

# DRAFT 2 West Concord Village Design Guidelines

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### **A. Introduction**

#### **1) History**

West Concord established its identity as a separate village and developed its current architectural character between the mid-1870s and the 1920s. Its architectural character is defined by those styles popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—Queen Anne, Shingle, Italianate, and Colonial Revival—as well as the more vernacular forms of these styles used in the commercial construction which developed along Commonwealth Avenue, Main Street, directly surrounding the train depot built in 1893 to serve the growing population. Just beyond the developing commercial thoroughfares, in close proximity to the transportation hub, are the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mills, storehouses, and industries which drove the fortunes of this community. Less formal than the typical village center, its structures are defined more by their similarities in materials, scale and orientation than by a common architectural style or design. This combination of elements gives West Concord an architectural character unique to this area of Town which its residents value and are eager to retain.

Although the area had been continually, if sparsely, settled since the 1680s as a series of three small hamlets—Westvale, which centered around the mills along the Assabet River; Warnerville, surrounding Ralph Warner’s Nashoba Brook tub and pail factory; and the Reformatory, which is defined by the neighborhood of worker’s housing built around the Massachusetts Reformatory after its construction in 1878—it lacked both the commercial development and social institutions on which to center a village. This changed in the 1880s, however, when the construction of a new railroad junction began a period of extensive industrial and agricultural development in the area. The influx of new workers associated with the expanding local industries created a need for housing in the immediate area, as well as the stores, businesses, schools and religious institutions necessary to support the new community. With the construction of the West Concord School (now demolished) in 1886, the corner of Main Street and Church Street was established as the center of these village activities. Interestingly, the name “West Concord” was first used in connection to this school, which, along with the growing business community, helped to unite Westvale, Warnerville, and the Reformatory into the single village of West Concord that we know today.

West Concord was officially designated as a separate village by vote of Town Meeting in 1928 and continued to thrive as Concord’s commercial and industrial center through the first half of the twentieth century. New schools, churches and Concord’s first branch library were all constructed at the center of the village. As the area boomed and prospered, each of these institutions had the distinction of building architect-designed structures that uniquely reflected the architectural styles popular in that period. The eclectic mix of Queen Anne, Shingle, Spanish Revival, and Colonial Revival architecture, among others, distinguished this area from the rest of Concord and set the tone for West Concord’s residential and commercial developments. While West

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Concord's prominence as an industrial center eventually faded with the decline of the railroads, the village itself has maintained its distinctive character and has evolved over time into a "funky, affordable, service-oriented" center of small, primarily locally owned shops and residential neighborhoods.

### **2) Background**

The West Concord Task Force was established in 2008 to develop recommendations on how best to address issues facing West Concord. One of their first directives was also to begin work on how best to implement the recommendations made in Concord's Village Center Study. This document was recently completed under the direction of the Planning Board and drew both from information and goals expressed in existing planning documents as well as from input received from local residents. As developing design guidelines and a process for their review is the first recommendation made for West Concord Village, work on this document was one of the first tasks undertaken in 2008.

Design guidelines were also recommended in prior Town reports and studies, dating back to the 1987 Long Range Plan, the 1994 West Concord Study Committee Report, and the 2005 Comprehensive Long Range Plan. Preparation of the first draft of the guidelines was initiated by Town Planning staff who relied upon the narrative history of West Concord prepared by Anne McCarthy Forbes, the 2001 Historic Resources Masterplan, the Historic Districts Commission Guidelines, the research done to create the Church Street Historic District and other guidelines developed by communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

### **3) Purpose**

The purpose of the West Concord Design Guidelines is to encourage property owners, merchants, and residents to recognize, enhance, protect and promote West Concord Village's distinctive character and identity by providing guidance about renovations or redevelopment of buildings and sites before submitting applications for a site plan or a special permit to the Town for approval. West Concord Village is a community with a unique history and with physical qualities and characteristics that can be reinforced by planning and improvements that are specific and appropriate to this place. These guidelines seek to improve the village "experience" for residents, customers, employees and others by encouraging renovations and improvements that will create a unique and attractive image for each business while respecting the original design qualities of existing buildings as well as providing for open space and visual amenities. While high design standards and creativity are valued goals, the guidelines are intended to also encourage solutions which achieve these goals affordably so that business and property owners are benefited rather than burdened.

These guidelines are intended to provide a framework for property owners to use when making needed updates and alterations to their properties which respect and maintain those characteristics that make West Concord unique; they are not intended to prohibit new development. This framework is applicable to both existing structures and new

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construction, as well as to West Concord's waterways, streets, planting, parking facilities and other distinctive features. Property owners are encouraged to preserve existing structures that are consistent with the Village's "Period of Significance" (1880s to 1920s) whenever possible and to restore and retain original architectural features of buildings from this era. Where the existing structure was built in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century or has been significantly altered over the years, there can be greater flexibility in making major changes or alterations.

New development and redevelopment is certain to occur in West Concord as property owners change and businesses come and go. There are several large, under-utilized parcels in West Concord that have great potential for change within the existing zoning. At a minimum, any improvements or renovations must be compatible with applicable zoning and building codes, must satisfy permit requirements and conform to any other regulatory restrictions (such as the Wetlands Protection Act or sewer capacity issues). By referring to these guidelines as part of the planning and design process, it is hoped that property owners can identify more creative solutions for their renovation or development projects which not only maintain West Concord's village character but enhance it.

