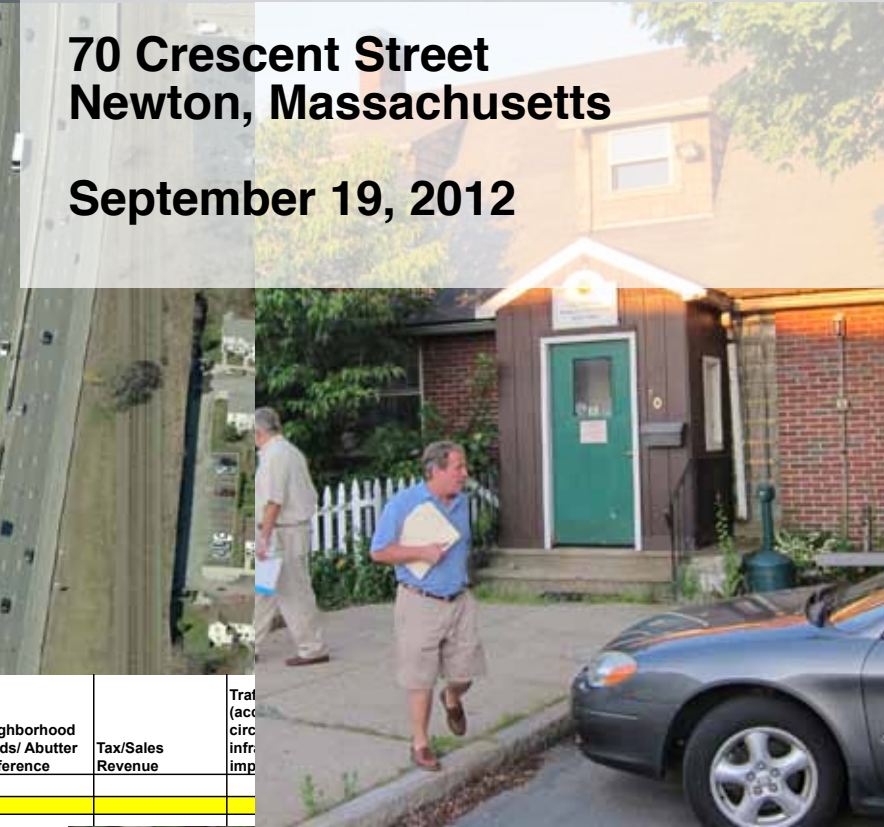




JAPG Report

70 Crescent Street
Newton, Massachusetts

September 19, 2012



Potential Use	Match with Market Potential	Neighborhood needs/ Abutter preference	Tax/Sales Revenue	Traffic (acc circ infr imp)
Market-Rate Housing				
Low-Density Housing (single-family or 2-family, 5-7 units)				
Medium-Density Housing (townhouses, 15 +/- units)				
High-Density Housing (40 +/- units)				
Affordable or Mixed-Income Housing (AC,EH,KM)				
Low-Density Housing (single-family or 2-family, 5-7 units)				
Medium-Density Housing (townhouses, 15 +/- units)				
High-Density Housing (40 +/- units)				
Age-Restricted Housing (AC,EH,KM)				
Market				
Affordable				
Assisted Living (market and/or affordable)(AC,EH,KM)				
School/Educational Facility (private, nonprofit)(AC,EH,KM)				
Church (Myrtle Baptist Church expansion, parking)(RS,DS,TT,WM)				
Commercial Use (RS,DS,TT,WM)				
Retail				
Office				
Institutional (cultural, community, nonprofit, religious)(RS,DS,TT,WM)				
Industrial Use (MA,AK,EK)				
Manufacturing				
Light Manufacturing/Incubator				
Mixed Use (ex. housing and retail/office)(MA,AK,EK)				
Subdivision (different uses)(MA,AK,EK)				
Open Space (park, passive recreation, etc)				
Recreational Facility (ballfields, playground expansion, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)				
Alternative Energy (solar farm, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)				
Urban Agriculture (community farm, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)				
Vacant/Unused(JM,JR,LS,GS)				







Executive Summary

Fourteen volunteers – including Newton residents, architects, planners, developers, and design and real estate professionals – were nominated by Mayor Warren and the Board of Aldermen and agreed to serve on the 70 Crescent Street Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG). Over the summer of 2012, the JAPG members met on a regular basis to study, research, and evaluate potential uses for the surplus parcel. The goal of this effort was to consider, evaluate and determine the highest and best uses of this asset for the City at large and for the neighborhood in particular.

