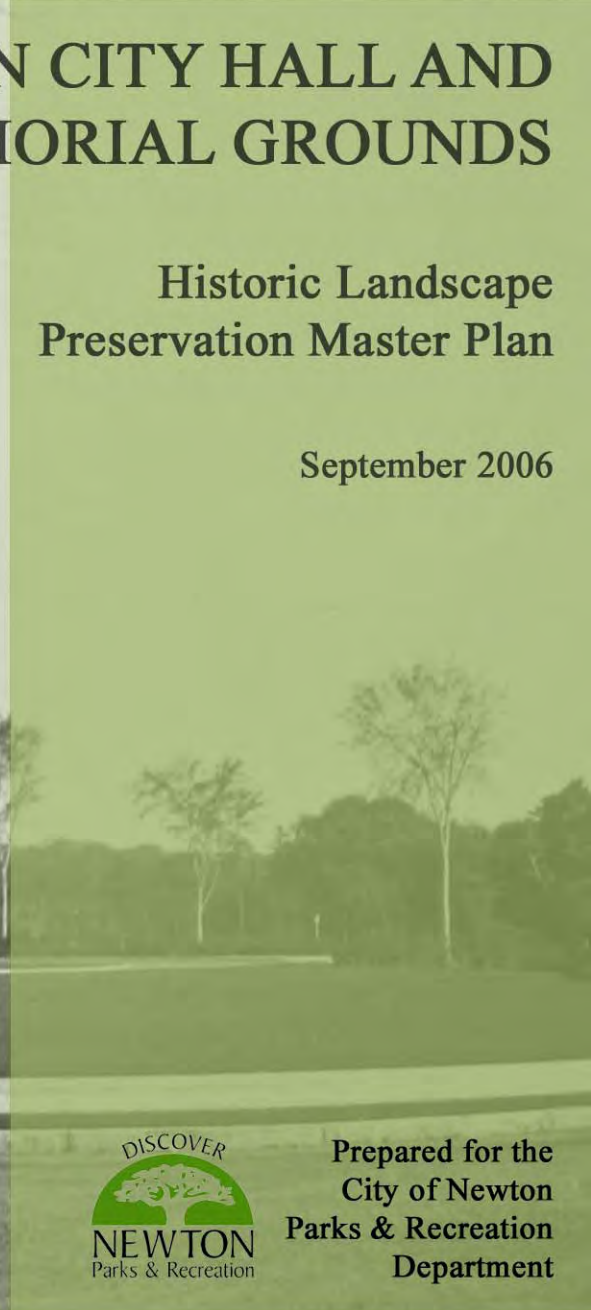


# NEWTON CITY HALL AND WAR MEMORIAL GROUNDS

## Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan

September 2006



Prepared for the  
City of Newton  
Parks & Recreation  
Department



pressley

by  
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and  
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Newton, MA



SC-10110-1001-CAR-MAY-11-07



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**NEWTON CITY HALL AND WAR  
MEMORIAL BUILDING GROUNDS  
Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan**

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# Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Overview

The City of Newton Parks & Recreation Department has developed this Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan for Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds in collaboration with Pressley Associates Inc, a landscape architecture firm specializing in historic preservation, and Bartlett Tree Experts, arborists. The Master Plan addresses a number of diverse objectives, focused primarily on protecting, stabilizing, and restoring this significant historic resource for future generations; meeting the community's current needs for the site; and arriving at a landscape solution that the City's Parks & Recreation Department can maintain with limited resources.

### Historic Significance of the Grounds

The grounds at the City Hall were designed and installed in 1931/32 by the Olmsted Brothers firm of landscape architects. The firm was founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., creator of New York's Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace, who is also regarded as the forefather of the landscape architecture profession in the United States. Following Olmsted Sr.'s retirement, the firm was continued and expanded by his sons John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. until, by the 1920s; it had become the largest landscape architecture office in the world with projects ranging from the Stanford University campus in California to Biltmore Estate in Ashville, North Carolina. Grounds of public buildings were a fairly unusual commission for the firm: of about five thousand projects nationwide, only one hundred or so (2%) were federal, state, and municipal public buildings (although these included the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and the National Museum in Washington, D.C.). The landscape design for Newton City Hall was directed by Henry Vincent Hubbard, one of the partners in the firm. Hubbard had a 33 year career (1906-1939) teaching at Harvard University, serving as Chair of the Harvard School of City Planning and as Charles Norton Professor of Regional Planning. He was the co-author with Theodora Kimball of an influential textbook (*An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*, 1917) that was for many years the standard reference for practicing landscape architects. He was also president of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) from 1931 to 1935 and was elected a Fellow of ASLA in 1910.

Hubbard's design for the City Hall grounds was elegant and dignified, as befitted the grand Georgian Revival building it surrounded, designed by Architects Allen and Collens. He turned the existing swamp and brook at the east end of the site into a linked trio of

picturesque ponds, which offered dramatic reflections of the building. The area around the ponds became a naturalistic park with rustic stone bridges, curving stone dust paths, and clumps of trees and shrubs set in the lawn to provide carefully framed views both within the site and from the surrounding roads. Immediately around the building the design was (in Hubbard's words) "simple but dignified and impressive" with open lawns, specimen elms, formal pathways leading to the building, and evergreen plantings around the entrances to enhance the dominance of the building on the site. The triangular portion of the site to the west of the War Memorial façade was designed as an open sweep of lawn, offering those approaching from Commonwealth Avenue dramatic views of the building, framed by specimen trees.



**Figure 1.** Historical views of the memorial lawn, 1932, and the south pond 1933. (National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, hereafter NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The completed Newton City Hall landscape garnered much praise and was subsequently featured in several national publications, including the American Society of Landscape Architects' *Illustration of Work of Members* in 1934 and the magazine *Landscape Architecture* in 1937. In the following year, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society awarded Newton City Hall a prestigious garden certificate. The building also received the Boston Society of Architects' celebrated Parker Award in 1936 for the "most beautiful building of the period." In 1990, the building and its landscape were listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Properties listed in the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. The Newton City Hall and War Memorial property, including the building and grounds, is significant in the areas of community planning and development, politics/government, architecture and landscape architecture.

### **Landscape Integrity**

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its historic identity, or the extent to which a property evokes its appearance during a particular historic period. It is clear that the

landscape at Newton City Hall and War Memorial has survived largely intact in the seventy years since it was laid out: many parts of the landscape are still recognizable from the 1930s work of the Olmsted firm. It retains its location and setting as a dignified civic landscape and naturalistic public park around the grand Georgian Revival City Hall and War Memorial building. Much of the original landscape design and materials, particularly the water bodies, bridges, roads, paths, steps, lawn and specimen tree collection, are still evident, if somewhat deteriorated, although some plant material and site features (such as the original fountain) have been lost. The intended relationship between the landscape and the building has been compromised, however, by a lack of maintenance and by non-historic plantings and other additions that obstruct important views and reflections in the water.

