

West Concord Junction Design Guidelines Preamble Summer 2021



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West Concord Junction Vision Statement

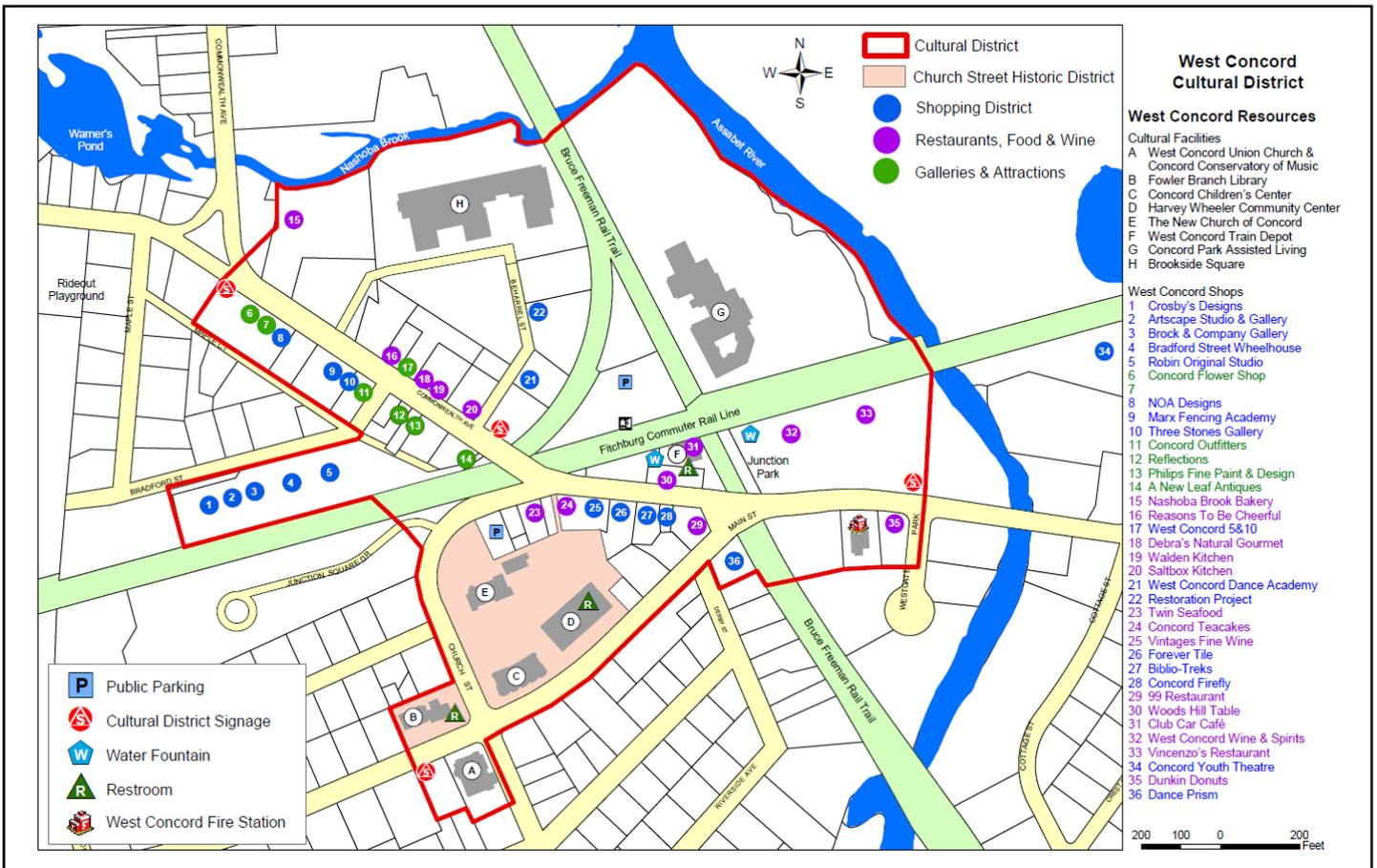
As we envision a vibrant future for West Concord’s village center, also called West Concord Junction, we request that new open space, new development and renovation should:

- Use evidence-based design, which is established from observations of people’s interactions with the space¹
- Prioritize pedestrians over automobiles and parking lots
- Reinforce the Junction’s coherent sense of place
- Support the community’s unique narrative
- Incorporate local time-tested architectural traditions (see photos p. 11-17)
- Be welcoming to all people

