

Centre and South Streets Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan



CORRIDOR-WIDE GUIDELINES Draft for Community Review – 9/21/2010

The Corridor-Wide Guidelines are a critical component of the overall Centre/South Street Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan. The guidelines are also posted on the BRA's website for review at www.cityofboston.gov/bra. Additional report sections will also be posted as available. All previous presentations and information presented as part of the Action Plan has been continually available as well.

Comments must be submitted by Monday, October 18th, and should be sent to Inés Palmarin at the BRA. Public comments received will also be posted regularly on the BRA's website. Comments must be in writing and may be submitted by e-mail (Ines.Palmarin.bra@cityofboston.gov), fax (617.367.6087), or by mail (Inés Palmarin, Boston Redevelopment Authority, One City Hall Square 9th Floor, Boston, MA 02122).



Boston Transportation Department

in partnership with:
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services

4. Corridor-Wide Guidelines

A key task of the Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan is to define a unifying vision for the Centre/South Street corridor. While this is broadly defined in the Vision Statement, the Corridor-Wide Guidelines are where this vision begins to take physical form. The Corridor-Wide Guidelines provide a community defined set of standard elements to be applied throughout the study area. To establish continuity from Jackson Square to Forest Hills, the guidelines provide consistency and quality to the corridor in keeping with the broadly defined vision to:

Establish Centre/South as the area's Main Street, drawing out new and existing connections, while celebrating the diversity of its people and places

The Guidelines developed by the community seek to ensure that the Centre/South Street corridor is both unified and reflects the variety of areas and conditions in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood it passes through. Setting the tone for the look, feel, and function of the corridor were primary discussion points in the development of the Guidelines. It is well understood that Corridor-Wide standards will not be implemented at once, but rather will establish the benchmark of materials, techniques, and priorities that will guide all future corridor improvements. Rooted locally, while seeking the best of current city, national and international practice, the Guidelines are reflective of and supportive to the following categories described in the Vision Statement:

- ◆ Build upon the corridor's identity to create a 21st century street with a Jamaica Plain character
- ◆ Create a place for all uses and users
- ◆ Reinforce the Centre/South corridors as the local and regional center of Jamaica Plain

Guidelines are intended to provide not just the framework, but also the material choices and considerations that can be used to provide both the base level of design and to *"provide special places for people to be along the corridor"* (Vision Statement). The community's intent is for these places to evolve over time, and the Corridor-Wide Guidelines are well-suited to a phased implementation approach.



*"Create a place for all uses and users"
(Vision Statement)*



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The Guidelines inform:

- ◆ Concept designs for Hyde Square, Monument Square, and the Jackson Square-Mozart Park area.
- ◆ MBTA plans for the Route 39 Corridor Improvement Program, for early phased application and implementation of the plan.
- ◆ Development projects and improvements to private property along the corridor.
- ◆ Serve as a basis for the City to continue to upgrade the Centre/South Street corridor in keeping with the Vision laid out through this process.

Sustainability

Environmental considerations are integrated throughout the corridor guidelines. Recycled content in materials, such as sidewalks and street furnishings, contribute toward material and resource efficiency. LED-technology for street lighting holds great promise for improved energy performance. Improved street tree plantings, permeable paving, stormwater management best practices, such as rain gardens, help reduce water pollution from runoff. All these contribute to a streetscape that is inviting and accommodating to various modes of travel—transit, walking, and bicycles— which helps encourage alternatives to single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips, thereby reducing the carbon footprint typically associated with vehicular transportation.



Creatively utilize space adjacent to and behind buildings to enhance commercial vitality (Farmers markets, rear doors, outdoor seating)" (Vision Statement)

Location

The Corridor-Wide Guidelines can vary by element in their recommendations for uniformity or diversity along the corridor. In each individual element described below, the Guidelines will describe the community's recommendation for application. Some elements may be uniform for the entire length of the corridor; with sidewalk materials serving as one example. Other elements, such as street lights and street trees, may vary from one

portion of the corridor to another. However, even elements that may vary will still fall within parameters defined in the Guidelines and relate to each of the other elements along the corridor as part of a family. The overall intent of the Guidelines is not to establish a homogenous look for the Centre/South corridor, but rather to define the parameters within which the community's character can best be expressed in a way that still melds into a cohesive whole.