### **Landscape Stewardship**

Responsible stewardship of historically significant landscapes requires following “responsible preservation practices that help protect the nation’s irreplaceable resources.”<sup>1</sup> This means retaining the features, materials, and spaces that are associated with the history of the property and which convey its significance. To this end, the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* have formed the benchmark for preservation practice in the U.S. since 1966, and were revised in 1992 to reflect consistent treatment for entire historic properties, including buildings, structures, landscapes, and objects. The *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, produced by the National Park Service in 1996, interpret the standards specifically for landscapes. The Secretary’s Standards include four distinct approaches that define the extent and intent of physical changes proposed for an historic property. The treatments Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction are defined as follows:

**Preservation:** the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and material of a historic property, which includes initial stabilization work, where necessary, as well as ongoing preservation maintenance and repair of historic materials and features.

**Rehabilitation:** the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

**Restoration:** the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by removing features from other periods in its history and reconstructing missing features from the restoration period.



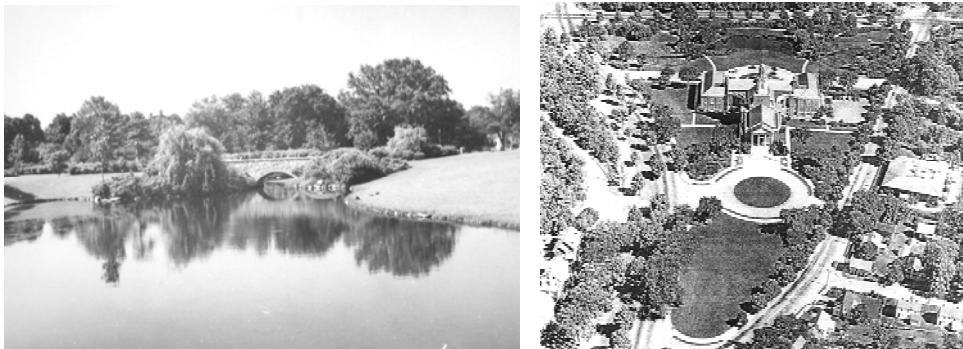
**Reconstruction:** the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.

## Recommended Treatment

Rehabilitation is the treatment recommended in this Master Plan for the Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds. It is an inclusive treatment that provides for a broad range of interventions to both meet contemporary uses and retain historic character. This includes the retention and maintenance of existing historic features, as well as selective changes to the property provided the overall historic character is not compromised.

The Recommended Treatment Plan for Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds is framed by a philosophy that recognizes the need to:

- Foster greater appreciation of Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds as a historic site;
- Understand the primary role of the landscape architect;
- Respect the value of the natural environment of the Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds;
- Foster a new generation of park managers;
- Be aware of outside impacts on the site;
- Respond to contemporary uses;
- Develop control of event programming;
- Develop access for all; and
- Establish guidelines for memorialization.



**Figure 2.** Historic view of one of the pond bridges, 1932. (NPS, Olmsted NHS) and historic aerial view of the site, 1946 (City of Newton).

Based on these tenets, rehabilitation of the Newton City Hall Grounds will focus on retaining the historic character around the three ponds and the lawns to the north and west of the building, while retaining contemporary additions such as Millennium Park and allowing for monitored public events. Selected non-historic trees and shrubs are to be removed to re-open lost views and vistas from the surrounding roadways.

The original character of the vegetation around the ponds is to be re-established to allow for reflections of the building in the water and the north pond re-configured to re-establish its original size and shape. Rehabilitation also allows for the replacement of the missing historic trees within the site and along the sidewalks and some shrub borders throughout the site, and for the replacement of the non-historic fountain in front of City Hall with the original Olmsted design, which is in keeping with the period of significance of the site and the architectural style of the building.

Rehabilitation of the War Memorial Grounds will focus on retaining the historic character of the open lawn so trees are to be removed to re-open the lost long view to the War Memorial building façade. Trees along the sidewalk that frame this view will be retained and some are to be replanted where they are missing. Some of the existing monuments are to be relocated to more appropriate locations and, where appropriate, surrounding plantings are to be modified to provide a better presence and to make the monuments more compatible with the historic character of the grounds. The ability of the site to host (and withstand) large public events will be improved.

Taken together, these changes will protect and restore this historically significant landscape. After their implementation, the site will be better able to support a range of contemporary uses and, with the accompanying Maintenance Plan, will be easier for the Parks and Recreation Department to maintain and manage within limited resources and management capacity.

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**Endnotes to Executive Summary**

<sup>1</sup> Charles Birnbaum, Editor, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1996), 6.

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# Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds

## CHAPTER ONE: ILLUSTRATED CHRONOLOGY

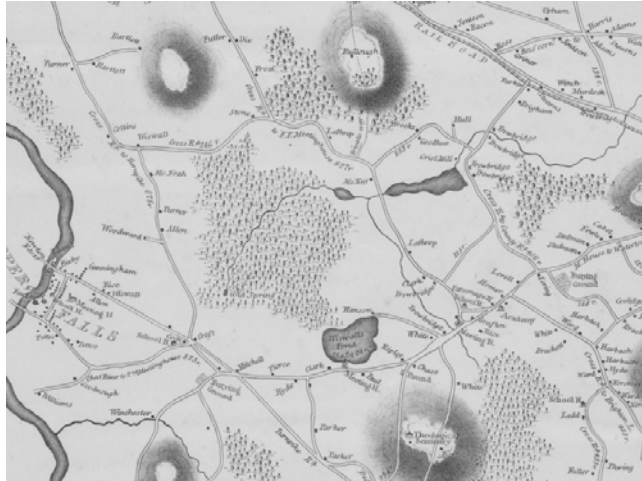
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### Introduction

This chapter of the Master Plan report sets out the history of the landscape at Newton City Hall and War Memorial, with the main events described in chronological order and illustrated with relevant photographs, maps, plans and drawings. The information is derived from an intensive study of primary and secondary research materials relating to the site. Annotations, in the form of endnotes, provide the sources for the information. Details of the repositories consulted, a full bibliography and a list of historical plans are included at the end of this report.

### Chronology

1831 A historic map of Newton (see Figure 1.1) shows the future site of the City Hall and War Memorial, with its swampy ground and a brook running through the area.



**Figure 1.1.** E. F. Woodward & W. F. Ward 1831 map of the town of Newton (detail) (Harvard Map Collection).

1873 Newton became a city. The old wooden building that had been the Town Hall on Washington Street in West Newton was refurbished and served as the City Hall for the next 59 years. The original Town Hall was torn down when it was finally replaced by the current building in 1932.<sup>1</sup>

1926 A site survey produced by the City of Newton Engineering Department shows the existing conditions of the area that was to become home to the new City Hall. The triangular site was bordered by Commonwealth Avenue, Walnut Street and Homer Street. Two roads (Lake View and Park Road) bisected the site. The plan shows

seven houses (one on Homer, four on Walnut and two facing Commonwealth Avenue), all but one marked “gone.” The plan also shows Hammond Brook entering through a culvert under Homer Street and then running as an open brook across the site, and plots the position of a number of existing trees. There is a good degree of topographical change: the brook elevation is 95 feet; the edge along Walnut Street about 104 feet.

