

City of
Newton



**Demolition Review
&
Post World War II Housing
Study**

-Final Report -

June 15, 2001

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Executive Summary

This report concludes a six-month study of Newton's demolition delay ordinance and its post-WWII housing stock, which was supported with a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Three main conclusions have been drawn from this investigation:

- The demolition delay ordinance is a tool that needs to be strengthened and supported by complementary regulations to be fully effective.
- There are neighborhoods made up of post-WWII housing, as well as other, earlier, 20th - century housing that are not receiving the protection of which they are worthy.
- Greater resources need to be made available for administration of the demolition delay ordinance in particular and historic preservation in general if the community is to benefit.

If there was any concern about the increasing number of dwelling units coming in for demolition review due to the post-WWII housing boom, it should be noted that all evidence points to the current housing market and boom economy (at least through the end of 2000) being responsible for the increase in permit applications. Indeed, demolition review records indicate that demolition of garages and carriage houses are responsible for about half of the demolition review activity by the Newton Historical Commission (NHC). Thus no change from the current 50-year threshold is warranted; rather, the focus needs to shift to how to ensure that the demolition delay ordinance can be made more effective in service of the community's welfare.

Waivers of the one-year delay greatly outweigh the number of buildings found "Preferable Preserved." To some extent this is due to requests for partial demolitions, that often have the effect of improving properties. Nonetheless, the NHC has not sent a clear and consistent message that demolition of historic structures will not be approved, and this may be responsible in some measure for the flood of demolition applications. On the other hand, the NHC is hamstrung by its lack of power to conduct meaningful design review of infill buildings without using the waiver as an enticement to property owners and developers to modify their plans. Even more importantly, the lack of financial incentives to encourage alternatives to demolition is another reason the delay is less effective than in neighboring communities.

Several strategies are therefore suggested to address the above concerns:

1. Initiate new survey efforts that will identify all individual and *groups* of buildings meeting the national, state and local criteria for designation.
2. Designate more individual structures and districts.
3. Amend the demolition delay ordinance to limit the conditions under which a waiver is granted, and provide mitigation for the impacts of demolition.
4. Draft new regulatory tools that will provide the NHC with the means of dealing with harmonious infill development without regard to the one-year time limit on demolitions.
5. Review all land use and housing policies and regulations to increase their reinforcement of each other, with a particular focus on *neighborhood* preservation.

6. Conduct a public education and awareness campaign that will highlight acceptable alternatives to demolition, especially as applies to mid-20th century houses.
7. Increase the efficacy of the Newton Historical Commission so it can better fulfill its role as protector of the city's historic resources.
8. Develop financial incentives to offer to property owners to retain and rehabilitate their properties rather than demolish them.

A number of specific actions are recommended for each of these strategies in Chapter IV.

Introduction & Background

Newton's Demolition Delay Ordinance and the impacts of the great number of post World War II residences, now triggering the 50-year date requiring demolition review is the subject of this study, along with the historic and architectural significance of these properties. The project was initiated in late January 2001 by Neil Larson and Jill Fisher of Neil Larson & Associates, Inc. The fact that Newton has chosen to undertake this study is testimony to its interest in and stewardship of the historic and architectural treasures within its bounds. Members of the Newton Historic Commission (NHC) volunteer many hours every month to assist the community in this mission. That Newton now employs a full-time preservation planner, who acts as staff to NHC, confirms this commitment to preserving the character of the city, a character that continues to attract people to the community and ensure its ongoing vitality.

Visitors to Newton cannot help but be impressed by the sheer magnitude of historic properties and architectural richness of this first-ring suburb's urban fabric. Staff at the Massachusetts Historical Commission have indicated that Newton is certainly ahead of most communities in the state when it comes to embracing historic preservation, through past survey work and implementing protective measures for its resources. Still, the onslaught of new demolition permits now having to be reviewed—a 730 % increase over 14 years—has raised legitimate questions about the efficacy of the ordinance and the need for protecting the much greater numbers of post-World War residences that meet the age threshold for review. It is these questions that this study endeavors to answer.

Study Process

During the first phase of the study, all available demolition files from 1987 to the present—approximately 575—were reviewed. (An additional 67 demolition delay applications that had been missing were reviewed during the final phase of the study.) Of the initial 575 applications, approximately 80 properties were field checked to determine the results of the NHC's review—whether historic properties remain, design directives were followed or unintended consequences occurred. This was done to determine whether imposition of a delay actually resulted in saving these buildings, or whether it did indeed simply delay the inevitable destruction of historic properties. Collating addresses of properties coming under review indicated certain streets were being greatly altered by demolition requests. A number of these were viewed to ascertain the extent of the impact on neighborhood character. From the 80 samples, 21 were selected as illustrative of both positive and negative results and discussed, so as to provide the NHC objective feedback the implementation of the Demolition Delay ordinance.

The second phase of the study involved three parts. The first included an overall analysis of Post-WWII Houses, their representation in Newton and their significance in terms of warranting preservation. The second focused on Demolition Ordinances and preservation practices in other communities; three in particular, from which lessons can be learned. Finally, section three contains a discussion about whether Newton's demolition delay provisions are achieving the City's preservation purposes, how the age of Newton's housing stock can be expected to impact

the number and type of reviews by the Newton Historical Commission and a variety of options that could improve the results achieved with the demolition review process.

This third and final phase of Demolition Delay Ordinance and Post-World War II Housing Study, has involved a second review of all the material collected to date, interviewing members of the NHC, as well as several Aldermen, City Attorney and City Assessor, and researching models for recommended actions.

This work has led to three basic findings by the consultant, noted previously in the Executive Summary. The basis for each of these is explored in Chapter I. Chapter II focuses on the significance of Post-World War II housing in Newton, and references the significance of other mid-20th housing in need of attention. Both of these chapters serve as a prelude to the final recommendations for action strategies found in Chapter III. Appendices include further background information as well as models and illustrations of the types of tools and approaches indicated in the recommendations.

Newton is to be commended for pursuing further information about its historic housing stock—especially modern structures that have just recently triggered the 50-year-old standard for National Register eligibility. While there is not yet community consensus on the historic value of these buildings, there is a growing recognition that maintaining the physical fabric of the city is important to the community's welfare and that these Post World War II neighborhoods serve the community in a number of ways, making them worthy of preservation.

While the challenges are great, there are steps that can be taken to strengthen Newton's quality of life through preservation of the full range of its historic resources.

Examination of Newton’s experience with its demolition delay ordinance since 1987, in conjunction with an analysis of Post-World War II housing, has resulted in a range of observations. Some of these lie outside the official scope of the project as defined in the original request for proposals, others go right to the heart of the issues posed at the outset. All, though, point to a community that is undergoing rapid infill development and redevelopment, some of which is threatening the community’s historic resources. These observations are shared with the hope that they will provide insight into how this development is being fueled and how it might be better channeled so as to meet the concerns of the community.

The text in the boxes that follow summarize three basic observations and conclusions made during the course of this study, with sections under each that are intended to further explain the issues that have been raised.

The Demolition Delay Ordinance is a tool that needs to be strengthened and supported by complementary regulations if it is to be fully effective.

During the course of researching demolition delay ordinances in surrounding communities and states, it became apparent that this regulation, in combination with historic districts, provides one of the most powerful land use tools available to communities. The key is to have complementary mechanisms that address the full range of preservation issues that confront a community. Newton has a good tool in place—especially given its 50-year review threshold and one-year delay, but it cannot be expected to handle the entire job of preserving individual landmarks and historic neighborhoods. At best, a demolition delay ordinance serves as a safety net to prevent demolition of structures and devastation of neighborhoods that are inadvertently overlooked or not yet evaluated. At worst it is simply a hoop through which developers are forced to jump, without producing the benefits of saving historic buildings.

The original purpose of the delay—to “assure the preservation and enhancement of the City of Newton’s historical and cultural heritage by preserving, rehabilitating or restoring wherever possible, buildings or structures which have distinctive architectural features or historical associations that contribute to the historic fabric of the City”—can be interpreted as far-reaching in its intent. However, as many community leaders can attest, developers responding to a vigorous housing market have discovered that it pays to simply wait out the year delay and demolish a house, rather than comply with the intent of the regulation.

In the past few years, Newton has become super-attractive for new house construction, especially in areas with large lots that can be subdivided, and in neighborhoods with modest houses with asking prices close to the value of the lots they occupy. These houses are generally viewed as not offering the amenities today’s homebuyers demand. Thus, a building contractor, under current market conditions—high demand for housing and relatively low carrying costs—has

learned to build in the cost of holding onto a property for one year to wait out the delay period and then have the freedom to build as of right, whatever the zoning will allow. This highlights the need to review the standards within residential zoning districts to identify exactly which standards are at variance with existing housing patterns, especially in neighborhoods 50 years of age or older.

Does this mean that Newton's Demolition Delay Ordinance should be scrapped? The answer, by this consultant's evaluation, is no. This is because the NHC has done a good job of negotiating modifications to plans, especially in those instances where partial demolition has been proposed. They have motivated owners to undertake more sensitive improvements thereby maintaining the value of their properties and advocated flexibility in the application of building code requirements that would have otherwise damaged the historic fabric of significant buildings. And in a few cases, the delay has worked to discourage the purchase of a historic property with the intent to demolish, allowing another buyer the chance to buy a property.

In short, Newton needs a few more arrows in its preservation quiver. If the City of Newton is truly committed to preserving its heritage and "historical associations that contribute to the historic fabric of the City," then it will provide the Commission with other complementary tools—both "carrots" and "sticks"—to induce property owners and developers to see demolition a last resort. Chapter III presents several tools in detail that should be considered for implementation.

There are neighborhoods made up of Post-World War II housing, as well as other, earlier, mid-20th century housing that are not receiving the protection of which they are worthy.

Formal survey of Newton's historic properties includes only buildings up through the 1910s. This leaves many neighborhoods comprised of Bungalows, Cape Cods, Two-Story Colonials, Ranches, Split-Levels and other 20th-century housing types unidentified and under-appreciated.

It is important to recognize that the city's heritage includes the 20th century and the type and style of houses distinctive to that time. It is also important for the city to protect these more recent historic resources using the same standards it employs for much older buildings. The dramatic visual difference between the smaller, more modest and affordable houses of the 20th century and the grander and more decorative homes of the 19th century is no basis for comparison.

More survey and public education would raise awareness and sensitivity for these buildings as well as increase their value. (It might be helpful to remember that as recently as the mid-1960s, Victorian homes that are now highly prized, were seen as white elephants and being randomly demolished.)

There are broader community planning and land use issues, which provide the legal underpinnings for why preservation is important to the community's welfare. These include providing a diversity of housing choices and maintaining affordable housing and neighborhoods. It can be easily demonstrated that even in a small grouping of houses, each may contribute to the greater whole and thus the destruction and replacement of even one by a radically different style or size of structure, impacts the entire neighborhood. Left unchecked, rampant demolition of these houses may work against the quality of life that Newton seeks to preserve for its residents, present and future. It is these issues that preservation of more recently built neighborhoods can address.

Greater resources need to be made available for administration of the Demolition Delay Ordinance in particular and historic preservation in general if the community is to benefit. Such resources include “carrots” that will entice residents to make extra efforts towards rehabilitating historic buildings rather than demolishing them.

If preservation of the community's heritage is acknowledged as a way to enhance and protect the quality of life for residents, then the community needs to make a commitment to understanding fully what that heritage is and devote sufficient resources to protecting it.

The workload for the NHC and its staff has been growing for years and can be expected to remain at a high level until the real estate market cools considerably and/or until property owners accept historic preservation standards, so as to bring their expectations and requests in line with them. Last year's increase in NHC staffing to full-time status is one step in achieving this. Yet an even higher level of commitment is needed.

In looking at other communities, there are some great models that Newton should consider emulating. These include developing financial incentives for owners of historic properties to maintain and restore these buildings, additional assistance to applicants by staff under delegated authority, more clerical and intern support for NHC staff, providing the latest in technological tools to staff to increase their efficiency, more training opportunities for NHC members, greater recruitment efforts for NHC volunteers, and public awareness and education programs about the community's diverse historic resources.

Streamlining the demolition review process must of course be a means of providing more service to the public in this regard

Most important is fully integrating all planning and community development functions with historic preservation efforts, so that one regulation and public policy doesn't work against another. Subdivision standards, for example, which are overseen by the Planning Board, perhaps should be looked at to ensure that the way lots are divided doesn't justify demolition of historic

structures. Accessory housing units developed in carriage houses and garages can be a way of providing more affordable housing units while encouraging adaptive reuse of original structures. The draft Comprehensive Plan gives some suggestion of this approach, yet could be more explicit in defining preservation as a fundamental value of the community that has relationship to the community's other functions and operations.

Chapter III

Strategies and Actions

Appendices

Chapter I

Project Background

This study was initiated by Newton's Planning Department to review the effects of the city's demolition delay ordinance and assess the potential impacts of the great number of post-World War II houses, now reaching the 50-year threshold for demolition review. Neil Larson & Associates, Inc began work on the project in late January 2001. Both principals of the firm were involved in the study—Neil Larson, an architectural historian, evaluated the significance of the historic resources in question, and Jill Fisher, an urban planner, analyzed the effectiveness of the regulation and administrative and procedural issues it raised.

Visitors to Newton cannot help but be impressed by the sheer magnitude of historic properties and architectural richness of this second-ring suburb's urban fabric. Newton is certainly ahead of most communities in the state when it comes to embracing historic preservation, through past survey work and implementing protective measures for its resources. Still, the onslaught of new demolition permits now having to be reviewed—increasing from 20 in 1987 to 146 in 2000 (730% over 14 years)—has raised legitimate questions about the efficacy of the ordinance and the need for protecting the much greater numbers of post-World War residences that meet the age threshold for review. It is these challenges that this study endeavors to address.

Study Process

During the first phase of the study, all available demolition files from 1987 to the present—approximately 575—were reviewed. (An additional 67 demolition delay applications that had been missing were reviewed during the final phase of the study.) Of the initial 575 applications, approximately 80 properties were field checked to determine the results of the NHC's review—whether historic properties remain, design directives were followed or unintended consequences occurred. This was done to determine whether imposition of a delay actually resulted in saving these buildings, or whether it did indeed simply delay the inevitable destruction of historic properties. Collating addresses of properties coming under review indicated certain streets were being greatly altered by demolition requests. A number of these were viewed to ascertain the extent of the impact on neighborhood character. From the 80 samples, 21 were selected as illustrative of both positive and negative results and discussed, so as to provide the NHC objective feedback the implementation of the demolition delay ordinance. See Appendix A for pertinent sections from the Phase I report.

