



Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association

November 12, 2004

The Community Preservation Committee  
Town of Lincoln  
Town Office Building  
16 Lincoln Road  
Lincoln, MA 01773  
Attention: Timothy S. Higgins, Town Administrator

Re: Request for CPA Grant for Brown's Wood Neighborhood Project

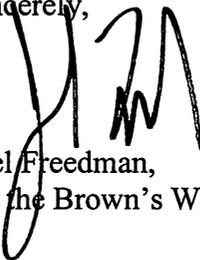
Gentlemen/Ladies:

The Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association is pleased to submit the enclosed Project Submission Sheet and attachments (10 copies of each) to request a Community Preservation Act grant in furtherance of the preservation of the Brown's Wood neighborhood, located on Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.  
I can be reached at 781-259-9260 (*h*), 617-289-9213 (*w*) or joelfreedman@hotmail.com.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Joel Freedman,  
for the Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association

200606

- Purpose:  Affordable Housing  
 Historic Preservation  
 Conservation/Open Space  
 Recreation

**Town of Lincoln, Massachusetts  
Community Preservation Committee  
Project Submission Sheet**

*Requests received by November 15, 2004 will be considered for recommendation at the April 2005 Town Meeting*

**Project Name:** Brown's Wood Neighborhood

**Submitted by:** Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association

**Submission Date:** November 12, 2004

**Address, Phone, E-Mail:** Contact: Joel Freedman  
38 Laurel Drive, Lincoln MA 01773  
781-259-9260 (h) 617-289-9213 (w)  
joelfreedman@hotmail.com

**Town Committee or Organization (if applicable):** Will be soliciting the support of the Lincoln Historical Commission and Planning Board by the end of 2004.

**Brief description of project:** The documentation of the architectural and cultural history of the Brown's Wood neighborhood, a community of modest, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century contemporary houses, on Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill, to be accomplished by the hiring of a preservation consultant to work with the neighborhood, review existing information, generate new materials and prepare submittals and publish a brochure.

**Time frame for completion of the project:** To be initiated and completed as soon as possible following funding.

**How does this project help preserve Lincoln's character or further its mission?** The project will inventory and document the historical and architectural character of the Brown's Wood neighborhood, which will further the goal of the preservation of Lincoln's historic resources and structures (which include the preservation of its 20<sup>th</sup> century resources) as well as the goal of protecting the diversity of housing in the Town.

**What are your funding requirements?**

Fiscal Year	Implementation Costs	Maintenance Costs	Total Costs	Other Funding Sources (and \$ amount)	CPC Funds Requested
2006	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000	As needed, other funds and services will be donated by neighbors	\$10,000
2007					
2008					
Total	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000		\$10,000

***PLEASE ATTACH SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS OR OTHER INFORMATION***

Attached is a Supplemental Statement, together with the documents referenced and attached to the Statement

For CPC Use:  
Received on: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Determination: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewed on: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

## Brown's Wood Neighborhood

Additional Information for Submittal of Proposed Project to  
Town of Lincoln Community Preservation Committee

November, 2004

### Background:

Brown's Wood is a neighborhood of 23 modest-sized contemporary houses, built in the 1950's, set in the woods and located on Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill.

The neighborhood was created as an intentional community; the original families joined together as a group to create a community with a shared vision of how families should live and neighborhoods should exist in post-World War II America. Together, operating by consensus, they located, purchased and subdivided the land, contracted for construction of two roads and built their own individual contemporary homes, designed by a variety of noted local architects.

The Brown's Wood neighborhood celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last year. It remains a vibrant, attractive, livable neighborhood. Some original families remain and new residents, who sought out the special qualities of Brown's Wood, as opposed to the more numerous traditionally designed offerings in Lincoln, are appreciative of the history and legacy of the neighborhood. They have tried to make improvements that are compatible with, and enhance, its qualities, and are committed to preserving its special character.

Brown's Wood does, however, face the challenges being felt generally throughout Lincoln – the market conditions that are putting pressure on the remaining modest housing in the Town, and threatening the integrity of neighborhoods and the diversity and character of Lincoln – as well as the special challenges of preserving a unique and historic neighborhood that, though of the recent past, is worthy of protection as an historical resource for Lincoln.

