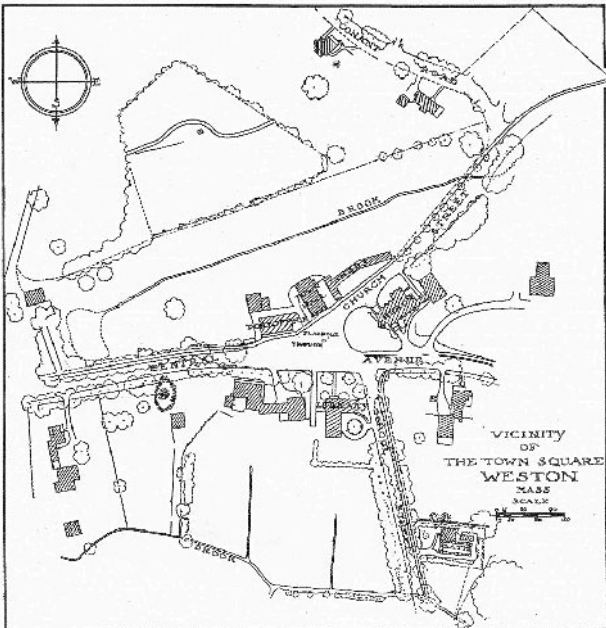


# The Town Green District

The intersection of Boston Post Road, Church Street, and School Street has been the religious and governmental heart of Weston for more than three centuries. In the days when Cutting's general store stood on what is now the Town Green, it was the commercial heart as well. Today, we can "read" the town's history in the architectural landmarks that remain here in this one compact district. In the handful of buildings that frame our Town Green, we see the architectural manifestation of Weston's increasing prominence and prosperity over three centuries.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Weston was one of the first stagecoach stops on the Boston Post Road going west, Josiah Smith operated a popular tavern. In singling out what he calls the "Town Green District" in his 2010 book *Metropolitan Boston*, architectural historian Keith Morgan writes: "The principal document of colonial commerce on the Town Green is the clapboard gambrel-roofed Josiah Smith Tavern."

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the town's transformation from a rural farm town to the "Lenox of the East" is symbolized by two new buildings in the Town Square, the fieldstone First Parish Church (1888) and the red brick Weston Public Library (1899). In these two buildings, the inspiration came from England, in the form of English Revival, a style used in academic and other learned settings. These two buildings were a source of great pride and represented an increased cultural sophistication.



The next step in the evolution of the "Town Square" was the actual redesign of the town center and creation of the Town Green in the 1910s. This time, the goal was nothing less than to create "a village common or green, always found in the best types of old New England villages." While only a decade or so later, the inspira-

*Left: Town fathers sent out this plan of the "Town Square" about 1911 to solicit ideas for an improved town center. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

tion was not England but rather American Colonial Revival. The landscape architect, Arthur Shurtleff (later Shurcliff), wrote in the 1912 *Town Report*:

In my opinion, the execution of this scheme would give Weston a Town Common of remarkable individuality and in many respects the finest open space of its kind in the Common-wealth.

The Town Improvement Plan also included construction of a new fire station (1913) and monumental Town Hall (1917), both designed in the Georgian/Colonial Revival style, as appropriate to the new colonial-style town common. The fire station was designed by Alexander S. Jenney, who had designed the nearby library fifteen years earlier. In 1919, the Gothic Revival St. Julia Church took its place facing the Town Green. Weston gained regional and even national attention for its new “civic center.”

Surrounding this early 20<sup>th</sup> century Town Green is an ensemble of important buildings representing each of these phases in the town’s growth and development. Each is more ambitious than the example from the previous century, as Weston attracted more and more well-to-do residents. But the common thread is the pride of the citizenry in their town center and the institutions—the church, library, and town hall, standing along with the colonial tavern.

Since the creation of the Town Green a century ago, town leaders have carefully protected this centerpiece of the town. Lamson Park was taken by eminent domain to protect the visual integrity of the Green and Town Hall. A recent addition to the Town Hall was carefully designed to preserve the character of the building. The exterior of the Josiah Smith Tavern was restored in 2006 with Community Preservation Act funds. First Parish Church has carefully guarded the integrity of its handsome stone building, which has several additions in compatible style. Constraints on the library site meant that the 1899 building was never expanded and it maintains its architectural integrity. As a result, the Town Green area looks much like it did a century ago, when town leaders completed their visionary Town Improvement Plan. Now, it is up to us to preserve this legacy.