The City of Boston has formally requested that the MBTA remove the remaining catenary poles.

Visual Clutter

One challenge to accomplishing this unity with diversity is to reduce visual clutter throughout the corridor. In many instances, streetscape elements should recede to allow the storefronts and vibrancy of street life to gather prominence. They should allow historic or unique corridor destinations to be brought to the fore. In others, the Guidelines should help to create “special” places that are nodes or destinations along the corridor. To accomplish this we need to look not only at what we want to build, but what should be removed. Competing and redundant onstreet signs, unattractive existing street furniture (street lights, benches), and especially the remaining catenary poles, must be removed so that more desirable features can be highlighted.

Elements of the Palette

Although buildings comprise the most visible elements along the corridor, streetscape elements including sidewalks, crosswalks and street lights are important elements that reinforce a particular look and feel for the corridor.

Opportunities vary within categories of elements. Signage and curb type, for example, need to maintain relatively strict consistency throughout the corridor. On the other end of the spectrum are benches and public art, which can draw from a wider array of options and exhibit substantial individuality.

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- Street Lights**
- Street Trees
- Signs
- Wayfinding
- Benches**
- Trash Receptacles**
- Other Street Furniture
- Crosswalk Material**
- Sidewalk Material**
- Public Art
- Curbs



Elements of the Streetscape Palette

Recommendations

Sidewalks

A large part of the vibrancy of the Centre/South Corridor is attributable to the activity that takes place on the sidewalks. The community spent a substantial amount of time discussing and reviewing ways to enhance this vibrancy.

Sidewalk Width

With sidewalks typically no larger than 8' in width along much of the Centre/South Corridor, little room is typically available for any enhancements. Street trees, street furniture, café or sales space for merchants, or any other contributors to urban vibrancy typically do not fit. Moreover, where street trees, or other amenities exist, they severely constrict the walking path, which is already too narrow to accommodate more than two people abreast.

Recognizing the constraint that the current sidewalks represent, the Guidelines recommend widening of the sidewalk where possible. An overall widening to 10 ft. or even 20 ft. could be considered accommodating. but always must be balanced with bicycle facilities and parking. Widening at key locations to provide merchant/café space, bus stop waiting areas, and larger street trees is preferred. Exploring opportunities to offer additional sidewalk amenities by increasing use of private property at the back of sidewalk is recommended.



The sidewalk is comprised of a number of zones. People tend to shy away from walking next to buildings and other edges and, where there is inadequate width, people walk everywhere.



Sidewalk with darker grey color, smooth finish, saw-cut joints, and dark surface aggregate.

Sidewalk Materials

Despite the width, the physical condition of sidewalks on the Centre/South corridor are in good condition, with many having recently been improved by the Boston Public Works

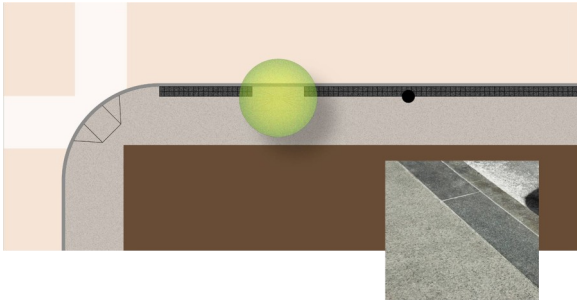
Department. The Guidelines

propose a simple, yet elegant, sidewalk material. They preferred to have the activity of the corridor naturally convey the sense of vibrancy, rather than through overly complicated material choices. Concrete is the preferred material, in keeping with general City standards, but a Higher Quality Concrete is specified, with a dark surface aggregate. The sidewalk would also have a smooth finish, and saw cut joints, adding both to the

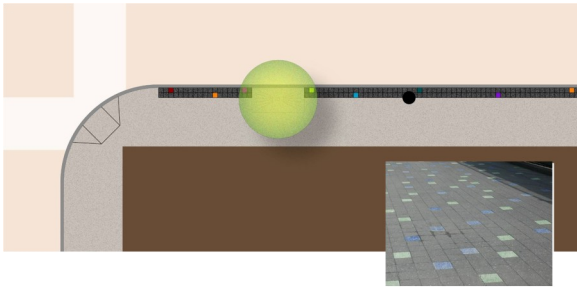
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simplicity and elegance of the design, while forming a base on which the rest of the Streetscape elements could be built.