A group of neighbors came together earlier this year out of concern with these issues, and formed the Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association. Nineteen families in the neighborhood are currently members. Among the Association's purposes is to take steps to increase awareness of and try to preserve and protect Brown's Wood. The Association has been directed by its members to explore techniques to preserve and protect the neighborhood and take steps to try to implement protections; and the Association is currently investigating the idea of proposing to that the Town enact a neighborhood preservation district bylaw and establish Brown's Wood as its first district.

The Association proposes, using CPA funding, to gather, analyze and record the history and architectural and cultural legacy of Brown's Wood. The Association intends to use this data to establish the significance of the neighborhood's architecture and to increase awareness and appreciation of Brown's Wood, within the neighborhood and in the Town.

The history and architectural legacy of Brown's Wood are not documented in any comprehensive or accessible way at present. Creating and disseminating such documentation is a crucial first step to preserving this neighborhood, and needs to be undertaken as soon as possible

It is hoped that the Brown's Wood project will not only enhance this neighborhood's preservation, but will also serve as a model for other modest or contemporary or diverse neighborhoods in Lincoln who are facing or who may soon face similar concerns and threats. The grant requested from the CPC will help the Brown's Wood neighborhood, and the Town, pioneer this process.

#### The Project:

The Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association is requesting funds from the CPC in order to hire a historical preservation consultant to assist the Association in documenting the Brown's Wood neighborhood:

1. To document the historical, architectural and cultural history of the Brown's Wood neighborhood.
2. Using the documentation obtained and developed, (i) to prepare a submittal to the Massachusetts Historical Commission requesting a determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historical Places, and (ii) to prepare and publish a neighborhood brochure providing information for the benefit of the neighborhood, Town and public about Brown's Wood.

The Association already has a substantial amount of materials, including: photographs, both historical and current, plans and descriptions of many of the houses, historical records of the minutes of Brown's Wood, Incorporated, from 1953 through 1965, and written histories and reminiscences from several of the original owners. What the neighborhood needs is for these materials to be reviewed and expanded on by a preservation professional, who can put the neighborhood's architectural characteristics and history in context, and assemble the information in an organized and publishable format. The Association seeks funds both to hire a preservation professional (and depending on the skills of the preservation consultant, it may also wish to be able to hire a graphics designer) and to publish the brochure that will be generated.

#### Attachments:

To provide further information for the project proposal, attached to this submittal are copies of the following documents:

- a short history of Brown's Wood, prepared by one of the original owners, Ruth Wales.
- a plan of Brown's Wood, prepared for the neighborhood's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2003.
- a memo, "A Call to Better Living", circulated to interested families in 1953 by the neighborhood's founders, Ranny and Ann Gras, proposing the creation of a new community, which became Brown's Wood.
- Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association's statement of purpose.

- The Association's statement regarding the preservation and conservation of Brown's Wood.
- a Submittal made to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (and the finding of the MHC) made by Peacock Farms in Lexington – another 1950's contemporary neighborhood (an example of the sort of submission to be prepared for Brown's Wood with the assistance of the requested grant)
- a Neighborhood brochure, prepared by Peacock Farms (an example of the sort of brochure to be published for Brown's Wood with the assistance of the requested grant)

## **The Brown's Wood Story**

Brown's Wood, a unique owner-developed neighborhood of 23 contemporary houses crisscrossed by Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill, was created more than 50 years ago. The name is a reference to the original 18th-century farmer who used the land, known in colonial times as Beers Hill, as his wood lot. Benjamin Brown bought it from Joseph Rice, an heir of Richard Beers of Watertown, to whom land had been granted as early as 1637 in the Great Dividends of Watertown. Captain Beers was killed in an Indian ambush at Northfield in 1675, early in King Philip's War. Brown, one of the founders of Weston and, later, Lincoln had a number of sons who lived on his extensive acreage. Most of the land on both sides of Conant Road from Weston Road to the Weston line belonged to Browns.

The Brown's Wood project began in May 1953 when a group of young families, attracted by the utopian vision of Ann and Ranny Gras, met in a room at MIT and discussed joining forces to develop a cooperative community of families with similar goals. The Grases' proposal was based on "Walden II" and the example of architect-initiated planned communities such as Six Moon Hill, Five Fields, and Kendal Common. The group had grand ideas about shared values, cooperation, and creating a connected neighborhood.

Seven months later, after many discussions and an extensive search for a suitable piece of land in the west of Boston area, five couples bravely plunked down \$100 each to buy an option on 32 acres of woodland -- a rock-core till hill in geological terms -- in the southeast corner of Lincoln. They were hoping to find enough other like-minded families to make their plan work. It was to be a do-it-yourself enterprise, without a supervising architect.

