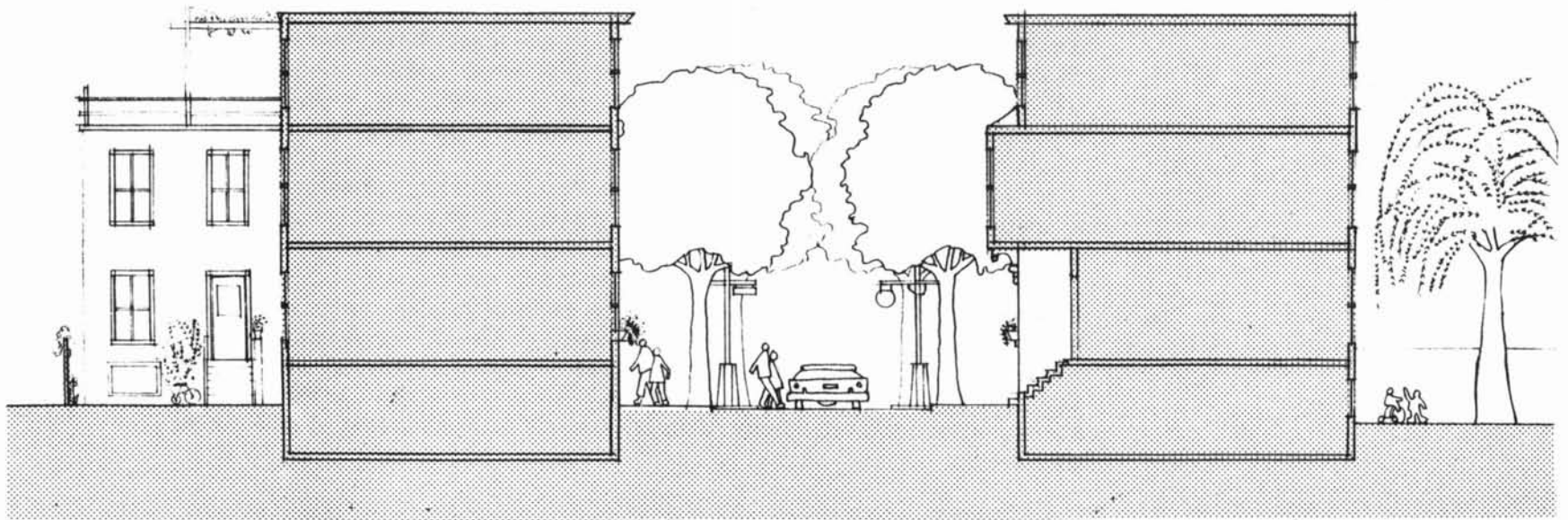
4 8 16
U-U



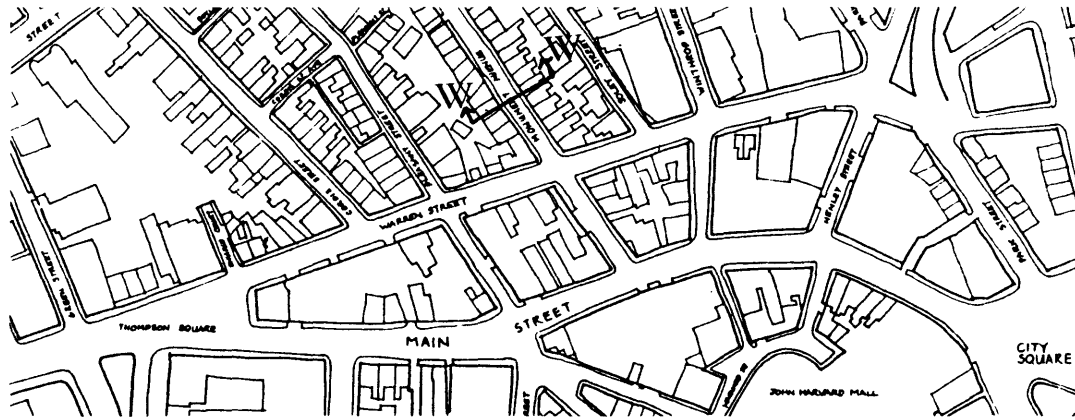
V-V

Where streets such as Pleasant come down from the hill into Warren Street, corner treatment should help make a gateway. Extending the sidewalk out also helps by keeping the last 20 feet free from parked cars which often hampers the vision of other drivers.

The residential side streets should be different from Main Street and should be defined as such. The local nature of the traffic makes it possible for many to use the street: from children playing street hockey to elderly sitting together outdoors.



