

History of the Revitalization Effort

Roslindale, MA originally part of Roxbury and then West Roxbury was established in 1870. During the 1950's and 1960's it had a thriving commercial district (2 supermarkets, a movie theater, department store, etc.). During the mid 1970's the commercial district saw a major decline due to the desegregation of the schools and subsequent flight of people to the suburbs and the growth of shopping malls. This decline continued for over 15 years. The commercial district during that time was empty storefronts and burned out buildings. Seventy-five percent of the commercial spaces were vacant. The businesses that managed to stay in the district were completely grated. There was virtually no foot traffic.

At the direction of City Councilor Thomas Menino (now Mayor of Boston), struggling merchants in the commercial district organized and applied to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Urban Demonstration Program. Roslindale Village Main Street (RVMS) was organized in 1985. Once organized, RVMS began the process of revitalizing the commercial district by fully working the Four Points of Main Streets.

When community activists learned that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) was planning a new commuter rail line that would go from downtown Boston to the suburbs, passing through Roslindale without stopping, they lobbied hard and successfully for a Roslindale stop. This stop provides a 12-minute ride to downtown Boston and has fueled to rebirth of the area.

In 1990 residents of Roslindale, spurred on by the efforts of RVMS, mobilized to form an organization for the purpose of opening a cooperative market. RVMS was instrumental in aiding the development of the supermarket in many ways. RVMS assisted the community group when they purchased the property and oil contamination was found on the site. We worked with the City on structuring financing for the project and in identifying an owner/operator for the store. In 1999 The Village Market was opened to a delighted community. Today, the Village Market has brought much needed foot traffic to the commercial district and that in turn has helped to bring other businesses. Gradually over the course of the past ten years, we have filled empty storefronts with an eclectic mix of businesses that meet the needs of a diverse resident base, provides income to the businesses, and creates a sense of pride in the community.

The RVMS organization is a strong, well-respected program that advocates a whole community approach. We are particularly proud of the diversity of our business community. Ethnic markets exist beside and near boutique stores and a childcare center operates in a retail space. Long time ethnic businesses survived the lean times and now enjoy a renewed business spirit. Roslindale has become a destination. While the journey has been long, it has been very fulfilling and we are only invigorated to continue to seek more revitalization and solutions. Looking back over the past twenty years, we recognize the courage, patience and vision that our founding members embraced in 1984. Without the efforts of these founding members, the Roslindale business district would not be the vibrant and growing commercial district that it is today. RVMS will in 2005 on our 20th anniversary consider expanding the scope of our district as many small pockets of businesses exist in Roslindale that are not receiving assistance. We will continue to seek resources to offer to the small business owners to help them sustain and grow their businesses as well as explore developing the entire district as a WI-FI area.

Key Participants

Local Stakeholders - Business Owners – 7 merchants are on the RVMS board. They bring their insight to everything the organization undertakes. **Residents** - make up the backbone of RVMS's volunteer base. 22 are residents on the board, committees, volunteering at events. We have 500 resident members.

Property Owners – RVMS has been able to accomplish so much of the years because we have always had property owners at the table. Currently 2 property owners are on the board.

City of Boston – In 1995, the City of Boston launched the first multi-district urban main street program and RVMS joined 10 other neighborhoods participating in Boston Main Streets (BMS). BMS provides financial and technical resources to RVMS. RVMS accesses storefront improvement grants through the BMS and the RESTORE program. The Browne Fund and NICE program has provided grants for public improvements. RVMS works with **City's Special Events Department** each year to provide live concerts in Adams Park each summer. Special Events provides the musicians and sound equipment and RVMS provides the publicity and free arts and crafts for the children.

Village Market Cooperative – Residents joined with RVMS to raise awareness and the money needed to purchase the land and building for a cooperative supermarket. RVMS helped throughout the development process (zoning, clean up, loans, etc.).

Roslindale Board of Trade – RVMS actively participates in this organization and over the years we have collaborated on many venues to help both organizations and the business community.

Healthy Roslindale – RVMS supports Healthy Roslindale's efforts, which include neighborhood crime watches and healthy behavior campaigns in the business district (anti-smoking and alcohol awareness). RVMS also works with the Healthy Roslindale youth group, Rossie Reps. who volunteer at all our events.

Roslindale Congregational Church - RVMS collaborates with the Roslindale Congregational Church to provide a weekly live Jazz concert. We help with the publicity and offer members' specials to attend. This past summer we expanded the program to a concert outdoors in a courtyard behind a group of businesses. We worked with the restaurants to offer members a dinner/concert program. It was well received and we are planning on making it a series next summer.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) – The MBTA has allowed RVMS to run a Farmers' Market in the commuter rail parking lot since 1990. They are also working with us on the development of a long-vacant historic MBTA property (a former trolley turnaround station).

