CHAPTER FOUR

Reinventing Beacon Hill

1960–2000

Quality that’s all its own
This little village overgrown—
A courteous grace one only meets
On Beacon Hill in little streets.

MINA DEHART MIDDLETON
As the 1960s arrived, historic Boston was sliding into a period of unseemly urban blight. The city built on a hill “for all to see” appeared to have become, as one observer put it, “an over-ripe plum permitted to shrink in the midst of great opportunities.” Past visions of urban renewal seemed to have lost their champions. Jungles of decayed housing spread across the city’s storied neighborhoods, encroaching Bunker Hill, surrounding Faneuil Hall, and engulfing the Old North Church. Nearly three-quarters of all buildings in central Boston had been built as far back as the Civil War and World War I, and most of those were in disrepair. Broken and boarded windows, sagging doors, peeling paint, and trash were familiar sights.

The fact that Boston’s property tax was the highest among American cities—two and a half times New York’s or Chicago’s, three times Philadelphia’s, and three and a half times Cleveland’s—did not help. In fact, it had created a vicious cycle. Fortune called it a “poisoning well” for real estate investors, “keeping the postwar U.S. building boom at bay.” The absence of new construction eroded the tax base, which only led to more tax increases. Traditional industries, such as textiles, leather, and shoe making, had gradually left Boston, and new industries were not moving in.

Meanwhile, the city’s population was also in serious decline. Between 1950 and 1960 it had decreased by 15.4 percent, the third largest drop among America’s two hundred largest cities. One of every four citizens had moved elsewhere, at an astonishing rate of twenty thousand a year, only partially offset by new births and immigrants. In the face of these demographics, and the state of the city more generally, the cradle of liberty was fast becoming what the Economist called “a graveyard of hopes.”

AWAKENINGS

In various neighborhoods, including Beacon Hill, a new consciousness was stirring about the extent to which Boston lagged behind other cities in urban development. Perhaps the experience of the West End’s “renewal” had frightened and discouraged some inner-city neighborhoods, not to mention the politicians, from moving programs ahead more vigorously. In the
West End had arisen Charles River Park: “banal groupings of blunt, balconied towers on a treeless plain.”7 Beacon Hill barely escaped the revitalizing bulldozers, even though its South Slope was protected as a Historic District. But the notion that all urban renewal should cease was not viable either. Neighborhoods like the North Slope of Beacon Hill were deteriorating at an alarming speed. Members of the Civic Association began carefully to analyze the forces producing these effects. President Gael Mahony concluded that the leading cause may have been overcoverage of land due to lack of zoning and proper building laws. “We are paying dearly now,” he said, “for our past sins of neglect of proper planning.”8

Leaders on Beacon Hill, as well as in the city at large, called for some serious soul-searching about Boston’s future in the hope of countering fears
that investors and visionaries would flee, like many of the middle class, to the suburbs. One city planner, Maurice Rolivar, was not about to give up on Boston. The city, he said, “is located in the right place, and it has a ‘soul’—an individual character.” Mayor John F. Collins began to thrust the issue of urban redevelopment center stage, appointing a new Director of Development, the first in Boston’s history. The new development czar, Edward T. Logue, was a young lawyer who had gained national attention through assisting New Haven’s mayor in directing that city’s urban renewal. After settling down at West Cedar Street on Beacon Hill, Logue challenged the recently established Boston Redevelopment Authority to develop a vision for the city.

The BRA focused its attention on neighborhoods that could help revitalize the city’s economy. One by one, these areas were transformed: Government Center in old Scollay Square (at the foot of Beacon Hill), a bolstered waterfront, a towering Prudential Center, a refurbished downtown business district, and a rehabilitated 502-acre Washington Park. These strides were warmly heralded. “Signs of Boston’s hidden renaissance are beginning to multiply,” reported the Christian Science Monitor, likening the situation to a butterfly emerging from its cocoon.

But the new city was starting to look dramatically different from its predecessor. Unlike the redbrick low-rises of Beacon Hill and the former West End, concrete skyscrapers came to symbolize the new Boston, such as the Prudential Tower, rising fifty-two stories like a huge blue milk carton with a restaurant on top, and the cluster of twenty-two-story skyscrapers in the West End. Boston’s provincial skyline was changing forever. Naturally, there were those who worried. Among them was Charles W. Eliot, a professor at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. “The towers of the ‘new Boston’ are almost all rectangular blocks chopped off at the maximum economic height,” he lamented. For Eliot, the hallmark of Boston for over a century had been the gently rounded Beacon Hill, topped by Bulfinch’s golden dome on the State House; the relatively uniform building height followed the shape of the ground. Many areas of Boston did need change, he conceded, but he strongly argued that Boston could “build on the success of the past without destroying our heritage.”

Like Eliot, residents of Beacon Hill watched the changes in Boston with mixed feelings. While the blight of the West End had been eliminated, so
had some of the architectural consistency and harmony that had characterized the neighborhood. For one thing, the gray skyscrapers of Charles River Park forcibly separated that neighborhood from Beacon Hill, making the Hill look like an island apart. The sense of isolation, Hillers now realized, might become more severe if the North Slope was itself to go the way of gray skyscrapers. The North Slope had long been a “poor sister,” but it was now apparent to the Beacon Hillers that the poor sister had to be given attention. A real makeover was in store. The question was how to ensure that whatever was undertaken would not replace one form of blight with another, albeit more modern?

BATTLE FOR THE NORTH SLOPE

The Civic Association knew there was precedent for amending the 1955 bill that first created the Historic District of Beacon Hill. After three years, in 1958, it had amended the bill to include the Flat of the Hill. Now again, in February 1963, the Civic Association decided to sponsor legislation to make the North Slope a part of the historic neighborhood. This, the association hoped, would “preserve a vista of old Boston in the shadows of the new high-rise apartment buildings in the West End and the modern structures of the new Government Center.” Though the North Slope had never been as grand or fashionable as the South, it nonetheless included some of the oldest and most important historic buildings on Beacon Hill. To the historically minded, at least, the North Slope’s architecture blended beautifully with the Beacon Hill Historic District of the South Slope.¹²

To rally support for the new legislation, on February 25 a public meeting was held at St. John’s Church on Bowdoin Street. The keynote speech came from Walter Muir Whitehill, a leading writer on Boston history and architecture. Whitehill, the director of the Boston Athenaeum, was also chair of the Boston Historical Conservation Committee. The committee, he said, had determined that three buildings on the North Slope carried national significance: the Harrison Gray Otis house and the Old West Church, both on Cambridge Street, and the Egyptian revivalist building at 57 Hancock
Street. The proposal to include the North Slope, instantly embraced by Hillers, gave momentum to the forces of historical preservation.