Revisions to the survey made in February 1931 show some topographical amendments and the proposed footprint of the building on the site.

- 1931 After years of public debate and discussion, construction began on the imposing brick City Hall and War Memorial on the triangular site (the so-called “Homer St triangle”<sup>2</sup>) on the corner of Walnut Street and Commonwealth Avenue. An official publication described the site as “a barren, ten-acre plot of land, crossed by a sluggish brook, and flecked by growths of scrub trees, weeds and brush.”<sup>3</sup> The \$1million development<sup>4</sup> was to serve as both the new home for the city government and as a memorial to veterans and soldiers who died in the First World War. It thus demanded two major façades. Designed by the Boston architecture firm of Allen & Collens (later Allen, Collens & Willis), the building was a monumental Georgian Revival-style structure. The western, War Memorial side had a raised central section with a massive pedimented portico and crowning steeple. It had three smaller bay wings trimmed with quoins and balustrades around hipped slate roofs. The eastern, City Hall side, facing Walnut Street, was similar but with different proportions and a less grandiose portico and steeple. The quatrastyle portico was centered on an eleven-bay façade articulated with quoins and entablature. Its Aldermanic Chamber on the second floor was inspired by the colonial model of Philadelphia’s Independence Hall.<sup>5</sup>

The City had received permission from the state legislature to borrow outside the debt limit to construct the building. Mayor Sinclair Weeks had argued that the construction of such a large building was justified during the Depression as such public works relieved unemployment, and eighty percent of the workers were Newton residents.

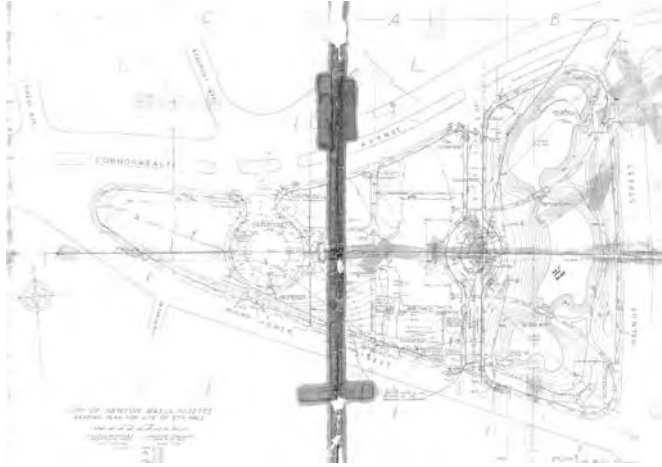
The City Hall architects Allen and Collens produced a conceptual design for the landscape surrounding the building (see Figure 1.2). It was a formal Beaux Arts design with roadways forming two axes across the site. One ran east-west with the building at its center; the second one ran north-south in front of City Hall, where a large circular turnaround marked the intersection of the two axes. On the Walnut Street end of the site, the axial roads created two separate, largely symmetrical areas, each featuring a large rectangular pond with a walkway around its edge. The War Memorial side was smaller and more neatly triangular than the later Olmsted design, with the central roadway that dissected the site bordered by a formal, symmetrical allée of trees.



**Figure 1.2.** The Allen & Collens conceptual design for the Soldiers' Memorial and City Hall, c.1931 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The Allen and Collens design was not implemented. Instead, the surrounding landscape was designed during 1931/2 by Henry Vincent Hubbard of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm. Hubbard (1875–1947) studied at both Harvard and MIT before joining the Olmsted Brothers in 1901. Five years later he established his own firm, Pray Hubbard and White, which specialized in the design of residential country estates, campus plans and other large landscapes. The First World War effectively ended the business and he rejoined the Olmsted firm where, in 1920, he was made a partner, a position he held until his death. Hubbard became planning consultant to many large cities and organizations, including the National Park Service, and, for a time, he was the Norton Professor of Regional Planning at Harvard. Active in the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), he co-founded and edited its journal *Landscape Architecture* and later was ASLA President for three years from 1931. Hubbard is perhaps best remembered today as the author, with Theodora Kimball, of *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*. First published in 1917 and revised and reprinted many times, it was the first and, for a long time, the standard textbook for landscape practitioners. In it, he and Kimball argued for the incorporation of natural features and native plants into designed landscapes. The book has been acknowledged as the single most influential source for park designers in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>6</sup>

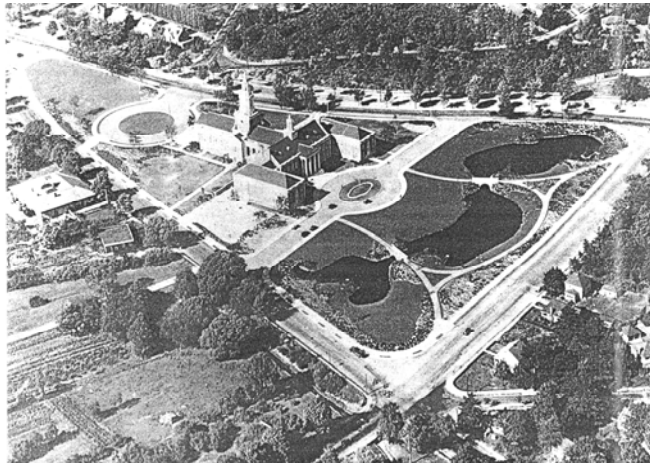
A considerable part of the Newton site had originally been swampland (see Figure 1.1), with a brook running through it. It was decided that, rather than spend extensive sums of money constructing a covered culvert, the swamp and brook should be converted through careful grading into a number of linked decorative ponds (see the grading plan at Figure 1.3, which shows the extent of the grading work necessary to form the three ponds.). There were substantial engineering issues in the work to reroute the water: the original Olmsted estimates include blue clay to form the ponds, inlet and tile storm drains, wrought iron water pipes and culverts.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1.3.** Olmsted grading plan for the City Hall site, 1931 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The clients, architect and landscape architect together agreed on a general plan for the layout of the site; the Olmsted firm then advised on the exact location of the building, as well as being responsible for all matters relating to the grading, planting, road construction and the supervision of the resulting work.<sup>8</sup> Photographs held at the Olmsted National Historic Site graphically reveal the amount of heavy construction work involved as the plan was implemented.

**Figure 1.4.** The newly-completed City Hall and War Memorial with its grounds designed by Henry Hubbard of the Olmsted firm, 1932 (Newton Historical Society).



The Olmsted design for the landscape was settled in 1931 and was much more naturalistic in feel than the Allen and Collens proposal, while still providing a suitable setting for the imposing civic building it surrounded. It called for an expansive open lawn and grand traffic circle in front of the War Memorial site, with the road (to be known as Memorial Drive) entering from Commonwealth Avenue. On the eastern side, the new City Hall Drive connected Commonwealth Avenue and Homer Street, with a second, more elliptical, traffic turnaround in front of the building. The roads were to be surfaced with bituminous macadam, with sidewalks carefully matched in materials and color to the sidewalks outside the property.<sup>9</sup> To the south of the City Hall, between the building and the Homer Street boundary was a square concrete parking area. The City Hall side of the site was to feature a grand water fountain, with a basin constructed of smooth, reinforced concrete and coping stones of Indiana limestone to match the building.

