

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SMALL TOWN URBANISM: UNVEILING  
IDENTITY IN PEMBROKE,  
MASSACHUSETTS.

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Directed By: Assistant Professor, Hooman Koliji, School of  
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New England communities exemplify resilience and innovation through their tradition of reinvention, although the practices of previous centuries have disrupted the region's ecology. As we move farther away from the 20th century, the time is ripe for a 21st century intervention which can restore our relationship with the land while improving the quality of life for residents. As a town with an active and young population and stable population growth, but also a lack of visible identity, Pembroke is the perfect candidate for such an intervention.

Through an investigation of Pembroke's history, context, demographics, and culture, as well as identification and consideration of the stakeholders involved and applicable precedents, a set of goals for the future of the town's center is established. These goals are used to inform a design proposal in which Pembroke's residents are reconnected to their history and the ecological processes of the region through an active procession of events in the town center.

SMALL TOWN URBANISM: UNVEILING IDENTITY IN PEMBROKE,  
MASSACHUSETTS.

By

Kimberly Joan Sullivan Centrone.

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Advisory Committee:  
Assistant Professor Hooman Koliji, Chair  
Professor Matthew J. Bell  
Professor Steven Hurtt  
Professor Garth Rockcastle

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *A Town's Identity Crisis*

Pembroke, Massachusetts is, in many ways a typical American town. It is full of working, middle class people who raise families there, get involved in town activities, and feel the effects of a fluctuating economy. But in many ways, it is unique. It contained part of a major route for Native Americans prior to colonization, and its location near Plymouth and the ocean made it one of the earliest settled towns in the United States. It is the home of the Pembroke Resolves, the first formal declaration considering independence from England, issued four years before the Declaration of Independence. Its ponds made it a tourist destination in the 1960s.

Despite the assets of the community, however, the town's historic center has little distinct character. Vehicles passing through are loathe to slow down or stop at traffic lights, and pedestrians are a rare sight. Having grown up in the town and moved away for college, I always found myself struggling to describe it to new people I met. It is halfway between Boston and Cape Cod. One town over from Duxbury beach. Near Plymouth. I always had to relate it to other imageable places. My friend would say "I think I saw an exit on the highway." Finally the conversation would conclude with my concession: "There's no reason to go there."

When people do pass through town, they comment on the prettiness of it. The ponds, the cranberry bogs, and the historic homes scattered throughout make for a picturesque drive. But the drive is a story without a climax or conclusion. The center of town is an opportunity to complete that story by creating a memorable and unique place. With healthy population growth and the energy and enthusiasm of a young population, the time is ripe for a master plan to celebrate the town's center.

### *The Myth of the New England Village*

Memorable town centers in New England are quaint, picturesque, and dense communities which appear to be variations of the stereotypical New England village. Most of those that are preserved survive mainly because of tourism, which has replaced the traditional functions from their form. The tourism can be predicated upon history, such as is the case of Plymouth; seaside visitors in the summer, as in Rockport or Oak Bluffs, both in Massachusetts; skiing and hiking, as in Stowe, Vermont, or Peterborough, New Hampshire; or the support of a college campus, as in Northhampton, Massachusetts.

Defining what the New England village is, however, reveals challenges to its existence. Joseph Wood states that "In the collective American mind the New England village is a nucleated agricultural settlement encircling a green and standing for community forbearance in a period of societal discipline and economic stability."<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to argue that this definition is inconsistent with history, as the

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<sup>1</sup> Wood 1997, pg. 2.

cooperative function was never intended and the nucleated form developed as a response to economic forces rather than collective values.

B. D. Wortham-Galvin corroborates this argument, explaining the significance in the cultural impact of the myth of the New England village over the centuries. She argues that “what Americans have done, and continue to do, in the making of New England is to fabricate their heritage.”<sup>2</sup> But she also recognizes the value in the myth, posing the question of whether or not the physical truth is relevant if the myth is true in our memories, and if it can “continue to reinvigorate a suburban cultural landscape in crisis.”<sup>3</sup> The question therefore becomes whether or not the values of democracy and community cooperation still have a physical place in 21st century America, and if so, what form do they take?

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<sup>2</sup> Wortham-Galvin 2010, pg. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Wortham-Galvin 2010, pg. 32.

## Chapter 2: Context

### *Historical Development of New England Communities*

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, Pembroke was inhabited by the Wampanoag and Massachuset tribes of Native Americans, who appreciated the abundant deer, beavers, bears, and turkeys found in the forests, as well as the fish in the many ponds and streams. However, after the English settlement of nearby Plymouth in 1620, the economic priorities of the European market took hold; the land's resources were seen as commodities to be sold for the acquisition of money and goods, as opposed to the Native American view of the land as a resource for sustenance which allowed them to move quickly and pack lightly without carrying many goods along.<sup>4</sup>

The wasteful settlers' cycle of cutting forest, planting fields, putting animals to pasture in the depleted fields, and then moving on to cut another section of forest promptly took a toll on the ecology of the area, as noted by the Narragansett sachem Miantonomo in 1642.<sup>5</sup> Native animals were overhunted or moved out of the inhospitable habitat; weeds and rats proliferated in the fields; deforestation led to drying out of soils and streams, flooding, and erosion.<sup>6</sup> The leader of the Massachuset, Wampatuck, likely through coercion, sold the land that is now

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<sup>4</sup> Cronon 1983, pgs. 166-168.

<sup>5</sup> Cronon 1983, pg. 162.

<sup>6</sup> Cronon 1983, pgs. 159-160.

Pembroke to English settlers migrating north from Plymouth in 1662, although surveyors had already arrived as early as 1650.<sup>7</sup>

Although the ideal Puritan town as outlined in a 1638 essay consisted of a compact center of homes featuring a fair distribution of land and a central meetinghouse for religious services surrounded by supporting shared and private agricultural fields,<sup>8</sup> almost immediately upon arrival in Plymouth, settlers looking to make profit dispersed, creating a landscape of scattered one-level homes with only the meetinghouse and burial ground marking the center.<sup>9</sup> In addition to farming, early Pembroke industries included fishing in the streams and ponds, production of iron from ore dredged from pond beds, hospitality for travelers from Plymouth to Boston, and milling of various products powered by the Herring Run.<sup>10</sup> These land uses were scattered throughout town, consistent with New England development at the time.

As economic activity and the specialization of trades increased throughout New England in the 18th century, commercial and supporting residential uses aggregated in town centers. In the 19th century, Romantic intellectual elites inspired by the likes of Thoreau and Longfellow spurred the transformation of town centers into what is now the mythical New England village; elegant homes surrounding a

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<sup>7</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 30.

<sup>8</sup> P.L. Knox 1988, pg. 66.

<sup>9</sup> Wood 1997, pgs. 44-45, pg. 180.

<sup>10</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pgs. 139-156.

town green, with supporting services located nearby.<sup>11</sup> Idealism was not sufficient to economically support the towns of New England, however, and they were forced to transform again in the 20th century. Those which embodied the ideal of the 19th century village could be transformed into a “cultural commodity” – a tourist attraction – for their survival.<sup>12</sup> Those that did not either declined economically or transformed themselves yet again to accept the automobile, the strip mall, and sprawling suburban housing developments.