Lastly, it should be noted that many of the potential changes discussed below will require a building permit at a minimum and may also require further review and approval from the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. Property owners are advised to consult with the relevant Town Departments (Building, Planning, Public Works, etc.) at the start of the project to identify any potential questions or concerns. Property owners are also encouraged to consult with professional architects and contractors in considering any significant changes or new construction.

### **4) Architectural Landscape**

West Concord's diversity, as seen in its wide variety of architectural styles and building types, can present a challenge when trying to apply specific design guidelines. While the area encompassed by these design guidelines is relatively compact, it includes both commercial and industrial areas which have decidedly different architectural and development patterns. As both of these areas contribute to the unique character of the Village, the design guidelines have been structured to include both general suggestions for the area as a whole as well as specific recommendations for each of these architectural areas as well as for a third, new construction. These architectural areas are defined as follows:

- Commercial - This is primarily the area along Main Street and Commonwealth Avenue where the majority of West Concord's shops and restaurants are located. This area is typified by largely late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings with a clear architectural style which were built directly on the street to encourage window shopping and the easy display of goods. These buildings have been clearly designed to accommodate pedestrian access and often incorporate architectural details and trim.

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- **Industrial** - Found primarily on Beharrel Street and Bradford Street, West Concord's industrial buildings were designed to accommodate the manufacturing and transportation needs of their products, and as such, their focus is almost the opposite of their neighbors in the commercial areas. Pedestrian entrances are generally downplayed and often located on a side or non-street façade with little or no detail to announce their presence. Instead of focusing on the street, these buildings face inward. Buildings were organized around small courtyards which provided loading and unloading areas as well as exterior space for other industrial needs. As such, these buildings are generally well spaced out and surrounded by substantial open space, both paved and unpaved, and have the feel of a campus style development which is unique to West Concord.

Architecturally, buildings in these industrial areas have fewer architectural details and trim than their commercial neighbors, and are generally simple and utilitarian design. That is not to say, however, that these buildings are any less valuable to the history or landscape of West Concord, in particular the 19<sup>th</sup> century mill buildings along Bradford Street which are iconic examples of New England mill buildings with a definite architectural design.

- **New Construction** - New construction should be relevant to, and in keeping with, its surrounding, irrespective of which area it is located in. However, it has also been acknowledged that West Concord cannot maintain its varied and diversified nature unless it continues to foster new growth and ideas. To allow more latitude in the design, style, and materials used for new construction, recommendations for these structures have been separated from those for existing buildings.

### **5) Applicability**

All West Concord property owners are strongly encouraged to use these design guidelines when planning and designing potential renovations or redevelopments of their properties. Any significant change to an existing building or property will likely require a permit from either the Planning Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals; most of the commercially developed properties in West Concord will require a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals to change, alter or extend the pre-existing, nonconforming use or structure, while most change of uses in the Business zoning district and some in the Industrial zoning district will require a special permit from the Planning Board while the West Concord Interim Planning Overlay District is in effect. Many sites will require Site Plan Review from either the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals will take these design guidelines into consideration when reviewing applications for potential developments within the Village's commercial area. These Boards are required to consider the following when reviewing an application for a special permit, and must determine that the adverse effects of the proposed use will not outweigh the beneficial impacts to the public interest, the Town and the neighborhood, in view of the particular characteristics of the site and of the proposal in relation to the site:

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- Impacts on economic or community needs;
- Traffic flow and safety concerns, including parking and loading;
- Adequacy of utilities and other public services;
- Impacts on neighborhood character;
- Impacts on the natural environment; and
- Fiscal impacts, including impacts on town services, the tax base and employment.

In addition, when Site Plan Review is required (which is the case whenever there is an increase in the amount of pavement, a change in parking or access locations, a change in parking requirements or more than 500 square feet of building proposed), the Boards are required to evaluate a site plan using the following criteria for all uses (except educational, religious or child care facility) (see the Concord Zoning Bylaw Section 11.8):

- (a) Protection of adjoining premises against seriously detrimental uses by provision for surface water drainage, sound and sight buffers, and preservation of views, light and air;
- (b) Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site, the location of driveway openings in relation to traffic or to adjacent streets and, when necessary, compliance with other regulations for the handicapped, minors and the elderly;
- (c) Adequacy of the methods of disposal of refuse and other wastes resulting from the uses permitted on the site;
- (d) Adequacy of the arrangement of parking and loading spaces in relation to the proposed uses of the premises;
- (e) Adequacy of the method of exterior lighting for convenience, safety and security within the site and for protection of neighboring properties, roadways and the night sky;
- (f) Relationship of structures and open spaces to the natural landscape, existing buildings and other community assets in the area and compliance with other requirements of this Bylaw; and,
- (g) Impact on the Town's resources including the effect of the Town's water supply and distribution system, sewage collection and treatment, fire protection, and streets.

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## 5) Map

For the purposes of these Design Guidelines, “West Concord” has been defined as the land zoned for commercial and industrial use which is located within the West Concord Interim Planning Overlay District (IPOD). Below is a map of the included area which is outlined in red.