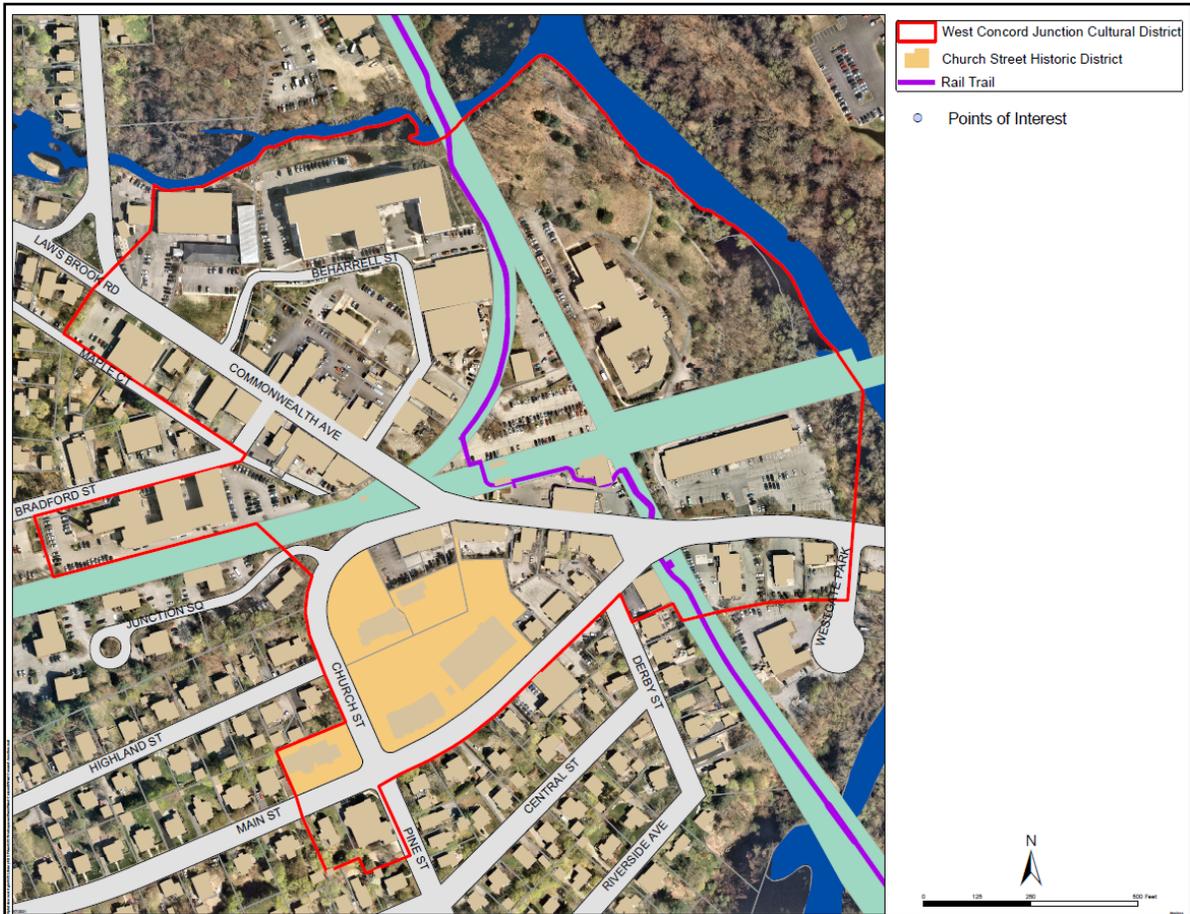
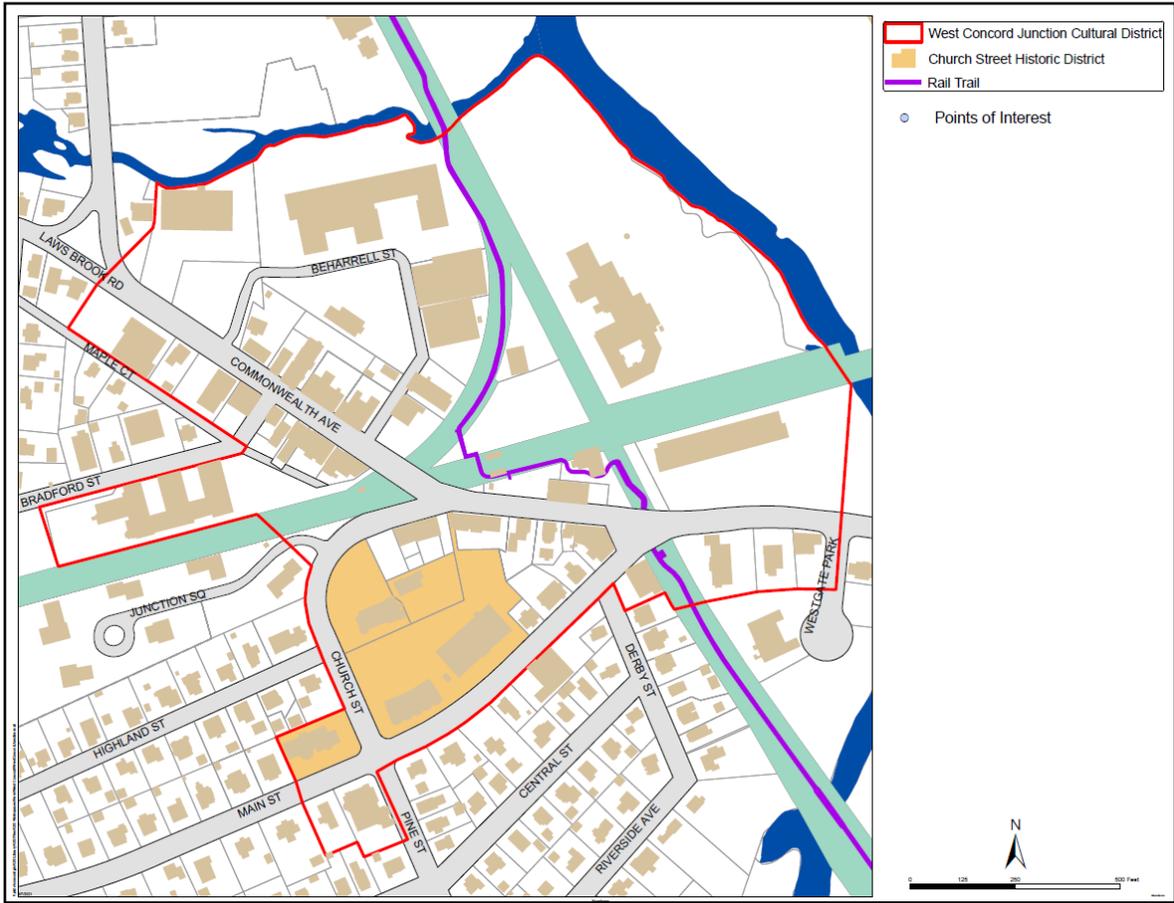