### *Pembroke’s Role in New England*

#### Climate

Pembroke is located in a cool, seasonal climate with average temperatures and daily sunshine on the lower end of the national averages, and precipitation on the higher end of the national average. Annual temperatures range from an average low of 20° Fahrenheit in January to an average high of 82° Fahrenheit in July. Snow accumulation in the winter and wind speed are both significantly higher than the national averages, with average snowfall reaching a high of 14.5 inches in January. Humidity fluctuates less and is also more moderate than the national averages, with yearly averages ranging from approximately 65% - 80%.<sup>13</sup>

Winter weather generally begins in early November and persists until the end of March, lasting nearly half the year. Although winter activities such as ice hockey

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<sup>11</sup> Wood 1997, pg. 180.

<sup>12</sup> Wood 1997, pgs. 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> City-Data.com: Pembroke, Massachusetts, accessed May 16, 2013.

and sledding are popular in the area, most people spend the bulk of their time during the dark winter months indoors. Summer weather, on the other hand, is very comfortable for outdoor activities, and many people enjoy going to the beach, outdoor sports such as baseball and soccer, camping, and hiking. This wide fluctuation in seasons, and therefore human behavior, could be addressed in any urban interventions in the area in order to maintain levels of usage and social interaction throughout the year.

#### Location and Connectivity

The town of Pembroke is located in Plymouth County on the South Shore of Massachusetts. The center of town consists of a commercial and civic core approximately half a mile in diameter, and 28.5 miles by car from both downtown Boston to the northwest and the Sagamore Bridge to enter Cape Cod to the southeast. Beaches in nearby Marshfield, Duxbury, and Kingston are all about ten miles away from Pembroke's center. The nearest highway on-ramp, to Route 3 between Boston and Cape Cod, is four miles to the northeast.

No public transportation serves Pembroke's center, however commuter rail access to Boston is four miles to the south. The nearest stop on Boston's subway system, the MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) in Braintree, is seventeen miles to the northwest. The MBTA also operates a commuter ferry from Hingham, seventeen miles north, to Boston.

## Ecology

Pembroke's landscape prominently features cranberry bogs, forest, freshwater marshes, ponds, and streams. The marshes and cranberry bogs drain into the ponds, some of which are also spring-fed, and in turn they drain into each other through a series of streams that loop around the center of town (Figure 1). These ponds provide some opportunity for recreational fishing, especially Oldham Pond and Furnace Pond, home to largemouth bass, panfish, lunkers, white perch, and calico crappie.<sup>14</sup> The Herring Brook and Swamp Brook begin on opposite sides of the Pembroke Country Club golf course in the western part of town, and converge at the Great Cedar Swamp in North Pembroke. The Great Cedar Swamp is the headwaters of the North River, which forms the northern border of Pembroke and runs for twelve miles before emptying into Massachusetts Bay.



**Figure 1: Hydrology surrounding the historic center of Pembroke (circled). (By author, edited from Bing maps).**

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<sup>14</sup> Pembroke Watershed Association, accessed May 16, 2013.



The Great Cedar Swamp borders the northern end of the center of town, and contains mostly protected freshwater tidal marsh. It is designated as a “Core Natural Habitat” by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, indicating that it provides habitat for animal and plant species and is a high quality wetland.<sup>15</sup> The wildlife species noted here include river otters, coyote, beaver, woodcock, ruffed grouse, and several amphibian species.<sup>16</sup> Access to walking trails within the Great Cedar Swamp is located about a mile north from the center of town on Barker Street. However, town-owned property within the Great Cedar Swamp is located directly adjacent to the center of town, providing a potential opportunity to increase access and visibility to this resource.

### *Pembroke’s Role on the South Shore*

#### Pembroke as a Crossroads

Even before the arrival of English colonists in Plymouth, the area that is now Pembroke was a crossroads. The bottom third of the town was part of the Wampanoag territory, while the northern two-thirds were the domain of the Massachuset tribe, separated by a route known as King Phillip’s Path.<sup>17</sup> The first white settlers in the area were simply passing through on the North River, but ended up staying due to the approaching winter.<sup>18</sup> In the 19th century, Pembroke’s Brimstone Tavern provided a stopover for the Plymouth to Boston stagecoach.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Natural Heritage Biomap, accessed May 16, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Willow Brook Farm - Pembroke, MA, accessed May 16, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 153.

In the early 20th century Pembroke's Mayflower Grove amusement park on the ponds provided a resting place on the railway between Plymouth and Whitman,<sup>20</sup> and in the 1950's the Howard Johnson's on Route 53 became a convenient stopping point between Boston and Cape Cod.<sup>21</sup> Now, the main route of travel through Pembroke is Route 3, which just skims the northeast corner of town, and the town is no longer a significant stopping point for travelers. However, highway access and passing traffic does exist, allowing for the potential for tourism if a worthy destination were to be created there.

Although the town is not currently the crossroads it has historically been, the character of the town remains divided roughly along elementary school district lines. North Pembroke has a more suburban feel as it is closer to the highway and Boston, and the homes there are larger and more expensive than those found in the rest of town. The Hobomock area in the southeast of town is rural and wooded, while Bryantville in the southwest features agricultural cranberry bogs, recreational ponds, and dense cottage neighborhoods. The three districts converge at Pembroke center, which could provide an opportunity for educational programs that allow for greater interaction between the school districts.

#### Pembroke as a Destination

Pembroke's ponds have long provided recreational activities, including Mayflower Grove, which enlivened the shore of Little Sandy Pond and was open

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<sup>20</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 275.

<sup>21</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pg. 157.

between 1901 and 1940.<sup>22</sup> Camping was also popular in the area, as Pembroke provided a relaxing retreat within a reasonable driving distance of Boston. Camp Pembroke, an all-girls Jewish camp, still operates. Many small cottages were densely built along the shores of the ponds, which today have been converted to modest single-family homes in the Bryantville area, southwest of Pembroke center. While the use of Pembroke has become more localized only in recent years, the town's form has not yet changed to reflect this greater autonomy.

#### Pembroke as Home

Today, Pembroke is no longer a crossroads or a destination. Since the 1960's, it has mainly been home to middle class families, some of whom commute to Boston, but many of whom work in the local area. Because current zoning dictates that any new housing consist of single family homes on minimum lots of 40,000 square feet, most of the homes are widely spaced and nestled in the forest. Sidewalks are rare, narrow, and lack buffers to street traffic, forcing the personal vehicle as the primary mode of transportation. Many people drive to wildlife sanctuary areas or downtown Plymouth to go for a pleasant walk, which could potentially be provided for in their own town. The financial burden of owning and maintaining a car can be cumbersome to some people in this middle-class town, where there are currently no truly walkable, mixed-use neighborhood options.

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<sup>22</sup> Pembroke 300th Anniversary Committee 2012, pgs. 275-283.

Shopping for basic needs in town is provided by the commercial area alongside the highway in North Pembroke, the shops in Pembroke center, and a small area of shops in Bryantville on the border with Halifax. The existing services provided seem to be sufficient for the current residential density, indicating that any increase in commercial buildings should be complemented by increased residential construction, and vice versa. Family events are very popular, as there are many young families in town, with large crowds attending the Arts Festival and the Fish Fry each year. Many families are also involved in town sports, including hockey, baseball, soccer, and basketball.

### *The Historic Center of Town and Its Use*

#### Current Configuration and Land Use

The center of Pembroke is loosely defined by its users, and therefore the edges of it are open to interpretation for any future development and use (Figure 2). The existing land ownership types (Figure 3) reveal that much of the land consists either of large parcels owned by the town, or smaller commercial parcels, while non-profits own some of the more historic buildings. Owners of some of the residential properties are attempting to sell them to cash in on the higher land value of commercial properties.