Quite soon, enough eager other families responded to the MIT bulletin-board notices and classical-music FM-radio station ads to support adding an additional eight acres at the top of the hill to the property. But the price went up: The raw land was \$600 an acre for the first piece and \$930 an acre for the second, purchased in September 1954. The final cash investment for an average lot was about \$3,000, covering land, road construction, and legal costs, a bargain even at the time. A nonprofit corporation was formed to transact business, own the land until it was transferred to individual owners, and control development.

Plenty of sweat equity was contributed by members. The corporation bought a chain saw, transit, and peavey, and members surveyed the land in many

family picnic outings. Everyone participated in some way. The group included engineers, scientists, mathematicians, musicians, artists, editors, a photojournalist, and other professionals. They designed the subdivision; got town approvals for the plan just before Lincoln went from one-acre to two-acre zoning; hired a road builder; supervised road construction; reviewed one another's house plans to make sure there were no traditional colonials, capes, or ranches; and talked about how to use the land that had been set aside for community recreation. Two lots were designated as common land: a large rolling three-acre piece at the end of Moccasin Hill, and a flat 1-1/4 acre piece on lower Laurel Drive.

Decisions were made by consensus. After passionate arguments about names for the roads, the group finally agreed on local wildflowers: mountain laurel and the plentiful pink lady-slipper or moccasin flower. But there never was an agreement on the Grases' plan for bulk-buying of staples like toilet paper – or even a single milk delivery company in those days when there were several choices. Ditto-reproduced reports of the discussions at meetings, entitled “The Consensus,” were distributed to members and now make up three fat volumes of fading but still readable text.

One significant disagreement was the location of a proposed swimming pool. There was no consensus to build one on the larger piece of common land, and some members proposed putting one on the smaller one instead, where at least a few tennis buffs had hoped to see a tennis court. The question of what to do with the larger piece of common land was resolved by the need for further work on the roads to meet requirements for town acceptance. Sale of the Moccasin Hill lot in 1958 provided money to pay for the repairs. The corporation had been assessing members for snow-plowing and maintenance, and they were eager to have the town take over.

Despite some disagreements, the sense of sharing and cooperation was strong. Members met frequently to discuss neighborhood concerns, exchanged jointly owned equipment (chain saw, scaffolding, post-hole digger), and even had a baby-sitting cooperative in which participants earned points sitting for one another. Families took turns keeping the books for a month at a time, earning points for that task. There were lots of kids in the neighborhood, but no teens yet. One memorable year, when the school bus stopped at the intersection of the two roads, it filled up with elementary school pupils. The year 1953 may have been the area's boom birth-boom year: Including the kids living on nearby Conant Road and Weston Road, there were 8 boys and 8 girls of that vintage, all in easy walking distance of one another.

