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THE CASE FOR ESTABLISHING THE
DENTON ROAD NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT
IN WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

Denton Road residents first came together in the summer of 2006 to discuss the possibility of establishing a Neighborhood Conservation District. Concerned by the construction of a house built on speculation at #39 Denton that was three times as large as the charming Dutch colonial house it replaced, many felt their sense of community as well as the pleasing architectural and natural features of their street were at risk. (See Appendix D-1 for a description of the original and replacement houses at #39).

Neighbors were alarmed because this type of building was at odds with the gradual development of the land that had occurred over the previous century as the Denton family sold off lots to family members and associates. From 1900 to 1970, the style and scale of the new structures varied with the times, but were compatible with surrounding properties; there was no massive removal of trees or radical change of grade. Residents, once established, raised their children, pursued their careers, and generally remained through retirement until they died.

The sudden arrival of the teardown and mansionization phenomenon to Denton Road was a shock, and it represented a threat for the immediate future. With a number of older residents on the street (many having lived there for 30 to 50 years), it was highly likely that more houses could face demolition and replacement in the near future by similarly incompatible successors.

The first step was to canvass neighbors on the street to gauge their interest in averting the potential threat. A meeting was held at St. Andrew’s Church on October 4, 2006, attended by about twenty people from the neighborhood. Based on their strong support, the Denton Road Neighborhood Association (DRNA) was formed with the express purpose of developing a bylaw that would allow the formation of Neighborhood Conservation Districts in Wellesley. Functioning as a grassroots advocacy group, the DRNA worked with the Wellesley Historical Commission to frame the NCD bylaw that was passed by the 2007 Annual Town Meeting.

Since then, the Association Steering Committee has worked closely with residents to define the boundaries and distinctive nature of the district and the type of design guidelines that would prevent the kind of incongruous construction that occurred at #39. They supported the zoning amendment for Large House Review (LHR) that was approved by the November 2007 Town Meeting, yet they also concluded that an NCD was needed to prevent incompatible development for structures of smaller size that fell below the threshold for LHR. (See Appendix
On December 4, 2007, Denton Road residents formally petitioned the Wellesley Historical Commission to establish the Denton Road NCD. Following provisions of Article 46A, Section 3. (c), a Study Committee was appointed to examine the merits of the petition.

This Report is a statement of the findings of the Study Committee. It recommends the acceptance of Denton Road as a Neighborhood Conservation District based on its integrity as a neighborhood. Its distinctive character is evident in the history of its development, its natural and architectural features, and its sense of identity and cohesiveness that has enabled it to pursue designation as Wellesley's first NCD.
I. NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER: SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

A rich historical and architectural legacy underpins the Denton neighborhood of which many residents are unaware. Yet it is that legacy that helped to create the pleasant and stable environment that currently exists. The thirteen acres of open land bought by the Denton family in the 1870s took a century to mature into a street of over thirty houses that forms a deep loop beginning and ending on either side of St. Andrew’s Church. This development was shaped by several forces: the Denton family, the Depression and World War II, the interests of Wellesley College and Dana Hall in St. Andrew’s Church, and the gradual succession of the population from single teachers and childless homeowners to families with children, many of whom continued to be part of the academic world.

Even as the neighborhood changed, however, it maintained a distinct social and architectural identity. Many residents were involved in education in one way or another and served on the faculties of Pine Manor, Dana Hall, Wellesley College, and other educational institutions. From the time of the Dentons to the present day, residents have shared a particular regard for the life of the mind – music, art, and books. Their values are reflected in the size and style of their properties where there is evident appreciation of nature – gardens, trees, birds, and the out-of-doors – and of the pleasure of walking – along the street, into town, or along Fuller Brook.