**Figure 1.5.** One of the pathways leading through the park towards City Hall, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).



Beyond City Hall Drive, a 3½-acre public park featured the three interconnecting ponds created from the swampland. Hubbard saw water in the landscape as “almost inevitably in each case the heart of the composition”<sup>10</sup> and believed that reflections on the water’s surface of surrounding buildings, bridges and trees provided great interest for the observer. The effects he created with the ponds at City Hall are well illustrated in many of the early photographs produced here (see, for example, Figure 1.16).

The ponds were crossed by two rock-faced rustic bridges (see Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.13). Over the bridges and through the parkland ran curving gravel paths. The photograph at Figure 1.5 shows the most northerly of the gravel paths curving through the grass, which is planted with shrubs and trees, and then running over one of the bridges and towards the City Hall building. The photograph also shows the gently sloping topography of the regraded land. Throughout the park, similarly naturalistic plantings of trees and shrubs offered spaces for passive public recreation and carefully-constructed views of the building from the surrounding streets (see, for instance, Figure 1.19).

Plans held at the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site reveal how the Hubbard design developed towards this solution in the first months of 1931 (a full list of the plans consulted for this report is included in the appendices). Plan #4, dated March 7, shows an early design for the site, conceptually similar to the final solution, but Memorial Drive is curved, and cuts through the site (rather than being a dead end with a turnaround); the City Hall Drive turnaround is circular rather than oval; the three ponds are more linear; there is no parking lot and instead just a service road from Homer Street to the building; the land to the south slopes gently to Homer Street, whereas the final solution had a steeper slope with a flight of steps; and the paths around the ponds are laid out to the corners of the park. A plan and elevation (#20) probably from around this time show that originally the bridges were designed in the Classical Revival style, in granite and brick.

On March 18, the Olmsted firm issued a number of plans for the landscape at City Hall. A staking plan (#34) shows the final layout for the site, with the center line of



the building from the War Memorial turnaround to the central pond, proposed grading, radii, roads and paths, the footprint of the building, reinforced concrete pavement for the parking lot, proposed culverts for the north and south ponds, and the depth of the lower pond (92.5 feet at the bottom; 95 feet at the water level).

A Preliminary Planting Plan (#28 print 1) has colored pencil indications of lawn areas, shrub massing and tree pits. It is a preparation plan, showing how the beds are to be laid out and the ground prepared for planting. The notes indicate that the tree pits inside the grounds are to be six feet diameter and three feet deep. The topsoil for the shrub beds is to be eighteen inches deep; the lawn topsoil twelve inches deep. The plan shows trees approximately forty feet on center along Walnut and Homer Streets. There is no planting at either corner on Walnut Street, with what appear to be view lines drawn to both corners to the building. The area north and south of the building is marked "limit of space to be occupied by building contractor" where plantings are to be delayed until Fall 1932. (Photographs held at the Olmsted Archives make clear that much of the landscape was installed during the construction of the building.)

Another preliminary plan of the same date (#12) shows the proposed tree and shrub masses, with a clear delineation of small and large trees. There is a square design in the War Memorial turnaround on the center of the building line: this is possibly a fountain or monument that was later dropped from the design. The plan shows regular street planting around the entire perimeter of the site except on the Commonwealth Avenue / Homer Street intersection, to allow for a view of the War Memorial.

Work began on site in 1931, with the building construction and the layout of the landscape being undertaken simultaneously. By the end of 1931 major construction work had converted the swampland and brook into three ornamental ponds with new, gently sloping shorelines.

Hubbard worked hard to create as full a view as possible of the ponds from the City Hall, at one point proposing removing soil from the regraded land to allow a view of "a little more of the middle pond" from the top of the steps leading to the building entrance.<sup>11</sup> Into the following year there were debates between the City, the architects and the Olmsted firm about how to maximize the reflection of the City Hall in the water, with analyses of the best level and source for the water, and the proposed use of various pumps, culverts and settling basins.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the project the Olmsted firm pressed for the creation of a settling basin and spillway on the upstream side of Homer Street, to retain sand and silt and thus prevent the ponds from becoming clogged.<sup>13</sup> Although the City considered the idea, such a basin was not constructed.

1932 The sum of \$100,000 was appropriated for the landscape work.<sup>14</sup> The amount to be spent on plant material was the subject of some debate with the City, a sign perhaps of the financial pressures caused by the Depression: Newton had allocated \$10,000

but Hubbard advised that \$16,000 was needed: if the City could not find that amount, he indicated that either the planting would end up looking “cheap, scuppy and rotten all over” or that just part of the site should be planted, with the rest postponed until further funds were available.<sup>15</sup> In the end it was agreed that \$15,000 should be spent.



**Figure 1.6.** Three early views of the ponds: left and right are the outer ponds as they are planted, May 1932; the image of the center pond shows the installation complete, October 1932 (all NPS, Olmsted NHS).

An annotated version (Figure 1.11) of the preliminary planting plan (#72) records the planting carried out in Spring 1932, with handwritten notes of changes made on the ground. Trees and shrubs were planted in the grounds to the west of Memorial Drive and to the east of City Hall Drive, in the pond area. Around the two bridges (see Figure 1.15) Hubbard specified taller trees and shrubs as a “pictorial enframement” for the views both of and from the bridges.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere specimen elm trees and other smaller trees and shrubs were used, with a deliberate variety of habit and form to provide year-round interest. In typical Olmsted style, the landscape composition was segregated from its surroundings by border plantations of trees and shrubs, especially along the Walnut Street edge, with carefully planned vista openings allowing framed views of City Hall and the War Memorial from strategic points.<sup>17</sup> (A complete list of the plant material used at Newton City Hall is included as an appendix to this report.)

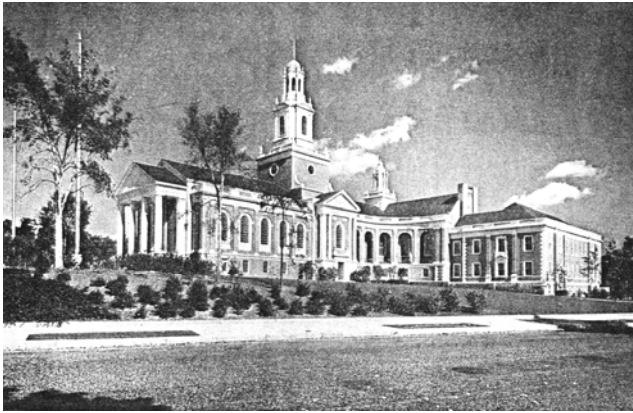
**Figure 1.7.** The War Memorial facade, viewed across open lawn. To the left is a well-established row of street trees, with light fixtures positioned at regular intervals. Large specimen elms, planted among beds of low-growing shrubs frame the view of the building, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).



