

IMPROVEMENT POSSIBILITIES FOR BUSINESS DISTRICTS

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 3

A GENERAL PLAN FOR BELMONT, MASS.

PREPARED FOR THE BELMONT PLANNING BOARD

ADAMS, HOWARD & GREELEY, PLANNING CONSULTANTS

JANUARY, 1963

BELMONT PLANNING BOARD

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This is one of a series of reports on the various elements to be included in a General Plan for Belmont. It presents background material for the plan in a convenient form for review and discussion.

Material in this report may be superceded in a later report or in the General Plan report as a result of such discussions and studies of other elements of the plan which may affect this one.

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Prepared for the BELMONT PLANNING BOARD

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

As a predominantly residential town, most of Belmont is characterized by pleasant, tree-lined streets and well maintained homes and grounds. However, comparably high standards are lacking in several commercial districts where business is declining, buildings are not well maintained, and the over-all appearance is somewhat disorganized.

To determine how the business districts might be improved by co-operative action short of total redevelopment, the present visual characteristics of several business areas were surveyed and features contributing to the visual disorder within these areas and the poor relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods were identified.

Based upon this survey, certain objectives were formulated as being necessary for a business district improvement program and a study was made of the means by which these objectives could be achieved. The objectives and their related proposals are set down on the succeeding pages, and are followed by illustrations suggesting how these proposals might be applied in specific commercial districts.

The illustrations herein are presented mainly as a guide for future action and do not constitute positive plans. Final development plans for a particular business district should be drawn up when the businessmen in a given area agree that improvement is desirable and are willing to take co-operative action in making such improvements, in conjunction with the town government.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that a number of the business areas are suffering decline because of competition from newer and more attractive commercial areas in the vicinity of Belmont, and that vigorous improvement action is mandatory if they are to survive. Most important is the provision of adequate parking, and hardly less important is the improvement in the amenity of the business areas to make them attractive to customers once the parking is there to accommodate them.

O B J E C T I V E S

Four objectives effectively summarize the targets for a business district improvement program in Belmont. Following each objective below are methods of achieving it (which also further explain the objective itself).

Objective 1: Improve the over-all appearance of each commercial area to give a favorable image of Belmont to both passers-by and shoppers, i.e. achieve an air of quality commensurate with the residential area of the town.

Strive for a high quality of design in carrying out the following objectives.

Strive for visual balance among the commercial buildings and spaces in terms of building height, width, setback and spacing, and the treatment of remaining open spaces.

Provide adequate sidewalk space for pedestrian shoppers, with amenities in the form of weather protection, seating, landscaping, and other shoppers' needs, e.g. supervised children's play space.

Strive for a high standard of window and store display.

Objective 2: Achieve a cohesive and harmonious over-all design and appearance within the commercial area to give it an air of unity and compactness.

Repeat throughout a given commercial center a strong design theme which is peculiar to that center, e.g. Belmont Center's emphasis on the use of brick in a variety of pleasant manners with various contrasts in use of wood, or the Trapelo Road-Beech Street area's

emerging use of colorful but not garish corrugated facades above broad areas of glass display windows and doors.

Strive to maintain visual continuity within the commercial area by screening "gaps" like parking lots and storage yards with hedges, walls, or changes in ground level.

Co-ordinate advertising signs and devices to a general standard for the specific commercial area.

Objective 3: Obtain a pleasant but definite transition in appearance from the abutting (usually residential) area to the commercial area:

Screen the boundary with a fence, hedge or wall, if necessary.

Continue large street trees, where existing in a residential area, up to a definite junction point with the commercial area.

Take advantage of changes of grade in hilly areas to accent the junction between commercial and residential areas, e. g. break the grade more sharply to dramatize the transition.

Clearly identify clustered commercial uses in business centers and play down isolated commercial uses outside them, e. g. allow only limited signs and no advertising for the isolated uses.

Use distinctively different "street furniture" in commercial areas, e.g. differently designed and brighter street lights, differently designed or painted fire hydrants and street name signs, and parking meters.

Use a buffer strip such as a park strip or a road to separate residential and commercial uses (where other methods fail or are unusable).

Objective 4: Obtain concurrent agreement between private owners in the commercial areas and the town administration to provide the required improvements in accordance with an over-all design plan for each area.

Obtain professional advice to develop a specific design plan (could be a joint public-private undertaking, with a sharing of cost, or a unilateral public or private undertaking, with close co-operation of both parties in evolving the plan to their mutual satisfaction).

