

NEWTON LOCAL LANDMARK REPORT

***The Kaplan House, TAC #1
12 Drumlin Road***

**Prepared for:
Newton Historical
Commission
March 2003**

The Kaplan House, TAC #1 – 12 Drumlin Road

1. Name of Property

- a. *Historic Name:* The Kaplan House, TAC #1
- b. *Common Name:* None

2. Location

- a. *Street Address:* 12 Drumlin Road
- b. *Zip Code:* Newton, 02459
- c. *Assessor's #:* 82-025-0037

3. Classification

- a. *Ownership of Property:* private
- b. *Type of Property:* residence
- c. *National Register Status:* MHC determination of NR IND eligibility

4. Function or Use

a. *Historic Functions:* The Kaplan House was built in 1946 as an International Style single-family residence designed to exemplify the post WWII aesthetics of simplicity in design and efficiency of use. Located in Oak Hill, an area which was largely agricultural and undeveloped well into the twentieth century, the house was one of the first post WWII buildings constructed in the area.

b. *Current Functions:* Originally situated in a largely undeveloped section of Newton, the Kaplan House has since become a prominent residence centered in what is now a suburban residential neighborhood of moderate sized single-family houses similar in scale, if not in architectural merit, to the Kaplan House. The house has not changed in function since its construction and remains a single-family home. By 2002, the house has had only three owners in fifty-six years, all of whom lived in the house for long periods of time.

5. Zoning

The Zoning District is Single Residence 1 which requires a 25,000 square foot lot for single-family use and frontage of 140 feet. A Special Permit is required for any other use on this site.

6. Description

a. *Neighborhood Description:* The Kaplan House is located in the Oak Hill section of Newton near the base of Bald Pate Hill. Unlike Newton's other villages which formed in the nineteenth century around commercial centers and

railway access, Oak Hill was historically an agricultural area which remained largely undeveloped well into the twentieth century. When development did begin to reach Oak Hill in the 1920s and 1930s, it found an area characterized by small-scale farms and well scattered rural estates such as 25 Drumlin Road, a substantial and well-detailed early 20th century Tudor structure on a large parcel of land. The area changed dramatically, however, during the housing boom which followed WWII. During the 1950s and 1960s, Oak Hill's remaining farms and open areas were quickly transformed into neighborhoods of Ranch, Split-Level, and Contemporary style homes located within a series of subdivision developments. By the end of this period, Oak Hill had developed into a contemporary neighborhood built around automobile access and the suburban ideals of single-family homes on well-spaced lots.

One of the first post WWII houses developed in Oak Hill, the Kaplan House is unusual in that it was not constructed as part of a larger subdivision and was individually designed by an architectural firm to meet the specific needs of the owner and the site. While two additional homes immediately adjacent to this property, 11 and 20 Drumlin Road, are also modern, architect-designed homes which appear to have been inspired by The Kaplan House, most of the surrounding properties were developed at roughly the same time using a standard design and floorplan which was popular during that period. Despite their origins, all of the properties in the area share the same single-family use and were originally constructed to be moderate sized structures surrounded by landscaped lawns. New construction in the area is beginning to replace these homes with substantially larger ones with smaller yards, but to date, none of the structures or properties immediately surrounding the Kaplan House have been substantially altered.

b. *Architectural Description:*

(1) *Materials:*

<i>Foundation:</i>	Cement
<i>Walls:</i>	Painted brick and vertical wood siding
<i>Roof:</i>	Flat roof
<i>Windows:</i>	Casement, picture, and transom windows
<i>Ornamentation:</i>	None

Vegetation: The site has been well maintained and landscaped with a mix of mature trees, small bushes, foundation plantings and flowers. The lot is predominantly open lawn with groupings of trees and additional plantings scattered throughout and is entirely in keeping with the residential character of the neighborhood. Foundation plantings have been

added in several locations around the house and larger bushes are planted along the street façade of the garage. The rear of the lot slopes steeply upward and is terraced with fairly dense plantings screening adjacent properties. The combination of mature trees, open lawn, and plantings has created an excellent backdrop for the stark white of the structure and contributes to its overall appearance.