In summary, the JAPG members have agreed that the neighborhood and the City of Newton would be best served if the 70 Crescent Street parcel, when redeveloped, meets the following criteria and goals:

- The redevelopment should be beneficial to the City in terms of its land sale and tax revenue, consistent with the residential character and scale of the neighborhood, and supported by the neighbors, i.e., a balanced approach.
- The redevelopment should be economically feasible and attractive to private developers.
- The playground and open space should be more accessible to the neighborhood. If necessary, a new easement through the property and/or a lot line reconfiguration should be considered to allow better access from Crescent Street.
- The redevelopment should include more than the minimum requirements for affordable housing for which there is a great need in Newton. Currently, only 7.5% of the housing in Newton is deemed “affordable”. The JAPG recommends that a minimum of 25% of the units be affordable.
- The redevelopment should include units that vary in type from one to three bedrooms.
- The redevelopment should not result in an undue maintenance and infrastructure burden (schools, e.g.) on the City.
- The redevelopment should allow accommodation with the current and future needs of the adjacent Myrtle Baptist Church, a key abutter and historical fixture in the community.

Summary of Recommendations

After months of gathering information and careful deliberation, the 70 Crescent Street JAPG has concluded that the site would be best suited for a moderately-sized residential development. Such a use would provide the best potential for inclusionary affordable houses and the best fit for the existing character and fabric of the neighborhood.

Specifically, the JAPG recommends that the site be redeveloped into a residential project with 8 to 20 units in several low-rise unit structures. The project shall be required to have at least 25% affordable units, and it should include a mix of unit types and sizes.

We agree with our original charge to retain on the site a park that is the same size as the existing park, which has served the neighborhood for many years. However, we believe that the selected developer should work with the Myrtle Baptist Church to modify lot lines so the properties can be used more efficiently. In addition, the developer should provide access to the park – via an easement – from Crescent Street.

To facilitate the expeditious implementation of the parcel(s), the JAPG recommends that the existing buildings be demolished and the property be rezoned in advance of the property being sold. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that the site may contain hazardous materials. The JAPG is concerned that this could be a “cloud” that may negatively affect the sale of the parcel and therefore recommends that a study be performed to assess the environmental conditions of the site.





Introduction

The Crescent Street parcel Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) was tasked to provide a vision of how this site might be best redeveloped for the community. Our group was comprised of 14 well-versed and diverse citizens of Newton, seven of whom were appointed by the Mayor and seven by the Board of Aldermen. Members included several direct abutters of the Crescent St parcel as well as developers and design and real estate professionals. The JAPG assembled as much information as was available and engaged in wide-ranging discussions about the Crescent Street parcel. The point of this exercise was to make thoughtful recommendations to the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen regarding the future use of this valuable City resource.

The Site

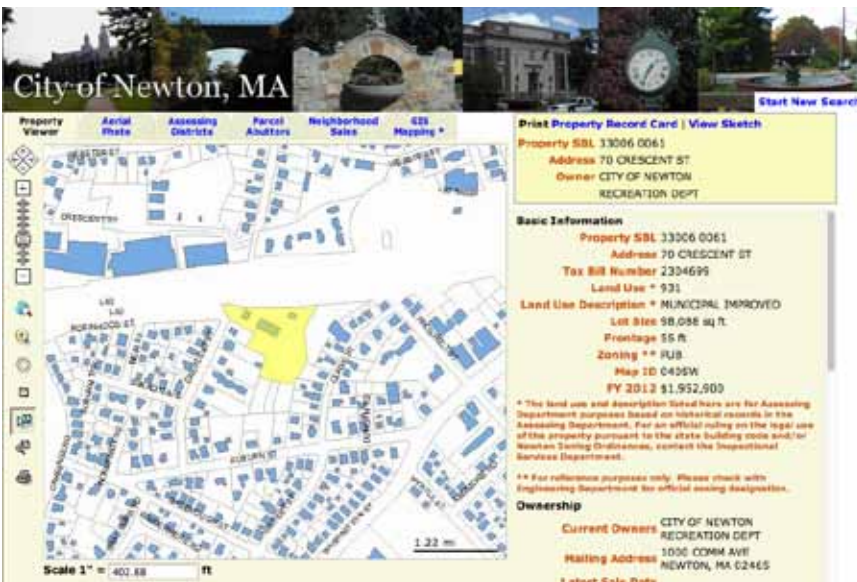
The 70 Crescent Street site, Parcel SBL #33006 0061, is located in the Auburndale neighborhood of Newton. It is an irregularly shaped site directly south of the Massachusetts Turnpike. The northwestern boundary intersects with Robinhood Street, which also borders the Pike, and at this juncture is the property's only entrance at 70 Crescent Street. The parcel's western boundary "steps down" behind three multifamily residences on Crescent Street. The parcel's southeastern section encompasses a walled-off small parking lot, park area and small playground behind the Myrtle Baptist Church and other residences on Curve Street. The southernmost boundary of this parcel borders an abandoned paper street and three contiguous fenced-in parcels, which are being used as an NSTAR electrical substation.

