Proposal for a Green Restaurant District:

Washington Square, Brookline Massachusetts

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December 7, 2011

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a proposal for a "green restaurant district" in the Washington Square neighborhood of Brookline, Massachusetts (United States). Such a district would include a significant number of restaurants certified by the Green Restaurant Association and would be the first of its kind in the country. Both conceptual and practical arguments for the economical and environmental benefits of such a district are presented. An action plan is included to have the public initiative for the district to begin during Brookline Climate Week in January 2012 and have the formal district designation achieved by January 2013.

The proposed Washington Square green restaurant district could serve as a model that could be replicated by other communities with similar aspirations and characteristics.

About Brookline and Washington Square

Brookline is a town of approximately 6.75 square miles and 56,000 residents ("Brookline CDP," 2010). It abuts the western border of the city of Boston. It is an affluent community with a median family income of $95,421, about 1.5 times the state average, a population density almost 10 times the state average. More than 75% of its housing units in multi-unit structures ("Brookline CDP," 2010). The average age is 36.2 and 89% of the population has completed at least some college ("Compare cities," 2010). It was ranked 39th out of 100 Best Places to Live by *Money* magazine in 2010 ("Brookline, MA," 2010).

Originally farmland featuring orchards and a dairy farm, what is now known as Washington Square did not see significant commercial and residential activity until late in the 19th and the early part of the 20th century (Pehlke, 2005). This was driven by the development of

Beacon Street as “a model French boulevard” (Warner, 1978, p. 125) and the installation of a streetcar line. Brookline thus developed as a classic streetcar suburb (Fishman, 1987, p. 138) with Washington Square as one of four commercial districts along Beacon Street. The others are St. Mary’s (closest to Boston), Coolidge Corner (the largest and next western-most), and to the west of Washington Square, Cleveland Circle. Brookline is still served by three streetcar lines with one of them, the MBTA’s C line, routed along Beacon Street with two stops in the area of the proposed green restaurant district (“Schedules and maps,” n.d.) making it easily accessible from downtown Boston and reasonably accessible by public transportation from Cambridge and other nearby communities.

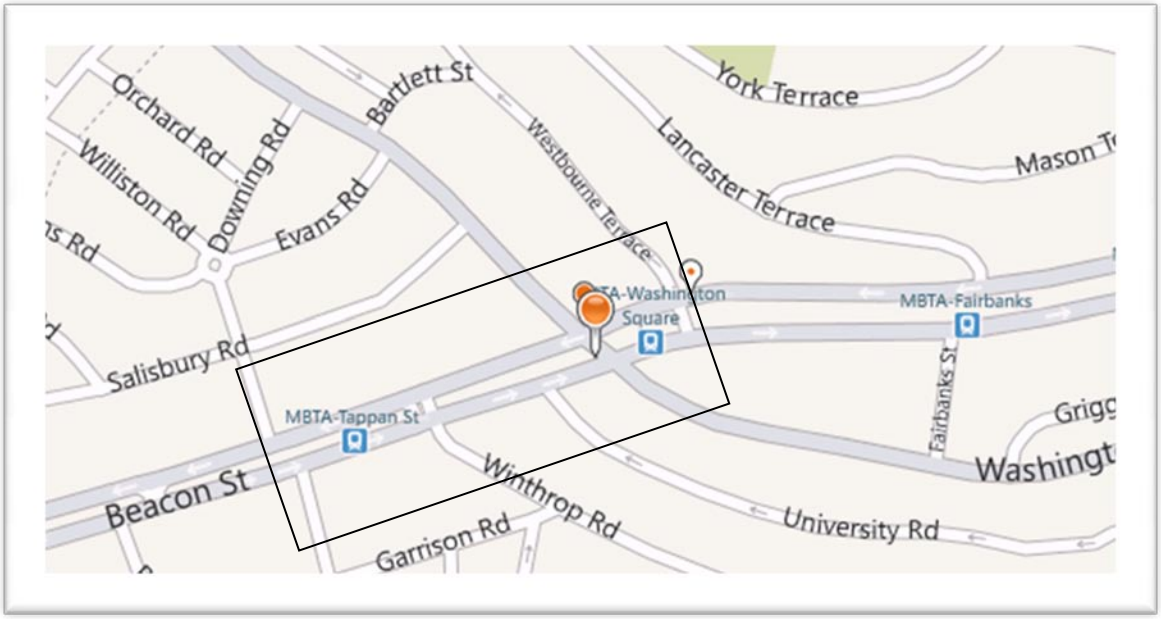

Figure 1

For the purposes of this paper, the Washington Square commercial district is considered to be the properties along approximately two-and-a-half city blocks on Beacon Street bordered on the east at Westbourne Terrace and on the west at Tappan Street (see Figure 1). Beyond these