Narrow band at curb, with permeable pavement.



Narrow band at curb, with color or art.

Feature Strip

Typical Boston sidewalk flourishes can include a Feature Strip along either the curbline, or the back of sidewalk, which are often designed with brick. Instead of a uniform brick look, the Streetscape Guidelines recommended a granite unit pavers for a feature strip, to be installed strategically in commercial or special areas. Sustainability was an additional factors for the Feature Strip, as granite pavers were seen both as exceedingly durable, and are able to be installed in a permeable manner. The granite pavers could be accented with recycled glass inserts, injecting both color and an additional sustainable element. Lastly, the Feature Strip could be part of the ArtWalk (described subsequently), including literally incorporating community art and marking the path to other installations. The community said that this should evolve over time, rather than be planned from the onset.

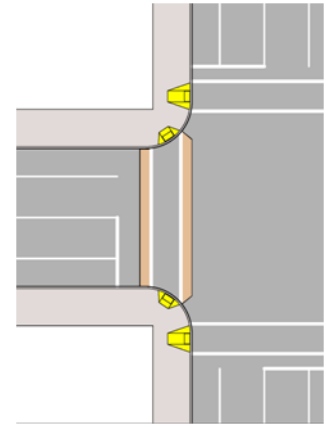
Crosswalks

With a high level of pedestrian activity, crosswalks serve an important functional role in supporting the vibrancy of the corridor. Especially in commercial areas, the presence of safe, accessible pedestrian crossings contributes greatly to the comfort level of pedestrians and consequently the connectivity of the corridor. The Guidelines recommend that crosswalks be well-placed, frequent, safe and meet all accessibility requirements. Crosswalks should all have pedestrian ramps as well. Two primary recommendations were discussed at length and strongly endorsed:



- 1) Traditional *ladder crosswalks* should be used for all installations. In both residential and commercial areas, the ladder crosswalk was seen as preferable for its simple and straight-forward functionality, rather than special patterns.
- 2) *Raised crosswalks* were recommended for use across side streets, especially in areas of heightened pedestrian activity. Commercial districts, and perhaps the areas near transit stations were seen as the prime candidates for this application. Raised crossings were recommended as they would emphasize

the pedestrian realm, by enhancing accessibility and ease of pedestrian travel along the main street. While the term “raised crosswalks” encompass a wide variety of applications currently in use, the Guidelines recommend a special type—a 3-Up, 3-Down crosswalk. In Boston, typical curb reveal is 6 inches, by raising the crosswalk 3 inches from the roadway, a transition is created 3 inches up from the road, and 3 inches down from the sidewalk.



3-UP, 3-DOWN raised crosswalks recommended across side streets.

Street Lights

The Committee recommended the City’s standard “acorn” type street lights with a cap to prevent glare and uplighting. This lighting style is in scale with the street dimensions and the architecture for retail, residential or other uses, reduces glare, and increases the night time presence of retail store front lighting. This fixture type should be used from Hyde Square south to



Acorn light fixture with cap

Carolina Avenue at the South Street Mall to reinforce the historic and commercial center of JP. In prominent pedestrian locations, double acorns should be used as appropriate. Acorn lights should have the following characteristics:

- ◆ 13-18’ height
- ◆ 75’ spacing
- ◆ Steel fluted poles with wide decorative base
- ◆ Black
- ◆ Cutoff achieved with louvres

"Pendant" style lights with a mast arm should be utilized north of Hyde Square to Jackson Square and south of Carolina Avenue to Forest Hills. These fixtures would complete the pattern that all ready exists on adjacent streets. Pendant lights should have the following characteristics:

- ◆ 23-28’ height
- ◆ 100’-120’ spacing
- ◆ Steel fluted poles with decorative base
- ◆ Black
- ◆ Full cutoff

Light spacing should be coordinated with tree spacing for both retail and residential areas.