This West Concord building, home to Concord Outfitters and Three Stones Gallery, was built in 2014 and integrates well with the Junction’s historical architecture

For the purposes of this document, West Concord Junction is the land zoned for commercial and industrial uses as defined in the Concord Zoning Bylaw as the “West Concord Village District,” the “West Concord Business District,” and the “West Concord Industrial District.” The maps below show the included area, outlined in red. Some businesses have changed since the first map was created.



¹See the writings of Jan Gehl for more on this approach to community planning.



What We Value About West Concord Junction

West Concord Junction is a practical and charming village center, an asset to West Concord’s residents and the town at large, and an inviting gateway for visitors. It’s an economically vibrant neighborhood with a unique identity and narrative. It’s recognized as a thriving Cultural District – and as you walk the streets, you can see, feel, and hear both the history of this neighborhood and the rich mix of activities that keep it vibrant today.

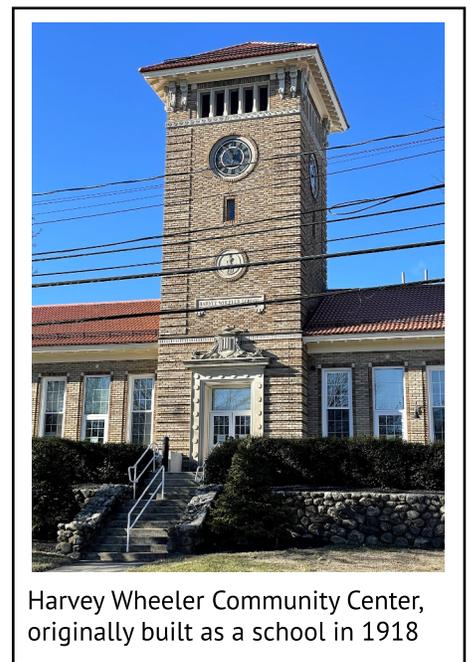


It features a diversity of businesses – it’s a place to enjoy a cup of coffee, choose among restaurants, purchase a fresh loaf of bread and enjoy unique art or take art classes. Locally owned retail and dining establishments flourish. People eat together outside at public picnic tables and gather at the benches outside the shops. Restaurants with table service increasingly offer outdoor seating, creating a lively buzz at mealtime. People arrive, often on foot, to pick up a few groceries, drop off dry cleaning, get their shoes repaired, pick up a prescription, grab flowers from the florist – to do their day-to-day errands with businesses new and old. **This is a town center that’s functional – not just decorative.**

Some buildings, like the Harvey Wheeler School, now used as a community center, are cherished landmarks and reminders of our history. The Harvey Wheeler clocktower is visible from most locations in the Junction and helps visitors and residents orient themselves in town. New structures should maintain or improve upon existing site lines of the clock tower and should give due regard to its significance as a landmark and visual reference point.

