

DAVIS SQUARE

A C T I O N P L A N



DAVIS SQUARE ACTION PLAN

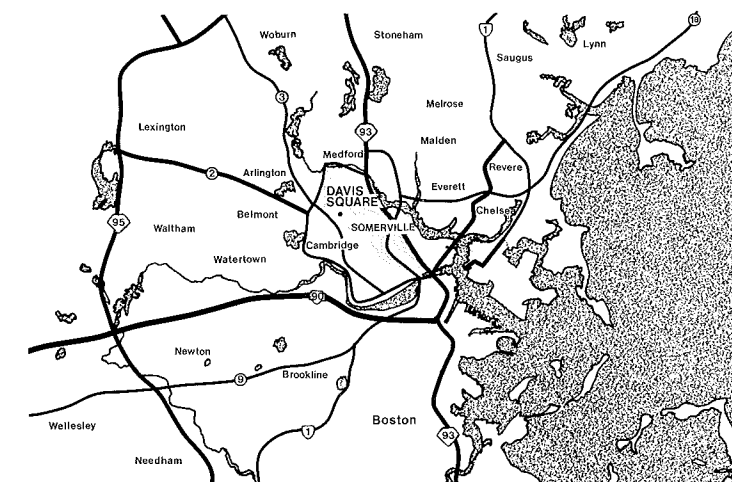
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Location Map

Office of Planning & Community Development
City Hall
Somerville, MA

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INTRODUCTION

Davis Square Background

The Davis Square section of Somerville is located in the west central area of the City, less than one quarter mile from the Cambridge line and just one half mile from the heart of the Tufts University campus. The Square is situated at the intersection of Highland Avenue, Elm Street, and College Avenue — all major secondary arteries — and is only blocks from Massachusetts Avenue. Currently several major bus routes connect Davis Square with the metropolitan area.

Davis Square is a compact commercial and retail center, surrounded by a stable residential area. The majority of retail trade focuses primarily on convenience goods, with a moderate mix offered. The basic infrastructure of the Square is sound, and recent interest in housing in this section of the City promises a growing retail market.

Prospects for Davis Square's future are bright. City officials and local residents are convinced that the downward trend has run its course and that Davis Square is on the verge of a major revitalization.

This renewed optimism results in large part from the MBTA's decision in 1976 to extend the Red Line from its present terminus at Harvard Square to Fresh Pond in Cambridge. Davis Square was included in the project as a transit station location. Construction is currently underway, and it is expected that the new transit line will be operational in 1983-1984.

During the initial stages of development of the Red Line extension, the Somerville Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) anticipated the need for joint planning with the MBTA to analyze and evaluate the opportunities for improving Davis Square's physical image and marketing position concurrent with the construction of the Red Line. In 1977, the OPCD and the MAPC worked with consultants to produce a preliminary urban design and business study.

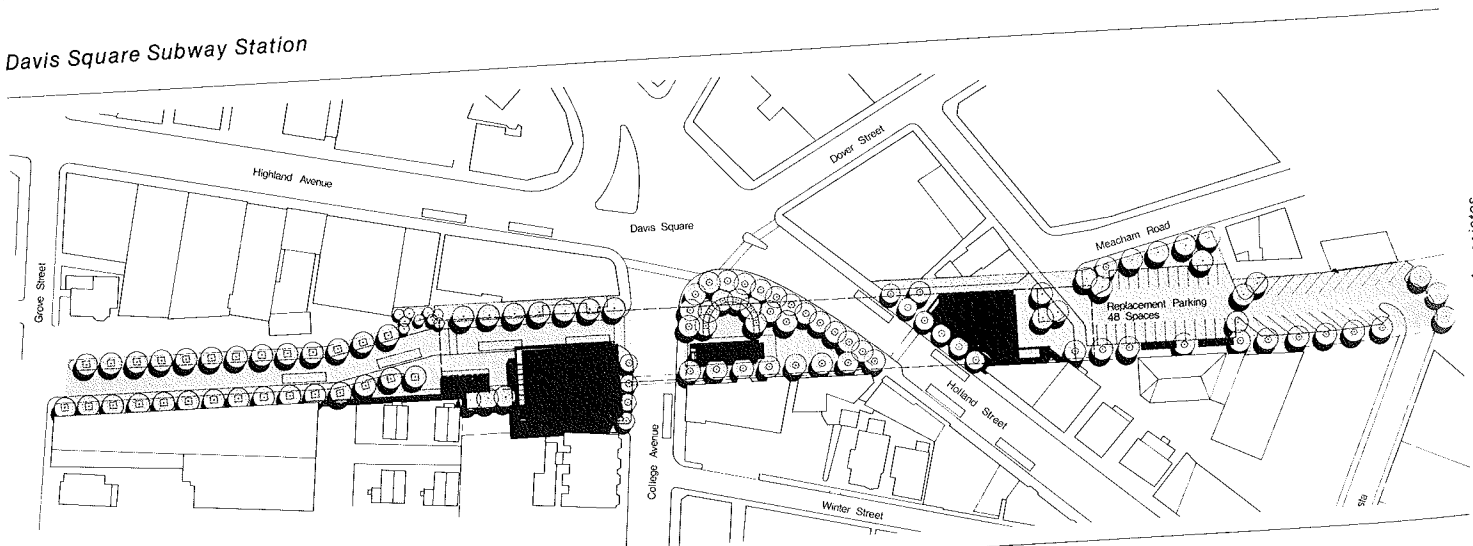
In the same year, the Davis Square Task Force was organized to facilitate public involvement in planning for the extension of the Red Line. The Task Force worked for several years pro-

ducing goal statements and an initial plan which was submitted to the City of Somerville. The Task Force plan focused on the provision of parking for merchants, storefront and street improvements, and the development of a supermarket. The Task Force supported the retention of the existing height limitation of 50 feet for new commercial development. The plan particularly stressed the preservation of the residential community around Davis Square.

During 1979, the OPCD employed several consultants to provide additional planning information to assist the Davis Square Task Force in policy-making and to monitor the construction of the Red Line. The principal planning issues which they investigated are detailed in nine working papers available through the OPCD.

The Davis Square Action Plan has been formulated by the OPCD in recognition of the combined efforts of the Davis Square Task Force, members of the business community, and residents who have participated in this planning effort.

Davis Square Subway Station



REVITALIZATION
ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

The Davis Square Action Plan represents a concerted effort by the Somerville OPCD to focus public/private reinvestment in Davis Square. The specific actions contained in this Plan have been formulated as a balanced response to the market potential of the area, the needs of the business community, and the concerns of surrounding area residents. The organization of the planning document is structured as an exploration of three basic issues: land use, traffic and parking, and development potential. The issues are analyzed and then linked with public policies and coordinated improvement programs, actions which will enhance the attractiveness and convenience of Davis Square.

LAND USE

In order to understand the character of Davis Square better, the OPCD undertook an investigation of the land uses represented there. For planning purposes, the OPCD established a project area which is depicted in Map A. The project area for Davis Square is dominated by commercial and residential land uses, which constitute respectively 21 and 29 percent of the total land area.

RESIDENTIAL

The residential neighborhoods encircling the commercial core consist of one- and two-family frame houses constructed during the period from 1870 to 1910. From 1910 to 1930, the construction of brick apartment buildings of five and six stories completed the existing neighborhood character. The neighborhood remains a tightly-built, medium density area. The overall quality of the housing stock surrounding the Square is excellent.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial uses include a mixture of businesses, services, and office uses. Businesses include a department store, variety stores, small specialty food markets, drug stores, and numerous eating and drinking establishments. Services include banks, photographers' studios, barber shops, beauty shops, and travel agencies.

Office uses, found mostly on the second floors above ground floor retail uses, include insurance agencies and professional offices for lawyers, doctors, and dentists.

OPEN SPACE
AND RECREATION

The most significant existing recreational open space is Kenney Park, located at the corner of Highland Avenue and Grove Street. This facility contains a small landscaped area for sitting, a tot lot, a child play area, and a paved area for basketball and other court games. Conceptual plans have been developed to renovate and modify this park to accommodate the expanded needs of the neighborhood. Construction is anticipated in 1983.

