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Branding and Wayfinding Project, Town of Wellesley, MA

A Report Prepared by Favermann Design



Massachusetts Downtown Initiative

Introduction

The Town of Wellesley made an application to the DHCD's Downtown Initiative Program to bring needed and better focused identification as well as directional access to Wellesley Square, the most prominent of the town's commercial districts. Many of the town's government buildings and facilities are located in and around Wellesley Square as well. Along with staff from the planning department, Wellesley Square Branding and Wayfinding Project Committee ("Project Committee") was appointed to serve to oversee the design and planning process for branding and wayfinding. Including one Selectman and members of the Planning Board and Historical Commission. Several town department representatives (DPW, Police, etc.) also participated in meetings.

Early on, it was decided that the design would be expanded also to include the two other prominent commercial districts—Lower Falls and Wellesley Hills. Therefore, the design process took into project consideration how to distinguish these commercial areas individually while being consistent with the Wellesley Square design. Additionally, it was recommended that resulting aspects of this branding and wayfinding project be applied where appropriate throughout the entire Town of Wellesley. The design process went through a series of steps and reviews culminating in a unanimous approval by the Wellesley Board of Selectman.

Background

With its well-kept houses and lawns and a population of over 28,000, the Town of Wellesley is a suburban, primarily residential community located just west of Boston. Wellesley has one of the highest median household and family incomes in the Commonwealth. Spread along both Route 9 and Routes 16 and 135, its retail shopping ranges from very good to excellent, functional to elegant. Known as the home of the prestigious and historic Wellesley College, it also includes the campuses of Babson College, a business and well-known executive education college and Massachusetts Bay Community College, a two-year public college.

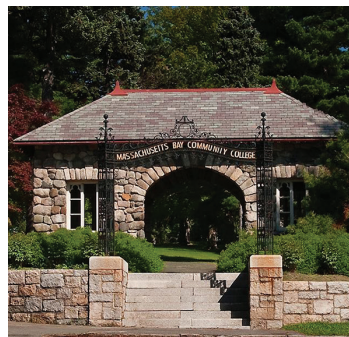
Located in eastern Massachusetts, it is bordered on the east by the City of Newton, on the north by the Town of Weston, on the south by the towns of Needham and Dover. On the west, it borders the Town of Natick. Wellesley has a total area of 10.49 square miles, of which, 10.18 square miles is land and only 0.32 square miles is water.



Clock in Wellesley Square



Babson College



Mass Bay Community College



Wellesley College

The Town was settled in the 1630s as a section of Dedham, MA. Later, it was part of adjacent Needham, MA and was called West Needham until 1881 when it became Wellesley. The Town was named after the estate of local benefactor Horatio Hollis Hunnewell. The Town grew rather modestly until the 1920s when it grew by 80 percent. Since its founding, the town government has been run by town meeting.

Wellesley is known for possessing the second greatest concentration of residents with advanced degrees in the country. The public education services of the town are very well regarded and its high school has been ranked 70th best public high school in the nation by U.S. News & Worlds Report. The Town also includes a number of private schools.

In terms of transportation, Wellesley has had rail service to Boston since 1833. Currently, service is provided through the MBTA. It offers 17 weekday Commuter Rail trains both inbound and outbound. There are three Wellesley's commuter stations. These include Wellesley Farms, Wellesley Hills and Wellesley Square. The MWRTA bus service runs along Walnut Street, Cedar Street, and Route 9.

Wellesley is home to the headquarters of many local, national and global businesses. These include Sun Life Financial/US, Biogen Idec and several others. Wellesley Office Park acts as a partial gateway to the town as one enters along Route 9 from Newton as does the crossroads of Route 9 and Route MA128/US95.

The Process

The design and planning process went through a series of tasks. These include the following:

Task 1: Site Review, Historical Context and Analysis (April-May 2016)

In order for the consultant Favermann Design to become familiar with the Wellesley Square Project area and the anticipated goals of the project, a site walking tour of Wellesley Square was led by Planning Director Michael Zehner and Senior Planner Heather Lamplough of the Wellesley Square in May 2016. This tour was followed by a photographic survey, review of site maps and analysis by Favermann Design. This analysis was eventually turned into an interactive workshop presentation for the Project Committee in June 2016.