(2) *Verbal Description:*

Historical appearance: The Kaplan House is one of the best examples of the International Style of architecture in Newton and one of the most distinctive buildings constructed here in the post WWII era. The house was designed by The Architect's Collaborative (TAC) of Cambridge and is also referred to as TAC #1 as it was the first project completed by the firm. Built on a sloping corner lot which offered sweeping views of the surrounding area, the building was sited to face into the open yard and Dudley/Drumlin Road intersection with utility areas and the driveway tucked behind it. In keeping with the straightforward nature of the International style, the predominant features of the building are the strong geometric shapes of its components and its lack of extraneous detail. The exterior cladding is a uniformly white combination of painted brick and vertical wood siding. The windows are primarily large, single-paned picture windows flanked by narrower casements, although the garage and several less prominent areas of the interior utilize narrow rows of rectangular fixed panes. The front entry faces the garage and is tucked under the roof of the second floor. Also minimally detailed, the paneled front door is accessed by a short set of stone steps in an entry defined by large fixed panes of glass set into a surrounding metal frame.

The main body of the house consists of two long, flat-roofed rectangles which are set at right angles to one another. The first, located roughly parallel to Drumlin Road, sits at ground level and contains the living room, kitchen, and utility areas of the house. A single rectangular brick chimney with two flues marks one end of the enclosed space on the first floor. The roofline itself, though, was carried beyond the chimney to smoothly integrate the roof of the open screened porch, now enclosed, with the interior areas of the structure. Tucked into the rear corner of the lot, the right end of the first floor rectangle includes an open utility area screened by a high wooden fence. This fence is actually formed by the continuation of the vertical wood siding found on the right corner of the house around the open utility area to the right. According to the original plans, this space was intended to provide a well-screened area for housing clotheslines and storing garbage cans and was directly accessible to the laundry and kitchen areas of the house.

The rear of the first floor rectangle faces into the back yard which rises steeply up Bald Pate Hill. A small lawn area created by low brick and stone retaining walls exists directly behind the house with a brick patio located under the overhanging second floor. To the right of this patio, the rear façade is indented slightly to create a small overhang along the rear elevation.

The second rectangle sits roughly parallel to Dudley Road and contains the second story of the structure. Balanced between columns resting in the backyard, the center of the first floor rectangle, and the square, freestanding structure of the garage, the second level was designed to use the roofs of both the garage and the first floor as open decks accessible through the proposed bedrooms. While two styles of railings are shown in the original plans, neither is currently in place and it is not clear which railing, if any, was used for these spaces. The original plans also showed seating and planters in these deck areas although this is also not known to have ever been installed. Two doors – one at the far right end of the second floor and the second facing Dudley Road - are still in place for easy access.

Set apart from the rest of the first floor, the garage forms the last piece of the structure and serves as part of the support system for the second floor. The square, predominantly brick structure is located so that its back wall faces Dudley Road and is accessed by a driveway off Drumlin Road. Due to the slope of the lot, low stone and brick retaining walls were used along the street edge of the driveway, which now blend in with the garage's foundation and plantings. A shallow overhang projects out over the large, rectangular garage door made up of four rows of eight squares panels. Fixed rectangular windows over the garage door and on the rear wall of the garage provide light into the structure and a second entry is located across from the front entrance.

Current appearance: Very few changes have been made to the exterior of the Kaplan House since it was constructed in 1946, and none of these changes has had a significant impact on the defining features of this International style structure. Interestingly, the most significant change made to the structure, enclosing the screened porch area at the left end of the first floor, was anticipated by the original architect and included as an option in the 1946 plans. The 1946 plans suggested that the porch should be enclosed by simply replacing the screens with windows which fit into the same frames. When the porch was actually enclosed in 1958, though, the owner chose a slightly different solution. A knee-high solid wall was added around the edge of the porch and large picture windows were installed which are similar to those found throughout the rest of the house. The roofline of the original porch was maintained and the footprint remained unaltered so that while the enclosed space is an obvious addition to the structure, it is still in keeping with the materials and form of the original design.