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Both lighting types are City standards so will not place any additional burden on the Public Works Department. The City of Boston has installed LED Light fixtures in the municipal parking lot in the JP Centre district as part of a citywide trial. The Guidelines recommend continued monitoring of LED technology and installation if City standards are established for LEDs at the time of construction. If City standards are not established, specify fixtures that can be retrofitted with LEDs.

A Sense of Green

The Centre South Corridor boasts a distinct “sense of green,” that moves well beyond the simple presence of street trees. Some areas within the corridor benefit from a backdrop of trees, such as those located in the adjacent open spaces of Arnold Arboretum, the Jamaicaway, and Southwest Corridor. These are augmented by trees on private property, especially in modest front and side yards of residences. Commercial areas, meanwhile, often rely on public street trees to provide shade, environmental, and aesthetic benefits. The “Sense of Green” contributes greatly to the livability and feel of the neighborhood as an urban oasis. Through the Action Plan, the “Sense of Green” was identified as having four component



- 1. Trees in the distance
- 2. Trees on private property

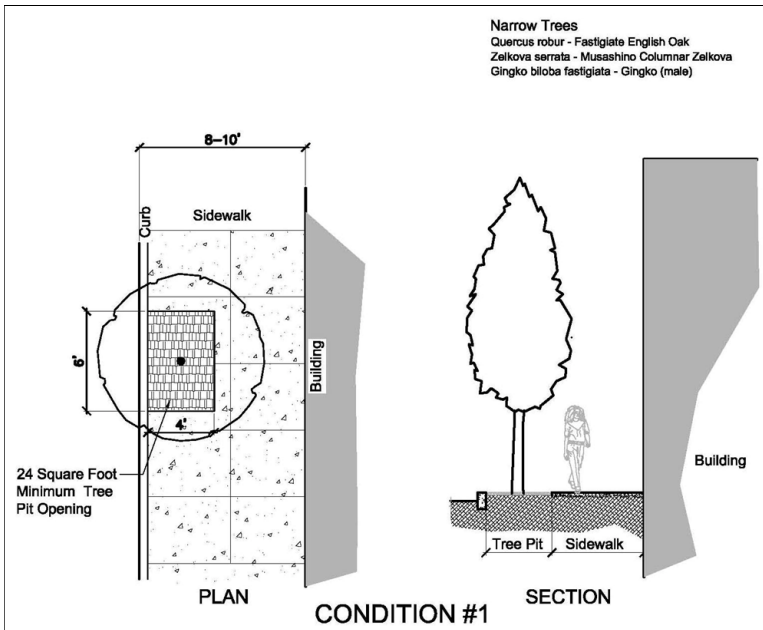


- 3. Traditional street trees
- 4. Lawns and shrubbery

A graphic analysis of the corridor was also prepared showing the “Sense of Green” and is shown on the opposite page.

