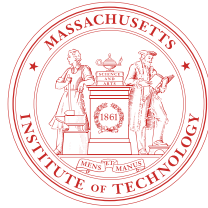




# Revitalizing Urban Main Streets: Roslindale Village



May 2005

Dear Roslindale Village Main Streets:

Thank you for welcoming us into the Roslindale community. Working with RVMS has given our team an opportunity to better understand the integrated nature of urban design and economic development within the context of a successful and storied district. In a three-stage work process that began with an inventory of existing conditions, continued with the development of a strategic vision, and ended with the formulation of a concrete set of recommendations, it is with great pleasure that we present you with this comprehensive main street revitalization plan.

As the product of a partnership between Roslindale Village Main Streets and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Department of Urban Studies and Planning, this revitalization plan highlights how integrated design and economic development efforts in current and future endeavors will help Roslindale enhance its sense of place, promote its district core as a civic center, and preserve its unique “village” identity. The existing natural, cultural, and historic elements of the district provide a strong and viable framework from which redevelopment strategies and district growth must be tied, and are essential elements in defining what the Roslindale “village” is to be.

We wish to extend our thanks to the community, residents, business owners, and many others who participated in our information gathering and assessment process, contributing to our understanding of the district and the final development of this proposal. Your dedicated and continued commitment to building a better Roslindale Village will assure the successful implementation of the plan, and in turn the continued growth and success of the main street district.

Sincerely,

The MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Revitalizing Urban Main Streets Roslindale Village Team



# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	5
<b>Existing Conditions</b>	7
A. About Roslindale Village	9
B. Who lives in Roslindale?	10
C. Physical Assessment	12
D. Economic Assessment	25
<b>Village Elements</b>	35
A. Adams Park	37
B. Gateways	43
C. Streetscape	51
D. Washington Street	55
E. Traffic	63
F. Parking	67
G. Business Mix	71
H. District Image	75
<b>Future Direction</b>	79
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	83
<b>Appendices</b>	85





**Roslindale Village** is one of Boston's special places. The community is filled with unique physical assets – landmarks, interesting views, and numerous gathering places along a pedestrian-scale street grid. Roslindale's population is stable, vibrant, and diverse – families are continuing to make their homes in Roslindale and neighborhood incomes are rising. New businesses are joining decades-old shops in providing a wide variety of goods and services. In short, Roslindale is not just a commercial center, but a true *village*.

Roslindale Village Main Streets has achieved remarkable success over the past 20 years in reversing a trend of decline. Today, Roslindale faces a new set of challenges: how does the village continue its strong growth while retaining its unique character? In what ways can the Main Streets organization strengthen its role in helping the village achieve its full potential?

Answering these questions requires a three-step process:

1. The first step is to define a vision that best captures the spirit of Roslindale – a vision that is based on its unique *village* character

2. The second step is to identify specific goals and strategies to advance the vision in both the short and long term

3. The third step is to establish an organizational framework for Main Streets to develop the tools to achieve these goals

This document begins with an assessment of existing conditions. What makes a Roslindale a village? Which aspects of the village are currently successful? Which aspects need improvement? The first chapter finds that Roslindale has strong physical assets, such as Adams Park, but also certain liabilities, such as congested traffic. Roslindale has a number of strengths to build upon and shortcomings to be addressed – there is room to grow as a *village*.

The second chapter outlines the goals and strategies that will help maintain Roslindale's unique village character as the district continues to develop. These goals and strategies span the gamut of physical, economic, and organizational interventions: improvements to Adams Park and the district's gateways; changes to traffic circulation and parking strategies; upgrades to streetscape and pedestrian circulation;

and unified efforts for business support and district marketing. Each of these elements has short and long term components that can be implemented incrementally as opportunities arise.

The third chapter discusses the steps required to implement the elements of the plan. More broadly, this chapter describes ways in which Main Streets can reposition itself for the challenges that lie ahead. The successes of the past twenty years have provided a firm foundation from which to grow the organization, cultivate new and existing relationships, and increase capacity and skills. Main Streets faces specific challenges – but also *opportunities* – in re-focusing its strategies for governance, community support, fiscal strength and sustainability, communications, and strategic partnerships.

Roslindale Village has been one of Boston's most successful Main Streets districts. By developing a community vision, a set of goals and strategies, and an implementation framework, Main Streets can help Roslindale grow even more prosperous while maintaining its unique character – ensuring that the village's best days are yet to come.