Other changes to the structure are far less obvious. As mentioned before, two types of railings were proposed for use around the second floor deck although no railings are currently in place. While there is no evidence of any railings on the roof or what form they would have taken, the fact that entrances were installed to the decks suggests that there were probably railings at one time which have since been removed. In the open utility area, large dog pens have replaced the clotheslines and storage containers. Lastly, the brick patio on the rear façade is

probably also a later addition as its material is not consistent with any other element of the house.

7. *History of Property*

Deed History: The property is registered land and all deed information is located at the Middlesex County (South) Registry of Deeds.

Original Certificate 31913, Book 207, Page 309 sets out the first plan to subdivide a substantial area of land north of Brookline Street and west of Dudley Road which was controlled by Arnold Hartmann, Trustee. The initial subdivision, registered on October 22, 1930, does not show the actual lots or the site of the Kaplan House but does lay out the future location of Bald Pate Hill Road and Drumlin Road.

Certificate 58030, Book 388, Page 209 further subdivided the property noted above and creates the lot on which the Kaplan House now stands. This document also conveyed the land to George and Ethel Kaplan, the first residents of the International style home. Despite the fact that this transaction took place in February 1946, over fifteen years after the property was originally subdivided, this appears to be one of the first lots created in the area west of Dudley Road and south of Drumlin Road.

Certificate 58315, Book 390, Page 133 was registered in April 1946 and conveys the property to Arthur Kaplan. Arthur Kaplan, formerly of Brookline, is responsible for hiring The Architects Collaborative of Cambridge to design the house and his name appears on the original building permits for the site. There is no evidence, however, that Arthur Kaplan ever actually lived in the new house as his ownership of the property lasted for less than a year.

Certificate 60706, Book 405, Page 425 registers the transfer of the property back to George and Ethel Kaplan in January 1947. While the relationship between Arthur Kaplan and George and Ethel is unknown, the repeated transfer of the property between these individuals suggest that they may have been family members or close acquaintances. In any case, while the house was designed for Arthur, George and Ethel are the first recorded residents of the house and continued to live there until 1955.

Certificate 86892, Book 564, Page 142 records the transfer of the property from George and Ethel Kaplan to Charles Dockser in November 1955. While the Dockser family would remain in residence here until 1969, the title for the property was transferred several times between the owner and several mortgage companies. Further Certificates for the property are as follows: Certificate 91411, Book 587, Page 61; Certificate 91901, Book 589, Page 151; Certificate 94397, Book 602, Page 47; and Certificate 102403, Book 642, Page 53.

Certificate 129911, Book 779, Page 161 is the final transfer of property within the Dockser family and conveys the property to Estelle Dockser, Charles Dockser's wife, in 1969. This may have taken place after Charles' death in that year.

Certificate 133744, Book 798, Page 194 conveys the property to Edward Tackeff in 1970. Shortly after this, Tackeff amended the record (Certificate 133744, Book 812, Page 107) to include his wife, Rebecca, on the title. The Tackeffs owned and lived at the property from 1970 until 2001.

Certificate 224370, Book 1252, Page 20 records the most recent transfer of the property from Edward Tackeff to Irina and Doron Shaar in May 2002.

