Campus Vision Statement

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Shady Hill School Campus Vision

Every Inch a Classroom

The buildings and grounds of Shady Hill play an active role in supporting the mission and program of the school. Organized as a village, the campus promotes the safety and freedom of children, the identity and hierarchy of communities within the school, and the developmental expansion of each child's world. We value exploration and understanding that lead to respect for the natural and built environment. We believe in a campus open to the spirit, curiosity, and imagination of childhood. The campus is every inch a classroom.

To that end, the campus embodies the following principles:

Simplicity

The campus is functional and unpretentious. Simplicity, an ideal set by the 1926 campus, is embodied in the use of basic building forms, order, clarity in construction, and modest landscape and building materials.

Child's Scale

The 1926 campus is appropriately scaled for the children it serves, comprising one-story buildings. Larger communal buildings are at the periphery of the campus. Two-story buildings are most inviting when they present one-story facades along paths and at the entries. The children's scale is also established through a hierarchy of built spaces, from the domestic-scaled, private spaces of the gradehead buildings, to the semi-public spaces of age-designated playgrounds, to the community-scaled public spaces of assembly and departmental buildings. Scale is of critical importance. Preservation of the scale of the campus should be carefully considered when evaluating programmatic growth that threatens that scale.

Open Air Tradition

The campus reflects Shady Hill's origin as an Open Air School by integrating inside and outside spaces. Gradehead classrooms are located on the ground floor with direct access from each classroom to the outside. Operable windows and skylights are maximized to expose interior spaces to fresh air and sunlight. Buildings have entry porches and classrooms have back porches for outdoor work and play. We believe that time spent outdoors is of immeasurable benefit to children. The campus includes a range of outdoor spaces from the flagpole green, to the structured playgrounds, open playing fields, unprogrammed interstitial spaces, and the wilds of the wetlands. Pathways, and children on them, are fully exposed to the elements.

Campus as Classroom

The school's grounds support the primacy of exploration and discovery by allowing children and teachers the flexibility to use, reinvent, explore, and experiment with them. Shady Hill buildings and grounds promote contact with primary sources and actual materials: plants, dirt, sand, sun and air. By employing visible construction techniques, the buildings are didactic. The playing fields are maintained at a level appropriate for competitive play. The educative use of the campus takes priority over beautification.

Citizenship and Stewardship

Shady Hill's campus makes a strong statement to our learners about how we view the world. We select materials and maintenance plans that are safe and environmentally thoughtful. The campus is developed and maintained to cultivate respect and responsibility for the natural and built environment. We encourage our students to become stewards of the campus.

Shady Hill Campus Vision

Appendix

The purpose of the appendix to the Shady Hill Campus Vision Statement is to assist those who are responsible for altering and maintaining the buildings and the landscape of the campus. This appendix will help architects, landscape architects and the maintenance crew to know what is of value to the community and to help guide the design of any changes to the campus. Further, we hope that the faculty is familiar with the materials in this document and that it will encourage and support them in their use of the campus as an educational medium.

Buildings

Siting and Planning: The Open-Air Tradition

The siting and planning of buildings should maintain Shady Hill's open-air tradition. Children at Shady Hill move easily from indoors to outdoors. Movement from one building to another—from classrooms to departmental and assembly buildings—is on paths fully exposed to the elements. A sense of outdoors should always be present in interior spaces as well.

Departmental and assembly buildings should be sited along the periphery of the campus so that their larger volumes do not intrude upon the smaller scale of interior buildings. They must be disposed so as to create side yards and front yards, unless the building opens directly onto a pathway. The longer dimension of the building will normally be parallel to the site contours. The view from the southern edge of the flagpole green across the playing fields should remain unobstructed.

Classroom buildings must be disposed to create side yards and back yards scaled appropriately for use as play spaces by the class. Classroom buildings should have covered porches with wooden floors. Porches should vary in size and each should be scaled appropriately for its building, intended activity, and age of the children who use it.