Role of the Denton Family, 1865-1970

From the beginning, the Denton family shaped the physical, cultural, and social character of the neighborhood. William Denton and his wife, Elizabeth M. F. Denton, settled in Wellesley in 1865. They purchased 13 acres of cornfield abutting Washington Street (near Cottage Street) and built a substantial Victorian house (# 11) set back from the road. Over the years they sold off properties to Miss Cooke the headmistress of Dana Hall, to St. Andrew’s Church (built in 1894), and to persons outside the family. Especially prominent on the street, however, were the members of the Denton family – Shelley, the gemologist at #24, Willie, the printer and lecturer at #32. The workshop for making butterfly jewelry is the barn that is now #72.
Culturally, the family was famous and traveled the world to collect exotic specimens of butterflies. William Denton was a well-known natural scientist and "the five children had been brought up by their father...to appreciate nature and learning." He frequently took them on his lecture tours in the United States, and his scientific studies often included roughing it on exploratory trips around the world. To support the family, following their father’s death on a collecting expedition in New Guinea, the boys used their collecting and preservation skills not only to protect the butterflies but also to make butterfly jewelry for Tiffany’s, the Paris Exposition, and the Prince of Wales. (See Appendix B.)

Socially, the Dentons created an intertwined community of family members and close associates, yet sadly very few of their line continued into the third generation. Following their respective marriages, Sherman, Shelley and William built homes on the Denton family property. Winsford's home was on the eastern edge of the Denton land, abutting what was later called Eastman Circle. Carrie never married and lived her entire life in the original family home. Parcels were also given to two granddaughters, Vanessa and Mildred. However, neither ever married and the only grandson, Robert, died during World War I before he could marry. With no offspring to continue the Denton name, the family sold some lots to outsiders. By 1924, 14 of the 17 developed lots on the road were owned by others. The neighborhood continued to grow and by 1935, 23 of the 33 lots shown on a map of the area had been developed. (See the 1935 Map in Appendix E.) With the death of granddaughter Mildred Denton in 1969, the old Denton house was sold to Julio DiGiando who built four new houses (9, 11, 71, and 75) in its place.

Depression, WWII, and Continued Development to 1970

New houses were built through the Depression and the post-war era with the last four houses completed in 1970-71 where the Denton homestead had stood on the acre of land behind St. Andrew’s Church. The social and demographic character of the neighborhood gradually shifted from a predominance of unmarried school teachers and families with boarders during the Depression, to a more heterogeneous mix of individual families following the war and leading up to the present. In 1939, for example, almost half of the 64 residents on the street were single women.

Prosperity and optimism characterized the years following World War II. All over the country couples married, had children, and settled down in neighborhoods, much like the one on

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Denton Road. Husbands worked outside the home, and the wives usually stayed at home. In 1975 half of the 80 residents on the street were married and 13 were students. As for occupations, there were 18 housewives, 14 educators, six bankers, five businessmen, three librarians, one doctor, one clergyman, a chemist, a physicist, and an editor, among others.

**Wellesley College, Dana Hall, St. Andrew’s, and Links to Education**

Intertwined with these changing family patterns were the many institutional interests being played out in the expansion of Dana Hall, the growth of St. Andrew’s Church, and the activities of faculty members, clergy, and congregants who supported them. The proximity of Denton Road to Wellesley College, Dana Hall (and later, Pine Manor Junior College) likely accounted for the prevalence of teachers and administrators among residents after 1930. (For a sampling of Denton Road educators, past and present, see Appendix C-1.).

Dana Hall was originally located on 100 acres of land abutting the east side of the Denton property. Charles B. Dana, a close friend of Henry F. Durant of Wellesley College, donated the property for the new school, and Sarah and Julia Eastman, hired by Durant, began the preparatory school for Wellesley College in 1881. Helen Temple Cooke, the school's headmistress, purchased the school in 1899.

Denton Road and Dana Hall were linked in other ways. Carrie Denton attended Dana Hall until the death of her father in 1883. Helen Temple Cooke purchased several Denton Road properties in her own name, and the school owned two houses, #14 (Orchard House, the home of the Eastman sisters) and #16 (Greenlow) which was used as a dispensary. Dormitories were placed nearby on Eastman Circle (the present location of the Wellesley Green condominiums). The main buildings for the school were on Grove Street (now 40 Grove and the Glen Grove Apartments) across from Eastman Circle.