Much of the plant material was supplied by Bay State Nurseries, Inc. of North Abington, MA, with specimen elm trees supplied and planted by H. L. Frost &

Higgins Co., of Arlington, MA (after an earlier dispute with the City’s legal advisors about the need or otherwise for competitive bids for the supply of plants).<sup>18</sup>

The photograph at Figure 1.8 from the Official Dedication Program shows the simple shrub massing along the Homer Street façade, with carefully placed specimen elm trees balancing the scale of the building.



**Figure 1.8.** The Homer Street facade, 1932 (City of Newton).

Plants intended for the omitted areas (in the space being used by the building contractor) were planted temporarily in a nursery on site.

The Olmsted firm produced a separate planting plan (#59) dated March 7 for the immediate vicinity of the building: it was to be “simple but dignified and impressive, with a maximum concentration of effect at certain agreed-on important locations.”<sup>19</sup> The intention was to use largely evergreen material, placed close around the building, to enhance its dominance on the site.<sup>20</sup> The photographs at Figure 1.8 and Figure 1.9 show the effect thus created when the planting was completed in early Autumn 1932.

**Figure 1.9.** A view of the some of the planting around the building, with one of the original light fixtures visible in the right foreground of the image, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).



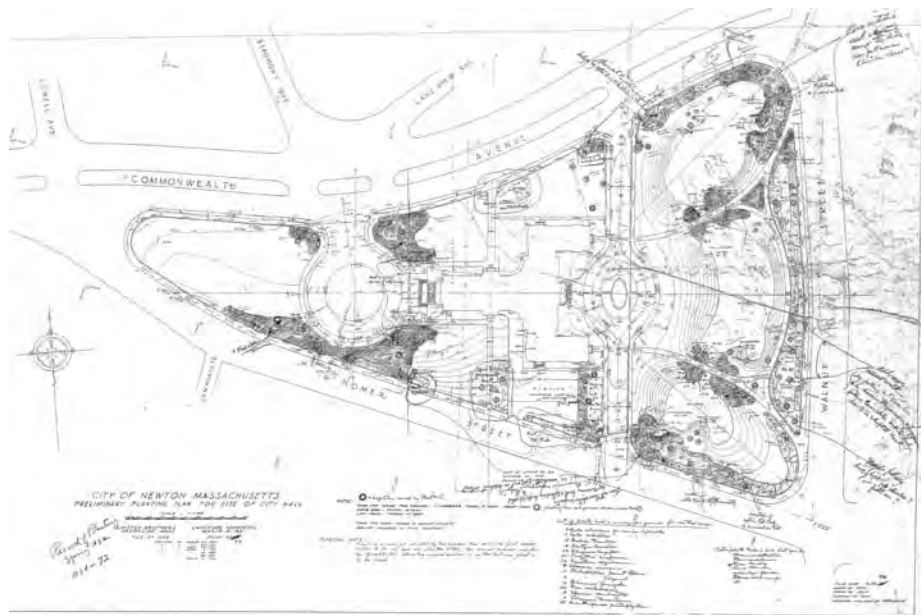
The architects objected to the appearance of the bridges, believing them to be “too rustic” and pressed the Olmsted firm to have them dressed down to even, smooth surfaces so that they related more to the building than the park.<sup>21</sup> After a rather bad-tempered exchange of letters, in which Hubbard explained that “we consider the

bridges to be, esthetically, a part of the naturalistic landscape, relating to the building in position and orientation rather than in similarity of finish,"<sup>22</sup> there is no evidence that any changes were made to the bridges' surface.



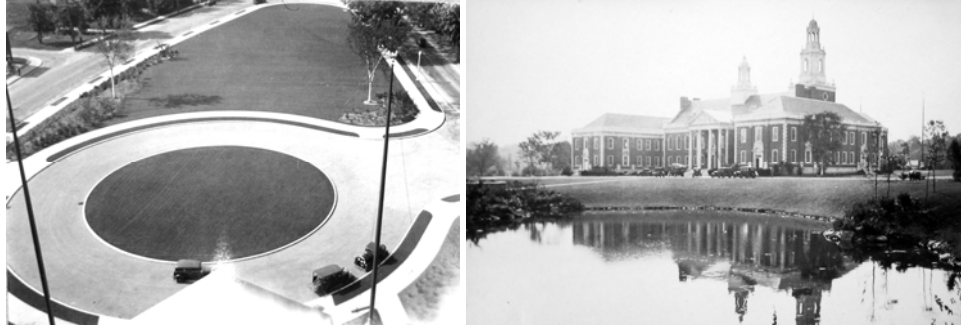
**Figure 1.10.** A view of the recently completed landscaping, with City Hall in the background, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

A photograph from 1932 (see Figure 1.10) shows how the turf-covered ground sloped smoothly from the building down to the water's edge, with boulders marking the edge of the water and taller plantings of trees and shrubs placed carefully to the side of the ponds and in the landscape beyond the water.



**Figure 1.11.** Annotated version of the Olmsted preliminary planting plan for the site of City Hall, 1931 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The new building was formally dedicated on Armistice Day, November 11. The Mayor subsequently wrote to the Olmsted firm, describing himself "well pleased" with the building and surroundings and stating that the firm had done "a mighty good job" which was leading to "nothing but extremely complimentary references, not only to the building itself, but in many cases, more particularly to its surroundings."<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 1.12.** Two photographs of the completed landscape, taken for the official opening: left is an elevated view from the War Memorial, showing the sweeping manicured lawn areas and the specimen elms planted among low shrubs; and, right, a view across the north pond showing the smooth grassy banks leading to the water with its reflection of the building, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

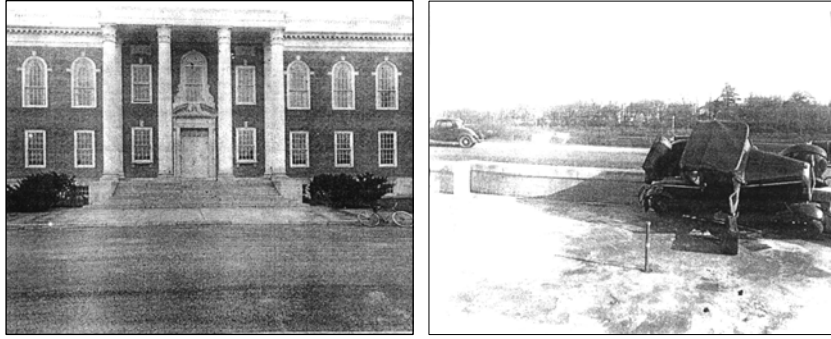
Hubbard wrote to the building commissioner with a number of final points that he felt needed to be addressed to improve and maintain the appearance of the landscape. He advised that a crew of five men would be needed between April and November for maintenance. He was also concerned to preserve the plant palate carefully chosen for the grounds, stressing that “there are no flowering garden plants at all, [his emphasis] and the planting of any would injure the appearance of the design and increase the upkeep.”<sup>24</sup> Hubbard also recommended the prevention of car parking on City Hall Drive, and proposed that the City should instead acquire space for a new lot from Newton Cemetery, to the south of Homer Street (now site of the Newton Free Library and parking lot); and the need to manage the periodic flooding of the ponds and to keep them clear of silt. Hubbard continued to press for the creation of a settling basin into which the brook could flow before it entered the site.<sup>25</sup>