Development History : Development in the neighborhood surrounding the Kaplan House was just beginning to pick up steam in the mid 1940s as the plans for the house itself took shape. With the exception of several substantial estates which were now interspersed between the early farms, remarkably few changes are evident in City atlases of the area between 1855 and 1917 atlases. Properties were still widely spaced and the major roads were not varied throughout this period. By the 1929 City atlas, though, plans for subdividing the wide open spaces were beginning to take shape. On the property of Blanche L. Hartmann, an estate of over 70 acres which included all of Bald Pate Hill and most of the acreage north of Brookline Street and west of Dudley Road, meandering residential streets are shown to crisscross the property. However, several of these streets appear to have never made it past the planning stages. An example of this is Drumlin Road, which is shown as a winding, forked street in 1929 but was slightly relocated and significantly straightened by the time the actual subdivision plan was filed in 1930. Despite these early advances, no additional lots or development appears to have taken place on the property until 1946. The City Atlas of that year shows Oak Hill to be well on its way to its present appearance with numerous residential streets and individual house lots having already replaced several of the large estates and farms still evident in 1929. While few of the actual new homes are shown at this time, it is clear that the groundwork had been laid for the modern residential suburb.

The 1946 map shows several lots laid out in the area immediately surrounding the Kaplan House but does not show the lot itself. The first evidence of the site is the February 1946 Certificate of Title, which includes a site plan of the new lot. By June 1946, a building permit application was filed with the house sited in its present location. The new structure was designed by The Architect's Collaborative, or TAC, of Cambridge, which is the firm founded by architect Walter Gropius. One of the most influential architects of the twentieth century, Gropius founded the internationally recognized Bauhaus School in Germany which revolutionized architecture and design by focusing on function, efficiency and simplicity over traditional forms. After the school was shut down in the 1930s, Gropius emigrated to the U.S. and began teaching at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. His home in Lincoln, MA, is considered to be the first Bauhaus style house in America and is now a museum which is owned and

operated by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The Architect's Collaborative of Cambridge (TAC) was founded in the 1940s to promote and further the Bauhaus principles of modern design. The Kaplan House, also known as TAC#1, was the first structure completed by the firm.

The Kaplan House was originally designed for Arthur Kaplan of Brookline, who is said to have seen Walter Gropius' home in Lincoln and requested a similar design for his new home in Newton. While Gropius was definitely involved in the concept for the building and his stamp is on the building permit, the actual design was completed by another partner in the firm, John Harkness. A review of the original architectural plans for the structure, now located in the MIT archives, show that the building was constructed as originally planned and sited. The plans also included simple and efficient designs for interior finishes, storage units, and furnishings which were in keeping with the modern aesthetic of the house. There is no indication on the plans as to whether all of these designs were used in the building, although a site visit to the property has shown that many of the original fixtures are still installed within the house in their originally planned locations.

However, while the building was completed as originally designed, there is no evidence that the man who commissioned the plans, Arthur Kaplan, ever actually lived in the house. Arthur Kaplan purchased the property from other Kaplans, George and Ethel, in 1946 and then sold the property back to them in 1947. Whether George and Ethel Kaplan were involved in the planning process for the structure, or had a connection to Arthur Kaplan, is not entirely clear. What is clear, though, is that George and Ethel were the first residents of the structure and continued to live at 12 Drumlin Road from 1948 until 1955. Following the Kaplans, the house was sold to attorney Charles Dockser and his wife Estelle, who lived in the house with their two sons for nearly fifteen years. After Charles Dockser's death in 1969, Estelle Dockser sold the property to Edward and Rebecca Tackeff. The Tackeffs are responsible for the existing landscaping of the property and remained in the house through 2001. The house was recently sold in 2002 to Doron and Irina Shaar.

8. *Significance of Property*

a. *Period of Significance:* The period of significance for the Kaplan House is 1946 through the 1960s. The period encompasses both its design and construction as the first structure completed by an influential and renowned architectural firm, the evolution of Oak Hill into the City's most significant post WWII residential development, and the emergence of the property as one of the City's best examples of the International style constructed in the post WWII era.

b. *Historical Significance:* Historically, the structure is significant as the first structure completed by an internationally recognized architectural firm (TAC) and for its association with the firm's leader, Walter Gropius, a world-renowned architect who started the Bauhaus movement and one of the founders of modern architectural design. Additionally, the structure is important for its contribution

to the neighborhood as one of the first post WWII houses completed in an area which is now defined by its development during that period.