St. Andrew’s Church, built in 1894 on land bought from Mrs. E. M. F. Denton, was also a major presence on the street. Because it was within walking distance of both institutions, Wellesley College and Dana Hall encouraged their students to worship there. Prominent faculty members and officials at the college (such as Katherine Lee Bates, President Ellen Fitz Pendleton, and Vida Scudder) were active in promoting expansion of the parish to accommodate large numbers of Wellesley College students. Until the Depression when it was no longer possible, Miss Cooke gave a yearly donation of $7 for each Dana Hall student who attended.
For more than a century St. Andrew’s has also been a prominent landmark at the head of the street. It began as a small stone and shingled structure to accommodate a couple hundred parishioners and then went through several major expansions. In 1899 a rectory was built next to it at 616 Washington Street, and the church purchased Greene (later Guild) Hall behind the church on Denton West in 1917 to function as a parish hall. Further additions included the north aisle (1931), a new parish hall and kitchen (1949), extension of the nave toward Washington Street (1954), and a children’s chapel and three-story educational wing (1964). In the meantime, the Guild Hall behind the church was moved to # 8 Cottage Street, and the 1899 rectory was moved in 1981 to the back of the church parking lot at #6 Cottage Street. The newly vacated lot at the northeast corner of Washington Street and Denton Road was then turned into a garden. (For historical sources on St. Andrew’s, see Appendix C-2.)

Architectural Features

The gradual development of the street resulted in several “generations” of architecture. The earliest began with the original mansard Denton house (the former #11) and its carriage house (now #72). A second period included Orchard House, the home of the Eastman Sisters who founded Dana hall (built in the 1880s) and the converted farmhouse (#55) of Winsford and Hattie Wiswall Denton that was moved from Eastman Circle, as well as the tall shingle and stucco style structures (#s 2, 6, 10, and 32) that were built by 1910. Following closely were the gambrel roof two-story houses (#s 16, 31, and the previous 39) built between 1910 and 1930 as well as the colonial at #29. The 1930s to 1950s brought the attractive capes and colonials at the lower end of the street (#s 15, 19, 28, 40, 46, 48, 52, 56, 58, 61, and 62) as well as the house that now holds three condominiums (# 60). Mr. DiGiando, who built and lived at # 44 and then at # 40, constructed six houses in all – two split-levels in 1964 and 1965 (#s 44 and 65) and the more recent colonials built on the site of the old Denton homestead that were completed by 1970 (9, 11, 71, and 75). (See Appendix D-2 for the Inventory of Houses.)

This architectural variety contributed to the charm and interesting nature of the street which is, as one resident said, “not cookie-cutter.” The adjacent properties also fit comfortably next to each other because of their compatible scale and naturalistic separation by mature shrubs and trees. Driveways tend to be inconspicuous, placed as they are at the side of a lot and headed into a garage that in the case of the older houses is either non-existent or is placed at the back.

Houses and gardens have been well maintained with enlargements and improvements made in
many of the structures. Orchard House (# 14) was expanded on either side with a covered swimming pool at one end and medical offices and an attached garage at the other. Three of the four modern colonials (#s 9, 11, and 71) that were built on the site of the original Denton house have added substantial living space. The house at # 29, originally designed by architect Eliza Newkirk Rogers, was extended across an adjoining lot to include a home office and an attached garage. At the 1910 shingle and stucco house built by “Willie” Denton at #32, two bedrooms and a bath were added in 1998 in what had been the attic without appreciably changing the rooftop. The cape at # 48 added a living area that blended in with the original design. As this report is being written in early 2008, renovations and additions are under way at four other properties on the western arm of the street.

Orchard Avenue, Denton Road, and the Footpath to Fuller Brook

Orchard Avenue, running parallel to the eastern edge of the Denton property, provided access to the Denton sons' new homes, as seen on the 1897 map in Appendix E-1. By 1924, Orchard Avenue was called "Denton Road," and "Denton Road West" had been built. The eastern and western arms, however, each functioned almost as dead end streets because the paved surface left off at the driveway leading into #32. What continued around the loop was a narrow and bumpy track that threaded around trees and shrubs on either side and near the middle of the lower end of Denton West. Not until 1968 was the street paved at Mr. DiGiando’s urging; he warned that in an emergency situation, fire trucks and similar vehicles would be unable to pass. Following the unification of the street, house numbers were changed so that #3 nearest to Washington Street became #78, the church office #4 became #79, and at the bottom of the loop what had been #37 became #46. (See Appendix E-2.)