1933



**Figure 1.13.** One of the rock-faced rustic bridges over the ponds in the public park, 1933 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The Newton Historical Society has three photographs of the City Hall steps (see one at Figure 1.14, left), which show the simple, low evergreen planting that fixes the visitor’s attention on the entrance and “makes a sequential connection between the horizontal lines of the ground and the vertical surfaces of the building.”<sup>26</sup>

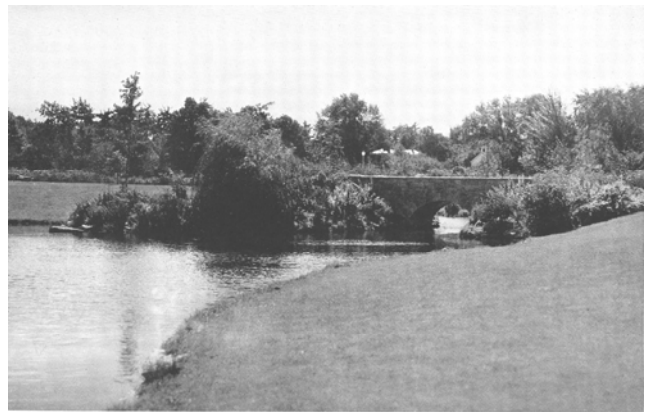


**Figure 1.14.** A view of City Hall steps, 1933 (left), and a car crashed into the fountain, 1930s (right), (both Newton Historical Society).

A photograph from around this time shows a car crashed into the fountain in front of City Hall, both of its right tires in the basin itself and the left tires on top of the surrounding wall. The photograph shows the scale and simplicity of the concrete basin used to hold the water for the fountain, and the simple jet at the center (see Figure 1.14, right).

1934

**Figure 1.15.** A view of one of the bridges over the ponds in the public park, 1934 (*American Society of Landscape Architects: Illustration of Work of Members*. NY: New York: J. Hayden Twiss, 1934).



The American Society of Landscape Architects featured the Olmsted Brothers design for the City Hall site in a publication about the work of its members. The accompanying photograph (see Figure 1.15) shows one of the naturalistic ponds in the public park, with the bridge carrying the path over the water, and clumps of woody plants framing the view and making a gentle transition between the structure and the surrounding grassland.

1936 The City Hall and War Memorial won the Boston Society of Architects J. Harleston Parker Award as the most beautiful building of the period.

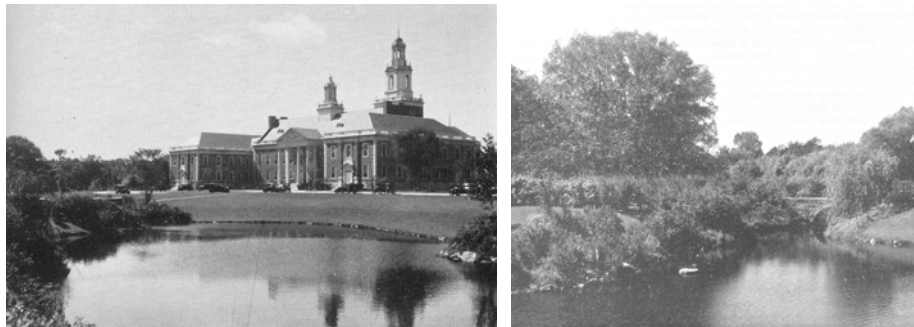
A guide to the city described the building's "beauty of design ... all in a park-like setting of ten acres. The whole ensemble expresses beauty and fitness without extravagant expenditure."<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 1.16.** City Hall from Walnut Street, a photograph taken by Henry V. Hubbard and later available as a postcard, c.1933 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The Olmsted firm wrote to the Mayor expressing concerns about the way that the shrubs on the grounds had been pruned. Hubbard's 1932 maintenance plan had made clear that the shrubs should be maintained in their respective natural habits: he expressly cautioned against the fashion for shearing them into rounded shapes "resembling a pan of green biscuits."<sup>28</sup> Despite this, they had now been pruned in many instances to an even height and cut back on the sides to create open spaces between them. The firm pressed for its original maintenance plan to be followed.<sup>29</sup>

1937



**Figure 1.17.** Two views of the site: left, the open view across the ponds to the City Hall; and, right, one of the ponds and a bridge in the public park (Henry Vincent Hubbard, "The Setting of a Public Building," *Landscape Architecture* (Vol. 28, 1937-38)).

Henry V. Hubbard wrote an article in *Landscape Architecture* about the design of the City Hall site, explaining how the Olmsted Brothers, Allen, Collens & Willis and the City of Newton had all worked closely together on the overall design. He also described the "unusual landscape character" of the site resulting from the decision to convert the swamp into ornamental ponds.<sup>30</sup> The published photographs (see Figure 1.17) show how the planting in the public park was already maturing to create a lush, naturalistic feel around the ponds without obscuring the carefully-designed views of the buildings and water.

1938



**Figure 1.18.** A view over the ponds to the City Hall, 1938 (NPS, Olmsted NHS).

The Massachusetts Horticultural Society awarded a garden certificate to the City Hall site (and two other landscapes) for the “development of the difficult site ... into grounds of beauty and character. [The ponds] offer a decorative water surface at all times. They effectively mirror the beautiful colonial building, which is the City Hall, and the appropriate planting which surrounds it.”<sup>31</sup>

1942 The photograph at Figure 1.19 (labeled the “proposed site for a plaque”) shows the carefully managed vista of the eastern façade of the City Hall through the boundary plantings.



**Figure 1.19.** A view from the corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Walnut Street, 1942 (Newton Historical Society).

An aerial photograph (Figure 1.20) of the City Hall and its grounds was used to illustrate an article describing the advantages of living in the city. It showed the maturing planting around the site, with clumps of trees and shrubs around the bridges over the ponds in the public park.



**Figure 1.20.** An aerial view of the site from the southwest, 1942 (*Newton Life*).



1945 The Newton Historical Society has a number of 1945 photographs (see one at Figure 1.21) of the City Hall parking area, showing the low evergreen planting around the building and the mature specimen elm trees in the background.



**Figure 1.21.** The car parking area, 1945 (Newton Historical Society).

1946 An aerial photograph (see

**Figure 1.22**), with the War Memorial façade and landscaping in the foreground, shows the landscape maturing, with the open lawn areas and clumps of naturalistic plantings settling well into the site.