The pedestrian mall adjacent to Brigham's extending from Elm Street to Herbert Street and the landscaped traffic island in Cutter Square complete the inventory of existing open space in Davis Square.

INDUSTRIAL

Light industry and manufacturing uses exist largely in the vicinity of the MBTA right-of-way southeast of Holland Street, although they are not a significant land use with respect to land area covered. These uses included Comfort Pillow, M.W. Carr, and others which extend toward the Cambridge line.

PARKING

Several off-street parking areas are located within the project study area (see Map A, opposite). The City of Somerville owns the Grove Street and Herbert Street lots. Several private lots have been leased by the MBTA and the City through 1984 for public parking.

UTILITIES AND
PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Two utility uses lie within the project study area: the Telephone Exchange Building and Commonwealth Gas Company, both on Highland Avenue. The principal public building in the vicinity of the Square is the West Somerville Library on College Avenue.

EXISTING LAND USE
CONTROLS

Davis Square is regulated by five different types of zoning districts — three residential districts (RA, RB and RC) and two business districts (BA and BB). The commercial core area of the study area coincides with the boundaries of the two business districts. The area's residential fringe is zoned almost exclusively for residential uses, falling predominantly within RB and RC districts.

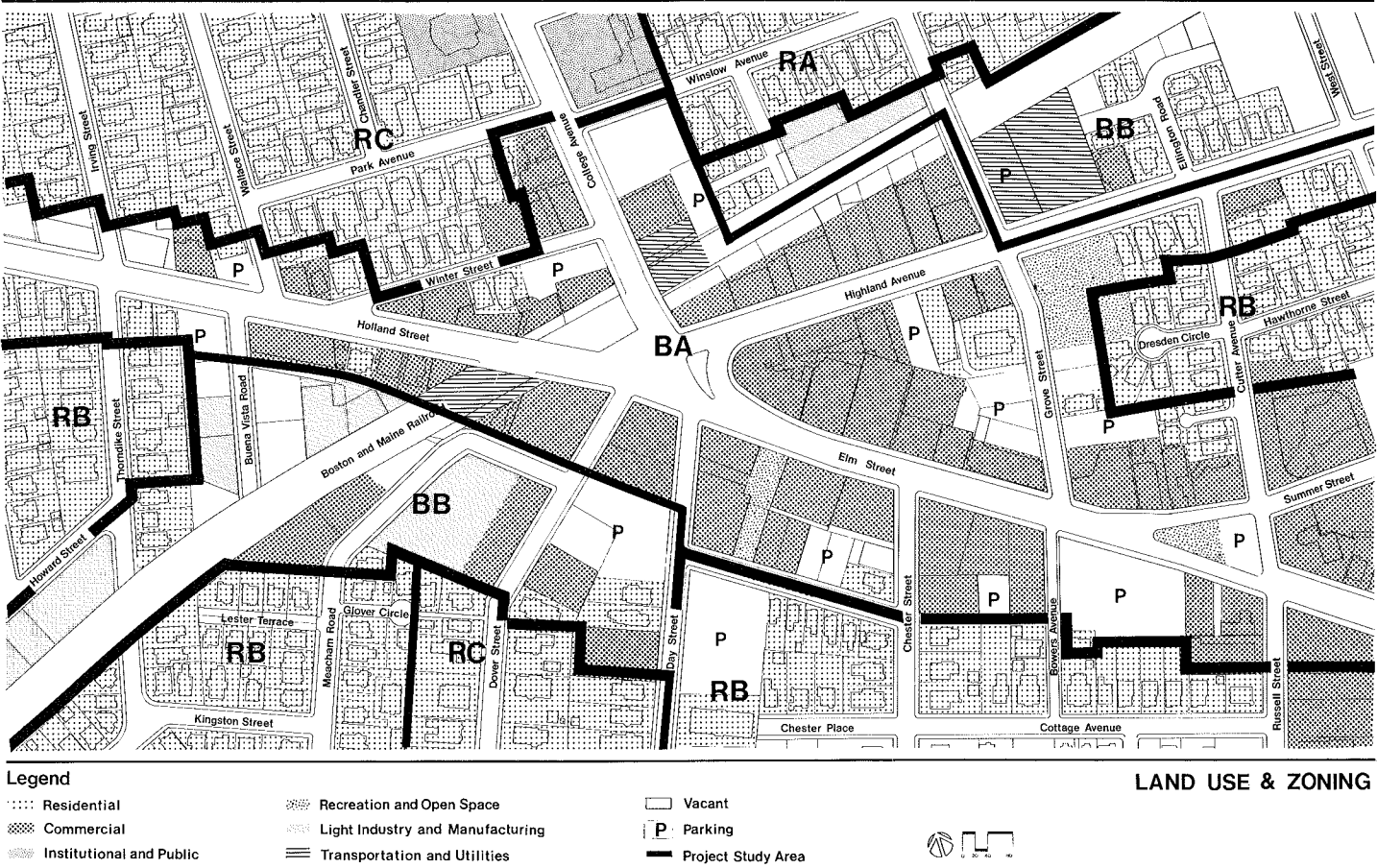
In addition to the four basic zoning districts described above, two other zoning districts overlay all or parts of the project study area. One of these is the Height-Limited (HL) Overlay District, which sets the limit on new building heights at four stories or 50 feet above grade, whichever is greater. The other is the Design Review (DR) Overlay District, which establishes specific design guidelines for Davis Square and requires OPCD review and approval of all designs for new construction or renovation.

Building Controls by Zoning District

Fig 1

Zoning District	Floor Area Ratio (a)	Maximum Building Height	Minimum Building Setbacks (ft)		
			Frnt.	Sd.	Rr.
Residential (RA)	.75	2½	15	6	20
Residential (RB)	1.00	3	15	8	20
Residential (RC)	2.00	None (b)	15	6	20
Business (BA)	2.00	None (b)	None		20
Business (BB)	2.00	None (b)	None		20
Height-limited (HL)	NA	4 stories/50'	NA	NA	NA
Design Review	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

a. Total lot area compared to gross floor area of all floors excluding basement.
b. Except where limited by HL District Zoning.



The issue of movement and parking of automobiles is of great concern to all who inhabit, work in, and shop in a mixed commercial and residential area. People who live in the Davis Square area need to park their cars on-street near their houses. Merchants and employees require a place to park their personal vehicles during the day. Shoppers arriving by car need a safe, convenient, and inexpensive place to park. With limited space and a complicated traffic pattern in Davis Square, pedestrians and vehicles often compete for the same space. When the transit station is completed, new conflicts as well as new opportunities will arise.

Since 1978, the OPCD, the Davis Square Task Force and the business community have recognized the need to create a more organized traffic and parking system for the Square. Issues identified are as follows:

- More clearly defined traffic routes for drivers entering the Square;
- Additional and more visible shoppers' parking;
- Additional long-term parking for employees; and
- A residential parking program to protect adjacent neighborhoods from shoppers and commuter parking.

In general, cars flow into the Square in a radial pattern from all directions. Currently 25,000 cars per day flow into Davis Square, the majority from the east via Elm Street and Highland Avenue. The flow pattern creates a traffic rotary around the triangular block bounded by Elm, Highland, and Grove Streets, thus distributing traffic to all secondary arterial and neighborhood streets.

Peak hourly volumes occur in Davis Square between 7 and 8 a.m. and 4 and 5 p.m., constituting together 15 percent of the daily traffic. This situation translates to approximately 1,100 cars moving west on Highland Avenue and about the same volume moving east on Elm Street during the morning peak, and slightly more during the eve-



Midday Traffic on Elm Street

ning rush hour. With completion of the MBTA station and the introduction of kiss-and-ride traffic, peak hour increases may be expected on all streets.