Private Responsibilities

Renovate and maintain commercial buildings

Construct and maintain sidewalk overhangs

Provide outdoor amenities for pedestrians in private areas (seats, sun-rain shelters, landscaping)

Design and maintain private parking areas

Convert uses to conform to design plan

Replace and maintain signs and advertising structures in accordance with plan

Maintain high standards of window and store display

Public Responsibilities

Renovate and maintain public buildings and street "furniture" (poles, hydrants, bus stop shelters, etc.)

Provide outdoor amenities for pedestrians in public areas (bus stop shelters, telephones, mail boxes, trees, landscaping)

Design and maintain public parking areas

Construct curbs, gutters, and median strips in streets

Revise zoning laws and boundaries to restrict commercial development to commercial centers in accordance with the General Plan and to control future structural developments within the centers according to the plan

CONCORD AVENUE - BRIGHT ROAD COMMERCIAL AREA .

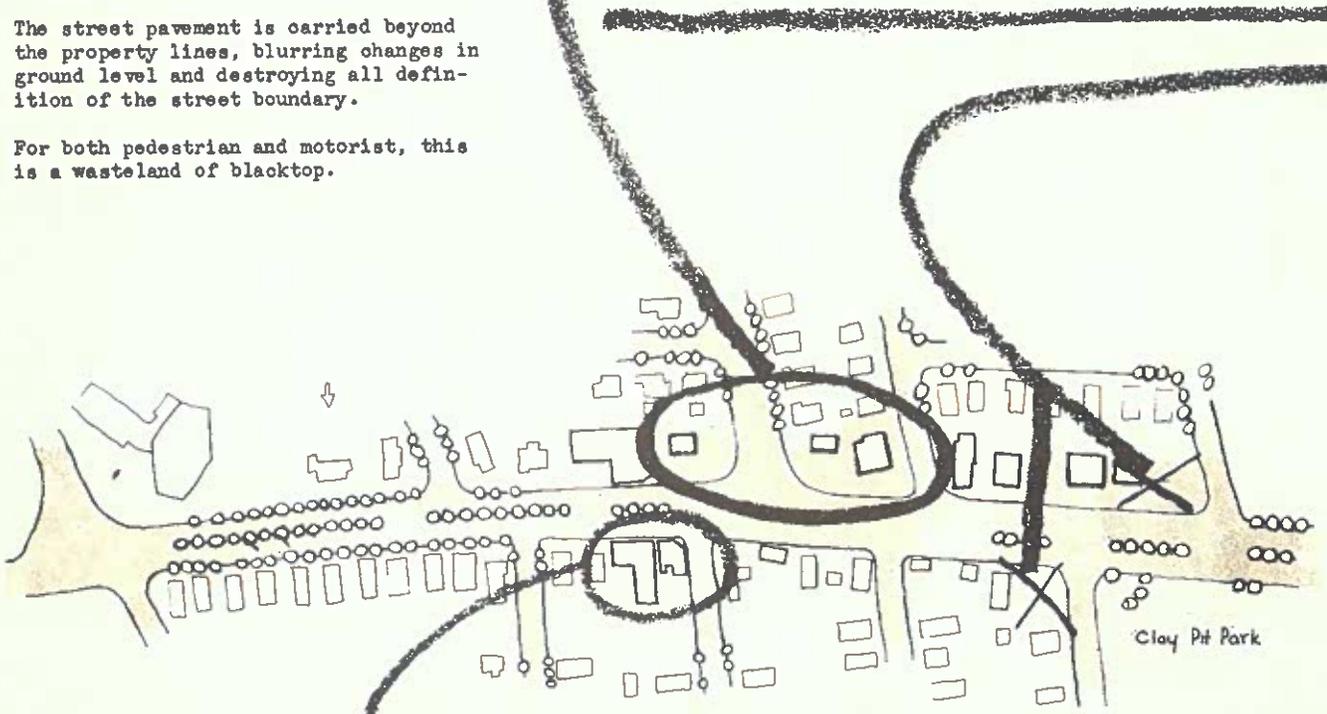


Sketch of Concord Avenue indicates the breakdown of neighborhood character which occurs at the commercial district.

The street pavement is carried beyond the property lines, blurring changes in ground level and destroying all definition of the street boundary.