**Figure 2: Existing Site Plan (by author).**



**Figure 3: Existing Property Ownership by Type, showing publicly owned properties in pink. By author.**

The town-owned land consists of the Police Station, Town Hall, an educational cooperative, a cemetery, the community center, the town green, the Center Library, playing fields, the Council on Aging, a fire station, and public housing. The existing community center is slated for imminent redevelopment, potentially in partnership with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The non-profits consist of the historic First Church and the Ladies’ Sewing Circle, both operated by the Unitarian Society, the Pembroke Historical Society, and the Boys’ Club. Commercial properties mostly consist of professional offices and banks, many of which are located in older converted homes, and the Pembroke Plaza, a strip mall rebuilt and expanded in 2012. The Pembroke Plaza houses a grocery store,

pharmacy, hardware store, sub shop, nail and hair salons, and liquor store. Finally, the United States Postal Service is positioned on the southern end of the site.

The existing land use shows some strong opportunities for reconfiguration. Many commercial properties have large, unused back yards. Large areas of both town-owned and commercial properties are utilized for surface parking. A very large area is used for the cemetery; however, this could be utilized as a park-like amenity. While the new Pembroke Plaza was unfortunately designed in a similar strip mall concept as the old, and the main intersection was designed with an unsightly pharmacy drive-through as the dominating feature, this area too could be considered for long-term rehabilitation to resolve issues of procession and walkability.

#### Changes Over Time

There are a handful of historically significant buildings in Pembroke center, none of which are formally protected other than their location in a historic overlay zone requiring architecturally stylistic review for any changes. As a result, many older buildings, if they did not burn down, have been moved or otherwise altered, dramatically affecting the procession and perception as one passes through the center of town.

The First Church was designed at the same time as the old Town Hall by renowned architect Alexander Parris in 1837. The two buildings faced each other with similar facades from across the street, representing the separation of church and

state. This relationship was later forgotten, and the Town Hall was moved in 1911 before eventually burning down in 1978. In its place is now the Pembroke Historical Society, consisting of two one-room schoolhouses relocated from other parts of town and set back from the road.

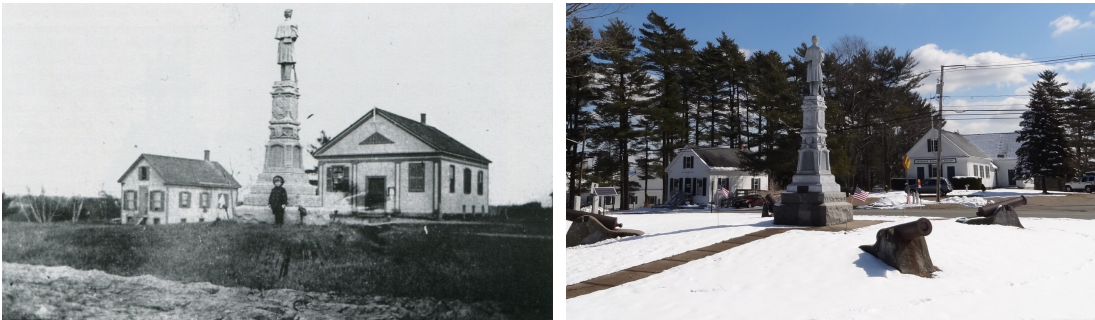
Two buildings, the Ladies' Sewing Circle and the Women's Relief Corps Hall (currently the Boys' Club), were commissioned by local groups of women in 1879 and 1896, respectively, although even the Ladies' Sewing Circle had previously been built on a different site and was moved. Both of these buildings have remained in their locations. Also remaining in its location is the town pound (Figure 10), a stone enclosure built in the early 1800s to collect stray farm animals, and one of only a dozen like it still existing in New England.

Historic homes, however, have fallen into private hands and have been moved, including the Elisha Josselyn home (1808), which was moved further down Center Street in the 1960s to make way for the Pembroke Plaza, and the Burton Homestead (1730), which was moved back from the road and repurposed as part of a bank building in the 1990s. In another part of town, the John Turner House (1760), which was built by one of the authors of the Pembroke Resolves, has recently been donated to the town. The Historical Society hopes to restore it and relocate it from its original and current position behind a gas station to a new location. The Porter store, built in the early 1800s, burned down in 1974, with the exception of a mid-19th century addition that was protected by a firewall.





**Figure 4: Left - Center and Curve Streets looking North, circa 1890's (Anttila pg. 32). Right – The same view in 2013 (photo by author).**



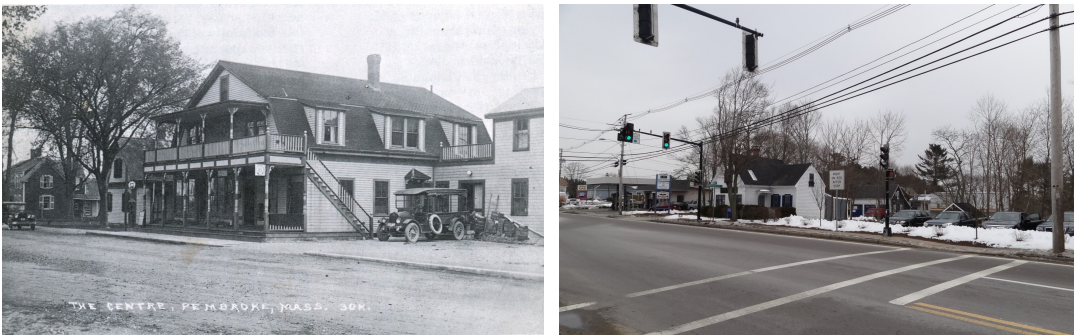
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**Figure 9: Left – The Pembroke Plaza shopping center in the 1960’s (Proctor pg. 133). Right – The same view in 2013, showing the new shopping plaza completed in 2012 (photo by author).**



**Figure 10: The stone pound with the newer (1970s) Town Hall beyond (photo by author).**

#### Memories and Meaning

While not all of the buildings in the center are technically historic, some have other sentimental value to residents. The existing community center, for example, has nearly been condemned several times and costs the town excessive amounts of money in maintenance due to its aging systems and hazardous materials. Built in the 1930s and added to in the 1950s, it is a low, long brick building of 34,000 square feet sprawling the length of the town green. The likely demolition of this building has brought about passionate objection from some local residents who fondly remember attending school there before it was a community center. The attachment to this use in the center of town is telling.

The Harry M. Woods Memorial Bandstand, built in the 1980s and prominently located at one end of the town green holds sentimental value for many

residents, as it is dedicated to a famous songwriter and native of the town. Likewise, the Council on Aging, which previously housed a school and the library, is topped with a large bee sculpture designed and built by a local artist using structural techniques inspired by shipbuilding. While the building itself is not particularly revered, the iconic bee is a small unique treasure in the town.

The number of historic buildings in town which have been or are slated to be relocated hints at the residents' perceptions of history and meaning. The region was developed, as noted earlier, in a scattered manner with buildings as small objects in vast space. The space itself appears to hold much less meaning and significance in residents' memories, perhaps with the exception of the town green and cemetery. This paradox makes the creation of space that is valuable to residents challenging, while also providing opportunities to reconfigure valued structures while preserving the meaning and memory for residents.