boundaries the development is largely residential. There is one large supermarket and a small number of other commercial entities on Beacon Street just beyond these borders but as none of them are restaurants, they are excluded here. Also included are businesses on Washington Street near its intersection with Beacon Street. Washington Square features 62 storefront businesses with the greatest percentage, approximately one-third, being restaurants. These 20 entities range from an ice cream shop to upscale full service dining establishments. The next greatest percentage of businesses is services (banks, dry cleaners, cobblers, etc.) and then general retail (clothing stores, etc.).

In addition to streetcar service, Washington Square offers metered on-street parking along Beacon and Washington Streets. Non-metered on-street parking is available on the surrounding residential streets. Bicycle racks are provided along Beacon Street.

The Environmental Impact of Restaurants

The environmental impact of restaurants falls into several categories. Those articulated by the National Restaurant Association (NRA) are: water, construction/building, energy, and waste ("Understanding the issues," 2011). Additional categories include the upstream impact of food production and packaging at the wholesale level as well as the impact of the transport required for food delivery and customer visits.

Water

While most publicly supplied water in the United States is used in homes ("Water supply and use," 2008), the average food service facility is a heavy user: approximately 300,000 gallons per year according to the Green Restaurant Association (GRA) ("Water," n.d.). The Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) has estimated that a restaurant uses

anywhere from six to 29 gallons of water per meal. In one MWRA case study, a restaurant saved 51,000 gallons of heated water annually by replacing its "prewash spray head with a low flow model" ("Water efficiency and management" n.d.). Fresh water is a critical environmental issue: thirty-six states are expecting some sort of water shortage as soon as 2013, even under non-drought conditions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency ("Water supply and use," 2008).

Construction/Building

The construction and renovation of a restaurant creates environmental consequences both in the original building process and the on-going operation. The careful choice of materials, such as sustainably harvested wood products, can mitigate some of this impact. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, green buildings offer lower operating costs and better indoor environmental quality ("The business case," 2011). Given the current land use in Washington Square, little new construction is anticipated; renovations could occur at any time and one large space is scheduled to undergo change as the current restaurant, American Craft, is scheduled to close and Barcelona Wine Bar, a Connecticut-based chain, will take over the location at 1700 Beacon Street (Applebaum, 2011).

Energy

A 2008 study indicated that as much as one-third of current commercial building electricity and natural gas usage could be saved through a variety of measures including conservation and improved technology (Brown, Borgeson, Koomey, & Biermeyer, 2008). According to the Environmental Protection Agency, restaurants use 2.5 times more energy than other commercial buildings ("Energy Star Guide," 2010, p.1). Thus given the percentage of

restaurants in Washington Square, restaurants may be consuming more energy than all of the other business sectors combined and offer significant potential for economic and environmental benefits through energy efficiency.

Waste

Food packaging accounts for almost two-thirds of packaging waste (Hunt, 1990 as cited by Marsh & Bugusu, 2007). According to the Green Restaurant Association (GRA), the average restaurant generates approximately 50,000 pounds of garbage each year, 95% of which could be recycled or composted ("Waste," n.d.). Thus simple arithmetic would suggest that up to 1,000,000 pounds of waste could potentially be generated by the restaurants in Washington Square each year. As many of these establishments are small and open for limited hours, they may produce less waste than average. However, even at half of the average they would produce 500,000 pounds or 250 tons of waste annually.

Upstream Environmental Impact

Livestock and the activities related to them contribute 18% of total global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions each year (Steinfeld, et al, 2006). One research report noted that if the average American reduced his annual meat consumption by 20%, the effect on greenhouse gases would be the equivalent to shifting from a standard sedan to a compact hybrid (Bond, 2008). Restaurants can help effect this change by offering a greater selection of meat-free menu items and, when offering meat, ensuring that it is locally raised, grass fed, and hormone free (all of which reduce the greenhouse gas intensity of the production process). While the distance traveled from farm to plate is not easily calculated and is not the sole measure of the

environmental impact of food (Black, 2008), it is one way that restaurants may either mitigate or exacerbate their environmental impact through their supply choices.