Pedestrians currently use Davis Square in greater numbers during the noon hour than in the morning or evening peaks. However, there are high pedestrian volumes at all hours in the heart of the Square, creating vehicle and pedestrian conflicts. When the MBTA station is built, these vehicle/pedestrian conflicts may be considerably amplified during peak hours. A major city initiative to improve traffic flow and pedestrian circulation is planned for Davis Square. Using Urban Systems funds from the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (MDPW), the City plans to install new signalization to minimize the problem.

According to surveys, half of the workers coming to Davis Square currently arrive by car and the other half by transit, walking, or carpooling. However, only 40 percent of shoppers are estimated to be drivers.* Forty percent of the shoppers are from the immediate area, and they are making a short trip to the Square — less than an hour in duration — to purchase convenience goods.

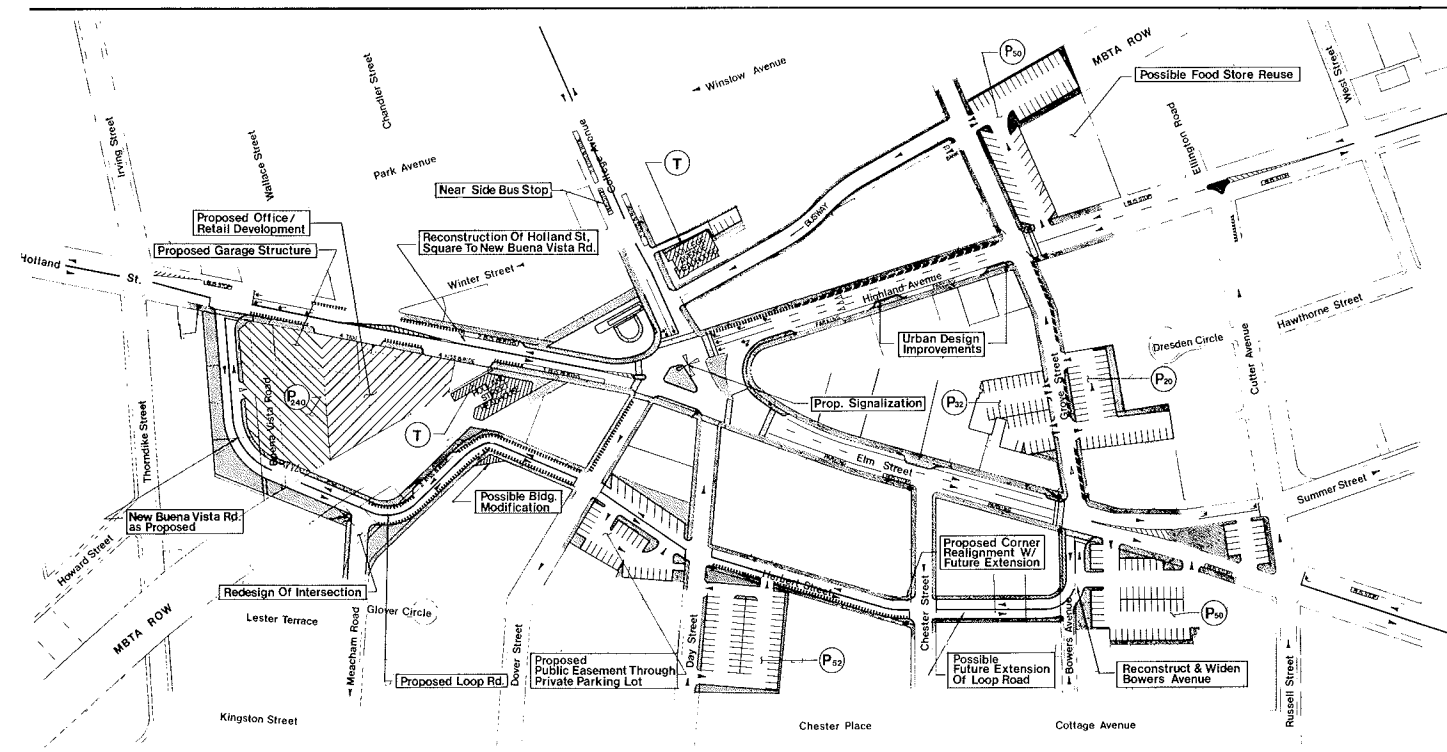
The existing supply of parking in Davis Square is 960 spaces, while the current demand is for 1,139 spaces. This creates a 179-space deficit. While the problem currently is not acute, with the completion of the transit station, the demand for parking should increase.

*Both estimates based on Task Force studies and telephone surveys.

- Minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflicts.
- Minimize through traffic circulation in residential neighborhoods.
- Provide clear, efficient passage for general auto/vehicular traffic through the Square.
- Provide visible and accessible routes for drivers in search of parking.
- Provide increased roadway capacity for transit system drop-off (kiss-and-ride) activities.
- Provide more aggressive enforcement of traffic and parking ordinances to benefit shoppers and merchants.

- Increase the total number of parking spaces, particularly in conjunction with any new development.
- Improve the visibility of and access to existing parking lots to provide for greater use of these facilities.

Map B. Traffic Improvement Plan



DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

With the opening of the Red Line station, Davis Square offers unique reinvestment potential to capture existing and future office and retail markets. The OPCD surveyed and analyzed the Davis Square market potentials in association with Minot, DeBlois, and Maddison Inc. of Boston. The following is a summary of those findings.

OFFICE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In Davis Square, with the new transit improvements the need for new and renovated office space will dramatically increase. In addition, the increasing demand for office space in the greater Boston commercial real estate market will contribute to the development potential of Davis Square.

In defining office markets in Greater Boston, there are three geographical distinctions: central city, inner-suburban, and outer-suburban. Somerville is a part of the inner-suburban ring, located within minutes of downtown Boston. Within the combined suburban market, demand for office space exceeds supply by approximately 600,000 square feet per year.

Historically, Somerville has absorbed roughly two percent of the total suburban share of the market. Applying this two percent absorption rate, Somerville might expect to take some 60,000 to 120,000 square feet of the projected demand by 1985 for seven million square feet of office space for the entire suburban area.

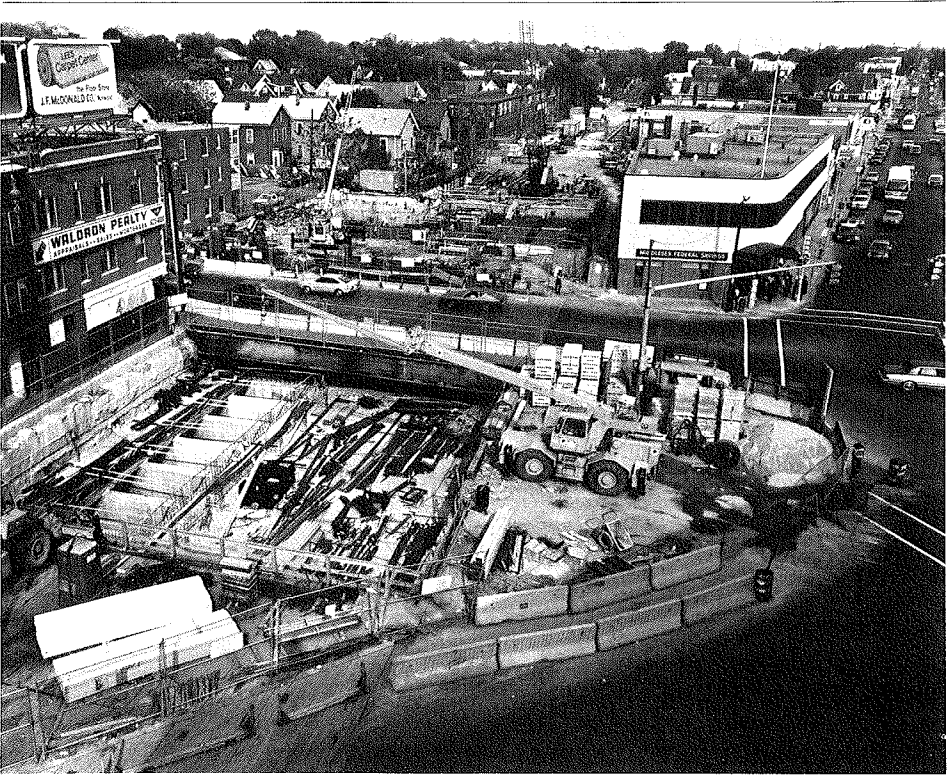
*"Land Use Impacts of Rapid Transit," U.S. Department of Transportation, December, 1977.