New, thoughtfully designed buildings incorporate time-tested New England building traditions and integrate into the fabric of the existing neighborhood, creating a coherent streetscape which invites exploration by all ages.

The sidewalks are comfortable and crosswalks easy to find. The large windows of retail establishments line the street, forming a





Buildings on Commonwealth Ave. in West Concord Junction are equally set back from the street and well-aligned with each other, which encourages pedestrian activity and provides space for benches. Deeper setbacks that provide room for outdoor dining and green space are desirable.

consistent alignment of building facades. Visitors arriving by train can orient and feel safe walking throughout the neighborhood, enjoying its connection to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, Rideout Playground, the Gerow Recreation Area, Warner’s Pond, the Assabet River and Nashoba Brook. You don’t have to have a car to enjoy this community. Students walk by on their way to school and residents from other Concord neighborhoods ride their bikes, moving smoothly through intersections and neighborhood streets.

We are proud of West Concord Junction. It is a community that values diversity and strives to ensure that everyone feels included and welcome.

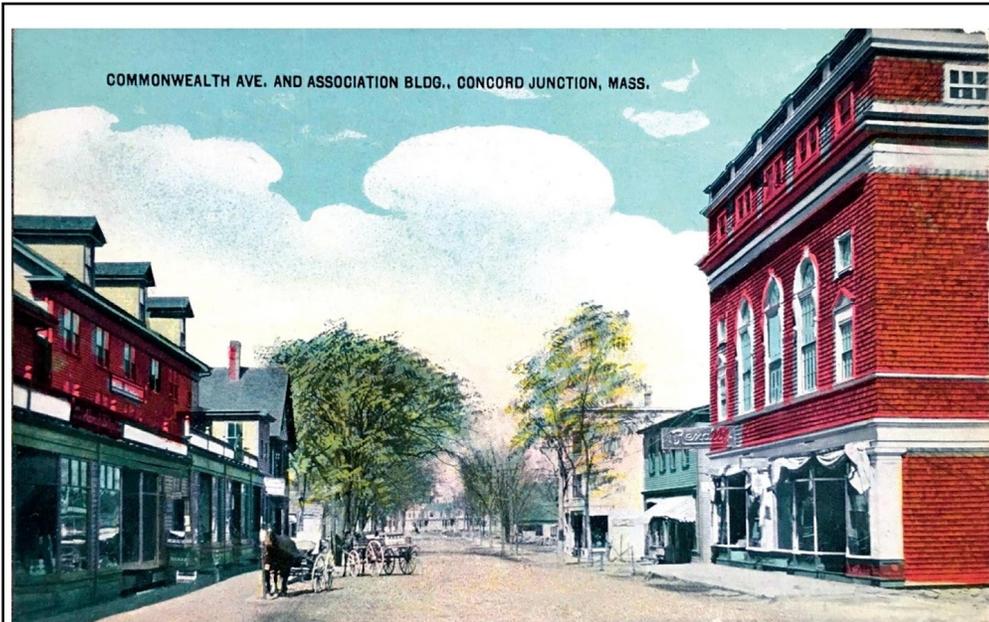
Background

The last ten years have been an exciting decade in West Concord’s evolution. We’ve seen new businesses and investment, parks and trails, and work spaces for artists along with increased visibility for the arts. These new investments have been powered by the determination of community members and business owners to reinforce and celebrate what has long made this neighborhood a great place to live, work and play. Key milestones include:

- **2010:** The West Concord Village Master Plan was developed, building on the work of the West Concord Task Force (predecessor of the West Concord Advisory Committee).
- **2011:** The West Concord Design Guidelines were written.
- **2016:** Massachusetts Cultural Council designated West Concord Junction a [Cultural District](#), making it one of only 50 such districts in the state. A cultural district is a specific area in a city or town. It has a number of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. It is a walkable, compact area. It is easy for visitors and residents to recognize. It is a hub of cultural, artistic and economic activity.
- **2018:** First annual Summer Concert Series was held on three Thursdays in July in Harvey Wheeler Community Center parking lot.
- **2019:** As part of ArtWeek in the spring, the event “West Concord Goes Bluegrass and Art Scramble” showcased bluegrass-themed art activities, music, literature, education, and food in West Concord Junction.
- **2019:** The first in a series of 5 mosaic-style murals was installed in West Concord Junction. Its creation was managed by a West-Concord-owned business, The Village Art Room, and it was completed by hundreds of local volunteers.
- **2019:** The West Concord section of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) opened, providing a 2.8 mile pedestrian path through the center of West Concord. With the anticipated bridge that will connect to the Acton section of the BFRT in 2022, it opens up even more possibilities for West Concord as a destination.