Transportation Impact

Restaurants accessible by public transportation offer the potential for less adverse environmental impact as driving by patrons and staff may be reduced. There may also be less need for impervious surfaces for parking. As noted above, Washington Square is accessible by public transportation and the majority of parking is in on-street spaces shared by residents and visitors.

The Case for a Green Restaurant District

Neighborhood Characteristics and Interest

Brookline evidences many characteristics of a successful setting for restaurants. Boston is ranked 19th in the nation overall for per household annual restaurant spending in 2009. The average spend was $3,953 versus a national average of $2,736 (“How America spends,” 2010). Brookline’s age and income demographics would indicate a level of restaurant spending significantly higher than the typical household: $156 per month versus $111 per month nationally based on 2009 data (“Household spending in U.S.,” 2010).

It is a competitive market: Money magazine reports that there are more than 5,000 restaurants within 15 miles of Brookline (“Compare cities: Leisure & culture,” 2010).

Washington Square in Brookline is home to The Fireplace, the first restaurant certified as green in greater Boston by the Green Restaurant Association. Owner Jim Solomon is an advocate for greater green certification and has endorsed this proposal (Solomon, J., personal

communication, Nov. 1, 2011). The GRA conducted a survey in Brookline and collected more than 2,500 signatures in support of greening Brookline restaurants (Oshman, M., personal communication, November 18, 2011).

The restaurants of Washington Square are largely independently owned and so decision-making around whether to participate in a green restaurant district can be made locally. This facilitates research as direct interaction with owners is possible. The owner of Jimmy's Bar & Oven, the newest restaurant in Washington Square, has expressed conceptual support and will base a final decision based on economics. "You have to be for this but we are a low-margin business and try to keep prices low. If it is cost-neutral or saves us money, we'll certainly participate," he said (Hamelburg, J., personal communication, November 29, 2011). The owner of The Abbey has expressed interest and asked for additional information (Dowling, D., personal communication, December 5, 2011).

What is a "Green Restaurant"?

This green restaurant district proposal uses the standards of the GRA for determining which restaurants are green and which are not. This has been done for three reasons:

- The GRA has been certifying restaurants as green for more than 20 years and thus has significant experience (GRA, n.d.). They offer extensive educational resources and have full-time staff to assist restaurant owners with certification;
- One neighborhood restaurant owner has had a positive experience with the GRA and maintains an ongoing relationship (Solomon, J., personal communication, Nov. 11, 2011);

- The GRA has agreed to support this proposal as they believe that it may offer a scalable model for green restaurant districts. They will certify a green restaurant district upon individual certification of 25% of Washington Square restaurants. This will require that four additional restaurants to be certified.

The GRA offers a comprehensive point-based rating system that leads to certification. Certified restaurants must accumulate at least 100 points with minimum point totals in certain categories (see Table 1). Additionally, the restaurant must have a full-scale recycling program, use no polystyrene foam, and participate in annual education ("Certification standards," n.d.).

	Two Stars (100 pts)	Three Stars (175 pts)	Four Stars (300 pts)
Water Efficiency	10	10	10
Waste Reduction & Recycling	10	10	10
Sustainable Furnishings & Bldg Materials*	0	0	0
Sustainable Foods	10	10	10
Energy	10	10	10
Disposables	10	10	10
Chemical & Pollution Reduction	10	10	10
Additional points from any category	40	115	240
REQUIRED MINIMUM	**100**	**175**	**300**

Table 1 Source: Green Restaurant Association

*There are separate certification standards for this category

The standards above are for the first year of certification for a restaurant. Each subsequent year through year eight, the restaurant must accumulate at least 10 additional points to retain certification; beginning in the ninth year, five additional points are required each year.

Why a Green Restaurant District?

The hypothesis underlying a green restaurant district is that a cluster of certified green restaurants may offer greater environmental and economic benefits than the same number of

green restaurants scattered over a wider geographic area. The GRA has previously worked with municipalities to establish them as “green dining destinations” (Atlanta, GA and Encinitas, CA). These efforts have not succeeded. It is thought now that a municipality may be too large and the restaurants in them to dispersed to create a cohesive green restaurant initiative. A neighborhood presents a new scale of inquiry and activity; Washington Square has restaurant and resident density, public transit access, and street parking that may make it a better candidate for success (Oshman, M., personal communication, Nov. 18, 2011).

The environmental benefits would derive from improving the environmental performance of the dominant business sector in Washington Square. Achieving GRA certification may result in reduced waste, lower energy and water use, increased use of sustainable ingredients, and reduced pollution.

