

MICHAEL V. O'BRIEN
CITY MANAGER



CITY OF WORCESTER

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July 6, 2004

TO WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILORS:

The attached communication relative to Worcester Common Restoration Master Plan, received from Robert C. Antonelli, Acting Commissioner, Parks, Recreation and Cemetery, is forwarded for the information of your Honorable Body.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael V. O'Brien
City Manager

Memorandum

City of Worcester
Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery Department

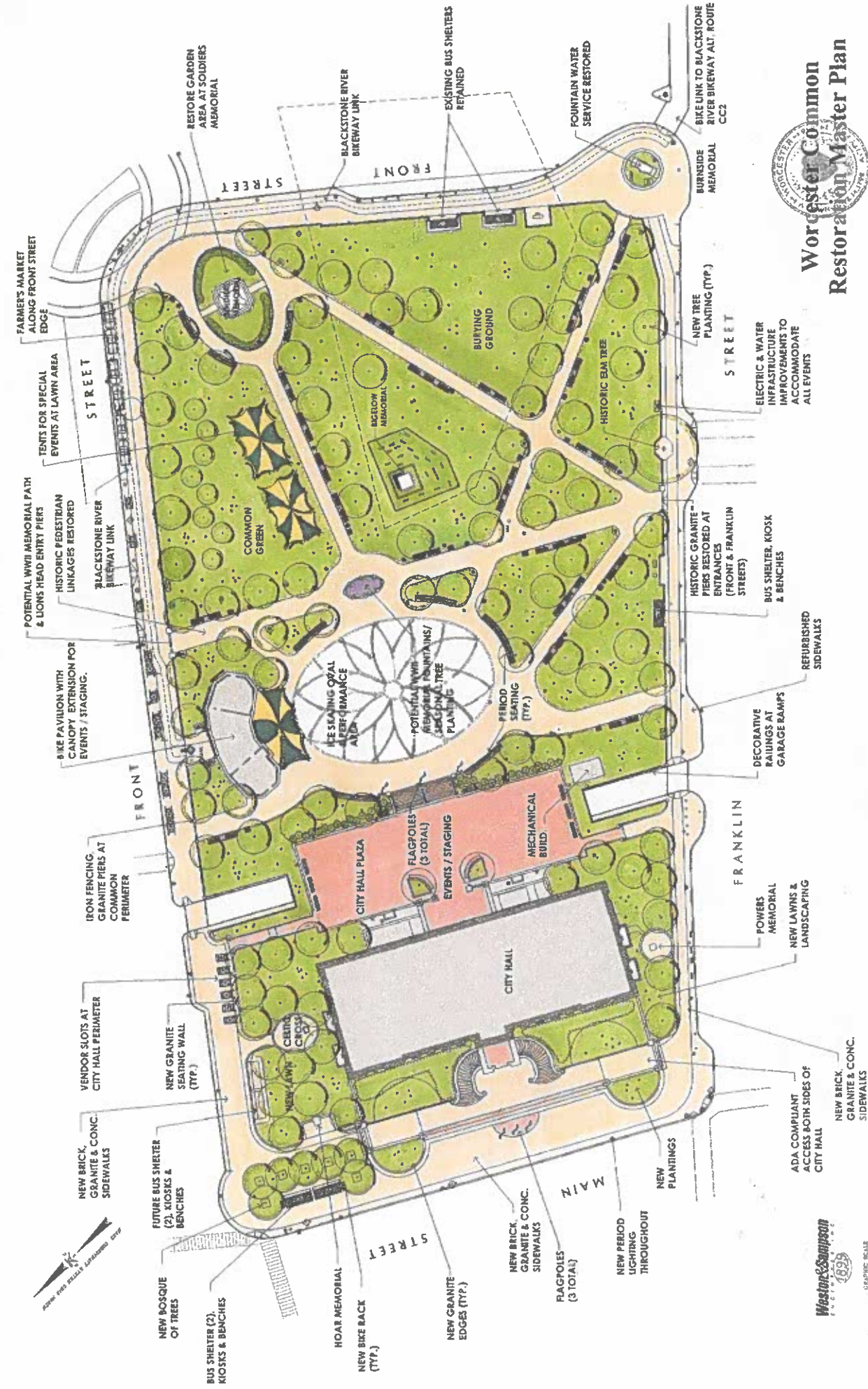
Date: July 1, 2004
To: Michael V. O'Brien, City Manager
From: Robert C. Antonelli, Jr., Acting Commissioner *RA*
Subject: Worcester Common Restoration Master Plan

I am pleased to submit the attached "Worcester Common Restoration Master Plan". This Master Plan describes the City's multi-faceted approach to restoring this most important and historic public open space property. It is an approach that ultimately restores the facility to its roots as a vibrant, 18-hour a day, four season green space in the heart of the City and the Commonwealth.