Drawing Inspiration From Our Past

West Concord Junction has traditionally been home to artisans, makers, performers, and industrialists. Pictures of West Concord in the early 1900s show a welcoming New England village, which the Junction still aspires to be today. As we look forward, and as our neighborhood continues to evolve, we think it's important that our streetscapes continue to reflect where we came from. Here are a few glimpses of the past that inspire us:



West Concord 'Junction', Commonwealth Ave., c. 1906; the 'heart' of the community. Buildings are 2-4 stories -- typically modest in scale and humble in appearance. They line the sidewalk with little or no setback. Windows along the street showcase goods and services within, and help create an inviting place to walk.



Commonwealth Ave, West Concord Junction, 1915. Street is unpaved; there are carriages and people, but no cars appear present. Trees are a welcome element within the streetscape and should be incorporated where feasible.



Old photo of West Concord Junction station. This building houses the Club Car Cafe today. Buildings like this give the Junction its identity, and frame its historic narrative. Bringing new life to existing buildings helps make West Concord's past an integral part of our future.



Photo of West Concord Junction station, present day. Club Car Cafe operates from this building, serving breakfast and lunch. The community is proud of its historic and functional station, offering a great vantage point from which to wait for a commuter train, have a meal, or a combination of both.

Vision Statement Principles

The Vision Statement is supported by a set of principles. These principles provide greater detail for how the vision will be achieved.

High-quality, time-tested design that honors West Concord's history: New development, as well as wayfinding, signage, and lighting, contributes to creating a walkable neighborhood with context-sensitive development, enhancing West Concord's unique sense of place. New structures don't interfere with sight lines to the Harvey Wheeler clock tower. Time-tested New England residential and commercial building design help define the public realm and create an engaging streetscape for all.

Active, commercial uses: Commercial spaces are sized to attract small businesses, and regulations encourage uses that serve local residents, such as cafes, bakeries, markets, and general stores.

A pedestrian-focused neighborhood: New development is oriented towards pedestrians (of all ages) — rather than cars — making it easy for new residents to walk to the train and to Junction businesses. Safe walkways connect the train station to all streets and key neighborhood destinations, and bike parking is secure and convenient. Parking is available for commuters and other users and efficiently located and designed to limit large expanses of asphalt as well as to encourage a walkable neighborhood and vibrant economy.

A walkable town center: Continuous sidewalks line all streets, are well-maintained, and connect the Junction to key destinations. New buildings enhance the street edge and contribute to coherent street scenes. Landscaping and street tree shade canopy create a comfortable environment for pedestrians.

Skillful use of traffic calming: Streets and intersections are designed to be safe for all users. Through-traffic should be limited on residential streets.

A network of gathering spaces: Public benches and outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants, as well as pocket parks, courtyards, or other areas provide gathering spaces for residents and visitors. Programming and events help make these spaces vibrant and well-used.

Reflect Concord's environmental and sustainability goals: At its 2017 Town Meeting, Concord committed to 100% carbon-free electricity sources by 2030 and an 80% reduction by 2050 in town-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from a 2008 baseline. New residential and commercial construction offers an economical opportunity to showcase net zero or passive house designs. Proposals for all-electric buildings with a well-insulated envelope are invited and encouraged, while plans for new buildings requiring fossil fuels (including natural gas) for heating and/or cooking are discouraged. Solar electric systems and electric vehicle charging are thoughtfully accommodated for residents and visitors.

How To Use This Document

This Preamble and the core Design Guidelines are intended to complement zoning and align each new investment in West Concord Junction with the needs of the community and the cultural district vision, which is to:

- 1) attract artists and cultural enterprises
- 2) encourage business and job development
- 3) establish the district as a tourist destination
- 4) preserve and reuse historic buildings
- 5) enhance property values
- 6) foster local cultural development²

² These are the goals of a cultural district, per Mass Cultural Council: <https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/fags/>

While the focus of this document applies to private development, these guidelines also touch upon publicly funded investments that help improve the public realm. Major new investments often represent opportunities that may only occur once in a generation. The Design Guidelines hope to clearly communicate the community's preferences for making the most of every opportunity. A project proponent is strongly encouraged to read this document during the early stages of project planning to guide the concept for the project in a manner that is consistent with West Concord Junction's vision and principles. This document and the Design Guidelines will be used by the West Concord Advisory Committee (WCAC), West Concord Junction Cultural District Committee (WCJCDC) and the Concord Planning Board during the review of a project application and approval process.