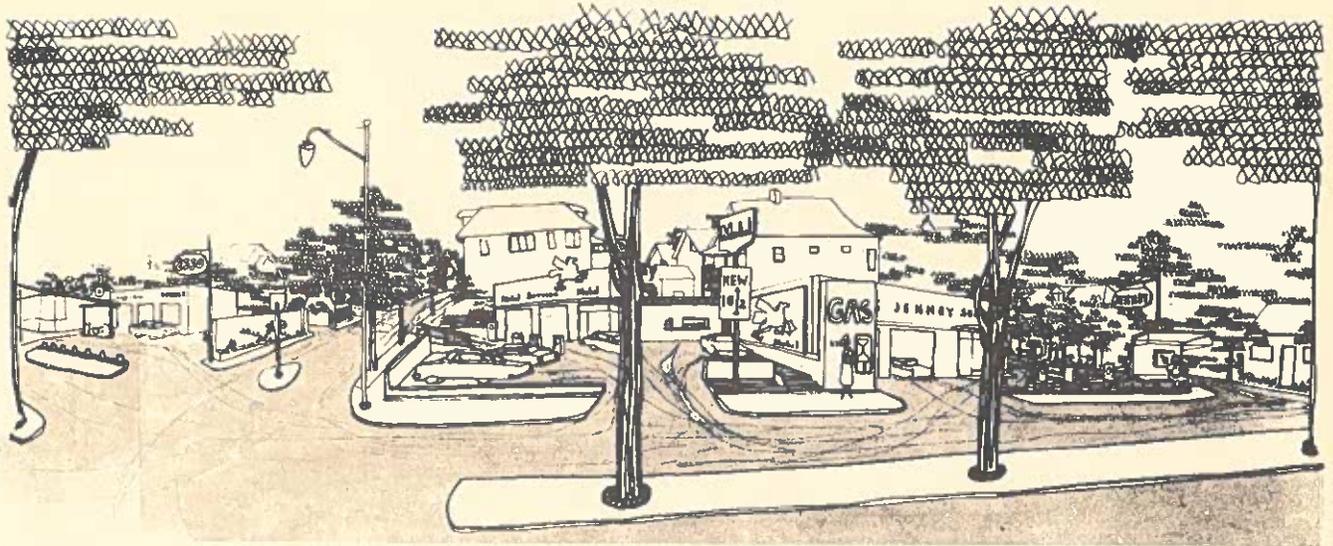
For both pedestrian and motorist, this is a wasteland of blacktop.

CONCORD AVENUE AND BRIGHT ROAD - AS IT IS NOW



At present the main cluster of neighborhood shops offers no pedestrian amenities, has no visual unity and has no clearly expressed identity.

IT COULD BE IMPROVED



AND AS IT MIGHT BE WHEN IMPROVED

These locations have been improved by the landscaping of Clay Pit Pond, and have potential as sites for future apartment development.

Such a use would provide a transition between residential and commercial areas, and would provide additional justification for the improvement of the commercial area.

1. Unbroken continuation of the character of Concord Avenue - median strip and trees.
2. Continuation of character of intersecting streets right up to meeting with Concord Avenue.
3. Provision of sidewalks and clear road definition.
4. Screening between commercial and residential areas.
5. Emphasis on changes in ground level between residential and commercial areas.
6. Improvement of ground surface treatment.
7. Improvement of "Street furniture" e.g. Bus shelter.
8. Coordination of advertising signs.

The Concord Avenue - Bright Road commercial area is not one of the Town's major business areas; therefore at this point strong visual disruption of Concord Avenue, one of the Town's major traffic arteries, is not warranted. The area does, however, play an important role in a visitor's visual impression of the Town, as it is one of the principal "gateways" marking entrance to Belmont. Visual improvement is necessary in order that this gateway might be a true indication of the character of the Town which it serves to introduce.

A sidewalk shelter would provide amenities for pedestrians and visually unify the commercial buildings at minimum expense. It could serve as a framework for integration of advertising, street signs and public amenities such as telephones, mail boxes and seating.



WAVERLEY SQUARE SHOPPING AREA

A staged Program for improvement

Waverley Square Shopping Area as it exists today.

Circumferential pedestrian movement and inadequate parking facilities.

Possible Improvement
STAGE ONE



A sheltered Bus Terminal (on Church Street) and additional parking facilities (on widened Thayer Street) are provided.

