

Adam's Green



As a smart-growth vision for the Hancock Lot was developed, other downtown revitalization opportunities were identified through conversations with the Downtown Redevelopment Committee. Based on an interest in ways to draw people downtown and to make the most of the historic resources in Quincy center, the design team developed a proposal for establishing a town green in front of the Church of the Presidents.

The Problem

The United First Parish Church in downtown Quincy occupies an important place in American history. Known as the "Church of the Presidents", it is the final resting place of two United States presidents and their wives. John and Abigail Adams lie with John Quincy and Louisa Catherine Adams in the crypt of the church.

The Church of the Presidents is a National Historic Landmark and part of the Adams National Historical Park. John Quincy Adams was instrumental in erecting the church building that is architecturally significant in its own right. Alexander Parris, who also designed Quincy Market in Boston, designed it in 1827. Some

preservation professionals consider it the finest Green Revival church in New England.

Located on Hancock Street opposite the historic Quincy City Hall and Hancock Cemetery, the Church of the Presidents was easily approached from all sides in horse-and-buggy days. It was then and continues to be a focal point at the heart of the city. What has changed since its founding is the introduction and rapid expansion of automobile traffic through Quincy's center. Today, the church is bounded by one-way streets with four travel lanes and two parking lanes, that isolate the church physically and psychologically. The width and straightness of Hancock Street encourage cars to race past the front of the church and turn the corner onto Temple Street at dangerously high speeds.

There is no designated stopping place for tours in front of the church forcing the National Park Service trolley to stop in a travel lane, which creates a hazardous condition. Eight isolated parking spaces directly in front of the church entrance block views of the church.

Goals

- Anchor the center of Quincy with a new town green.
- Reduce the actual and perceived isolation of the Church of the Presidents.
- Open views to the church and link it visually to City Hall and Hancock Center across the street.
- Create an elegant setting for the Green Revival church structure that relates to its scale and materials.
- Establish a ceremonial gathering space in front of the church that can accommodate large gatherings for formal occasions.
- Eliminate impervious pavement and introduce more green into downtown.
- Encourage alternative forms of transportation—walking, bicycling, trolley.
- Rationalize and simplify the traffic patterns through the center of Quincy in the vicinity of the Church of the Presidents.
- Eliminate unnecessary traffic movements and traffic lights.
- Create a safe and attractive pedestrian environment around the Church by taming or eliminating traffic on the Hancock Street leg of the triangle.
- Memorialize the Adams presidents and their wives in front of the Church of the Presidents.
- Interpret the most significant aspects of the Adams family for visitors to the Adams National Historic Site.

The Concept

“Adams Green” will enhance the existing civic spaces and historic landmarks that make Quincy such a remarkable place. The proposal calls for a creation of a setting appropriate for a national memorial to the Adams family and a distinctive town green that can be enjoyed by the entire community. By removing the six-lane roadway between the United First Parish Church and City Hall, the Church of the Presidents is reunited with downtown and gains a setting worthy of a

National Historic Landmark. At the same time Quincy gains a new town green that marks the center of town in a simple and powerful way. This green would be visible from a great distance as one approaches the church from Hancock Street or Coddington Street.

Separating this pedestrian precinct from traffic ensures a quiet setting for a variety of formal and informal activities on the green. A broad promenade in front of City Hall and the Hancock Cemetery accommodates pedestrians and trolleys and can be used as a parade route on special occasions. Adams Green links three significant green spaces—Hancock Cemetery, the church grounds, and city hall park—into a unified park setting for civic structures and memorials.

Traffic

A preliminary investigation of the impact of this project on downtown traffic circulation and function was part of this study. Working with Earthtech, an independent consultant hired by the city, following points were brought to the committee for discussion.

Divert Hancock Street around the west side of the Church of the Presidents and convert it to a two-way avenue. Eliminating the complex rotary system allows removal of two traffic lights as well as simplifies traffic movements and creates intersections that all function as well as or better than the current configuration in the AM and PL peaks under current traffic volumes. It seems likely that some traffic would divert to the McGrath Highway, and the proposed Concourse (once construction is complete) to produce net drop in traffic flow past the church.

Today there are 36 parking spaces close to the church and Old City Hall. Fourteen of these spaces are around the church isolated and with poor pedestrian connections to city hall. To accommodate additional parking for special events at the church, one lane of Hancock Street must be closed with the help of a police detail. The proposed plan replaces the existing 36 spaces with 30 spaces that have better access to city hall and to nearby stores. The plan also provides short-term overflow parking for 42 cars during special occasions. These temporary spaces would be on the green itself and could be used without the police detail required for closing a major road.

Adams Green

On the celebration of John Adams' birthday in 2004, Mayor William Phelan spoke of Adams' commitment to Quincy and to raising a loving family. Other speakers elaborated on the relationship between the public and the private lives of the presidents and their wives. Peter Boylston Adams encouraged the audience to "remember the ladies" and their quiet contributions to the cause. Adams green should reflect both the public and the private lives of these four individuals and represent a remarkable new place to gather and enjoy history in the heart of the community.

Conclusion

Quincy has gradually ceded the symbolic center of its downtown to roadway engineering and the automobile to the point that pedestrians no longer feel welcome. This condition can be dramatically improved for pedestrians without adversely affecting automobile traffic to and from the center.