With the tax incentives given to commercial buildings over 40 years old by the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, many existing buildings in Davis Square may see substantial rehabilitation into prime office space.

The existence of several banking institutions, a post office, and other support facilities are important factors to be considered in decisions to develop office space in Davis Square. Because of the transit improvements, Davis Square's competitive position in the office development market will be enhanced.

A recent study of the impact of transit improvements on downtown centers concluded that "rapid transit improvements can help to induce increased downtown development."* The study also noted that "the presence of other supportive factors is essential," including the assemblage of parcels adjacent to the transit system.* The City and the Davis Square Task Force have identified a key parcel adjacent to the transit station along Buena Vista Road and are currently proceeding with plans for its redevelopment. The Buena Vista project is discussed in more detail as part of the Action Plan.

Red Line Construction, Davis Square, looking east toward the MBTA plaza area, 1982



RETAIL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The City of Somerville seeks to promote a stronger sense of identity for Davis Square and a higher level of commercial service for the surrounding community. With the opening of the transit station and the implementation of improvements to the pedestrian environment and storefronts, the Square will become a more attractive and convenient retail environment.

Although the population in and around Davis Square declined between 1970 and 1980, the number of households increased, indicating an in-migration of younger people with smaller families. Per capita incomes are rising, reflecting a trend now occurring in older cities as professionals move back into urban neighborhoods. Given this offsetting factor to population losses, the aggregate purchasing power of the market area is projected to increase over the next five years.

With a general pattern of in-migration of younger professionals to the neighborhood, a more attractive Davis Square can capture a large share of this new market. Over 1,000 new households are expected to reside in the overall trade area by 1985. This gradual shift in trade area demographics will further hasten Davis Square's revitalization.

Davis Square also has a specific locational advantage in its proximity to Tufts University. The student market is currently not being met by the retail mix that exists in the Square, nor is there a significant effort to aim promotional efforts at this market. A shuttle bus service between Davis Square and Tufts has been proposed. If retailers can take advantage of this incentive by targeting their sales to students, Davis Square might easily capture more of this market.

RETAIL POTENTIALS

Davis Square has the potential to support approximately 60,000 square feet of retail space in the next five years, given the estimated influx of residents and the new MBTA station. This scenario breaks down to 30,000 square feet devoted to durable goods; 20,000 to convenience goods; and 10,000 to eating and drinking.

Capture ratios, which represent a percentage of trade area retail expenditures, should range from 13 to 14 percent for a retail center such as Davis Square. The actual sales dollars represented by this projection for Davis Square would show an increase of between \$6.5 and \$13 million over current sales levels (\$11.1 million) by 1985.

Shoppers in Davis Square



RETAIL SURVEYS

As a follow-up to an earlier study of Davis Square completed in 1977, two surveys were undertaken in 1980. The first was a business survey administered to all retail and service establishments. Nearly 60 percent of those polled completed and returned the survey. The second was a survey of approximately 200 Davis Square shoppers taken on two weekdays and one Saturday at various times of the day.

SURVEY SUMMARIES

Businesses: Positive characteristics noted by businesspeople included the Square's convenient location and the impending arrival of the Red Line. However, many businesspeople identified the following areas for improvement: parking, traffic congestion, the Square's appearance, store variety, and security. **Shoppers:** Of the shoppers polled, over 40 percent live in the immediate Davis Square neighborhood and 80 percent in Somerville. Most shoppers come to Davis Square for food, clothing, and banking services.

The survey results indicated an important gap in the retail mix — a community food store — and although there are a number of eating and drinking establishments in the Square, the potential for a full-service dinner restaurant also appears quite strong. Additionally, many respondents cited the need for another clothing store as well as a broader range of shoppers' goods.

The following shoppers' goods store types have also been identified as those which would lend balance to the existing mix and provide new services to the area's untapped markets:

- cycle shops
- wine & cheese stores
- book shops
- men's & women's apparel stores
- hobby shops
- record & tape stores
- furniture stores
- crafts consignment shops
- camera stores
- artisan's supply stores
- pottery stores
- sewing notion & fabric stores

COMMERCIAL FLOOR AREA INVENTORY

Business Type	Sq. ft.	%
Shoppers Goods	127,350	38.6%
General Merchandise	81,750	24.8%
Apparel/Accessories	16,670	5.0%
Furniture/Appliances	10,070	3.1%
Miscellaneous Retail	18,860	5.7%
Convenience Goods	21,330	6.4%
Food	12,580	3.8%
Drugs/Personal Care	6,000	1.8%
Alcoholic Beverages	2,750	.8%
Eating and Drinking	44,000	13.3%
Building Supply/Hardware	3,205	1.0%
Personal Services	26,805	8.1%
Professional Services	81,690	24.8%
Automotive	25,580	7.8%
Total	329,960	100.0%

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

One of the major goals of the Davis Square Action Plan is to preserve the character and quality of life in the residential neighborhoods which surround the commercial core. To achieve this goal the OPCD has: a) developed programs which provide financial assistance to eligible homeowners for property rehabilitation; b) secured subsidies to provide rental assistance for low and moderate income tenants; and c) identified sites appropriate for future residential development in cooperation with the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA), private developers, and the Davis Square Task Force. Each of the major components of this strategy is described in more detail below.

The OPCD provides the following programs on a citywide basis to homeowners undertaking property rehabilitation:

- **SOMERVILLE HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (SHIP)**
The SHIP program offers a 30 percent rebate on code-related repairs approved by OPCD rehabilitation staff. (Low income homeowners are eligible for a 50 percent rebate.) The maximum rebate is \$1,500.
- **INTEREST REDUCTION PROGRAM**
The Interest Reduction Program is designed to provide financial and technical assistance to qualified homeowners whose properties have been determined to be in violation of the State Sanitary Code. The Program provides eligible homeowners with financing for property rehabilitation at an effective interest rate of six, ten, or 14 percent, depending on the applicant's adjusted gross income.

- **SOMERVILLE HOME ASSISTANCE PAINT PROGRAM (SHAPP)**

The SHAPP program provides a rebate of \$15 per gallon of paint utilized by eligible homeowners to paint their homes.

- **SECTION 8 MODERATE REHABILITATION PROGRAM**

The Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program provides a guaranteed rental income to property owners to finance eligible property improvements. In addition to providing financial assistance for property owners, the Section 8 Program subsidizes monthly rental payments for low and moderate income tenants to a level which is equivalent to 25 percent of their monthly income.

In addition to the programs described above, the OPCD offers a variety of programs designed to provide technical and financial assistance for home weatherization and energy conservation.

There are a number of development opportunities for new housing in the Davis Square area which the OPCD is actively pursuing. The Davis Square plan recommends elderly housing on the vacant site formerly occupied by the Woodbridge Inn. The SHA has received a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to construct elderly and family housing and is working with the OPCD and the Davis Square Task Force to develop this project on the Woodbridge site. Negotiations are currently underway on this important aspect of the overall revitalization plan. If realized, the proposed elderly development will provide much needed housing for low income elderly and will serve to define the boundary of the commercial area.

Another potential housing development site is the Summer Street vent shaft location. This 16,000 square foot parcel of land will be available for development in the fall of 1982.

As part of the City's School Reuse Process, the former Lowe School on Morrison Avenue was offered for private development in 1981. The accepted proposal was selected by a committee comprised of neighborhood residents, the Ward Alderman, and representatives of the OPCD. The project, which is currently underway, will renovate the structure to include 16 condominium units.