A pedestrian shopping court serves as a link between the bus terminal and the new parking area. Additional shopping facilities are provided, several of the existing structures being converted from residential to commercial use.

Possible Improvement
STAGE TWO.



A pedestrian shopping mall is formed linking the court with Trapelo Road.

Further structures are converted from residential to commercial use.

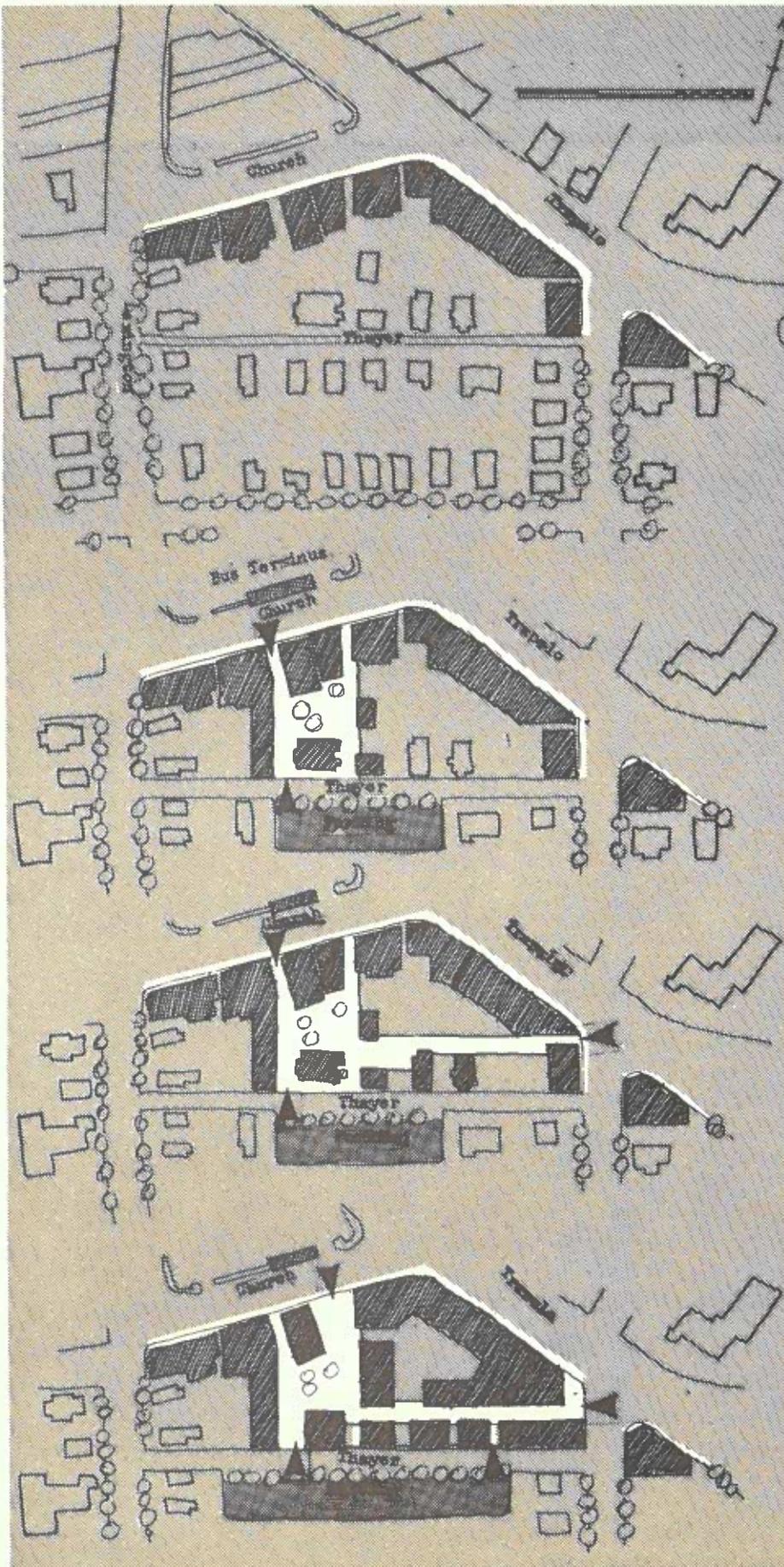
Possible Improvement
STAGE THREE.