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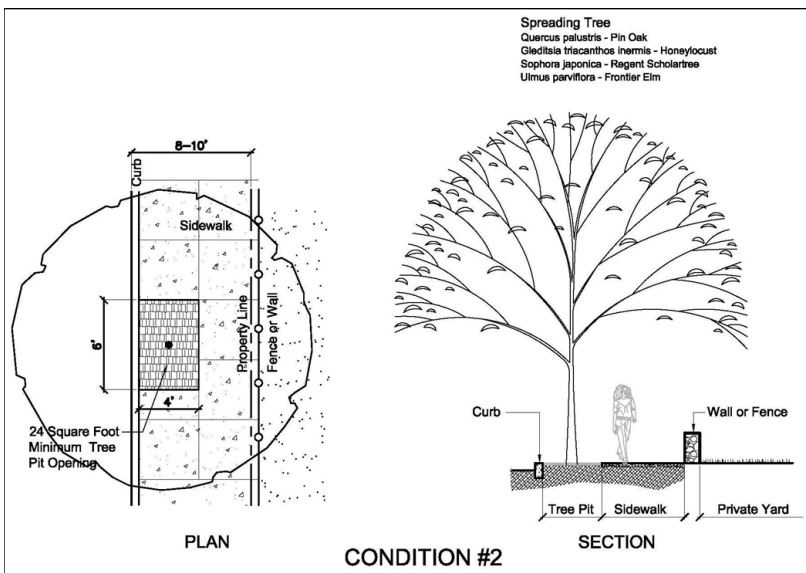
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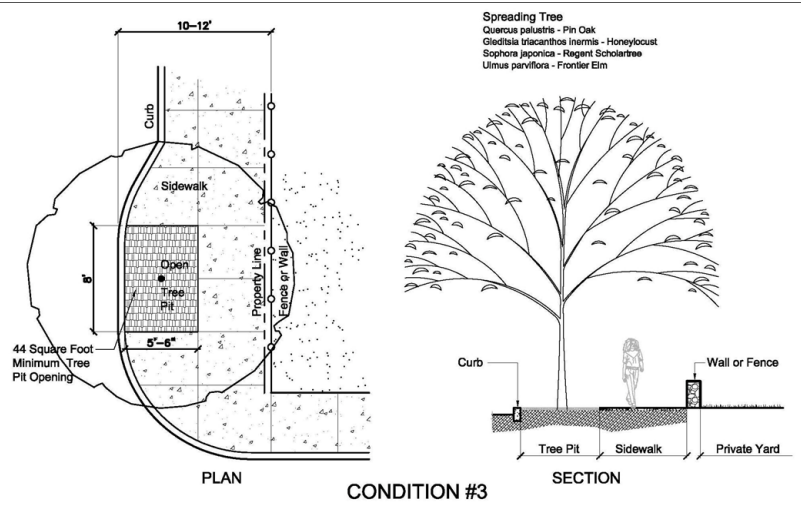
Condition 2 & 3 street trees include Honeylocust, Pin oak, Frontier elm, and Sophora



Condition 2 is for places where a wider, spreading canopy is desirable. This condition typically involves sidewalks in residential, or other, areas where buildings do not abut the back of sidewalk. Concentrations of trees and species would be preferable, even as many as 6 per residential block.



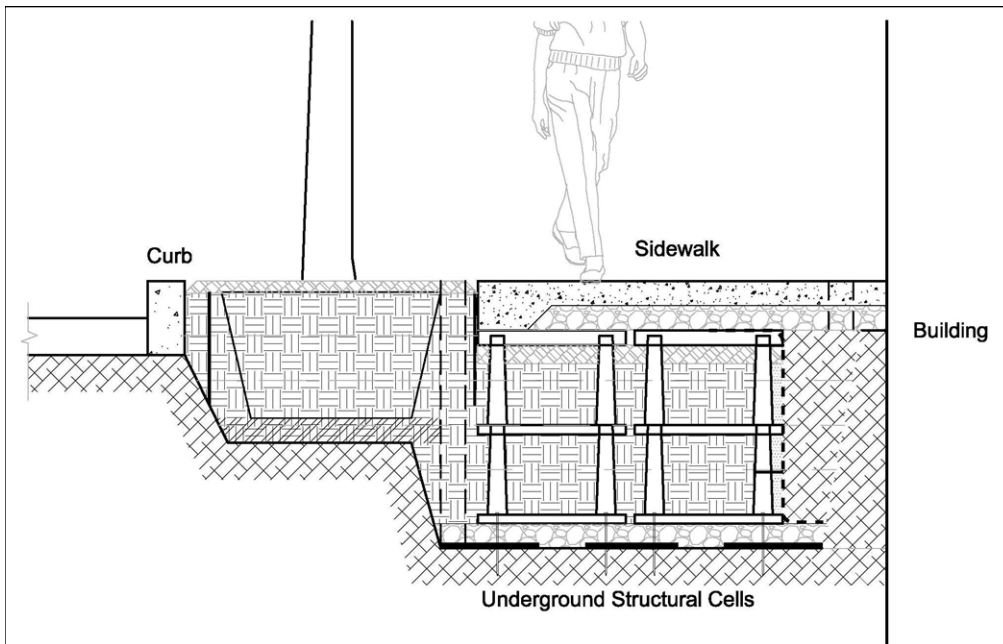
Condition 3 is for the largest trees, and typically involves wider sidewalks, or uniquely created places to thrive. Larger tree pits (5' x 8') are required for these to thrive.