One of the most important amenities associated with Denton Road is its proximity to Fuller Brook, a 2.5 mile parkway with paths in some places on two sides that provide an ideal place for walking and biking. First proposed by John Charles Olmstead in 1897 as a way of draining swampy areas and at the same time creating a beautiful landscape, the parkway was established by the Town in 1899. By 1902 land acquisition on either side of the stream was almost complete. The first to be finished was the section between Grove and Cottage Streets where the help of Mr. Dana and the Dentons must have speeded the process. (See Appendix E-3).
For many years the way from Denton Road to the Brook was a well-worn but simple footpath that ran between the properties at #32 and #40. Tradition had it that the Misses Bush and Johnson, the Dana Hall teachers who lived at #32, were careful to keep the hemlocks on their side of the fence trimmed so that Dana Students could pass by easily when they came to tea. This informal path continued to be used until some time in the late 1970s when Mr. DiGiando, then living at #40 (which had no fence on its side of the path), decided to close it off because he felt it to be a liability. Neighbors protested and sought some sort of compromise. The upshot was that the Town made the path official, surveyed the right-of-way, graded and paved it with crushed stone, and then constructed two parallel chain-link fences on either side.

To this day frequent and varied use of the path continues – by children going to school, pedestrians walking to the Square from Cottage Street, and by children from the Montessori preschool at St. Andrew’s who walk down the street with their teachers in good weather and then out to the park along the Brook.
II. MAPS OF THE PROPOSED DENTON ROAD NCD

As required by the NCD enabling bylaw (Article 46A, Section 3. (c) (ii), this report includes a map of the proposed Area to be included within the Denton Road Neighborhood Conservation District. The proposed area is shown on three different maps in Appendix F that illustrate the surroundings and limits of the Denton Road NCD. The *locus map* shows the district as a part of the town and its location in relation to Washington Street and Fuller Brook. The *NCD map* shows the properties included in the proposed district. The *ortho map* gives an aerial view that shows the vegetative cover.

The locus map (Appendix F-1) highlights the Denton Road neighborhood at the western end of town. Turning left off Washington Street just west of Wellesley Square, the street runs toward the Fuller Brook Parkway. It is within easy walking distance of the shops in the center as well as the Wellesley Square railroad station, Town Hall, Library, and Hunnewell School. One can see also how Denton Road in 1900 was a meeting point between Dana Hall on Grove Street and Wellesley College further west on Washington Street. In the decades before 1950 when more Wellesley College students lived in “the vil,” the crossroads nature of this location for faculty houses and church going at St. Andrew’s was quite apparent.

The NCD map (Appendix F-2) identifies the properties in the proposed Denton Road NCD as well as those whose owners opted out. Our Denton Road neighborhood includes 25 homes and starts at the back of the church and stretches down the hill to Fuller Brook. It is hoped that with actual establishment of the district and with further experience in seeing how an NCD operates, one or more of those property owners who have currently opted out of the NCD may eventually change their decision and petition to opt in. Such changes are provided for in Article 46A, Section 3. (i).

The ortho map (Appendix F-3) gives an aerial view of Denton Road that shows the mature tree canopy especially as seen at the lower end of the street. This photo was taken prior to 2006 when the new house at #39 had been completed and most of the trees on that lot had been removed. One can see from the overlay of the boundary map on the outline of the area that there is a pleasant separation of properties created by natural vegetation, which is also evident to pedestrians at the street level.
III. GUIDELINES FOR THE AREA

Article 46A of Wellesley’s Town Bylaw is the basis for the regulations to administer the proposed Denton Road NCD. The goal of the Study Committee in drafting the guidelines is to encourage compatibility of construction, create dialog among neighbors, and continue the dynamic improvement of the street’s pleasant scale and setting. (See Appendix G-1 for the text of Article 46A, the enabling bylaw, and Appendix G-2 for the Warrant Article that, if passed by the 2008 Town Meeting, will become Article 46B.)