Additional Guidance: Six Quick Tips For Designing New Buildings With The Community's Values In Mind

A developer recently found the design advice below to be helpful. We encourage future development to incorporate these same elements, as appropriate to the project and the site.

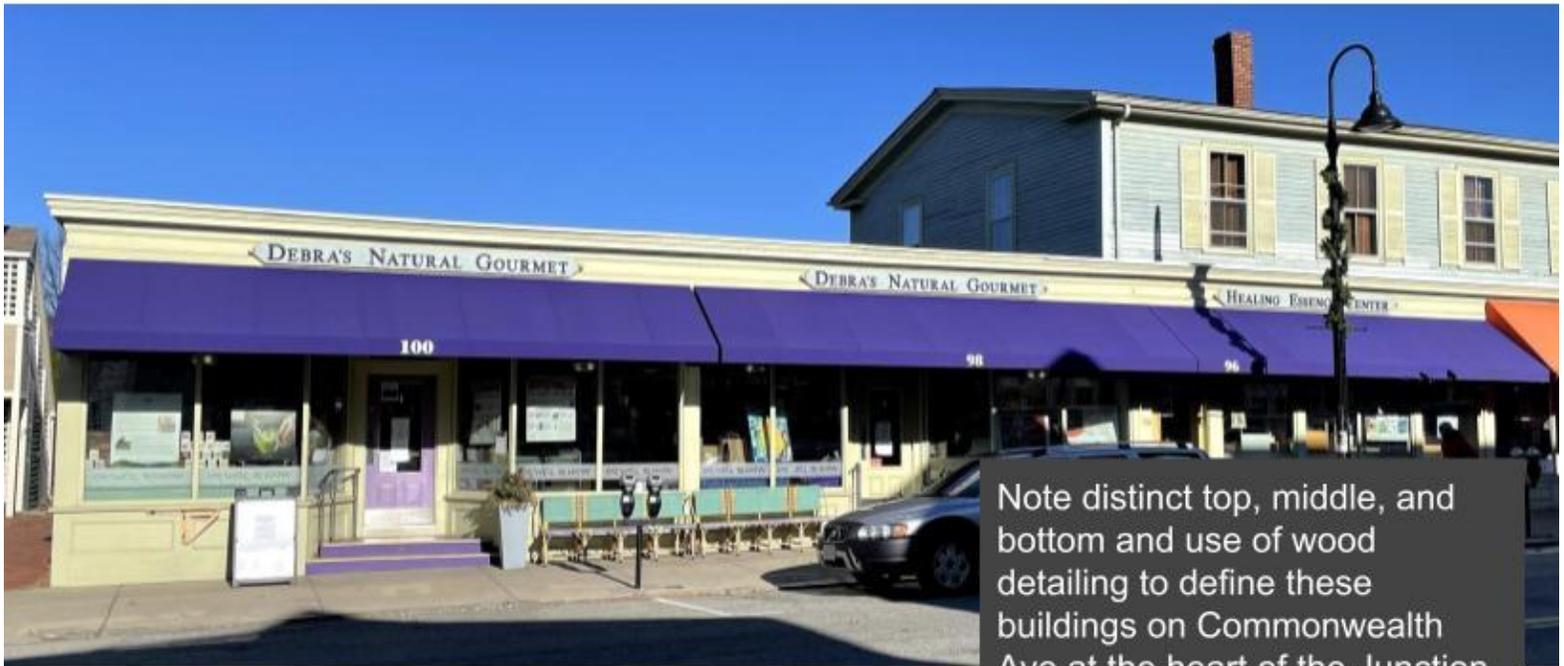
'Front Door' Guidelines for West Concord Junction Cultural District (for enhanced pedestrian experience)



1. Building meets sidewalk to get people moving down street
2. South-edge aligns with Debra's Natural Gourmet, extending view
3. Building celebrates quality craftsmanship, New England building traditions and reinforces West Concord's unique cultural narrative
4. Façade has distinct top-middle-bottom; could be simple like Salt Box Kitchen or Concord Outfitters
5. Enhances visual coherence of Commonwealth Ave
6. Cements 'topophilia': a positive 'unique' sense of place, making people happy, less stressed, and the Junction memorable

On pages 11-17, we share our favorite buildings in West Concord Junction as examples of styles and architectural approaches we'd value in new development.