Current Uses

In October, 2011, the site was effectively vacated by the City of Newton's Department of Parks and Recreation, which had used the site for years. The site is almost completely paved and has numerous storage areas for vehicles and heavy equipment, mostly on the periphery. Outdoor storage of nursery materials such as mulch, woodchips and loam still occupy one corner of the site.

At the entrance of the property on Crescent Street is the three-story former headquarters building comprising approximately 3200 sq. ft. Its basement level consists of a bathroom, a break room, two workstations, a small office and a storage room. The second floor at street level, where the public accessed the building, consists of a meeting room, 10 workstations and a reception area. The third floor contains two bathrooms and nine to -11 workstations.

A garage facility is located behind the headquarters



building, near the geographic center of the site with three distinct sections: an equipment repair shop, a vehicle lift station and a carpentry shop.

It should be noted that due to the historical uses of the site, contamination is highly possible and should be investigated before property disposition if possible.

Size

The size of the irregularly-shaped site is 98,088 square feet. The fenced-off southeastern section – which contains the parking lot currently being used by the Myrtle Baptist Church as well as a park area and small playground – comprises roughly 37,000 square feet. The Commissioners of Parks excluded this improved area from reuse, leaving the total parcel available for reuse at 62,088 square feet. We recommend, however, that reuse of the site consider the entire parcel.



Access

Current access to 70 Crescent Street is a paved entrance at the northwestern corner of the site intersecting with Robinhood Street, which runs parallel to the Massachusetts Turnpike on the north. This entrance comprises approximately 61 feet of frontage at this corner. Most options for residential development will require at least 80 feet of frontage per parcel. However, the required minimum right-of-way width for a new city street is only 45 feet. It may be possible to extend Crescent Street on the west onto the site, forming a cul-de-sac or hammerhead, thereby providing the required 80 foot of frontage per lot along the entire length of this newly-created street.

Ownership

The site is currently owned by the City of Newton. The City's Parks and Recreation Department was located on the site until relocating on October 19, 2011 into the former Newton Corner Library building. The site is currently in process of being reviewed for either public or private reuse by the 70 Crescent Street Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) to be submitted to the Aldermanic Real Property Reuse Committee, then to the full Board of Aldermen, and finally to Mayor Setti Warren for their review and consideration of the JAPG's recommendations.

Zoning

The site is currently zoned for Public Use but was declared surplus property on October 19, 2011 by the Board of Aldermen. If the City of Newton should decide to retain ownership of the site and reuse it for other City purposes, the site would not have to change its zoning status. However, if, as planned, the City chooses to sell the site for private use, it would have to be rezoned.