# Executive Summary



# Chapter 1 • Existing Conditions





Roslindale is located six miles southwest of downtown Boston. Covering approximately three square miles, Roslindale borders Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury, Hyde Park, and Mattapan. The population of Roslindale began to grow substantially in the late 19th century with the installation of trolley lines from downtown Boston to Dedham, which greatly facilitated commuter trips to and from the district. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Roslindale was one of the strongest commercial areas in southwest Boston. Yet as with many urban neighborhoods across the country, the district lost many of its customers to new, suburban malls during the 1960's. Many local businesses were forced to close as shoppers and competing businesses moved to shopping centers such as the Dedham Mall. As a result, the district saw great deterioration in the 1970's and 1980's, with high rates of abandonment and arson.



In 1983, Roslindale Village, as part of the Urban Demonstration Project, became the first urban application of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street model. The Roslindale Village Main Street

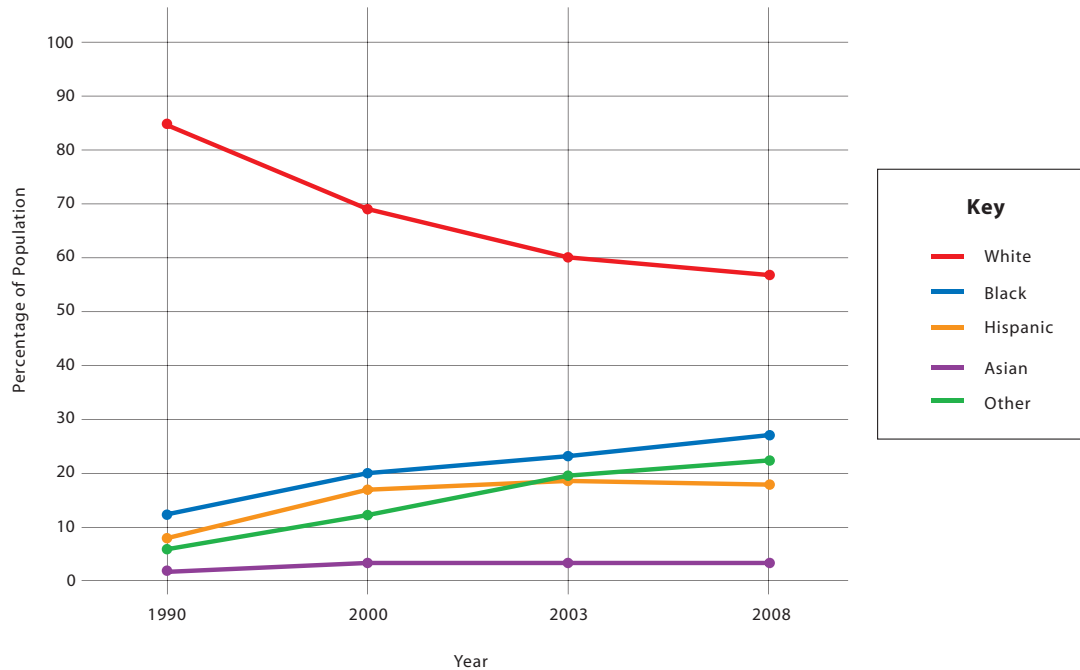
(RVMS) organization has been working to improve the business district in Roslindale Square for over twenty years by refurbishing dozens of commercial buildings and

façades, supporting local businesses, and organizing many social community events.

Roslindale Village and surrounding neighborhoods

# About Roslindale Village

Population by Race (in Percent)



One of the most important tasks facing RVMS is adjusting to the changing demographics of Roslindale. The population of Roslindale grew slightly between 1990 and 2000, and growth is expected to remain stable in the next decade. According to projections published with the 2000 US Census, 26,937 people lived in Roslindale in 2003, and it is anticipated that the total population will increase only to 27,200 by 2008.

The diversity of the Roslindale community is one of the core strengths of this district and is central in shaping the village identity. In recent years, Roslindale has seen increasing racial diversity, and according to projections, racial diversity in Roslindale is expected to increase. As the proportion of black, Hispanic, and other minorities increase, the white population is expected to decrease in size. The percentage of residents born outside of the United States has also grown from 1990 to 2000, suggesting increasing diversity and a greater international presence in the district. There are several cultural groups that add to Roslindale's ethnic richness that are not represented in these Census figures. For example, the Greek community holds a visible presence in the neighborhood, as evidenced by the Vouros Pastry Shop, the Roslindale Fish Market, and Alexander the Great Park.