In addition to the public/private housing rehabilitation and development efforts described above, the Davis Square plan also anticipates increased levels of private investment in the neighborhood's housing stock by younger, upwardly mobile households. This increased private investment, combined with programs to assist low and moderate income residents, will result in a diversified and stable residential area.

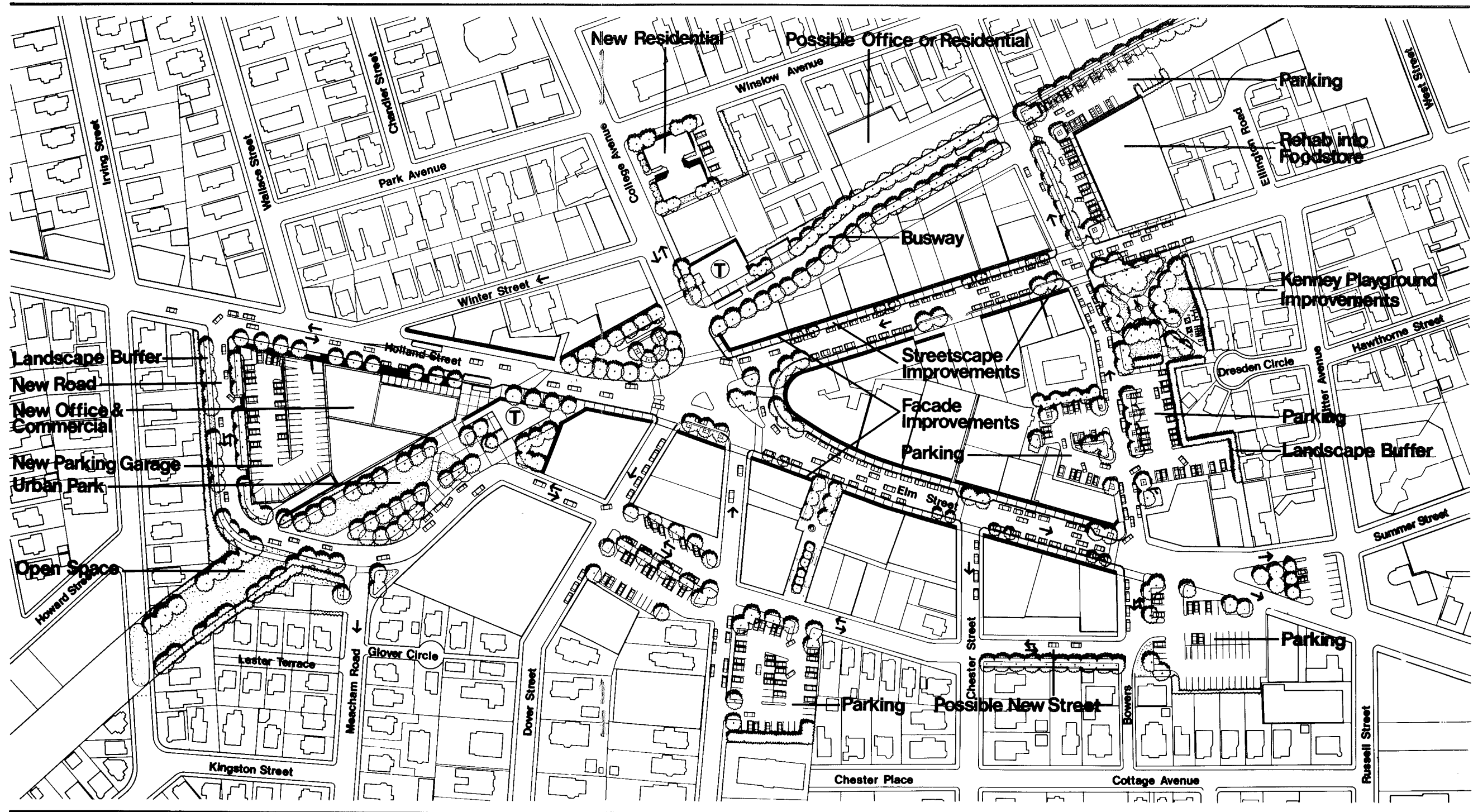
Summary

The analysis of development potentials associated with the transit station location, and the goals and objectives of area residents and businesses, have led to the formulation of the Davis Square Action Plan which is outlined in the following sections.

THE ACTION PLAN

Summary Annotated Action Plan

The planning work of the last several years has sought to make the most of the advantages afforded Davis Square as a result of the Red Line extension. An improved image combined with a variety of new and existing services should create many opportunities both for current entrepreneurs and new investors in the Square. The continued interest of the City of Somerville in the management of development will lend stability to the process. A public/private alliance is the key to implementing actions which address the issues explored in this report. That alliance is an important factor in many of the planned actions summarized on the following pages.



DAVIS SQUARE
CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS



Graphic by Alan Ward

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS AND INCENTIVES

The MBTA construction of the Red Line in Davis Square is projected for completion in 1983, with full system operation in 1984. The Davis Square station will be served by two entrances, at College Avenue and Holland Street. These entrances will lead to a mezzanine where fares will be collected. The central platform will be below and will be illuminated naturally by a skylight. The College Avenue entry will include a bus waiting area which will be protected from the weather. Buses will serve the station via a new busway constructed behind the Highland Avenue frontage between Grove Street and College Avenue.

The College Avenue building has been designed so that an air-rights building may be constructed above the station entrance. Between the two station entrances is a plaza area designed by the station's architects, Goody Clancy Associates of Boston. The plaza, which will include tree plantings and sculpture, will be situated on the corner of College Avenue and Holland Street between the two new entries to the transit station. New benches and trash receptacles will be installed, and pedestrian crossing areas will be improved.

As part of the Red Line Extension Project, the MBTA will provide major open space improvements which will result in a public plaza and park directly adjacent to office development described herein. The open space improvements will include brick sidewalks, tree plantings, benches and sculpture. These improvements will upgrade the Square's image and create a more pleasant pedestrian environment.



Courtesy of James Tyler, Sculptor

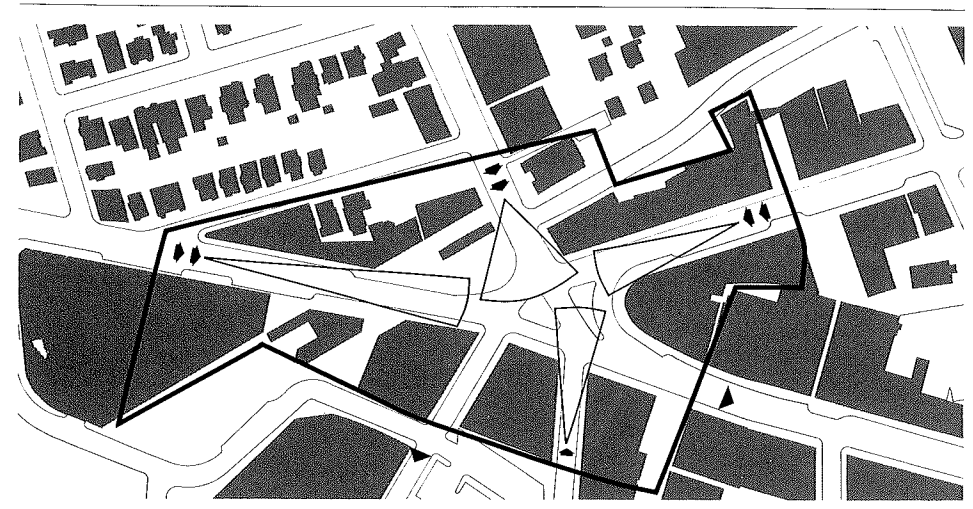
"Fishman and Fisherwoman" by James Tyler, sculpture which will be installed on the MBTA plaza in Davis Square as part of the Arts on the Line project

In addition to the MBTA improvements, the City of Somerville will provide funding for a wide range of public improvements designed to foster revitalization. These improvements will include construction of additional public parking facilities, street and sidewalk repairs, facade improvements, landscaping, and other public open space improvements.