The Worcester Common restoration is an enormously important part of a multi-faceted economic revitalization for downtown Worcester through the development of new cultural and recreational opportunities. We have commenced construction on the Phase 1 renovation program and these improvements include perimeter fencing, granite entrance piers, historical site entrances, realignment of historical linkages, the implementation of historical lighting and furnishings, and the re-establishment of "the Green" of Worcester Common, which was lost during the 1970 renovation. This re-greening will be accomplished by eliminating large expanses of pavement and the removal of the reflecting pool.

This Department continues to aggressively focus on the design of both Phase II and Phase III of this Master Plan. I also continue to submit updated information and documentation to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department Conservation and Recreation, Division of Conservation Services, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and The Worcester Historical Commission. As we advance with the design of the next two phases, I will continue to keep these organizations as well as your office up to date of our progress.

Please review and advise if additional information is required.



Worcester Common Restoration Master Plan

March 2004





Worcester Common Restoration Master Plan



Introduction

A comprehensive and collaborative planning and design process that has garnered the advice of members of the general public; local, state and federal officials; City department heads and staff members; and civic, cultural and historical groups has yielded the establishment of this **Restoration Master Plan**. The Plan matches the critical needs of our City with major grant funding sources and dates of availability. The full restoration program will encompass three distinct phases totaling approximately \$5.6 M in public investment. Upon completion, the implementation of all desired enhancements to Worcester Common and to the areas surrounding Worcester City Hall will have been achieved, and Worcester Common will have been returned to the center of community life in the city.

Construction documents (plans, specifications and estimates) have been prepared for the initial \$2.0 M round of improvements and renovations have begun. In total, the three phases of construction will encompass the following:

Phase	Scope of Improvements	Status	Approximate Budget	Date of Completion
1	Restoration of Worcester Common Proper, including perimeter fencing, granite entrance piers, historical site entrances and walkways, landscaping, extensive site furnishings, lighting and utility infrastructure and support systems.	100% Design	\$2,000,000	May 2005
2	Construction of the Bike Pavilion and park support structure, skating oval and mechanical systems, site entrances and walkways, landscaping, furnishings, lighting and utility support systems. Construction of the Blackstone River Bikeway link running parallel to the Common along Front Street, and restoration of the Burnside Fountain.	Preliminary Design	\$3,200,000	December 2005
3	Restoration of the areas surrounding Worcester City Hall at Franklin, Main and Front Streets, including Bus Shelters, ADA improvements, sidewalks, other paved areas, landscaping, extensive furnishings, lighting and utility systems. Enhancement of Monument and Memorial Settings.	Preliminary Design	\$400,000	December 2005

A Project of Enormous Importance

The restoration of Worcester Common is a project of enormous importance to the City of Worcester and is part of a multi-faceted initiative to create life and vigor through the development of new commercial, residential, cultural, recreational and institutional opportunities within the downtown district that surrounds Worcester Common. Many exciting public and private projects and ventures that are currently in the planning process are anticipated to be realized over the course of the next 2- to 5-year period of time.

Implementation of all planned improvements, with a basic theme of protecting and enhancing the past while creating sensible amenities for the future, will reestablish this historically loved, but currently forgotten, open space as the focal point of our community.

The Vision

A Vision Statement presented in October 2001 during the early part of the master planning process described the purpose of the planned restoration efforts as follows.