## Chapter 3: People

### Population Profile

#### Demographics

Since the 1950's and 1960's when commuting to work by automobile became possible, the population of Pembroke has spiked dramatically. Before that time, the town's population remained steadily between 1500 - 2000 people from at least 1790. Today the population has reached almost 19,000 people and continues to grow. Between 2000 and 2009, the population increased at a rate of 11.9%.<sup>23</sup>

Understanding who are the people moving to town is critical for the programming of the town center. Most significant, perhaps, are the ages of residents. The median age is 36, but age charts show significant population bubbles for those under age eighteen and between their late twenties and late forties.<sup>24</sup> The town is statistically the "youngest town on the South Shore," according to local town hall officials. What this means is that there are a lot of families with children in town. According to the Town Administrator, Edwin Thorne, in recent years nearly half of kindergartners enrolled in Pembroke schools were born in other towns. Population projections show that between 2010 and 2030, an additional 1,358 residents will have moved to town,<sup>25</sup> which is about half the projected growth rate of the United States.

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<sup>23</sup> City-Data.com: Pembroke, Massachusetts. Accessed April 5, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> City-Data.com: Pembroke, Massachusetts. Accessed April 5, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Strate, Accessed May 19, 2014.

The population distribution in the Southeast Region of Massachusetts is expected to become more even, with more young adults and seniors who will need accommodation in addition to the young families.<sup>26</sup>

Men in town most commonly work as electricians, managers, salesmen, mechanics, and engineers, while women most commonly work as secretaries, nurses, teachers, managers, and saleswomen. These occupations reflect a moderate educational attainment level, with residents completing high school and any amount of college through the Bachelor's degree level at higher rates than the state average. Levels less than high school and Master's degree or above are lower than the state averages. The town is faring better economically than most in the state. The unemployment rate is slightly lower than the state average, median per capita income is 107% of the state average at \$35,688, and mean home value is 113% of the state average at \$380,855.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, the population of Pembroke consists of middle class, working families, with increasing numbers of young adults and elderly people. Family activities, local employment, opportunities for young people, and the ability for the aging to remain a part of the community should be fostered in any new development in order to maintain a healthy economy and population. Since most residents' families do not have a long history in the town, they may be unaware of the cultural value of the community in which they reside.

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<sup>26</sup> Renski, Koshgarian and Strate 2013, pg. 48.

<sup>27</sup> City-Data.com: Pembroke, Massachusetts, accessed April 5, 2013.

## Character

Pembroke's residents tend to speak with a sort of blunt honesty expected of New Englanders. They value independence and autonomy, many choosing to live in the town because of the opportunity for larger plots of land at an affordable price. This type of living arrangement not only affords privacy and freedom from restrictions, but also provides plenty of space for children to roam outside.

Because houses are spaced far apart, children and teenagers not old enough to drive have a difficult time moving freely to see friends or attend activities. Odd places become hang-out spots, sometimes where trespassers are not supposed to be. Parking lots and cranberry bogs are popular gathering spaces for teenagers, although landowners and police are quick to move loiterers along. This results in frustration for teenagers in particular, and petty theft and recreational drug use may stem from boredom and rebellion.

Respecting the local culture of independence while accommodating the natural inclination for adults and children alike to socialize in safe public areas should be a priority addressed in any plans for the center of town. The center provides an opportunity for a neutral, public meeting space with oversight, maintaining the privacy of the homes outside the center.

## Stakeholder Perspectives

To gain a better understanding of the desires for the town and the issues currently unresolved, I interviewed several residents in town in March of 2013, and

facilitated small group discussions in December of 2013. I spoke to members of town government, the Historical Society, the Chamber of Commerce, the library, the Arts Festival Committee, local real estate agents, the Conservation Commission, and the Planning Board, as well as regular town residents. From these conversations I summarized the issues in town from several different perspectives.

#### Town Government

The town government strives to meet the needs of all residents by providing and maintaining community amenities, supporting local businesses, and using town-owned land responsibly. Desires regarding the center of town include resolving the issue of the dilapidated community center frugally and with community support, improving the condition of the recently damaged town green, bringing community members together for events and activities in the center of town, and creating a sense of identity. Maintenance costs and traffic complaints remain concerns, as well as the increased need of parking capacity that would come with increased community activity.

#### Historical Society

The Pembroke Historical Society owns and maintains several historic buildings and runs a small museum in their building in the center of town. Its members continue to document the town's history in books and also act as guardians to some historic documents which are not kept in the public library. They are interested in preserving the architectural history of the town, and several years ago



were instrumental in preventing the Burton homestead owned by the Rockland Trust Bank from being demolished. Through these buildings and community events they aim to celebrate and teach Pembroke's history. Concerns for them are the lack of walkability in the center of town, ability to use the town green, traffic congestion, and the scale and character of new buildings.

#### Chamber of Commerce

The Pembroke Chamber of Commerce's mission statement is to "address the issues that affect the bottom line of our local businesses and the quality of life of our business owners."<sup>28</sup> They organize networking and local business awareness events and boast over one hundred member businesses throughout town, many of which are located in the center. Primary goals for future development in town include profit opportunities for business owners, supporting local businesses, and keeping businesses visible. Concerns include the economy of new buildings, easy vehicular access, and avoiding traffic and congestion.

#### Town Residents

Residents in town have many different desires and goals for what the town could be, but there are some similarities that hold true for the general population. Given the popularity of family-oriented events and sporting activities, family recreation opportunities are clearly considered a priority. Functional and easy access to amenities and affordable living are also major desires for community members. Areas of concern include safety, traffic, parking, and the ability to afford amenities

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<sup>28</sup> Pembroke Chamber of Commerce, accessed April 5, 2013.

and taxes. Since the ponds are a major amenity in town, the ecological health of the ponds is also a major concern.

#### Local Youth

Teenagers in town are somewhat stigmatized, especially when they convene in groups. The Pembroke Plaza was developed as a strip mall instead of another proposed option involving a courtyard partly because of concerns about the teens loitering or skateboarding in the courtyard space. In the local Dunkin' Donuts I found the drink case locked because of problems with teens stealing, and a rowdy group of about fifteen young teenagers was gathered outside the library for no apparent reason on a weekday after school. These teenagers are looking for a place to socialize, trying to find something to do with their free time, and likely just want to get out of the house. Efforts to build a skate park have stalled for decades, and teens have concerns about their mobility and freedom in a town where they are always being moved along with no place to go.

## Chapter 4: Identity and Precedents

### *Creating Identity*

The major opportunity and challenge in Pembroke is to bring forward a visible identity for the town which is based in the town center. In order to be successful, the town's identity should be based in its existing characteristics, should be visible and experienced by both those seeking to interact with it as well as those merely passing through, and should play to the residents' sense of pride. Tying in as many opportunities for interaction with the built form as possible and considering all types of residents would increase the likelihood of success for any changes. Some of the town's most prominent features include those tied in with its ecology and history. The need for processional experience and community events has been established, while the opportunities for them are notably absent. An evaluation of how identity has successfully been created in other locations can help inform the potential 21st century transformation of Pembroke.

### *Identity Through Ecology*

Pembroke's defining features of agricultural cranberry bogs, waterways, and open spaces converge at the town center, yet are divided by roads and parking lots. The streams, marshes, and an older cranberry bog transitioning back to marsh are not visible from the roads, preventing people from interacting with them although they

are located on town-owned property. Furthermore, they are polluted by residential septic systems, as there is no sewer system in Pembroke. These distinct features and their role at the headwater of a major regional river could provide potential for celebration and education, especially if they were repaired with the introduction of a wastewater treatment system.

