



## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES.

The development of housing proposals appropriate for various neighborhoods in Wakefield requires a clear understanding of the patterns of land use and the natural and man-made features that give the town its character. Although there is a tremendous variety from one neighborhood to another – from Main Street’s continuous street wall to Greenwood’s bungalows and wooded hillsides – together they create a tapestry that is uniquely Wakefield’s.

This section of the Housing Master Plan looks at town character from two perspectives. One is qualitative. Photos and text illustrate the feelings evoked by different patterns of building and open space that define Wakefield. These photos and texts are intended to make explicit those qualities that are implicit in people’s impression of the town. They will allow development proposals to be evaluated in terms of a clear set of qualities that make Wakefield attractive.

The second perspective looks quantitatively at four existing neighborhoods that have provided attractive housing for residents. Although their house and lot sizes are relatively small compared to some new developments today, these dimensions help create friendly, coherent, walkable neighborhoods. Relative density is a critical parameter that determines people’s perception of a place and where they put it on the urban to rural continuum. Each of these four neighborhoods is defined by its density in terms of square footage of land per housing unit. This analytical process of quantifying the specific characteristics of these desirable streets and

neighborhoods provides the data to formulate zoning requirements which will continue positive development patterns and scenarios.

**Section 6 – Design Guidelines** of this Master Plan defines more specific architectural features and spatial relationships that make houses into neighborhoods.

Together **Section 4 – Town Character**, **Section 5 – Development Scenarios** and **Section 6 – Design Guidelines** create a kind of Wakefield development primer that suggests alternatives to the development that has reduced the town’s open space and created developments that break from established patterns that define the Town.



*Winding roads, such as Montrose Ave. still maintain a rural character.*

*Protected open spaces along Crystal Lake provide a green buffer for adjacent neighborhoods.*



## NATURAL CHARACTER

Wakefield has a series of natural landscape features that, on the one hand, distinguish it from so many other small towns, and on the other hand, give it an archetypal “small town” character. Unlike so many suburbs that seem to be a part of a seemingly endless sprawl of featureless streets, identical ranch houses, pretentious mansionettes, and could-be-anywhere strip malls, Wakefield has a clear character. Bodies of water, steep hillsides, and wooded lowlands create a series of intimate neighborhoods and scenic vistas that give the Town a unique identity.

Many of these features are threatened by development that fails to recognize the value they bring to residents and visitors. The major features and their contribution to defining Wakefield’s unique identity are described below.

## GLACIATED LANDSCAPE

Wakefield’s finely scaled landscape of hills and valleys was shaped by receding glaciers 20,000 years ago. They create a series of intimate neighborhoods separated by steep slopes and thickly vegetated wetlands. The growth of many residential areas has been limited by unbuildable areas that allow neighborhoods to back up to, or be surrounded by open green areas. These residential pockets, connected to, yet somewhat separate from the remainder of the town, create a sense of place that roots people to the land. This has allowed an urbanized suburb of a large metropolitan area to maintain a semi-rural character that evokes images of pastoral living.

Rocky ledges and steep hillsides provide the kind of dramatic picturesque landscapes that evoke a sense of nature’s drama and beauty. The way they emerge out of wooded low-lands suggest the timelessness of the natural order.

Maintaining the green borders, wetland edges, and rocky ridges that create intimate pockets for living and work is essential if Wakefield is going to continue to offer residents charming landscapes and verdant vistas.

**Many tracts of wetlands and wooded areas should be protected from development. This is especially important when they can be part of an interconnected network of open space for walking and biking.**

**When development does take place in areas of natural beauty it is appropriate to cluster development in order to retain significant areas of open space elsewhere on the property.**

**Steep slopes should be protected from development. Recent housing sited on slopes is often perched in awkward ways that disturb the equilibrium of the area and interfere with its scenic beauty.**

## **TREES**

Despite a century of development, much of Wakefield has an abundance of trees. The older suburbs have tree-lined streets that provide shade and a pleasant place to walk. Protected areas such as the Town Forest and the Crystal Lake watershed provide a forested respite from traffic and congestion. Many streets that pass by wetlands or steep slopes maintain a forested rural character that complements the more urbanized areas of the Town. Due to the finely scaled glaciated landscape, these green areas are spread throughout Wakefield; one is never far from green natural areas.