Buildings along Commonwealth Avenue



Note distinct top, middle, and bottom and use of wood detailing to define these buildings on Commonwealth Ave at the heart of the Junction Cultural District. They also feature large, active display windows, clearly defined entrances that face the street, and welcoming seating areas in front of the stores to invite people to step into the District and linger there. It's important that all new development does this too, to expand the District's appeal and promote its successful growth.



Buildings that reference traditional New England design



West Concord Junction's architectural facades reference traditional New England design. They present a distinct top, middle, and bottom.

Left: This building is home to an adventure clothing retailer and an art gallery, with residential space above. The large street-level windows are ideal for attracting customers.

Right: Both the building above and to the right reference time-tested building traditions. While many buildings in West Concord Center are 1-2 story, we welcome 3-story buildings to make more efficient use of space.



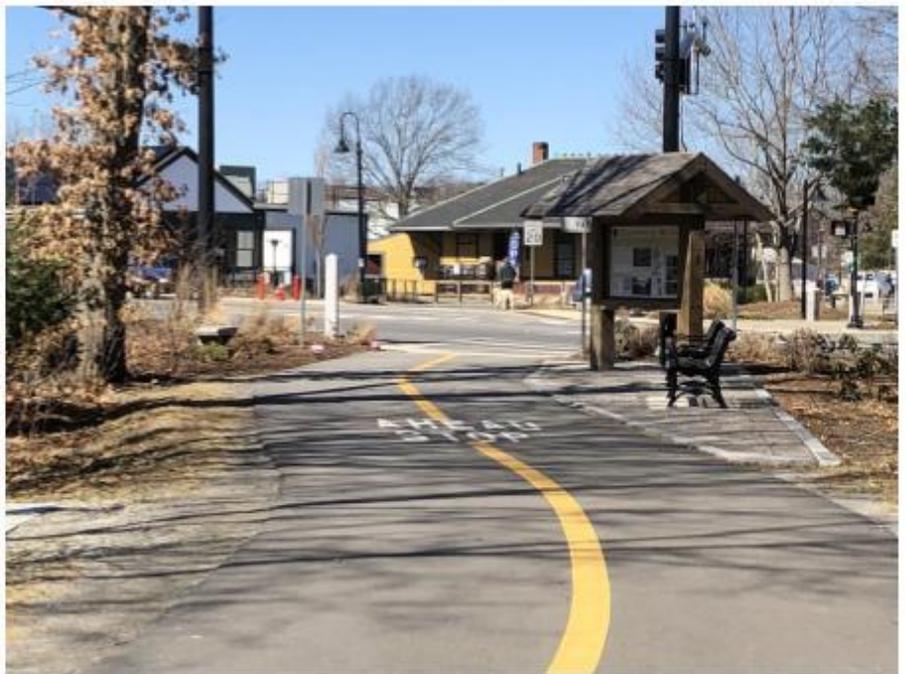
Below: These buildings are in Junction Square, a commercial development off of Church St. in West Concord Junction. Though they were built in 1985, the simple materials and design help them fit in with much older commercial buildings a few blocks away.



Getting To West Concord Junction And Getting Around



Left: The historic train depot in West Concord Center was built in 1894 and is now home to Club Car Cafe. Commuters gather daily on the platform to take the MBTA Commuter Rail east to Boston or west to Wachusett.



Above: We prioritize pedestrians of all types, prize our sidewalks, and promote sharing our roadways and walkways. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) is a paved path for non-motorized use that goes through West Concord Junction to the edge of Sudbury. Construction of a connection to the Acton - Westford segment of the BFRT is planned to be completed in the Summer of 2022.

Art studios and workspaces in West Concord Junction



Bradford Street in West Concord Junction Cultural District (left and above): Bradford Mill buildings contain offices, co-working spaces (Wheelhouse) and ArtScape art studios and galleries at Building 43 (note sign above).

Outdoor Murals



Community art in the Junction captures the spirit of the neighborhood and perpetuates West Concord's legacy of collaboration and making. New buildings are encouraged to offer space for art to be incorporated.



Top: Art Scramble 1 "Music in the Village" mural, each square hand-painted by a local volunteer, displayed on the side of the Reasons To Be Cheerful Ice Cream Shop. Bottom: Mural of West Concord Junction opposite Concord Teacakes and on wall of Twin Seafood, designed by ArtScape artists.