Many cities in China are currently undergoing environmental improvements in order to improve ecological systems and provide residents with the opportunity to interact with and understand natural processes. The Qunli Stormwater Park in Haerbin City is a massive urban project designed to filter stormwater runoff from the city and restore the integrity of waterways divided by urban development. While Pembroke's waterways are not at same scale of environmental issues, the way in which the relationship between the natural and the urban is mediated, as well as the integration of human activity with the landscape can be informative here.

Rather than prevent people from interacting with the sensitive landscape, designers at Turenscape and Peking University in Beijing used the opportunity to create an attachment to and understanding of it. A series of filtration ponds and wooded mounds rings the marshy area, while boardwalks, pavilions, and viewing platforms are woven through the perimeter.<sup>29</sup> The human experience and the filtration process appear to be inextricably linked, increasing the value of the city with its distinctive aesthetics and experience.

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<sup>29</sup> A Green Sponge for a Water-Resilient City: Qunli Stormwater Park, accessed May 17, 2013.

At a smaller scale and within the United States, wastewater treatment facilities can be created as wetlands parks, opportunities for recreation, education, and conservation. Examples include the Arcata Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary in Arcata, California; Neary Lagoon Park in Santa Cruz, California; and Greenwood Urban Wetland in Orlando, Florida.<sup>30</sup> Pembroke owns several parcels of open space which could be considered for an intervention such as these, and federal or state funding may be available to offset the cost, especially considering that the regional ecology is affected by the current method of handling wastewater.

Interventions in the landscape can change depending upon proximity to the town or wilderness. Naturalistic, romantic gardens, such as the Arnold Arboretum, may be more appropriate where bordering untamed landscape. Garden-like cemeteries, such as Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, District of Columbia, and Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts can serve as inspiration for the use of the historic cemetery. More formal civic squares, such as Market Square in Alexandria, Virginia, are appropriate in the denser core of the town and fronting civic buildings.

### *Identity Through Heritage*

While Pembroke has a long and interesting history, it is not easily visible or readily experienced by passersby. Residents value the objects of the buildings, and not necessarily their locations. At the same time, the possibility of continuing the

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<sup>30</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency 1993

myth of the New England village as a way to spur reinvention for the 21st century could provide the opportunity for the interpretation and restating of history to tell a new story as the town moves forward.

Downtown Plymouth, Massachusetts, has very few structures existing from the original settlers, but still bases its tourism on the 1620 settlement. A recreation of it has been built near the downtown, which even employs actors to pretend to be of the 17th century. The downtown area itself contains many historic buildings from later centuries in a dense and walkable format, with newer buildings seamlessly interspersed without notice due to their shared urban characteristics.

While most of the buildings in the downtown area could be located in any number of American towns built prior to the 20th century, Plymouth retains its unique identity through the occasional distinguishing feature. The Plymouth Rock, which was not actually the landing spot of the Pilgrims, the occasional 17th century house, statues of colonists and their native counterparts, and graves of Pilgrim settlers, all mixed in with shops and restaurants and fussed over by ghost tours on summer nights provide plenty of entertainment for tourists walking through town. The original features which draw people may be small, sporadic, and of dubious authenticity, but it is the myth that keeps the town alive. Pembroke's history may not be as significant as that of Plymouth, but the opportunity to create a new heritage with the existing historical remnants and other unique features of the town could provide a draw within the region.

### *Identity Through Procession*

Both identity through ecology and identity through heritage rely on one similar characteristic: Procession. Without the means to experience them, any interventions would fail. Open spaces, historical sites, shops, restaurants, and event venues can all increase their viability exponentially when tied together within a walkable and comprehensible area.

To create an enjoyable procession through Pembroke center, this project seeks to create event nodes, or gathering spaces, such as the town green in Grafton, Massachusetts; memorable objects or places, like the unforgettable image of a covered bridge in Jackson, New Hampshire; continuous, engaging street edges, as found in nearby Plymouth; and continuous, walkable pathways between the town and countryside to tie everything together in one experience, similar to the Burlington Bike Path in Vermont. Currently, the event node of the town green is underutilized, because it is not connected to enough other places and buildings to allow for convenient or accidental engagement. Memorable objects and places are scattered without a continuous street edge to tie them together, and there is little engagement or connectivity between the landscape and the town (Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Sparse urban form with little connection to open spaces. By author.**



## Chapter 5: Design Approach

### Project Goals

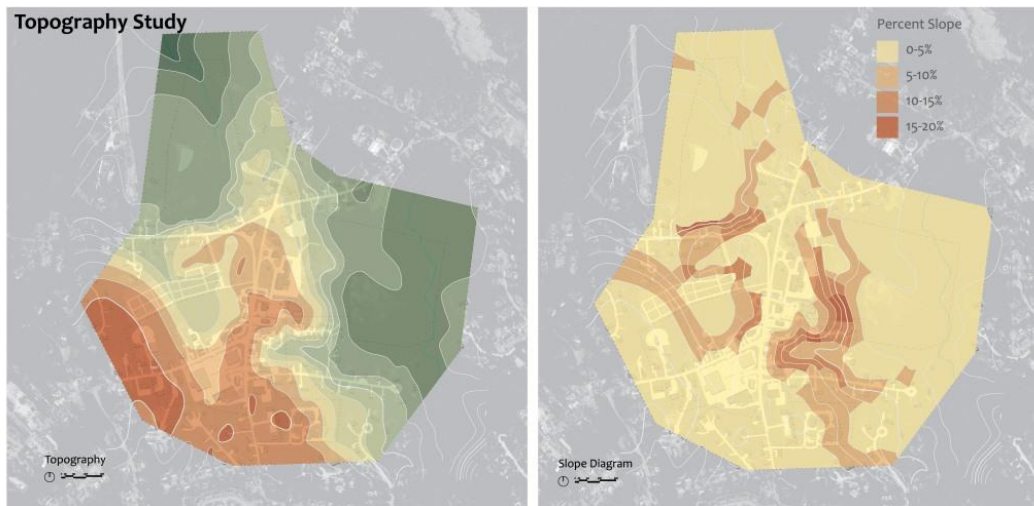
In considering all of the research regarding Pembroke's history, current situation, ecology, and stakeholders, as well as relevant precedents, the following Project Goals have been established as a means to inform the overarching role of Pembroke's town center in the context of the greater region:

- 1) Centennial Reinvention. Update the center of town to address the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including establishing identity, designing for both the pedestrian and vehicle, and accommodating the desire to live, work, and play within a walkable area.
- 2) Community Cooperation. A major strength and cultural characteristic of New England communities is the ability to get things accomplished on the local level through the private and public cooperation. The project should consider the opportunities inherent in these partnerships for future business and community activity.
- 3) Establish Relationship with the Land. Since European colonization, the relationship between the New England landscape and its inhabitants has been fraught with misunderstanding. This project seeks to educate about, and foster appreciation for, the ecosystem of the area.
- 4) Improve Quality of Life for Residents. Opportunities to interact with each other and feel the unique place that is Pembroke are limited by its current configuration. New interventions should encourage chance encounters, collaboration, and recreation within a central social and commercial hub.

### Designing for Topography

A study of the topography (Figure 12) and drainage flows in the center of town revealed that the historic center was built along a ridge flanked by freshwater

marsh, with the First Church and a former school, now the Council on Aging, prominently located at high points. While the ridge becomes quite narrow at the existing intersection of Center and Mattakeesett Streets, there is room to introduce a secondary road parallel to Center Street in order to alleviate traffic pressures and create an alternative route for residents. Much of the land drains well enough, or can be drained well enough, to support increased building density.