NEIGHBORHOOD APPROACHES AND EDGES

Approaching the commercial core of the Square from any of the surrounding neighborhoods, an individual is moving through a moderately tightly-built corridor which focuses attention on the principal corners of the Square and the buildings which occupy them. These sites, the focal areas in the irregular radial plan, deserve special design attention. The MBTA plaza is an effort which is indicative of the care that must be taken. The Somerville Theatre building, the One Davis Square Building, and the corner building at Elm and Highland are substantial existing buildings, the treatments of which are extremely important to the appearance of the Square.

The irregular pattern of the streets leading into Davis Square creates a complex pattern of edges between residential and commercial uses. These complex edges may be sensitive because of the land use differences on either side. These uses may be either visually and functionally compatible, or not. If they are not — for example, a 24-hour commercial use or even a parking lot next to a single family residence — there must be an attempt to buffer the edges. Planting trees is one way to do this. Walls and fences may also be used.



ENTRY VIEWS FROM CARS
VIEWS AWAY FROM SQUARE
CORE BOUNDARY

Davis Square Core Area Views

THE IMAGE OF DAVIS SQUARE

An important part of any plan for the enhancement of Davis Square is the effort to create a strong image of an attractive place in which to live, work, and shop. This Action Plan addresses the need for storefront, streetscape and open space improvements.

STREETSCAPE

In response to the surveys of shoppers and merchants in Davis Square, the OPCD has proposed sidewalk improvements for Elm Street, Highland Avenue, and Holland Street. The improvements to the retail core include sidewalk widenings at intersections and at midblock. These widenings will occur on one side of the street so that three unimpeded lanes will continue to carry traffic efficiently through the Square by limiting parking at peak hours.

New street trees will be planted at the widened areas and wherever feasible in other areas. New street furniture — benches, trash receptacles, and street lights — will be installed.

The Urban Systems Roadway Improvements Program, administered by the MDPW, provides up to 100 percent of construction costs for the type of streetscape improvements outlined above. The City has made preliminary application to the MDPW, and is hoped that funds for traffic and streetscape improvements will be approved.



Davis Square streetscape with new street trees and benches

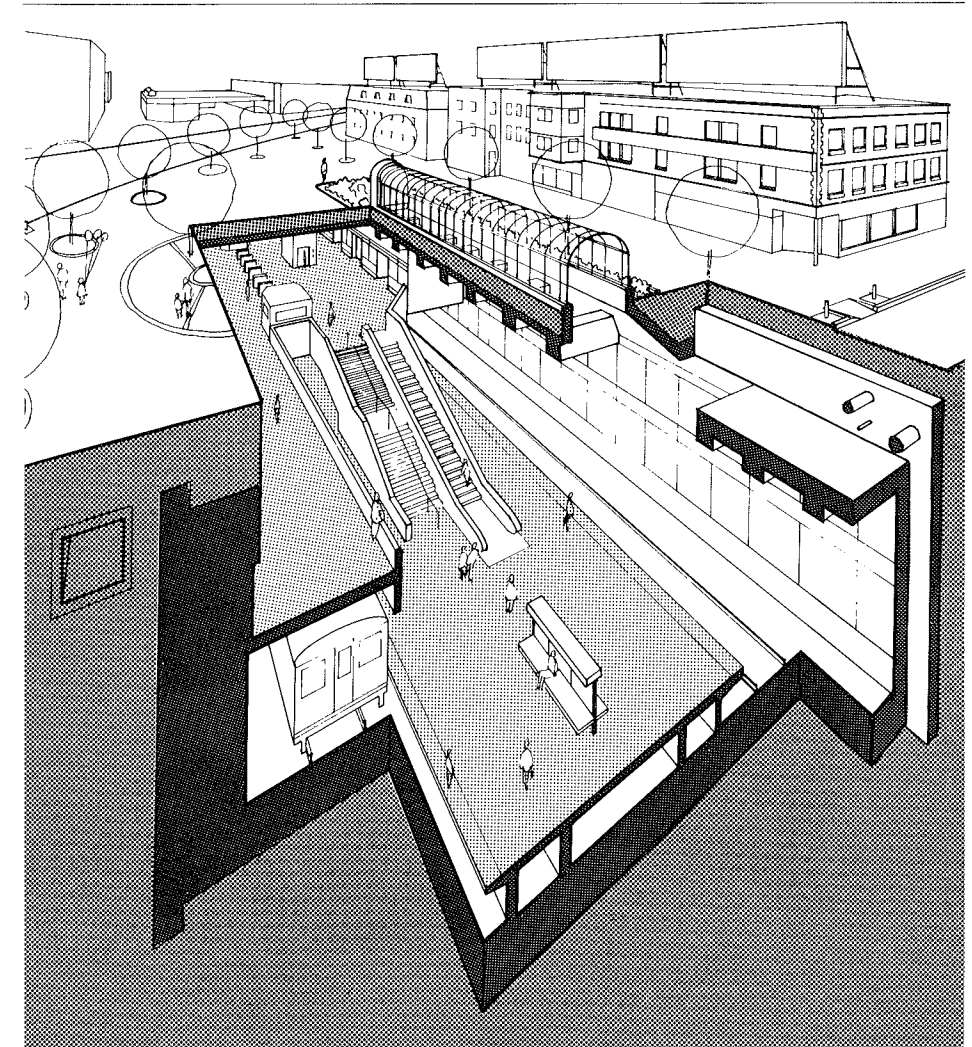
OPEN SPACE

Two substantial urban plazas will be created by the MBTA. As noted earlier, a public plaza will be created at the corner of Holland Street and College Avenue. This corner plaza will be expressed by street trees and benches in a semi-circular design. The base of the semi-circle defines the line of pedestrian flow between the station headhouses and to and from a second MBTA plaza adjacent to the Buena Vista parcel on the old Boston and Maine right-of-way.

Land above the MBTA right-of-way, west of Davis Square station, will be made available to the City of Somerville. The City, with the Davis Square Task Force, is currently in the process of making a decision about the future use of the property. The MBTA right-of-way could provide an important link to open spaces in Cambridge, and Fresh Pond. The OPCD will continue to pursue ways to maintain the link and also address the concerns of abutters.

Kenney Park, Davis Square's most important existing open space, will be renovated as part of the City's ongoing open space improvements. Construction will take place in the spring of 1983.

Perspective of the new MBTA plaza with a cutaway view to platform below



Courtesy of Goody Clancy Associates

Other open space recommendations:

- Design improvements are needed on the through-block plaza between Elm and Herbert Streets. New trees, pedestrian lighting, and a sculptural element would create a more attractive pedestrian space. The City should work to maintain this important through-block connection.
- Acquire other vacant railroad lands east of Davis Square for possible use by abutters and as pedestrian connection to the Square.
- Encourage private developers to create rooftop gardens, terraces, atria, and other open spaces in new developments.

