Why Hopkinton?

A small town in the middle of nowhere. The kind of place where the local paper fills its pages with the police log, which includes items such as vandalized mailboxes, unleashed dogs running in traffic, violations of the winter parking ban, a report of "four males in their twenties [who] neglected to clean up after a large picnic at the barbeque area by the upper left parking lot of the State Park." The kind of place where vigilant citizens call the police with sightings of a fox and wild turkeys. The kind of place where suspicious red-colored snow turns out to be from a deer struck by a car, where the sound of multiple gunshots turns out to be from the Sportsman Club's skeet shooting. The kind of place where, one January day in 2006, Neil Entwistle allegedly shot his young wife and baby daughter.

In short, a small town like so many in America. Why on earth would *ArchitectureBoston* devote a whole issue to it?

The answer lies in its history. Throughout much of its municipal life, Hopkinton has been exemplary in its ordinariness. Its rural character was never shaped by gentlemen farmers; its downtown remained resolutely a downtown and not a twee village of shoppes. Even the international celebrity of the Boston Marathon, which has had its starting line in Hopkinton since 1924, has had little effect on the fortunes of the town. All of that was destined to change the day a transportation planner pointed a finger at a map and traced the route of the Massachusetts Turnpike through the town as part of the postwar Interstate Highway System. That change became inevitable in 1968, when Exit 11A opened, linking the Pike and Route 495, the Boston circumferential connecting New Hampshire to Cape Cod.

With that, Hopkinton became a watchtower along the asphalt moat protecting Boston and its suburbs from the western frontier. As John Mullin, director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, told *The Boston Globe* in 1998, "I think a Bostonian would rather go north or south than east to west. There is a sense that anything west of Route 495 needs a passport and currency control."

The last decade has proved that more Bostonians have developed a greater sense of adventure, necessitated largely by the high cost of housing in the city and inner suburbs, as well as jobs that are frequently found in office parks along Routes 128 and 495, or in the increasingly vigorous cities of Providence and Worcester. Two-career households, in which jobs are rarely found in the same community, have also required geographic creativity. In short, more people pick a hometown on the basis of a driving radius: a town within 45 minutes of their jobs.

This has meant some stunning changes for the little town of Hopkinton, which has seen its population double (to almost 15,000) since 1980; a 2002 study showed that more than half the population had arrived in the previous five years. Many of the newcomers are wealthier than previous residents, bringing upscale tastes and a corresponding demand for services and conveniences. A town that was accustomed to small-scale, single-family house construction is now in the sights of developers who toss around numbers like 900 and even 1,500 housing units — in a town with approximately 4,500 housing units currently.

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Once again, though for different reasons, Hopkinton is exemplary in its ordinariness: the changes and stresses it faces are familiar to thousands of small communities across the country. As Dolores Hayden notes (see page 42), more Americans live in suburbs than in inner cities and rural areas combined. And yet our schools of architecture rarely pay much attention to suburbia — even though their faculties and students are frequently themselves children of the 'burbs. Despite a popular culture that celebrates the city — admittedly a good thing — the fact remains that we are a country of suburbs.

And that is why *ArchitectureBoston* has devoted an issue to this one small town. In many ways, it is Everytown. ■

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