In the State House, meanwhile, the legislation drew fierce opposition. At the center of the controversy was the future of Bowdoin Street, the eastern end of which had been demolished to make way for construction of the State Office Building. The street had the longest row of bow-front Greek Revival housing from the 1840s and was considered a symbol of the transition between the modern buildings of Government Center and the redbrick colonials of Beacon Hill. To the residents of Beacon Hill, Bowdoin Street stood as a last line of defense against further encroachments from developers. Another view was held by commercial interests located on the street. All land on Bowdoin Street was under private ownership. One person alone owned nine parcels of land on the lower side of the street, and reportedly he was considering the construction of a new hotel or motel on the fringe of Government Center. Should the new legislation receive the approval of Massachusetts lawmakers, persons with such position and plans would be required to get permission from the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission before they could demolish bow-front buildings for any new construction.

Unfortunately for the forces of historical preservation, many House legislators were sympathetic to proposals for architecturally sensitive development of the desirable lower side of Bowdoin Street. The House voted down the bill, stating that it could be reconsidered only if the Bowdoin Street provision was omitted. The Boston Sunday Globe, calling the action “very discouraging,” argued that omitting Bowdoin Street would destroy the line of transition between Government Center and Beacon Hill.

Despite immediate discouragement among Beacon Hill residents, the political currents running against North Slope preservation soon took a surprisingly reverse course. On May 22, 1963, the National Park Service of the Department of Interior gave the South Slope of Beacon Hill national visibility. The Park Service designated the South Slope a National Historic Landmark, one among sixty-five sites chosen in a new effort to commemorate American history. Representing Beacon Hill, Mayor Collins personally attended official ceremonies and received the award. Somehow the honor seemed to presciently embrace the North Slope as well, like a powerful in-
visible hand reaching out to reclaim an endangered species. The effort to reconsider the bill for the preservation of the North Slope revived over the summer of 1963. It triumphed on August 9, when Governor Endicott Peabody signed a bill extending the Beacon Hill Historic District to include the North Slope. It had taken a five-month legislative battle. But there was no longer any question that Beacon Hill would be permanently preserved—not in part—but in its entirety.
TODAY’S INTERIOR, YESTERDAY’S WALL

The Beacon Hill Architectural Commission was, perhaps, destined to face hurricanes over modern development of the Hill. Things had started peacefully enough in the life of the young commission. In the eight years after its creation by the Massachusetts legislature in 1955, it had received more than two hundred applications from property owners seeking permission to renovate. The commission turned down very few of these proposals, since most would affect only interiors, and the mission of the Architectural Commission was to safeguard the exterior harmony of the Hill. Then came the spring of 1963. The architect Eduard Bullerjahn, a resident of Mount Vernon Street, and his partner, Andrew Hepburn, also an architect went looking for a certificate of demolition. They proposed tearing down the brownstone building at 70-72 Mount Vernon Street, built in 1846 by the esteemed architect Richard Upjohn. The plan also called for demolishing Granite chapel at 27-29 Chestnut Street, 1963. Courtesy of the Boston Herald. This chapel was formerly the Boston University School of Theology. A new proposal from the architects Bullerjahn and Hepburn called for the demolition of the chapel and the construction of luxury apartments. The proposal naturally resulted in a neighborhood uproar.
Andrew Hepburn (left) and his partner Eduard Bullerjahn, May 1963. Courtesy of the Associated Press. The two architects look over the plans of their proposed apartment complex.
the granite chapel at 27–29 Chestnut Street, formerly the home of the Boston University School of Theology. In the place of these buildings, Bullerjahn and Hepburn wanted to build a million-dollar complex of luxury apartments.

Apparently the architects were aware of the fact that proposals such as theirs could trigger passionate reactions among their fellow Beacon Hillers. Indeed, the prospect of obliterating buildings that had been around for as long as Louisburg Square caused the blood of many residents to boil. In this case Bullerjahn and Hepburn had secured the backing of some Boston heavyweights, which had the effect of splitting the Hill right down the middle. “Good heavens,” lamented one resident, “old Boston friendships have broken over this.”

As the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission opened hearings, they listened as the parties made their cases. Supporting the plan was Walter Muir Whitehill, who had previously been known for his preservationist instincts. “Originally,” Whitehill told the Architectural Commission, “these two brownstones represented the taste of newly-rich Boston merchants of the 19th century. They are grossly inharmonious with the small-brick structures of their neighbors.” Whitehill vouched for the character and competence of the two architects, stating his conviction that they would produce an apartment block that was architecturally sympathetic to neighboring buildings. Another supporter, eighty-six-year-old William Stanley Parker, an architect and former member of the Boston Planning Board, thought he could persuade the commission by suggesting that their initial reluctance had some historical irony: “These brownstones were built in 1846. If your commission were sitting at that time for the protection of the characteristics of Beacon Hill, [the brownstones] would never have been permitted to be built.”

Another supporter of the new construction, Joseph Lund, a real estate executive and Hiller, said he could see no sound use for the present properties, except institutional, which was not in conformity with the area’s residential character.

Opponents, like their adamant forebears in past battles over preservation, mounted an organized campaign, many of them canceling summer vacation plans. Ready to voice their views before the Architectural Commission,
about 150 residents "marched down their historic citadel," reported the *Boston Globe*,
armed with nine hundred signatures opposing change. The opponents drew from the press comparisons to the "old Revolutionary rider with the red flag of warning" during the battles of Lexington and Concord. Two spokesmen for the opposition, Carl Sapers and Jacob Atwood, reminded the commission of the statute prohibiting demolition and new construction. Bertram Little, director of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, also voiced the opposition of the society, recommending further exploration of new uses for the existing properties. Henry Milton, a professor of architectural history at MIT and a resident of Myrtle Street, declared, "This is no longer a local matter solely for the residents." The Boston Society of Architects wrote to the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission and expressed their concern. Meanwhile the architect Frederick A. Stahl, a resident of Hancock Street, in a series of letters to the commission criticized the Bullerjahn proposal as inconsistent and inappropriate with the adjoining buildings. Also making her voice heard was Dorothy Upjohn Lewis, the great-granddaughter of the famed architect of the endangered Mount Vernon brownstone. Writing the commission from her home in Long Island, she stated her hope that "valiant Bostonians" would save their Beacon Hill buildings from "the Hunnish hordes of progress."