**Figure 1.22.** An aerial view of the site looking east, 1946 (Newton Historical Society).

- 1949 The Newton Tribute Foundation established small shrub gardens along Commonwealth Avenue, in honor of those who took part in World War II. At the junction with Walnut Street, laurel and hemlock were planted, along with euonymus, flowering crab, kerria and Japanese quince. Some plants were chosen to repeat “the lovely planting which is in the yard of City Hall.”<sup>32</sup>

1970s



**Figure 1.23.** 1970s aerial view of the site from the northeast (City of Newton).

An aerial photograph (see Figure 1.23) taken from the northeast of the site shows the changing nature of the tree cover along the Walnut Street boundary. Also evident is the loss of many of the street trees along Homer Street and the cars parked on both sides of City Hall Drive and around the traffic island. In the background to the left is the undeveloped lot that will become home to the Newton Free Library. On the War Memorial side, there appears to be a small shrub bed around a low memorial on the northeast corner of the open lawn adjacent to the junction of Commonwealth Avenue and Memorial Drive.

- 1987 Candace Jenkins and Susan Abele produced a Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form for the Newton City Hall and War Memorial, which was revised in May 1988.

The City made extensive plans to celebrate Newton’s Tercentenary on New Year’s Eve, which included a ‘Historic Illumination of Newton City Hall and grounds’ with lights installed at the front of the building and around the ponds.

- 1988 The Newton Tricentennial Beautification Committee, which worked on four major projects including the City Hall grounds, produced plans to renovate the landscape around the front steps, which was estimated to cost \$10,000. The City subsequently applied for a state grant for the historic restoration of the whole City Hall grounds (Massachusetts had funds to support 90% of the cost of restoration for selected Olmsted landscapes), and took advice from the Director of the Olmsted Preservation Program at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM, now part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation), and from the NPS Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, to confirm the authenticity of the

landscape as an Olmsted design. The City and the chair of the Friends Group identified, as a basis for the restoration, the Olmsted master plan, grading plan, planting plan, plant lists, construction photographs, local archive material and hundreds of pages of correspondence between the City and the Olmsted firm.

In support of the City's application for a Massachusetts Historical Commission grant, the Director of the DEM Olmsted Program described the Newton landscape as:

... one of the most significant [Olmsted] landscapes associated with a public building because of the existence of a true park, a romantic pastoral landscape whose reflecting ponds mirror the Georgian Revival architecture ... What is so remarkable about this project is that so much of the original design was carried out, affected only in a minimal way by economic conditions in the 1930's, and that so much of what was designed remains intact today for the use and enjoyment of the public. The original circulation, ponds, and the handsome bridges over those ponds remain intact and represent more than just a landscape composition of a typical Massachusetts city hall: these elements comprise a real park for the community.<sup>33</sup>

1989 The Massachusetts Historical Commission turned down the application for a State Survey and Planning Grant for the Newton City Hall landscape.<sup>34</sup>

2,500 bulbs (a mix of yellow daffodils, red tulips, crocus and *Iris reticulata*) were planted in the grounds, mainly around the Walnut Street boundary, in the beds adjacent to the two building entrances, and around both sides of Memorial Drive. More were added in subsequent years.

1990 The Newton City Hall and War Memorial were listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the amended Newton Multiple Resources Area.

1992 On behalf of the City, Baystate Environmental Consultants produced construction drawings for a City Hall Ponds Restoration Plan: Restoration of Laundry Brook Drainage System.

The City declared almost 168,000 square feet of the grounds (the area to the east of City Hall) permanently dedicated to public recreational use, so that state funding could be obtained for Phase II of the Restoration Project.<sup>35</sup>

Thirty-four trees were planted largely on the City Hall side of the site, under a \$17,500 grant provided to the City by the Mass Releaf Grant Program in September 1991. The plantings included oaks, dogwoods, cherries, birch and amelanchier, as shown on a 1992 Field Drawing produced by Kenn Eisenbraun, City landscape designer (see Figure 1.24).

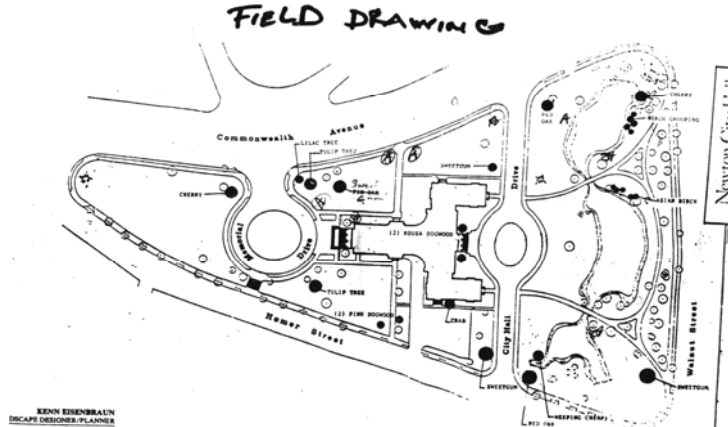


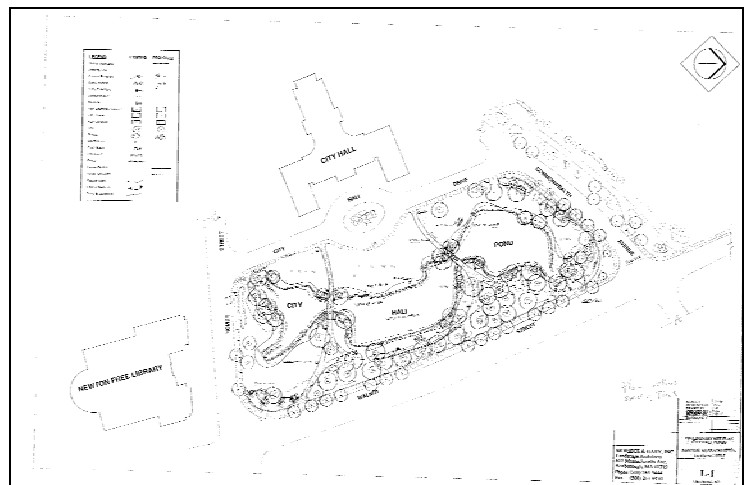
Figure 1.24. Field drawing showing the locations of the trees planted with Mass Releaf funding, 1992 (City of Newton).

A further grant of \$22,500 was awarded for tree planting on the War Memorial grounds. Original plans to establish two angled rows of paired botanical specimens along the edges of the site were reworked after the Newton Historical Commission raised concerns that the plans were not in keeping with the Olmsted design intent.<sup>36</sup>

1993 About 55 trees were planted under the second Mass Releaf Grant, including 18 kousa dogwoods, 7 *Betula jacquemontii*, 6 *Franklinia alatamaha* and a selection of maples, silverbells, elms and other trees.

1994 Landscape architects Moriece and Gary were engaged by the City to implement the City Hall Ponds Restoration Plan (see Figure 1.25). Their work maintained the original path system, bridges, ground form and selected plants, while adding a 'garland' of spring and summer-flowering bulbs and perennials around the ponds, with a low fence to discourage Canada geese from using the ponds and surrounding lawns. New evergreen trees and shrubs were added at the boundary to filter out traffic noise.<sup>37</sup>

Figure 1.25. Preliminary Site Plan, Newton City Hall Ponds, 1994 (Moriece & Gary).