The second phase of the study involved three parts. The first included an overall architectural analysis of houses built in Newton between 1945 and 1960, and their significance in terms of warranting preservation. The second focused on demolition ordinances and preservation practices in other communities; three in particular, from which lessons could be learned. Finally, section three contained a discussion about whether Newton's demolition delay provisions are achieving the City's preservation purposes, how the age of Newton's housing stock could be expected to impact the number and type of reviews by the Newton Historical

Commission and listed a variety of options to improve the results achieved with the demolition review process. See Appendix B for pertinent sections from the Phase II report.

This third and final phase of demolition delay ordinance and post-World War II Housing Study, has involved a second review of all the material collected to date, interviews with members of the NHC, as well as several Aldermen, the City Attorney and the City Assessor, and researching models for recommended actions. One observation arising from these interviews is that the demolition delay ordinance is viewed differently by different people, depending on their roles. In general, the NHC members view it much more positively than do the elected officials, probably because they see the full range of issues it addresses, whereas the City Aldermen tend to get involved in only its most controversial applications.

This work has led to three basic findings by the consultant, noted previously in the Executive Summary. The basis for each of these is explored in Chapter II. Chapter III focuses on the significance of post-World War II housing in Newton, and references the significance of other mid-20th housing in need of attention. Both of these chapters serve as a prelude to the final recommendations for action strategies found in Chapter IV. Appendices include additional background information as well as models and illustrations of the types of tools and approaches indicated in the recommendations.

Newton is to be commended for pursuing further information about its historic housing stock—especially buildings that have just recently triggered the 50-year-age eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. While there is not yet community consensus on the historic value of these buildings, there is a growing recognition that maintaining the physical fabric of the city is important to the community's welfare and that these post-World War II neighborhoods serve the community in a number of ways, making them worthy of preservation.

While the challenges are great, there are steps that can be taken to strengthen Newton's quality of life through preserving examples of the full range of its historic resources.

Chapter II

Basic Conclusions

Examination of Newton’s experience with its demolition delay ordinance since 1987, in conjunction with an analysis of post-World War II housing, has resulted in a range of observations. Some of these lie outside the official scope of the project as defined in the original request for proposals, others go right to the heart of the issues posed at the outset. All, however, point to a community that is undergoing rapid infill development and redevelopment, some of which is threatening the community’s historic resources. These observations are made to provide insight into how this development is being fueled and how it might be better channeled so as to meet the broader concerns of the community.

The text in the boxes that follow summarize three basic conclusions of this study, with sections under each that are intended to further explain the issues that have been raised.

The demolition delay ordinance is a tool that needs to be strengthened and supported by complementary regulations if it is to be fully effective.

During the course of researching demolition delay ordinances in surrounding communities and states, it became apparent that this regulation, in combination with historic districts, provides one of the most powerful land use tools available to communities. The key is to have other complementary mechanisms that address the full range of preservation issues that confront a community. Newton has a good tool in place—especially given its 50-year review threshold and one-year delay, but it cannot be expected to handle the entire job of preserving individual landmarks and historic neighborhoods. At best, a demolition delay ordinance serves as a safety net to prevent demolition of structures and devastation of neighborhoods that are inadvertently overlooked or not yet evaluated. At worst it is simply a hoop through which developers are forced to jump, without producing the benefits of saving historic buildings.

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In the past few years, Newton has become super-attractive for new house construction, especially in areas with large lots that can be subdivided, and in neighborhoods with modest houses with asking prices close to the value of the lots they occupy. These houses are

generally viewed as not offering the amenities today's homebuyers demand. Thus, a building contractor, under current market conditions—high demand for housing and relatively low carrying costs—has learned to build in the cost of holding onto a property for one year to wait out the delay period and then have the freedom to build as of right, whatever the zoning will allow, often to the detriment of an entire neighborhood.

Does this mean that Newton's demolition delay ordinance should be scrapped? The answer, by this consultant's evaluation, is no. This is because the NHC has done a good job of negotiating modifications to plans, especially in those instances where partial demolition has been proposed. It has motivated owners to undertake more sensitive improvements thereby maintaining the value of their properties and has advocated flexibility in the application of building code requirements where strict adherence would have resulted in damage to the historic fabric of significant buildings. And in a few cases, the delay has worked to derail purchases of historic properties for demolition, allowing other preservation-oriented buyers the chance to acquire these properties. However, a number of problems remain to be addressed.

The most problematic aspect of the current demolition delay ordinance is the waiver provision. The delay period is often not allowed to run its course so that alternatives to demolition of historically and architecturally significant buildings that have been found "Preferably Preserved" can be investigated and pursued. This follow-up aspect has not occurred, due to lack of incentive mechanisms and staffing. Another impediment to demolition could also be added: that design review be required of all replacement houses *after* the one-year delay has expired and proof is shown that the building cannot be saved.

Another issue is residential zoning districts standards can be at variance with existing housing patterns, especially in neighborhoods 50 years of age or older.

In short, Newton needs a few more arrows in its preservation quiver. If the City of Newton is truly committed to preserving its heritage and "historical associations that contribute to the historic fabric of the City," then it will provide the Commission with other complementary tools—both "carrots" and "sticks"—to induce property owners and developers to see demolition a last resort rather than a first choice.

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It is important to recognize that the city's heritage includes the 20th century and the type and style of houses distinctive to that time. It is also important for the city to protect these more recent historic resources using the same standards it employs for much older buildings. The dramatic visual difference between the smaller, more modest and affordable houses of the 20th century and the grander and more decorative homes of the 19th century is not a legitimate basis for comparison.

More survey and public education would raise awareness of and sensitivity to these buildings as well as increase their value. (It might be helpful to remember that as recently as the 1970s, Victorian homes that are now highly prized, were seen as white elephants, devalued and randomly demolished.)

There are broader community planning and land use issues, which provide the legal underpinnings for why preservation is important to the community's welfare. These include providing a diversity of housing choices and maintaining affordable housing and neighborhoods. It can be easily demonstrated that even in a small grouping of houses, each may contribute to the greater whole and thus the destruction and replacement of even one by a radically different style or size of structure, impacts the entire neighborhood. Left unchecked, rampant demolition of these houses may work against the quality of life that Newton seeks to preserve for its residents, present and future. It is these issues that preservation of more recently built neighborhoods can address.

Greater resources need to be made available for administration of the demolition delay ordinance in particular and historic preservation in general if the community is to benefit.

If preservation of the community's heritage is acknowledged as a way to protect and enhance the quality of life for residents, then the community needs to make a commitment to understanding fully what that heritage is and devote sufficient resources to protecting it. In particular, this involves undertaking regular survey work, findings from which should provide the basis for the NHC's actions.

The workload for the NHC and its staff has been growing for years and can be expected to remain at a high level until the real estate market cools considerably and/or until property owners accept historic preservation standards, so as to bring their expectations and requests in line with them. Last year's increase in NHC staffing to full-time status is one step in achieving this. Yet an even higher level of commitment is needed if Newton is to continue to protect its quality of life and diversity of neighborhoods and housing choices, which is one of the policies put forth in the city's draft Framework Plan.

Most important is fully integrating all planning and community development functions with historic preservation efforts, so that one regulation and public policy doesn't work against another. Subdivision standards, for example, which are overseen by the Planning Board, perhaps should be looked at to ensure that the way lots are divided doesn't justify demolition of historic structures. Accessory housing units developed in carriage houses and garages can be a way of providing more affordable housing units while encouraging adaptive reuse of original structures. The draft Framework for the City's Planning gives some suggestion of this approach, yet needs to be more explicit in defining preservation as a fundamental value of the community that has relationship to the community's other functions and operations.

In looking at other communities, there are some excellent models that Newton should consider emulating. These include developing financial incentives for owners of historic properties to maintain and restore their historic buildings, additional assistance to applicants by staff under delegated authority, more clerical and intern support for NHC staff, providing the latest in technological tools to staff to increase their efficiency, more training opportunities for commission members, greater recruitment efforts for volunteers, and public awareness and education programs about the community's diverse historic resources.

Chapter IV provides recommend specific strategies and actions to address each of these conclusions.

Chapter III

Chapter III

An Overview of Post-World War II Housing and its Significance in Newton, Massachusetts

by Neil Larson

The following text was written as a part of a 2001 study of The Demolition Delay Ordinance and post-World War II Housing in Newton, Massachusetts, funded by a CLG grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, with the intention that it will serve as a stand-alone essay for purposes of public education about the historic resource this housing comprises.

A Brief History Of Post-World War II Housing

More houses were built in Newton in the years immediately following World War II than in any other city in the Commonwealth. In 1950, more new houses were constructed in Newton than in any single previous year. This is according to the narrative description contained in the National Register Nomination Form amending the Newton Multiple Resource Area for the period of significance 1908-1940.

City records show that nearly 4000 additions were made to the city's housing stock in the decade 1950-1959, again more than any previous decade. From this information, it is evident that the post-WWII Era (1945-1960) represents an important period of development in Newton. And in this way, Newton convincingly illustrates the patterns of growth, innovative designs and methods of construction, and domestic reform distinctive to this historic period of American community building and architecture. Because of the relatively recent and revolutionary nature of this phenomenon, it is only now that histories and critical assessments are emerging by which Newton's post-WWII-era resources can be effectively contextualized and evaluated for significance.

Newton reflects the broader conditions that existed nationwide in suburban residential communities at the close of World War II. There was a tremendous housing shortage. A pent-up demand for single-family houses, created by a scarcity of building materials during the war, was greatly exaggerated when ten million American service men and women were discharged in 1945 and 1946. Two and one-half million reunited families and recently married couples moved in with relatives. The National Housing Agency estimated that five million new housing units were needed immediately with 12.5 million required over the next decade. War veterans returned to their hometowns with a very different outlook than when they left. They had lost their youthfulness and were intent upon claiming their part of the American Dream as reward for their sacrifices overseas. They wanted good jobs, security for their families, and homes to own. Many were starting from scratch. And the nation was committed to meeting their needs. In so doing the conception and design of houses and communities, as well as the pattern of domestic life, were transformed forever.

The United States government played a pivotal role in the housing boom of the post-WWII era. This was largely the result of the Veterans Administration's decision in 1944 to issue mortgage guarantees for discharged servicemen. The VA-backed mortgages provided 30-year loans for 85% of the cost of a new house, which represented an extraordinary reform of traditional mortgage practice. Prior to this, banks would seldom make a loan of more than half of a house's value and then for only five years or less. In addition, because of the government's insurance of mortgages to veterans, interest rates dropped considerably. This mortgage financing was administered by the Federal Housing Administration, and their concern for economy precipitated direct governmental involvement in the design and construction of housing under their jurisdiction. President Harry S. Truman signed the Federal Housing Act into law in 1949 to achieve "the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." Since the FHA would only insure mortgages granted on single-family homes in suburban settings, they essentially dictated the kind of housing that would proliferate under the Federal housing program. And because they desired to keep housing costs low (while material and labor costs were increasing), the FHA favored the construction of small, stripped-down houses, the value of which was determined by the size of the monthly payment veterans were able to afford.

What emerged was a new architecture that was distilled from progressive domestic plans, traditional wood construction methods and a fascination with modern technological conveniences and then reduced and compressed to meet a predetermined limited cost. Compromises were made with the satisfaction that a more universal need was being met and with the expectation that these were "starter homes" that the ambitious new owners would gradually expand and improve. (One historian has noted that 70% of new homeowners had money saved for immediate improvements to their houses.) To meet a sales price of \$8,000 - \$10,000, which included the expenses of site purchase and improvement, meeting municipal zoning codes (water, sewer, roads, utilities), landscaping, providing kitchen appliances, advertising and sales, and some profit for the builder, drastic reductions in space and labor were necessary.

The first traditional house feature to go was the basement. Most of the original FHA-supported houses were built on concrete slabs. The slab was as much a technological innovation as a cost-reducing reality. By the twentieth-century, the suburban house basement represented wasted space occupied by furnaces, coal bins, cisterns and kitchen storage areas outmoded by new heating and kitchen technology. Additionally, the slabs contained a grid of copper tubing that provided radiant heat for the house and removed the need for dust-catching radiators modern homemakers had denounced in numerous magazine surveys. Second floors were also removed from the plan of the post-WWII-Era house with all domestic zones arranged on one level. Early "Slab Capes" had sufficient headroom in an unfinished attic (no floor even) for the homeowner to expand habitable space, but the flatter roof of the more ubiquitous Ranches provided no such opportunity. The dining room was also removed from the 800 to 1000 square foot houses, to the expressed dismay of housewives, but kitchen improvements and open planning of kitchen and living spaces mitigated the disappointment. Two tiny bedrooms and a single bath were the norm, but they were generally adequate for the young, small families moving in. Clearly, the veterans' families were enthusiastic partners in the ideological process of creating a new, affordable single-family house. With their alternative being a tenement apartment or urban multi-family house, homebuyers were

extremely optimistic, appreciative and resourceful. While critics condemned these houses and their communities as slums-in-the-making, the veteran families were committed to making them work. There was a sense of privilege in these communities, a feeling of being in the now and part of a trail-blazing endeavor that consoled them. And, ultimately, they came to vastly outnumber (and outlive) their detractors.

In the interest of protecting its investment in these mortgages, the FHA was very conservative, almost capricious, in the house types it would accept. Simple, modest established forms were favored over the cornucopia of modernist house designs that were produced in the era. Thus, Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses were rejected, even though he demonstrated their economy, and the Cape and Ranch were written into the FHA guidelines. The federal bureaucrats were decidedly anti-intellectual in their approach to affordable housing; no architect made his fame or fortune from post-WWII housing. They may have also underestimated the taste of their buyers, but the borrowers weren't complaining. The FHA justification was that they wanted designs whose popular appeal would last the life of the mortgage. They did not wish to risk their investment on ephemeral concepts. Who knows what would have happened if the Usonian house replaced the Cape or Ranch as the national norm. One result was that homeowners were provided with a much more architecturally-neutral house that they could adapt and personalize freely.