The Beacon Hill Architectural Commission was left with the unenviable task of deciding what to do. On August 21, 1963, the commission pleased the opposition forces by rejecting the Bullerjahn-Hepburn proposal. However,
the commission still left the door ajar for alternative plans. And alternative plans did emerge from the same architects. This time Bullerjahn and Hepburn proposed thirty-one modern luxury apartments within the shells of old structures, suggesting that the finished buildings could be “1840s on the outside” and “1960s on the inside.” Bullerjahn argued that with modern technology the buildings would be so soundproof that “a child sleeping in one room would not be disturbed by someone in an adjoining room playing a grand piano.”

The apartments would also have individually controlled air-conditioning, enabling residents to enjoy today’s interior within yesterday’s walls. Hillers welcomed the new prospect. This time, breathing a sigh of relief, the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission gave the green light.

TOWN AND GOWN

Like a first wave of settlers that brings another wave, Bullerjahn and Hepburn were but the first of many new incursions into Beacon Hill in 1963. For some time Suffolk University had been eyeing the eastern border of the North Slope. Suffolk, the largest institutional neighbor of Beacon Hill, that year purchased land on Temple Street, the former home of the First Methodist Church, as well as the Temple Hall Hotel and a small apartment house. A few years later, the university also bought 32 and 34 Hancock Street, two buildings destroyed by fire the previous winter. The plan was to demolish existing buildings and turn the property into a student parking lot. In the meantime the university also took an interest in the abandoned Stop & Shop building on Cambridge Street. These aggressive moves by what used to be a quiet neighbor created fears that the residential character of the Hill was again being threatened. This fear intensified when Hillers learned that the legislature was considering an amendment to the bill that originally protected the North Slope as a Historic District, an amendment that would exempt Suffolk from architectural controls on the district—granting it a variance. The traditionally peaceful relationship of “town and gown,” as the Beacon Hill News termed it, was now in jeopardy.

Perhaps the main difficulty for the Hill was the perception of the North
Slope held by university students and officials. “Suffolk is located on the ‘dark side’ of the Hill,” wrote the student government president to the Boston Globe. “We are not discussing the beautiful 19th century homes on Mt. Vernon Street or Louisburg Square. We are discussing the buildings located on lower Joy Street, Hancock Street, and Temple Street. These are a series of antiquated, run-down apartment houses which in no way can be called worthy examples of early architecture.” An editorial in the school newspaper, the Suffolk Journal, echoed that sentiment. “There is nothing historic or charming about this area. It looks older than God, and life there is as stark and as harsh as in Hell.” Residents of the North Slope, of course, took exception to such views, considering their neighborhood nothing less than a precious memorial to the past, as well as a place to which young couples were bringing renewal.

In December 1967 rising tempers turned into a pitched battle. The Boston Board of Appeals gave Suffolk University a variance to go ahead and convert the one-story building, the former Stop & Shop, into a five-story, multipurpose undergraduate facility. In response, the Beacon Hill Civic Association formed a special planning committee chaired by Frederick Stahl of Hancock Street and James McNeely of Temple Street. The committee tried to work out a compromise with all parties involved. When negotiations failed, both town and gown threw down their gauntlets and went to court. Representing the Civic Association was the association’s former president, Gael Mahony of the law firm Hill and Barlow. The case of Trustees of Suffolk University v. James McNeely et al. proved a long and costly legal battle. To raise funds for indefinite court proceedings, the association reached out to its members. They delivered. By the summer of 1970 there was good news. On July 3 the Supreme Judicial Court of the Commonwealth decided in favor of the association’s appeal, denying the granting of a variance to Suffolk University. Once again the integrity of Beacon Hill and its future as a residential community had been reaffirmed.
THE SUMMER OF LOVE

The 1960s that swept Beacon Hill into battles to preserve local turf also swept Hillers into controversy over much larger conflicts. By the summer of 1967 more than half a million American soldiers had gone to fight in Vietnam, thirteen thousand of them killed in action. American public sentiment toward the war began to turn from initial ambivalence to open protest. On October 16 Boston joined forty other American cities as a venue for simultaneous antiwar rallies. More than five thousand participants, mostly students and faculty from Greater Boston and other New England colleges, gathered on Boston Common. Speakers at the rally included Professor Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Professor Howard Zinn of Boston University. More than one hundred ministers from various denominations also joined in. “We are now in effect declaring our independence from this war,” said Professor Zinn to a youthful, orderly audience sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on the Common.30 “The men who went to war most often and died most frequently were the people who had nothing to gain.”

After the rally demonstrators, led by a coalition of ministers, marched to Arlington Street Church. The church soon overflowed, and three thousand people were left standing outside. Inside, speakers elaborated the religious and moral justifications of civil disobedience. Invoking Socrates and Saint Peter, the Reverend William Sloan Coffin, Jr., chaplain of Yale University and cochairman of the National Committee of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, suggested that each student must probe his own conscience to justify civil disobedience. “Men at times will feel constrained to disobey the law out of a sense of obedience to a higher allegiance,” said the Reverend Coffin. At the conclusion of speeches, Dr. George H. Williams of Harvard Divinity School signaled students to burn their draft cards. Fifty-six young men marched to the altar as a hushed crowd looked on. A burning candle on the altar was used to ignite their draft cards. Another 214 students decided to give their cards to the clergy of their respective faiths to be taken to Washington and turned over to U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. The students were ready to accept whatever action the federal government would
take. Jail was not to be feared, said Ray Mungo, the former editor of the Boston University News and a graduate student at Harvard. Jail was an honorable alternative to serving in Vietnam. Church bells pealed out the tune to “We Shall Overcome.”

More than two hundred faculty members from New England colleges also pledged their allegiance to draft resisters and signed a declaration of support in a newspaper advertisement. “As their teachers,” said the declaration, “we stand with them to help in any way we can. . . . We can and do pledge them our total support.”31 Many residents of Beacon Hill also registered their support. Led by Joseph Masski, a real estate agent living on Revere Street, a group of young Hillers formed the Beacon Hill Committee on the
War in Vietnam. Their goal was to educate the public about the war and its adverse impact on American life. The committee also planned to persuade local political leaders to work for an end to the war. Canvassing the Hill door-to-door with a public opinion poll, they found that 60 to 70 percent of Hillers opposed the war. Antiwar efforts of the Beacon Hillers were augmented by the formation of another group of protesters, known as the Beacon Hill Support Group for Peace Action in Vietnam, which used the Charles Street Meeting House as its headquarters. They distributed antiwar literature and organized citizen participation in many peace rallies, including the 1969 national antiwar rally in Washington, D.C.

