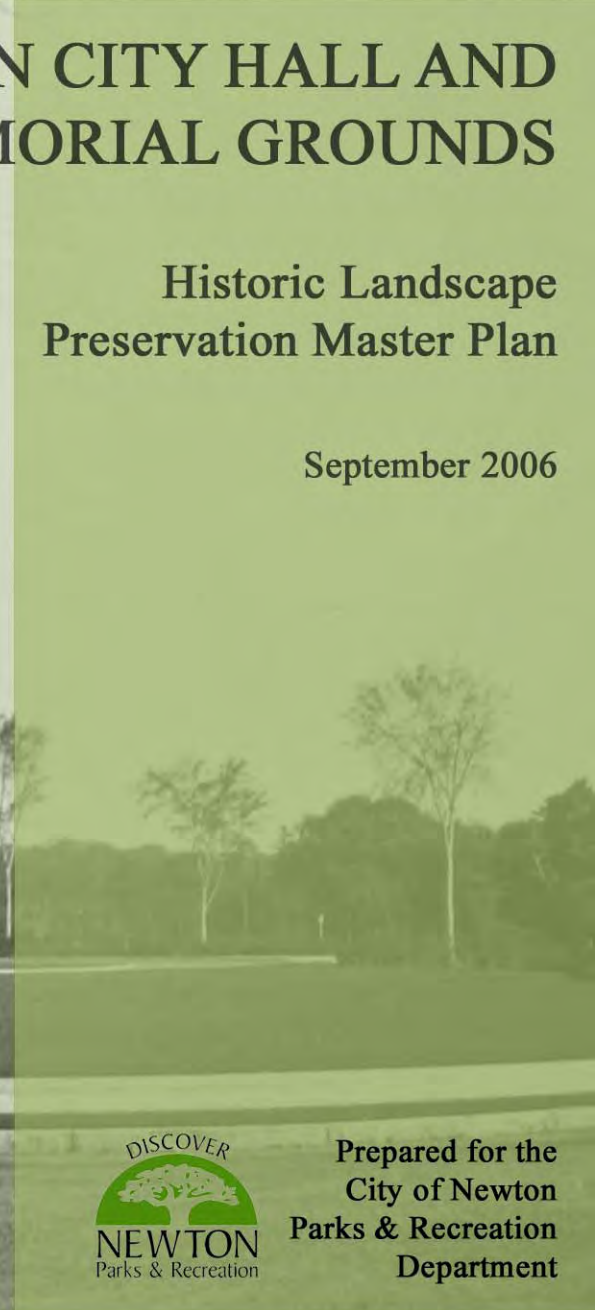


# NEWTON CITY HALL AND WAR MEMORIAL GROUNDS

## Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan

September 2006



Prepared for the  
City of Newton  
Parks & Recreation  
Department



pressley

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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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**Table of Contents**

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<del>Executive Summary</del>	<del>1</del>
<del>Overview</del>	<del>1</del>
<del>Historic Significance of the Grounds</del>	<del>1</del>
<del>Landscape Integrity</del>	<del>2</del>
<del>Landscape Stewardship</del>	<del>3</del>
<del>Recommended Treatment</del>	<del>4</del>
<del>Chapter One: Illustrated Chronology</del>	<del>7</del>
<del>Introduction</del>	<del>7</del>
<del>Chronology</del>	<del>7</del>
<del>Chapter Two: Existing Conditions</del>	<del>27</del>
<del>Introduction</del>	<del>27</del>
<del>Landscape Context</del>	<del>27</del>
<del>Vegetation</del>	<del>29</del>
<del>Topography</del>	<del>32</del>
<del>Buildings and Structures</del>	<del>33</del>
<del>Circulation</del>	<del>34</del>
<del>Constructed Water Features</del>	<del>36</del>