With the proliferation and repetition of standardized house plans with no complexity or frills, the architect's role in the home-building process was insignificant, and if it existed at all, it was through providing ideas and innovations in professional and popular house magazines. The principal player in the new housing game was the merchant builder. The term "merchant" has been applied to the builder in the post-WWII Era to indicate that the traditional architect-builder-client relationship in custom house construction had evolved, at least in the case of the mass-produced housing development, to a situation where the house builder controlled all aspects of the relationship, including marketing a finished, manufactured product. Some of these builders had been establishing themselves prior to the war in upper middle-class suburban subdivisions on the outskirts of major urban centers. Many more were small contractors attracted into the merchant builder business by this unprecedented, tremendous demand for affordable housing.

Profit margins were minimal on FHA-supported house construction and the bureaucratic hoops were numerous: the merchant builder had to be a master of efficiency. Any unanticipated costs or delays could upset the delicate balance of the complex economics of constructing even a simple house and wipe out the builder's share. Builders vertically integrated into all aspects of producing the house from site acquisition to brokering mortgages to preserve their control of projects and ensure that they would profit something in the end. Planning became a critical factor in house construction.

Of course, one significant way to economize was by spreading land, site development and design costs over a large number of lots and houses. In this way, the post-WWII Era ushered in the large-scale planned communities and mass-market building industry that Americans now associate with suburban development. Prior to the war, suburban subdivisions and house construction were separate transactions. The owner of a parcel would make lot subdivisions and provide roads and services required by the municipality, often gradually. Individuals would purchase a lot and arrange with a builder to erect a house. (Land developers were very

seldom builders.) There were often deed restrictions limiting lot uses and building size and placement to ensure some consistency to the development. Higher end subdivisions incorporated more stringent lot and design restrictions into the deeds. It would usually take some years to build out these plans; some of them were never fully realized. Many subdivisions were quite informal with lots being combined and houses constructed in a wide variety of sizes, styles and periods. This was particularly the case in the earlier working- and lower-middle-class "street-car" subdivisions that were appended to the periphery of small cities.

At times, builders would purchase a small series of lots and market them with house plans to potential buyers. This is why small numbers of houses with identical or similar thematic designs are visible in many early-twentieth-century neighborhoods. However, the restrictive mortgages of the period did not allow much flexibility for the builder or the buyer. Building houses on speculation was not something banks would support. The post-WWII housing crunch mobilized the federal government and the banking establishment into facilitating home construction: the FHA mortgage insurance program reduced the risks of lending, which made the banks more willing to extend seed money to builders. This allowed merchant builders to conceive projects involving the construction of hundreds, sometimes thousands of houses—or in the case of some like the Levittowns, tens of thousands of houses.

The City of Newton is one of many municipalities where veteran housing projects were created following the war. Even in the absence of an adequate contextual understanding of the post-war housing boom in New England, based on the distinctive characteristics of the plan and architecture (Slab Ranches) of Newton's Oak Hill Park, it can be viewed as the epitome of a veteran's housing project. The wider extent of this phenomenon has yet to be identified, much less quantified, in Massachusetts or any other state, yet it is evident that it was quite large in scope. (For example, a large development of attached homes—Hancock Village—was constructed in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1946-49.) Huge FHA developments, such as Panorama City in California (3000 identical Ranch houses), Oak Forest near Houston (5000), Park Forest outside Chicago (8000), and the Levittowns in New York and Pennsylvania (17,450 houses in New York alone), have been described and analyzed in recent dissertations and publications, but the significance of the smaller, locally-significant projects like Oak Hill Park (412 houses) have yet to be adequately examined.

The construction of moderate-cost housing was also booming in the 1950's. Veterans able to afford higher monthly payments could also receive FHA-insured mortgages on larger, more expensive homes. (FHA funding was also available for home improvements.) Sometimes these houses were constructed as part of planned developments by merchant builders, other times they were built on a more individualized basis. Colonial and Ranch types remained the norm; flagrantly "Modern" designs were still discouraged. Floor area increased with rooms more spacious overall. Rooms excluded from the basic plans were restored, such as the dining room, and more bedrooms were added. In the process, the Cape evolved into a Two-Story Colonial and the Ranch expanded in all directions. To raise a Ranch to two stories would belie the type; however, in larger versions, part of the floor plan was bumped up a half-story above a sunken basement and/or garage to accommodate more space. This variant of the Ranch became known as the Split-Level house. Other characteristic features of the Ranch were preserved, such as the low-pitched gable or hipped roof, deep overhangs, varied window sizes, and innovative siding materials. The larger, more expensive houses were more

consciously designed and individualized to their buyers. Architectural details and materials were carefully selected, and the increased house prices reflected this luxury. The houses may have been the first houses constructed by their owners, and like their more economical counterparts, certain construction jobs were undertaken by owners to keep costs down.

The fundamental design unity of the simplified types, forms and materials of post-war housing presented a jarring contrast to the existing residential architecture in older suburban communities where they were often introduced, whether at the lower or upper ends of prevailing house values. In truth, the design of these houses (or lack thereof) clashed with the picturesque designs of their predecessors and their cheapness offended the bourgeois Victorian sensibilities that had spawned the suburbs. Even the more progressive house types introduced in the era just before World War II, such as Bungalows, Four-Squares, and Colonial Revival houses, bore little resemblance to the unpretentious Ranches and Split-Levels. Post-WWII house design represented a radical departure from the established suburban ideal. The machine had definitely invaded the garden.

In most cases, the new houses were constructed in peripheral or marginal areas of towns where house construction had been avoided in the past. The inferior status of these areas resulted in lower land costs land for merchant builders and contributed to the success of projects. Municipalities would be more likely to support development proposals that improved a poor existing condition. Less desirable property along rail lines, highways and industrial zones were also developed during the housing shortage, particularly in communities that were reaching their development limits. But these locations also served to reinforce the second-class status affordable housing endured in established suburban communities. Fortunately, these were owner-occupied homes housing war veterans and their families; communities were more accepting of the newcomers that they might otherwise have been.

The role of the automobile in the history of post-WWII Era housing cannot be overstated. With car ownership fairly much the norm for middle-class families, development of areas some distance from commercial centers and mass-transit lines became possible. The lower land costs of these remote properties, many of which were peripheral farms that had ceased operation during and since the Depression, were crucial to the success of the merchant builders' delicate, low-budget formulas. It was the post-war housing projects that came to define what are now known as automobile suburbs. Houses were sited in relation to intricate road systems with driveways and garages as integral parts of the landscape. In some cases, such as at Levittown, carports were built instead of garages as a further cost-cutting measure. Garages were an option for home-buyers in Newton's Oak Hill Park. Eventually, garages were made a part of the house. The houses were born from the same infatuation with technology and mass-production affordability that characterized the automobile trend. Both were tremendous agents in the democratization of home ownership and suburban living in the United States.

Post-WWII Era houses quickly claimed a substantial piece of suburbia and caused a revolution in the previously accepted practices of house design, construction and financing. The generation of veterans wanted a place in the suburbs but, by-and-large, could not afford it. They were also directed away from the conventional affordable housing in the cities by urban and racial prejudices. Whether they grew up in the city or the country, they were attracted to the idealized zone in between, and new space had to be made for them. The

government, the banks and the housing industry were determined to capitalize on the economic and social benefits of the situation. The housing explosion that followed the Second World War completely redefined the suburbs both in their physical appearance and social composition. The multitudinous Capes, Ranches and Split-Levels interspersed in older suburbs are landmarks of this important moment in time and the transformations it irrevocably fomented.

And then it was over. By 1960, the production of affordable housing went in a completely different direction. As material and labor costs continued to escalate (and the veterans were suitably housed), the home building industry experienced a recession in the late 1950's. Demand had not totally diminished, rather a coherent, long-term plan for financing and constructing housing that would meet the needs of lower middle class families never materialized. The lack of a national housing policy seriously curtailed the expansion of the single-family housing boom into other segments of the population. To respond to the prevailing entry-level housing needs, merchant builders returned to the multi-family form, with the garden apartment emerging as a characteristic type.

Post-World War II Housing In Newton

A windshield survey of houses built between 1945 and 1960 conducted in the development of this report has revealed some distinctive conditions in Newton. (This survey attempted to cover all residential areas of the city where concentrations of buildings built in that time frame were indicated on a map generated by the Newton GIS.) Consistent with broader patterns of development, Newton's post-war housing stock is principally concentrated in previously undeveloped or underdeveloped areas in the northern and southern zones of the city, notably along the Waltham town line and in Oak Hill, where the greatest concentration of houses built in the 1945-1960 period are located. In addition, there are numerous small subdivisions scattered around the city where smaller parcels of underdeveloped land existed. Many of these parcels were likely older residential properties and contained houses and/or outbuildings that were demolished to maximize the value of the real estate. (This situation continues today.) New houses built in existing neighborhoods generally correspond to their neighbors in scale, design quality, materials, and value. Few, if any, areas of the city have been seriously compromised by the introduction of post-WWII houses other than by the contrast in taste they represent. The principal exception appears to be when a spacious house lot is parceled out and presents a visible contradiction in the streetscape. This intensification of density began occurring in Newton long before the Second World War, however.

The catalog of post-WWII-era house types is limited, and the examples that distinguish Newton's building record are no exception. Within these limited types, there is a wide range of examples that represent design and cost alternatives. Five types are described below. The distinctive characteristics of Newton's documented veterans' housing project are described independently.



Photo 1 - 182 Adams Street

The Cape

The Cape is a 20th-century suburban house type that is rooted in New England's traditional architecture. The one-story box form with tall gable roof punctuated with a center chimney and dormers was a popular, inexpensive small house form that appealed to the popular Colonial Revival taste. While examples appear nation-wide, the Cape was appropriately much more prevalent in New England where it was a modern, industrial-age paean to an enduring regional house form. It was adopted by merchant builders before the Second World War and became one of the first house types that the Federal Housing Administration approved for mortgages. The Cape proliferated in cities like Newton after the war largely because it qualified for long-term, affordable loans.



Photo 2 -Albert Road

The Cape was also an effective do-it-yourselfer's house. In Levittown, New York, where around 6,000 Capes were constructed during the initial phase of the community, Capes were built on concrete slabs to reduce costs and attics were left unfinished and without floors. Homeowners quickly made their attic spaces habitable, particularly as the young families grew and more bedroom space became necessary. These houses were designed and built as starter homes, and as the years progressed, the quality of components and finishes were upgraded as they wore out befitting the success and taste of individual owners. Today, few "unimproved" Capes remain in the city creating a catalog of modifications that are significant architectural expressions of a new domestic culture.



Photo 3 – 23 Sylvester Street

There are literally hundreds of Capes in Newton. Most of them appear in newly formed post-WWII-Era neighborhoods with a mixture of other design options, notably Ranches and Split-Levels. Some streets display a mixture of Capes and Two-Story Colonials that indicate that there was a range in physical and economic scale for this inherently middle-class dwelling. The heterogeneity of the architecture in these small street developments also reflect the extent of the options available to individual lot owners as they contracted to have their houses to be built in the manner of a traditional subdivision. At the lower end, merchant builder would have favored more uniformity in type and appearance. There are few locations in the city, such as on Albert Road in Auburndale, where planned communities of Capes are evident. Another uniform neighborhood of Capes exists in Auburndale along Russell and Sylvester Roads. These buildings are additionally noticeable because they were constructed of oversize bricks (for economy of labor). Concentrations of Capes are also present in a number of "key hole" subdivisions that were created from older, larger house lots during this period.



Photo 4 – Fessenden Street

The Two-Story Colonial

As indicated by its name, the Two-Story Colonial is a larger and more elaborate house than the Cape, and it represents a more costly dwelling available to a smaller segment of the population. It developed out of the same historicist spirit as the Cape and in many cases shared a similar plan. However, the Colonial was twice the size and displayed more decoration than its one-story counterpart. Porches, sunrooms and garages were common appendages. Plans were spacious with stair halls, dining rooms and extra service areas on the first floor and three or more bedrooms on the second floor.

Hundreds of houses built between 1900 and 1960 at the higher end of Newton's real estate market can be classified in this way. Most of the houses built prior to World War II were architect-designed and as a group, display a wide variety of scale, materials and architectural embellishment. While those built after the war share an unmistakable resemblance and architectural legacy with these older Colonial Revival houses, they also illustrate the shift of house construction to the smaller, less embellished, lower-cost merchant builder homes typical of the period. A notable planned development of Two-Story Colonials is located on Fessenden Street in Newtonville.



Photo 5 - 192 Concord Street

The Ranch

The Ranch can be generally defined as a low, long, rectangular house with a shallow-pitched side-gable roof. It appeared on the scene in Newton and every other suburban community in the Northeastern United States in the housing boom that followed World War II. It is also characterized by the use of (what were then) new materials for exterior walls, windows and roofs. The Ranch epitomized what was new and modern in house design and in family lifestyles following the Second World War. It was the result of the Progressive Era prescriptions for more informal, open living areas in the house and Modern ideals of technological efficiency. What it lacked in the hard-edged refinement of the stark, rectilinear forms of Modern architecture, it made up for in popularizing its revolutionary design and social programs. Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the most visible and controversial public figures of the period, and images of his idealistic architecture were known to just about every house-builder and home-buyer. There was also great economy in the open plans and stripped-down efficiency of the Ranch. It was a form designed for mass-production.

The popularity of the Ranch originated in California before the war where the westward migration created a tremendous and continuous demand for house-building, particularly at the economical end. Once beyond the influence of the Eastern seaboard, established architectural traditions lost their importance and the Western climate inspired innovations. The Ranch was introduced to the East in the post-WWII-Era when the federal government's interest in single-family housing placed home-building in a national context. The Ranch presented a visible contrast to the existing housing in the Northeast in its form, scale and design. Even when compared to other affordable housing options, such as the Cape, the Ranch was an alien object. This was particularly evident in the more densely developed, nineteenth-century suburbs like Newton. Nevertheless, by virtue of their sheer numbers, the Ranch forced its way into older contexts and radically transformed them.



Photo 6 – Mary Ellen Road

In Newton, Ranch houses appear nearly as frequently as Capes and Two-Story Colonials, but they stand out more. Ranches and Capes often appear together in smaller street developments particularly in the southern part of the city, e.g. Oak Hill and Waban. Unlike Capes, there were many variations in Ranch design and it was a Modern house that appealed to upper as



Photo 7 – Swallow Drive

well as lower middle class families. Thus there are collections of small, modest Ranches, such as on Joseph and Edward roads in Newtonville, and spacious, elegant Ranches, such as on Ruane and Mary Ellen roads west of the cemetery in Newton Village. The Ranch usually invited some form of individualized design that set a particular house in a development apart from others, and there is a substantial range of examples spread throughout the City of Newton. One of the more distinctive of these can be found on Maynard, Emmon and Mossman streets in Newtonville where a collection of L-shaped frame houses with brick ends and integral garages are located. Houses on Swallow Drive in Newton Lower Falls represent a type of Ranch with attached garage that appears repeatedly in other parts of the city, and houses on Selwyn Road between Newton Upper Falls and Oak Hill with their metal frame casement and picture windows provide a distinctive manufactured appearance. Some developments are plainly idiosyncratic, reflecting the taste or wit of the merchant builder. The most extreme example of this situation can be found in a small group of houses with wild brick and stone masonry on Bencliffe Circle in Auburndale.