Beacon Hill was deeply affected by the emerging “youth culture” during the antiwar movement, as it attracted, like a magnet, many rebellious youth who defied tradition. As elsewhere, these young people were driven by a mix of motivations—on the one hand, ideals of equality, nonexploitation, and reverence for the sacredness of life; on the other hand, a deeply troubled sense over events in Southeast Asia. Some wanted to develop a more defined “counterculture,” taking cues from university intellectuals. And like their cohorts in other parts of the country, many of those involved on the Hill were youth caught up in the throes of late adolescence, interpreting the call to counterculture as an occasion to free themselves from any social or parental constraint and to experiment with free love and drugs. These were the “hippies” of Beacon Hill.

Charles Street, the main commercial thoroughfare, became the center of “youthful” activities on the Hill. Groups of young people loitered day and night at store entrances and street corners, some wearing “Dutch-boy hats on unwashed hair.” The blockage of traffic disturbed the residents and shopkeepers, as did the dirtied streets. In time, customers were discouraged from shopping on Charles Street, and some stores were forced to close. In fact, Charles Street was in real trouble, wrote the Beacon Hill News. “Shopping center, playground, combat zone, public dump, or historic showplace: what is the future of Charles Street?” Drug trafficking was on the rise, not only on the main street but also throughout Beacon Hill. The police station on Joy Street became an unwilling, temporary stop for those unable to get away when the police showed up. Describing the situation with an overture of hu-
mor, an article appeared in the Beacon Hill News: "The pot-head was inside the temporary lock-up room, his hands trussed behind him with his own vest. Bearded, shoeless and semi-toothless. Earlier that evening he had tried serenading Beacon Hill. Unfortunately, no one appreciated his efforts, especially since the concert had blocked traffic on Phillips Street."  

The use of marijuana, LSD, and other drugs on Beacon Hill increased so fast that Beacon Hill unwillingly gained a reputation as one of Boston's leading drug traffic centers. During the summer of 1967, the "hippie summer," thousands of migrating youth brought a kind of Haight-Ashbury atmosphere to the Boston Common and Beacon Hill, as drug dealers set up shop for major trafficking. Window boxes on the Hill were used as stashes for cocaine. Burglary and related crimes followed. Many residents, according to the Beacon Hill News, hoped that "a strong breeze or a Harvard riot" might "dislodge the gypsies."  

Beacon Hill's response to the new hippie culture was as diverse as the hippie culture itself. There were hard-liners calling for police control of hippies and a curfew on the Common. There were soft-liners who sympathized with the younger generation and tried to reach out to them with medical, psychiatric, and other social services. There were also middle-of-the-roaders, advocating medical assistance to the needy coupled with increased law enforcement and street clearance. Many Hill residents tried to distinguish the idealist hippies from the junkies. "We 'squares' have no mission to be critical of the clothes and habits of the hippie population, nor of their philosophy," wrote Frederick Witherby, president of the Beacon Hill Civic Association, "because the principles of American life are based upon the right of each individual to make a personal choice as to certain matters so long as he does not interfere with the rights of other people."  

Long hair and idleness were their business, said Maurice E. Frye, Jr., a state representative, "but pan-handling, litter-bugging, using and trafficking drugs, blocking public ways, and over-use of public parks are my business."  

In fact, many Hill residents made it their own business to try to deal with the unruly situation. As early as 1963, three like-minded neighbors, Nathaniel Young and Nicholas DeWolf of Pinckney Street and John Ryan of West Cedar Street, had formed a three-man Law Enforcement Committee to supervise the streets and curb disturbances with the police depart-
ment. The three-member committee gained financial support from fourteen other residents on the North Slope. After making house-to-house calls, the committee appointed six street captains with the principal duties of disseminating the committee’s literature and organizing residents of their streets. A hotline and a designated mailbox were established to encourage residents to report disturbances. During the summer of 1967, a four-man police foot patrol was added, covering the Charles Street area after 6 p.m., and charged with, in addition to normal parking and traffic enforcement, breaking up gangs of hippies gathered in store entrances or across sidewalks. By the summer of 1969, a small group of North Slope residents formed what they called the “North Slope Average Neighbors Group,” trying to remedy conditions that threatened health and safety on the North Slope. The same summer, the Hip Task Force was also established to provide free programs of recreation and entertainment to the large influx of youth.40

But if there were efforts to curb disruptions of peace and order, there also surfaced a recognition that serious needs existed among the hippie community—needs that Hillers could and should do something about. The Old West Church held weekly dialogue forums for community leaders, including the mayor’s office, the police department, medical and social workers, and other concerned citizens. Out of these meetings came the formation of a Youth Hostel, all-night drop-in centers in two local churches, and professional counseling for many hippies. Such solutions, many believed, would have a better long-term impact than jails, mental institutions, and remedial programs. The Reverend Hudson, copastor of Old West Church, observed later that some recognized that the failures of what was called the “silent generation” had actually helped create the conditions that produced these young people.41

Another effort to generate creative solutions came from Dr. Alfred Koumans, a psychiatrist at both Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Massachusetts General Hospital, and Dr. David Lewis, an internist at Beth Israel Hospital. They both took an interest in addressing the deteriorating health of hippies, many of whom tended to refuse medical help even when suffering from ulcerative colitis, pneumonia, kidney infections, and acute psychosis. Some of the needier hippies found their way to volunteer organizations such as Project Place, a halfway house for troubled youth run by
divinity students in the South End. But basic medical assistance was lacking at Project Place. Following the model of a free clinic in San Francisco, Dr. Koumans and Dr. Lewis set out to establish their own free clinic, called Medical Service, in the summer of 1968. Koumans and Lewis believed that the best location for the clinic, if it was to be accessible and effective, would be close to Boston Common, where most hippies congregated. The doctors settled, ironically, upon a site widely perceived to be one of the city's most conservative establishments—King's Chapel, courtesy of the Reverend Carl Scovel, its pastor. Scovel persuaded members of his Board of Regents to allow the doctors to use the Parish House at 64 Beacon Street for the summer.42

