



Village Condominium

A Brief History of the Site

Early History

In 1910, the 18-acre site of what is now the Village Condominium was a working piggery owned by Fred Bleiler.

In the fall of 1946, Paul Livoli, a New England housing developer, notified the Watertown Board of Selectmen that he wanted to build 90 apartment units on the former piggery on Lexington Street at Orchard Street.

The legal notice on January 10, 1947 defined the boundaries of the new complex as follows:

- northerly by Belmont Street, then called Country Road;
- northeasterly by the curved junction of Belmont and Lexington Streets, then called Town Road;
- and westerly by the Harrington Farm, including Duff Street, which was a private way.

The units would be attractively arranged around a courtyard and would house four families. Zoning laws in Watertown at the time allowed only one- and two-family dwellings. Therefore, a change in the zoning laws was necessary to build these new apartment units.

The early plans stated that the units would be rented only to veterans. Later in January 1947, this was changed to veteran's preference.

Fairfield Gardens 1947 - 1972

Plans for the layout of the streets of the new housing development were approved in January 1947. In addition to Lexington, Belmont, and Duff Streets, the plans called for construction of a new street called Pierce Road, which would be bisected by an extension of Grant Avenue from Duff to Lexington Street.

The Livoli Realty Company would be the contractors and managers of the development. In the fall of 1947, construction of the largest housing project in Watertown began, consisting of 308 garden-style apartments on landscaped courtyards with natural gas lamps, to be called **Fairfield Gardens**. The complex was promoted as suburban living within easy commuting distance from Boston.

The Village Condominium - 1972

Condominiums were not a new housing concept in the 1970s. Surprisingly, the concept dates back to 14th Century Italy. However, for a number of reasons, condominiums came late to Massachusetts. Chief among these reasons was the negative image of condominium developers as "rip-off" businessmen. States like Florida had had many problems with developers and Massachusetts did not want the same experience.

Another reason condominiums in Massachusetts were slow to be developed was that Massachusetts banks took a long time to accept the idea that giving mortgages to condominium unit owners would be beneficial to both the banks and the buyers.

On October 6, 1971, James P. and Norman J. Duffy, doing business as Duffy Associates, acquired the Fairfield Gardens property. Fairfield Gardens was renamed the **Village Condominium**. In 1972, they began the conversion to condominiums. At the time, this project was the biggest condominium conversion in Massachusetts.

Early promotion of the Village featured two beautifully decorated model units, accessibility to shopping, and convenient public transportation. The location was considered ideal for access to the Greater Boston area with Routes 128 and the Turnpike conveniently nearby. Even the interior design of the units was considered for awards.

By August 1972, Glenn Realty, the real estate subsidiary of Duffy Associates, announced that 120 of the 308 units had been sold. The selling price was in the low \$20,000. Duffy Associates remained as developers and managers for about three years upgrading and refurbishing the remaining units to make them attractive for sale. The condominium fee was a low \$20.00 a month, which was attractive to new unit owners who did not want to pay a big share of the development costs.

Overall, Duffy Associates as developers, did an excellent job, especially considering they were in uncharted waters and had undertaken such a large project. They were, however, overly active in the management of the new condominium complex. They tended to treat the unit owners as if they were apartment renters. Although condominiums are community associations, at first they tend to be regarded as apartments by many new owners and management agents.

In these early years of condominium associations, experienced management was often lacking. The three successive companies with which the Village contracted for management services after the Duffys left were not equipped to identify problems, explain them convincingly to the Board of Managers, and offer viable solutions.

Finally, in 1978, the first all unit-owner Board of Managers, led by its President took a bold step. They determined the Village's specific needs, translating these needs into a fundamental and vital capital improvements plan. The program would begin repairs on roofs, gutters, bulkheads, and doorways. It would be financed by special assessments and an increase in the monthly condominium fee.

Although there was some dissension among unit owners accustomed to having landlords pay for such repairs, the Board stood firm in its position. This action helped educate unit owners of the fledgling condominium association that they were owners and as such, had all the responsibilities that come with the title. The Board began to seek contractors who would provide superior service and work with the association to meet its short-term and long-term needs. With over 2,000 bushes, about 225 trees, and 6½ miles of walkways, the Village is condominium living with a large landscape and snow removal involvement. Such an involvement requires unique contractors who are willing to grow and adapt to the changing needs of the unit owners and the Board.

In 1978, the year of the Big Blizzard, the Village first contracted with Belmont Car Wash, owned by Paul Tocci of Belmont, to do snow removal. It was evident from the beginning that the Tocci organization had the team capable of cleaning the snow from the 18 acres of Village property with its four parking lots and 6½ miles of asphalt walkways. This relationship, lasting for the past nineteen years, has produced an ideal alliance.

In 1980, the Village hired Meredith Management Company (Bill Mancini) to be the condominium's managing agent. This was the beginning of an eighteen-year relationship of mutual respect and growth, still flourishing in 1997. With 18 years of history and experience to rely on in meeting the needs and solving the problems of the Association, Meredith is an invaluable resource to each new Board of Managers.

Maintenance and repair are planned, prudently scheduled, and tightly cost-controlled by the Board of Managers and Meredith working together. The result is a well-maintained condominium complex with a stable monthly fee and few special assessments. Therefore, the Board's relationship with Meredith is a partnership of purpose, resulting in the Village's reputation as an attractive, popular, and well-managed suburban complex.

Where We Are Today

Through the years, the Village has been active on issues affecting all condominiums. Although condominiums are held as single tax entities in Massachusetts, they are frequently denied certain rights that other homeowners receive. One such issue recently was the struggle to obtain equal trash collection rights for all condominiums in Watertown. After two years of negotiation and strategizing by the Village Condominium Association president, the town agreed to pick-up trash from all condominiums in Watertown at town expense. Other condominium associations in Watertown and other Massachusetts' communities continue to look to the Village for leadership on vital issues.

The value of the land and property which make up the Village has grown significantly through the years and the impact of our tax contribution to the town gives us a voice to be listened to. In 1910, when the land was occupied by the Bleiler Farm, the taxable value of the 18-acre site was \$17,000. Today the same 18 acres owned by 308 homeowners has a taxable value of \$35 million.

Residents view the Village as a convenient and pleasant place to live. They tend to stay a long time, thereby contributing to a stable environment. Almost 20% of the original owners are still here 25 years later; another 50% of the residents have owned 10 years or longer. Many prospective owners waited for years to get into the complex; until just the right unit became available. Others rented from an owner until they could buy a unit.

The Village is representative of the American urban community today. We have a diverse ethnic population and attract a wide variety of people. We have a large number of professionals, business and financial executives, sports figures, members of famous political families, media personalities, prominent educators, and scientists. This diversity and their professional experience has contributed significantly to the strength of our Board of Managers and the many committees that make up the Village Association.

As we celebrate 25 years as a condominium association on June 6th and 7th in 1997, we extend our deep gratitude to all the past Presidents, Board Members, editors of the award-winning Village Newsletter, other committee members over the years, Meredith Management Company, Belmont Car Wash personnel, and all others whose tireless efforts, services and neighborly gestures have contributed to making the Village a special place in which to live.



Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Committee

Pat Gold (Chairperson)

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Judy Manning

Mary Frissora

Dorothy Fleming

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Pat Powers

Helen Purcell

Alice Wadden

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