<del>Millennium Park</del>	<del>37</del>
<del>Views and Vistas</del>	<del>37</del>
<del>Small-Scale Features</del>	<del>38</del>
<del>Plans Accompanying Chapter Two</del>	
<del>Plan L1: Tree Inventory</del>	
<del>Plan L2: Existing Features Plan</del>	
<b>Chapter Three: Analysis of Integrity</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction	41
Summary of Landscape Integrity	42
Vegetation	43
Topography	43
Buildings and Structures	43
Circulation Routes	43
Constructed Water Features	44
Millennium Park	44
Views and Vistas	44
Small-Scale Features	45
Plan Accompanying Chapter Three	
Plan L3: Annotated Extant Historic Features Plan	
<del><b>Chapter Four: Treatment Alternatives</b></del>	<del><b>47</b></del>
<del>Introduction</del>	<del>47</del>
<del>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards</del>	<del>47</del>
<del>Comparison of the Treatment Alternatives</del>	<del>49</del>
<del>Preservation</del>	<del>49</del>
<del>Rehabilitation</del>	<del>50</del>
<del>Restoration</del>	<del>52</del>
<del>Comparison of Treatment Alternatives for Newton City Hall</del>	<del>53</del>
<del>Plans Accompanying Chapter Four</del>	
<del>Plan L4: Conceptual Preservation Plan</del>	
<del>Plan L5: Conceptual Rehabilitation Plan</del>	
<del>Plan L6: Conceptual Restoration Plan</del>	

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<b><del>Chapter Five: Recommendations</del></b>	<b><del>59</del></b>
<del>Introduction</del>	<del>59</del>
<del>Philosophical Approach</del>	<del>59</del>
<del>Summary of Specific Recommendations</del>	<del>61</del>
<del>Specific Recommendations</del>	<del>62</del>
<del>Vegetation</del>	<del>62</del>
<del>Topography</del>	<del>64</del>
<del>Buildings, Structures</del>	<del>64</del>
<del>Circulation</del>	<del>65</del>
<del>Constructed Water Features</del>	<del>67</del>
<del>Millennium Park</del>	<del>67</del>
<del>Views and Vistas</del>	<del>67</del>
<del>Small-Scale Features</del>	<del>68</del>
<del>Plan Accompanying Chapter Five</del>	
<del>Plan L7: Recommended Treatment Plan</del>	
<b><del>Chapter Six: Maintenance Plan</del></b>	<b><del>71</del></b>
<del>Introduction</del>	<del>71</del>
<del>Specific Maintenance Categories</del>	<del>73</del>
<del>Landscape Features</del>	<del>73</del>
<del>Tree Maintenance</del>	<del>74</del>
<del>Shrub and Ground Cover Planting Area Maintenance</del>	<del>75</del>
<del>Mown Lawn Maintenance</del>	<del>76</del>
<del>Embankment Planting Maintenance at Ponds</del>	<del>79</del>
<del>Weed and Pest Control</del>	<del>80</del>
<del>Bedding-out or Floral Displays</del>	<del>80</del>
<del>Water Body Features</del>	<del>80</del>
<del>Site Amenities Features</del>	<del>82</del>
<del>Pavements, Paths, Curbs, and Accessibility Ramps Maintenance</del>	<del>82</del>
<del>Structures</del>	<del>83</del>
<del>Furnishings</del>	<del>83</del>
<del>General Trash Removal</del>	<del>84</del>
<del>General Graffiti Removal</del>	<del>85</del>
<del>Conclusion</del>	<del>85</del>
<del>Event Maintenance and Event Damage Costs</del>	<del>86</del>
<del>Current Events Held on City Hall and War Memorial Grounds</del>	<del>87</del>

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## Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds

### CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF INTEGRITY

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#### Introduction

This chapter briefly analyzes the integrity of the landscape at Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds, based on an examination of the historic physical features and intent of the 1932 Olmsted design and a comparison with the existing site conditions as described in Chapter Two of this report. The accompanying Extant Historic Features Plan sets out graphically which elements of the Olmsted design remain today.

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, usually the period of significance. The period of significance for the Newton City Hall and War Memorial Grounds is likely to begin in 1931, when work commenced on the site, and to end around 1949, when changes began to be implemented to the landscape.<sup>1</sup> Defining the end of the period of significance for the Newton City Hall landscape as c.1949 also reflects the National Park Service guidance that properties achieving significance within the past fifty years are not generally considered historic or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places unless they demonstrate transcendent importance.<sup>2</sup>

While the evaluation of integrity is often a subjective judgment, particularly for a landscape, it must be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to significance. The National Register of Historic Places identifies seven aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association). Retention of these qualities is essential for a property to convey its significance, though all of the seven qualities need not be present to convey a sense of past time and place.