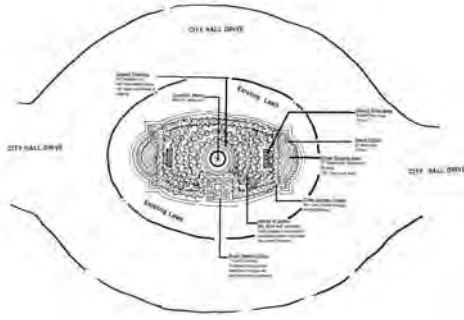


Commissioner Hickey extended to scope of the project to include landscape improvements to the oval island within City Hall Drive. City landscape designer

Kenn Eisenbraun proposed refurbishing the planting beds flanking the City Hall steps at the same time, suggesting permanent plantings and seasonal bulbs and annuals.<sup>38</sup>

1996 Kenn Eisenbraun produced plans for a small City employees' garden, adjacent to the parking lot to the southwest of City Hall, adding fragrant, flowering plants to an existing seating area.

1998



**Figure 1.26.** The planting plan (detail) around the new memorial fountain, 1998 (Kenn Eisenbraun/City of Newton).

The City landscape designer proposed a planting plan around the new black granite Memorial Fountain in front of City Hall in the location of the original Olmsted basin and jet. This included Japanese holly with a low evergreen planting and pockets of flowering plants (see Figure 1.26).

2003 The Newton Public Buildings Preservation Task Force made a series of observations and recommendations about the preservation of City Hall, including the restoration of the landscape to reflect the original Olmsted intentions. The Task Force, with help from landscape architect Marion Pressley, identified the as-built Olmsted planting plan and early photographs of the property shortly after planting. While not advocating a complete restoration (as both plant availability and landscape purpose had changed), the Task Force recommended restoring the views of the building and the places and spaces on its grounds, as envisioned by the Olmsted firm. The recommendations included the removal of vines that were damaging the fabric of the building and overwhelming other plantings; removal of other inappropriate planting; replacement of key missing plants and, as funds allowed, the re-introduction of smaller massed plantings.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 1.27.** Three lost views: left, from the pond-side benches; center, from City Hall towards the ponds; right, from the corner of Homer Walnut Streets towards City Hall, 2003 (Newton Public Buildings Preservation Task Force).

- 2005 The City formally opened the privately-funded Salvatore A. Balsamo Millennium Park, constructed on one acre of the historic City Hall Grounds between Memorial Drive and City Hall Drive (see Figure 1.28). Designed by Chang and Sylligardos, it included an accessible passive recreational area, paths, seating, and games tables, as well as, the millennium commemorative wall. New planting included Beech, Katsura, and Crabapples. Several sonnets by U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky about the City of Newton, engraved in bronze, were to be distributed throughout the park and are planned to be installed in 2006.



**Figure 1.28.** The new brick path in Balsamo Millennium Park, on the south side of City Hall, 2005 (Pressley Associates).

Pressley Associates, Inc. was invited to produce a Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan for the Newton City Hall and War Memorial Building Grounds.

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## Endnotes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Beauty is promised in City Hall that Newton has just started," August 16, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Beauty promised."

<sup>3</sup> "The Official Dedication Program of the Newton City Hall and War Memorial Building" (Newton, MA: George D. Hall, November 11, 1932).

<sup>4</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Beauty promised."

<sup>5</sup> Candace Jenkins and Susan Abele, "Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form: Newton City Hall and War Memorial" (May 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Karen Madsen, "Henry Vincent Hubbard," in Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 177-180.

<sup>7</sup> Olmsted Brothers, Newton City Hall Estimate, July 2, 1931.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Vincent Hubbard, "The Setting of a Public Building," *Landscape Architecture* (Vol. 28, 1937-38), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to H. A. Hageman, Public Buildings Commissioner May 18, 1932.

<sup>10</sup> Henry V. Hubbard and Theodora Kimball, *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (Boston: Hubbard Educational Trust, 1967), 137.

<sup>11</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Honorable Sinclair Weeks, Nov. 10, 1931.

<sup>12</sup> Olmsted Brothers, memorandum as to the level of the water in the three informal ponds, March 8, 1932.

- <sup>13</sup> Henry V. Hubbard, letter to Honorable Sinclair Weeks, Jan 14, 1932.
- <sup>14</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Beauty promised."
- <sup>15</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Honorable Sinclair Weeks, Feb. 18, 1932.
- <sup>16</sup> Hubbard and Kimball, *Study of Landscape Design*, 187.
- <sup>17</sup> Hubbard and Kimball, *Study of Landscape Design*, 90.
- <sup>18</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Honorable Sinclair Weeks, Dec. 24, 1931.
- <sup>19</sup> Henry V. Hubbard, memorandum of Conference, March 1, 1932.
- <sup>20</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Allen and Collens, Sept, 22, 1932.
- <sup>21</sup> Charles Collens, letter to Olmsted Brothers, April 21, 1932.
- <sup>22</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Messrs Allen & Collens, June 2, 1932.
- <sup>23</sup> Mayor Sinclair Weeks, letter to Henry V. Hubbard, Nov. 19, 1932.
- <sup>24</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to H. A. Hageman, Oct. 24, 1932.
- <sup>25</sup> Henry V. Hubbard, letter to Honorable Sinclair Weeks, Nov.29, 1932.
- <sup>26</sup> Hubbard and Kimball, *Study of Landscape Design*, 187.
- <sup>27</sup> John R. Prescott, *The Story of Newton, Massachusetts: Its Natural Beauty, Attractive Homes and Historical Associations* (Newton, MA: Newtonville Library Association, 1936), 49-50.
- <sup>28</sup> Henry V. Hubbard, letter to H.A. Hageman, Oct. 24, 1932.
- <sup>29</sup> Olmsted Brothers, letter to Honorable Edwin O. Childs, June 3, 1936.
- <sup>30</sup> Hubbard, "Setting of a Public Building."
- <sup>31</sup> "Garden Awards in Massachusetts," article on file at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, probably from an MHS journal *Garden in New England Section* (March 15, 1938).
- <sup>32</sup> Emily Seaber Parcher, "An Enduring Memorial...beautified by time." *Newton Progress* (April-May 1949).
- <sup>33</sup> Anne Hoover Henderson, letter to Elsa N. Fitzgerald, Assistant Director, MHC, Jan. 3, 1988.
- <sup>34</sup> Elsa N. Fitzgerald, letter to Anita Abeles, Friends of Grounds of Newton City Hall, June 15, 1989.
- <sup>35</sup> City of Newton Board of Aldermen, Order, Sept. 21, 1992.
- <sup>36</sup> Gretchen Schuler, NHC, memo to Kenn Eisenbraun, March 9, 1992.
- <sup>37</sup> Moriece and Gary, "City Hall & Bullough's Pond, Newton MA," [www.mgary.com/P\\_ Bullough .htm](http://www.mgary.com/P_Bullough.htm), 2005.
- <sup>38</sup> Kenn Eisenbraun, memo to Commissioner Russell Halloran, Oct. 11, 1994.
- <sup>39</sup> Newton Public Buildings Preservation Task Force, "Newton City Hall Preservation Recommendations: Key Projects for Future Funding and Implementation" (July 2003).