Photo 8 – 184 Paulson Road

The Split Level

Once the Ranch began to proliferate in communities across America following the Second World War, it began to evolve in form and scale, particularly at the upper end of the economic scale where homeowners did not need to sacrifice all space or decoration for the sake of affordability. As Ranches grew in size, their characteristic one-story, low-pitched-roof massing was stretched to the limit. One solution was to attach ell in L, T and H configurations, but limited lot sizes would often interfere with enlarging the footprint of the house in any significant way. As a result, the Split-Level house was introduced, which

elevated a portion of the house a half story above a sunken story that usually contained garages and other service rooms. The bump in the roofline, when combined with the other Ranch-like elements in the overall design, did not seriously affect the low, horizontal appearance of the type. Bedrooms were generally placed in the raised section to further isolate them from the public realms of the house. And incorporating the garage into the mass of the house, rather than simply appending it to one end, constituted no small change in itself. This condition continues to be a prominent feature in house design today.

Newton has its fair share of Split-Level houses, and they are located in many of the in-fill subdivisions in the historic core of the city as well as in Oak Hill where larger developments were undertaken on vacant land that still existed there after the war. Distinctive examples of the type are located on Paulson Road west of the Newton Cemetery and Bound Brook Road near Newton Upper Falls. The Paulson Road examples have in-line, side-gable roofs; the raised sections of the Bound Brook Road examples have front-facing gables that create an L-shaped roof. In a number of cases, such as on Bound Brook Road, the garage level of the two-story section is sunken into the ground to maintain the one-story Ranch appearance. Many Split-Levels are sited on hillsides so that the garage entry can be accessed from a lower elevation. The varying roof heights of the Split-Level invited more creative and Modern design treatments. Split-Level houses at 16 Selwyn Road and 46 Juniper Lane illustrate the use of long, sloping front-gable roofs with ridgelines skewed to one side, over the raised section of the house. While not uncommon, these more stylish houses represented only a small proportion of the Ranches and Split-Levels. The subdivision known as Esty Farm just north of Oak Hill Park is a rare example of an entire planned development of Split-Levels in a Modern design.



Photo 9 – Juniper Lane

The Contemporary House

The Contemporary House is one of a number of terms applied to the post-WWII house type, usually architect-designed, that more aggressively employed the Modern Period design program in a more doctrinaire manner. These houses were starkly rectilinear with flat wall and roof planes. Components were often segmented and staggered creating box-like forms. Porch roofs and overhangs were pierced, and there was extensive use of large fenestration. Interior plans were open and public spaces voluminous. There are a few such houses scattered among older residences in Newton's higher-end neighborhoods, since these were expensive houses to build. Generally, Contemporary Houses would be sited on larger and more dramatic lots than were available in the older suburbs such as Newton.

Veterans' Housing in Planned Communities

This house type is characterized by the small-scaled, simply designed, and economically constructed dwellings that were approved for FHA-insured mortgages in the 1940's and 1950's. The predominant house styles were Capes and Ranches, with the latter emerging as epitomizing the type. While one documented veterans' housing project took place in Newton in 1948, there are a number of other, smaller groupings and individual houses in the city where it is apparent that some FHA-approved model was utilized.

- **Oak Hill Park:** Oak Hill Park has already been recognized by the Newton Historical Commission as a distinctive component of the architectural and social history of the city. This 412-unit housing development ranks with the likes of Levittown as a textbook example of the design and planning of a Post-WWII housing project for returning veterans. Unlike Levittown, it is little known outside of the city. A different type of veterans' housing project was undertaken in Brookline, Massachusetts, where a large number of attached, townhouse units were built. Undoubtedly, other housing projects developed in the Boston area as well as in New England in the period following the war, but until a systematic survey is done, the extent of this phenomenon will not be known. This eventual knowledge will only enhance the significance of Oak Hill Park.



Photo 10 – 102 Hanson Road

The small Slab Capes that were "manufactured" on site in Oak Hill Park were very similar in plan and design as those erected in the more publicized communities. With three bedrooms, the Oak Hill Park model was larger than the two-bedroom Levittowner. The site plan of Oak Hill Park was also noteworthy in that it incorporated pedestrian amenities from earlier, Progressive-Era suburban models, such as Radburn, New Jersey, that were generally dismissed in FHA-supported communities. The core houses in Oak Hill Park are oriented towards pedestrian walks that link most of the community. The houses were sited so that their rear elevations faced cul-de-sacs that provided automobile service access.



Photo 11 – 88 Selwyn Road

- **Other Developments of Veterans' Housing:** Two additional developments utilize house types that suggest that they were planned FHA-backed projects. There are a few Ranch Houses on Edward Road in West Newton that appear to be identical to those erected in Oak Hill Park, although a number of lots on that street now contain new houses that apparently replaced more of them. While larger than those in Oak Hill Park, the Ranch Houses built on Selwyn Road between Newton Upper Falls and Oak Hill also appear to have been part of an affordable housing project in the era. Moreover, the identical brick Capes on Sylvester and Russell Roads in West Newton are of a scale and design that infers some form of government-supported project. Further research into the history of these developments, as well as dozens of others, is necessary to place them in historical contexts and evaluate their significance.

Other Planned Communities

There are scores of small planned developments throughout the city constructed during the 1945-1960 period. Most of the examples used to illustrate the descriptions of house types made above are parts of those communities. Each has its own particular history as well as a role to play in the context of post-WWII housing in Newton and the greater Boston area. In the absence of a survey, a map of the city with properties color coded to reflect the age of the houses thereon is a convincing document of the extent of post-WWII housing and its concentration in a multitude of groupings.

Significance Of Post-WW II Era Houses In Newton

In both of Newton's two large National Register multiple-resource nominations, it is prominently stated that the Massachusetts Historical Commission had determined that the city "retains the finest and most comprehensive collection of late 19th and early 20th century suburban residential architecture in the Boston area." Although systematic surveys of historic buildings built after 1925 have not been undertaken in Massachusetts, it can be inferred that this degree of significance would extend into the post-WWII Era as well, recognizing that more houses were built in Newton over those years than any other municipality in the Commonwealth. Yet, the form and design of this architecture is so visibly different from that built in the three preceding centuries that it continues to be considered non-historic, even though it clearly reflects design and historical contexts that are now in the past.

The significance of Newton's post-WWII Era architecture originates with affordable housing projects, large and small, designed to accommodate returning war veterans and their generation. It has already been stated that Newton contains an exceptional example of this in Oak Hill Park, where the city took part in this highly publicized project, but it is evident that many other projects were undertaken by merchant builders in the period to address this critical housing need. In every case, these developments possess important information about a nationally significant phenomenon in architecture and social programming. The significance of Oak Hill Park transcends the local context as a notable example of veterans' housing in the state and even, perhaps, as an exemplary federally supported project in a national context. Newspaper accounts of the opening of Oak Hill Park contain testimonies to the city's investment in the project as a memorial to the war veterans, which contributes another dimension to the sense of the project's significance. Additionally, the modest, economical houses of Oak Hill Park are as much relics of a historic architecture as any dwelling from the nineteenth or eighteenth centuries. The Ranch house continues to be a viable house type today, but the tiny, Spartan Slab Ranch built for war veterans and bought by them with FHA-insured VA mortgages existed for no more than a decade in the 1940's and 1950's.

The Ranch was ultimately built in a wide range of sizes and levels of elaboration from the no-frills Slab Ranch of veterans' projects to larger, one-of-a-kind, architect-designed homes for the elite. In the middle of this range, houses were still being constructed by merchant builders in planned developments. The more costly these developments became, the more diversified the designs of the houses that were offered, as the buyer became more involved in the conception of the house. There are quite a few of these types of developments in Newton. The significance of these more individualized ranches and their developments relies

increasingly on their distinction as architectural objects. As a home-owner's interest in architecture became more elevated, the house type described as the Contemporary House replaced the elaborated Ranch as a model. These houses were always architect-designed and built for the client. The few examples of the Contemporary House in Newton will be evaluated individually for their architectural significance.

Capes and Two-Story Colonials have proven to be far less ephemeral than the Slab Ranch; however, they have their own significance in the context of the city and the suburban history of the greater Boston area. Their design association with the historic architecture of the region provides them with a link to tradition that the Ranch does not enjoy, and this continuity imbues them with certain significance. As twentieth-century buildings, both types have histories that predate the appearance of the Ranch, but those examples built in the post-WWII Era acquire the added significance of being built in the context of affordable housing in that period. The Cape and Two-Story Colonial bridge the period so they do not have the rarity or time-bound significance of the Slab Ranch, nor do they epitomize the affordable house, even though the appearance of the Slab Cape predated the Slab Ranch at Levittown, Forest Park and other early veterans' housing projects. The Cape has been the affordable house in New England for centuries and is significant for that reason in any era. Likewise, the Two-Story Colonial is an indigenous New England house that has become the standard of suburban middle-class architecture across the nation.

Split-Levels are far less ubiquitous than Capes, Two-Story Colonials or Ranches. They are a single-family house type that evolved during the post-WWII Era to provide more space and architectural interest to the Ranch. They are often "Colonialized" in Northeastern towns like Newton, with the addition of features like shutters and clapboard, which amalgamates all these types into one hybrid form. Add the internal garage to this composition, a standard component of the Split-Level, and an ideal post-WWII Era suburban fusion is achieved, although often quite awkwardly. With all its extras, the Split-Level was not an entry-level house in the post-war market. It was a house option for families higher up in the ever-widening middle-class hierarchy. The popularity of the Split-Level was short-lived. Few are built today, having been replaced by the more spacious Raised Ranch house. The Split-Level is a distinctive post-WWII Era house type with a significance to consider in the Newton context, yet it is more an architectural than a historical object.

In each of these cases, the significance of the houses are going to be enhanced by their relationships to other similar houses in planned developments and their associations with builders and buyers who relate them to the social history of Newton during the period. Based on the current low level of documentation of this era in the city, determining the significance of individual examples of this architecture will be difficult, particularly due to their modest architectural pretensions. Until more comprehensive and detailed surveys are made of Newton's twentieth-century architecture, little more than a cursory review of public documents and visual assessments can be made. Yet, it is obvious that there are volumes to tell about the post-WWII Era history of the city. Planned developments, large (e.g., Oak Hill Park) and small, provide more definable entities to consider for significance; however, many will still be overlooked without the benefit of a survey.

Integrity

The integrity of historic form and materials plays the same role in evaluating the significance of post-WWII Era housing as it does with buildings of earlier periods with one important exception: the stripped-down, affordable houses built for the veterans' generation. Like the vernacular architecture of the lower classes in previous centuries (the vast majority of which has disappeared), these veterans' houses were rudimentary, standardized dwellings built by one class for another. The significance of vernacular houses relates as much to how they evolved to meet the changing needs and tastes of the people who resided in them as it does to their original form and design. So too with the identical and impersonal Slab Ranches and Capes into which veterans moved with their young families. The condition of the finished house that the veteran bought in Oak Hill Park was only the beginning stage in an on-going process of adjustment, elaboration and individualization.

Fifty years earlier, new home-buyers in Newton selected houses plans and designs that were tailored to their personal aspirations and tastes. If they bought a used house, renovations were inevitably made to physically and decoratively reorient the house to their preferred lifestyle. Sometimes this was simple; other times it was complex. In a sense, the veterans were buying somebody else's house, and they quickly adapted and elaborated them to make them their own. Thus the integrity of houses in planned developments, like Oak Hill Park, cannot be determined solely by the conditions that the merchant builders created; rather, integrity must include the conditions created by the new owners once they took possession and individualized them. Still a limit needs to be established, or perhaps better, a period of significance that encompasses the variables set by the first generation of residents.

More expensive Ranch or Split-Level homes built in the post-war period, where builders and clients had more direct relationships and the houses are distinguished by distinctive design features and materials, can be considered finished products when they were built. The impact of subsequent changes should be considered in that context. However, it must be cautioned that the norm is not the rule; many of these houses were also conceived to evolve over time with the sweat-equity of their owners. Capes and Two-Story Colonials have distinguishable forms that are inherent to their definition, no matter how plain or elaborate they may be. Alterations that noticeably change, obscure or dilute the integrity of those forms would affect the historic integrity of the house. Like with the Slab Ranches, the consideration of integrity of Capes that are the principal and repetitious house form in planned developments should be more flexibly applied.

When considering integrity of a particular post-WWII Era house, it should be first determined if it is a component of a larger planned development. In most cases it will be one of a number of houses, which will place the interpretation of integrity in a broader context. Where a cluster of similar house forms exists, the individual significance cannot be evaluated without reference to surrounding homes. In those remaining instances where the buildings are clearly isolated examples, the integrity test must focus on the determination of the house being a distinctive example of its type, period or method of construction. The level of alterations in many of these cases, will lead to the conclusion that sufficient integrity is not present for a determination of significance. However, conversely, if an intact example of a modest Cape, Two-Story Colonial, Ranch or Split-Level exists in isolation in the city, it should qualify as significant, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive survey.

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Chapter IV

Recommended Strategies & Actions

for Improving Results from Demolition Review

The following recommendations are made in the interest of improving overall preservation results in Newton. Many of these ideas are inter-dependent and would need to be implemented concurrently for them to work, particularly those related to staffing and the work of the NHC. All of the recommended strategies and actions are based on one fundamental assumption: that the demolition delay ordinance in Newton is an important tool for preserving the community's historic resources and it will remain in place.

Strategy # 1 - Initiate new survey efforts that will identify all individual and groups of buildings meeting the national, state and local criteria for designation.

Most of Newton's 20th-century architecture has yet to be surveyed. With a high percentage of demolition requests involving buildings in this age bracket, it is crucial to have a more comprehensive inventory of them and the contexts in which they predominate. Special attention should be given to surveying garages, including carriage houses, stables and barns.