"The City of Worcester has initiated a process to prepare and update a Master Plan that will lay the foundation for a dramatic restoration of historic Worcester Common. All new planning and design efforts will build upon earlier master planning efforts and allow for the implementation of a series of thoughtful, pragmatic, and community-supported enhancements. Upon the successful conclusion of the process, the articulated goals of so many will have been achieved, and the social, cultural, historic and commercial fabric of our City will be greatly strengthened. Worcester Common, a place to gather, a place to enjoy and a place proudly recognized by all, will have been restored to its former glory."

As we conclude the master planning process and embark of the implementation phases of the project, it is believed that the goals articulated in 2001 have been successfully achieved through the establishment of this finished plan, but much work at the periphery of the project still needs to progress to ensure ultimate success.

The Challenge to Our Community

Implementing the selected restoration plan may be our simplest task. Ensuring that the new and beautiful Common is fully embraced and fully adopted by our community will remain our focus and our most important challenge. To take its place as the premier outdoor public space at the heart of our City, important and creative initiatives that transform the built landscape surrounding the Common with new and restored residential, commercial, office, retail and institutional uses must continue to evolve and be realized. Then, and only then, will the desired results have been achieved. In this way, the fully restored Common will provide critical venues for a wide range of public uses that support new development in the surrounding downtown areas, while the new and ambitious developments will help to ensure the maintaining and continued enhancement of a fully restored Common.

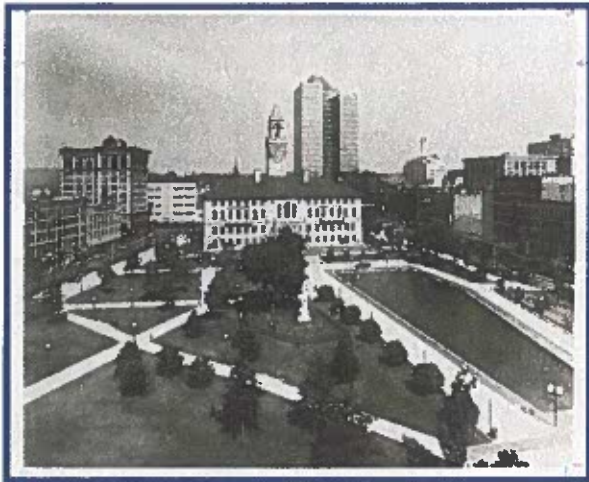


The Restoration Plan

Themes / Elements Retained from the 1972 Improvement Program

Since its inception, the modernist design imposed on the Common by the early 1970's Improvement Program has been neither entirely successful, nor warmly received by the community. With its broad expanses of pavement and lack of spatial definition, much of the existing Common often times appears cold, harsh, and uninviting.

The approved Master Plan greatly alters the current design; many of its existing features and spaces will not be retained in their original form. Nevertheless, and to the extent practical and possible, materials and elements from the existing site will be reused, vistas and views will be maintained and validated pedestrian corridors will be preserved and enhanced.



Specifically, the following major existing site elements will be retained:

- ◆ All monuments and memorials, and the historic burial ground that encompasses a large expanse within the Common
- ◆ Mature shade trees, including the landmark Elm tree adjacent to the Common at Franklin Street
- ◆ Lawn areas
- ◆ Certain pathway alignments and entrance locations
- ◆ Portions of the utility infrastructure system including storm drainage piping and related structures

Themes / Elements Restored from Yesteryear

Early postcards and photographs of the site depict a traditional New England Common with wide walks lined with stately trees, expanses of lawn with sweeps of colorful flowers, and architecturally interesting and significant monuments - a great gathering place; the celebratory, boisterous, solemn, yet lively heart, of a great and vibrant City. This is the Common that people now look back on and recall with fond memory and deep affection.



The vision for the new Common very much follows traditional design and historic precedent. Pedestrian linkages and pathways will be established that will not only provide more convenient and direct circulation routes, but also more closely resemble historic alignments. Expansive paved areas will be eliminated or greatly reduced as areas dedicated to lawn and landscape will be significantly increased. Large shade trees will be planted to line new pathways, provide greater spatial definition, and reaffirm the essential quality of place. Monuments will be restored. New traditional period-styled features and facilities will be integrated that will complement not only the grandeur of City Hall architecture, but also recent streetscape and City Hall Plaza improvements. Updated to accommodate the needs of the present, the Old Common will be created anew.

