

Weston Nurseries Development Plan

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Overview

The sale and reuse of a portion of Weston Nurseries is an opportunity to be embraced both by the current residents of the Town of Hopkinton and by the Mezitt family who plan to continue operating a portion of the Nurseries. The site will offer versions of suburban living that respect and enhance existing characteristics of the town, provide additional amenities and services that residents desire, and complement rather than compete with the Town Center, which is situated less than one mile to the west.

The Weston Nurseries lands will tell the story of three unique landscapes that preserve and enhance Hopkinton's rural, small town character. These plans are developed only on the 600 acres of the site that are proposed for sale, and we assume that the Garden Center and the remaining 400 acres will remain in operation. Therefore, the plans on each parcel could be developed separately, but together they provide a variety of residential options that build off of the existing Nurseries.

Residential development on the Weston Nurseries Property can meet some of the demand imposed by people eager to move to the community in a way that minimizes disturbance to natural resources, encourages alternative development patterns, provides transportation options, and serves some middle- and low-income households. The inclusion of affordable housing through lower cost offerings and rental units will help the Town reach its goal of 10 percent affordable housing stock while simultaneously allowing long-time residents to continue living in town even as they retire. The development plan also transfers a portion of land to the Town for use as they deem most appropriate. Potential public uses include a school to meet the needs of families moving to the site, community supported agriculture reminiscent of the current land use, and open space preservation.

Site Analysis

Physical and Community site analyses inform the Weston Nurseries Development. The physical analysis indicates that significant factors with the greatest potential to constrain development are wetland resources, their surrounding buffers, and steep slopes. Although soils could also restrict construction, the least suitable soils coincide with wetland areas. Therefore, the suitability map assumes that the highest development costs and greatest impacts on natural resources would be in areas within the outer or inner buffers of surface water resources and vernal pools or with slopes of greater than 15 degrees. The development plan does not place any structures in these constrained areas in order to protect water resources and prevent excess erosion. Table 1 demonstrates the percentage of developable land on the site and in each of the parcels proposed for sale specifically.

Location	Constrained Area (acres)	Suitable Area (acres)	Total Area (acres)	Percent Suitable
Parcel A	41	193	235	82%
Parcel B	38	67	105	64%
Parcel C	139	122	261	47%
Parcel A+B+C	218	382	601	64%
Entire Site	349	696	1,045	67%

The NStar liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility might become another physical constraint to the site. Located in the northeast corner of Parcel A, the facility could pose some health risks. However, homes already exist along Wilson Road in close proximity to the LNG facility. Given the uncertainty of its effects, the LNG facility is not included in the physical suitability figures in Table 1.

The community analysis considers attributes of the site that represent particular significance to the Town of Hopkinton as well as concerns and desires voiced by citizens during recent surveys and public forums. According to the Town's 2004 Master Plan Survey, the characteristic of Hopkinton

most valued by residents is the feel of the town. Similarly, their top community priority is to maintain its rural character. Finally, citizens are most willing to consider bringing additional business to the Town as a method to raise revenue to implement these goals.¹ Supporting the noted desire for coffee shops, restaurants, and light retail, an analysis of the community’s purchasing power and spending habits for retail goods indicates that approximately 42 percent of money spent by residents on retail goods is spent outside of the community.² Therefore, citizens might choose to support retail development within Hopkinton if the opportunity existed.

As part of the community analysis, the plan also considers transportation and connectivity. Hopkinton is situated in close proximity to Route 495 and the Massachusetts Turnpike. Route 135 is a major thoroughfare that divides the site between northern Parcels A and B and southern Parcel C. Recognizing that roads in general and Route 135 in particular may become severely congested with additional development, we consider transportation alternatives. The LIFT Public Transit System, a bus service operated out of nearby Framingham, runs along Route 135 and would connect the site to Hopkinton Center, the nearby communities of Ashland and Framingham, and MBTA commuter rail stations located in Ashland and Framingham. An easement cutting from east to west across Parcel C represents a final alternative transportation consideration as this easement could become the right-of-way for a bike path linking the site to other areas in Hopkinton.

Design Features

The primary design features of this development plan are three typologies of residential development that will meet the Town’s current housing needs in a way that reflects the communities’ rural nature. Residential development also protects wildlife corridors linking to other nearby protected areas such as Hopkinton State Park. Finally, the Plan includes a transfer of land to the public for use as the Town deems most appropriate.