Classroom buildings must be one story. Departmental and assembly buildings may be two stories, but both departmental and assembly buildings such as the gymnasium should present a single-story elevation to the pathway or public space it fronts.

Entrances should be made in the building wall rather than through devices such as linking "necks" or entrance pavilions. The planning of entry halls should not be "mono-functional," but rather should be programmed so as to facilitate small-group socialization and activity; in particular, classroom entry halls may double as cubby rooms. Entrances should be clearly denoted through the use of porches or protective roofs and landings. Normally the entry should be symmetrically composed. In consideration of our soil conditions and proximity to wetlands, entrance porches should be two or three steps above grade rather than at grade.

Composition: Didactic Buildings

The design of buildings should reflect the school's educational mission: buildings should be "didactic." Simple, visible structural systems can help children understand the logic of load transfer and bearing. Joinery and exposed fasteners and connections can help children understand the logic of construction. Ducts, conduits, sprinklers, and other such elements may be exposed to help demonstrate how building systems work.

Building volumes and roof configurations should respect and harmonize with those of the 1926 campus buildings. Buildings should normally present simple, unified exterior volumes (even though their interiors may be volumetrically more complex) with minimal protrusions or appendages. A "generic" feeling is not an unwanted quality.

Roofs pitches should harmonize with those of the 1926 campus buildings. Porch roofs should be of open construction.

Effort should be made to develop the building section in order to (1) reflect the roof configuration and, where possible, the roof construction, (2) vary the ceiling heights and (3) allow natural light through light monitors, clerestories, etc. Dropped flat ceilings should be avoided wherever possible.

Within the classroom, natural light and ventilation are extremely important. They allow the atmosphere of the classroom to vary with the weather and strengthen the connection between indoors and outdoors. Mechanical air conditioning should be avoided if other, more environmentally sensible means of cooling and heating are possible.

Effort should be made to maintain approximately the same proportion of window to wall as in the existing buildings. Window sashes should be painted wood. Windows should be operable wherever possible. (Also see **Preservation and Restoration** section.)

Materials: Aesthetic Experience

Following John Dewey, we believe that the roots of aesthetic value lie in commonplace experiences, and that the intelligent use of materials and the imaginative development of possible solutions (the processes found in the creative work of artists) should be valued in all human activity. Aesthetic experience emerges in the practical situation where individuals, materials, and environment interact.

Building materials and colors should be simple and the number of different materials restricted. Use of materials should be straightforward and didactic, reflecting the intrinsic structural characteristics and performance of each material and the logic of their combination and construction. Any changes in materials in elevation should normally be made so as to create horizontal rather than vertical joints in order that the "from-the-ground-up" nature of construction is conveyed. Clearly visible construction can be used to demonstrate the value of craft. Experimentation with new materials is encouraged if these materials reflect values similar to those now in place on the campus.

Wood shingles are the preferred material for exterior siding but other materials similar in scale may be considered for assembly buildings. Painted wood must be "Shady Hill Gray."

Classroom walls should be finished with tackable materials where appropriate. Where acoustical properties of ceilings are at issue, wood fiber is preferred over acoustical tiles. Wood and cork floors are preferred over vinyl composition tile. Restrict the use of gypsum wallboard as a finish material for walls. The tactile quality of finishes and the way in which surfaces wear over time should be considered as of equal importance to the visual effect.

Mahogany doors with two glazed panels are preferred for all main doors.

Preservation and Restoration

The original 1926 buildings, along with the slightly later Assembly, Music and Shop buildings, are particularly beloved and valuable to the school. Every effort shall be made to preserve them, in their most original state: in form, material, and detail, both inside and out. Certain changes will be necessary to bring the buildings up to current code, and to meet contemporary requirements, but these modifications should be made thoughtfully to minimize the impact on these historic buildings.

Changes have been made to a number of the 1926 buildings that significantly compromise their original simple elegance. Particularly glaring are the single pane vinyl replacement windows. Over time, those windows should be replaced with historically accurate true-divided light windows. In the future all replacement windows should be historically accurate.

Landscape

Design

• Planted areas should invite children to enter into them. They should be welcoming places for children to play, learn and explore.

