

Weston Futures

Hopkinton, MA

OVERVIEW

The overall concept of our proposal hinges upon the principle of respecting the natural features and existing cultural meanings of the Weston Nurseries site and surrounding area. The proposed housing, corporate, retail, and civic amenities are meant to be an integrated part of the Hopkinton community. The northern portion of the site will include a range of housing types, a small office park, and spaces for civic amenities all designed to encourage walking. A large North-South park connecting the areas north of the site to preserved open space along 135 will serve as a unique bridge between the existing community and new mixed uses. South of 135, lower density residential units clustered within open fields, trees, and protected wetlands also include boardwalk trails that allow residents to passively experience those natural features. Large swaths of forested land, wetlands, and agricultural plots will be preserved to complement the new development and assure some environmental protection. 760 units of housing are proposed.

SITE ANALYSIS, INFORMATION

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The existing physical and social context of the site and Hopkinton informed our decision-making of where to site development, which open and green spaces to preserve, and where to make connections to the existing road system and community.

Soils – In general, soil quality, with the exception of areas surrounding wetlands and stream corridors, does not provide a serious limitation to the type and scale of development proposed.

Topography – The southern portions of the site are relatively flat, that provide some excellent views into the wetlands and pond. The northern portion of the site contains the highest point at Weston at around 490 feet. Around the highest point, there is a relatively flat area where development could be valuable. Outside of that, the slopes move range from 5 to nearly 20% imposing some constraints on housing development.

Wildlife Corridors – The area between 85, Wilson Road, and encroaching on the site has forested, physical connections to Hopkinton State Park and the wetlands to the south. Although homes, the NStar facility, and roads bisect the area, it should be valuable to preserve part of that forested corridor on the Weston site.

Wetlands – Critical wetlands penetrate through the southern portions of the site, and could be part of a larger hydrology network that could be a water supply in the future. Protecting these wetlands is of prime importance, but allowing housing to have views and allowing residents to enjoy them through boardwalk trails is part of the proposal as well.

Road Network – The site is bounded by several roads of importance in Hopkinton and the region. Multiple connections to roads besides Route 135 are proposed to avoid funneling traffic completely onto the already congested route.

View Corridors – Several view corridors inform the proposal of protecting the open space adjacent to 135 to maintain a pastoral viewshed. In terms of development value, views from the northern portion of the site to below and views within the southern portion of the site to the wetlands are beautiful and important to maintain.

Recreation – The Weston site is already used for horse-riding, biking and strolling on mainly informal trails. Maintaining connections to and within the site for public use will allow for a balanced coexistence of new development, open space, and public use.

KEY DESIGN FEATURES

Road network - Two connections to Wilson Road, one to Curtis Road, and two connections to Clinton Street will offer multiple points of entry to the site besides 135. The southern sites contain roads more narrow, residential roads. The northern roads, due to its corporate and civic facilities have both residential and collector streets. Further, the road network establishes a sense of walkability to 135 or to the corporate/civic center in the north. Walking to catch a new Hopkinton shuttle to the commuter rail, walking for leisure, and/or biking will all be promoted and an enhanced mode of transportation.

Trails – A north-south bike path cuts through the northern portion of the site, more formally paved or marked and connecting to 135. Trails about the bike path in the north, and cut through the open space and forests below the development. The trails also will have a formal connection across 135. In the southern portion, trails will meander through the development and the wetlands contiguously. Boardwalks should be used to allow for entrance into the wetlands.

Wildlife preservation – As mentioned above, the southern wetlands, and the northern forests will be preserved for visual enjoyment and natural protection.

Integrating nature and housing – The proposal hinges upon development coexisting with the natural features of the site. Placing development to minimize impact on existing trees and to maximize views will allow for a cognitive relationship between the development, wetlands, forests, and meadows.

Mixture of housing types – The proposal aims to provide a range of housing types for all income-levels. The northern portion of the site contains a range of small and large lot single family homes, townhomes, and multifamily dwellings. The southern portion contains mainly single-family homes of varying square footages, but also townhomes and apartments.

DESIGN GUIDELINES – EACH AREA

SOUTHERN AREA – S1 (see map, connection to 135 and Curtis Road)

Maintaining the pastoral qualities of the Weston Nursery area generally, and the parcels south of Route-135 specifically, were guiding concerns in both the placement and design of the residential development proposed. A new north-south corridor that provides the spine for the site offers a new rural viewshed. In this light, development along the road is minimized, while both the existing agricultural fields and forested woodlands are enhanced to provide the intended pastoral experience to both the pedestrian and the driver. The design of the development – the siting and layout of housing and roads – is to be guided, to a large extent, by existing agricultural fields. Two primary housing typologies are offered – detached single-family homes and attached single-family townhouses – that speak to the topography, vegetation, and existing vistas. Sensitive areas, such as wetlands, large forest tracts, poor soil quality, and heightened topographical relief are avoided and permanently protected by the development plan. Overall, 84 housing units are offered by this proposal.

Road Network

The width of all roads is to be minimized to the greatest extent possible in order to provide for an extended rural character. They are to be sited so as to minimize the requirement for cut-and-fill, and are to be flanked on both sides by shallow vegetated swales. Large street trees are to be lined along the roads as they pass through residential areas to soften the character of the development and to more seamlessly integrate the visual qualities of the housing and the landscape. Views from the southernmost east-west road towards the wetlands and pond are to be kept open, so as to ensure a sense of public access to this natural amenity. Finally, fields along the primary north-south road are to be preserved by a proposed homeownership association, to protect and enhance the agricultural history of the area.