Historic Boston - RVMS collaborated with Historic Boston to find ways to convince the MBTA to sell a significant and long time vacant property in our district. Historic Boston provided funds and expertise to do a feasibility study. Sale of the property is pending.

Longfellow Neighborhood Association – RVMS supports LNA's efforts and advocates for their concerns around neighborhood issues that will ultimately affect the business district.

Major Achievements

1. Comprehensive improvement to the look and feel of the district

Historic preservation and storefront improvement has been a major thrust of our program. The RVMS district consisted of very old deteriorated, grated buildings that had been horribly patched and neglected. We were lucky enough to organize a Design Committee that has consisted of a core group of architects, planners and designers (all Roslindale residents and professionals). The process has taken a great deal of patience and brainstorming to come up with solutions that meld the preservation hopes with contemporary costs. The Roslindale business district now has 60% new signage that gives a welcoming look and feel and 95% of the grates are gone because of our efforts. RVMS has had the responsibility for the maintenance of Adams Park -- a treasured centerpiece of our business district -- for the past 9 years. Many of our events take place in the park and bring residents directly into the business district. RVMS solicited the money (\$10,000 annually) and hired the landscaping contractor.

2. The Village Market

The catalyst project that spurred major and sustainable growth in the Roslindale business district is the opening of a 18,000 sq. ft. super market in 1998. RVMS was a major guide in helping the community overcome obstacles to the opening of the Village Market such as oil contamination and funding. Additionally RVMS worked with the new owners of the Village Market to coordinate the community needs with the structure of the products and employment of the business.

3. Created a vibrant business district filled with a great mix of businesses

When RVMS began its efforts in 1985, 75% of the business district was vacant. By working with property owners and strongly promoting the district, Roslindale Village is now almost completely occupied. The district now hosts a supermarket, four gourmet restaurants, an ice cream shop, five bakeries, several ethnic markets, three independent bookstores, an art center/gallery, several gift and boutique shops, salons, service businesses, a pet supply shop, a guitar shop, as well as many others. Many of these businesses have received design, signage funding from RVMS. Aside from a Dunkin' Donuts' and Lappen Auto Supplies, the businesses are entirely independently owned.

4. Hundreds of residents participate in RVMS efforts throughout the year.

RVMS maintains a year-long calendar of special events drawing residents into the district. These include: summer concerts, Easter Egg Hunt, holiday tree lighting and shopping promotions, jazz concerts, Farmers' Market, Trick or Treat Trot. We have maintained a regularly visited web site for over 12 years that lists events, services, and history. The web site is also used for listing available properties in the district. We also do a monthly email newsletter that connects residents with goings on in the business district. Two years ago RVMS launched a major membership drive. We had a welcome response and now have over 500 members. The members get discounts at local stores but the real benefit is the communication from RVMS.

5. The Farmers' Market

One of our most successful community events has been our Farmers' Market, sponsored by RVMS for the past 17 years. Each Saturday from June to October the lower parking lot of the Roslindale Village Commuter Rail is filled with fresh produce, flower and bargain vendors. RVMS plans special events such as the Corn and Tomato Festival and Harvest Festival. This year we had a promotion with our membership -- people who showed their membership card at the

Main Street table had an opportunity to win \$25 in “Market Bucks” (fake money we gave that could only be spent at the market).

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Business Development

RVMS worked to end a 75% vacancy in the business district. This effort was done in a variety of ways: inventory of space/buildings; communication with property owners; active solicitation of businesses by the Economic Revitalization committee. Working with the City of Boston's Office of Business Development, who helped us to identify businesses looking for space, we arranged for meetings and visits. Putting properties on our web site along with photos also helped.

We have offered numerous programs to help our existing businesses by arranging organizations such as Jewish Vocational Services to give technical assistance for business plan development and loan applications through our office.

The RVMS program has encouraged and assisted many entrepreneurs in finding ways to get funding and technical assistance. Photo Image Plus, opened in 1989 received technical assistance and signage design from the program. Our Design Committee has worked with numerous businesses on merchandising.

Our business development efforts were also used to inform and organize residents and merchants to discourage businesses that did not belong in the center of the district (a drive through fast food restaurant and a towering public storage facility).

RVMS has supported the efforts of a new building for the Greater Roslindale Medical and Dental Center (\$5 Million) and upgrades to the municipal building (\$4 Million) that are in the heart of the district.

For Example:

Centre Cuts Salon and Day Spa at 6-8 Belgrade Avenue.