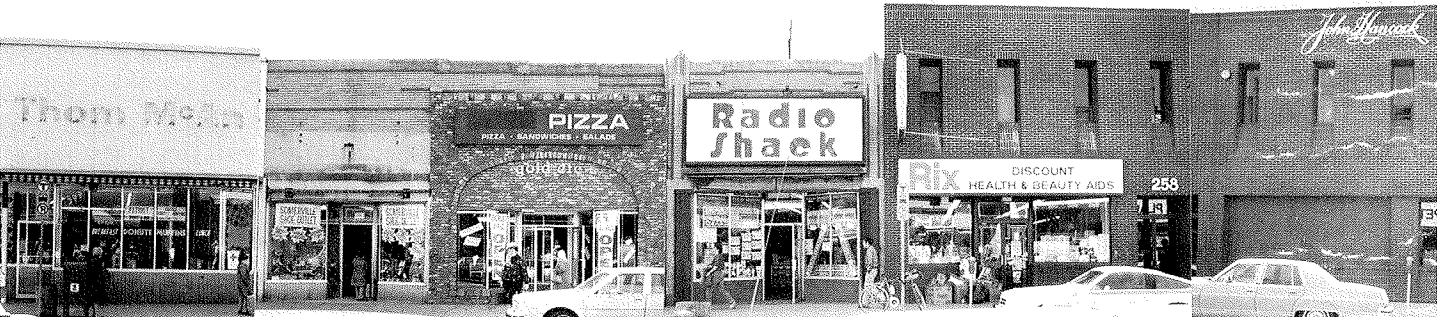
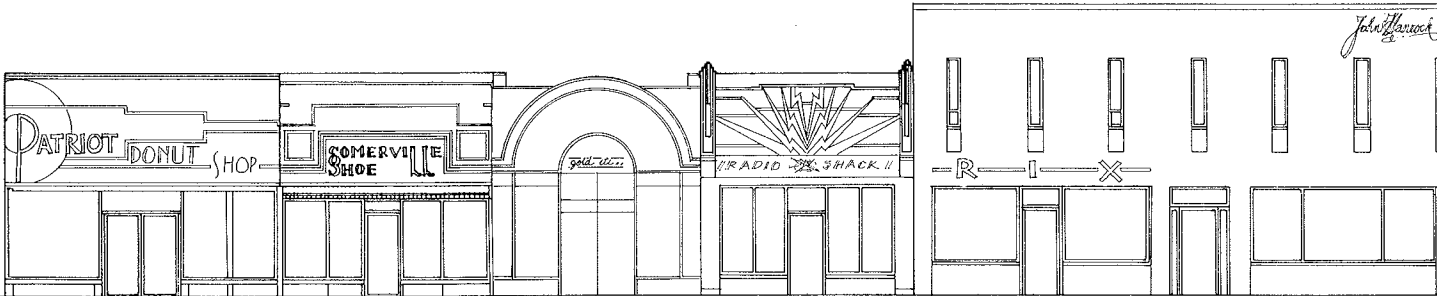
STOREFRONTS

Well-maintained storefronts and coordinated signs project the image of a shopping district which is economically stable and attractive to both investors and shoppers. The commercial buildings in Davis Square represent a rich diversity of styles from 1870 to the present. Most of these structures need only minor rehabilitation and maintenance of facades and storefronts.

In order to conserve and enhance the visual image of Davis Square, the OPCD has developed a design ordinance for rehabilitation which addresses architectural character, scale, and detail; materials and colors; doors and windows; and lighting, awnings, and signs. The underlying principle of these guidelines is respect for the existing scale and architectural order of the buildings, particularly as they are reflected in the bay system, floor heights, and signage areas that were established in the original designs.

The City of Somerville has a variety of resources to aid in storefront renovation:

- The OPCD has measured base drawings of all facades in the Square and will make these available to owners interested in renovation.
- A Storefront Improvement Program provides for architectural design services and a one-half rebate on the cost of facade improvements up to a limit of \$5,000 per storefront. Improvements must follow the design guidelines set out by the OPCD.
- A design review process has been developed by the OPCD in order to assure that the design guidelines for commercial rehabilitation will be followed. All designs will be reviewed by OPCD staff in regard to signage, lighting and architectural expression.



TRAFFIC

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRAFFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Install new traffic signals and street markings to regularize traffic flows and allow pedestrians to cross safely.
- Regulate parking during peak hours so that traffic will not congest the Square's major streets.
- Create a one-way system which will discourage commercial core-destined traffic from entering residential areas.
- Provide a well-identified parking lot system which is connected to the kiss-and-ride areas near the transit station.
- Centralize and control peak hour impacts of traffic generated by new development.

The City of Somerville has applied for monies from the Urban Systems Roadway Improvement Fund, through the MDPW, for improved traffic controls including new signs and signals, lane channelization, and pedestrian crossings. Additionally, anticipated new shopping and commuter drop-off traffic may be re-routed to a new loop road created by the relocation and extension of Buena Vista Road.

PARKING

HIGHLIGHTS OF PARKING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a parking structure on the Buena Vista parcel and new lots along Grove Street between Elm Street and Highland Avenue, near the MBTA Row east of the Holland Street headhouse.
- Institute a residential on-street parking sticker program to reduce business parking on residential streets.
- Discourage long-term usage of the limited retail parking spaces through better enforcement of existing regulations and installation of short-term meters. Regulate new facilities to discourage commuter parking.
- Enforce regulations of loading zones which have been established at key locations in the Square. These zones are designed to reduce vehicle conflicts during peak hours and to clarify the parking situation.
- Institute a system for validated parking for shoppers.

Monies have been made available to the Traffic Commission by the OPCD specifically for the implementation of a resident parking program in the Davis Square area. This will be a pilot program for a citywide effort; implementation is expected in the summer of 1982.

OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

The market for renovated office space is promising, and renovation of existing structures will be encouraged. The City of Somerville will also promote the development of the Buena Vista parcel and other key parcels in Davis Square for office and office/retail development. At the same time, the developers of parcels which benefit by public incentives will be required to meet certain conditions specific to each site necessary to protect the interests of the community.

The proposed Buena Vista parcel is a public/private venture programmed to promote the construction of a 40-50,000 square foot office/retail complex with a 240-car parking garage next to the Red Line station. The City is offering two significant incentives for the development of this parcel:

- **240-car parking garage** — The City has already received approval from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a \$2 million grant to construct this facility on the Buena Vista site to support new office and retail space, as well as to provide additional public supply for existing businesses.
- **Land Bank financing** — The Massachusetts Government Land Bank has given a favorable preliminary review to a proposal by the City to use its urban renewal authority to assemble the parcel, relocate existing owners and tenants, clear existing structures, and prepare the site. Land Bank financing would allow the City to offer the site adjacent to the parking structure at a cost favorable to the development feasibility.

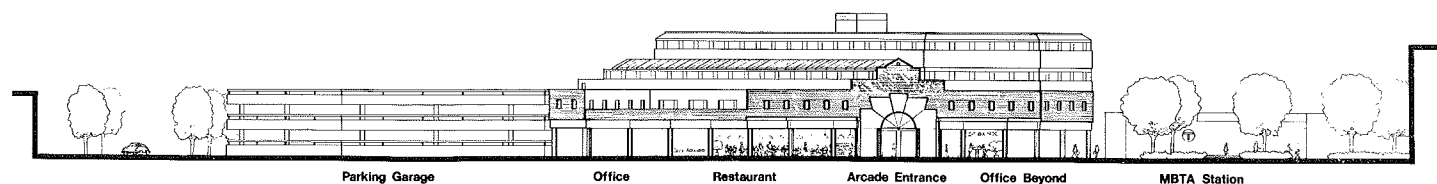
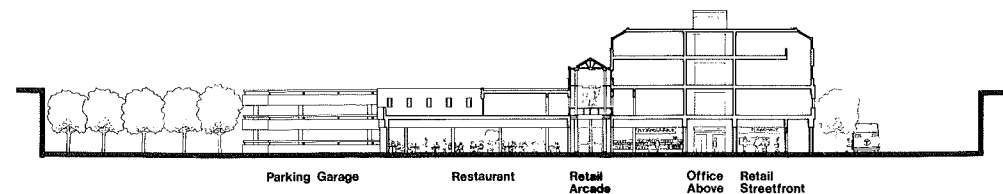
These public sector incentives for the Buena Vista parcel are offered with the

purpose of guiding the land use pattern, character, scale, and configuration of development which will occur there. Several conditions must therefore be met by the developer, including:

- the development of a retail arcade on the ground floor between the transit station and parking garage;
- the use of materials, such as brick, which relate to the character of many of the existing buildings in the Square;
- the limitation of the height of the building to 50 feet; and
- the orientation of the retail space to allow for a continuation of public-oriented retail frontage on Holland Street and for an appropriate use of the park frontage on the south side of the building.