70 Crescent Street Neighborhood and Abutter Data

Street	Residences	Land Use				Zoning				Lot Acres	Housing Density **
		Single Family	Two Family	Condo	Apts.	MR1	MR2	SR2	BU2		
Crescent	16 [5]*	8 [2]*	6 [2]*	2 [1]*		16				4.0 [1.8]*	4.0 [2.8]*
Auburn	19	8	10		1	19				4.7	4.1
Curve	16 [6]*	14 [6]*	1	1		6 [4]*	10 [2]*			3.8 [1.2]*	4.2 [4.9]*
Robinhood	6	6				6				0.9	6.5
Sharon Ave.	13	7	4	2		13				1.9	6.8
Weir	6	5		1		6				1.0	6.3
Commonwealth Ave.	9	4	4	1		9				1.4	6.3
Normandy Rd.	4	2	2			4				0.5	8.1
Other ***	8	4	2	2		2	3	1	2	1.5	5.2
Summary	97 [11]*	58 [8]*	29 [2]*	9 [1]*	1	81 [4]*	13 [2]*	1	2	19.7 [3.0]*	4.9 [3.7]*

* Abutter Data []

** Residences per Acre

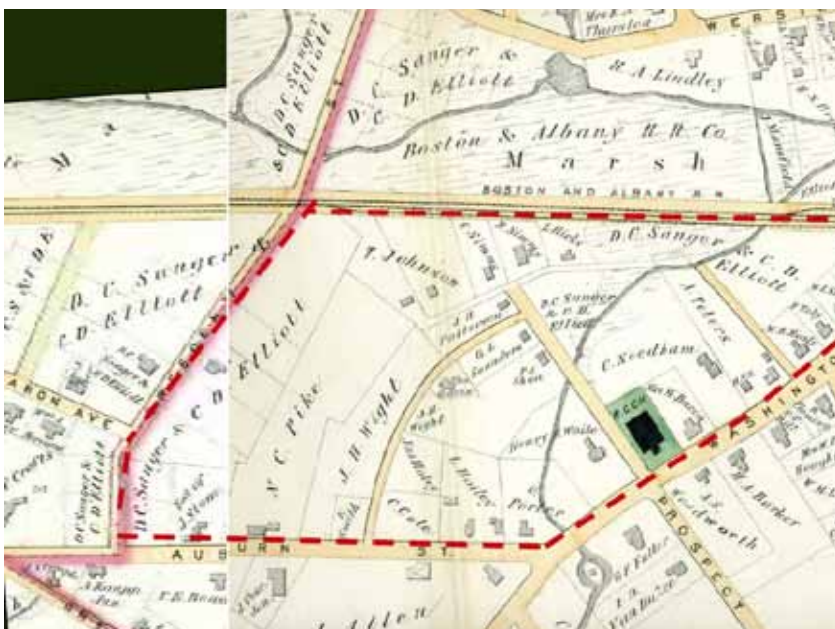
***Prospect St. (4), Simms Ct. (2), Duncan Road (1), Washington St.(1)

Street	FY 2012 Assessed Value			
	Median	Average	Median*	Average*
Crescent	516600	522394	[515200]	[532080]
Auburn	500100	516795		
Curve	397500	396118	[413700]	[424067]
Robinhood	425183	442400		
Sharon Ave.	533900	504164		
Weir	414150	441300		
Commonwealth Ave.	489750	475510		
Normandy Rd.	583650	594725		
Other ***	358650	402350		

History

Crescent Street formerly connected to the south side of the Turnpike, but it now ends at the subject site. The street was first divided by the B & M railroad with a portion of the street located in West Newton and a portion located in Auburndale. The construction of the Turnpike in the early 1960s involved

widespread taking of properties in Newton, including some in the vicinity of this parcel. This parcel is an assemblage of parcels affected by those takings. The Myrtle Baptist Church was one of the abutters affected. Not only did the church lose some of its land, the Turnpike Authority attempted to put a restaurant and gas station on this parcel, but this proposal did not come to fruition. The subject parcel is now comprised of 98,088 square feet of land, a portion (approximately 37,000 square feet) of which is currently known as the Rev. Louis E Ford playground. This section is fenced off from the rest of the Parks and Recreation site.



Neighborhood Context

The 70 Crescent Street Site is bounded on the North by the Massachusetts

Turnpike (I-90), on the West by the Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Road, on the South by Auburn Street, and on the Southeast by a short stretch of Washington Street that leads from Auburn Street to the West Newton Entrance /Exit Ramps of the Turnpike. Within the boundaries are Robinhood Street and Crescent Street, which provide access to the site, and Curve Street, which runs East of the site and adjacent to it. Sharon Avenue, Auburn Terrace, Weir Street, Normandy Road, Prospect Street, Simms Court and Duncan Road are interior streets within the neighborhood.