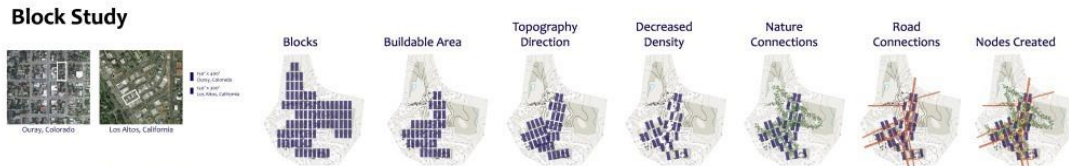


**Figure 12: Topography study showing height above sea level at 10' increments (left) and percent slope (right). By author.**

### *Designing for Connectivity*

Introducing additional roads and density to the center calls for an organizational structure which would be clear while also respecting the land's form and historical development. I studied how various block sizes could lay over and adjust to the site, based on precedents ranging in size from the 150'x300' blocks of Los Altos, California, to the 300'x800' blocks of Plymouth, Massachusetts. I adjusted the orientation of blocks, combined multiple block sizes within one scheme, and chipped away at them to allow for open space nodes (Figure 13). Eventually,

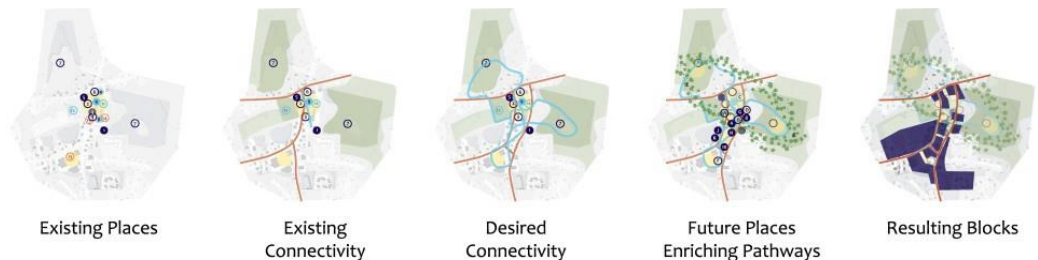
seven different block scheme options resulted in different configurations of parks/open space knit together with the townscape to create a network of pathways.



**Figure 13: Sample block study. By author.**

### Designing for Memory

Once the ability of applying blocks to the landscape to create contrast and a network of nodes was established, I began to study the existing and desired memorable places in the town center and how they would affect future development. The existing memorable places with positive connotations, such as the library, town green, Historical Society building, and First Church are all located along a single, short axis without direct access or marked edges. By drawing a greater looping network reaching all corners of the site, I was able to establish ideal locations of future interventions to create a series of memorable experiences which could be embedded within the larger town structure (Figure 14).



**Figure 14: Memorable Place Study. By author.**

## Synthesis

Initial process drawings studied how a sense of procession and place-making could be established with minimal constructed interventions (Figure 15). These interventions focused on the strengthening of the original main street (Center Street), the addition of a new parallel street, and the introduction of a civic square at the intersection of these two streets and Mattakeesett Street. The necessary new civic buildings were accounted for, as well as new commercial uses and limited residential uses.



**Figure 15: Process drawing showing minimal interventions. By author.**

Once these basic necessary interventions were established, I focused on increasing residential density to accommodate the additional 485 households expected in the next sixteen years (Figure 16). The new main square featured a commercial character, while the expanded town green would be surrounded and strengthened by both commercial and institutional uses. The possibility of relocating the existing grocery store and redeveloping the land for a residential use was also explored.



**Figure 16: Process drawing showing increased density. By author.**

The next process drawing shows the acknowledgement that this grocery store would likely best serve the community by staying in place, but continues to develop the residential block structures and strengthens the commercial street south of the

civic square (Figure 17). The centerpiece of the civic square becomes a new town hall, located on a high point to balance the First Church at the opposite edge of the ridge.



**Figure 17: Further development of the site plan. By author.**



Throughout all of these steps, minimal design interventions are utilized in the landscape to strengthen the relationship to the town and the experience within these spaces. The former cranberry bogs/wetlands at the northwest corner of the site are redeveloped into a park, where a small existing pond is enlarged and a lawn created opposite it, with wetlands in between. Strategic plantings are used to frame views to and from existing pathways. The cemetery similarly would have flowering plantings introduced, with views to the town green emphasized in select locations. Dense vegetation would be thinned out between the existing playing fields and freshwater marsh to establish a view corridor to new boardwalks introduced in this area.

## Chapter 6: Proposed Solution

### *Site Plan: Organization and Major Characteristics*



**Figure 18: Proposed site plan. By author.**

The proposed site plan (Figure 18) is characterized by a block organization that yields to the topography and existing conditions while still allowing for a continuous street structure. Civic buildings are strategically located: the new town

hall is visible from the southern approach on Center Street, with its tower offsetting that of the First Church visible from the northern approach on Center Street; the existing library becomes a focal point terminating the new Reed Street; the new Community Center shifts to the side at the end of new Park Street to highlight the connection to the landscape; the existing First Church and the new Arts Society building face off at opposite ends of the new Parris Road, an homage to the former relationship between the church and old town hall; and finally, the First Church and new Police Station and Fire Station form a bookend at the center's terminus along Barker Street.

At the heart of the town are the two major civic spaces, the town green and the new Queen Patience Square. The relationship between these spaces is experienced not only along Center and Walsh Streets, but also through the new Market Square. Market Square is internal to the block and will serve as a parking lot most of the time, but permeable pavers, gardens, and trees create a pleasant space which can also be transformed for use during festivals and special events.

### Neighborhoods and Uses

#### Residential

The new homes in the center create three distinct neighborhoods (Figure 19). To the north, a small community of grand single family homes and homes divided into apartments is focused around the new community amenities, town green, and playing fields. To the west is a unique 21<sup>st</sup> century community which emphasizes the

increased predominance of live/work arrangements. Most of the dedicated live/work units, located in row homes and apartments, form a walking loop adjacent to Queen Patience Square to encourage the public to explore. The ground floor working space in these units can be reclaimed as part of the house or converted to rental units if no longer needed as working space. Single family homes, duplexes, three-families, and apartment villas complete this neighborhood.

At the southern end of the site, the proposed plan redevelops the existing public housing community at Kilcommons Drive to increase density and create a new aging-in-place community, allowing Pembroke residents to remain in town as active members of the community. The new community would likely be privately run, with some units coordinated and subsidized through the town. Unit types include single family homes, duplexes, three-families, garden apartments, courtyard apartments, and live/work row homes.



**Figure 19: Residential Uses, with new in orange and existing in yellow. By author.**

### Institutional

Existing institutional uses (Figure 20) to remain in place include the existing First Church and Sewing Circle, Educational Collaborative, Boys' Club, Library, and Post Office. The existing Police Station would undergo renovation and an addition to become the new Fire Station, while a new Police Station would be built adjacent to the old stone pound. The existing Historical Society would be shifted closer to the

road to complete the street edge and make space for new homes, and the existing John Turner House on Route 53 would be relocated to a new home on the town green, restored, and turned into a house museum. The existing Council on Aging would be moved away from the location of the new Market Square, for more easy pedestrian accessibility from the Aging-in-Place community.

New community buildings are already being considered, but they and modifications to existing buildings could be partially funded by the sale or long-term land lease of the town-owned land that is programmed for private use. They include the new Police Station, Community Center, and Town Hall. The new Arts Society building and Charter School would be privately funded.