**New housing developments should leave existing trees in place wherever possible. It takes generations to grow the towering maples and oaks that residents enjoy.**

**New developments should have trees bordering the streets to provide attractive places to walk.**

## **LAKES**

Wakefield's two lakes are important defining elements. With its open shoreline, Lake Quannapowitt offers scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and a focus for community life. Crystal Lake, on the other hand, is bordered by railroad tracks to the east, protected



*Stone retaining walls can make an attractive transition from hillside, to yard, to street.*

*Excessive blasting and excavation can mar the natural landscape.*





*Protection of critical open space for recreation should be coordinated with development in adjacent areas.*

*Crystal Lake's wooded shoreline provides a striking contrast to downtown Wakefield nearby.*



watershed to the south and west, and public works land to the north. These features protect it from over-development but make it inaccessible for enjoyment and use.

**Redevelopment of multi-family housing in former industrial areas adjacent to Crystal Lake could open up view corridors to the water as well as physical connections from nearby streets to the water's edge. If construction is carefully designed, excessive runoff can be avoided while taking advantage of the Lake's natural beauty.**

## **WETLANDS**

Wetlands occur throughout many neighborhoods in Wakefield and give definition and variety to the townscape. Because they are not appropriate for many kinds of development they provide green edges to many neighborhoods. Purple loosestrife and cattails add color and character to these areas.

In many places wetlands are neglected "backyard" areas removed from public access. In other areas wetland trails make them scenic and recreational features. Wetlands adjacent to the Saugus River become part of a larger network of greenspaces.

**Wetlands are an important part of the local ecosystem and should be protected from excessive development. Development should be located a suitable distance from wetlands to avoid flooding. Appropriately sited housing development, however, could open up to wetland trails and take advantage of wetland views. This would connect residents to the natural beauty of these landscape features.**

## **MILL RIVER**

The Mill River was once an important Wakefield feature along which both housing and industry developed. In recent years the River has been neglected, virtually disappearing in overgrown backyards and industrial areas. Lack of access prevents the public from enjoying its natural beauty and historic importance.



Although turning the Mill River into an improved public resource providing enhanced views, access and recreation is a long term project requiring a substantial public commitment, the development of housing on streets and greenways adjacent to it can provide public access that will help support a renewal effort.

## ARCHITECTURAL / URBAN CHARACTER

### CLEAR URBAN STRUCTURE

Wakefield's system of major streets defined by closely spaced buildings threaded between two lakes and steep hills creates a clearly defined urban structure. Unlike many newer suburbs with major arteries scaled for high speed automobile traffic and residential areas oriented inward on arbitrarily curving streets, Wakefield forms a coherent whole. It is connected to neighboring towns but, like a small rural town, has a center that hold the edges together. A grid of smaller streets connect to main streets, most of which connect to downtown. This creates a sense of belonging which roots citizens to their community.

**New development should be part of Wakefield's urban structure - major streets connecting the central business and civic district, the lakefronts, and neighborhoods. New streets should be woven into the grid-like fabric of the town rather than pulling away from the other neighborhoods that surround them. The creation of rural-feeling enclaves is appropriate, yet not at the expense of civic unity.**

### DEFINED DOWNTOWN

Unlike many towns that have demolished much of their downtown areas to make way for parking and large scale development, Wakefield has preserved its traditional small town center. Public and commercial buildings line Main Street, holding the street edge and maintaining a 1-4 story height. There are some "holes" in the continuous line of buildings downtown, and some buildings, at 1 story, seem too low for the downtown. None-the-less, Main Street retains a sense of place that is clear and dignified and the overall feeling is pleasant, intimate, and traditional, while still keeping up with the times.