The City of Newton Assessor's Database map of the neighborhood shows it to be almost totally residential. The only non-residential properties within it are the 70 Crescent Street site, a NSTAR electric right-of-way and sub-station, the Myrtle Baptist Church, Archdiocese of Boston Property (St. Bernard Church, Rectory and Learning Prep High School buildings), a funeral home on the periphery and a few, small undevelopable parcels.

For the neighborhood's 97 residential properties, including 11 abutter properties, Land Use, Zoning and Lot Sizes were researched in the Assessor's Database. For each street in the neighborhood, that data is summarized in Attachment 4-B (p.7) along with FY 2012 Assessed Property Value and calculated Residence Density.



Proposed Use Matrix

As one of its first steps, the JAPG created a matrix to help ensure that a broad range of potential uses was considered for the Crescent Street site. Specifically, the group listed all potential uses in the matrix and then developed a set of criteria to analyze each use. The potential uses included different types of housing (low to high-density, affordable to market-rate and assisted living), commercial, industrial, institutional and recreational uses. The expansion of the abutting Myrtle Baptist Church was considered, as was the creation of open space, urban agriculture, alternative energy facilities and a mixed-use development. The options to subdivide the property for different uses or leave the site vacant were also considered. The edited matrix with the full list of potential uses has been

Reuse Evaluation for 70 Crescent Street

1 worst, 5 best

Potential Use	Match with Market Potential	Neighborhood needs/ Abutter preference	Tax/Sales Revenue	Traffic Impact (access and circulation, infrastructure improvements, etc)	Impact on Schools
Market-Rate Housing					
<i>Low-Density Housing (single-family or 2-family, 5-7 units)</i>					
<i>Medium-Density Housing (townhouses, 15 +/- units)</i>					
<i>High-Density Housing (40 +/- units)</i>					
Affordable or Mixed-Income Housing (AC,EH,KM)					
<i>Low-Density Housing (single-family or 2-family, 5-7 units)</i>					
<i>Medium-Density Housing (townhouses, 15 +/- units)</i>					
<i>High-Density Housing (40 +/- units)</i>					
Age-Restricted Housing (AC,EH,KM)					
Market					
Affordable					
Assisted Living (market and/or affordable)(AC,EH,KM)					
School/Educational Facility (private, nonprofit)(AC,EH,KM)					
Church (Myrtle Baptist Church expansion, parking)(RS,DS,TT,WM)					
Commercial Use (RS,DS,TT,WM)					
Retail					
Office					
Institutional (cultural, community, nonprofit, religious)(RS,DS,TT,WM)					
Industrial Use (MA,AK,EK)					
Manufacturing					
Light Manufacturing/Incubator					
Mixed Use (ex. housing and retail/office)(MA,AK,EK)					
Subdivision (different uses)(MA,AK,EK)					
Open Space (park, passive recreation, etc)					
Recreational Facility (ballfields, playground expansion, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)					
Alternative Energy (solar farm, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)					
Urban Agriculture (community farm, etc)(JM,JR,LS,GS)					
Vacant/Unused(JM,JR,LS,GS)					

Myrtle Baptist Church's future expansion.

It is important to note that while the results of the matrix analysis helped the JAPG narrow down the list of potential uses, it was not intended to actually determine the recommended use. Instead, the JAPG used the results – low- to mid-density housing as the preferred uses – to begin a more detailed, in-depth analysis of different types of residential redevelopment options.

Density Comparisons

Following the analysis of the merits of various uses on the site, the JAPG created a site model to study various densities of construction and their distribution on the site. Focusing on residential uses, models were developed to see how different types of housing fit on the site and how they fit with the existing scale and density of the neighborhood. The JAPG used the expertise of its members to weigh the development's constructability and benefit to the neighborhood and the city as a whole.

The diagrammatic models made it clear that while low-density single-family housing may imitate the density of the immediate surrounding streets, it was not the most efficient or beneficial use of the large site. At the same time, high-density housing could be very efficiently planned, but it was a poor fit for the neighborhood.