- **Location** is the place where the historic property was constructed, or the historic event occurred.
- **Design** is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
- **Setting** is the physical environment of a historic property.
- **Materials** are the physical elements of a particular period, which includes plant materials, paving, and other landscape features.

- **Workmanship** includes the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular period.
- **Feeling** is a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sensibilities of a particular period.
- **Association** is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

**Table 3.1: Summary of landscape integrity at Newton City Hall**

<b>Aspects of Integrity</b>	<b>Period of Significance</b>
<b>Location</b>	Retains location.
<b>Design</b>	Retains most elements of the original design, although some non-historic additions such as the new plantings, memorials and Millennium Park diminish landscape design integrity.
<b>Setting</b>	Retains setting as a dignified civic landscape and naturalistic public park around the grand Georgian Revival City Hall and War Memorial building.
<b>Materials</b>	Retains most landscape materials, particularly water bodies, bridges, roads, paths, steps, lawn and specimen tree collection. Some loss of plant materials and site features (such as the original fountain) and a lack of maintenance diminish landscape materials.
<b>Workmanship</b>	Retains workmanship in the ground form, bridges, layout of the roads and paths, and original planting design intent, but diminished workmanship in some of the subsequent planting.
<b>Feeling</b>	Retains some feeling; many parts of the landscape are recognizable from the 1930s appearance, but non-historic plantings and other features, and parked cars, diminish views and vistas in many areas.
<b>Association</b>	Retains association with City Hall; Olmsted Brothers work is clearly recognizable although the intended relationship between the landscape and the building is compromised by new additions that obstruct views and reflections in the water.

The landscape at Newton City Hall thus possesses integrity of location, setting and workmanship, with some reduction in design, materials, feeling and association. Despite the loss of some integrity, caused mainly by the introduction of later, non-historic features and a lack of maintenance, the extant resources continue to embody a good sense of the historic character of the Olmsted design. The section below identifies extant, altered, and missing historic features and non-historic additions in the landscape, organized under the same headings that were used to document the existing conditions in Chapter Two above.

## **Vegetation**

Around twenty-five specimen trees remain on the site that were planted by the Olmsted firm or which pre-dated Hubbard's design and were incorporated by him into the new landscape. These are shown on the accompanying Extant Historic Features Plan (L-3). In addition, some of the later planting appears to be direct replacements for trees from the original design, while many of the species chosen for subsequent planting, if not direct replacements, were historically appropriate and matched those found on the Olmsted planting lists.

There are however many trees and shrubs today in areas of the landscape which were originally designed as open lawn: for instance on the west slopes of the ponds, adjacent to both intersections on Walnut Street, on the traffic island in front of the War Memorial, around the POW memorial, and along the borders of the War Memorial lawn. There is also a good deal of perennial and shrub material around the pond edges, replacing what was previously open lawn or low ground cover.

## **Topography**

The slope and orientation of the ground at Newton City Hall still reflects the major grading changes introduced by the Olmsted firm to produce a landscape suitable for the grand civic building to be constructed there. There are minor examples of erosion in the banks adjacent to the bridges and some need for stabilization in the War Memorial lawn, but otherwise the topography remains largely unchanged from 1932.

## **Buildings and Structures**

The two bridges and retaining wall installed by the Olmsted firm in the pond area remain intact and in good condition, and help define the rustic character of that area. The main stone steps down to Homer Street and the smaller steps on the path either side of the War Memorial also date from the original design, although they are in poor condition.

## **Circulation Routes**

The spatial organization of the site remains very largely intact, with the current layout of the roads and paths continuing to mirror the 1932 circulation routes in all but a few minor details (principally in the changes introduced for Millennium Park). Two new 'desire line' paths have appeared in the grass in the pond area. The surface of the paths and roads, however, has deteriorated and there is no longer the same crisp definition between the lawn and the paths visible in the 1930s photographs.



**Figure 3.1.** The pathway over the bridge in 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS) and in 2005 (Pressley Associates).

### **Constructed Water Features**

The three interconnected ponds, which designer Henry V. Hubbard saw as “the heart of the composition”, remain an integral part of the landscape. The size of both the north and south pond has been reduced, however, and new edges created since 1932. There are continuing problems with silt build-up. The vegetated shorelines and new tree plantings described above have considerably lessened the impact of the water in the landscape, as the building is no longer significantly reflected in the surface of the ponds.