A cluster of certified restaurants in a geographically defined district may offer additional opportunities through easy sharing of experience and best practices; shared sourcing that may make possible some initiatives that would not be viable for a single establishment; and mutual reinforcement that may encourage additional restaurants in the district to undertake environmentally beneficial practices whether or not they pursue GRA certification.

One economic benefit may result directly from the net lower operating costs that derive from lower energy and water use, less waste, and the other environmental benefits detailed above. Jim Solomon of The Fireplace has stated publicly that he has decreased his annual operating costs by about $1,200 as a result of activities associated with achieving GRA certification (“Six reasons…,” n.d.). In an interview for this proposal, the GRA’s CEO stated that

cost benefits were the most compelling to restaurant owners (Oshman, M., personal communication, November 18, 2011).

A second economic benefit may be increased activity at the restaurants: a district with a sufficient number of green dining options may make Washington Square a destination for local, regional, and tourist diners concerned with the environment, natural/organic foods, and other related issues. In one study, 65% of consumers surveyed indicated that they were influenced by a restaurant's social responsibility activities when making the decision to try a new restaurant; that a restaurant had undertaken "green initiatives" was slightly more influential than online reviews from other consumers ("Deals that pay," 2009) in that decision. A study commissioned by the GRA indicated that 79% of consumers surveyed would dine more often in a certified green restaurant versus a restaurant not certified as green ("Consumers…, 2010).

A third economic benefit is that the designation of Washington Square as the nation's first green restaurant district may attract significant media attention that would benefit the restaurants and other businesses in the district.

A social benefit is that a green restaurant district would provide a focal point for the community. Both Climate Change Action Brookline and the Aspinwall Hill Neighborhood Association (the residential neighborhood abutting Washington Square to the south) have expressed their support for such a district and have asked for a presentation on the green restaurant district at their January meetings (Dewart, M., personal communication, Nov. 1, 2011; Ueda, P., personal communication, Nov. 20, 2011).

A Conceptual Structure for Social Change

While it is easy to embrace the “feel good” potential of a green restaurant district, one must also examine the academic literature to see if theory can help inform whether such a district would indeed foster the desired social change implicit in the proposal: Will restaurants adapt more environmentally friendly policies and practices in such a district? Will customers increase their patronage? Will there truly be a win-win outcome?

Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, and Ganapathi (2007) laid out a multi-level theory of social change in organizations that is relevant here. They argued that three levels of motivation that come into play when individuals and organizations consider socially responsible activities: instrumental (providing control), relational (fostering better relationships with key stakeholders and a sense of belonging), and moral (doing the “right thing”). Their findings echo and expand those by Bansal and Roth (2000) and others (Dillon & Fischer, 1992, Lampe, Ellis, & Drummond, 1991; Lawrence & Morell, 1995; Vredenburg & Westley, 1993; Winn, 1995 as cited by Bansal & Roth, 2000).

Aguilera et al argued that individuals put primacy on instrumental interests: translated here, customers want control over what they buy and what organizations they support; employees perceive socially responsible organizations as more fair and desire fairness for themselves; and restaurant owners want greater control over costs as well as greater revenue. The district would support all of these by clearly identifying which restaurants meet clearly articulated sustainability standards making it easier for customers and employees to find them, and providing owners with potential savings and revenue opportunities.

Second-most for individuals is a sense of belongingness. The district supports this by delineating an area where a critical mass of restaurants supports environmental responsibility. Customers may feel better about dining in the company of others who share their belief in sustainability while employees and owners may see themselves as part of a valued social group.

Third-most for individuals are moral motivations as they seek meaning in their lives. The district supports this in providing an outlet for customers to take what they perceive as socially positive action while also enjoying a meal out. Employees have shown a willingness to work for lower pay at socially responsible organizations as they derive sufficient non-material benefits to compensate for the monetary difference (Barbian, 2001 as cited by Aguilera et al 2007). Owners may, like customers, take satisfaction from “doing good while doing well.”

Organizations act on the same motives as individuals although they may do so in a different hierarchy. In general, corporate entities place the greatest emphasis on that which provides direct financial return. In the case of Washington Square with many owner-operators, restaurant owners may act with either an individual or organizational mindset. However, as the GRA has indicated that cost savings are a primary benefit of environmentally positive practices, the district would satisfy both organizational and individual instrumental motives.

