

## A New Green to Recenter Quincy

by Robert Knox

### Plan would close part of a major street and replace it with a unique park in the middle of the city

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A new public space envisioned for Quincy Center would take the heart of the city back to its beginnings, centuries ago. The key change would close a block of Hancock Street and replace it with a green, pedestrian mall about four times the size of Boston's Copley Square.

Provisionally called Adams Green, the concept will require at least two years of maneuvering through government agencies before construction begins. When completed, the urban park would be a venue for celebrations, pushcarts, fairs, and outdoor concerts, as well as strolling, sitting on park benches, or meeting friends before deciding where to go for dinner.

"We want a space that will capture people's hearts," said landscape architect Craig Halvorson. The concept draws on the classic New England green to create an area with "more green space and curves," said Halvorson, whose company was hired by Quincy to design the park. Halvorson Design is responsible for the popular Post Office Square in downtown Boston, City Square in Charlestown, and Eastport Park near the Boston World Trade Center.

Adams Green will also draw on the city's unique characteristics. "Few downtowns have this," Halvorson said of a city center, whose historical claims include the burial crypts of John Adams and John Quincy Adams beneath the United First Parish Church. While still a part of Braintree in Colonial days, Quincy's center consisted of the church, bordered by a big green triangle, known as the training ground. But that long-ago village green changed. An Art Deco skyscraper, the still handsome Granite Trust Building, dominated the area in the 1920s, architect Bob Uhlig said last month at the public unveiling of the [Halvorson team's conceptual drawings](#). The retail shopping center of subsequent decades brought streams of traffic, and wider roads, into the center through the 1970s.

"The problem now is you come into Quincy Center T station and you head toward the church — and you have four lanes of traffic," said Quincy Mayor Thomas P. Koch, who sees the new park as a key piece of the city's redevelopment plans. "I think it becomes the front door to Quincy Center, the entranceway," Koch said. "It's an important piece because it gives a perspective you don't have now."

Wide streets and steady traffic make the area "unrestful," said Halvorson, who also said he wants to lighten up the area and widen sidewalks on the new park's edges, allowing restaurants and coffee shops to spill outdoors in warm weather. The design team offered [three conceptual drawings](#) with variations on the theme of a unified public space consisting of a town green, a civic plaza, and a foot path, or "promenade," through the area.

One design emphasizes a continuous, flowing park, with a small plaza in front of the First Parish Church, and serpentine paths through the space to take advantage of views of plants and architecture.

The second design features a larger plaza in front of the church, a more formal, elliptically shaped town green, and a curved path between the two. Another design, called the “linear promenade,” offers a straight footpath through the green and plaza, following the current sidewalk along Hancock Street. Common to all the designs are benches, trees, flowering shrubs, entry gateways consisting of stone posts or low walls at both ends of the promenade, and the possibility of new monuments or statues.

The designers also proposed “edge treatments” for spaces bordering the park, which could screen the view of the railroad tracks and soften the train noise with vine-covered fences. Designers are also looking for ways to strengthen the connection from the park to the lawn outside the Thomas Crane Public Library, the sidewalks outside the Granite Trust Building, and the towering Stop & Shop headquarters.

“It definitely could help the [Hancock] cemetery,” said Edward Fitzgerald, executive director of the Quincy Historical Society. Dating back to the 17th century, the cemetery holds the graves of the father of John Hancock, the ancestors of John Adams, and Revolutionary patriot Josiah Quincy Jr., a prominent American patriot and colleague of Adams.

The city has scheduled a May 18 meeting at the Crane library to hear public comments on the three designs, and Uhlig said Halvorson Design expects to offer a more refined plan in June. The Planning Department will meet next month with state officials, who must approve significant road projects before they can receive federal funding. Quincy is seeking the \$6 million earmarked in a federal transportation bill for improvements in Quincy Center, for such things as realigning the streets and changing traffic signals. The funding process is expected to take at least a year.

According to Dennis Harrington, director of Quincy’s Planning Department, city officials hope to get the design work 25 percent complete by the end of this year, and 75 percent next year. A big part of the design is handling the 21,000 cars that currently travel on Hancock Street past the church each day. Even if everything goes as planned with traffic studies, permitting, and funding, actual construction would have to wait until the Quincy Concourse — the new east-west connector through the center of the city — is completed, Koch said. Completing that road is essential to allow for blocking off the street for the green, he said. Work on the concourse is scheduled to begin this summer and last 18 months. Under an optimistic scenario, Harrington said, construction would begin in 2012.

Koch said the new public space would play an important part in the city’s \$1 billion redevelopment plan and would bring in 1,100 more housing units. Fitzgerald said that while the plans emphasize important historical sites, it would be a mistake to think of the space as a museum. Instead, he said, “It’s still the heart of an active governmental and civic life.”