The large, simple fountain in the City Hall turnaround has been removed and subsequently replaced by a much smaller granite fountain and low planting, within a stone edging that mirrors the shape of the original Olmsted basin.



**Figure 3.2.** The original Olmsted fountain, 1932 (NPS, Olmsted NHS) and the smaller fountain and planting currently in place, 2005 (Pressley Associates).

### **Millennium Park**

Millennium Park is a new, non-historic addition to the landscape to the south of City Hall.

### **Views and Vistas**

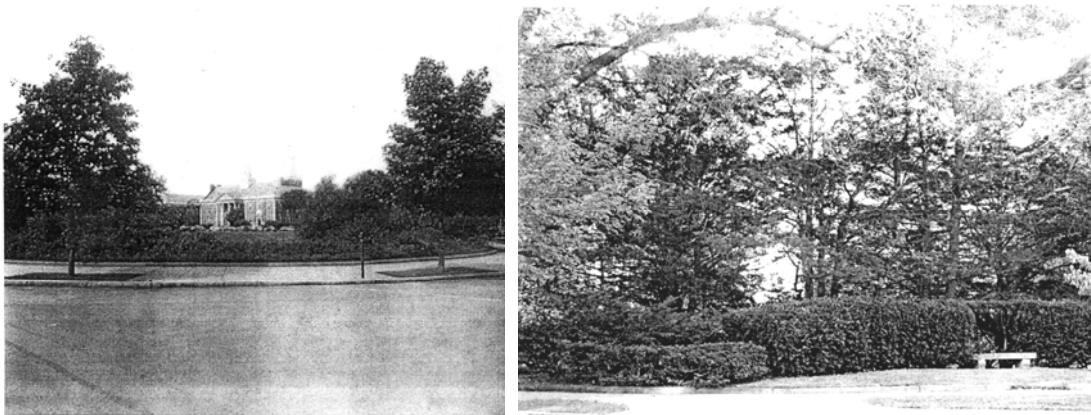
Most of the views and vistas created so carefully by the Olmsted firm have been lost over the years. It is this change, more than any other, which diminishes the historic character of



the site. The reflections of the City Hall façade in the water are no longer visible because of the dense vegetated shorelines. The view of the ponds from the City Hall steps is partly hidden by the fountain and its associated planting in the turnaround, and by the trees and other plant material between the building and the shoreline. The framed view of the building from the Commonwealth Avenue / Walnut Street intersection is obscured by the evergreen planting around the Armed Forces monument. Similarly the view line from the Walnut Street / Homer Street corner is blocked by trees and the City information board. To the west of the site, the historic view of the War Memorial from Commonwealth Avenue is partially blocked by the new trees that encroach on the open lawn area, the dogwoods on the turnaround and, in particular, the planting around the POW memorial.



**Figure 3.3.** One of the lost vistas at Newton City Hall: the view looking southwest in 1933 (NPS, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site) and a similar view in 2005 (Pressley Associates).



**Figure 3.4.** Left is the view from the Commonwealth Avenue / Walnut Street intersection in 1942 (City of Newton) and, now obscured by the planting around the armed forces memorial, in 2003 (Newton Public Buildings Preservation Task Force).

### Small-Scale Features

A number of smaller non-historic features have been added to the site since it was first designed: these include the six memorials, and a selection of benches, signs and light