*The Mill river seen from Wiley Street is an underutilized natural resource for Wakefield.*

*Downtown's density makes it a social center for Wakefield.*





*The train station on North Ave. is a focus for community life in Wakefield.*

*A line of shops with offices or apartments above defines an intimate pedestrian scale for Main Street.*



North Avenue is a more difficult situation. Like Main St., it has a downtown feel, yet the street wall is less continuous, and due to the commuter rail line on its west edge North Avenue has buildings on only one side. Albion Street running between Main and North is lined with commercial uses and helps give the whole area a unified downtown character.

Other sections of North Avenue also feature commercial buildings, although the development is not quite substantial enough to create a “downtown” feeling.

**New development can and should reinforce the urban quality of Main Street, North Avenue, and other streets in the downtown area. Residential uses above commercial uses reinforce the street wall and bring people into the heart of town where public transportation and stores don’t require car ownership. Higher density in these areas reinforces the vitality of the town center, takes advantage of the commuter rail line, and should be encouraged. Empty lots and underutilized industrial properties should be the focus of development efforts.**

## **ATTRACTIVE RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS**

Most of the residential areas in Wakefield are composed of tree-lined streets, relatively closely spaced houses facing the streets, and house designs featuring porches, bays, and other scaling elements. The street grid connects one block to the next and neighborhoods to the center of Wakefield, and along with public spaces defined by trees, this grid of streets reinforces a sense of civic order. This kind of urban coherence and architectural richness creates strong communities.

Some of these neighborhoods are 100 years old or more and have real historic value. Others are of more recent vintage but have a character that is well worth preserving.

**The infilling of empty lots in older neighborhoods with new buildings in scale with the old reinforces the continuity of the streetscape. Extending the fabric of these neighborhoods into unbuilt areas can reinforce the community structure as long as sufficient open space is preserved in the process.**

**New developments can benefit from following the “rules” that make some of the older neighborhoods so attractive - houses that reinforce the public space of the street with porches and bays, sidewalks, narrow streets, trees along the street, and a combination of relatively high density and generous green space.**

### **FINELY SCALED NEIGHBORHOOD ENCLAVES**

Wakefield is composed of defined neighborhoods that are part of the larger town but have their own distinct character. The topography, major thoroughfares and railroad tracks, the grid of streets, the two lakes, greenspaces, and proximity to downtown and other commercial areas give the neighborhoods their own clear identity. Some of the older neighborhoods are organized around small parks or are marked by stone pillars that create gateways. The fine scale and sense of intimacy that these features create avoids the sense of sprawl that characterizes many newer suburbs. At the same time, few of these areas feel isolated or are cut off from other neighborhoods.

Some residential areas have been cut into wooded or sloping areas creating small enclaves with a distinctly rural quality. These enclaves contribute to the character of Wakefield.

**New construction should reinforce the character of Wakefield’s neighborhoods through architectural design, siting, and the use of landscape features. New developments can create their own unique characters that both connect to and distinguish them from other Wakefield neighborhoods. The focal green spaces and gateways that define older enclaves can be a model for new neighborhoods.**



*Large trees, rolling hills, stone walls and grass, tie houses to the landscape.*

*Stone pillars mark the entry to a West Side neighborhood.*





## DENSITY: NEIGHBORHOOD STUDIES

Density is important to our perception of the built environment. Although the way in which buildings are distributed on the site - along the street or set back, clustered together or spread out - is also important, we can quantify building density to suggest how urbanized a site will feel. This allows us to measure the attributes and character of a neighborhood and establish standards for future developments.

Density is neither good nor bad. Appropriate densities for a site depend on where it is located, the density of nearby development, adjacent uses, presence or absence of parking and public transportation, and the appropriateness of the site for use as open space. Downtown areas, for example, can sustain higher densities than rural sites, especially if parking lots or garages are provided.

