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Street at Chestnut Hill, city and developer produce a gem

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If you need a retail/shopping fix or you just want to hang out at a place that makes you feel good, try The Street in Newton Mass. Even in the winter, it feels cheery with its colorful blue outdoor chairs and tables, bright crystal ball lighting, and small walkable blocks of stores and restaurants.

In the industry The Street is called an "open air lifestyle center," but it is more interesting than most. In plan it resembles a roofless mall and in character a contemporary village with various size curving streets with walkways and a square for sitting around or staged promotional events.

The Street is a clever infill project redesigning and unifying the best of an older fragmented retail area and adding new uses. Although much of the retail faces the highway, it is separated from it by a parallel landscaped pedestrian street. Combining the best preexisting retail with new-to-Newton stores makes for a far more compelling shopping experience than the usual shopping center tenant mix. Pottery Barn and Shake Shack are category winners, but there is an extra sparkle with some new stores from Boston's Newbury St. and a few independents, like: KU DE TA and Portobello RD. Parking exists in front of some of the stores and in lots around the exterior. Instead of one huge sea of parking, there are several smaller lots, and parking is clear and easy to access.

The Street is retail innovation. It would have been easier to dress up the same old stores found everywhere in strip center fashion facing Boylston St. Instead, an enlightened mayor worked with an enlightened developer to create a public private partnership and made creative use of state and federal funds.

Within four years the team designed and improved road, traffic, land, and real estate on a key Newton corridor. Often developers oppose public input or find it anti-development. In this case, it was a leader. Kudos to mayor Setti Warren and WS Development.

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