As word got out about the new free clinic, volunteers began to pour in from local hospitals, including internists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, and medical students. The clinic soon had a staff of sixty people, with more on the waiting list. All except for a full-time secretary served without pay. Hospitals, medical supply companies, and drug companies rushed free supplies to the clinic. The Massachusetts Mental Health Association furnished whatever supplies were needed that had not been donated. Financial donations came in from Hill residents and members of King’s Chapel. During the summer of 1968, the free clinic was able to treat 450 patients, most between fourteen and twenty-four years old and suffering problems ranging from minor infections to serious disease. A friendly rapport was taking hold among hippie patients and the medical staff, especially as the clinic demonstrated it could strictly observe confidentiality. Meanwhile, the Reverend Scovel and church volunteers made food coupons available to those in need. “You don’t have to be a hippie to treat hippies,” concluded Dr. Lewis. “It is only when older people make up their minds beforehand and start acting like parents that the kids run away. We treat them without moral judgments.”43

Success notwithstanding, the clinic was controversial among Hillers. Supporters said it fulfilled humanitarian imperatives—for hippies had their rights too. Others worried the clinic would attract even more hippies to the area. At one meeting of the Civic Association, a resident called the effort to provide aid and comfort to drug users a “cruel betrayal” of those who lived on
Hill House (old firehouse), 127 Mount Vernon Street, 2001. In order to expand and serve the community better, Hill House purchased the old firehouse. Countless volunteers worked tirelessly to make the new Hill House a true community center for all the residents of Beacon Hill.
Church of the Advent, Mount Vernon and Brimmer Streets, 2002, photograph by the author.
The "Sunflower House," 2002, photograph by the author. The house at 130 Mount Vernon Street was built in 1840 and remodeled in 1878.
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Louisburg Square at dawn, 2002, photograph by the author.
Acorn Street, 2002, photograph by the author. In the nineteenth century the cobblestone street became home to many servants working for the families of the South Slope. This may be the most often photographed street on Beacon Hill.
Christmas decorations, 2001, photograph by the author. West Cedar Street is dressed up for the season.
Students standing outside the Advent School, the only independent elementary school on Beacon Hill. Courtesy of Nancy Harris Frohlich.
Beacon Hill. In his view, drug traffic had turned the neighborhood into a slum, so that it was not safe any more to send children to the Common or to leave wives at home alone. The Reverend William Alberts of Old West Church countered by characterizing that position as one marked by hysteria and dehumanization. “These young people are still human beings,” he said. Among the 150 members on hand, there were cheers for arguments on both sides of the issue.

The hippie era served as a mirror for the community to reflect on its own attitudes, value systems, and humanity, a process that went on for several summers to come. In his letter to the Beacon Hill News, the Reverend Hudson tried to put the hippie experience into perspective. The widespread breakdown of American home life, he said, along with the search to replace old systems of authority with authenticity and integrity, and the unrest among young people concerning war, poverty, and injustice, their idealism and the possibility of a more human society—all these suggested that the “youth problem” would be around for many years to come. “Perhaps we would be well advised in some areas to wish them well.” One possible solution to the hippie problem, argued Hudson, was to try to be more sensitive to the individuals who got lumped into this group. “They really do not make up a single type any more than the ‘straight’ citizens of Beacon Hill make up a single type.”

If one thing was certain about Beacon Hill residents, they simply all did not hold the same image of “hippies.” It was equally true that they did not agree on what to do about them. The hippie summer passed, like other summers, never to return in its original form. But many of the realizations born during that summer—both sympathetic and defensive—continued to reverberate for many years.

THE ’60S GENERATION DIGS IN

In the 1960s three momentous social developments converged on American life—the antiwar movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the youth counterculture. Each in its own way brought to the surface contradic-
tions in American life that had long been repressed or denied. How to reconcile the fact that in this democracy persons of diverse races and colors were not being treated equally? How, in the wealthiest nation on earth, could so many citizens be living in poverty? How could a nation that espoused the moral and spiritual values of great religious traditions experience such disintegration of family and community? By the 1970s the young people who had openly and rebelliously brought these contradictions to light now faced the challenge of rebuilding a society based on truer ideals.

Beacon Hill, in its own search for answers, was slowly being transformed. Since the 1960s the Hill had witnessed a major demographic change, with a growing number of young people in their twenties and early thirties moving to the Hill. By 1970 that number had risen 40 percent compared to 1960. Some in this age group had experienced the Vietnam War firsthand. Those who had not been to Vietnam were still deeply influenced by the ethos of the period. Most of them brought to Beacon Hill a heightened sense of volunteerism, as well as the desire to find a broader, more inclusive sense of community—even if it meant challenging some practices of the revered Civic Association.

Nick DeWol£, for one, felt that the long-standing gap between the association and the community had widened into a gulf. In the fall of 1970 he called for a dramatic shift in the association’s orientation and attitude. Joining DeWol£ in his concerns was Bernard Borman, a resident of 3 Rollins Place, a former president of the association, and a lawyer with the firm Nathanson and Rudofsky. They urged the association to do more—in light of the mounting urban crisis across America—to encourage democratic participation in the association. Looking at the nominated candidates for leadership of the association for 1970, Borman pointed out that no one had been nominated from seven major streets of the North Slope. Questions needed to be asked, said Borman. How many tenants were being nominated? How many under thirty? Or twenty? How many poor folks? How many nonwhites? “It is no excuse,” he said, “to say that these people don’t participate in the Beacon Hill Civic Association. Their nonparticipation in community affairs is the root of the problem on Beacon Hill.” Term limits should also be imposed, in Borman’s view, to avoid the appearance of “musical chairs” and self-perpetu-
ing “clubism.” In short, Borman argued, in an era in which neighborhoods all over America were demonstrating new abilities to organize and be heard, Beacon Hill, with its heterogeneous composition and well-educated citizenry, should have one of the most progressive and broadly based neighborhood associations. Membership recruitment should be drawn from all geographic areas, among all ethnic groups, age groups, owners, and tenants.\(^{47}\)

While Bernard Borman and Nick DeWolf were shaking things up in the Civic Association, an attempt to build a more inclusive neighborhood was taking place on other fronts as well, some with roots going back to the 1960s. In 1966 there came up for sale the old police office, known as Station Three, at 74 Joy Street. Built in 1862 by the City of Boston, the building had had a colorful history. During World War II stopping at Station Three became a “must” activity for servicemen, since both the Navy Shore Patrol and the Army Military Police were headquartered there. Failing to stop in would be like coming to see Boston and failing to pay one’s respects to the Bunker Hill Monument or Paul Revere’s house. Station Three continued its fame after the war. John F. Kennedy once voted there. Willie Sutton, a famous robber, slept there, as did a murderer brought back all the way from Carson City, Nevada, by a Mounties-like police chief. No criminal had ever succeeded in breaking out of Station Three.