It is important, however, to look not just at the density of areas, but at their density in relation to un-built areas adjacent to them. Dense development on one part of a site may leave another part of the site clear for use as open space. This type of clustered development may in fact be more effective for maintaining the small-town character of an area than less-dense development distributed more evenly across an entire site. Parks, wetlands, wooded hillsides, planted intersections, and even the streets themselves, if lined with trees, contribute to open space. These historic patterns of building are similar to what is now termed “conservation subdivision” or “cluster” development.

Four existing neighborhoods are shown on the following pages. Their densities have been tabulated in terms of square footage per dwelling unit, and their spatial character is described. They exemplify many of the urban design virtues that give Wakefield its character, and provide a key for how new development can reinforce the best qualities of the town.

Although the way in which buildings are disposed on their lots and along the streets in these neighborhoods is as important as the square footage of lot area per unit, this number is a way of describing these existing neighborhoods and helping the city to build more such neighborhoods where appropriate.

## DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

**To conceptually define development options, this Master Plan establishes four density levels that will be used to characterize existing neighborhoods and proposed development models. The Implementation section of this report will then key these densities to zoning requirements that will help insure that housing construction will have public as well as private benefits.**

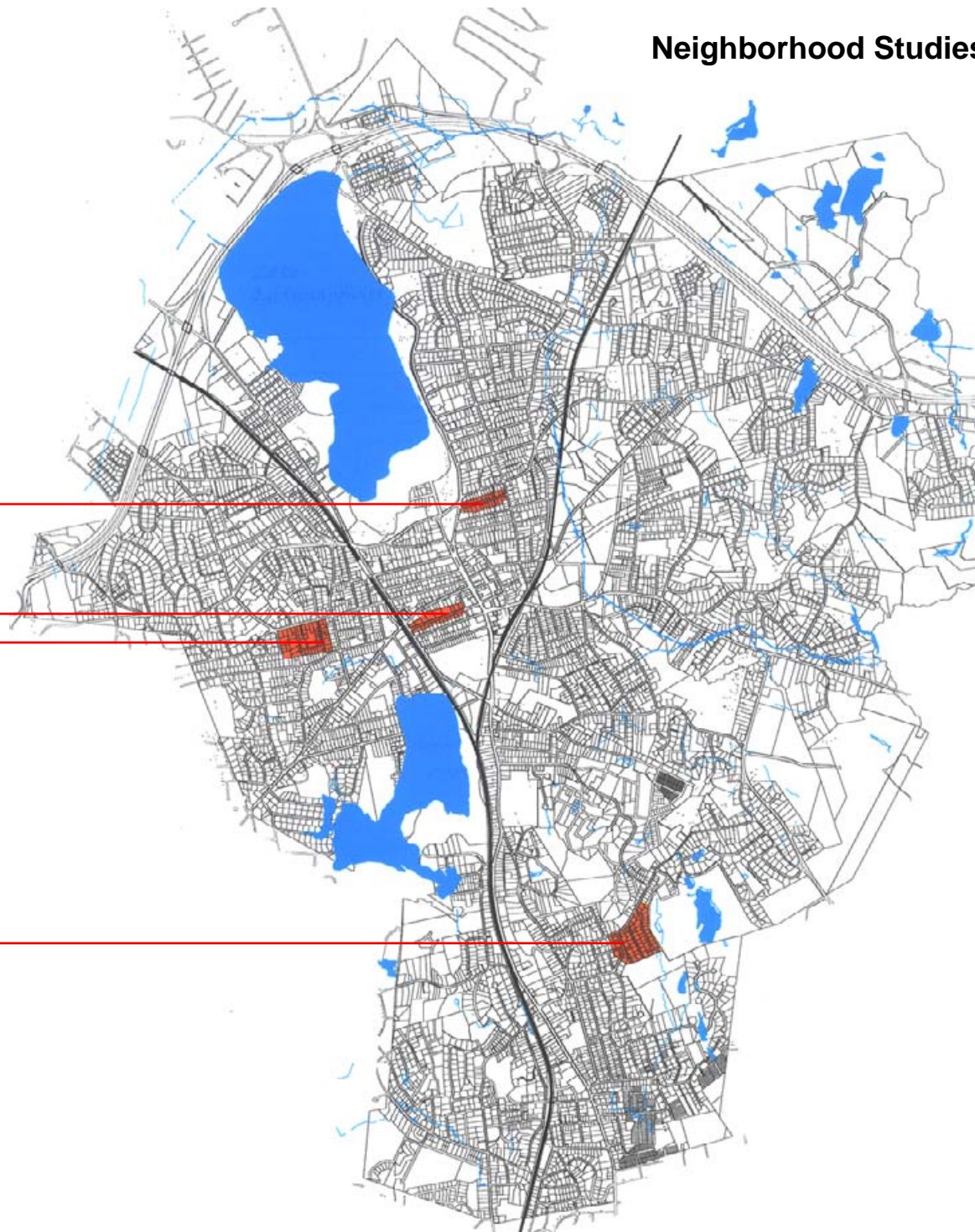
- **D1 density:** Greater than 5,000 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit  
**D1 Development Model:** a set of recommendations for a new single family cluster ordinance modeled on Conservation Subdivision Design or CSD, intended to replace the current Cluster bylaw;
- **D2 density:** 3,000 to 5,000 square feet per unit  
**D2 Development Model:** an attached single-family version of D1 that is meant to fit in well with existing neighborhoods and provide new affordable housing;
- **D3 density:** 1,500 to 3,000 square feet per unit  
**D3 Development Model:** a mixed use housing and retail concept modeled on traditional New England main street development and intended for use along North Avenue near the commuter rail station downtown, and on Main Street, both downtown and in Greenwood;
- **D4 density:** Less than 1,500 square feet per unit  
**D4 Development Model:** a medium density, mid-rise model for additional development on the Colonial Point housing site in Edgewater Office Park, and perhaps at other locations that have yet to be identified.