The Guidelines recommend trees should be:

- ◆ Spaced appropriately: 30' – 40' on center for Condition 2 & 3; 20' – 25' on center for Condition 1
- ◆ Plant variety throughout the corridor, but group by species to create uniformity and maximize visual impact

For sustainability and tree health, alternative technologies were recommended for further exploration. As shown below, installing underground structural cells can support the sidewalk, while providing additional growing medium for tree roots to grow into. Recapturing rainwater into tree pits using perforated pipes and rain gardens wherever possible also helps to promote tree growth.



The City of Boston requires a minimum sidewalk width of 7'-6" (inclusive of the curb) in order to plant a street tree. In order to achieve the highest level of growth and health of the street trees, methods to extend the volume of soil around the tree roots and prevent soil compaction will be used.

Trees behind the Sidewalk

In conditions where the sidewalk is too narrow or busy to plant street trees, or to complement trees planted at the curb, locations where trees can be planted on private property behind the sidewalk should be identified. Boston’s tree planting program can provide for a tree on private property,

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free of charge, if the property owner agrees to maintain the tree.

Of particular interest are those locations where asphalt parking lots abut directly against the sidewalk. Tree planting in these areas as part of a buffer between the parking and sidewalk are important to achieve a continuity of green along the corridor.

Benches

Like other street furnishings, benches are subject to the larger debate between traditional and contemporary aesthetics. The City standard black-painted metal is a timeless look that can be well-suited to benches and other improvements that are expected to be in place for decades. Contemporary and artist-designed benches add a splash of individuality to a location and helps distinguish a particular neighborhood, but run the risk of looking dated over time. For these reasons, the black finish steel benches with four-leg configuration, bolted to sidewalk are recommended throughout the corridor. However, the City and community should identify locations for artist-designed benches, to take advantage of the positive impact these furnishings can have on public spaces.

Example of an artist designed bench (right) and City standard black-painted metal bench (far right)



City standard solar compactor (above) and combination trash/recycling unit (left)

Trash Receptacles

It is recommended that the City standard solar compactor for trash disposal be installed throughout the corridor. Newer units, with a combination recycling receptacle are being tested in parts of Boston. Where possible, these units shown below are recommended for installation in the Centre/South corridor.





City standard bicycle rack (above left) and example of an artist-designed rack (above right)

Bicycle Racks

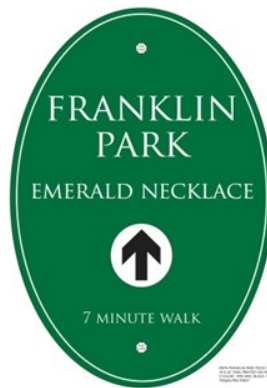
Similar to street bench recommendations, the City standard post with circle, black finish is recommended for installation throughout the corridor. As Jamaica Plain has perhaps the highest level of bicycle use in the city of Boston, bicycle racks should be ubiquitous, especially near commercial areas, and other corridor destinations. In “special areas”, locations may be identified for artist-designed bike racks.

Newspaper Box Corrals

The high number of newspaper boxes along the corridor, particularly in commercial nodes, creates an eyesore in the pedestrian zone. Identify locations where groupings of newspaper boxes can be located and use black finished metal structures, bolted to the sidewalk. In Boston, no more than five are permitted in a single location.

Wayfinding

The objectives of a coordinated wayfinding plan are two-fold. First, signs should efficiently direct drivers to off-street parking lots. Second, pedestrian signs and maps should be located at key decision points, such as parking lots, bus stops, streets linking to T stations, and streets linking to Jamaica Pond and adjacent parks. Together, these elements serve to improve and maintain circulation throughout the neighborhood and connect visitors to local business and other attractions.