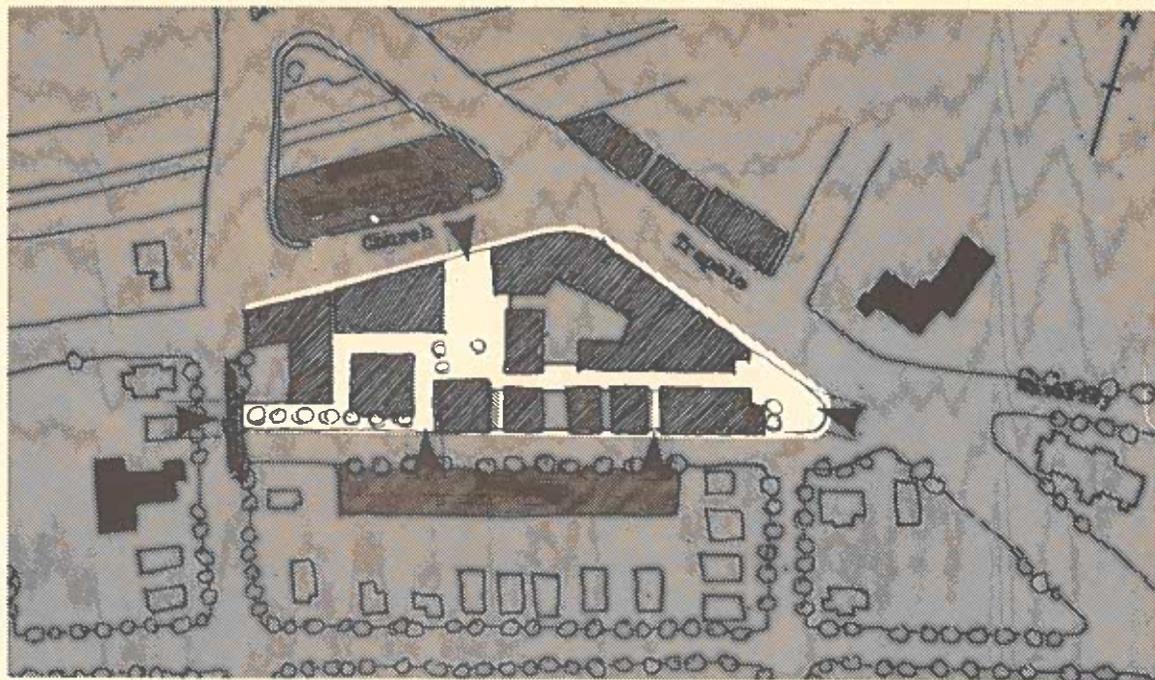


The pedestrian mall terminates in a small shopping court on Trapelo Road.

Additional parking area is provided off Thayer Street.

Old structures are replaced and the approach to the main court is improved.





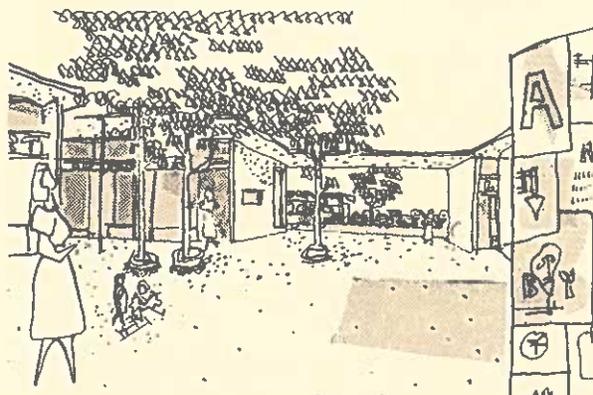
Possible Improvement
STAGE FOUR.

The ultimate development could contain a series of pedestrian shopping courts, each opening off a main thoroughfare and oriented towards a distinct local landmark - the churches on Trapelo Road and Lexington Street and the bus terminal on Church Street. These courts could be connected by a series of pedestrian shopping malls. The provision of added amenities for motorist, pedestrian and bus patron should enable the area to realise its full potential for commercial development.



Sketch indicating the character of a pedestrian mall leading off the main shopping court.

A safe and pleasant shopping environment.....