For the Beacon Hill Civic Association the sale of Station Three loomed as a major opportunity for community service and inclusion. The association decided to bid on the property, intending to convert it to a community center and a permanent home for the association and the Beacon Hill Nursery School. Plans also included a recreation center with a comprehensive program for senior citizens on the Hill, gym facilities for classes from the Advent School, and after-school activities for all youngsters of the Hill. This was one Hill initiative that seemed to attract universal support from the neighbors, as well as the city at large. Police Commissioner Edmund McNamara and Mayor John Collins endorsed the sale of the building to the association. State Senator Oliver Ames and State Representatives John W. Sears, Maurice Frye, Jr., and Katherine Kane spoke in favor at a hearing before the Boston City Council. All emphasized the idea that the center would be available to all residents of the neighborhood.\(^{48}\) In March 1966 the city council
gave its final approval. And in May of the same year, the new community center was officially incorporated as Hill House, with a twenty-one-member board of directors.

**HILL HOUSE**

Joseph Lund was sure Beacon Hill had reached a real turning point, a moment at which a community makes a decision that forever changes its direction. Lund and Guido Perera were cochairs of the 1966 Capital Fund Drive for Hill House. “Our neighborhood,” said Lund, “which decided a decade ago to embrace the Historic District (a decision whose beneficial effects are still being felt), now has another opportunity of comparable magnitude. It is a chance to develop here on Beacon Hill a unique community center financed by, run by and for the benefit of all of the people of Beacon Hill.” Hill House, like the Historic District legislation, became a vehicle for realizing a shared vision, one that reflected the spirit of the times. In its Articles of Organization, Hill House was described as serving the needs of all residents of Beacon Hill, old and young. This all-inclusiveness became its hallmark. Its objectives were “to progress towards elimination of poverty or causes of poverty among persons in the Beacon Hill neighborhood” and “to alleviate the problems of aging by providing new learning and service opportunities for the senior citizens of Beacon Hill.” The idealism of the 1960s and the generation that shaped and was shaped by it became the driving force behind this new communal vision.

With song and dance Hill House officially opened on October 22, 1968, after two years of renovation. The nursery school moved into its new quarters with a play yard that charmed parents and a full enrollment of more than seventy children between the ages of two and five. With the new facility, the school was poised for a program expansion, adding afternoon classes to its original mornings-only curriculum. Beacon Hill’s “native-grown” teenagers were also beneficiaries of Hill House. Inspired by the success of a teen program of Old West Church, the board of Hill House voted to appropriate funds for the church to start a similar program at Hill House.
Serving only the teenagers of Beacon Hill and Charles River Park, the new Beacon Hill Teen Program offered a variety of activities, including athletics and courses on television production with video expert Steve Gilford. An open shop program with Tom Wilson of Asterisk, where teens over fifteen could design their own projects (ham radio, woodwork, auto mechanics), as well as dance lessons for four days a week with live bands and refreshments, were offered.

Adult volunteers, in addition to being chaperones, were encouraged to reach out to the teenagers as friends and advise them on both personal and school-related issues. At a time when many teenagers were turning to drugs as a form of rebellion, Hill House created a sanctuary in an effort to channel the boundless energies of teenagers into more positive activities.

Other programs benefited adults, including more than a thousand senior citizens, a group for whom few services had been offered on the Hill. A large area at the front of Hill House was designated the reading and recreation
lounge for senior citizens. It was furnished with games and reading materials, along with information on Medicare, Social Security, health lectures, and trips to historic spots. The senior citizens, feeling more connected with each other and their community, soon began to make joint decisions, such as voting to join the National Council of Senior Citizens.

Meanwhile, young adults also made good use of course offerings at Hill House, which included lectures on Beacon Hill architecture, Italian language, history, and the arts.

The role of Hill House went beyond providing a shared physical space; it offered a vehicle to reach out to a broader spectrum of neighbors who called Beacon Hill home.

CHARLES STREET FAIR

One crisp fall day in 1970, a happier wind blew across Beacon Hill, as if to say that the heaviness of the times would not be allowed to utterly flatten Boston spirits: neighbors celebrated the first Charles Street Fair. It was the genesis of a new-fashioned tradition, one that would last well into the next decade. Community institutions had joined together in the planning—the Beacon Hill Garden Club, Hill House, the Beacon Hill Nursery School, among others. Young and old were entertained by a mix of offerings, from carnival games, to book and bake sales, to the demonstration of a full-sized sailboat by the Charles River Boating Club. Colorful banners adorned the Charles Street Hardware Store to attract public attention. To recruit members for the association, a large map of Beacon Hill was displayed with red dots showing where current members lived. By the end of the fair, seventy-five more red dots had been added. Ideas were hatched that would enhance the fair in years to come: the ideas of creating a beer garden, a flea market, a raffle with prizes, and arts and entertainment. What began as a rather modest effort became, by 1976, an event attracting thirty thousand visitors, with local television stations covering the activities for the nightly news.

For Hillers the Charles Street Fair was a reminder that a little community
Charles Street Fair, 1970s. Courtesy of the Beacon Hill Civic Association. Started in the fall of 1970, the Charles Street Fair became a celebrated neighborhood affair and a Beacon Hill tradition until 1988, when it was canceled.
spirit could do wonders not just for renewing the neighborhood, but also for keeping businesses in the area. From the early days local merchants showed their enthusiasm for the idea by offering donations, free services, and supplies. The participants’ list came to read like a business directory of Beacon Hill, with names such as the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Stop & Shop, Phillips Drug Store, Kelley’s Ice Cream, Nino’s Pizza, and Baskin-Robbins. The fair was, in one sense, an expression of the Hillers’ desire to reclaim their main street from the aftermath of the Vietnam War. And businesses also renewed their faith in the Hill, especially its main street.