c. *Architectural Significance:* The Kaplan House, TAC#1, is one of the best examples of the International Style of architecture in Newton and one of the most distinctive buildings constructed in the City in the Post WWII era. The building has retained its original lot configuration and its defining architectural style and form with few significant alterations.

d. *Landmark Designation Criteria:* The Kaplan House meets criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 22-93 of Newton's Ordinance T-288. The property is:

- Eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places
- Architecturally significant as one of the best examples of the International style in Newton
- Historically significant for its association with one of the one of preeminent architects and architectural firms of its period of construction
- Historic location and setting has been retained and is compatible with future preservation and use
- Representative of the original design retaining most of its original fabric and features

9. *Recommendations*

a. *Preservation Recommendations:* The property has been well maintained with repairs and additions which are appropriate to the building and which were completed with compatible materials. The building has retained the style and appearance of its period of historic significance.

b. *Important Features:* The most important features of the Kaplan House are the strong geometric shapes of its components and its lack of extraneous detail. The exterior of the house is defined by the uniformly white brick and vertical wood siding façade, large picture and casement windows, and the flat roofs of its components.

10. *Standards for Design Review*

a. *General Standards* All projects affecting the property should be evaluated by considering the effect that proposed changes would have on the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved and the relationship of such features to the surrounding area. In the case of additions, the

appropriateness of size, shape and location of the additions is of critical concern. The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation should provide a baseline for review of changes to the landmark property.

b. *Specific Standards* Specific design standards have been addressed in the current maintenance of the property with regard to additions, height, proportion of windows and doors, scale and architectural detail. The same principles should be applied in developing designs for changes and in reviewing proposed changes, such that the key features retain their prominence and that the structure itself retains its identity as an excellent example of an International style, mid-twentieth century single-family residence. Thus the following specific design standards refer to potential changes to the existing structure:

Exterior Walls

- Brick walls should be retained, repointed if necessary, and painted white.
- Vertical wood siding should be replaced in kind and painted white.
- No new openings should be allowed on the front façade or those sides visible from Dudley Road or the corner of Dudley and Drumlin Road.
- No existing openings should be filled in on the front façade or those sides visible from Dudley Road or the corner of Dudley and Drumlin Road.
- The existing fence around the open utility area should be retained. If replacement is absolutely necessary, vertical wood siding should be used and painted white.

Windows

- Surviving historic windows should be retained and repaired if possible. If replacement is absolutely necessary, the replacements should match as closely as possible the original window in materials, style, and design.

Entrances/Doors

- The original front entrance design and arrangement should be retained.
- Replacement doors should be fabricated to match the style and materials of the originals.

- The garage doors should either be retained and repaired or replaced with ones which match the originals in materials, style, and design.

Roof

- The flat roof of the building is original and integral to the appearance of the building and every effort should be made to see that this is retained.
- If repair or replacement of the roofing materials is necessary, it should be carried out using only similar materials.
- If at some time the roof is converted back into deck space, every effort should be made to insure that the new deck does not effect the integrity of the roof and that new railings match the originally proposed railings as closely as possible in material, style, and design.

11. *Notification*

The following properties are considered abutters for the purposes of notification. Owners of these properties should receive notice when this property is considered for landmark designation and for any future under the Landmark Ordinance.

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>S/B/L</u>
85 Baldpate Hill Road	82/025/0056
447 Dudley Road	82/025/0038
446 Dudley Road	82/006/0016
436 Dudley Road	82/006/0017
428 Dudley Road	82/006/0018
11 Drumlin Road	82/007/0045
20 Drumlin Road	82/025/0036
25 Drumlin Road	82/007/0044



View of Garage Facing Dudley Road



View from Driveway/Drumlin Road



Front View of House from Dudley Road



View of House from Drumlin Road



View of Garage from Driveway



Rear View of House