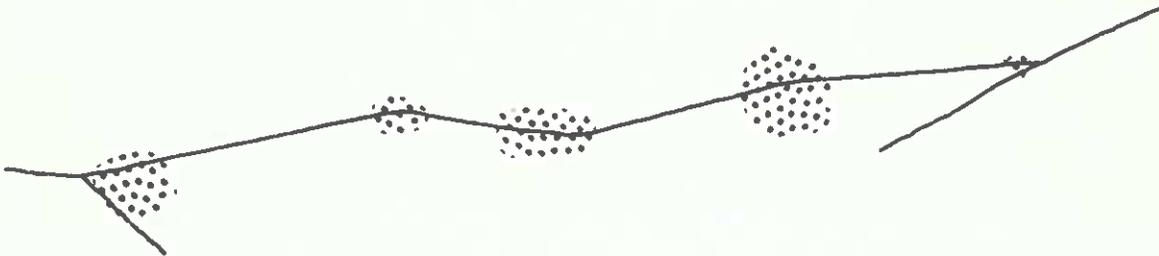
..... but readily accessible to transportation

Sketch indicating the location of the bus terminal and car park at the entrance to the main shopping court.

TRAPELO ROAD

The emphasis of this report has been upon the improvement of individual business areas, but Trapelo Road has the additional consideration that it has a series of commercial centers.

At the present time, the section of the road between Waverley Square and Belmont Street appears to be a gently undulating way passing through an unplanned mixture of uses which are visually confusing and frequently unattractive. On closer inspection, however, an understandable pattern does emerge, for each change in direction of the road is marked by a center of commercial activity and these are separated by areas of predominantly residential use.



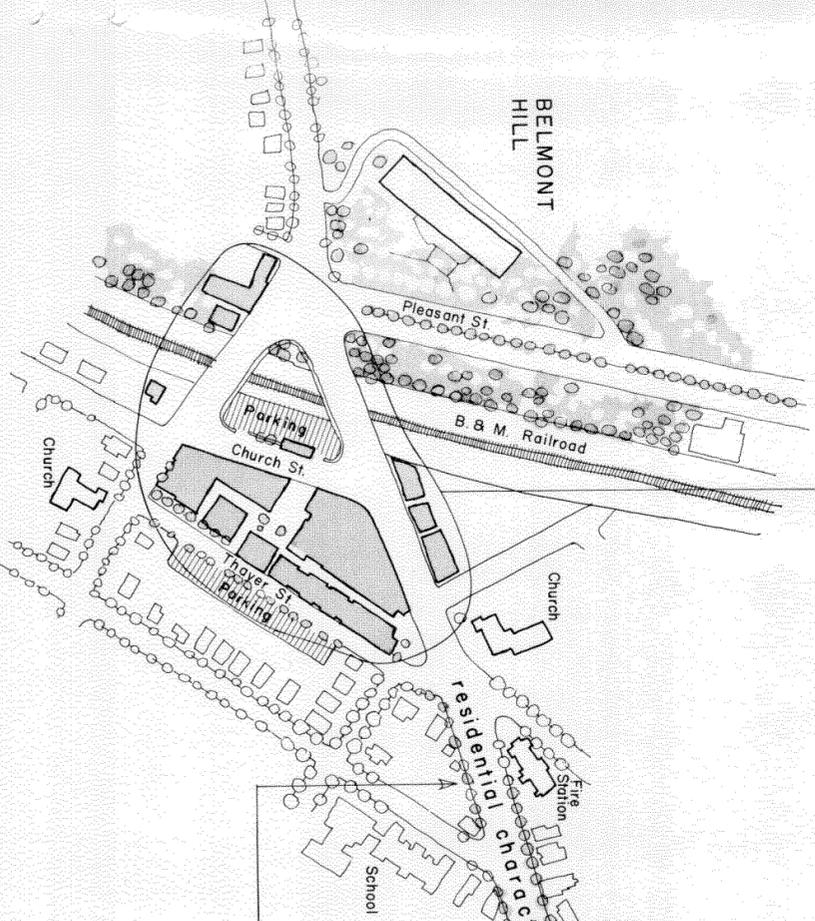
The appearance of this main corridor through the town could be greatly improved by the suggested changes shown in the sketch at right. The business centers would be visually distinct from the residential areas, lending clear emphasis to the commercial activity centers at each turn in the road.

As a main corridor through the town, Trapelo Road gives many passers-by their only visual image of the town. A co-ordinated improvement program could both make this image comparable in quality and visual appeal to that of the residential areas and contribute to the financial viability and health of the commercial centers along it.