Survey of historic resources is probably *the* most important action to take as it supports the activities of the NHC, giving it a sound basis for its ongoing reviews as well as streamlining the process of determining a property historically significant. Once the resources are known, their relative merits will be far easier to determine, eliminating the need for debating a property's merits on a case-by-case basis. This will help improve the consistency of the NHC's actions. It also opens the door for greater delegation to staff, thereby lightening the workload for the NHC.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Formally request the Massachusetts Historical Commission to allocate grant funding for survey of Post-World War II housing in Newton, since it represents the largest concentration of such resources in the Commonwealth.
- Develop a regular summertime internship program that will focus on completing and updating the inventory of structures that are 50 years old or older, drawing upon area college students pursuing preservation degrees.
- Promote a community-wide documentation program, asking residents to send in photos of their homes, neighborhoods and favorite landmarks, using a standard form for address and other background information.
- Plan to conduct a survey of building conditions within designated districts and study areas to determine extent of maintenance needs.

Strategy # 2 - Designate more individual structures and districts.

The windshield survey of Newton undertaken in this study revealed the extent and diversity of historic resources the city has stewardship over and suggests that further protections are needed. More historic districts would not be unwarranted, which is indeed under consideration in several neighborhoods.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Bring more historic buildings under the protection of local historic district designations to focus demolition and design review within more specific contexts.
- Create local legislation for “Neighborhood Conservation Districts” to provide some level of protection for neighborhoods that have recently become eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This will begin to develop public awareness of the historic importance of these structures and their contribution to local heritage. See Appendix C for an explanation of this regulatory mechanism.
- Enlist public participation in nominating neighborhoods as “conservation areas,” with designation leading to promotion of the housing types found there, and maintenance of the size and scale of these developments, especially with regard to replacement/infill housing.
- Seek support and explicit direction from the Board of Aldermen concerning its desire for greater protection of older neighborhoods, so as to reinforce the ordinance language which specifies that a structure is significant “...either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures.”
- Establish “Preservation Plans” for each new district with clear design criteria, referenced in the city code, for new buildings and additions/modifications to existing buildings as a way to discourage district commissions from imposing individual tastes in subsequent review processes.

Strategy # 3 - Amend the demolition delay ordinance to limit the conditions under which a waiver is granted, and provide mitigation for the impacts of demolition.

As noted in Chapter II, in order to try to gain some semblance of design control over infill development, the NHC has often waived the one-year delay even for buildings that have been found to be “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved.” Thus the intent to allow the time needed for finding alternatives to demolition has been circumvented. It would be more consistent with the spirit of the law to make delay of total demolition (as opposed to partial demolition, where the NHC’s guidance in achieving sympathetic improvements and modifications can happen more rapidly) automatic once the “Preferably Preserved” finding has been made. In the case where a building is significant but its condition suggests that there is no alternative to demolition, the NHC’s action would be to find the building “Not Preferably Preserved.” Here, full documentation of a significant structure should be one of the conditions imposed to mitigate its removal. Such documentation should be prepared by a preservation professional rather than the property owner.

This recommendation presupposes that other complementary regulatory tools, as under Strategy # 4, below, would be implemented concurrently.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Amend the demolition delay ordinance language to eliminate waivers from the demolition delay for “Preferably Preserved” structures that are being proposed for total demolition and provide opportunities for design review at the end of the year, if no alternatives to demolition emerge.
- Add language to the demolition delay ordinance requiring photographic and written documentation of a building found to be “Historic” but not “Preferably Preserved” which is being proposed for total demolition.
- Add language to the demolition delay ordinance requiring prominent posting of public notice on a property proposed for total demolition, with the date and time of the public hearing.

Strategy # 4 - Draft new regulatory tools that will provide the NHC with the means of dealing with harmonious infill development without regard to the one-year time limit on demolitions.

In addition to adopting legislation to create Neighborhood Conservation Districts, as noted under Strategy # 2, and limiting waivers from the demolition delay under Strategy # 4, above, other regulatory mechanisms are badly needed. The lack of design review for significant properties, especially those located in neighborhoods outside of designated districts cannot help but lead to using the demolition delay waiver as a means of reducing the impact of insensitive development on established neighborhoods. These actions demonstrate that the community looks at preservation as a neighborhood issue.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Adopt local legislation, perhaps as an amendment to the current demolition delay ordinance, requiring design review for any replacement or infill building located within a neighborhood of buildings over 50 years old, whether a building was demolished to make way for such construction (including emergency demolition) or an existing lot is being divided. See Appendix D for National Trust publication to guide the NHC in design review within 20th-century neighborhoods.
- Adopt zoning standards which are geared to the architectural context of the neighborhood applicable to properties for which the NHC makes specific findings that they are significant “*based on their contribution to their immediate neighborhood.*” Such standards should be codified and could include provisions such as:
 - 1 – New construction in significant neighborhoods (or conservation areas) may not have a footprint more than 15% larger than the average of neighboring houses on either side of the subject property;
 - 2 – New construction in shall not be more than 5’ taller than the average height of neighboring houses on either side of the subject property;
 - 3 – New construction and additions may not reduce current side-yard setbacks.
 - 4 – New construction or additions shall match the average of front yard setbacks of neighboring properties on either side of the subject property.
- Subject subdivisions of properties with buildings over 50 years of age on them to be reviewed by the NHC for comments and recommendations to the Planning Board.

Strategy # 5 - Review all land use and housing policies and regulations to increase their reinforcement of each other, with a particular focus on *neighborhood* preservation.

Given the incredible historic resources Newton is privileged to have, greater emphasis needs to be put on how they are treated. Complacency about these resources will ensure their disappearance over time and result in a loss of character and quality of life for the community. At present, the draft document, “A Framework for the City’s Planning” does not distinguish historic preservation as a separate component, indicating a lack of full consideration of the community’s physical heritage.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Convene a summit of chairs of Boards, Commissions and Committees involved in land use decisions and/or policy formation (Planning, Zoning, Housing, Framework plan, etc.) along with appropriate city staff to identify instances where decisions were in conflict and where areas exist for greater potential coordination. Follow up by initiating appropriate review and comment procedures between various boards/staff.
- Include language in the draft of the Framework Plan calling for a full-fledged Historic Preservation Plan for the City to assure greater consideration for these resources in the years ahead.
- Review the zoning ordinance for possible amendments and additions that will serve to reinforce the community’s historic development patterns in creative ways that will also meet current community needs as soon as the Framework Plan has been adopted.
- Clarify local legislation with regards to demolitions that have not occurred within one year of the expiration of the end of the imposed delay period, such that these properties must go back through the demolition review process. Also provide that any changes made to building plans after review by the NHC, must obtain separate approvals, either by the commission or, if minor, by staff under delegated authority.

Strategy # 6 - Conduct a public education and awareness campaign that will highlight acceptable alternatives to demolition, especially as applies to mid-20th-century houses.

A concerted effort is needed to educate the public in general and real estate professionals and builders in particular about the significance of the city's post-WWII housing stock if these buildings are to be appreciated and saved from demolition. Many of Newton's late 1940s and early 1950s developments provide quality urban neighborhoods and diversity of housing choices that serve the community well. Their aesthetics date to a particular time period, which together with their cohesiveness and maturity, indicate that they have the potential to become highly prized historic districts. Such districts have long stabilized and enhanced property values and been assets to the community's continuing attractiveness. However, these are exactly the neighborhoods that are currently being targeted for redevelopment as a result of the overheated housing market. On the other hand, there are ways that the houses can be updated to meet current market demands without involving wholesale demolition. But these must be publicized and people convinced that these options are preferable to new construction.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Develop pamphlets or brochures for distribution to owners of these properties and real estate offices to share with prospective buyers. See Appendix E for a model of the type of educational efforts that have been used effectively in the suburbs of the Twin Cities in Minnesota.
- Present lectures, programs and workshops for the general public on the topic of 20th-century architecture, including post-WWII housing.
- Develop a special section on the city's web site to coordinate with printed materials that are developed.
- Make presentations to professional real estate associations to establish a clear stance on demolition, the demolition review process and preservation alternatives.

Strategy # 7 – Increase the efficacy of the Newton Historical Commission so it can better fulfill its role as protector of the city’s historic resources.

The workload of the commission can be expected to continue to increase over the next decade simply based on the age of the housing stock. Therefore, if the commission is to manage, ways must be found streamline its reviews and to minimize the number of significant buildings being considered for demolition. Beyond reviewing such delays, the Commission needs to lead in public education efforts and in developing a constituency for preservation.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Amend local legislation to increase the number of NHC members to seven and eliminate alternate members. This action is needed to reduce inconsistency in findings over time due to who shows up and votes at any given meeting. This will enable the NHC to better signal its intent over time to the development community and clarify expectations, which may help to deter some demolition requests.
- Strengthen role of Preservation Planner in NHC discussions in recognition that she is able to provide a certain level of consistency to the deliberations by virtue of her presence at every meeting.
- Delegate review of minor changes on documented significant buildings to staff, especially projects that are essentially restoration work.
- Present a formal staff report on each application with photos illustrating the neighborhood context, and including recommendations, or at least a list of pros and cons, regarding the finding of “Preferably Preserved.” Use a standard form for written staff reports to the NHC to simplify and expedite the production of these reports. See Appendix F for a suggested format.
- Make a digital camera available to NHC staff to allow for sufficient photo documentation of historic buildings, neighborhoods and ease of image storage.
- Increase assistance to property owners in finding alternatives to demolition once a delay has been imposed, including advertising, contacting developers known to be interested in historic properties, investigating moving opportunities.
- Involve other planners in the staffing and administration of the historic/district commissions, and execution of various preservation initiatives.

Strategy # 8 - Develop financial incentives to offer to property owners to retain the properties rather than demolish them.

When all else fails, appeal to people's pocketbooks when seeking to save buildings. There are several real potentials for providing this incentive.

- Work towards passage of the Community Preservation Act in Newton, so as to develop a real funding source for preservation incentives. Six options prepared by the City Assessor, indicate a wide range of dollars that could be available for historic preservation purposes, the lowest amount being nearly \$85,000 (10% of \$849,184; a 1% surcharge with numerous exemptions) and the highest being \$457,000 (10% of \$4,571,811; 3% surcharge with no exemptions). The City should ensure that preservation receives a full third of any monies generated and available through this program. See Appendix G for CPA options prepared by Newton City Assessor.
- Identify community leaders that would work to revitalize the 501.c.3 non-profit organization currently in place and conduct a capital campaign to establish a revolving low-interest loan fund targeted toward preventing demolitions (both total and partial).
- Seek CDBG funding to capitalize a pool for restoration loans and grants. (See Appendix B, *The ABCs of Demolition Delay*, Town of Arlington information.)

List of Appendices

- A** – Sections from Phase I Report
- B** – Sections from Phase II Report
- C** - “Neighborhood Conservation Districts” from *Tools and Techniques for Preservation Used by Communities in Massachusetts* by the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- D** - “Getting to Know Your 20th-Century Neighborhood” by Gretta Terrell from the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s *Preservation Information* series
- E** - “Cape Cods and Ramblers – A Remodeling Planbook for Post-WWII Houses” by Robert Gerloff, AIA, Kristi Johnson and Peter J Musty
- F** - Model Staff Report Form
- G** - Calculations for Various Options of Implementation of the Community Preservation Act by Elizabeth Dromey, City Assessor, Newton, MA

Appendix A

Sections from Phase I Report

Statistical Analysis of the Demolition Review Ordinance

Attached are permit reviews in chart and graph form. Both illustrate the increase in the number of permits over the 1987 to 2000 period. As expected, the numbers of properties found both “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved” increased correspondingly. Demolition delay waivers, as judged as a percentage of the number of properties found “Preferably Preserved,” have remained fairly high. This appears to be for two main reasons. Many waivers were granted for the partial demolition of insensitive additions to historic houses. The second common occurrence of waivers resulted when buildings were in such poor condition that they were beyond saving, including instances where the Building Inspection Department condemned properties because they posed public safety hazards.

Analysis of this data must be very general due to inconsistent record keeping over the years. When a permit was applied for in December, it sometimes but not always got listed in the year that final action was taken rather than the year the review was initiated. Data was tracked by calendar year until 1992, when the reviews are listed by fiscal year, which resulted in at least 7 property reviews not listed for 1991. Other files were somehow omitted from the review lists. In Fiscal Year 1999, properties that have separate items being reviewed, sometimes with one being found “Historic” and another not, are duplicated on this data base. The same holds true for the 2000 and 2001 data. In addition, some properties are simply listed under the wrong fiscal year.

Initial Observations on the Application of Newton’s Demolition Delay Ordinance

1. Historic documentation is vital to making informed decisions as well as contributing to later analyses of the types of properties that may become more rare and therefore more significant. However, at present, not all properties are photographically documented and background research on many is sketchy at best. One of the primary benefits the Demolition Delay Ordinance provides is the opportunity to document historically and architecturally significant properties for posterity, whether or not it results in the resource being preserved.

2. Properties that have been surveyed receive the greatest consideration for protection and implementation of the demolition delay provisions. Consequently, the lack of survey information on more recent structures has substantially lessened the careful review and protection of the 50-year-old structures built in the 20th century.
3. The NHC has grown more sensitive to 20th century buildings in recent years, as requests to alter and/or demolish them have increased.
4. On numerous occasions, restoration or rehabilitation efforts coming before the NHC have received timely and critical review resulting in discouraging poorly conceived alterations to historic homes from being implemented. The NHC has also acted on behalf of property owners to request the Building Inspection Department to allow flexibility in application of the current building code to allow the retention and replication of important design features, such as porches with low railing heights and window dimensions.
5. The analysis of properties as to their being termed “Historic” is almost exclusively based on their visual and aesthetic merits, rather than explicitly related to their importance to the historical development of the city.
6. Over the years there has been confusion between what is being termed “Historic” by the NHC. At times this finding has referred to the house in question, sometimes to an accessory structure such as a garage and other times to individual elements of a building such as a roof, porch or ell. In at least a couple of instances, what was initially viewed as “Historic” was, several years later, viewed as “Not Historic.”
7. Attendance by Commission members is somewhat sporadic, with “alternates” sitting in when a quorum of regular members is not available. This creates a situation where similar situations can easily be treated quite differently and raises equity issues for applicants.
8. There are virtually no references to the Secretary of Interior Standards for eligibility in the official record of actions on these applications, which suggests that the judgments being made by the NHC are inconsistent and less rigorous than they might be.
9. Additions and alterations to a residential structure, such as being resided, have often been used as rationale to find it “Not Historic” or “Not Preferably Preserved.”
10. The workload of the NHC over the past few years has significantly increased in tandem with the dramatic rise in demolition review applications; and as a consequence, at least some of the reviews have become more cursory.