# Who lives in Roslindale?

Average household income in Roslindale in 2003 was approximately \$59,000, which is

higher than the city average. Household income grew during the 1990's, and the total income of Roslindale families is projected to increase by 17% to \$64,363 by 2008.

The 2000 US Census is the latest comprehensive count of Roslindale residents and may not reflect more recent demographic shifts in the area. The Census Bureau and several repackaged data products offer projections based on trends from earlier censuses. These projections provide a conservative estimate of trends, which may understate some of the recent changes observed by area residents. For instance, interviews and observation in the district point to an influx of young, wealthy families that does not match these demographic projections. The analysis in this report is based on Census Bureau 2003 and 2008 estimates obtained from GeoLytics. "Roslindale" is defined here as the 22 Census block groups that are contained entirely within the 02131 Roslindale zip code.



### Household Structure

	1 Person	2 Persons	3 Persons	4 Persons	5 Persons	6 Persons	7 or More Persons
1990	25%	31%	18%	14%	8%	3%	1%
2000	26%	30%	17%	15%	8%	3%	2%
2003 (proj.)	26%	30%	16%	14%	8%	3%	2%
2008 (proj.)	27%	30%	16%	14%	8%	3%	2%

### Demographic Profile

Year	Total Population	Total Household Income	Income per Household	Percent Foreign Born
1990	25,808	\$ 288,122,500	\$ 39,241	18%
2000	26,969	\$ 542,828,095	\$ 54,517	26%
2003 (proj.)	26,937	\$ 569,735,705	\$ 54,851	N/A
2008 (proj.)	27,203	\$ 679,540,566	\$ 64,363	N/A

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

### Household Composition

	Under 18	18-65	Over 65
1990	22%	62%	16%
2000	25%	62%	13%
2003 (proj.)	25%	63%	13%
2008 (proj.)	24%	63%	13%

Right: Notable façade of Sacred Heart Catholic Church.



Smaller landmarks distinguish the Village as a one-of-a-kind place, in sharp contrast to common commercial landmarks (such as McDonalds' golden arches) that can be found anywhere throughout the city. These smaller landmarks also create pedestrian-scaled reference points within the Village, allowing, for example, a group of friends to meet up "by the clock on the corner."

Left: Clock tower at corner of South & Birch Streets.



Sense of place is a key element for both visitors and residents. Roslindale Village is fortunate to have a wide variety of physical attributes, including landmarks, open spaces, and views that visitors and residents use to identify the fact that they are within the Village. Highlighting these physical landmarks strengthens Roslindale's identity as a unique place and will provide a starting point for even greater physical definition of Roslindale Village. A positive image of Roslindale can encourage visitors to return and enhance the quality of life for residents.

### Landmarks

Landmarks within Roslindale Village exist both at the large scale, such as church steeples that can be seen from across the district, and the small scale, including sculptures and murals that are seen only from an immediately adjacent area. Both scales are equally important. When large-scale monuments come into view, a sense of arrival is created, and throughout a visit to the district, these monuments give physical reference to the boundaries of the Village.

Large-scale landmarks in Roslindale Village include the three church steeples that bracket the eastern and western boundaries of the commercial district and two major buildings, the public library, with its rounded blue roof and the MBTA substation on Washington Street. Also at this scale are the two most prominent open spaces, Adams Park and Alexander the Great Park, which can be seen from many vantage points within the Village. On a smaller scale, murals found throughout the district enhance the sense of place. At the smallest scale, visible mainly to the pedestrian or observant driver or passenger, are two memorials in Adams Park and the clock near the train station.

# Physical Assessment



A. A small landmark, the clock tower at South and Birch Streets.



B. The Roslindale Branch Public Library completes a vista down Corinth Street



C. Perimeter of Adams Park along South Street



D. View of a mural on the historic MBTA station



E. The prominent steeple of Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Right: A pedestrian crosswalk leading into Adams Park



### Place-making

A wide range of landmarks combines with Roslindale Village's irregular street grid to create a series of street views that continually reveal the unique elements of the Village. For example, as one walks or drives down Corinth Street, Alexander the Great Park marks the entry into the Village, two murals further define the Village, and the blue roof of the Library helps people orient themselves in the Village. While this series of unique views invites the pedestrian to explore Roslindale Village, a series of public spaces provide an important opportunity to linger. While Adams Park is the most visible of these spaces, smaller public spaces also provide hidden jewels for the visitor to discover and allow for a more intimate experience of the neighborhood. These unique street views and public spaces provide a backbone of positive physical attributes that can be expanded to strengthen Roslindale's distinct character and unique identity.