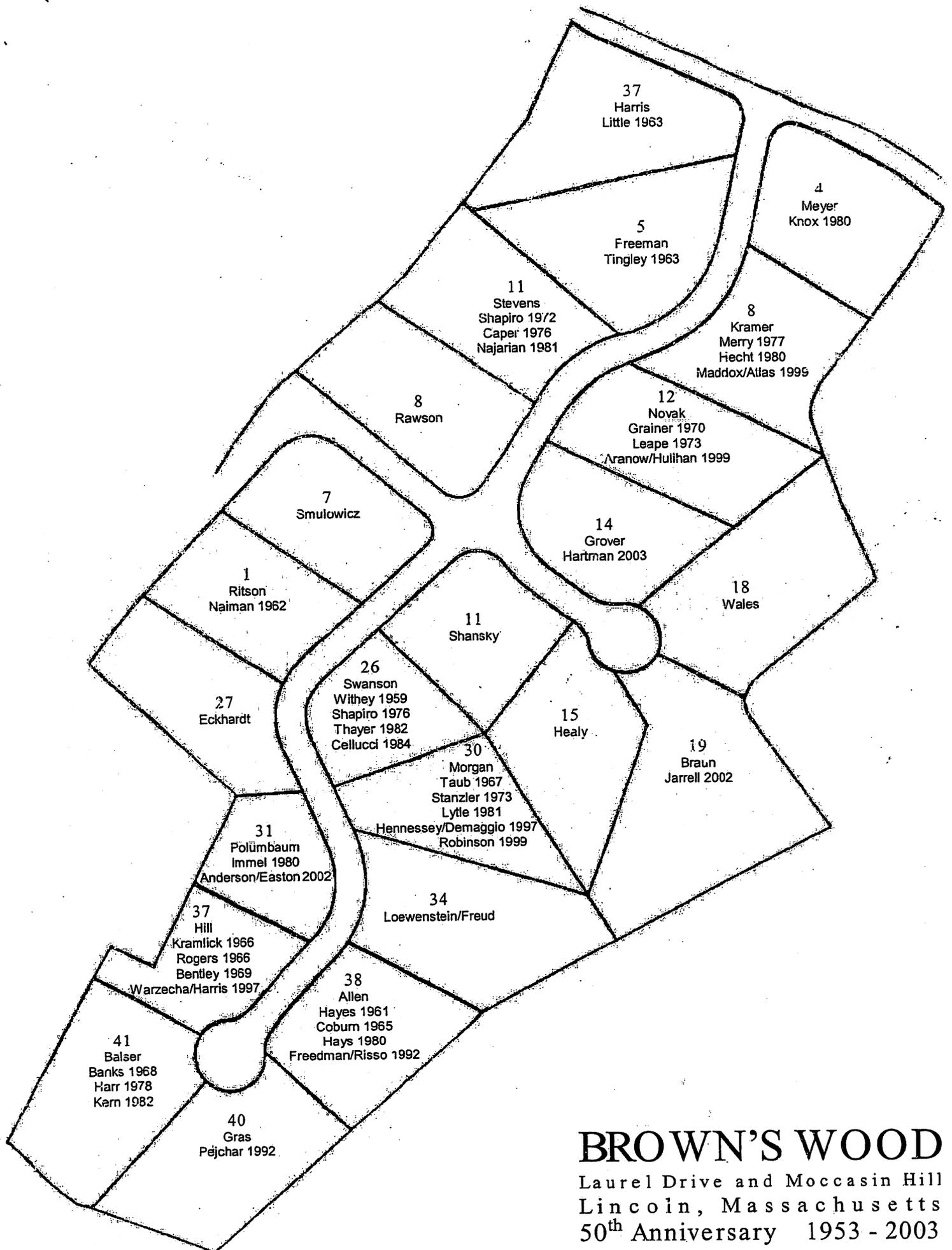
Meanwhile, the Grases were looking out of their windows at the top of Laurel Drive into the valley below and imagining a pond and conservation preserve where a stream meandered through a low swampy area surrounded by farm fields. So another cooperative venture was launched in 1960, this one involving a wider community as people bought shares to help buy the 56 acres of land in Lincoln and Weston and to pay for the creation of two ponds, the larger one for boating and the smaller one for swimming. Some of the loam excavated during the construction was sold to raise money. The sale of lots along Conant Road was also a major source of funds, making Valley Pond a good example of early creative land development in Lincoln.

The members of Brown's Wood Incorporated, seeing no need now for common recreational land, sold the remaining undeveloped lot on Laurel Drive in 1964 and bought nontransferable shares for each of their house lots. Then the corporation, which no longer owned anything except a missing chain saw and the remains of the scaffolding, was dissolved. But for many in Brown's Wood, it was a natural move to participate in the larger community of Lincoln, serving on the Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Finance Committee, Bemus Trustees, Bike Path Committee, Library Friends, Lincoln School Association, League of Women Voters, Minuteman School Committee, Codman Community Farms, and Council on Aging, for example.

For the 35th anniversary of Brown's Wood, current and former residents celebrated with a big pot-luck party and planted a pear tree at the intersection of the two roads to honor Ann and Ranny Gras. Many families, including some who could not attend, recorded brief accounts of their adventures over the years, published in a booklet whose cover is a map of the neighborhood listing all the owners of each lot up to that time. Ten had had only one owner. By the time of the 50th anniversary picnic, only seven original owners were left.

Most of the houses look much as they did when the first owners built them, although some have grown. So have the trees. Farmer Brown would still be able to harvest plenty of wood. Houses eventually did get finished on the inside. Like the neighborhood, they were often do-it-yourself projects lengthened by other demands and interests. Meandering paths, perhaps not as well worn now, still lead to the shores of Valley Pond, where some regular swimmers can recall the year it opened. New families moving in find, as did the first families, that Brown's Wood is a great place to raise kids.