Suggestions as to how to address the issues raised by these observations will be included in later phases of this study. However, some issues may be more immediately tackled, and thus suggestions are made in the Summary and Preliminary Recommendations section of this Phase I Report.

In Depth Review of Selected Properties

Successes!

The following properties are examples of where the effect of Newton's Demolition Review Ordinance can be considered to have been a success.



29 Pearl Street – File Photo



29 Pearl Street – File Photo

29 Pearl Street - On February 5, 1998, three members of the of the NHC voted unanimously to find the two modest mid-19th century vernacular cottages on this property “Historic.” One month later, the request to waive the one-year demolition delay was denied by a unanimous 5 to 0 vote with the comment that plans submitted for replacement construction were not consistent in size and scale with the fabric of the neighborhood. Three years later, the two properties are extant and reveal investment in the property with an addition to one of the dwellings. This property was surveyed in January of 1977, providing historical background for the property and a clear basis for the NHC’s decision.



29 Pearl Street – Feb. 2001



78 Hawthorne Street – Feb. 2001



Hawthorne Street Neighborhood Context – Feb. 2001

78 Hawthorne Street – Back in 1991, this c1912 three-story building, constructed of rough-faced concrete block, was reviewed by the NHC. A request was made for partial demolition impacting the porch, balconies and roof. The Commission determined that the building was “Historic” but allowed that the seriously deteriorated wooden appurtenances were “Not Preferably Preserved.” It is unclear from the file whether the Commission was involved in any real review of the design of the replacement balconies, but the results in place 10 years later clearly provided for the ongoing use of the historic property and demonstrates how a modern approach to the design of reconstructed elements can still be sensitive to the scale and original architectural character of the building. The 78 Hawthorne Street building, in its prominent corner location, continues to anchor this largely intact working class neighborhood made up of modest, homestead style frame dwellings.



24 Nickerson Road – File Photo



24 Nickerson Road – Feb. 2001

24 Nickerson Road - This 1941 Cape Cod cottage is a good example of where a house was given the protection of demolition delay based on its high quality architectural character *and* context. Surrounded by similarly styled and scaled buildings, its loss would have certainly impaired the cohesiveness of the neighborhood. The 5 unanimous votes of Commission Members to find the house “Preferably Preserved” confirm this understanding. It appears from

information on the application that the house was up for sale as a part of the settlement of an estate. It is difficult not to speculate that a realtor felt the value of the property was primarily in the land and that the “highest and best use” of the property would be for new construction. Fortunately, given the one-year waiting period commencing April 2, 1998, the home still stands today, occupied and fixed up; a continuing asset to this intact mid-20th century neighborhood.



134 Vine Street – File Photo



134 Vine Street – Feb. 2001

134 Vine Street – Here we have an example of where NHC Members were divided in their opinions as to whether this altered 18th century dwelling should be protected. This property was reviewed twice: once in 1995, when the NHC determined the building to be “Historic” and “Preferable Preserved” and where the demolition delay was waived by a 3 to 2 vote, and again, in 1999, when the Commission found the property “Not Preferable Preserved” on a 4 to 1 vote. A 1983 survey form for the property provided background research revealing that the house is historically significant even though it had undergone many changes. In spite of the decision to waive the demolition delay, the property was sold to a new owner interested in preserving the house, according to a postcard from the owner attached to the file.

This example indicates that there are willing buyers for smaller historic properties in Newton, and that a reasonable economic use of a property is evident, thereby supporting future decisions of the NHC to uphold the demolition delay. Indeed, even though the 1999 decision did not find the house preferably preserved, “due to its lack of original material and setting,” the house still stands and is occupied. Historic structures are often prematurely written off because they have been resided, even though original massing, windows and design are visible, not to mention other historic fabric or significance not evident in a cursory review. How many large high-style homes have been resided and then restored to their original condition at a later date? Further, updating exterior cladding materials, particularly on modest

vernacular houses is ubiquitous to the extent that it can legitimately be viewed as a part of the history of the structure and should not be considered a condition to support its destruction. In any case, the fact that this historically significant structure remains today should be counted as a success.

76 Dalby Street – Feb. 2001

76 Dalby Street – In early 1997 a request was made to demolish a c1870 workers cottage/vernacular two-story home. By a 5 to 0 vote, the NHC’s initial finding in February of that year was that the home was “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved for its context, spacing on the streetscape, setback, scale and minor detail.” A 1976 survey form was attached to the file to support this finding. Unfortunately a significant settling problem as well



as a siting issue made rehabilitation of the property uneconomical according to testimony. Thus, the demolition delay was waived upon approval of plans that were not only sensitive to the design and scale of the neighborhood but that replicated in an acceptable way the historic character of the original home. The NHC gave full consideration to the impact of the infill structure and provided appropriate and constructive design directives. This type of careful review and consideration is a good model for similar situations concerning contextual design review for new construction following demolition of historic buildings.

73 Beecher Place – Feb. 2001



73 Beecher Place – Older buildings, such as this c1885 Queen Anne residence seem to be more often protected than those dating to the early- to mid-20th century. In this case, the NHC voted 4-0 in March 1995 to find the house both “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved.” That evidently was the end of the matter, and though the demolition delay expired in six months later, the building remains today, a substantial

investment in its renovation having been made. It is a visible example of how such homes can be preserved so as benefit an entire neighborhood of older working class homes from the same period. In this case, the presence of a

survey from 1983 was supportive of the Commission's decision to uphold the demolition delay.

Problematic Cases

The properties discussed below were selected to show both the range of issues that have emerged over the 14 years the NHC has been reviewing demolition proposals and the most typical situations that have occurred. Unfortunately, examples of problematical reviews and regretful results outnumbered the success stories. However, without this study and the information it provides, the NHC would have no way of knowing what reoccurring issues there are and how their mission might better be accomplished.



26 Beecher Terrace - Just a few doors away from 73 Beecher Place, cited as a success story, above, another, more modest dwelling, which also contributes to the character of the historic neighborhood was found by a 4 to 1 vote "Not Preferably Preserved" in May, 2000. In this case, the finding that the c1896 workers home is "Historic" based on "its age, context and architectural detail and significance" appears to be

inconsistent with the rationale not to uphold the demolition delay: "lack of detail and later additions which are not consistent with the original structure." A site visit to these two proximate houses, suggests that the second was as worthy of protection as the first and that the "later additions" did not negate its architectural integrity as viewed from the right-of-way. In spite of the decision, the building remains standing, and one might hope that it may yet be saved for the integrity of the entire neighborhood; for if a new large-scale house is built there, it will likely lead to other demolition requests.

67 Wildwood Avenue - After reviewing hundreds of demolition review files, the NHC's split decision on this rather attractive c1890 gambrel-roofed cottage comes as no surprise. Virtually all "Dutch Colonial" homes coming before the Commission have been allowed to be demolished without delays as they have typically been seen as "Not Historic." According to the photo submitted, the house retained much of



its original character and the neighborhood context would seem to have supported giving this building an opportunity of being bought by someone appreciative of its historic quality. The NHC's finding that the house had been "significantly changed," citing the dormers, which were located on the side elevation, appears to be incorrect as the dormers were almost certainly original, despite the downsizing of windows within them. Alteration of a porch floor is a change that is likely to have occurred in any building this age and certainly a minor, virtually invisible change at that. This example is not unusual, but a frequently occurring situation where lack of survey information and a rather superficial, visual review of a plain house, has resulted in the loss of a historic building in sound condition. An inspection of the site confirmed that the building has been demolished.



69 Webster Park – File Photo



69 Webster Park – Feb. 2001

69 Webster Park - In August of 1996, the NHC was approached by an elderly couple in dire financial straits asking for permission to demolish their c1870 Italianate residence in the Webster Park National Register Historic District. A lengthy list of structural deficiencies by Black Paw Home Inspection, Inc. was presented to prove that the "house was falling down around" the owners. Plans for a replacement duplex in a Colonial style were presented to the Commission, which, in spite of finding the home "Historic," voted 3 to 1 to waive the six-month delay "due to hardship...and the fact that the new design does not substantially degrade the character of Webster Park." This is probably the most serious example of the Commission not having sufficient tools to protect the historic properties under its purview. While it is extremely difficult to ignore the personal financial hardships individual owners might be facing, the definition of "hardship" in land use decisions such as this means physical difficulties that run with the property rather than personal ones. In addition, it appears that the Commission may not fully appreciate the impact of the loss of even a single dwelling in a historic district. Further, even if this was an issue of simple design review, the plans submitted for the replacement structure have little relationship to the character of the district. This decision, more than any other, suggests that specific criteria need to be developed by which to evaluate such situations and that Commission members should receive

orientation and refer to established preservation standards for historic districts.



1964 Beacon Street – File Photo



1964 Beacon Street – Feb. 2001

1964 Beacon Street – As recently as last year, in May of 2000, an intact c1929 bungalow in a residential neighborhood with various styles and dwelling sizes was found to be “Historic” (unanimous 5 to 0 vote) but “Not Preferably Preserved” (4 to 1 vote). Here, the neighborhood context was presented as the rationale for not protecting the home: “...it is an aberration in the neighborhood which is not similar enough to the surrounding homes to be in context and not special enough to stand on its own.” Ironically, the replacement home appears to be every bit as much an aberration in the historic streetscape as the bungalow was. No design review of the replacement structure is indicated in the file documents, so this result was probably bound to occur. Again, no background research on the possible historic aspects of the structure appears to have been done, but rather a perfunctory review based on a quick visual analysis. Without a survey of these homes, by which their relative merits can be better analyzed, it will be difficult to maintain consistency in the Commission’s decisions over time. In this case, there also appears to have been some opposition from neighbors to the home’s demolition. One can imagine that had a demolition delay been upheld for the property, the bungalow might have found an appreciative owner who could have the option of adding on to the home in an architecturally sensitive way, thereby enriching the architectural character of this neighborhood and the city as a whole in a way the replacement house is unlikely to do.



Neighboring Building to left of 1445 Centre St
File Photo



1445 Centre Street (on Right) – Feb. 2001 Photo

1445 Centre Street - In contrast to the above example, this property is one where the Commission by a 5 to 0 vote in 1998, upheld the demolition delay on a high quality 1925 Craftsman bungalow. The reason this is problematic is that the request was to remove the roof to allow for the addition of a second floor in a neighborhood context where the building is surrounded by larger two-story dwellings. This raises the issue of whether historic buildings can be altered in any way and if the Commission is following the Secretary of Interior Standards in reviewing proposed changes. Rather than being able to directly address the issue of sensitive alterations, the Commission seems to be backed into a corner of determining only whether a historic residence can or can't be altered. In a case such as this, a more reasonable approach may have been to give more precise direction as to what kinds of alterations would be found acceptable. A site visit revealed that the dwelling remains unaltered after three years and in good condition, a testimony to its continuing functionality.



39 Fernwood Road – File Photo



39 Fernwood Road – Feb. 2001

39 Fernwood Road - The home in question here was one of a neighborhood full of Cape Cod homes built in the 1940s. In 1996 this home was considered “Not Historic” and “Not Preferably Preserved” in a determination made by staff to the

Commission, and thus no public hearing was held. There is no indication that any of the Commission Members conducted a site visit in this instance (though there are numerous other examples of 1940s homes that did receive such review and were evaluated similarly). File documents do not suggest that any background research was done and since there has been no survey of properties from this era, there is no real basis for the finding of “Not Historic.” This scenario is typical of how such modest homes have been viewed over the years. In action after action, the Commission has cited “lack of architectural detail” or “no defining features” as reasons to find simple workers housing, modest cottages, and vernacular architecture “Not Preferably Preserved.” On one level, this indicates a strong bias in favor of high style residences and on another, a lack of appreciation for the fact that these types of dwellings are *defined* by their lack of architectural embellishment. It is their stripped down simplicity that distinguishes them. What will hopefully be recognized at this point, is that these houses, few of which may be determined significant in and of themselves, when clustered in distinct groups or neighborhoods, may very well be eligible for the National Register as districts. Ongoing and spotty replacement of these dwellings, driven by current market conditions, without any sort of design review, will likely eliminate the possibility of certain neighborhoods ever making it to the stage where they can be appreciated and preserved.



72 Charlemont St. -File Photo



Charlemont St.- Neighborhood Context
Feb. 2001



Replacement Building for Bungalow at
72 Charlemont St. - Feb. 2001

72 Charlemont Street - This 1996 request for demolition of a 1920s bungalow is one more of numerous examples of early-20th century neighborhoods being disconcertingly altered by newer, out-of-scale developments. In this case the rationale cited for finding the dwelling “Not Preferably Preserved,” that it “...does not contribute to the streetscape and neighborhood,” is questionable. This is illustrated by the photos presented here. Interestingly, the home itself was found to be “Historic” unlike the one described in the next example.



Cape Cods to left of 11 Bunny Circle
Feb. 2001



Replacement House at 11 Bunny Circle



Cape Cods to right of 11 Bunny Circle

11 Bunny Circle - Like the above examples, the immediate neighborhood context was evidently not given any weight when the decision to find it “Not Historic” was made. In this case, the dwelling was in a “keyhole subdivision”—at the center of group of 5 Cape Cods arrayed around a cul-de-sac. However, there are a number of other problems illustrated here as well. One is that the actual file is missing, therefore no photo documentation of the property exists, no record of who made the decision (staff or the NHC) or what the rationale was. Such holes in the record are not uncommon—most 1998 files are missing—which makes ongoing tracking of NHC decisions difficult. Only an entry of the address in the listing of Demolition Reviews for FY1999 indicates this was considered. The list actually indicates that only a garage demolition was requested; yet the minutes reveal that the entire house was being proposed for demolition. Regardless, the replacement structure is so out of scale with the neighboring dwellings, it pleads the case for limits on the size of infill structures and some level of design review to assure harmonious integration of new and old structures for the greater welfare of the community.