In 2001, Centre Cuts was considering an expansion both physically and in its business services. They approached RVMS to help them. RVMS put them in touch with Jewish Vocation Services' "Neighborhood Business Builders". Once a week in the RVMS office, a JVS representative worked with Centre Cuts owners to put together a viable business plan and to apply for a loan. The owner of Centre Cuts was a board officer of the Roslindale Board of Trade. Through our continued collaboration, Centre Cuts was made aware of this program at a critical time in its growth.

Today Centre Cuts has gone from a simple hairstyle business to a full service salon that also offers massage, pedicures, manicures and facials. The salon is beautiful and is an asset to the business community. This year Centre Cuts participated at our Farmers' Market and Harvest Festival by providing chair massages (\$10 for 10 minutes).

Economic Impact

The greatest testament to the economic impact RVMS' efforts have made to the Roslindale commercial district is the fact that we have a 4% vacancy rate (down from 75% in 1985) in spite of a very soft overall economy in Massachusetts. Roslindale has become a destination bringing shoppers and diners from Roslindale and from many surrounding neighborhoods. Our restaurants which have only existed for a few years have waiting lines.

Our businesses are mostly owned by individuals but our pharmacy and supermarket employ together over 75 people. Additionally, our many businesses help to support the many service type businesses that exist in the district such as lawyers, accountants, insurance companies, and banks.

Once our funding was depleted for storefront improvement, we worked with the City of Boston Office of Business Development RESTORE program to get matching funds for business owners for signage. We currently are assisting eight businesses with this program providing paper work assistance and design assistance. The work is contracted to local sign companies and contractors.

Housing values have increased significantly with the revitalization of the business district. The average selling price of Roslindale homes today is \$335,000. Ten years ago that selling price would have been around \$125,000.

PART IV: SLIDE DESCRIPTIONS

Submit 15 slides labeled with “slide #, city, state and “GAMSA 2005.” Provide description of each image in the space below within the 1” margins. Limit your responses to this page.

Name of Commercial District & State:	Roslindale Village Main Street
1.	Streetscape - RVMS logo proudly displayed in Adams Park. The Park is an oasis in the middle of the business district that provides space for community events. RVMS maintains the Park.
2.	Economic Restructuring - Village Market – major revitalization project – opened in 1998 – 18,000 sq. ft. brought foot traffic back to the business district. RVMS recently did a customer satisfaction survey for the Village Market.
3.	Economic Restructuring – A shopper looks over the produce section of the Village Market. Current customers number 10,500 per week.
4.	Economic Restructuring - Centre Cuts – this photo shows the expansion (pedicure room) of the business that was assisted by RVMS’ ER efforts in collaboration with Jewish Vocational Services.
5.	Economic Restructuring - MBTA Sub Station – a major piece of property in the business district that has been vacant for 30 years. Collaborating with the MBTA and Historic Boston the property is up for sale under strict redevelopment guidelines.
6.	Organization - Commuter train passing in the back of Alexander the Greek Park. RVMS lobbied to get a commuter rail stop in the village which has helped to develop the community.
7.	Economic Restructuring - Current construction of the new \$5 Million Greater Roslindale Medical Center in the business district. This project will increase foot traffic for our businesses.
8.	Storefront Improvement - Corinth Street Block BEFORE. (5 businesses) RVMS spent 4 years bringing this major storefront improvement project to completion and contributed \$35,000 to the \$85,000 cost..
9.	Storefront Improvement - Corinth Street Block AFTER Photo. RVMS targeted this block and worked with property owners. RVMS Design Committee stayed on the project from start to completion.
10.	Business Recruitment - Fornax Bread Company. One of the first small businesses to come to Roslindale with the promise of a supermarket. RVMS helped sponsor the mural on the side of the building.
11.	Economic Restructuring - Zia Flag on Birch Street – RVMS worked with the property owner and developer to create a street with 6 boutique businesses that draws shoppers and diners from other cities and towns. These businesses have had extensive media coverage and are 90% women owned.
12.	Streetscape – RVMS worked with the City of Boston N.I.C.E. program to obtain a clock for a small park area across from the MBTA Roslindale Commuter Rail Stop.

13. **Economic Restructuring** - Block on Corinth Street that was once all grated storefronts. Block now has a wine store, shoe store, Sushi restaurant and a real estate company. RVMS lobbied with property owners to remove grates.

14. **Promotion** - RVMS Annual “The Cooperative Bank Trick or Treat Trot” – fundraiser for RVMS held with costumed participants. Local merchants provide gift certificates for prizes. Draws many spectators. Now in its 7th year.

15. **Promotion** - Annual RVMS Egg Hunt – Each spring Adams Park is filled with 100’s of children and parents who come for egg hunt, games, arts & crafts and treats. RVMS works with local youth group to hide over 2,000 eggs in the Park.