



*The American city*

# The American City

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# The American City

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# The Improvement of a Country Town

Portions of a Report to the Improvement Society of Wayland, Mass.,  
Containing Valuable Suggestions Appropriate  
to Other Small Places



By John Nolen  
Landscape Architect

I HAVE been asked by the Secretary of your Society to submit a report which "will serve as a basis for the intelligent preservation and improvement of Wayland as a country town." Acting on this general suggestion and on my study of local conditions, the five specific purposes that seem to me of greatest importance in working out a town plan for Wayland in accordance with the ideas of the Society are: (1) To preserve and fix, so far as possible, the existing town developments which are most in character with what you naturally want Wayland to be; (2) to eliminate or check, so far as possible, undesirable and inharmonious elements; (3) to anticipate the reasonable public requirements of the future; (4) to regulate, so far as possible, private developments in the interests of the whole town; (5) to avoid doing anything with the direct intention of stimulating real estate values or increasing the population of the town.

## *Improve the Approaches to the Town*

The impression made at present upon one arriving at Wayland by rail or road is not particularly agreeable. The railroad station and its surroundings are very ordinary, and the views along the state road, both east and west, as the village is approached, and likewise along Main Street in Wayland and Cochrasset, are far from pleasing; in some places they are decidedly unsightly. A new and better railroad station would help, but even with the present station a great improvement could be effected by a more orderly development of the grounds of the station, the construction of carriage sheds and appropriate planting. Poles and wires near the station should be gradually eliminated or rendered less conspicuous and objectionable in appearance. North of the railroad tracks between the Concord and Sudbury Roads, the triangular strip of ground should be bought by the town and rearranged so as to avoid the extra cross-

ing of the railroad at grade and provide generally better facilities for all traffic at that important point. In addition to its practical advantages, this change would improve greatly the appearance of that part of Wayland and open to view the new public library building.

The approaches by road, especially the State Road, give no better impression than the approach by rail. Intelligent tree planting and tree maintenance would have a decided effect upon the appearance of the main roads, and by awakening local pride the character of private building might be improved and the orderliness of private grounds increased. The town itself, however, has the responsibility for the most necessary improvement, namely, the acquisition of the triangle bounded by Main Street, the State Road west and Pelham Island Road and its improvement as a public open space. In my judgment this is a great opportunity for Wayland. This triangle is so small and so situated that its use for private business purposes is more than likely to prove unfavorable to the orderly and right appearance of the town. But if it were made a permanent public open space, all the property fronting upon it would be rendered more suitable for the proper kind of store and business development. To illustrate the change that the adoption of this recommendation might bring about I submit two sketches; one showing the approach to Wayland from the State Road west as it is to-day, the other the same approach as it might readily be made if the town owned and improved the little triangle. Anyone who has observed the number of rapidly moving vehicles that pass this point in a day may estimate its importance in forming the public impression of Wayland.

## *Suitable and Attractive Roads*

The highway system of Wayland is the result of influences exercised one by one

during a period of nearly 300 years. Considering the haphazard character of the methods followed, the results are fairly good. The general locations of roads are convenient and no important connection has been omitted. It is difficult to get accurate information as to the legal width of roads, but it seems certain that no road is wider than 66 feet, and most of the roads are only half that width. In the future the main highways of Wayland will have an even heavier motor traffic than to-day. Some of them will have to provide for one or two lines of electric cars. Such roads should also have separate sidewalks. To walk in the road itself, as one must do today on the State Road in Wayland, is unsatisfactory and dangerous, especially for children. Furthermore, main roads, and also other roads in Wayland, should be wide enough for shade trees and other roadside planting.

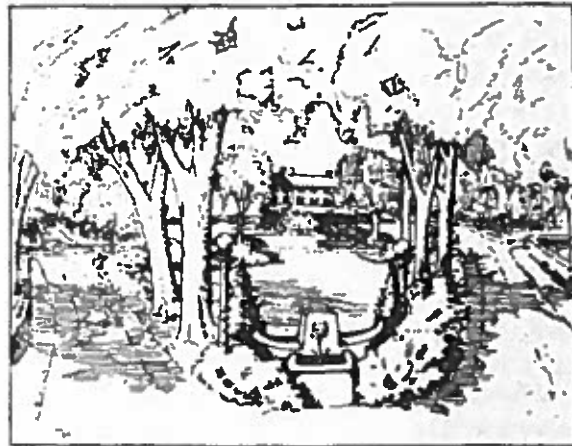
In addition to sidewalks running parallel to the main roads, a system of cross connecting foothpaths, such as one finds in English towns and villages, would be a source of convenience and pleasure. The cost of their establishment ought not to be great.

The general appearance of the village centers of Wayland and Cochrane is unattractive and, in some places, disorderly and shabby. Much of the public as well as private property lacks neat and suitable improvement. Without making the main street at all like a city street, the grass strips, trees, sidewalks and gutters should be improved according to a definite plan. Some sort of low inconspicuous curbing is indispensable to a neat appearance of the roads and grass margins in the store centers, and the carriage approaches to these stores and to the postoffice should be defined and provided for, and not left to the chance location of drivers.

The village center at Wayland would be greatly improved by the purchase of the two triangles already referred to in the paragraphs relating to the rail and road approaches to the town and by the development of the town playground and recreation field in connection with the Wayland school. In both village centers much can be done by the planting of trees, shrubs and hardy perennials. Here is an opportunity for the voluntary improvement association to afford an object lesson. Under the su-



EXISTING APPROACH TO WAYLAND FROM STATE ROAD WEST



PROPOSED APPROACH TO WAYLAND FROM STATE ROAD WEST

pervision and subject to the approval of the town, the local improvement association could carry out the recommended planting of public and quasi-public property, and perhaps secure the coöperation of private property owners in the planting of private property.