Committee Members Participating in Design Process

Task 2: Develop Brand (June – October 2016)

A. After a preliminary meeting in June 2016 between Favermann Design and the Wellesley Square Branding and Wayfinding Project Committee to finalize scope and develop strategy and goals, a background presentation was presented at a follow-up meeting by Favermann Design. Future meetings were to be scheduled monthly until completion of the project.

B. An interactive Ideation Exercise was participated in by the committee members to ascertain descriptive elements, symbols and colors to be used in the design. In collaboration with the Project Committee, a design of a brand theme, logo, and slogan or tagline, including color, font, placement, etc. were reviewed and discussed. This was followed up by a review of revised design options.

C. Early on in the process, it was decided that a tagline or slogan was not necessary. However, it was agreed that a band at the bottom of the gateway signs should include a “band” to differentiate the three commercial districts.

D. A separate meeting was held that included an interactive process that allowed the committee to suggest locations of various sign elements. A map was used for placement of elements. These elements were

considered as phased implementation segments. Eventual funding, both public and private, would be premised on this phased implementation strategy.

E. A meeting on January 11, 2017 was scheduled to have the Wellesley Design Review Committee approve the designs. Approval was unanimous.

F. A February 6, 2017 meeting was scheduled with the Wellesley Board of Selectmen to review and approve recommendations from the Project Committee and Design Review Board.

G. The Branding and Wayfinding program was approved unanimously on February 13, 2017 by the Board of Selectman.

Wellesley Square Branding & Wayfinding Project Committee Members

Over the months involved during the design and planning process, the high level of participation by the various committee members was notable. Each meeting was highly attended and thoughtfully participated in. This was a wonderful example of public-private cooperation and collaboration.

The members included the following:

Robert Skolnick, Design Review Board
Deb Carpenter, Planning Board
Jeanne Conroy, Planning Board
Barbara Searle, Board of Selectman
Grant Brown, Historical Commission
Miquel Lessing, NRC Trails Committee
Demian Wendrow, Wellesley Square Merchants Assoc.
Brad Perry, Property Owner in Wellesley square
Meghan Jop, Board of Selectman's Office
Dave Cohen, Department of Public Works
Sgt Brian Spencer, Police Department
Michael Zehner, Planning Director
Heather Lamplough, Senior Planner
Victor Panak, Planner

The Design

Whatever the design would eventually be, from the outset of the process, it was clear to the committee members that the design had to reflect the upscale quality of life of the community. The design needed to be elegant and functional expressing a sense of the character of Town of Wellesley. Early in the process, the Planning Department and the committee wanted the brand to be able to work throughout the Town of Wellesley, not just for Wellesley Square commercial district.

An initial phase of the process was the Wellesley-specific ideation exercise.



Isaac Sprague Memorial Tower (1928)



Waban Arches, Wellesley

The exercise generated the following words, phrases and descriptions:

Symbols

Town Hall

Sprague Clock Tower

Flowers (roses & daffodils)

Station Oak

Tree Canopy

Rod Iron Fences

Store-lined Streets

Ducks

Church Steeples

Lollipop Clock

Lake Waban/Fuller Brook



Wellesley Town Hall

From these exercises, Favermann Design was able to initially develop images that reflected the concept of Town of Wellesley's character. Various strategic and symbolic images were explored: one of which would hopefully become the visual solution to a brand. Among the symbols and elements tested were a streetscape view of Wellesley Square, the Town Hall and the Sprague Clock Tower—all prominent symbols that represented a layered or multi-part image encompassing Wellesley's history and/or community pride of place. Also, sprigs of flowers including roses and daffodils were looked at as they all had a narrative connected to the Town of Wellesley. Roses are historically symbolic of the Hunnewell Gardens on the namesake of the Town, Wellesley Estate; daffodils are presented to runners at the Boston Marathon each year. At the same time, there was an exploration of colors, colors that were suggested in the ideation process with the committee. A collage effect was also developed putting graphic representations of roses in the background or sky of the image.

