

2009 Branford Town Green Study

The purpose of the 2009 Town Green Study is to advance the preliminary concept plan for the Town Green, completed in January 2007, to a preliminary design stage that is more grounded in the realities of the existing site. The 2009 study incorporates existing topography and significant landscape features, roadway geometry, traffic engineering standards, and landscape design principles into the preliminary design while maintaining the following goals and objectives, which were established in the course of developing the 2007 concept plan.

Design Goals and Objectives

1. Preserve and enhance the 18th and 19th century heritage and charm of the Green and its historic architecture, significant trees, statues and monuments.
2. Undo some of the damage of 20th century improvements that adapted the Green to meet the needs of the automobile and restore the Green to an earlier time by reorganizing parking, improving traffic and pedestrian safety, and down-sizing streets and walkways that bisect the Green.
3. Redesign traffic circulation, signage and lighting to reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles and improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.
4. Eliminate dangerous left turn from Town Hall Drive onto Montowese Street.
5. Eliminate the traffic safety hazards associated with the five-legged intersection of Main Street, Taintor Drive, Town Hall Drive, and Blackstone Avenue.
6. Enhance the continuity of greenspace along Main Street running the entire length of the Town Green.
7. Enhance the prominence of the ‘noble row’ of buildings on the Green facing Main Street.
8. Reorganize parking on the Green to make it less intrusive without reducing the total number of spaces available.
9. Involve and seek consensus of individual citizens as well as boards and commissions, churches, and surrounding businesses during the design process to ensure compatibility of the project's goals with the needs, expectations, and values of the community.

Design Principles

1. Circulation and parking improvements should reflect best engineering practices, with particular attention to:
 - intersection geometry and sight lines
 - safety concerns associated with frequent loading and unloading of passengers, frequent turn-over of parking spaces, and heavy pedestrian traffic
 - emergency vehicle access to all buildings on the Green
 - properly engineered siting of streets and parking areas
2. Improvements to the Green (including lighting, pavement, benches, signs, etc) should:
 - Be pedestrian scaled

- Be environmentally responsible or sustainable
 - Be visually unified
 - Utilize historical design precedents or motifs
 - Be constructed of materials and colors that complement the vernacular, historic architecture of the Green
 - Use materials and details that are practical (e.g. low maintenance) and durable
 - Emphasize and highlight links with the past and protect the heritage of the site
 - Avoid encroaching upon statues, monuments or other historic features of the Green and respect their settings.
 - Capitalize on existing features (e.g. monuments, open space, views, etc.)
 - Provide clear, effective directional signage and lighting.
3. Carefully consider all handicapped and other ADA requirements (e.g. proper clearances for wheelchairs between fixed objects, maximum gradients on walks or curb-cuts, etc.)
 4. Preserve, to the greatest extent possible, specimen trees and the interesting, natural contours of the land.
 5. Minimize future utility improvements to the Green. When utilities or other equipment are unavoidable, they should be constructed to be as visually unobtrusive as possible (e.g. screened or placed underground).

Facts and figures

- The Branford Green was established more than three centuries ago when John Taintor willed his home lot to the town in 1699 to erect a new meeting house, the predecessor of the First Congregational Church of Branford.¹
- During the colonial period The Branford Green was open pasture in the tradition of town Commons and was used as a livestock pasture, as drill grounds for the local militia, and as a place for townspeople to congregate.²
- The Branford Green has been the civic and religious center of the community since its establishment. The fact that its civic and religious buildings were not removed to create a park is unusual since that was generally the practice during the late 19th century.³
- A major change in the use of the green occurred in the 1890s when citizens were fined for allowing their cows to graze there, although it was a few years before



¹ Jane Peterson Bouley, Town Historian

² Ibid.

³ www.TownGreens.com

the practice was discontinued. It is during this period the green was re-graded, grass was planted, and sidewalks and curbs were installed. A baseball field located in front of the Town Hall was also removed.⁴