In preparation for drawing up the guidelines, the drafters of the 2007 enabling bylaw, the Denton Road petitioners, and members of this committee conducted wide-ranging research into the creation and experience of other NCDs around the country. At the national level they examined NCDs in Chapel Hill, NC, Lake Forest, IL, Wilmington, DE, and design guidelines for Naperville, IL. Of particular interest were the various criteria for establishing guidelines as well as the specific details of the guidelines themselves. Special attention was given to three districts in Cambridge, MA, of which one dates back to 1984.

In drafting the guidelines and regulations in Article 46B, the Study Committee focused its attention on balancing ease of administration with adequate protection. The Article now contains two levels of review: “Exempt from Review,” and “Subject to Review,” the latter resulting in binding determinations by the NCD Commission. At one stage of the Committee’s deliberation, non-binding determinations were discussed and eliminated. This decision was made in order to keep the review process brief and clear. Since the guidelines deal with design and not zoning regulations, they rely on qualitative rather than numeric indicators. Unlike zoning that applies to the town as a whole, NCD guidelines focus specifically on the Denton Road Neighborhood and the best way to conserve its overall scale and character.

A Neighborhood Conservation District is administered by its own Commission, which is empowered to review and approve any new construction, alteration, or demolition within the district that is visible from a public way. The Study Committee believes that a Denton Road NCD will serve not only the interests of its residents but the Town of Wellesley as a whole by protecting and maintaining the distinctive historical and architectural character of this unique neighborhood.

Determinations by the Denton Road NCD Commission

The NCD Commission exercises its oversight function in a process that begins with an owner’s application for a building or demolition permit. Before a permit can be issued, the Commission will review the proposed work and decide whether to issue a Certificate of Compatibility that allows the work to go forward, a Certificate of Hardship that recognizes that the construction may not be totally in character but is allowed to go forward anyway, or a
Certificate of Non-Applicability that defines the work as either resulting in no appreciable change or as exempt from review.

**Exempt from Review:**

- Temporary Structures.
- Interior Alterations.
- Storm windows, storm doors and screens.
- Colors.
- Accessory Structures of less than 120 square feet of floor area and less than 15 feet in height.
- Skylights and solar panels parallel to, and in close contact with, the plane of a roof.
- Exterior features of a Building, Structure, or Setting not visible from a public way or area open to public access.
- Ordinary maintenance, repair or replacement in kind of Exterior Architectural Features or changes required by the Building Inspector for public safety.
- Fences four feet high or less and their equal-height entry gates.
- Handicapped-accessible ramps or other features.
- Plant material replaced in kind or similar in type or function.
- Replacement of window(s) in kind or similar in size and style.
General Criteria for NCD Commission Determinations

The Study Committee devoted much time and attention to general conservation standards, specific criteria, and design and demolition guidelines to inform the decisions of the NCD Commission. The guidelines constitute the District’s rules of operation. The Committee decided that, in the final analysis, all applications are to be considered with regard to their potential adverse impact on the abutters, the immediate streetscape, and the District as a whole.

The Commission will apply three General Conservation Standards in deciding whether any given construction, alteration, or demolition is compatible with the guidelines: (1) whether the building, structure or setting is architecturally or historically significant; (2) whether the proposed change would be compatible with the physical characteristics of the site, the existing topography, vegetation, and related features; and (3) whether the proposed change will make use, if possible, of energy-conserving materials and techniques.