The City is completing an Urban Renewal Plan which includes this project area and

Proposed Buena Vista project, schematic section looking west on Holland Street and elevation along MBTA right-of-way



is proceeding with land appraisals and the securing of a commitment from the Land Bank. The OPCD has prepared a Development Brief outlining preliminary feasibility, program, and timing. This document is available for review by prospective developers.

The construction of a new office/retail structure is seen as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the existing retail area, as well as adding to a new image of Davis Square. The City is sponsoring a controlled development of the Buena Vista parcel, with qualified support from area residents, as a way of providing a new market for existing retail, as well as increased jobs and revenues. Along with the efforts outlined for upgrading the existing streetscape and storefronts, Davis Square could substantially increase its level of service to the existing community and regain a healthy business climate.

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

The focus of the City's retail development strategy is to make policy and create programs which will promote:

- upgrading of existing retail businesses, as well as the modification and improvement of the retail mix;
- specific marketing targeted towards untapped existing markets (Tufts) as well as new markets resulting from the MBTA improvements;
- the development of a 15,000 to 20,000 square foot supermarket. The Davis Square Task Force has suggested that a full-service food store be built on the site at the corner of Highland Avenue and Grove Street currently occupied by the New England Telephone Company. The MBTA has agreed to provide an additional parking supply behind the building, which will double the number of existing spaces. This loca-

tion is also preferred by the City because it causes fewer traffic problems than other sites in the Square. The development of a full-service food store is a significant part of the effort to make Davis Square a full-service community shopping district for area residents. The City has begun discussions with New England Telephone regarding the disposition of this property, given the company's plans to vacate in late 1982. Several retail food concerns have indicated an initial interest.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The City will continue to encourage the rehabilitation of residential units through its SHIP program and through gradual re-investment in area housing. Sales and value will be monitored and an attempt to control unauthorized conversions should be fostered. Recent condominium controls are intended to protect existing residents, particularly the elderly, from the negative aspects of gentrification (i.e., the influx of more wealthy home buyers).

A strong recommendation of the Task Force relative to housing is the construction of elderly housing on the site of the old Woodbridge Inn on College Avenue. While this site may have some commercial value, there is certainly a need for elderly housing in West Somerville and there is a concern by area residents as to the limits of the commercial district.

The City is working cooperatively with the SHA in selecting sites for their recent grant of \$4.2 million for elderly housing, and is hopeful that a project in keeping with the character and scale of the community can be developed on this site within the constraints of the SHA requirements.

Any new housing development would be required to meet existing zoning requirements and design review criteria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

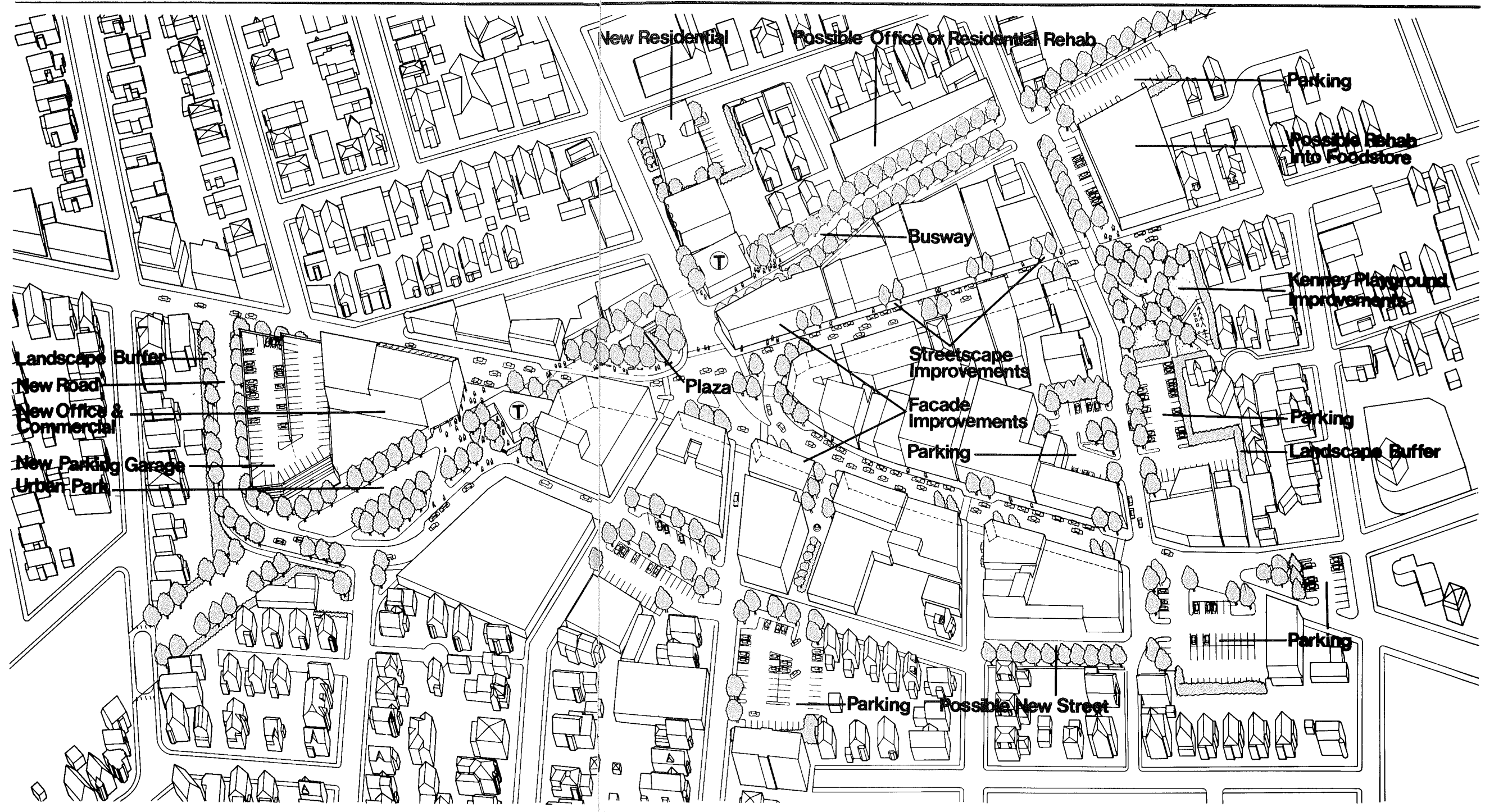
1. Property owners should be allowed to develop to the existing zoning and building code requirements as-of-right with administrative design review by the OPCD.
2. A property owner or developer should be able to elect to go through a special administrative design review process by the OPCD and a community design review process by an appointed community review board to be able to gain height and floor area ratio bonuses. This proposed procedure would be elective and would be initiated by the owner/developer with no guarantees given that any additional development rights would be granted.
3. A set of land use and design guidelines for ground floor uses should be established to insure active and attractive retail uses along the street.
4. Existing commercial land use categories should have extra side and rear yard set-backs required when adjacent to residential uses. Special landscape requirements to screen residential uses from commercial activity should be established to protect neighborhood edges.

CONCLUSION

A great deal of work has been done in planning for the revitalization of Davis Square. This latest effort has perhaps been the most extensive and comprehensive work yet, and it has striven to incorporate the important aspects of previous work. The process has been a long and arduous one, testing the endurance of the Task Force and public officials. It is clear as the opening of the subway station draws near that there is a need for action that will both foster commercial revitalization and protect the interests of area residents. This plan represents a balanced effort toward those goals and has been developed under the guiding concept of "a greater public good."

Timing and coordination are critical aspects of successful planning, and perhaps at no other time in the past has there been such a close alliance between the City administration and the residents and businesses in Davis Square.

The City is committed to managing the growth of Davis Square in a measured, constructive manner. The actions outlined in this report for coordinated office, retail and residential development are realistic and achievable. The OPCD will need the continued collaborative support of the Davis Square Task Force, members of the business community, and area residents in the process of making a more vital and attractive Davis Square.



DAVIS SQUARE CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS



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The Davis Square Task Force

Ward Six Civic Association

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