Members of the committee reacted to these images and colors in thoughtful ways by asking for some to be eliminated and others to be further refined. Almost immediately, the concept of Wellesley Square was rejected because it was felt that it limited clear brand applications. The committee rejected use of Wellesley High School colors red, black and white. It was also recommended that a better (stronger) image of Wellesley Town Hall be tested.

As a decorative element, a metal band was shown at the bottom of each larger "gateway" sign. Initially these showed roses or daffodil horizontal configurations. At the September 2016 Review Meeting, it was recommended by the committee to use this band as a way to indicate and thus differentiate the three major commercial districts in the town. Thus, Lower Falls, Wellesley Hills and Wellesley Square would all be stated at welcoming signs to each. A flower motif would also "frame" the names.

A recommendation was made at the September meeting that the Town Hall be used as the major symbolic element. Also, at that time, the consultant was asked to refine the colors to two options: blue and green. A darker green color was eventually agreed upon.

Along with welcome or gateway sign elements, directional signs were included as well as parking and parking directional units. Parking signs will include a "P" in a blue circle. Added to these sign elements were smaller signs for trail markers. Additionally, banner suggestions and Artwings—a metal sculptural piece to be affixed to light poles, are included in the sign element system. On top of directional sign elements would be decorative hardware as well. These could include symbolic forms of Town Hall, Sprague Clock Tower, roses and the letter "w."

After developing the sign element program, the committee spent one entire session applying the various element to specific locations within Wellesley Square. This task was applied to a current aerial map provided by the Town's Planning Department. During that exercise, various phases of the wayfinding element implementation were discussed. Each of the the types of sign units and phases was then indicated by color marker dots. This map was further refined by the Planning Department and digitized using the Town's GIS mapping system.

Further recommendation included study and review of potential "site specific" signs for prominent buildings and structures. These may include Town Hall, libraries, Sprague Clock Tower, etc. In addition, historical markers should be considered part of the overall wayfinding system as well. These sign elements would include narratives about the particular site and their context.



Designer Nearly Done with Wellesley Signage Concepts

Updated Sep 28, 2016 at 2:21 PM

Wellesley is closing in on a finalized brand identity that the project's designer hopes will integrate seamlessly into the town's streets.

According to Mark Favermann, the designer contracted to the town via a grant from the state Department of Housing and Community Development, the signs he's working on with a group of town appointees will give a sense of place to visitors and residents alike.

"We're trying to develop a community brand that can be applied to signage and wayfinding elements," said Favermann, who has done similar projects for other communities as well as design work for large-scale organizations and events like the Red Sox and the 1996 Olympics.

The signs, which are nearing completion and a presentation to the Board of Selectmen, will feature a stylized picture of Town Hall and will point people in the direction of town landmarks and key locations.

"Right now the Town Hall is the image that they've chosen," Favermann said, referring to the Wellesley Square Wayfinding and Branding Project Committee. "So we're trying to work through that to make sure that it's noticeable and it reinforces that sense of character we're trying to achieve."

Identifying and representing the town's character, he said, is the critical element to the project. "It's clearly an affluent, elegant community that holds a lot of things precious like family and education and safety," he said. "It has some prestige, it has some tradition and legacy to it."

Next Steps

As there was unanimous support for the brand design and the wayfinding program by the Wellesley Board of Selectman, the town's Planning Department has followed up the DHCD Downtown Initiative project by exploring public and private grant opportunities. These are to obtain funding for further refinements, additional elements (kiosks, etc.) and preparation of specifications and vendor-ready bid materials for fabrication and installation of Phase One wayfinding elements. Implementation funding will be requested at future Town Meetings and consideration will also be given to utilizing Planning Department operating funds along with potential private funding participation (community foundations, banks, corporate gifts, etc.).

Family of Elements