Parcel A preserves the existing tapestry of forest and field through a combination of homes clustered around fields and larger properties suitable for horse pasturing and light agriculture. This parcel receives the lightest development due to its proximity to the Hopkinton reservoir and distance from existing infrastructure. Parcel B uses its dense tree cover and rolling terrain to create an enchanting cluster of low-slung homes connected by winding country roads. The well-hidden homes provide a feeling of privacy and spaciousness for homeowners while keeping considerable area undeveloped and available for key ecological functions, such as a wildlife corridor. Parcel C takes its cue from the beloved Hopkinton Town Center and provides higher densities in a form that is familiar and fitting. It also increases opportunities for mobility with connections to Hopkinton’s walking and bicycle trail system and by concentrating development near the LIFT Public Transit System route. In future phases, Parcel C will include a similar village green motif in the southeast portion of the site off of Clifton Street. Table 2 presents the number of proposed units for each parcel.

Location	Residential Units	Retail Units
Parcel A	42	--
Parcel B	46	--
Parcel C	420 (249 in Phase 1)	6
Total	508	6

¹ Town of Hopkinton Planning Board. 2004. *Master Plan Survey Results*. November. Accessed at <<http://www.hopkinton.org/gov/planning/SurveyResults.htm>>.

² University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Employment and Training Institute. 2005. *ETI Urban Markets Retail Sales Leakage/Surplus Drill Downs*. Accessed at <<http://www3.uwm.edu/Dept/ETI/workforce/retail.cfm>>.

Parcel A: Forest and Field

The objective of Parcel A is to preserve the unique character of the northern Western Nurseries site through maintenance of the unique mix of forest and meadow on the northern parcel; architecture that is site responsive and unpretentious in scale and character; and low-impact development that reduces building footprint and impervious surfaces. Parcel A will contain three property types: cottages; estate lots; and larger “farmettes.” The cottage and estate lots will belong to a Homeowner’s Association whose dues will pay for the maintenance of Common Open Space. In addition to the guidelines and dimensional standards outlined below, each homeowner will, prior to purchase, sign an agreement for an Individual Lot plan that requires certain natural features be maintained or preserved to promote the objectives for Parcel A.

The 28 cottages will be situated on ½- to ¼-acre lots with front yards between 25 and 30 feet, side setbacks of 20 feet, and a maximum height of 2 ½ stories. In addition, rear-loaded lots will feature setbacks of 50 feet, or as designated by Individual Lot plan. Garages may be detached, but they will remain within 20 feet of house and comply with the same setback requirements as the cottages. Their maximum area will be 635 square feet (average 2-bay garage), and their maximum height will be 20 feet. The cottages will maintain a 10-foot vegetative buffer composed of shrubs, evergreen and deciduous species with minimal thinning to reduce lateral visibility and maximize privacy. They will also maintain a 50-foot rear deciduous and evergreen tree buffer with selective thinning to allow lateral visibility. The crushed gravel or otherwise pervious driveways will be deeded to one of the two properties that share it.

The 10 estate lots will be situated on 2 to 5 acres. The setback requirements will be particular to each site in accordance with the Individual Lot plan), but future additions should avoid slopes, integrate with topography, and adhere to 50-foot front setbacks, 40-foot side setbacks. The maximum height of these homes will be 2 ½ stories, and their visual mass will be reduced through architecture. The maximum square footage will be 2,500 on the first floor and 5,000 total, and the maximum cumulative lineal frontage will be 90 feet. The same cottage garage guidelines apply to the estate lots. Landscaping should seek to preserve existing vegetation and to provide limited or no visibility from adjoining lots. Buffers will contain the same vegetation mixture as cottage buffers. Side buffers will be a minimum of 20 feet, and rear buffers will be approximately 150 feet. Clear-cutting is prohibited, but selective cutting to allow certain views and to frame the house may be permitted by the Homeowner’s Association Review Board. Finally, individual vegetative coverage shall be required to partially screen homes from proximate lots.

The 4 large-lot “farmettes” will provide a rural setting that encourages some agriculture in the tradition of Weston Nurseries. Specific dimensional standards do not apply to these properties. Instead, all buildings including houses, garages and barns shall be sited per the Individual Lot Plan. All buildings will be sited to provide maximum vistas from within and an attractive view from the road. Where large lots have large amounts of open meadow, buildings will be set against existing tree lines and framed with additional plantings. The visual mass will be reduced through architecture. Any future additions should maintain compact for minimal habitat disturbance, and houses shall not exceed 6,000 square feet. The Owner will be responsible for maintaining the mix of woods and meadow as shown on the lot plan. Light agricultural practices will play a critical role in maintaining the pastoral character desired for the site, and are therefore encouraged. In addition to residential, allowable uses include horse pasturing, haying, and fruit orchards. Additional uses will be considered upon written request to the Homeowner’s Association.

Access to the site will occur north from Frankland Street, following the tree line until it forks south to Parcel B and northwest to Wilson Road. The narrow 20-foot road with informal 4-foot gravel shoulders encourages slow driving and accommodates pedestrian use, biking, and horseback riding.