The Specific Criteria that the Study Committee believes appropriate for Denton Road are based on design principles that allow for diversity while at the same time retaining what is unique and pleasing about the neighborhood. The first three principles concern architectural features and the historic character of the neighborhood: (1) conservation of the diversity of architectural styles, including the existing scale and proximity of abutting buildings and

Subject to Review:

- Construction of a new Building or Structure.
- Demolition of an existing Building or Structure.
- Alteration or Construction of an Addition to an existing Building or Structure which would require a building permit.
- Alteration of the existing landscape by removal of significant shrubbery and trees over 8” in diameter.
- Alteration of any of the grading on the property.
- Construction of a retaining wall.
- Installation of (a) fence(s) or other built landscape feature(s) higher than four feet.
- Terraces, walks and sidewalks.
- Addition of paving or creation of a new driveway.
- Permanent exterior lighting.
- Changing the siding material or trim on an existing Building or Structure.
- Replacement of windows differing in size or style from those existing.
structures, as well as of others elsewhere in the District; (2) conservation of the District’s predominant pattern of wood frame architecture; and (3) allowing for architectural diversity and individualized alterations while preserving the traditional scale of the buildings and structures.

The remaining **Specific Criteria** focus on landscape and the location of new construction in relation to trees and other planting: (4) encouraging the retention of mature landscape materials and the planting of trees and greenery; (5) preserving the existing grade, location and setback of buildings and structures to maintain the sightlines of the street; and (6) encouraging the separation of properties by means of landscape planting rather than fencing.

**Design Guidelines**

In addition to the preceding general standards and specific criteria that the NCD Commission will use to arrive at its decisions, the review of an application for any new **construction** will consider specific aspects of the plan to determine whether it is generally compatible with its surroundings. The Commission will consider:

- Site layout.
- Volume and dimensions of the building or structure.
- Provision for open space and landscaping.
- Scale and massing in relation to the surroundings.
- Provisions for driveways and parking.
- The effect on the water table or subsoil conditions of adjacent properties.

Similar guidelines will apply to proposed **alteration of an existing building, structure, or setting**. The Commission will consider:

- The architectural or historical significance of the building or feature to be altered and the effect of the proposed alteration on the integrity of the original style or design.
- The potential adverse effect of the proposed alteration on neighboring properties, the surrounding streetscape, and the District as a whole.

In evaluating an application for **demolition** of a building or structure, the Commission will consider:

- The architectural or historical significance of the building or structure of which any portion is to be demolished, giving consideration to its possible eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The physical condition of the building or structure and its subsoil conditions, if applicable.
- A claim of substantial hardship, financial or otherwise.
- The design of any replacement building(s) or structure(s).
The Review Process

To begin the Review process, a complete application for a Certificate of Compatibility, Certificate of Hardship, or Certificate of Non-Applicability must be filed with the NCD Commission. In addition to materials required for a building permit, the Commission may require other information to enable it to make a determination on the application. At its discretion, the Commission may waive certain submission documents or steps in the review process. It is also hoped that informal dialogue may take place between an applicant and one or more of the members of the Commission to iron out any potential problems with the proposal and to consider possible alternatives. Such dialogue is intended to benefit all parties involved and to speed the review process. The date the completed application is received by the Commission will count as the date of its filing.

Within two weeks, the Commission will decide whether or not the application is subject to review. If it is not, a Certificate of Non-Applicability will immediately be given. If the project is subject to review, the Commission will hold a public hearing within 45 days of the filing date. It may make a determination at the time of the hearing or in a reasonable amount of time thereafter. The intent of this timetable is to avoid a tedious, drawn-out process. If the NCD Commission fails to render a decision within 60 days after the close of the public hearing, or within whatever greater time the applicant may, in writing, grant to the Commission, the NCD Commission must issue a Certificate of Compatibility.

After it has made a determination, the NCD Commission will file a copy of all Certificates of Compatibility, Certificates of Hardship, Certificates of Non-Applicability, and determinations of disapproval with the Building Inspector, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, and Wellesley Historical Commission.

Judicial Review, Enforcement, and Lapse

An applicant who is dissatisfied with a decision by the NCD Commission may request a review at a joint meeting of the Wellesley Historical Commission and the Planning Board. As a final recourse, the applicant may ask for further review in the Superior Court of Norfolk County. The Building Inspector will enforce the provisions of Article 46A and the proposed Article 46B.