A “sister fair,” meanwhile, made its debut in the spring of 1975. At “HealthFest,” sponsored by the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and the Beacon Hill Civic Association, Hill residents of all ages were invited to receive free medical exams and advice. Doctors, nurses, and hospital staff from the Infirmary were on hand to advise and screen for eye, ear, nose, and throat problems, while other local health groups held workshops on resuscitating victims of heart attacks. At the corner of Fruit and Charles Streets strolling performers and musicians entertained patients and visitors. More than eight hundred people sampled the free screening that day, with Beacon Hill’s elderly being special beneficiaries. Massachusetts General Hospital joined the sponsorship the following year, offering free screenings for blood pressure, as well as measuring height and weight. Educational booths and a film series provided other essential health information. Between HealthFest and the Charles Street Fair, the effects in the postwar period were apparently therapeutic; boundaries had begun to fall between rich and poor, old and young, in the celebration of common humanity and neighborliness.

In 1978 more than forty thousand people visited the Charles Street Fair, making it the largest neighborhood street fair in Boston. Organizers sensed they had something extraordinary on their hands. Like Christmas Eve on the Hill a few decades before, the Charles Street Fair was becoming a Beacon Hill tradition in its own right, even a Boston tradition. “The Charles Street Fair isn’t ours alone anymore,” commented the Beacon Hill News. Publicity brought larger and larger crowds from out of town, making it nearly impossible to walk across the streets on fair day. The sheer size started to make the event more and more unwieldy as years went on. By the mid-
The Charles Street Fair became the largest of its kind in Boston, visited by more than forty thousand people.

Charles Street Fair, 1980s. Courtesy of the Beacon Hill Civic Association.
1980s, insurance costs had quadrupled. In 1986 the beer garden was canceled
because no insurance company was willing to provide host-liquor liability
insurance. In an effort to avoid the throngs, more and more of Beacon Hill’s
own residents stayed away. The goal of “neighboring,” which first brought the
fair into existence, seemed to have been lost sight of, as larger forces of urban
reveling set in. In 1988 the Civic Association finally decided to cancel the
Charles Street Fair and refocus on the Winter Ball, which was started in 1972
to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Association, as the major
annual event for the Hill and its community.

SMALL MIRACLES

Since the Mount Vernon Proprietors put their first ad in the Columbian
Centinel in 1796 to attract new residents, only two types of accommoda-
tions existed on Beacon Hill: owner-occupied, single-family houses and
rooming houses. Traditionally, each rooming house was presided over and
cared for by a widow, known as a “mother hen”—this was a way for widows
to supplement their income. Lodgers tended to stay a long time and were
considered either part of her family or permanent guests. Through the car-
ing hands of mother hens on the Hill, rooming houses were generally kept
clean and orderly. By the early 1970s, however, though some of the traditional
rooming houses still existed, more and more had come to be managed by
commercial syndicated trusts and absentee owners who invested little in
property maintenance. Increasingly, tenants of the rooming houses were
transients.

In the mid-1970s a new urban housing fad found its way to Beacon Hill in
the form of converting apartments and single-family houses into condo-
miniums. Baby boomers and young urban professionals (yuppies) were at-
tracted to the idea because condos satisfied both their urge to own property
at a relatively low cost and their preference for city living. Two entire build-
ings on Hancock Street, for example, were converted into condo units. The
full-floor, two-bedroom units, twelve in all, were sold before they were
finished at forty to fifty thousand dollars per unit. With both excitement and
concern, the residents watched this new real estate phenomenon spread across Beacon Hill.

In February 1976 the *Beacon Hill News* investigated the community's view toward it. "Is this the beginning of a trend that can save once lavish single-family houses from absentee landlords?" asked the newspaper. "Is it a means by which middle-class families can afford to own properties on Beacon Hill?" At first, many Hillers saw the condo conversions as a solution to some long-standing problems on the Hill. Ownership of property, they believed, would lead to pride and upkeep for buildings and the neighborhood, motivated by the financial commitments involved. The streets of Beacon Hill would be cleaner and safer. But as condo conversion spread, attitudes began to change. From 1976 to 1978 the number of condo conversions went up a whopping 200 percent, starting to leave what, for some, was a worrisome imprint on the Hill. Some were concerned that the conversions were leaving fewer apartments on the Hill, driving up their rents, forcing some elderly and less affluent families to move out, and further gentrifying the neighborhood. Other neighbors worried that condo conversion could threaten the existence of single-family houses. Still others were troubled to see some long-term residents forced out of Beacon Hill because they were either unable or unwilling to buy.

In a humorous though impassioned article, twenty-eight-year-old resident Chris Glynn wrote about his own experience in the five years since 1973. In those years Glynn lived in an apartment with his housemate, Susan. "We intended to continue to live together, until death or marriage do us part," Glynn wrote. "We thought about death and marriage. We didn't think about condominium conversion." The couple's residence had now been sold and rumor had it that all in the building would be forcibly "converted" to condominiums. "I do not wish to convert," protested Glynn. However, if necessary, he said, he would try to buy, which would mean "going into hock majeur when neither of us wants to or really is ready to." Condo conversion, admitted Glynn, most certainly had its good points. But the negatives heavily outweighed the benefits. The Hill, he said, would become an upper-class ghetto, with all the implied sterility. "Anything worth converting was on the danger list, leaving only the small, dark, dank, and bug-ridden apartments for the..."
masses. The landed gentry will move into the bigger boxes, and the rest of us will get the pigeon coops.  

Chris Glynn was not alone in his feelings about condos. Shirley Thatcher had worked for many years with programs to assist the elderly on the Hill. It was getting more and more difficult, she said, to find rooms on the first and second floors for senior citizens with physical disabilities. According to a list compiled by the Civic Association in 1976, forty licensed lodging houses existed on the Hill, with 70 percent of the tenants being elderly or nonprofessionals who had lived there for a long time.  

Beacon Hill had always comprised a diverse mix of Brahmins, professionals, itinerants, and the poor. “The viability of any community is its ability to integrate its different segments,” argued Thatcher.  

Sharing the concerns of Thatcher and Glynn was the new president of the Civic Association, Joel Pierce. As the oldest neighborhood organization in America, he wrote, the association was strongly interested in preserving the special character of life on the Hill as an economically mixed residential neighborhood. “I personally prefer a policy that would severely restrict conversion where elderly, low-income, or handicapped tenants would be displaced.” But it was an intriguing question, reported the Beacon Hill News: how could something that is “so good for the neighborhood . . . be bad for the neighborhood at the same time?” The task of reconciling the desire for neighborhood diversity, on the one hand, with the rights of property owners, on the other, was now turned over to a special housing policy subcommittee of the Civic Association. In time, other members of the Civic Association also volunteered their time and expertise, creating several proud “miracles” on the Hill.  

