

# Discover Historic OAK HILL PARK

**30, 57, and 77 Bontempo Road** were all originally oriented to the street and are in good condition with little or no alterations. 57 Bontempo has retained wood shingle siding in keeping with the originally constructed models.

**634 Saw Mill Brook Parkway** is a good example of an original house which has retained its original, one car garage attached to the house by a glassed in breezeway. The house has maintained its original orientation with the main entrance facing the path and the garage oriented to the cul-de-sac behind it. Other examples of the original house with the attached garage can be found at **5 McCarthy Road** and **30 Keller Path**.

**727 Saw Mill Brook Parkway** is a fine example of an original detached garage as well as of a moderately altered house which has retained its original character. Changes include shifting the front entrance to the side of the house and adding a small entrance porch. Other examples of moderately altered structures include **15**

**Avery Path, 552 Saw Mill Brook Parkway, and 36 Bontempo Road.**

On November 11, 1998, Newton recognized the 50th anniversary of the construction of Veteran's housing in Oak Hill Park with the dedication of a monument to Newton Veterans of All Wars. The monument is located on Saw Mill Brook Parkway directly across from the business and shopping center.

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David B. Cohen, Mayor



The end of World War II created a unique problem in American history. As veterans returned to their hometowns and families, most found that while they wanted to buy or rent homes, very few were available. Around the country, communities looked for ways to provide affordable, modern housing as quickly as possible, and the City of Newton was no exception. Unlike most other communities, though, Newton chose to build an entirely new neighborhood

for its veterans, including 412 houses, a shopping center, and a school. This new neighborhood was called Oak Hill Park.

Oak Hill Park is located in the southernmost part of the City at the West Roxbury (a Boston neighborhood) line. It is roughly bounded by Mt. Ida College to the north, the Boston City limits to the south, Dedham Street to the east, and the Charles River to the west.

Unlike many similar veterans'

housing projects in other communities, Oak Hill Park was financed by the City itself, without the aid of state or federal funds. The City funded the project with a \$1,250,000 bond issue. In addition, the new sewer and water main, which was estimated to cost an additional \$4,000 per lot was provided by the City. The land, formerly the Highland Sand and Gravel Pit, was sold to the contractor for \$50 per lot, although its per lot value at the time was estimated at \$2,000-\$2,500. It was the largest single project ever undertaken by the City, and it was the largest local project of its kind built under Chapter 372

of the Acts of 1946, which allowed the City to borrow and spend money outside the debt limit to construct housing for Veterans. The project began in 1946, and by the end of 1947, preliminary plans and estimates were completed. City Engineer Ashley L. Robinson, under the supervision

of Public Works Director Willard S. Pratt, laid out the development. They were responsible for the design of Oak Hill Park, as well as the coordination of the enormous work load generated by this project. The plan, reminiscent of the English "garden city" or the "greenbelt" towns constructed by the New Deal, reflected precedents of earlier private subdivisions created in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Radburn, NJ (ca. 1926). Oak Hill Park featured a series of cul-de-sacs, with houses facing away from the street and in toward public walkways which transverse the development and lead to the school and business center. The intent of the path system was to provide a traditional, homelike atmosphere, secure from the dangers and confusion of modern life, where "American" values could be nurtured and perpetuated. The path system minimized the intrusion of cars and attempted to foster community and neighborhood interaction by encouraging people to favor the common pedestrian ways.

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In January of 1948, the City created the Veterans Housing Department to oversee the devel-

opment of Oak Hill Park itself. This agency set the standards and guidelines for the construction, and also sold the houses. One of its first acts was to choose the names for the paths and streets. In April 1948, they chose to name the 33 streets and paths in the neighborhood after Newton citizens who had died in WWII. On April 14, a lottery was held to pick the names from the list of over 200 Newton citizens, while those whose names were not picked were memorialized when the school was dedicated in their honor.

Area politicians officially dedicated Oak Hill Park on May 21, 1950 with a parade and speeches. It was the first and only time that an entire village was incorporated into the City of Newton.

The City set only two qualifications for homeowners — they had to be veterans and Newton residents before the war. Interested couples who met these requirements went to City Hall where an office was set up to sell Oak Hill Park homes. The couple selected a lot from the map and chose a design with the help of a



1946 pre-development



1947 Streetscape

sales representative. Two homes were available as models in November 1948, but it appears that the homes sold themselves without the use of the models. The average Oak Hill Park family in 1950 was under the age of 30 and had married just before or after the war. One third of the children were born in 1946 or 1947.

Great attention was paid to variety and convenience in the overall plan and street layout, and the houses were built without sacrificing architectural variety, modern amenities, or pleasant surroundings. The 412 small but modern cottage style homes were constructed from six basic designs for a base price of \$7,820. Each basic house included three bedrooms, a living room, dining area, kitchen, bath, and utility room. The houses lacked basements, but

standard features included venetian blinds, window shutters and boxes, door knockers and chimes, built in ironing boards, and fluorescent kitchen lights. All the homes boasted oil fired radiant heating. In addition to their choice of six different designs, prospective owners could select clapboard, cedar shingle, or asbestos shingle siding, hip or gable roof treatment, and, for a modest additional sum, the addition of a porch (\$325), breezeway (\$300), or garage (\$1,000). With all the extras, including cedar siding, the most expensive houses still cost less than \$10,000, and worked out to be about \$62.39/month for the mortgage and taxes. With the average veteran making \$58/week, the houses were easily within their price range. Though all of the houses were the same size, the availability of extras, and the stag-



Aerial View 1948