Other Projects

The group researched other local projects that have proven to be successful examples of medium-density residential development that include affordable components. The Women's Institute project on Crescent Street is a 23-unit development on a relatively small parcel abutting the Mass Pike. Of the 23 units, three were designated as affordable. All units sold quickly, and it continues to be a well maintained and seemingly successful development. The construction was configured as clusters of three units per building with one building containing two units. This provided a medium density





on the site.

The JAPG also analyzed the 192 Lexington Street development, which is a closely arranged group of 15 single-family homes, with two designated as affordable. This development was done by a developer for profit, so it was viewed as an example of a successful low-density development on a constricted site.

Input from Experts

The group sought to learn more about the City of Newton’s housing needs before finalizing its recommendations. Toward this end, Newton Housing Development Planner

Rob Muollo and Newton Housing Partnership members Phil Herr and Josephine McNeil attended the meeting and provided information as well as their perspectives on housing needs throughout the city. During the meeting, the group discussed the need for affordable housing, how the existing high home costs in Newton exclude most if not all moderate, low, and extremely low income residents from the housing market. The amount of existing affordable housing and funding for additional units was a stark reminder.

Concerned that the recommendation for affordable housing might make the development costs too high, the JAPG members asked the housing experts and City of Newton Senior Planner Derek Valentine about the feasibility and preference for different types of housing, including bedroom sizes, tenure (ownership versus rental) and affordability. There was also a discussion about funding sources and the challenges facing affordable housing developers in Newton.

Ensuring a Balance between Neighborhood Impact and City Benefits

Newton’s Comprehensive Plan, developed by a broadly-based Advisory Committee, was completed in 2006, and subsequently adopted by the Mayor. The Plan seeks to guide the growth and development of the City based on sound planning principles.

In undertaking our task of recommending the reuse of the Crescent Street property, the JAPG has been guided by several of the components of the Plan, with particular emphasis on “neighborhood context,” “place excellence,” “housing diversity and affordability,” and “open space.” What follows are quotes from the Plan, which directly bear upon the conclusions and ultimate recommendations of the Crescent



Street JAPG report:

- “What distinguishes good places involves many elements. In almost every case both public and private actions are involved in their creation...those good places illustrate the excellence in place-making that has gone on at many (but not all) places in the City over many decades. The Plan seeks to assure that such excellence will continue to characterize change as it takes place in the future.”
- “Both rules and practices should assure that the special characteristics of locations are respected without stifling creativity and individual choice...new developments should not damage the valued qualities which exist in the vicinity.”
- “Open Space: to assure a well-informed and well-coordinated stewardship for the open space and recreation resources for which the City is privileged to be custodian.”
- “[the Plan] wants our stock of housing to match the social and economic diversity of our population. That requires both rental and home ownership opportunities for the entire range of low, moderate and middle income families...At a minimum, we intend to make efforts to promptly reach the 10% affordability as set by the State...”
- “[the Plan] seeks diversity between and within the City’s neighborhoods so that among them they afford real choices in living environment.”
- “Housing affordability in Newton is a problem not only for low-income families, for many others as well, including those of moderate and middle income, and housing efforts must recognize this. We need affordability in all forms of housing created in the City, not just in relatively large multifamily developments.”
- “All plans made for neighborhoods, village centers and other sub-centers





should include a responsible share of the City’s overall housing growth expansion.”

○ “[the City] should systematically review the inventory of real estate owned by the City or other public bodies to identify possible opportunities to provide housing development or adaptive reuse. The sale of public-owned real estate with provisions assuring housing affordability has been a powerful tool in the past...”

The Crescent Street JAPG has reached its recommendations and conclusions based on a wide variety of interactions, discussions and resources. The Newton Comprehensive Plan has been one of those resources. We believe that our findings are generally consistent with the tenets of the Plan – another community-based planning effort.



Endnote

The 70 Crescent St. JAPG is grateful for the confidence in the judgment granted to our group by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen. We trust that with careful consideration of this report and our recommendations – and as the redevelopment proceeds with a responsible development group – the parcel can be a real benefit to both the neighborhood and the City.

Mark Armstrong, Chair
James Robertson, Vice Chair
Eunice Kim
George Schnee
Rick Sewall
Jim Miller
Ed Hadro
David Snieckus
Tom Turner
Lawrence Schwirian
Andrea Kelley
Angelo Conti
Kathy Mazzola
Wataru Matsuyasu