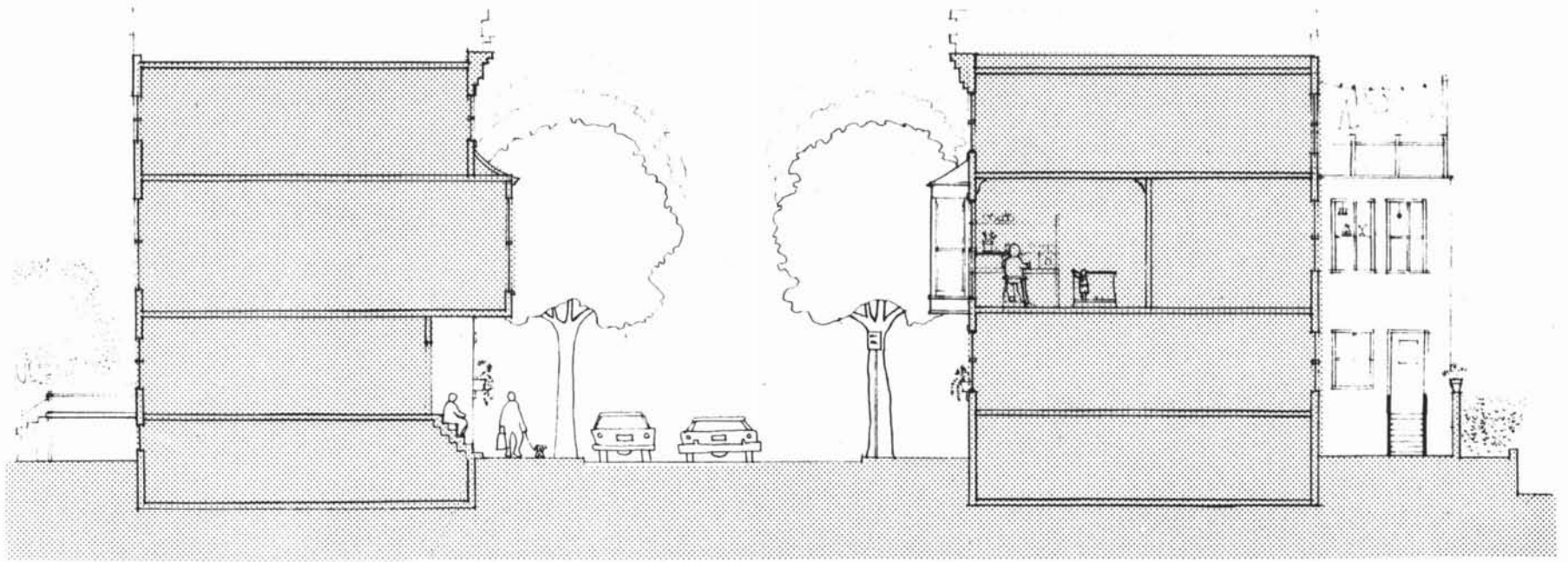
V-V



W - W

Monument Avenue--where I live. It is a busy street with many heading up the hill to the Monument. This traffic divides one side from the other and makes neighborhood use of the street not as active as elsewhere. People retreat to their recessed stoops to watch the activity of passersby.

The houses are formal, facing the street and forming a continuous wall, yet not revealing much. People can lead very private lives, yet know they are part of a community. The architecture and scale of the houses contribute to this warmth. One can imagine a similarly organized place where people would feel alienated and alone. Bay windows contribute to the "towniness." Perhaps a design code could dictate that a certain percentage of above ground windows would be three-dimensional bay windows.



1 8 16
W-W

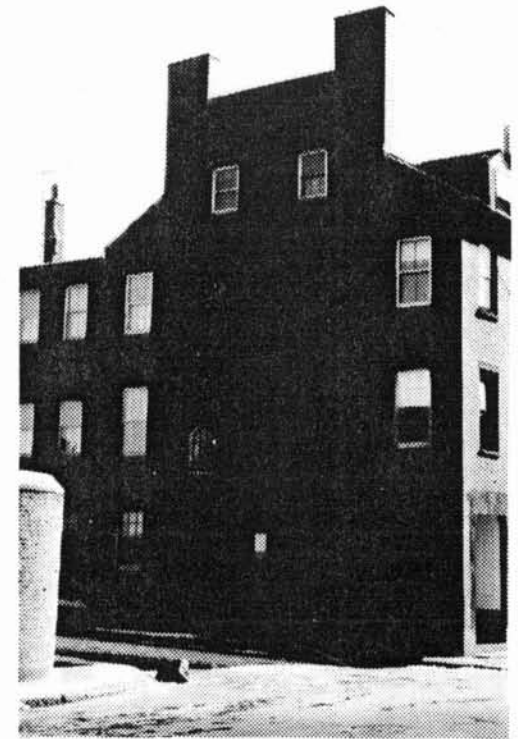
Conclusion

Rarely, if ever, will any one factor such as motivation, overt behavior, cultural norms or physical characteristics determine use and meaning; but it is worth knowing what constraints are imposed by each factor and what may have been made possible by the constraints themselves.

Stan Anderson
Thresholds, Working Paper I

When the elevated along Main Street was taken down several years ago I had thought there might be something one could do with the street to use the wide dimension originally needed for the railines. What one might design for this outdoor space or how to begin were questions which led me towards this exploration.

The problem was awesome but became less so when I began looking at the smaller pieces which made up the environment. Walking around with a camera forced me to discover many positive physical clues. At first I found small isolated things to care about--an old granite sign here, or a brick wall there--but then I began to understand how the pieces were not arbitrarily arranged, but that a public framework had been developed, mostly between 1800



and 1900. This public framework was created by patterns of usage, materials, building methods and some kind of understanding about what a street should be.

Faced with designing what might become of the street, I realized how impossible it was to make a separate decision about each particular place, without having some kind of framework or overall order within which to work. Once I began thinking of how materials and components could be used systematically, almost as variations on a prototype, my job became easier.

My designs represent a first pass at the problem--not the final design by any means, but the beginning of a process. Much more has to be taken into account. The new buildings should be more integrated with the streetscape and things like the column should be examined in more detail, with prototypical models built. The actual process of this thesis paralleled the building process itself. To begin I had to establish reference points, just as one might do when staking out a foundation for a simple dwelling with corner references from which everything else is measured.

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Footnotes

1. Richard Frothingham, History of Charlestown, p. 118.
2. Ibid., p. 29.
3. Ibid., p. 150.
4. Ibid., p. 103.
5. Timothy Sawyer, Old Charlestown, p. 173.
6. Ibid., p. 27.
7. Charles Hunnewell, A History of Charlestown, Massachusetts, p. 116.
8. Sawyer, op. cit., p. 178.
9. BRA, Charlestown, p. 8.
10. Lisa Hescong, "Commercial Life and Community Structure," p. 10.