Most importantly, the historic Common was the venue of choice for large-scale public celebrations, events and gatherings of all kinds. *The newly restored Common will contain all of the necessary facilities to accommodate the wide range of outdoor activities and civic events that are central to a great and vibrant city in the 21st century.*

New Introductions - Compatible with the Past, Critical to the Future

Above all else, the Common has always provided a much-needed and important green space/urban park within the confines of the City. New features and facilities seek to improve current usage and usability of the site, offer respect and consideration for the past, and provide new opportunities for the future.

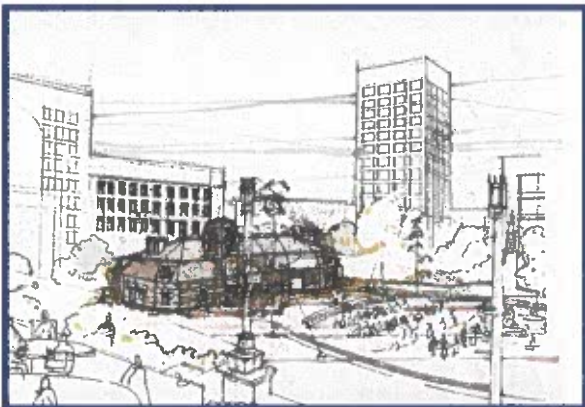
The primary emphasis of all restoration efforts relates to providing dramatically enhanced public safety, convenience and enjoyment through the development of a well lighted, well designed and secure environment with a full range of highly desirable amenities. At once the restoration plan intends to be finished and complete, yet flexible and open enough to support a wide range of desired uses and activities throughout the year.

Skating Oval

Following successful implementation of seasonal skating facilities in Boston, Providence and other similar urban communities, plans for the Worcester Common include the construction of a skating oval. Aligned symmetrically with City Hall, the proposed oval will cover approximately 12,000 square feet and will be located immediately east of City Hall Plaza. Underground refrigeration piping and related mechanical systems will ensure perfect skating conditions throughout the cold weather season.



The skating oval is designed to be multifunctional. With City Hall as its backdrop, the skating oval will be fully operational from November to April. In warmer weather, dasher boards will be removed and stored, portable planters, tables with umbrellas and chairs will be set out to transform the paved oval to an outdoor plaza/café. For community events, appropriately sized concerts and performances, the cleared area can be programmed for use as an outdoor performance space and oriented either toward the grand rear façade of City Hall or the attractive new façade of the Park Pavilion.



Park Pavilion

To ensure the success and viability of the Park Pavilion, multiple uses have been established that will bring desirable year-round activity to the structure and surrounding Common areas. During the entire year, but practically speaking during eight of the warmest weather months, the pavilion will serve as the northern terminus of the Blackstone River Bikeway, a forty-six mile multiple use transportation facility connecting Providence, Rhode Island and Worcester, Massachusetts. During the winter months, the pavilion will serve as the hub for all skating activities. Other uses, for cold and warm weather months are described below:

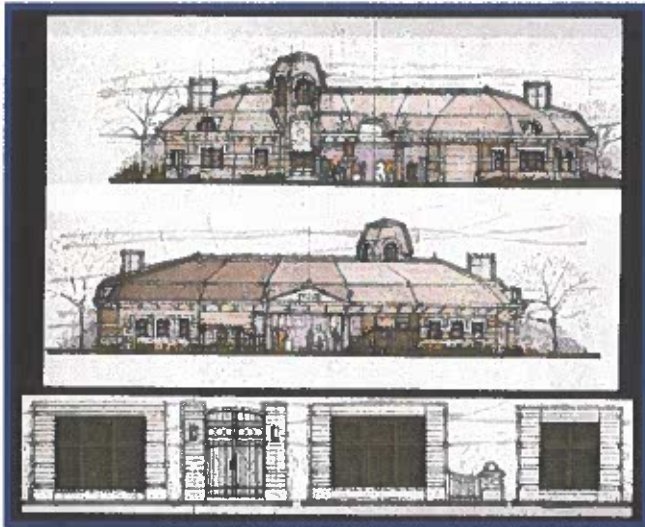
Summer Months

- ◆ Bike shop
- ◆ Bike repairs
- ◆ Bike storage / lockers / bike racks
- ◆ Concessions
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Benches and tables for resting
- ◆ Visitor information
- ◆ Police sub-station
- ◆ Informational kiosks
- ◆ Canopy extension for seating during inclement weather and staging of small-scaled performances and concerts