**Figure 20: Institutional Uses, with new in orange and existing in yellow. By author.**

### Commercial

Almost all existing commercial uses (Figure 21) are planned to stay in place. Two existing centrally located gas stations would be relocated to the periphery of the center, with the covered gas filling area less predominately featured along the street edge. Several businesses along Center Street, including Dunkin' Donuts, a dance studio, a contractors' office, and a convenience store would be accommodated by the new commercial buildings, which include shops surrounding Queen Patience Square.

The Market Square allows for a different type of shop with high visibility and office use or apartments above. The new Inn & Restaurant on the town green would provide a cultural institution and small event space while addressing the need for a hotel in town.



**Figure 21: Commercial Uses, with new in orange and existing in yellow. By author.**

### Phasing

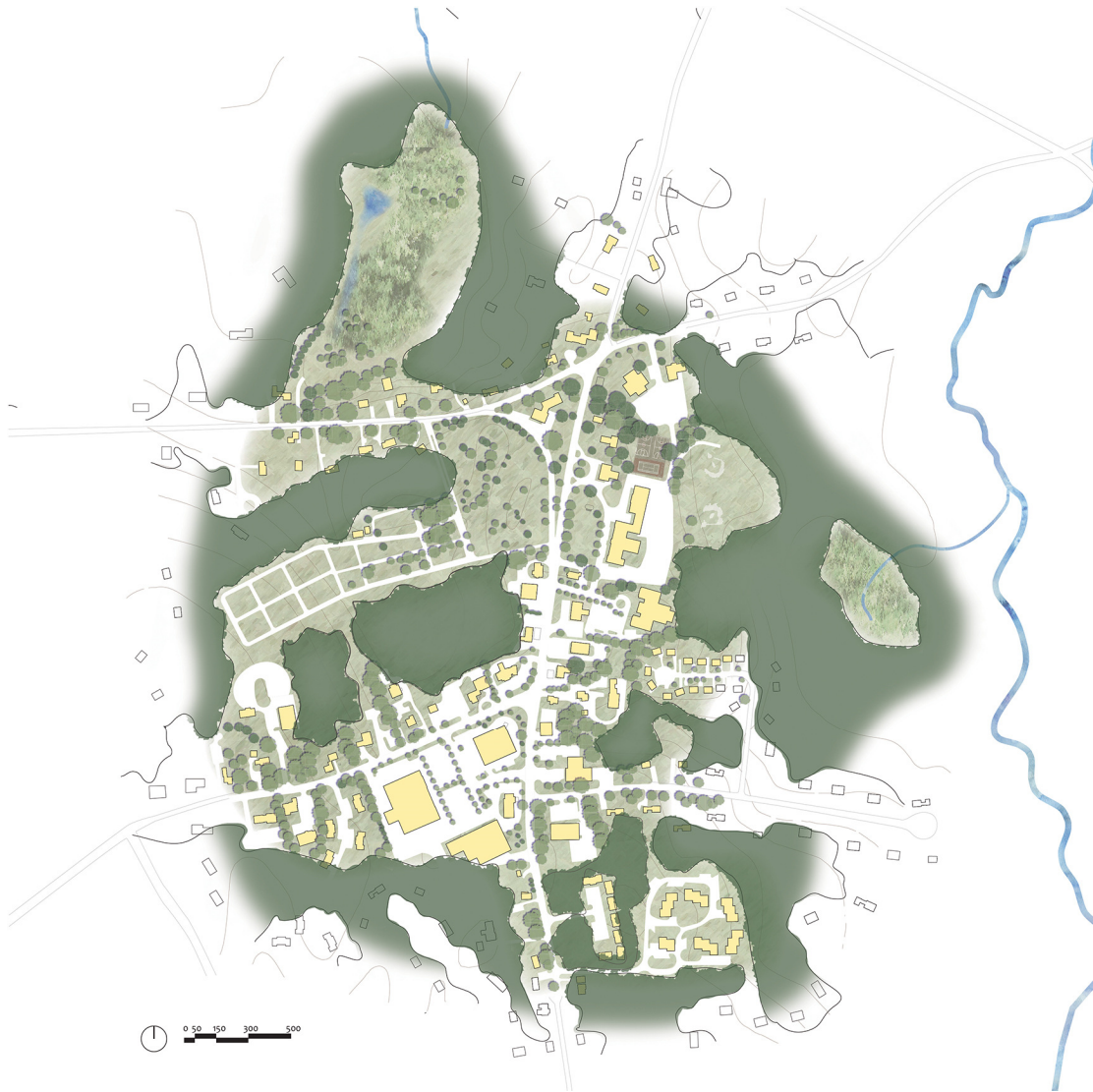
The public defense of this review at the University of Maryland on May 15, 2014, was attended by invited guest critics Bill Bonstra, FAIA, of Bonstra/Haresign



Architects in Washington, DC; Tom Davis, FAIA, Architect and Professor at the University of Tennessee; Ellen Dunham-Jones, Architect and Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at Georgia Technical University and Director of the Master of Urban Design program there; and Jon Michael Schwarting, Architect and Professor of Architecture at the New York Institute of Technology. The project was well-received and comments were positive, with the main concern being how to go about implementing this project. The committee stressed the importance of showing precedents to the community to address concerns regarding density and traffic, creating a pro-forma to prove the financial viability of the project, and establishing a phasing plan based on existing property lines.

The first step in this project will be to address the wastewater treatment issues affecting the lot sizes and the health of the waterways prior to continuing with densification at the town's center. Once that process has been complete, the project phases described below may proceed. This project relies on the unique identity of the town's open spaces and newly created civic spaces to bring life and desirability to the site. Therefore, the first phase must include these uses in order to support future phases. By separating this phase into two parts, Phase 1a (Figure 23) and Phase 1b (Figure 24), funds can be raised through the development of town-owned property in order to support the park development. Phase 1 addresses residents' relationship with the land, relies on community cooperation, and begins to address the goals of centennial reinvention and quality of life. Opportunities for future community cooperation are reinforced by the close proximity of establishments to each other.

For example, the new, private inn & restaurant could have the opportunity to cater and host events in the new community center, in turn providing increased revenue opportunities for the town.



**Figure 22: Existing Site Plan, prior to phased interventions. By author.**



**Figure 23: Phase 1a: New civic spaces and residential, institutional, and commercial buildings.  
By author.**



**Figure 24: Phase 1b: Park development. By author.**

Phase 2 (Figure 25) continues the tradition of community cooperation by developing a new Aging-in-Place community at the location of existing public housing. While this community would likely be privately-run, the town could own or subsidize units as needed for public housing, while the private entity could provide amenities. It would vastly improve the quality of life for elderly residents, putting them within walking or shuttle distance to center, where they can continue to be active members of the community without the need for a car.



**Figure 25: Phase 2, Aging-in-Place community. By author.**

Phase 3 (Figure 26) requires the acquisition or redevelopment of several private properties located between public property, improving connectivity to the Aging-in-Place community and adding commercial and residential uses in a prime location. Phase 4 (Figure 27) would occur as private landowners choose to cash in on the increasing property values in the center of town, and would allow an active Live/Work community and additional homes in a variety of types to develop in what are now businesses' back yards. In addition, commercial properties along Center

Street would be redeveloped to create a more consistent street edge and a better pedestrian experience. Finally, Phase 5 (Figure 28) reconfigures an existing commercial property for the owner to take advantage of greater desirability in the area, as well as improving the urban edge at Queen Patience Square.