Ruth Johnstone Wales, 2003/2004



# BROWN'S WOOD

Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill  
 Lincoln, Massachusetts  
 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1953 - 2003

Discussed at  
5/23/0 & meeting

" A CALL TO BETTER LIVING "

You have expressed an interest in our proposal for a cooperative community. This letter will tell you more about it.

BACKGROUND:

We are a young family, with two small children, and a basic requirement shared by many - we need a house. However, we have never felt that "a house" would be enough. We want that house to be part of a way of life. Considering all the ingredients in the ideal way of life we envisioned, it seemed clear that they could only be found in a community of friends working together for the same ideal.

For the past four or five years we have watched with great interest several communities of cooperative nature. For a few years we were part of a group formed for this purpose. In this case, the cooperative aspect became submerged, and we withdrew our interest, but not before gaining much in experience. Other groups were more successful in various ways, but none that we know has approached a fulfillment of the possibilities.

Our conclusion is that since we cannot find the kind of group or community we want "ready made", we would try to form one ourselves, believing that others will share our ideals. We offer only a starting point: some ideas, some experience, and a lot of faith. We take upon ourselves the task of gathering the group together, and helping it reach the point where it can act as an organized body. Once the group is formed, we shall devote every effort to helping it achieve the goals that we and every other member family desire.

COMMUNITY AIMS:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. To enable each member to obtain a home that really fills their needs and desires at a price they can afford.   | To combat the trend towards small lots, cramped houses, and the resultant shift of social activity and hobbies to places outside the family's sphere of influence. |
| 2. To develop community facilities for recreation, such as tennis courts, a pond for swimming and skating, so that members can have ready access to healthful activities. | To combat reliance on non-participation activities (spectator sports) and the tendency for youngsters and their elders to think they can't have fun together.      |
| 3. To use group buying power to achieve substantial savings on purchase of standard items such as appliances, staple groceries, etc.                                      | To combat the high cost of living, and the pressure to settle for poor quality.  |
| 4. To show the younger generation by example the true meaning of democracy and cooperation.   | To combat the two attitudes: "leave it to the Government" and "you can't buck politics".   |

5. To foster an atmosphere which will encourage individual initiative, exchange of ideas, independent thought; where integrity and good will are the only units used in measuring your neighbor.

To combat the trend toward closed minds, intolerance, and fear of disagreement.

6. To broaden each member's outlook by bringing together people of different professions and experience, and to stimulate new thought by informal discussions on every kind of topic.

To combat the human habit of getting in a rut.

Admittedly these ideals are high, and not to be achieved easily. Nor can they be reached without some organization. Our own personal ideas of how they can be realized are briefly as follows.

#### WAYS AND MEANS:

1. Gather a group of six to twenty families who share the same ideals, and who can agree on how to proceed. We would prefer a group any member of which would be willing to assume direction of the entire group at any time.

2. Incorporate the group. This is the easiest method of obtaining the necessary legal powers to carry out the plan.

3. Investigate all purchasable land within an area agreed upon by the membership (personally we prefer Weston and vicinity, but we have seen good and less expensive land farther West or South). Also investigate possibilities of land not on the regular market, since some land-owners might be interested in helping such a group.

4. Agree on a tract of land, between twenty and fifty acres, and buy it, sharing this expense equally.

5. Plan the subdivision (we suggest approximately two acres per family, with three to ten acres of common land held by the corporation. Form estimate of development cost, figuring it on the safe side to eliminate possibility of running short of funds.

6. Each family puts in proportionate share of development cost. Total lot prices will vary with area and desirability, but maximum should not far exceed \$3000. Development begins. It might easily be worth while to rent equipment and build the road ourselves. Wells are cheaper than town water, and are reliable in most areas.

7. Work on house plans for each member. We prefer contemporary design, but exceptions should be considered. Plans may be obtained from any source, but some system should be set up for group approval of plans. In any event, the entire group should take an active interest in each family's plans from the beginning, in order to offer suggestions and doubts, if any. We feel that no design should be used more than twice.

8. Plan most economical construction of houses. Great savings can be accomplished by: building several houses at one time; owners acting as general contractors; several owners using the same sub-contractors; especially, cooperative labor by owners, in a manner that will increase each person's efficiency, and make the best use of his particular talents. This all requires the utmost care in organization, but an hour in conference can save many hours in construction time. Further savings can be made by group purchase of appliances, materials, fixtures, etc.