Left: Corner of a triangular building that houses Emack & Bolio's



Auto    Church    Kids    Social Services  
Residents    Visitors    Commuters

### Nodes

Roslindale’s diversity can be seen through the variety of goods, services, and community organizations that are clustered throughout the district. The analysis map of the physical uses show how the village serves the needs of a variety of groups, including residents, visitors, commuters, children, and the elderly. The map shows where use is concentrated or where overlaps in use take place. An analysis of usage patterns identifies Washington Street as a possible barrier for some groups and highlights how this major arterial road divides the district in two.



The Roslindale Community Center and the post office at the intersection of Cummins Highway and Washington Street



Above: Perimeter of Adams Park along Poplar Street in winter.



Middle: Pedestrian pathway in Adams Park.



Below: Entry into Adams Park from Washington Street.



### Adams Park

As the physical center of Roslindale Village, this small, triangular park anchors one of the few true squares in Boston. Adams Park shapes the Roslindale business district in a non-linear fashion that is distinct from other Main Street districts in Boston. Adams Park is a site for much-loved community events, such as the annual Easter Egg Hunt and the Christmas Tree lighting. For commuters, Adams Park is a strong marker along Washington Street that indicates arrival into Roslindale.

In spite of the park's prominent role in shaping the character of the district, Adams Park does not presently function as the center of Roslindale Village. Following the revitalization of the northwest corner of Roslindale Village, the psychological center of the Square has shifted. Some residents have gone as far as to define the borders of Roslindale Square as Birch, Corinth, Poplar, and South Streets, relegating Adams Park

to a second tier feature within Roslindale Village. Furthermore, because of the traffic circulation patterns and rapid vehicular flow around Adams Park, pedestrians must contend with cars, buses, and delivery trucks, making visiting the park difficult and often dangerous.

Adams Park falls under the jurisdiction of the Boston Parks Department and is maintained through a grant from Bank of America. This grant allows Roslindale to pay for landscape maintenance but not to introduce large-scale park improvements. The landscape design for the park does not allow the space to meet its full potential as an event place and location for informal recreation. Although there are over twenty businesses that are directly across the street, Adams Park remains disconnected from all of its surrounding uses. Adjacent businesses are seemingly disconnected from the park and do not take advantage of its close proximity.



Above: The unoccupied former gas station on Washington Street



Below: The vacant building that formerly housed the Ashmont Discount store

## Vacancies

There are several key vacancies in the core of Roslindale Village that disrupt the district’s character but also present great opportunity for development. Colloquially called “missing teeth,” these gaping holes are a prominent component of the district for visitors and passers-by. The majority of the vacant lot space and unoccupied buildings in Roslindale are concentrated along Washington Street. As one of Boston’s longest arterial roads, Washington

Street serves as a conduit for over 10,000 drivers per day. The business mix along Washington Street in Roslindale over-emphasizes auto-oriented uses and services. As a result, curb cuts, parking lots, and deep-set buildings frequently break the streetwall

of Washington Street. This combination of vacancies and auto-oriented businesses makes Washington Street unwelcoming to pedestrians and unmemorable to passers-by.





Vision for potential development at the corner of Corinth & Birch Streets





Above: Cars turning from Cummins Highway onto Washington Street.

## Traffic

Traffic congestion is one of the more noticeable and obstructive characteristics of Roslindale Village. Three major roads cross the district: *Washington Street*, which borders Adams Park, *Belgrade Avenue*, which connects to Jamaica Plain, and *Cummins Highway*, which connects to Mattapan. Cummins Highway carries 18,000 cars a day and feeds directly into Washington Street at Adam's Park. According to the Boston Transportation Department, approximately 50% of Roslindale residents drove to work in 1990 and 80% owned cars. Today, 64% of trips in Roslindale are made by car, 38% are made by foot or bike, and only 6% by public transit. The village is highly accessible by multiple modes of transportation; seventeen bus lines travel through Roslindale Village.