### *Play in Country Towns*

One of the chief fallacies concerning play and recreation is that it is only necessary for the public to provide for it in slum districts or, at least, in closely built-up sections where there are no private yards. Even superficial observation of the way children use their time after school hours and during the summer vacations ought to convince one of the error of this view. Country children often know less of good games than city children, and they often show less of the play impulse. They sometimes actually do not have so much opportunity to swim and skate and enjoy conveniently other outdoor sports. Until recently, Wayland, like

most towns of its size, has let each family find play opportunity for its own children as best it could; but within a year a real start has been made to provide adequate playfields in Wayland village and to direct the play of children along the happiest and most fruitful lines. Notwithstanding the crudeness of the fields and the necessity for excessive economy, the results have been gratifying and convincing. It is especially fortunate that the town may still secure open land for play in direct connection with the public schools.

The next step in the development of public grounds in the town of Wayland for play and recreation should be the acceptance by the town of the Park Act. Without the acceptance of this act the town cannot proceed with confidence or economy to make the provision that is necessary for both young and old.

Fields for games are only a beginning in meeting the demands for play in a town like Wayland. Many of its inhabitants have been attracted to settle there because of the beautiful natural features that may be enjoyed. The Sudbury River and its marshes, the brooks and ponds, the several high view points and fine pieces of woodland are unquestionably among the main assets of Wayland. But not one of these is owned or controlled by the town. They are all private property. It is true that owing to the generosity of private owners, the townspeople are still permitted to visit these natural features, but some day the privilege may be denied, not so much from a change of opinion on the part of private owners as because of the impracticability of continuing that privilege. In other places this change is taking place constantly. But, aside from this fact, the best use of such natural features is dependent upon public ownership, because only when the title to the property rests in the public is proper development for public use possible.

The town of Wayland could well afford to acquire Mill Pond and its surrounding property with perhaps a strip along Millbrook extending all the way to the main street. In addition to Mill Pond, the town should own at least enough of Baldwin's Pond to ensure good bathing facilities, and, if possible, secure swimming rights on Dudley Pond, now owned, but I believe not used, by the Metropolitan Water Commission. Wayland could afford to buy a couple of

fine outlook points, like the bluff which abuts on the railroad just to the right of Russell's crossing on the State Road, and more especially a piece of Reeves' Hill. The latter outlook is worth much to anyone who has a love of natural scenery, and its loss to the town could not be compensated for in any other way.

### *The Future of the Town*

Much of the charm of Wayland is due to its private places. From the point of view of architecture and fitness the old houses are nearly all good and their surroundings are simple and unaffected and inconspicuously beautiful. Many of the modern houses with their large grounds seem to insure an open and country-like character to the town. So far as private developments go, Wayland is as yet largely unspoiled. The question is with regard to the future. Will it suffer as other towns have suffered through the construction of buildings quite out of keeping with its present character? Will it gradually deteriorate until it becomes commonplace like other towns which might easily be mentioned, and thus lose part of its present peculiar appeal? Unquestionably there is a tendency for all towns near increasing city population to become "citified" and to lose their old-fashioned and quaint appearance. If this is an undesirable form of development—and I believe the citizens of Wayland are generally agreed that it is—what can be done to prevent it?

The town itself can do something officially by adopting suitable building regulations. At the present time building in Wayland is entirely unrestricted, so that virtually anything can be built anywhere. Under these circumstances it is an evidence of widespread good taste and pride in the town that worse things have not happened. But the present method is an unsafe one. Wayland should adopt building regulations that would reduce the fire risk, insure sanitary homes, and, so far as possible, encourage the construction of homes that would enhance and not diminish the beauty of the town. Its next-door neighbor, the town of Weston, has taken the first step in such a program. At the last town meeting the selectmen were authorized to appoint a committee of five to draft a tenement-house law and to report at the next meeting. The membership includes two archi-

pects, a builder, a physician and a clergyman. This committee has drafted a by-law which covers the erection of new buildings; the alteration of old tenement houses to make them conform as far as possible to the law respecting new buildings; the maintenance of all tenement houses, and the requirements and penalties for violations of the by-law. The general purpose of the Weston by-law is to insure that if at any future time tenement houses are built in Weston, there shall be a proper regard for light, ventilation, sanitation and fire protection. So far as this goes it is admirable. It is a fair question whether it should not include all dwellings and not merely tenements.

Officially, however, a town cannot do enough to insure entirely satisfactory results. It must appeal also to voluntary action, to local pride and to the local advantages which follow from the construction and improvement of private places with reasonable regard for the public good. I believe much can be done in Wayland by this method, and that the appeal will be

surprisingly successful. As a step in this direction it may be possible to get many private owners of real estate to insert restrictions in the deeds of property at the time of sale which will tend to bring about appropriate development. This is not at all a question of expensive or inexpensive homes, or of large or small places. It is simply to recognize that the townspeople have certain ideals, and that by coöperation these ideals may be more fully realized.

In the long history of Wayland there are many examples of her citizens acting unselfishly for the public good.

Modern times do not make demands in the same direction as earlier times, but they do call for the same sort of leadership and the same sort of coöperation in carrying through movements in which the common good is the dominant purpose. This movement for bettering Wayland is a call for such leadership and coöperation, and it affords an opportunity for the townspeople as a whole to insure durable satisfactions and benefits to present and future generations.