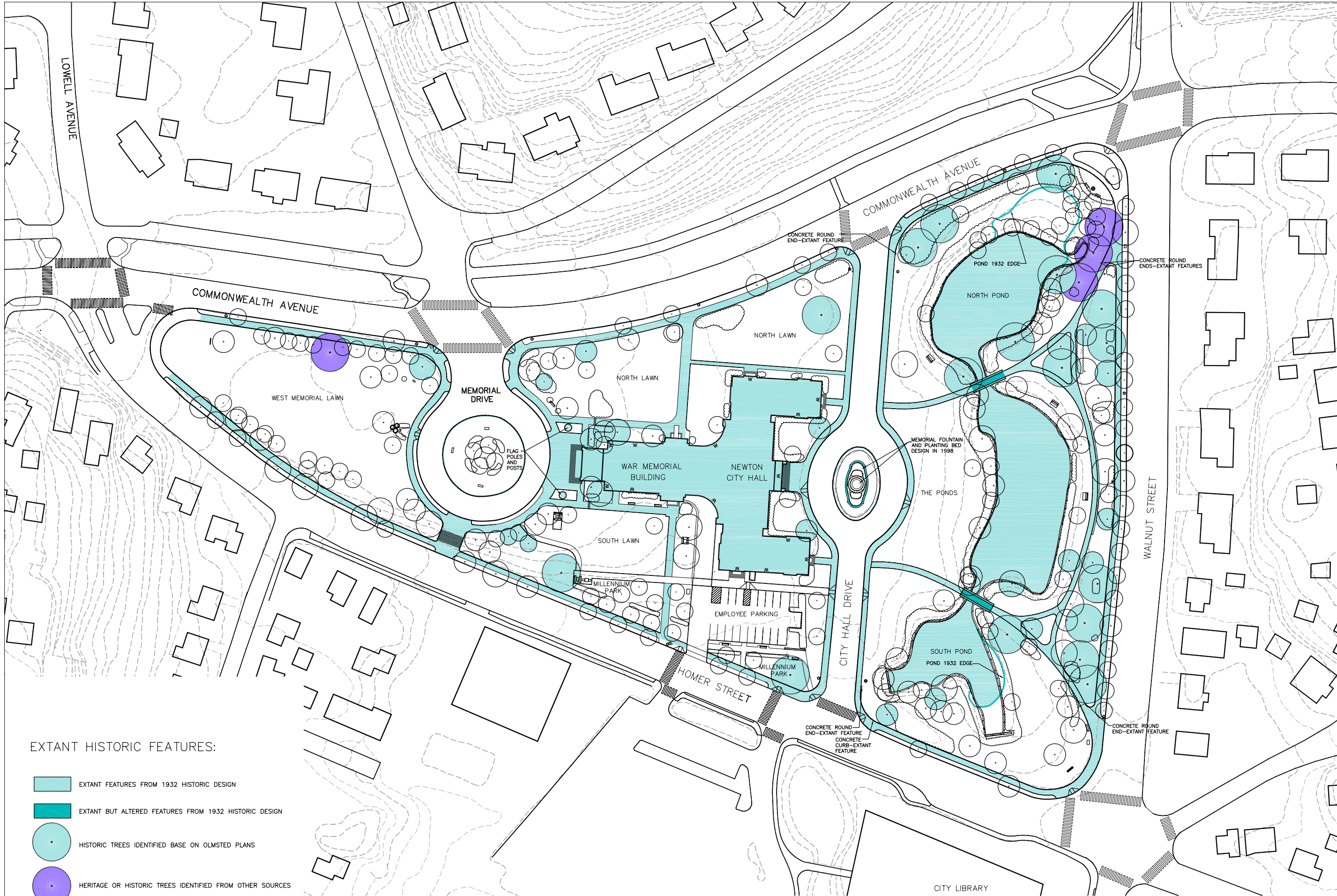
fixtures as described in the chapter on Existing Conditions. To a greater or lesser extent, these serve to reduce or detract from the historic character of the landscape at Newton City Hall.

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### **Endnotes to Chapter Three**

<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form compiled in 1987 by Candace Jenkins and Susan Abele does not give a period of significance for Newton City Hall and War Memorial. Although the property is listed on the National Register, there is apparently no National Register nomination form (and hence no officially defined period of significance): Candace Jenkins remembers that one was not completed as the nomination was taken forward as part of the Newton Multiple Resource Area nomination.

<sup>2</sup> National Register *Bulletin*, 15.



EXTANT HISTORIC FEATURES:


- EXTANT FEATURES FROM 1932 HISTORIC DESIGN
- EXTANT BUT ALTERED FEATURES FROM 1932 HISTORIC DESIGN
- HISTORIC TREES IDENTIFIED BASE ON OLMSTED PLANS
- HERITAGE OR HISTORIC TREES IDENTIFIED FROM OTHER SOURCES

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Prepared For:  
  
**NEWTON**  
 Parks & Recreation

**Newton City Hall and War Memorial Building Grounds**  
 Newton, Massachusetts

SEAL: \_\_\_\_\_ NORTH: 

DRAWING TITLE:  
**EXTANT HISTORIC FEATURES**

DRAWN BY: TT  
 CHECKED BY: LM, JS, MP  
 DATE: JUNE 15, 2006  
 PROJECT: PA#05070.00

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