Traffic circulation around Adams Park negatively impacts the village feel and pedestrian experience. Buses that stop along Washington Street significantly congest the traffic flow within Roslindale Square. A circulation pattern that uses the roadway perimeter around Adams Park as a rotary exacerbates the district's congestion problems. The otherwise picturesque park and its surrounding businesses lose their pedestrian appeal because of the danger associated with the traffic that runs counterclockwise around the park. Furthermore, pedestrian deaths have occurred on South Street.



Below: A pedestrian crossing sign on Birch Street.





People awaiting the bus at the corner of Poplar and Corinth Streets.



Pedestrians crossing Washington Street

A view of the MBTA Commuter Rail parking lot, facing Belgrade Avenue.



### Parking

There are almost 800 parking spots in Roslindale Village that are split evenly between on-street and surface lot parking. Although the parking lots are rarely full, Roslindale residents and visitors perceive a lack of parking to be one of the most pressing issues facing the district. There are 425 surface parking spots within Roslindale Village, 70% of which are open to the public. The MBTA commuter rail lot is the largest and offers 139 parking spots for two dollars a day. The second largest is the public parking lot behind the Citizens Bank, which offers free daily parking. Unfortunately, surface parking in Roslindale is underutilized.

In a recent survey of 96 users of Roslindale Village, individuals were asked to rate 18 different amenities provided by the Village on a scale of 1-low to 5-high. The amount of parking in the Village received the second lowest score out of all of the amenities that are provided by Roslindale Village. While the individuals surveyed believed that the amount of parking available was a major issue for the district, over 80% of the

individuals who had driven to the district had no problems finding parking. Of the drivers who claimed to have problems finding parking, 71% were not Roslindale residents. The survey analysis, combined with the observed under-usage of surface parking in Roslindale, indicates that the parking problem in Roslindale has more to do with *perception* than with any actual shortage.

Rather than park in lots, drivers in Roslindale Village choose to park on the street as close to their destination as possible. Due to the high demand for on-street parking, this often means that drivers circle the village looking for parking (while adding to traffic and pollution), only to park further from their destination than the nearest available lot. The on-street parking problem is exacerbated by day-long users, such as employees and commuters, who park on the street. Additionally, many drivers in Roslindale Village are unaware of public parking locations or are uncomfortable leaving their cars in the lots.



Curbside parking along Washington Street, facing south.



A sign on South Street indicating a nearby parking lot.

## Zoning

Understanding the zoning and regulatory context for Roslindale Village is crucial to assessing development opportunities and challenges, such as the opportunities and constraints of redeveloping vacant or abandoned parcels. Currently, the bulk of Roslindale Village’s vacant parcels fall into B-1 and B-2 “general business zoning” districts, where an array of allowable uses runs the gamut from residential to retail. This kind of mixed-use zoning is an essential ingredient for building a successful urban retail district as the mix of uses increases foot traffic and a “captive audience” for signage and other marketing techniques.

Currently, the Boston Redevelopment Authority is pursuing the implementation of an interim planning overlay district (IPOD) for the Roslindale neighborhood. The Boston Redevelopment Authority defines an Interim Planning Overlay District as

“a district or group of districts or a subdistrict or group of subdistricts or parts thereof (hereafter referred to as an area) may be established as an interim planning overlay district when it is determined by the Zoning Commission that: (1) the existing zoning is thought to be inappropriate; (2) a rezoning of the area is anticipated; (3) a comprehensive planning study preceding the anticipated rezoning is needed; and (4) interim land use regulations are essential



A view of Corinth Street from the Washington Street intersection

to maintain the status quo in the area and prevent introduction of changes to the area which may be incompatible with the goals of the comprehensive planning study or anticipated rezoning” (*Roslindale Interim Planning Overlay District, BRA*).

The IPOD is meant to serve as a first step to developing a neighborhood-specific zoning code for Roslindale. Roslindale’s current situation is anomalous; almost all other established neighborhoods in the City of Boston have neighborhood specific zoning regulations.

The latest draft of the proposed IPOD regulations for Roslindale support retail uses through design. Specifically, the

policies put forth by the IPOD mandate the continuity of the street wall, the removal of storefront grates, and preservation of existing neighborhood character. Each of these mandates is consistent with traditional urban design policies for sustaining urban retail. Additionally, no drastic changes to the zoning or physical character of Roslindale are prescribed by the most recent draft overlay district.