WAVERLEY SQUARE
MAJOR SHOPPING AREA

Staged program for the development of a planned shopping complex with the provision of additional parking & terminal facilities and separated auto & pedestrian circulation — see preceding sketches. Pleasant Street, rerouted and landscaped, provides a clear termination to the chain of commercial centers along Trapelo Road.

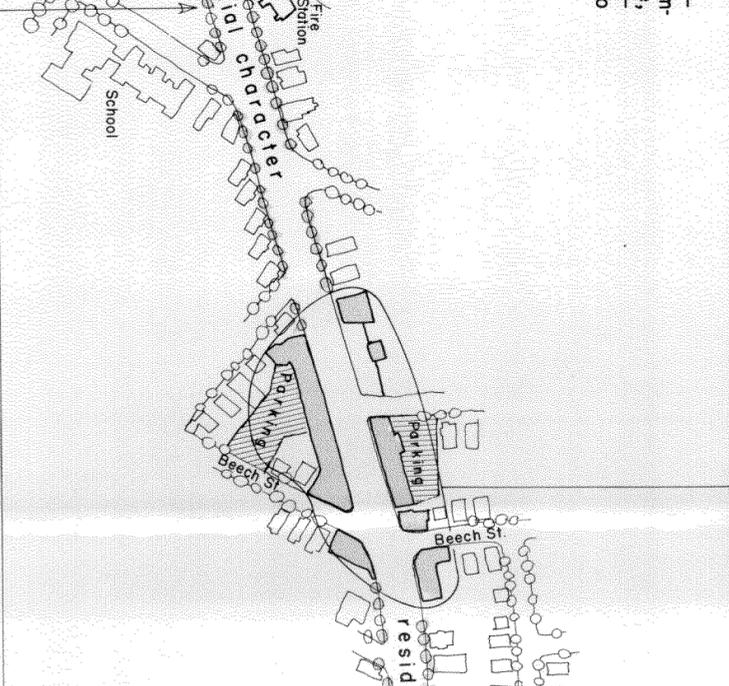
Land west of Pleasant Street is suitable for apartment or office development, a use which will not compete with commercial facilities in Waverley Square, but will enhance their value and encourage their improvement. Structures should be sited appropriately so that the visual dominance of the Hill is retained.



BEECH STREET NEIGHBORHOOD
SHOPPING AREA

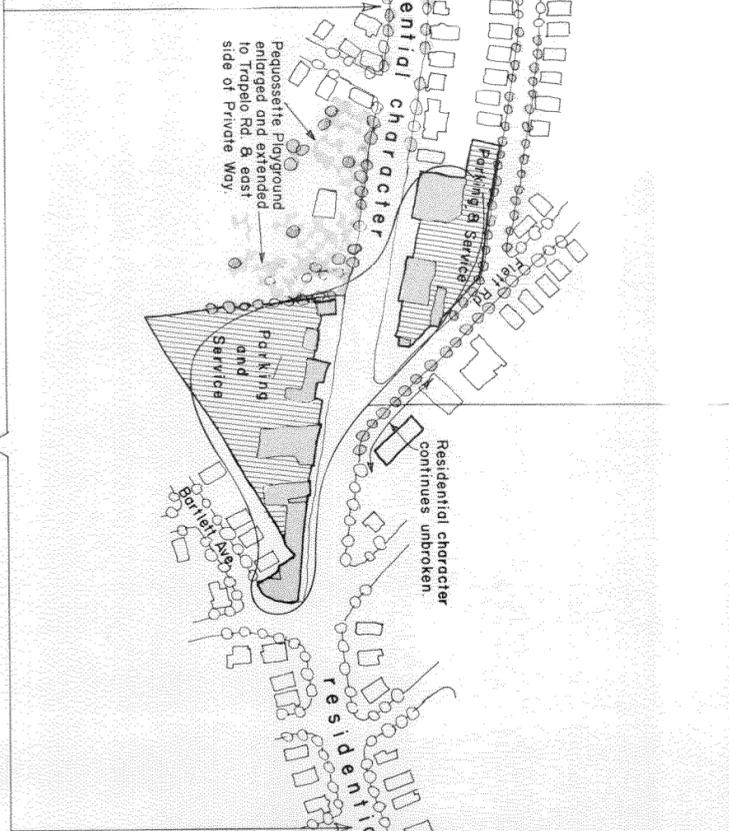
Consolidation of existing commercial facilities with the provision of off-street parking space.

A possible reduction in the demand for shopping facilities in this area could be balanced by increased demand for space on the part of medical & dental practitioners now in predominantly residential areas.