**Figure 26: Phase 3, additional residential and commercial uses. By author.**



**Figure 27: Phase 4, private development of existing back yards to residential and live/work, with commercial densification. By author.**



**Figure 28: Phase 5, commercial property development. By author.**

### Experience

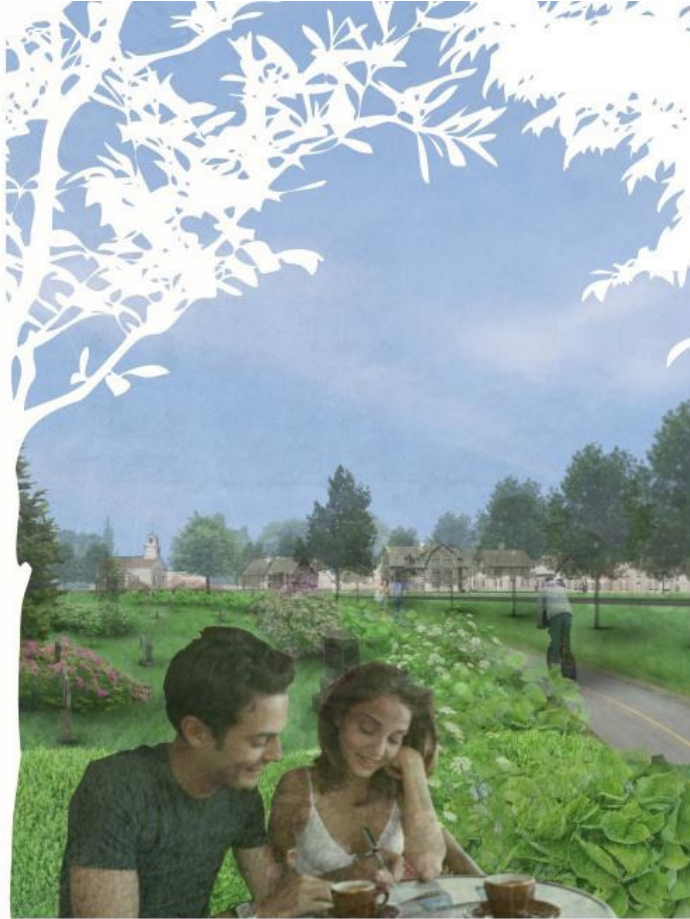
A sample walk-through of the new spaces created with this plan can give a sense of the richness of the experience created. One may start at the new Great Cedar Park off Oldham Street, exploring the wetlands flora and fauna and enjoying activities on the lawn (Figure 29). From there one can continue on a pathway towards the cemetery, walking through the historic portion and understanding the significance



of the town's previous residents in a park-like setting. Reaching the corner of Reed and Center Streets, one can stop at a café and sit on the patio opposite the green enjoying a drink and the peaceful gardens (Figure 30).



**Figure 29: Great Cedar Park. By author.**



**Figure 30: Memorial Park & Cemetery. By author.**

From there, continuing down the hill into the live/work community (Figure 31), one can pass the vast variety of home business types, and catch a glimpse of the strong ties developed amongst people who are both neighbors and share professional ideas and socialization opportunities during the day. Looping around and back up the hill, one would emerge in Queen Patience Square, a new centerpiece of the community (Figure 32). The square dramatically showcases the new town hall and is surrounded by new and existing businesses. A prominently located new shop across from the town hall could be home to a bike and boat rental and sales business, tying in to the recreation opportunities in town. The square itself features a discovery walk

with a native plantings garden, statues of prominent 18<sup>th</sup> century residents Queen Patience and John Turner, and colorful seasonal planters surrounding a community gathering and display plaza (Figure 33). Visiting in the fall, one might see a scarecrow competition on display in this space; on Memorial Day, the parade would make a stop here for speeches.



**Figure 31: Live/Work Community. By author.**



**Figure 32: Queen Patience Square and new Town Hall from Center Street to the South. By author.**



**Figure 33: Detail Section of Queen Patience Square. By author.**

From here, gardens continue alongside the town hall and draw passersby into the Market Square (Figure 34), where events may be taking place and local shops create a draw. Continuing on to the town green (Figure 35), one can see the extent of community involvement in full force, as this space is activated by the community center, charter school, and inn & restaurant. Alongside the community center, a playground segues into the playing fields (Figure 36), and a recreational path continues down to the boardwalks in the freshwater marsh, the most natural of all the public spaces (Figure 37). Continuing back up towards town, one can stop in the gallery at the Arts Society building, appreciate the beautiful homes in this neighborhood, pass by the Union Soldier statue at Memorial park, and visit the First Church before continuing back to the Great Cedar Park.



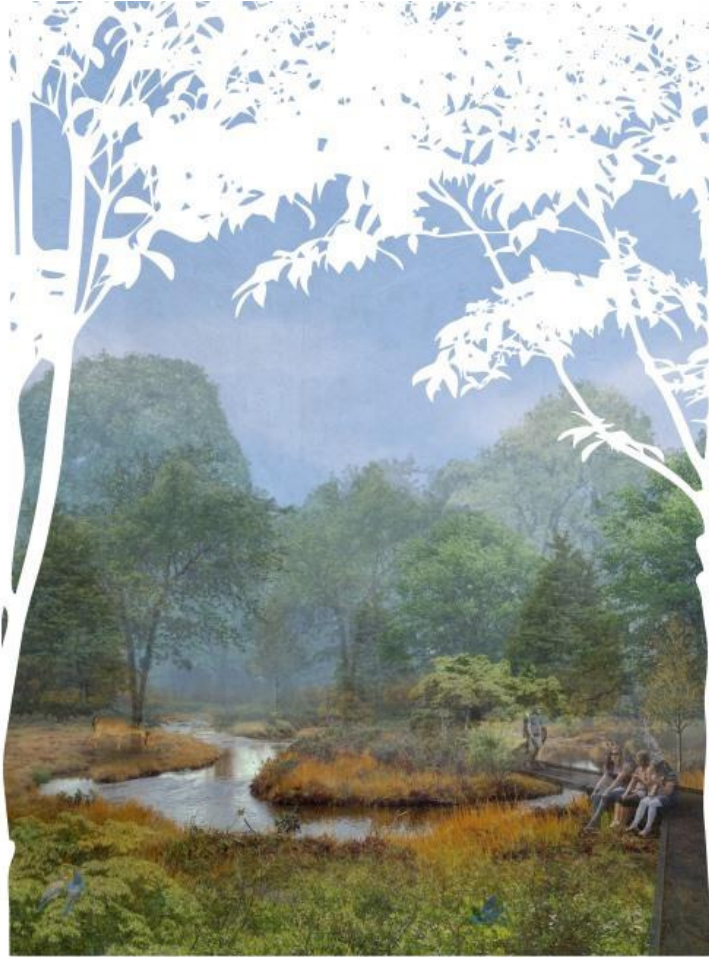
**Figure 34: Market Square. By author.**



**Figure 35: Town Green. By author.**



**Figure 36: Playing Fields with Community Center function space to the left and Arts Society building to the right. By author.**



**Figure 37: Freshwater marsh with boardwalk. By author.**

### Conclusion

Upon completing this walking tour of Pembroke, a visitor would be able to fully understand the culture, history, and ecology of Pembroke through its unique and memorable features. The demands of an increasing population will have been met through 2030, while not only preserving, but enhancing the town's open space. The principles of design applied in the center of town could be instituted in other appropriate locations both within town and in other towns across the United States. Most importantly, this plan is attainable. Working with the existing network of

community organizations and with partnerships between the public and private entities, the community cooperation characteristic of New England could lead to a better and more interesting built form in this unique town.



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