581 Saw Mill Brook Parkway – File Photo



Saw mill Brook Parkway – Context – Feb. 2001

581 Saw Mill Brook Parkway - This Oak Hill Park dwelling was reviewed in May 2000. Demolition was requested for the garage, which was still extant as of February 2001. Here the issue is a questionable finding by the NHC, as indicated by its resolution to “find the attached one-car garage to be ‘Not

Preferably Preserved’ as it is not original and does not contribute to the architectural character of the house.” Contradicting this observation is the fact that neighboring dwellings have similar attached garages and photos in the April 1999 Report on Oak Hill Park produced on behalf of the Commission seem to illustrate that these types of attached garages were original. Whether the garage “contributes to the architectural character of the house” may be a somewhat subjective opinion, but it can be argued that its massing and scale is consistent with the modest character of the house itself and the original character of the neighborhood, which has begun to be recognized as worthy of protection. What seems more to the point, is that garages which have become functionally obsolete, are not generally seen as “Preferably Preserved” by the Commission, as the results of many other demolition reviews demonstrate.

Other Issues

Beyond the issue of successful outcomes and indefensible decisions, there are many hundreds of properties that fall in a grey zone. These include clearly historic homes in mixed neighborhoods, dwellings whose conditions act as a blight on a neighborhood, potentially historic properties which have not yet been surveyed, and homes whose determined owners vow to raze them. The following examples raise issues that need to be considered in a more deliberate and perhaps rigorous fashion.

100 Hull Street – This c1925 Colonial Revival house is one that lacks survey data (or any background information) and therefore a basis for any decision to allow demolition. Survey of early 20th century homes in the city is incomplete, and without that, this very intact example of a clear architectural type typical of this period of development in Newton, cannot be adequately evaluated.



Two NHC members evidently conducted a site visit, which resulted in the finding of “Not Historic” and “Not Preferably Preserved.” While the architectural context in this situation certainly compromises the dwelling’s significance (given the proximity of a large brick high school building with minimal setback across the narrow street), the lack of survey data by which to judge such structures creates the impression that the Commission sees no value in modest housing types of the early 20th century. Fortunately, photos of the dwelling are attached to the file—though unlabeled—which provides some record of the property. Interestingly enough however, the dwelling was still standing six months after the request to demolish was submitted. One can speculate that the setting of the home is such that it does not support the economic investment required to both demolish the old and build anew.

112 Norwood Avenue – In addition to the lack of a survey of mid-20th century houses, this 1997 file indicates a problem with documentation. There is none. All that is noted on the sheet filled out by staff is that a 1946 Cape Cod style dwelling was built on a 19th century home's foundation as the original home burned in 1946. No photos of the house or surrounding properties are attached, and no review by any of the Commission members appears to have occurred. The structure replacing the Cape is a duplex in a traditional design. This brings up the issue of whether Newton's current zoning classifications help or hinder the ability of the NHC to protect potential historic districts—for certainly, the economic return of a duplex on what was previously a single-family lot, will make these properties ripe for dramatic changeovers.



348 Hartman Road - This file represents a looming issue—the many 1950s modern ranches, split levels, and Cape Cods that will come increasingly under the Commission's review in coming years. The tendency will be, based on most people's gut-level reaction, to find these "Not Historic" and "Not Preferably Preserved." And yet, if we can remove our cultural biases, imagine ourselves 20 years hence looking at these collections of homes, one can understand that they

do indeed have something to say about the time in which they were built and the styles that were once but no longer prevalent. Neighborhoods made up of such homes are the historic districts of tomorrow, if they are not allowed to be unduly altered in a piece-meal, lot-by-lot fashion. To date, none of the homes from this era, such as the c1950 ranch noted to occupy this property, have been recognized by the Commission as historic, even though they are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register. Although these homes are quite numerous due to the post World War II building boom, this should not automatically mean they have no historic value. Survey work is needed to detail the extent and qualities of these newly historic enclaves so individual properties within them can be adequately and fairly evaluated.

Garages

Throughout the city of Newton there are garages, carriage houses and barns of all ages in a variety of architectural styles. After reviewing all of the available Demolition Review files, it was found that the accessory building determined to be both "Historic" and "Preferably Preserved" is rare. Generally they are limited to late-19th century carriage houses designed in the same style as the house they originally served. However, because Newton developed as a suburban

community and exhibits the three main historic waves of suburbanization—the street car suburbs of the late 1800s, early-20th century garden suburbs at the beginning of the auto era, and the post World War II housing boom supported by interstate highways which enabled mass automobile commuting—garages can be viewed as very significant and interesting historic structures. Indeed, the size and location of a garage provides an immediate clue to the age of a residence. Those large barn-like carriage houses located far to the rear of the house, often off an alley, indicate a pre-1900 building date when horses provided conveyance, while single-stall garages located closer to the main structure but remaining detached, accessed either via an alley or a driveway past the house are indicative of early-20th century dates when cars were still relatively rare. By the 1940s, the garages were moved even closer to houses and attached via breezeways or as a one-story wing. When one sees a single-stall tucked-under garage, the building date is almost invariably in the 1950s, and after that garages are predominantly two-stalled and often the most prominent architectural expression of dwellings built in the 1970s and 80s. Obviously the design of the structure is very much tied to its function, to the types of vehicles commonly used and there’s the dilemma. Older garages become functionally obsolete. So even though they may well contribute to the historic character of any given property, and convey the historic development pattern of a neighborhood, they are the often the first change to be made. Two ways of immediately addressing this issue come to mind. First, require photo documentation of all garages over 50 years of age that are being demolished so that at a minimum, a record of these patterns is preserved. Second, where space permits, adapting small one-stall garages to other complementary uses—a potting shed for example—could be encouraged.



House at 91 Waban Avenue – File Photo



Garage at 91 Waban Avenue – File Photo

91 Waban Avenue – This property contained a small, detached garage clearly built in the same Arts and Crafts style of the main house but which was found “Not Preferably Preserved.” Despite neighbors’ letters attesting to the poor condition of the structure, photos reveal it to be well kept.

Another concern is the noted tendency on the part of the NHC (though less so in recent years) to find a home “Historic” its companion garage of the same era “Not Historic.” More troubling yet are contradictory statements such as those made in response to a requested garage demolition at 142 Woodland Road, which reads: “Resolved to find the garage to be historic as it was designed to be in keeping with the main house which is part of a National Register District” and “Further resolved to find this garage to be ‘Not Preferably Preserved’ as it is not a compelling piece of architecture for the neighborhood or main house.” Given that garages are mainly functional structures and seldom “compelling pieces of architecture” such reasoning does not lend credence to the Commission’s actions.

Subdivisions

In several instances it was noted that subdivisions had occurred for large historic lots that have had the effect of dividing off a carriage house from the main dwellings, which was then used as justification to demolish it. This is a situation where the planning board should request formal input from the NHC prior to granting approvals of such divisions. Planning staff coordination so that these impacts make it into staff reports would also be helpful.

9 Cedar Street – The Wales Jam Factory is an example of the impact that proposed subdivisions will have on significant historic properties. Despite the NHC upholding the six-month demolition delay, the economic benefit of being able to subdivide this property was too great an incentive to allow for restoration, rehabilitation or adaptive reuse of any of the historic structures on it. When situations such as this come to light, other methods of protecting such properties may be justified and legally defensible, including seeking landmark status.

Phase I Summary & Preliminary Recommendations

Newton's Demolition Delay Ordinance has clearly resulted in preserving some historic buildings and in protecting the architectural character of the community. However this tool has shortcomings that limit its effectiveness. One of the most evident is that the NHC's lack of direct design review powers has encouraged it to allow demolitions it might otherwise have opposed in order to gain some input into the design of a proposed addition or infill structure and consequent impacts on historic neighborhoods. The lack of good solid background information of historical and architectural significance of residential structures has also limited the ability of the Commission to act decisively in protecting threatened properties, particularly those built in the 20th century.

Suggestions for NHC Reviews

One change in NHC's reviews that should be considered immediately is to look at a property in its entirety when making a determination of "Historic" or "Not Historic" and then evaluate the requested demolition, total or partial, in this context. This would establish a clear record for future actions and holds the potential to streamline future requests concerning a given property. In addition, this is more in line with national preservation standards and recognizes the potential importance of historic landscape designs and features, site plan, and accessory buildings.

The Commission should also routinely extend its review to the entire neighborhood context. The City of Newton's Draft Framework Plan dated August 2000 supports this approach: "Land use decisions should be sensitive to preservation of and compatibility with historic building, landscapes, and wider historic contexts. Decisions should encourage preservation of historic commercial and industrial buildings and historic landscapes, as well as preservation of historic residences

Special attention should be given to the remaining pockets of intact neighborhoods comprised of early- to mid-20th century housing, since a great number of them hold the potential for being eligible for future district designations. Indeed, Sec. 22-44(b)(3)b. of the Demolition Ordinance specifically states that one reason the Commission may find a structure "Historically significant" is that it is "Historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, *either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures.*" [Emphasis added.] Encouraging sensitive treatment to these dwellings serves not only preservation purposes, but other broader planning goals of the city as well. Specifically, the Framework Plan Draft

states: “We are committed to providing housing which matches the economic and social diversity of our City and responds to under-served citizens.” Such a goal can be furthered by protecting historic neighborhoods of workers housing, single-story structures and modest homes. However, to adequately justify such protection, survey work must be initiated at the earliest opportunity.

The terminology of findings used by the NHC could also be easily modified to allow for more precision. Rather than finding a property “Historic” or “Not Historic,” a property could just as well be found to be “Significant” or “Not Significant” with qualifying rationale, i.e. “based on it’s architectural merits” or “based on its contribution to the historic neighborhood context.” A review of the Demolition ordinance by Newton’s City Attorney should be undertaken to confirm the legitimacy of such a change in language.

The Commission is also urged to regularly refer to National Park Service/National Register standards and definitions for Historic Significance, Historic Integrity and Historic Context. While the NHC’s standards need not be as high as required for National Register nomination, this discipline will help establish certain principles and criteria to use as a checklist to enable the Commission to more consistently, equitably and quickly establish a finding of “Historic” or “Not Historic.” These materials would also help guide decisions regarding whether the property or some part of it should be “Preferably Preserved.”

Suggested Improvements Demolition Review File Information Handling

A database consisting of all Demolition Review Applications from the 1987 start date through current reviews should be created to allow analysis of the impact of demolitions on individual streets and neighborhoods over time. An initial listing illustrates how readily neighborhood impacts can be seen. Files for each application should list cross-streets at both ends of the block on which the subject property is located. This will enable staff to easily check the database for all other demolition actions within the immediate neighborhood, report it to the NHC and thereby enable the Commission to consider these impacts in its deliberations. An electronic file providing the beginnings of such a master database is provided with this report. Changes to the data base format to accommodate information that should be tracked over time and facilitate analysis should also be considered.

Another method of easily tracking demolition delays occurring in any given area is creation of a rolodex file with a card for each demolition request listing all pertinent information—whether the property was found “Historic,” and “Preferably Preserved,” and for what parts of the property, whether the demolition delay was waived, what actions happened when in the case of repeat

applications, and what the cross streets are. A city map showing age of structures, mounted on foam core and marked with all demolition delay reviews can be helpful and easily brought to a meeting for an easy visual reference.

Each address should receive its own file. Photos of all requested demolitions, labeled with the property address, should be required. This should include photo documentation of each facade that would be changed by the requested demolition. Garages are especially important to document since they are disappearing so rapidly.

Complete street names should always be listed so as to avoid confusion between streets, avenues, terraces, places, etc. that share similar names. The FY92 listing in particular should be updated.

Appendix B

Sections from Phase II Report

The A-B-Cs of Demolition Review: The Experience of Neighboring Communities

Preservation staff and activists in three neighboring communities were interviewed to understand better how the process of demolition delay can protect a community's historic buildings. Arlington, Brookline and Cambridge were selected for study by the consultant with input from Chris Skelly of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and Newton's Preservation Planner, Lara Kritzer. Summaries of the information obtained during the interviews follows.

Arlington

Bob Botterio, Chair of the Arlington Historical Commission, and Alan McClennen, Jr., Director of the Arlington Planning Department, were interviewed for this report.

The Arlington experience with demolition review is unique in a number of ways. For one, it is entirely administered by the voluntary 7-member Arlington Historical Commission without staffing by the town government. Second, the definition of "demolition" in the Arlington bylaw includes any modification involving more than 25% of an elevation (front or side), thus granting an implied design review function. Third, it has private non-profit corporation that was created by the town to supply financial incentives needed to induce property owners to fix-up rather than tear down historic properties.

Lack of staffing has meant that no formal written reports are prepared in advance of the public hearing on a demolition. The Commission has been able to administer the bylaw to date because there have been very few demolition requests—8 in 1999 and 8 in 2000. Of the 8 reviews conducted in 2000, 3 requests to demolish were unanimously delayed. Several other requests that year were actually restoration projects for which the AHC waived the demolition delay. However, the commission's work load is growing, due to the 25% demolition provision. It is estimated that 30% of the residential stock in Arlington was built between 1945 and 1960, yet, not many of these structures are on the Multiple Resource Inventory List (consisting of approximately 1000 properties), which is what triggers the required review. Historically, Arlington was densely developed, with 5,000-square-foot lots being typical. Today, limits on both the height and footprint of a building reduce the incentive to demolish and rebuild, since scarcely any increase in size is allowed to occur.

One of the most impressive aspects of Arlington's preservation program is its "Preservation Fund." The fund was capitalized with \$150,000 in CDBG funds. Its purpose is to grant \$10,000 - \$15,000 loans for residential facade preservation and improvements at an interest rate half of the prime. Through the demolition review process, homeowners who might not otherwise be aware of the program and therefore considering changes that would impair the historic character of a house, can be identified and informed about this help. Further, the commission can guide

owners in the restoration process, that helps stabilize the value of the property and neighborhood. Coordination between the AHC and the Preservation Fund Board, is accomplished with interlocking memberships. And this is the area where the Town Arlington, through representation of its Planning and Development Department on the Preservation Fund Board, interfaces with the preservation activities of the various commissions.

One example of how the fund was used was as a construction loan for a property whose owner had become incompetent to maintain the place and the property was slated for demolition. With the involvement of the Arlington Planning Department, a guardian for the owner was appointed, the property sold to a contractor who restored the house, resold it and repaid the Preservation Fund loan out of the profits. A win-win solution all the way around, which the demolition review bylaw precipitated. On the other hand, a 1946 Contemporary House, which was found to be architecturally significant, was located on a large lot and in spite of the one-year delay imposed, was demolished to proceed with a five-lot-subdivision of the property.