Residential Development

Careful attention to siting and planting must be given to minimize the visual impact of development in the area. Covenants are to be placed on all deeds that will have the effect of restricting the construction of fences, hedge-rows, or any other impediment to the visual fluency of the landscape. A zero-net policy for additional pervious surfaces is also to be required. Public right-of-ways are to be required between the housing parcels to protect public access to the highly-prized recreational aspects of the greater area. Stormwater is to be dealt with onsite by the construction of un-fenced shallow (less than 1-foot) vegetated swales. Given the low overall density of the development proposal, wastewater is to be managed by either individual or communal septic systems.

SOUTHERN AREA – S2 (see map, connection to 135 and Clinton Street)

Trails - The trails in site S2 connect to the larger network that runs through the whole site.

- In the woods between houses, it is a low maintenance dirt trail for walking, jogging.
- In the wetland preserve, the trail becomes a boardwalk that hugs the ponds and streams.

Trees -

- The forest between the houses are eastern white elm, red oak, littleleaf linden, eastern hemlock, rose ash, etc. Focus on trees that are native to New England and, especially close to the road, those with red and yellow autumn colors.
- The planting strip in front of big houses in NE corner are redbuds, dogwood, sargent cherry or Elizabeth magnolia.
- The open space in front of the big houses in SE corner are redbud, sargent cherry dogwood, southern magnolia.
- The wetland conserve is existing white eastern pine, littleleaf linden, etc.

Roads -

- Shared driveways and private driveways in single family area are packed gravel.
- The curvy perimeter road around single family housing is paved, 12.5 feet each lane, with 10 foot shoulders. No sidewalks, to keep rural character.
- Streets in front of apartments are paved with sidewalks, 12.5 feet each lane.

Homes:

- Single family residences are large, custom-designed homes – Whitefox, Kistler & Knapp, Wesketch. Quarter to half-acre lots are extended by views to shared woodlands owned by homeowners association.
- Apartments are of a style known as "big house." 6-10-unit dwellings have front and back elevations that look like single family homes. Humphrey & Partners have designed many such homes.

Sewage:

Soccer fields and tennis courts lie above a leaching field. The area is about one acre.

Drainage:

Topography slopes in towards paths between sections of homes and down towards the preserve. The paths become boardwalks as they get closer to the houses and the street, and drainage will run under and eventually into the wetland preserve. Because the area is such low density and driveways are permeable, stormwater runoff will not endanger the wetlands preserve.

NORTHERN AREA – N (see map, connection to 135 and Wilson Road)

The guiding vision for this portion of the site is to create a mix of land uses located to offer views, respect natural features and topography, and continues to offer naturalistic public spaces open to the community. The road network attempts to parallel the contours of the topography, with some connector roads running the length of the slopes. In this manner, a hillside housing typology is developed maximizing views to the south. Further, the core of the site is designed with a traffic rotary, allowing drivers, walkers, or bikers to filter to the various residential areas. The rotary is bounded by the corporate buildings, the community center/YMCA, library, and pockets of the large North-South park that extends through the site. Residential buildings extend through a gradient of density, where multifamily dwellings are near the core of the site, then townhomes, then single-family homes. A housing mix of building types is suggested to push for a visually pleasing housing diversity. Swales, as narrow grassy “ditches” in between the rows of housing should sufficiently capture excess stormwater and allow it to percolate to the ground. In order to make a more historical connection to the Weston Nurseries, the spaces between homes are intended to become “meadows.” 22 single-family, 44 townhomes, and 96 apartments are outlined in this portion of the northern site. Please see the “North Residential” section to see the continuous adjacent proposed residential development.

Connections

The site is connected by a bypass of Phipps Road, extending from the existing road around the location of the nursery headquarters. It is about 40 feet wide, to provide or a small grassy median, and to be lined by trees. It approaches the rotary, where the corporate center of 6 acres, 4 community facility buildings, a shared parking facility of around 170 spaces surround the rotary. The large North-South park also serves as a trail and bicycle connection to 135 and the existing ponds on the site. Around the rotary, two wide roads parallel the ponds and connect to the other northern residential areas and Wilson Road. Further, an east-west road comes off the rotary to connect to Wilson Road as well. Meadowy pastures, the park, and housing variety on these roads will allow it to be a pleasurable walking experience. Further, the rotary could serve as a very accessible and pleasant commuter rail shuttle stop.

Housing Gradient

The location of housing would allow a mixture of multifamily buildings, townhomes, and houses access to the North-South park and meadow-like pastures in between the homes. The proposed aesthetic is one of modern taste and low-rise to emphasize the extent of the meadows and reference the nursery's history. Homes are sited along the length of the hill to provide views to the south open space preserve. Further, swales in between the rows of housing will capture excess stormwater. Houses closer to the core should have minimal 8-15 feet grass setbacks to enhance the streetscape. The homes line the streets which connect to the core and park.

OTHER NORTH RESIDENTIAL

We further propose low density residential development on these portions of the site which are currently nursery plots. Housing should follow the pattern described in Area N, but at a density more around 3-4 units per acre. The connective roads would serve as the spine of those areas with connections to the new core and Wilson Road. If the density holds, this area could house 345 units.

WESTON RETAIL

We also propose development adjacent to the Weston Nurseries retail and landscaping store to create a historical and enjoying attraction. The suggested design aesthetic should follow the forms of nursery, farm, warehouse buildings set among rolling walkways. Specialty restaurants or retail could be housed in this area as well. Connections to the proposed development would be through the adjacent park, bike lane, and Phipps Road.