Winter Months

- ◆ Skate shop
- ◆ Ticket sales and skate rentals
- ◆ Skate changing
- ◆ Warming area
- ◆ Concessions
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Zamboni storage
- ◆ Visitor information
- ◆ Police sub-station
- ◆ Informational kiosks

A small mechanical structure will also be located on premises and tucked into an out-of-the-way and visually unobtrusive location adjacent to the garage exit ramp. Architecturally, the new buildings will be scaled to harmonize with their surroundings and designed to complement City Hall.



"Early renderings of the Park Pavilion identify a small, architecturally interesting building that will be compatible with the historic nature of City Hall and other significant buildings that surround the Common. Continued evolution of the design will ensure public acceptance of the building's final architectural flavor..."

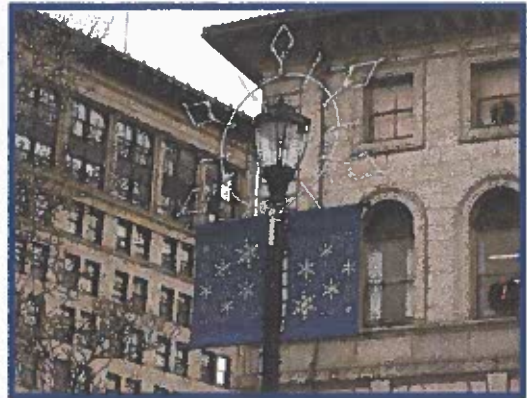
Modern Infrastructure

Existing utilities serving the Common are outmoded, inadequate, and in many cases, non-functional. To ensure the success of revitalization efforts and to support new facilities and the expanded use of the site, planned improvements include the installation of modern infrastructure systems.

Water service improvements will include installation of new drinking fountains, hose bibs and other enhancements to provide better access to potable water for users on a daily basis and for special events located throughout the Common. New irrigation systems will greatly enhance the viability of existing and proposed trees, shrubs and lawn areas. Electrical service improvements will not only include new pedestrian path lighting, but also provide duplex receptacles strategically located to accommodate temporary electrical needs and seasonal lighting. Electrical sub-panels will allow connections for the largest of potential events at the Common.

The pedestrian lighting system will be an attractive addition to Worcester Common that expands the use of period style lights installed during the plaza restoration effort. The new lights will line all pathways and other paved locations and facilities. Lighting levels will be greatly improved

over current levels. The lighting design will help create a pleasant and safe environment for evening access to and through the Common and for special events. Each light feature will contain an electrical receptacle for the connection of seasonal lights and other desired devices.



WW II Memorial

Under the approved Master Plan, the existing Memorial Pool and Rotary Fountains will be demolished and a new memorial will be created to rightfully honor those who served during World War II.

Concepts for the memorial's design are currently under exploration in response to community input generated during the public meeting process and include the potential dedication of the historical Portland to Commercial Street corridor as a memorial pathway with decorative pavement and special edge treatments. Potential commemorative features along this corridor include the re-fabricated historic granite lion-head entrance piers (removed during the previous renovation of the Common) to be located at Front and Franklin Streets, and a small fountain feature to be located along the path and aligned with the rear entrance to City Hall. Design concepts will continue to evolve with final designs to be included within the Phase 2 Improvement Program.



Seating Enclaves and Seating Opportunities

To support the needs for passive recreation, numerous benches, arranged in groups or enclaves, are proposed to line interior pathways of the Common and provide ample seating for park users. Additional, more formalized seating enclaves are proposed at the Civil War Memorial, Power's Memorial and Celtic Cross vicinities.

Additional seating (permanent and portable) will be available to support activities at the skating oval and Park Pavilion. The style of all benches and related trash receptacles will complement the overall theme of the Common restoration effort and match the architectural motifs of City Hall and other planned buildings.