The AHC members have a range of attendance records. At least two of the seven are reported to attend every meeting, with three missing only two meetings in the past year, while one member had very poor attendance. While not perfect, such performance of this public service is seen as lending an overall consistency to the decisions by the AHC. In addition, there is a strong enough interest in preservation in Arlington that several “Associates”—non-voting members of the Commission—attend, entering into discussions and participating in a variety of the Commission’s special projects, which are extensive. Arlington has separate historic district commissions for each historic district, which reduces the review workload of the AHC.

In the opinion of Arlington Planning and Development Director McClennen, “The demolition bylaw, in combination with historic districts, provides one of the most powerful land use tools available to communities.”

Brookline

Greer Hardwicke, Preservation Planner for Town of Brookline was interviewed for this report.

Brookline’s demolition bylaw has been in effect since April of 1988. It provides for a one-year delay for a broadly defined range of buildings, overseen by a seven-member Brookline Preservation Commission (BPC). First, there is a list which includes those structures that are located within a local historic district, listed on the National Register of Historic Places or eligible for such listing, listed on the State Register of Historic Places or preliminarily determined eligible for such listing by the MHC. Second, the bylaw also allows the BPC to consider buildings that are associated with significant persons or events, or the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town or Commonwealth. Buildings that the commission finds historically or architecturally significant in terms of period, style, method of building construction, or association with a significant architect or builder, either by itself or as part of a group of buildings can also be added to the list. Thus structures are evaluated without reference to their age. When the BPC reviews a building to determine whether it is a “Significant Building” it specifically does not consider its condition.

Language in Brookline's demolition bylaw directs the Chair and Staff of the BPC to invite the owner of record, the Building Commissioner and Planning Director to participate in an investigation of alternatives to demolition. Such alternatives include:

- Incorporation of the building into the future development of the site
- Adaptive reuse of the building
- Utilization of financial incentives to rehabilitate the building
- Seeking a new owner willing to purchase and preserve the structure
- Restoration and rehabilitation of the building
- Moving the building

There are other unique provisions in Brookline's demolition bylaw: The town charges a fee for a "Certificate of Significance": \$20 in the case of a non-significant building and \$100 for a significant building. Also, the bylaw allows the BPC staff to require posting a notice on the property, visible from the nearest public way, of the demolition being sought and the public hearing concerning such demolition.

Brookline's demolition bylaw does not explicitly state that the BPC may undertake design review and waive the delay period upon finding that the proposed change is acceptable, yet in practice this does occur. Such practice is an interpretation of a provision in the law which states that, "...the Building Commissioner may issue a demolition permit for a significant building at any time after receipt of written advice from the Commission to the effect that the Commission is satisfied that there is no reasonable likelihood that the building can be preserved, restored, rehabilitated or moved."

It is estimated that 90% of the town's structures have been surveyed, which provides a good basis for the initial determination of significance. A data base with information on buildings built between 1889 and 1922 has been developed, based on a 1987 Multiple Resource Inventory and information provided on building permits, which were required since 1889. Garages, carriage houses and barns are currently being surveyed and mid-20th century structures are just now beginning to be studied. Notable examples of these buildings include a 1930's subdivision of "All Gas Houses" that were developed by Boston Gas, a number of International style homes, and a subdivision laid out by the Olmstead firm after WWII are among the notable. (Frederick Law Olmstead established a home office in Brookline at age 60.) Post-WWII housing is concentrated in a few pockets and constitutes a relatively small proportion of all residences.

The BPC has not had nearly the great number of demolition permits to review that Newton has experienced, due to the town having been developed earlier and the number of buildings that have been surveyed and determined significant. However, it was observed that the number of reviews has grown in recent years. (No figures were supplied.) The BPC also reviews proposed changes within established historic districts. Until recently, a separate department was responsible for the town's preservation activities, which included staffing the BPC. Currently, "Preservation" is one of four divisions in the Department of Planning and Community Development with two part-time preservation planners (one works half time and one works 2/3 time).

Written staff reports to the BPC vary with the significance of the structure and the time available. Substantial amounts of time are spent on documenting very significant structures while reports on other, less significant structures, may be more cursory. Follow-up on demolition delays falls to staff and can be quite time-consuming. This may at times include placing ads in the newspaper to solicit other parties interested in preserving a particular structure. Training for members of the BPC is mainly “on-the-job” but does involve reviewing background materials from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Attendance by the seven regular and four alternates is reported to be good, with alternates actively engaged in the discussions and committee work. A majority of four members in attendance is required before official action can be taken.

Ms Hardwicke maintains that Brookline’s demolition bylaw has proven to be a very good tool to further the purposes of historic preservation in that town. She affirms that it provides adequate time and incentives to give all parties a chance to come up with alternatives to demolition, including revisions of plans to save the historic character of an affected building. Where a building cannot be saved from demolition, the time also provides the opportunity to thoroughly document the building. Indeed, documentation of a building, including provision of photographs and measured drawings has been viewed as mitigation for a demolition and allowed the delay to be waived. She observed that there appears to be a good deal of understanding on the part of the general public about the Demolition Bylaw and its purpose, evidenced by a general lack of controversy despite high development pressures and the density of development.

Cambridge

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission was interviewed for this report.

Cambridge has the Cadillac of historic preservation programs. Its Demolition Delay Ordinance, adopted in 1979, is one of several tools, used by Cambridge for the purpose of “...preserving and protecting significant buildings within the City which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political and economic or social history of the city...” and “...to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose...” The community is committed to maintaining its historic character as evidenced by the number of city employees (6) that staff its Historical Commission and the fact that the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) warrants its own city department. The Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals are cognizant of preservation issues and regularly refer matters to the CHC for its input before making decisions about specific properties. Even the City’s zoning ordinance provides for higher standards applicable to Significant properties.

Cambridge’s demolition ordinance provides for a six-month delay, and is applicable to all buildings 50 years of age and older. Criteria as to what makes a building “Significant” mirrors the National Park Service’s standards for nomination of a building to the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings need not be unaltered to be found significant. If the CHC feels that alterations are reversible and that the original architectural character of the building can be recovered, it does not hesitate to impose the delay. It is estimated that approximately 50% of the

buildings having gone through a demolition review are still extant after five years. In 2000 there were 59 demolition applications of which 35 were determined by staff to be not significant (most of which were concrete garages) and 24 received a public hearing. Once a building has been found to be “Significant” the property retains that status even after the 6-month delay expires.

The Cambridge Historical Commission enjoys having a 1960 historic survey of virtually all the community’s 13,000 buildings upon which to base its findings. Information from Sanborn Maps, City Directories and title searches supplement the background provided by the survey. This provides the basis to find nearly all of the buildings, with the notable exception of concrete garages, “Significant.” Staff plays an active role in negotiating with applicants and preparing a detailed staff report (2-plus pages for even the simplest request) with recommendations. A site visit is conducted, slides taken and a formal presentation made to the Commission for every demolition request involving a significant property. When a building is found to be “Preferably Preserved” and the demolition delay period instituted, the Commission may ask staff to prepare landmark designation or take other steps to effect its preservation.

The Cambridge Historical Commission is comprised of seven members with three alternates, all of which regularly attend the monthly meetings. The Executive Director reported that there are no consistent “no-shows” and that the City has no trouble finding residents willing to serve on the Commission despite the workload required of its members. Staff provides training for Commission members; two workshops have been held in the past couple of years. For interim appointments, staff meets individually with the new members to provide needed background information and training.

The actual Public Hearing process was characterized as being “fairly informal” with opportunity to engage in a dialog with the property owners as to alternatives to wholesale demolition and design directives for partial demolitions that would allow the commission to waive the delay period.

In summation, Mr. Sullivan observed that, without its demolition delay ordinance, the city would be “defenseless” against the negative impacts of the forces of development. He stated that this is the one tool that allows residents to have some review and input to changes proposed for their neighborhood. He asserted that it is an effective tool for furthering the City’s preservation goals as that it allowed them a means of keeping up with the ever- changing status of the city’s historic properties.

The following table compares key aspects of the demolition review laws from these three communities to Newton’s.

Observations drawn from interviews and other research

The above interviews seem to indicate that communities that review on the basis of an established list of significant buildings have a less demanding workload than those that dealt with buildings reaching a certain age. Inclusion on such a list may also deter owners from seeking demolition as well. However, relying on a list is only effective in protecting a community's historic resources if survey work is ongoing and the list is scrupulously kept up to date. Another area that receives varying treatment between different communities is notification of interested parties. Notification in newspapers allows for knowledgeable and interested persons other than immediate neighbors to have input into the process; letters only to abutting property owners may not adequately address issues that concern an entire neighborhood. Posting of a sign on the property is one technique that may allow others with ties to a particular neighborhood or knowledge of local history to have input into the review process.

Demolition Review in Other Communities

Demolition ordinances in five other Massachusetts communities (Danvers, Framingham, Lexington, Williamstown and Worcester) were also reviewed in an effort to understand better the range of approaches that may be taken to demolition review and its administration. A review of a Connecticut study of demolition delay ordinances also provided insight into the effectiveness of these regulations. One of the major ideas it stressed was the importance of working with applicants to find alternatives to demolition, which is in line with the approaches taken by Arlington, Brookline and Cambridge. Please see Appendix E for a summary of that study.

It is safe to say that much of the general language that establishes the purpose for a demolition ordinance is quite similar. Typical language in the purpose section calls for "Preserving and protecting significant buildings" in the community that "...reflect its architectural, historical and cultural heritage" to "...encourage owners of such buildings to seek alternatives to demolition." Also fairly standard are the criteria by which buildings are said to be significant, whether or not an age provision is mentioned. These criteria mostly repeat the language of the Secretary of Interior Standards for historic significance. For example, almost all ordinances/bylaws define a significant building as being "...historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of building construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings."

The following table allows comparison of some key bylaw/ordinance provisions that illustrate the range of requirements communities have to ensure that the review procedures for historic properties cover pertinent materials and that affected parties are involved. Next time Newton considers amending its demolition review ordinance, a review of these other ordinances may be worthwhile, to see what additional provisions and clarifications could be made.

TABLE 2: Comparison of Demolition Delay Provisions in 5 Massachusetts Communities

Town	Danvers	Framingham	Lexington	Williamstown	Worcester
delay period	6 months	6 months	6 months	90 days	6 months
bldgs reviewed	75 years old	50 years old	on list	on list	on list
Enforcement Provisions	\$300 + 2-yr building permit delay	2-yr building permit delay	2-yr building permit delay	\$300 fine	\$300 fine
Notification Requirements	newspaper + abutters	newspaper (applicant pays)	newspaper	newspaper + property owner w/in 300'	newspaper
Other Unique Provisions	submittal requirements (3 sets of photos of all affected elevations &, plot plan) + other	section on Responsibility of owners	significance does not include “in group of buildings”	determinations by WHC lapse after one year	directs WHC to assist owner in finding a buyer who will preserve, restore or rehab

**Analysis of Demolition Delay In Newton
– Its Effectiveness & Impacts**

The consensus of the community leaders interviewed for this report is that demolition review and delay is an important tool for preservation of historic resources. It appears to be most effective when applied in concert with historic district regulations. A second benefit of demolition delay is having the opportunity to assemble photographic and historic documentation for a property that is unable to be saved, so that a record of the historic resource is preserved. This will thereby ease preservation of other similar structures in the future.

Design review of new construction or additions to existing buildings that involve partial demolition, is an inevitable part of the demolition review process. There will always be instances where a property’s condition is such that its continued preservation is infeasible, and in those cases, design review of a proposed infill building is appropriate, especially if the structure is one of a group that would be compromised by the introduction of out-of-scale or insensitive new construction. Also, where partial demolitions involve destroying parts of a building that

define its architectural importance, such as removing a wrap-around porch on a Queen Anne-style house, design review is imperative. However, where concern about the design of a proposed new building overrides the careful consideration of the significance and possible loss of a threatened structure and demolition delays are not upheld simply to attain the chance to have some say over a replacement structure, the underlying purpose of the demolition delay—finding alternatives to demolition—is undermined. It is in this area that companion legislation, allowing for design review once a property is found to be significant, would be most helpful.

Because most of the Massachusetts demolition review ordinances and bylaws have very similar in wording, especially in their purposes and criteria section, with individual nuances here and there, the effectiveness of the tool really comes down to how it is used by a particular historical commission and what other support the community provides for its preservation activities. Whether in the form of adequate staff support, financial incentives for preservation of private properties, ongoing survey or coordination between all the land-use functions of a town or city, demolition delay must be backed up the political will of a community to preserve its historic resources. Once that commitment is made, the commission becomes responsible for ensuring that a thorough and thoughtful analysis of any given property coming under review is conducted.

Newton has experienced, and will continue to experience, a high number of demolition requests simply based on the age of its housing stock and a vigorous real estate market—presuming there is no national recession with consequent damping effects on building projects. Record numbers of dwelling units were built in Newton during the post-WWII Era, increasing numbers of eligible buildings come under the jurisdiction of the demolition review each year. Indeed, the permit review done under the first phase of this study, documented the dramatic rise in demolition reviews during the past few years. However, the increase in demolition requests is not due to just the buildings from that era, as the following table illustrates. Note the number of undated garages that have been reviewed in the past several years—most of these were determined not to be historic by staff and their reviews never seen by the Commission.

Table 3 – Dates of Properties Receiving Demolition Review by Year*

<u># of reviews / year</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>
1920 or earlier	12	25	26	22	10	45
1920-1929	4	8	4	8	4	22
1930-1944	3	4	3	4	6	12
1945 or later	0	3	2	2	3	14
garages (not dated)	11	0	12	18	22	16

*Data is incomplete due to lack of building dates noted, missing files and other record-keeping problems. Years 1987 – 1984 were not included in the analysis since post-WWII Era housing did not trigger the 50-year building age requirement until 1995.

There are other factors, though, that have a bearing on these numbers. Communities that have taken a hard line with protecting their historic resources and clearly indicate to the public that demolition permits for these properties are difficult to obtain seem to have fewer reviews, as was the case in all three of the communities interviewed. This suggests that the more demolition delay waivers that are granted, the greater number of review requests can be expected.

Another aspect that enters into the number of demolition requests is that Newton has larger lots than many of the other Boston suburbs. Small houses on large lots are an invitation for people looking to build new and larger homes in this highly desirable area. This may be exacerbated by the fact that other nearby communities with smaller lots (as in the case of Arlington) are not accommodating this type of growth. Finally, the tax base of the city has only so many ways it can grow, thus the City's own financial incentives tend to favor newer larger buildings.