Pearl Street Study Area

Richardson Avenue Study Area

Ashcroft Street Study Area

Fell Street Study Area





*Houses and hillside create a distinctive neighborhood character.*

*Relatively small houses, big trees, fences and landscaping help define Greenwood's narrow streets.*



## **ATWOOD STREET/ FELL STREET/ MAPLE WAY**

### **DENSITY D1: 7155 SQ. FT. OF LOT AREA/DWELLING UNIT**

The Greenwood section of Wakefield is composed of fairly small houses on small lots surrounded by open green space. The density creates a strong sense of neighborhood while the open space ties it to the rural landscapes associated with New England communities. This pattern of building provides a model for future development, balancing affordability, a strong neighborhood, accessible open space, and an appropriate character.

Greenwood neighborhoods generally conform to these design and planning principals:

- Level areas have been developed while sloped areas and wetlands have been left open reducing costs and damage to the landscape.
- Lots are small and houses are clustered along streets creating a sense of community. They share the surrounding landscape for visual and recreational pleasure - many houses look out onto parks and wooded hillsides. The density prevents a sense of sprawl while maintaining a rural character.
- Houses face the street with consistent setbacks, welcoming porches and attractive facades while street trees reinforce the civic quality of the public sidewalks.
- Houses are within walking distance of public transportation and commercial areas reducing dependence on cars.









*Clustering of houses along Ashcroft Place allows open space to be maintained behind and creates a strong sense of community.*

## **ASHCROFT PLACE**

### **DENSITY D1: 6700 SQ. FT. OF LOT AREA/DWELLING UNIT**

Located in the West Side off of Chestnut Street, Ashcroft Place embodies urban design principals common to both new development and traditional development in Wakefield. These include:

- Houses are on a cul-de-sac, removed from through traffic and creating a close-knit sheltered sense of community. The village-like character is appealing.
- The enclave is a part of the grid of streets that connect Ashcroft to nearby neighborhoods and downtown. Houses are tied to the larger urban context.
- Houses are clustered close together around an access drive allowing a significant area of surrounding land to remain open. Lot area for each house is small; common open space is relatively large. Paved area is minimized by avoiding long driveways.
- Houses are built on relatively flat land; the open space has more topographic variation.
- Houses anchor the corner of Ashcroft and Chestnut, reinforcing the sense of a walkable street animated by houses.