Parcel B: Country Road

Parcel B will contain 46 single-family residences scattered along a wooded street similar to nearby Wilson Road. The winding road will follow the site's contours to arrive at shaded clusters of low-slung, prairie-style houses tucked along shared driveways that minimize impervious surface. By integrating houses with the wooded terrain, views from scenic Wilson Road are protected, a key concern for Hopkinton residents. Easements will maintain the existing vegetative cover around homes by requiring buffers of shrubs, evergreen and deciduous tree species. This natural curtain will simultaneously protect views from the roads and create a sense of privacy for residents.

The organic pattern of homes nestled within the woods is also an efficient one, preserving a large swath of open space that functions as a wildlife corridor for north-south movement along the eastern edge of the parcel. The southern portion of the corridor features open fields and ponds and maintains the protective water resource buffer. The northern portion of the corridor is forested. The development pattern protects several potential vernal pools existing on the Parcel. In addition to protecting wildlife mobility, the swath of undeveloped land preserves significant viewsheds for the Town of Hopkinton. The low-lying homes are largely unseen from Route 135 looking north and east from the Garden Center.

Primary access to Parcel B will come from Route 135 between Wilson Road and Frankland Street. This road will travel north before splitting west to Wilson Road and east to connect with Parcel A. With a width of only 20 feet, the narrow road will encourage slow movement through the site. The road will also feature informal 3-foot pervious gravel shoulders on both sides that permit pedestrian use, biking, and horseback riding.

Parcel C: New Village

The northern section of Parcel C offers a unique opportunity to build housing at a higher density than elsewhere on the site due to its proximity to the highway and the Garden Center and its relatively flat topography and few water resources. The wetlands, streams, ponds, and surrounding areas in the southern portion of Parcel C are transferred to the Town of Hopkinton for municipal use or open space preservation. Building at higher density in Parcel C redirects development pressure away from Parcels A and B and preserves open space elsewhere on the site.

This residential neighborhood replicates a traditional New England town pattern centered on a village green. A regular, but non-rectilinear road structure breaks the houses into several blocks oriented around the green. Pedestrian pathways connect the blocks to the village green and to open space in the south around the existing irrigation pond. Houses are placed at a density close to that seen in blocks at the Hopkinton Town Center; the higher unit count results from the fact that many of these units are attached homes. Near the green, these homes are sets of three or four semi-detached units, and towards the edges they spread out to single family detached units. All are oriented towards the street; some of the attached homes replace garages with parking sheds at the center of blocks, and additional parking is available on the streets. Altogether, there will be 229 new units built south of Route 135.

Primary access to the New Village comes from a main boulevard that enters the site at a squared-up intersection with Route 135 by the existing Garden Center. This boulevard, spanning 25 feet and featuring formal sidewalks, travels south to the edge of the wetlands before cutting east to another relatively high, flat area where more homes could be developed in a similar pattern and density in future phases of development. After crossing the site that could comprise 170 additional units, this road connects with Clinton St. Smaller residential streets branch off the boulevard to access homes. Trees and landscaping along the roads vary the views; driving south, houses are only on one side of the street. At the southeastern bend, the beloved view south to the pond has been kept clear of development. The southernmost homes also enjoy views to the pond.

A proposed bicycle path runs through the site and the houses adjacent to it. Because existing homeowners object to the placement of the path near their homes, the plan propose a redirected path that still begins and ends where the easement meets the parcel lines, but now runs along the village green and around existing neighborhoods. A post-office to service New Village residents and a bike shop or other single retail unit are situated at the intersection of the bike and walking paths on the village green to encourage active use of the area.

As mentioned, the development plan transfers ownership of the southern portion of the Parcel C to the Town. The Plan does not designate a municipal use, instead leaving the choice to the Town. Potential uses could include a school to service children from New Village and adjacent neighborhoods; community-supported agriculture; or open space preservation with a trail network that invites Hopkinton citizens to enjoy the area. It is important to note that an agricultural use would sustain the pond, which is currently used for irrigation. Furthermore, the Plan also recognizes that the Town might develop municipal water supplies in these wetland areas, so transferring the land to the Town will allow it to maintain more control over uses that might affect water supply.

Anchoring the northern edge of New Village, a mixed-use development provides two 3-story buildings between the existing Garden Center and the squared up intersection with Route 135, Frankland Street, and the new boulevard. These buildings, with 12,500 square-foot footprints, add 6 retail units of varying sizes on the ground level that opens to a parking lot and picnic area which could also host a Farmer's Market. The second and third stories contain 20 apartment units, and separate parking for these residential units exists just north of the buildings.