The second-most important motive for organizations is meeting stakeholder interests. The district supports this by projecting a positive message to customers, employees, town and state officials, and others. The restaurants may be more likely to be perceived as “good corporate citizens” by others and thus given social license to operate. If the establishment of the green restaurant district increases the volume of customers to Washington Square, the benefit will be

shared with many of the non-restaurant businesses and thus promote better relations between all businesses in the district.

The third-most important motive for organizations is one of stewardship. Here, individual and organizational motivations of owner-operators are closely aligned. Stewardship theory suggests that owners are not likely to abandon their personal morality when acting in an organizational role (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997 as cited by Aguilera et al, 2007). Thus to the extent that the restaurant owners embrace environmentalism as a path toward a better world, participating in the district can give voice to their beliefs and evidence of their actions.

Governments have different concerns although the categorization of underlying motives holds. They are interested in competitiveness (instrumental), social cohesion (relational), and collective responsibility (moral). If a green restaurant district in Washington Square functions as envisioned, it may make Brookline more competitive in attracting both businesses and residents. In supporting the district, the town would also enable like-minded people to socially co-locate which may foster social cohesion. The Town of Brookline has acknowledged collective responsibility for addressing environmental concerns and the Board of Selectmen has formed a Climate Action Committee to “recommend programs that reduce the net production of greenhouse gases in Brookline.” The actions needed to attain GRA accreditation as part of the green restaurant district would support this goal.

Theory, therefore, supports the idea that socially responsible actions by individuals, organizations, and government may result from the establishment of a green restaurant district.

Implementation Plan

Information on the proposal has been hand-delivered to each restaurant in Washington Square with the exception of the new occupants of one space who are based in New Jersey. Information has been sent to them by mail. Follow up will take the form of requests for one-on-one meetings as well as appearances at meetings of neighborhood groups. Activities leading up to and including Brookline Climate Week (January 23-29, 2012) will be critical to the effort to garner support for the proposal. The following table illustrates the major steps needed to implement this proposal. There will be periodic meetings and reviews throughout the process not detailed here.

Step	Status
Interview Jim Solomon, owner, The Fireplace (GRA certified restaurant)	Complete. Will support proposal
Interview Mike Oshman, CEO, GRA	Complete. Will support proposal
Establish criteria for district certification with GRA	Complete. Five restaurants (25% of total) will be needed to obtain GRA certification
Establish connections with town gov't	Met with head of Brookline Climate Action Committee on November 1, 2011. Will support proposal and would like public launch during Brookline Climate Week, January 23-29, 2012
Establish connections with restaurant owners	In process. Information distributed to all restaurants. Interviews with at least three rest. to be completed by December 31, 2011. Goal is 4 restaurants committed to GRA certification prior to public launch in late January.
Establish connections with community groups	Aspinwall Hill Neighborhood Association supports proposal. Presentation at its annual meeting on January 29, 2011. The Washington Square Association was approached by December 1, 2011 and has expressed initial support. Salisbury/Corey Farm Neighborhood Association will be approached but it is largely inactive.

Schedule information session for restaurant owners	In process. Jim Solomon has agreed to host and GRA has agreed to present at an information session in January 2012
Begin certification process	To be scheduled. Goal is to have three restaurants begin certification process prior to public announcement. At least two additional restaurants to start by March 1, 2012
Schedule mid-certification progress event	Earth Day 2012 will be the target date for an event in which all restaurants seeking certification can participate. Author to participate with GRA CEO and Fireplace owner Jim Solomon in a panel discussion sponsored by Brookline Continuing Education to be held on April 28, 2012
Complete certification process	Three new restaurants to be certified by June 2012 (certification takes approximately six months). Two additional restaurants certified by September 30, 2012.
Ratify Green Restaurant District	To be scheduled. Goal is to officially establish the district between October and December, 2012
Media Outreach	Upon certification of the fifth green restaurant in Washington Square, a campaign to generate publicity for the district. The GRA will lead this effort.
Green Restaurant District Celebration	To be held during Brookline Climate Week, January 2013

Conclusion

Restaurants are the dominant business entity in Washington Square, Brookline, Massachusetts. The establishment of a green restaurant district in Washington Square is a conceptually valid and practically viable initiative for realizing the environmental and economic goals of individuals, organizations, and local government. It is built on an understanding of social change theory as it relates to climate change issues and a proven framework for improving the environmental performance of restaurants, a high-impact sector in the local economy. It also

has the potential to improve economic performance by increasing consumer visits to Washington Square.

The Washington Square green restaurant project presents an opportunity to pilot a model that may be possible to replicate in other communities worldwide.

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