- The greatest change to the Branford Town Green came in the 20th century with the rise of the automobile when the narrow cart paths on the Green were widened and paved to provide roadways and parking. The Branford Green was also reduced in size by the widening of Main, Montowese and South Main Streets and for the expansion of the churches and Town Hall.⁵
- Improvements to the Town Center implemented 1988-89 included a streetscape designed by the landscape architectural office of Arthur Selbert Design Associates with amenities for the green including benches, pedestrian lights, street lights, rubbish containers, a bus shelter, a public phone, and a drinking fountain; all Victorian reproductions.⁶
- The Branford Green has been placed on the State's Historic Resource Inventory which identifies historic, architectural and cultural resources. Its buildings are also part of the Branford Center National Register Historic District which is a federal program through the Department of the Interior and National Park Service. The Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (Public Act 820-362) permits legal recourse for the unreasonable destruction of the state's natural, architectural and cultural resources as listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁷
- The Green is a 10 acre triangle bounded by Main Street, Montowese Street and South Main Street. It is divided into five irregular shapes by three roads cutting through it: Blackstone Avenue, Taintor Drive and Town Hall Drive.
- South Main Street (route 146) is designated a Scenic Road which protects notable landscapes from alterations that would alter or diminish their appearance including widening and the removal of mature trees.
- Historic buildings standing on the Green⁸ include:
The Academy - Built in 1820 by private subscription. It has been moved twice, most recently in 1971 to its present location.

The First Baptist Church - Built in 1840. The back was enlarged in 1908 and the educational wing added in 1957.

The First Congregational Church - This is the fourth edifice, built in 1843 with a new facade and steeple added in 1878. The educational wing was added in 1955 and another addition in 1999.

Trinity Episcopal Church - This is the second edifice built in 1851. The Parish Hall was added in 1916 and the Parish House in 1957.

The Town Hall - Built in 1857, the front pillars and stucco were added in 1917. There have been additions in 1969 and 2001.

- Situated on the green are several monuments⁹ including:

⁴ www.TownGreens.com

⁵ Jane Peterson Bouley, Town Historian

⁶ www.TownGreens.com

⁷ Jane Peterson Bouley, Town Historian

⁸ Jane Peterson Bouley, Town Historian

Grand Army of the Republic Monument (GAR) – This cut stone obelisk and statue was erected in 1885 to honor the Branford veterans of the Civil War. It stands between the Town Hall and Congregational Church

Yale Memorial Tablet - Erected in 1900 by the DAR celebrating the 200th anniversary of Yale College and Branford's role in its founding. It stands in front of the Academy at the southeast corner of the Green.

The Cenotaph – A classical, semi-circular, stone wall set behind a paved circle is located behind Town Hall. It was dedicated in 1923 to honor the veterans of World War I and was designed by nationally known Branford artist J. Andre Smith.

Veteran's Memorial - Built in 1956 of Stony Creek granite around the flag pole to honor all Branford veterans. The flag pole was cast by the Malleable Iron Fittings Company (MIF).

A granite memorial to the veterans of **World War II, the Korean conflict and Vietnam War** is located at the base of the large flagpole in the center of the green.

Summary of Findings of EarthTech/Yale Urban Design Workshop Study (completed in January, 2007)

1. The concept that needs to be held includes preserving/protecting the character, aesthetics and usefulness of the Town Green without losing parking availability. The town should not obsess over the actual parking space numbers but be cognizant of preserving the appearance.
2. The Montowese Street improvements are critical to creating better pedestrian flow (bump-outs & shorter crosswalks, improved Montowese corner parking lot). An improved sidewalk plan can also function as a unifying element throughout the Green. Some under-utilized areas of the Town Green include eastern point (near Baptist Church) and behind the Town Hall.
3. The study utilized concepts implemented by the national Park Service in which parking is redistributed in small parking “nodes” rather than large lots.
4. The Town Green & Town Center are already designed very well and cited as design examples of what other communities should strive to create. A distinct feature of the Green is the row of buildings on the Green – (Episcopal Church, Town Hall, First Congregational Church, and Baptist Church). The strong relationship among the buildings that make up this “noble” line of buildings has historically functioned as an organizing principle.
5. Discussion ensued concerning immediate steps to take without losing sight of the “big picture” improvements. All were in agreement that the 3-pronged Main Street entrance needed to be closed. The directional flow should enter off of Montowese Street (one way and loop through to South Main Street).

⁹ Jane Peterson Bouley, Town Historian

6. There is also the desire to keep functional aspects of the Green out of the way of its public image (e.g. reduce the visibility of electrical boxes, parking areas and driveways).
7. Audience comment: People are “people watchers,” so the Main Street side of the Green could be a good place for more benches. YUDW notes that the Branford Green allows for a variety of experiences. There can be places to sit in the middle of the green as well as around its perimeter.
8. Audience comment: The churches on the Green have circulation and parking needs—for pick-up, drop-off, van parking, funeral processions, etc.—that are quite different from the normal week-day activities.
9. Audience comment: There are serious bottlenecks on the Green that make emergency vehicle access difficult.