The old Bowdoin School was the first of the Hill’s new stories of realized hope. Constructed in 1896 on Myrtle Street, the building served as an elementary school for Beacon Hill and the West End until 1936, when the Boston School Committee moved in its administrative offices. Later, as the new City Hall was under construction in the mid-1960s, it became apparent that the School Committee would relocate into the new City Hall, triggering renewed speculation about the future of the old school building. Would there now be luxury apartments? Or what? The Civic Association immedi-
ately voted down the idea of luxury units in favor of serving the housing needs of senior citizens on the North Slope. The City of Boston, for its part, furnished public funds to encourage the conversion of properties into subsidized housing for the elderly and poor.

Most important, though, were the volunteer initiatives of people like Bernard Borman, a former president of the Civic Association, and Roy Littlehale, a realtor and chairman of the association’s Bowdoin School Committee. Together with other volunteers from the Hill, Borman and Littlehale brought their expertise in real estate and politics to bear and negotiated with the city to acquire the old school building at a reasonable price. They also worked out terms with private developers for renovation and collaborated with the public and private sectors to find creative financing options. The architect Frederick Stahl was brought in to conduct a feasibility study on the architectural viability of converting the building into apartments. And once Borman and Littlehale got the green light from the architect, they found a developer and launched construction.

As the renovation went forward, the former school was transformed into thirty-five apartments on five floors, twenty of them one-bedroom units, the rest two-bedroom units, and space was set aside for a community meeting room and lounge. Plans were drawn up for rents to be reasonable and for some apartments to qualify for rent subsidies. August 25, 1977, saw the official opening of the Bowdoin School Apartments. On this cool, sunny, late-summer day, a large crowd gathered at the newly renovated apartments for the ceremony, including Hill residents, city officials, architects, planners, and new tenants. One of those present that day, Stephen Oleskey, later reflected that the new project demonstrated what a volunteer association could do to enhance an urban neighborhood. Bowdoin School Apartments was also an important watershed for the generation that came of age in the 1960s. As John Bok, a resident of Pinckney Street, later reminisced, the project embodied the ideal of the 1960s generation to realize a more inclusive and diverse vision of community. The *Beacon Hill News* called the completed work “a small miracle.”

Another neighborhood miracle occurred just a few years later. Two blocks away from the State House, at the corner of Myrtle and Joy Streets, stood
the five-story Beacon Chambers, an apartment complex for 350 elderly men of low income. In 1980 a midday fire ravaged the building. The men’s lives were spared, but all were left homeless. The site was considered a prime location for high-end condominiums. Beacon Chambers became the focus of developers interested in converting the damaged structure, as had been the Bowdoin School building.

As it had with the Bowdoin School, the community intervened. A group of former residents of Beacon Chambers filed a class-action suit in the Boston Housing Court, requesting the right to reclaim the units. A Housing Court judge, George Daher, ruled in their favor. The majority of the Beacon Hill residents expressed their desire for the building to remain a
The Beacon Chambers Hotel on fire, October 14, 1980. Courtesy of the Boston Herald. A midday fire ravaged the hotel, leaving 350 elderly men of low income unharmed but homeless. Shown here are firefighters rescuing residents from the building.
sanctuary for elderly and low-income residents. The Rogerson House of Jamaica Plain, a well-endowed, elder-care organization with 130 years of history, indicated its willingness to purchase the building and restore it to moderate-income housing. With the support of the Civic Association, the Rogerson House acquired financing from the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency and other government sources. Beacon Hill residents also contributed money and time to make the project possible.

Three years after the fire that demolished the old site, the new Beacon House opened its doors. Its atrium, topped by a skylight and its eight stories of tiered brick balconies, graced the entrance of the House. As its executive director, James F. Seagle, Jr., would later explain, the realization of this 6.6-million-dollar project showed that low-income people could indeed live side by side with the well-to-do if a community made that decision. The Boston Globe, in a story entitled "A Beacon of Hope," exclaimed that housing for single people of modest means had been preserved and enhanced, even on some of the choicest real estate in the heart of Boston. Not every project had well-to-do neighbors of conscience who would contribute to it, added the Globe, noting that in many places such neighbors typically opposed subsidized housing. The reopening of the old Beacon Chambers signaled that Beacon Hill wanted to remain a true urban center, a place where people of diverse economic status could reside in dignity.  

BEACON HILL VILLAGE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The turn of the twenty-first century again found the citizens of Beacon Hill shaping new forms of community life. Just as one group had launched a diversified retirement community in the 1980s through subsidized housing, another group would now envision a second alternative in retirement living. Appropriately named Beacon Hill Village, the new concept involved creating a private, nonprofit organization to help its members enjoy their later years to the fullest in their own homes by providing them with the practical means and assistance. The concept entailed a modest annual membership fee. Participants would then be entitled to a package of services rang-
ing from social and cultural activities to multiple options for exercise, home health care, and household services. In only two to three years, the Village's new president, J. Arwood Ives of West Cedar Street, expected membership to grow to approximately three hundred. Since this is a nonprofit organization, said Ives, any future profit should be shared with members. To ensure that the experiment serves all income groups, the Board of Directors of Beacon Hill Village plans to create an endowment drive with a special focus on assisting those in need.

The idea of such a “virtual retirement community” grew out of a grassroots brainstorming that began in the late 1990s, when friends and neighbors sought models for growing old together gracefully on the Hill. Initial discussions led to a series of focus-group studies and surveys among thirteen hundred residents over the age of sixty. The project was assisted by the Harvard Business School’s Community Action Program and by the Rogerson Communities (the former Rogerson House), which manages both Beacon House and Peter Faneuil House on the Hill. Out of these efforts emerged a distinctive model launched in 2002—the first of its kind in the United States.

With the creation of Beacon Hill Village at the turn of the new millennium, the ancient Hill and its people have traversed a full historical circle. Nearly four centuries before, its community began as a New World village with Old World ties, growing immensely over the centuries in size, diversity, and complexity. Today, while it has gained a reputation for being one of the best-preserved historic districts in the nation, Beacon Hill is still charged with energy for renewal. The introduction of the Beacon Hill Village experiment by Beacon Hillers, for Beacon Hillers, symbolizes the vitality of this timeless community.
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