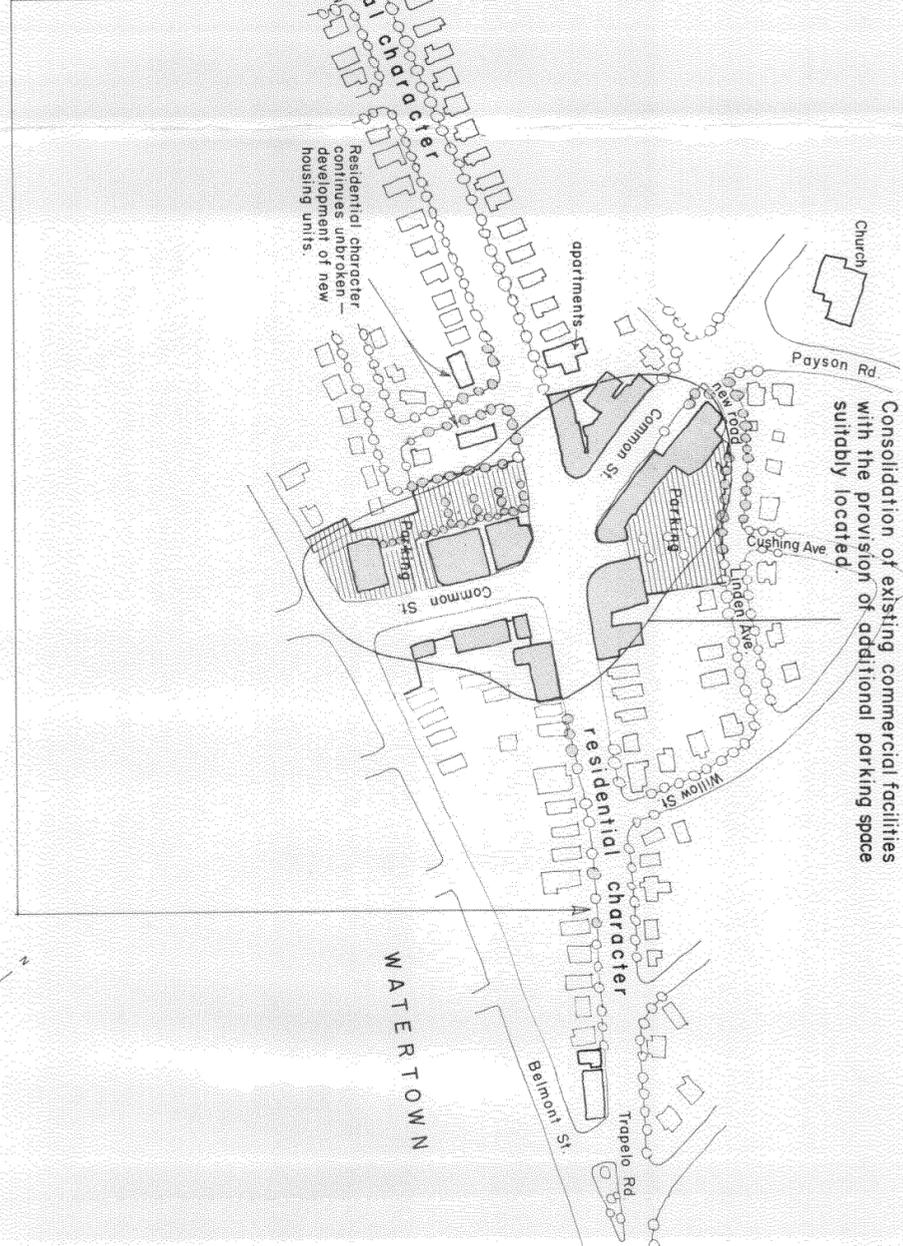
TRAPELO ROAD
AUTOMOTIVE CENTER

Site work and screening to improve the appearance of the area, and thus combat the blighting effect which the area now exercises over adjoining residential streets.



CUSHING SQUARE
MAJOR SHOPPING AREA

Consolidation of existing commercial facilities with the provision of additional parking space suitably located.



AREAS OF RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER

Continuous line of street trees to be maintained. Trees shaded indicate new trees to be planted. Where possible, existing uses are to revert to residential. Where this is not practicable, existing non-residential properties could be made more compatible with the residential character by reduction of signs & advertising and by appropriate site treatment.