This small development that undoubtedly predates any zoning regulation in Wakefield embodies many of the design principles of the “conservation subdivision” proposed as a contemporary approach to reducing sprawl and maintaining open space.





*Trees, porches, and sidewalks help create a comfortable pedestrian environment.*

*Simple house plans can accommodate well designed additions and changes allowed by zoning without disturbing the character of the neighborhood.*



## PEARL STREET

### DENSITY D1/D2: 5000 SQ. FT. OF LOT AREA/DWELLING UNIT

Pearl Street is typical of many of the older neighborhoods in Wakefield and throughout the United States. Development took place before most families had two or three cars, allowing close spacing of houses with parking on a narrow driveway or on the street. Although current automobile use makes the development of houses and lots of with these proportions difficult to build, they still offer a neighborhood model that defines the character of Wakefield.

The Pearl Street neighborhood is defined by the following characteristics:

- Houses enfronting the street with similar setbacks from house to house, defining the street as a neighborhood-oriented public space.
- Consistency of streetscape - curb, planting, street-trees, sidewalk, front yards, porches, house facades - to unify street and neighborhood and provide a lively streetscape.
- Long narrow proportions of houses and lots allow a balance between high density with adequate yards on front, sides and rear. Density allows significant population near downtown amenities supporting retail and recreational facilities without overloading parking.









*Multi-family buildings allow relatively high density near downtown transit and shopping, while maintaining green space.*

*Attached housing increases density while providing amenities like porches and front lawns.*



## **RICHARDSON AVENUE**

### **DENSITY D3: 2500 SQ. FT. OF LOT AREA/DWELLING UNIT**

Immediately adjacent to downtown retail, Richardson Avenue between Main Street and North Avenue is lined by multi-family housing. Buildings on the north side of the street consist of “bars” of units in various configurations. Buildings on the south side are the size of large single-family houses on small lots containing multiple (two, three, or four) units. Although open space is limited, density is appropriate for a central business district. These buildings are characterized by:

- Long, low and relatively narrow building proportions that allow multi-family aggregation of units while avoiding massive, block-size developments that would be out of scale with the neighborhood.
- A variety of configurations that allow a single building type to be adapted to many different urban configurations including housing on upper floors above retail.
- A transitional building type between continuous “Main Street” retail and neighborhood single and two-family housing.
- High unit count per acre close to downtown and public transportation - appropriate for elderly who may not have or need cars.





*Aerial view of single and multi-family housing on Wakefield's West Side looking east toward Harvard Mills at upper right.*

Traditional patterns of development in Wakefield give the town a distinct character, making it an attractive place to live. These patterns are defined by density, and by the relationships between buildings, streets, and the landscape. Private and public space are both given the kind of coherent form that creates a strong sense of community.

The neighborhood densities noted on page 4.8 form the basis for the development option scenarios described in the next section of this report, and for the design guidelines and implementation strategies in Sections 6 and 7.

The intention is not to create a nostalgic evocation of a bygone era. It is to encourage the development of housing that meets a broad range of contemporary needs while protecting the natural environment and the town's strong neighborhood structure. The result will be the creation of the kinds of pedestrian oriented communities that have attracted people to Wakefield for well over a century.

# Typical Neighborhood Street Section

COMFORTABLE SIDEWALK WIDTHS ENCOURAGE WALKING. 5' ALLOWS TWO PEOPLE TO WALK COMFORTABLY

SHADE TREES SPACED AT 30' VISUALLY FRAME THE STREET

NARROW TRAVEL LANES CALM TRAFFIC AND GIVE STREETS MORE INTIMATE SCALE

RETAINING WALL ACCOMMODATES GRADE CHANGE AND MARKS TRANSITION FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE, TOWNSCAPE TO LANDSCAPE

FENCES, PLANTINGS, STEPS AND PORCHES MEDIATE FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE ZONE