The addition of blue P for parking signs to direct drivers to off-street lots are recommended, which turn drivers into pedestrians as quickly as possible and encourages the park-once-and-walk approach. Other signage should build on existing sign systems, such as JP Walks, MBTA and Emerald Necklace Conservancy, to locate information at critical

decision points along the corridor. These locations should include off-street parking lots, bus shelters, and at intersections with streets linking to MBTA station and Jamaica Pond.

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Public Art

Home to many artists, and art organizations, the Jamaica Plain clearly views art as an important expression of the community. A clear desire is to continue to develop artistic expression as part of the Centre/South streetscape. The Centre South Corridor is home to numerous existing murals and public art, which are an important feature in the neighborhood's identity. While seeking to encourage the public expression of the Arts, the community wants to allow for the organic development of artistic expression. As places or nodes are developed, room for the arts should be provided, but should not be proscriptive.

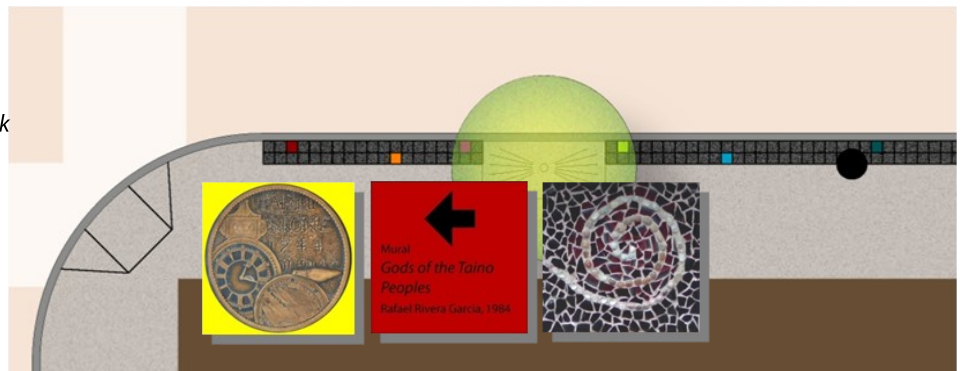


Art should be integrated throughout the corridor



One coordinated approach to public art recommended was the creation of a Jamaica Plain Arts Walk from Jackson Square to Forest Hills. The large number of murals along the corridor could serve as a foundation, with additional locations identified for major art installations at critical decision points along the corridor. These ultimately could assist in navigation as well as enhancing the environment. The artist-designed benches and bike racks described above could supplement those elements. The proposed sidewalk feature strip could not only mark the path, but also be used as a framework for adding small, two-dimensional art elements along the corridor. Pavers in the feature strip could also be swapped out for identifiers of adjacent murals, and for historic or cultural markers.

The Artwalk can be integrated with the sidewalk feature strip



Additional Recommendations for Private Property

Fences, Walls and Hedges

Boundary elements at the back of sidewalk, particularly for residential properties, form an important part of the streetscape by reinforcing the boundary between what is private and what is public. When done well, these elements also add to the beauty and visual richness of the streetscape. Unfortunately, the use of chain-link fencing along the corridor does not add to the beauty of the street. We recommend that, as opportunities for

replacement of chain link fencing become available, that it be replaced with black metal picket-type fences already found along the corridor, or other appropriate materials.



Awnings

In addition to their visual impact, awnings can provide shade for pedestrians and reduce solar gain on the large windows typically found on commercial buildings. Particularly on narrow sidewalks where there is not sufficient room for street trees, awnings can provide shade as well as protection from rain.

The use of awnings, rather than window blinds, also reduces glare allowing for greater transparency between the interior and exterior of storefronts; a desirable quality in a commercial district.



Awnings can provide shade on sidewalks too narrow for street trees

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Transparency contributes to a vibrant environment

Storefront Windows

A high degree of transparency between the sidewalk and the interior of storefronts is found in the most successful pedestrian environments. Windows that are blocked with signs, blinds and impermeable displays reduce this transparency and are to be discouraged.

Where security screens are used, the open grill screens, rather than solid, are preferred because they maintain the transparency as well as allow light to spill out onto the sidewalk at night.