9. Construct houses. It is our hope that all houses will be completed before the group considers other ventures. Members who do not live in the community cannot share the same interest in group activities as those who do live there, and the group will not have achieved its first goal until every family has its home.

10. Set up system for cooperative buying. Group purchase of oil, milk, Kleenex, etc. can accumulate substantial savings.

11. Plan development of common land, and follow through. Possibilities include children's playground, tennis courts, pond, ball field, stable, community house for parties, meetings, dances; with enough land, we could even consider a small farm, cooperatively run. In any case, facilities will be constructed with a lot of labor and a minimum of cash outlay.

12. The other ideals, which are less materialistic, can be reached at the beginning. In fact, we feel they must be for the community to be successful. But there is no reason why the group should ever stop gaining in interest, in understanding, in knowledge, or in the satisfaction and true enjoyment of every member.

If you share our ideals, and can agree with at least some of our plans, you would probably enjoy coming to a meeting we will arrange. Please let us know and you will hear from us again.

*Ranny and Ann Gras*

Ranny and Ann Gras  
48 Mass. Ave., Cambridge

May 1953



## B r o w n ' s   W o o d   N e i g h b o r h o o d   A s s o c i a t i o n

The Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association is a voluntary group of home-owners in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Brown's Wood is a neighborhood of 23 contemporary houses set in the woods and located on Laurel Drive and Moccasin Hill, built by the original residents in the 1950's.

The purpose of the Association is to foster a sense of community within the neighborhood and encourage respect for the character and history of Brown's Wood.

The Association provides a forum for discussing issues of interest to the neighborhood, and will facilitate efforts to communicate among neighbors and with the Town of Lincoln.

The Association will organize community events, such as the annual picnic, act to increase appreciation and awareness of the neighborhood, such as by producing a neighborhood brochure, and serve as a forum for discussion of issues of general concern.

In addition, Association members are concerned with threats to the unique character of the neighborhood, and have agreed to pursue efforts to formally preserve and enhance Brown's Wood.

All residents are encouraged to use the Neighborhood Association to facilitate the review and discussion of proposed architectural changes in a supportive and constructive environment, prior to submittals to the Town.

Everyone who owns a home in Brown's Wood is invited to join the Association. Others, renters and interested nearby residents, may also join as friends of Brown's Wood. A \$5.00 fee will cover mailing costs, etc. All neighbors, whether members or not, will be informed of the Association's efforts and activities.

Please contact Kathy Harris (1039), Ruth Wales (8934) or Joel Freedman (9260) for more information.



## Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association

### PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF BROWN'S WOOD

The Brown's Wood Neighborhood Association is concerned with potential threats to the neighborhood's unique character from inappropriate development, due to the absence of focused and effective controls over such activities and the absence of a forum for neighbors to encourage appropriate change and growth in the neighborhood. It is the consensus of members of the Association to explore techniques to preserve and protect the neighborhood and take steps to try to implement protections.

Brown's Wood is a unique, distinctive architectural and historical ensemble, but it is not frozen in time and needs to be able to grow and change to meet the needs of current and future owners and of current and future times, without destroying the unique qualities of the neighborhood.

The Association intends to advocate for the creation of a Neighborhood Conservation bylaw in the Town and the establishment of a Brown's Wood Neighborhood Conservation District. Such a district would be created by the Town by a vote at Town meeting.

A Neighborhood Conservation District can be flexibly structured to protect a group of buildings that are architecturally or historically distinctive. The designation recognizes the particular design qualities of distinctive neighborhoods and encourages their protection, maintenance and organic growth for the benefit of the entire Town. Such a district could provide a customized, tailored level of protection to the neighborhood, sufficient to protect its character but without creating an undue burden on homeowners.

A Neighborhood Conservation District is not an historic district, and would not provide pervasive controls over buildings and changes, and it is not a zoning district, which is directed primarily towards dimensional, measurable standards. The Neighborhood Conservation District would rather focus on the criteria that really matter to the preservation of the neighborhood – the general design, arrangement, composition, massing, texture and materials, the relationship to the site, and the compatibility with other structures in the neighborhood.

It is the Association's belief that a Brown's Wood Neighborhood Conservation District would promote wider knowledge and appreciation of Brown's Wood, preserve and enhance property values, and maintain the cohesiveness of the neighborhood, for the benefit of all residents. The district would encourage preservation of the architectural and historic character of Brown's Wood, so that growth and change complement its unique qualities.