Historic churches are home to the performing arts



Two beautiful churches in the Junction host cultural organizations and add to the character of the community. They are an example of how West Concord values repurposing beloved older buildings for modern uses. The West Concord Junction Cultural District includes the decommissioned church above, which houses the thriving Concord Youth Theatre; it draws performing arts students from more than a dozen communities. The West Concord Union Church, below, has an active congregation and is also home to The Concord Conservatory of Music. The Conservatory provides music instruction to people of all ages from 15 surrounding communities. Both buildings pictured here are adjacent to the Harvey Wheeler Community Center and across the street from the Fowler Public Library.



Harvey Wheeler Community Center and Fowler Library



Above: A landmark in the West Concord Junction Cultural District is the Harvey Wheeler Community Center, which is a repurposed school originally built in 1918. It is now the location of a preschool and is also used for community meetings, social events, and voting.



Above: Fowler Library was built in 1930 and expanded in 1996. The Library and the Community Center are both a short walk from West Concord Center, the train station and surrounding neighborhoods.

West Concord awarded Cultural District designation

Posted May 25, 2016 at 12:40 PM

Updated May 25, 2016 at 12:40 PM

Concord now has two official cultural districts.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council Board approved the designation of the West Concord Junction Cultural District on May 17 at its meeting in Plymouth. West Concord Junction joins the Concord Center Cultural District as the two designated in town.

The state, with last week's addition of Amherst and West Concord, now has 34 Cultural Districts.

"I am delighted that the Massachusetts Cultural Council has approved the West Concord Junction Cultural District," said State Rep. Cory Atkins, C-Concord. "This designation will go a long way to attract visitors to the village, benefit cultural and business organizations and promote tourism in the area." Atkins is House chair of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

The Concord Select Board approved the Concord Chamber of Commerce going forward with the application for the district in May of 2015 and the Chamber was named as the management organization for the district. The Chamber will work with local cultural partners, stakeholders and businesses to stimulate increased participation in arts and cultural activities, provide economic benefits and increased revenue for art and cultural organizations and local businesses, attract more visitors to Concord, and foster local cultural programming, education and youth programming. The Chamber will help to create a partnership between the two Concord designated area to increase arts and cultural development and to increase business and visitor activity in the two districts in Concord.

In 1844, the first train of the Boston and Maine line went through West Concord, en route from Fitchburg to Boston. In 1872, the Old Colony line laid tracks from Framingham to Lowell and the crossing of these tracks created the junction of the railroads. Some 125 trains passed through West Concord every day and the section of town received the name “Concord Junction.” Industries and homes became concentrated around the area, as did churches and schools, and the area became the crossroads for activity in the village.

West Concord, in the past few years, has become a more active cultural area, aided by the rebuilding of the Bradford Mill, and its ArtScape studios housing 20 artists; and the completion of Brookside Square, with 74 residential units, 30,000 square feet of commercial space and a public courtyard that was developed to host outdoor performances and public art. Shops like Debra’s Natural Gourmet, West Concord 5&10, noa Designs, Concord Outfitters, Firefly, Forever Tile, and Phillips Fine Paint and Design have created varied shopping experiences. Concord Youth Theatre, Concord Conservatory of Music, West Concord Dance Academy, and Dance Prism offer performances, concerts, classes and workshops. Merlin’s Silver Star Studio, Three Stones Gallery, Robin Original Studio, and Brock & Co. Gallery add to the art scene.

West Concord offers a wide range of dining options which include casual cafés, a specialty ice cream shop, two local bakeries and “farm to table” fine dining.

The district is home to a number of annual events: Concord Give Back Day, the annual ArtWalk, West Concord Open Studios, Discover West Concord Day, The Tastes of Concord Wine and Food event, West Concord’s Early Bird Shopping Day and an annual outdoor summer film series held in Rideout Park.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail will be extended through West Concord and is on schedule to be completed in 2018. The completed bike path will cross through the site of the historic railroad crossing and add a new dimension to visiting the Junction.

The Cultural Districts Initiative was authorized by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature in 2010, and launched in April 2011, to recognize a specific geographical area in a city or town that has a concentration of cultural facilities,

activities, and assets. It is defined as a walkable, compact area that is easily identifiable to visitors and residents and serves as a center of cultural, artistic and economic activity.

Cultural Districts are meant to help cities and towns identify, support, and promote their unique identities and sense of place; help local arts, humanities, and science organizations improve the quality and range of their public programs so that more local families can benefit from them; enhance the experience for visitors and thus attract more tourist dollars and tax revenue; and attract artists, cultural organizations and entrepreneurs of all kinds, enhancing property values and making communities more attractive.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council will officially welcome the West Concord Junction District at a local event in June.