Common "Green"

The Common "Green" is a new open space that will make use of a larger portion of the former reflecting pool and fountain area. The space is located toward Front Street and is generally defined by new and existing tree plantings, the burial ground, Bigelow Memorial, Soldiers Memorial and the new ceremonial pathway that connects the Soldiers Memorial to the rear entrance of City Hall. The space will constitute the largest uninterrupted open lawn area contained on the Common and will support a wide range of passive recreational pursuits and such active recreational pursuits as tossing a Frisbee. Large tents could easily be erected on the lawn area for a wide range of special events and activities. Nearby hookups for potable water and for electrical service will accommodate all programmatic uses within this area.

Circulation and Access

Most current pedestrian entrances and points of access will be retained. Notwithstanding, to better provide spatial definition, excessive expanses of pavement will be removed from the area encompassing the Soldiers' Memorial, across from the main entrance of the Worcester Galleria and to the Front of City Hall.

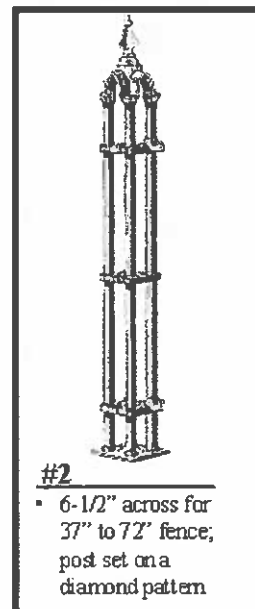
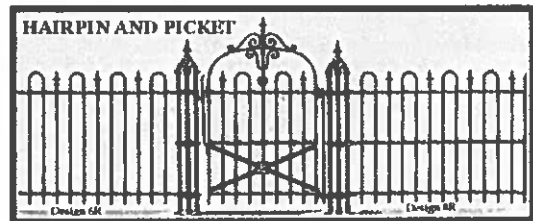
With the removal of the World War II Memorial Pool and Fountains, necessitated by deteriorated conditions and the need to implement new site amenities, current circulation conflicts imposed by the existing site layout will be corrected. New pathway corridors will provide access to key spaces and important site features, reestablish the vital Portland to Commercial Street pedestrian linkage, and closely follow historical circulation patterns. Pathway alignments will provide interesting and varied vistas and focal points for individuals sitting within the space or passing through the space.

Pavement Materials

Materials used in reconstruction of the Common must reflect the enduring quality of the site and its history and, therefore, must be extremely durable and of high quality. Pedestrian pathway treatments, pavements and edging include brick, granite, and concrete - material selections that may vary slightly to designate the significance of a particular pathway. Pavement treatments will be compatible with the historic nature of the site, the architectural flavor of City Hall and with other recent improvement efforts at City Hall Plaza area and elsewhere. Pavement treatments established within the interior of the Common will be carried to outside areas along Franklin, Front and Main streets to help establish a consistent and recognizable appearance for this important city block.

Fencing and Site Furnishings

Ornamental iron fencing will line the perimeter of the Common to provide edge and access definition and to restrict pedestrians to paved pathway areas. Benches, trash receptacles, light poles and luminaires, and various other furnishings will be durable, period-styled fixtures that will materially complement recent City Hall Plaza renovations and streetscape improvements and visually underscore the historical significance of City Hall and the Worcester Common.



Landscape Restoration / Enhancement

Implementation of landscape improvements will address long deferred maintenance issues. Compacted soils will be aerated. Lawn areas will be revitalized. Overgrown and undesirable shrubs will be removed. Existing trees will be pruned and fertilized. Existing trees that have reached maturity and are in decline and trees that are diseased or badly damaged will be removed to allow for the planting of new deciduous flowering and shade trees.

Intensive replanting efforts will be undertaken. Perennials will be installed at key locations to provide seasonal color and low maintenance. Limited shrub beds will be planted in accordance with sustainable practices. Numerous trees will be added across the site to emphasize spatial character, provide site definition and reestablish the Common as an urban oasis.

New lawn areas will be installed that are in keeping with historical precedent (lawn area surrounding the Soldiers Memorial) and to accommodate new uses and activities (the Common "Green" at Front Street).

Continuing and Future Events and Programs

New or refurbished amenities will continue to accommodate current events such as the Farmer's Market, Latin Festival and countless other activities. It is also anticipated, as the new designs are implemented, that new and exciting programming opportunities will evolve that the City will encourage and promote.