• Both programmed and unprogrammed space should be provided for outdoor play.

• Landscaped areas created adjacent to individual buildings should relate to the campus wide landscape.

• The space between the shop and the new studio will be an important new courtyard. Care should be taken to make it a lively, useful and inviting space.

• The perimeter of the campus should be considered as an opportunity to add another unprogrammed space for children to play and explore. A planted buffer along the boundary with BB&N and Cambridge Cemetery could have dense planting for exploration yet be transparent enough for security.

• Natural barriers, such as thorny shrubs may be planted where high traffic kills grass.

• New planted areas should be designed to reduce maintenance requirements once installed.

• Plantings should be used to create spaces around and outside of the structures, not just to mask where the building meets the ground.

• Landscape plantings should be used to add more character and definition to the smaller courtyard and outdoor play spaces. (The renovation of the plantings in Harvard Yard involved

planting the smaller courtyards surrounding the Yard with groves of different kinds of trees, giving each courtyard its own character. This already exists in the grove of crabapple trees in the courtyard near the Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade buildings).

• An area along the school border could be set up so that parents can donate plantings from their own land. Perhaps an exchange could be set up.

• Consider installing habitat gardens that would provide adequate shelter and food for birds, butterflies and other pollinating insects. Once established these can provide multi-season interest and can be designed in such a way that they are not very high maintenance.

• Replace mulched areas where appropriate with native plantings to add beauty, possible habitat and food sources, and teaching opportunities.

• Remove small areas of turf that serve no purpose and require constant maintenance and replace either with ground cover or in some cases with small learning gardens: plants for smelling/touching tasting, bog plants, spring ephemerals and ferns…

Landscape as Classroom

• The landscape should be accessible and manipulable by children.

• Where possible, the landscape should support the curriculum of the various central subjects as well as the science and studio departments.

Materials: Plants

• Generally, native species are preferred over exotic species. The campus is very much of the New England landscape and its image as a village should be reinforced by the plantings throughout the campus.

• Adopt a ‘right plant/right place’ philosophy. Rather than trying to plant shade and acid-loving Rhododendrons next to sun and alkaline loving turf, make choices to ensure happy plants and less maintenance.

• Special high traffic grass seed or sod is needed periodically north of the Beehive and Athletic Field goal areas. Other areas can be maintained with different varieties of grass. Movable bases or field markers should be available for recess play. Moving the games periodically could lessen wear on the fields.

Materials: Hardscape

• Impermeable materials should be reduced to a minimum. (Parking areas and places where oil spillage is certain should continue to have impermeable surfaces with proper drains). Areas that empty directly or indirectly to the fields and river should be permeable. A tarmac like that used at Walden Pond might be suitable for many walkways.

• Consider using wooden walkways to bridge wet areas instead of bituminous paths. Areas where this might be effective are by the tetherball, going into the west beehive door, or through and around the wetlands by the science and shop buildings.

• Use of landscape materials should be consistent throughout the campus. Unless there is a strong motivation to introduce a new material, materials traditionally used on the campus such as asphalt, granite, slate or bluestone should be used in new construction, (e.g. the brick courtyard by the 8th grade building feels oddly different because it is the only place on the campus that is paved in brick.)

• Playground materials should be constructed of wood. They should not be treated with noxious preservatives.

Wetland

As SHS goes forward with plans to renovate and rebuild buildings on the west side of campus, particular attention should be paid to the wetlands there. There are four parcels of wetlands:

1) Behind the science building (the driest of the areas)
2) South of the shop building (bounded by the shop and stream)
3) Behind the headmaster's house (close to the back parking lot) and
4) South of the present soccer/lacrosse field (bordering the Cambridge Cemetery)

There are other areas that could support wetland plants and wildlife, but these are the ones designated as wetlands.

• The wetlands should be celebrated, not treated as leftover space.

• Increase the ability to view and use the wetlands periphery, while reducing access into the fragile environment of the wetlands. Build boardwalks with observation decks instead of causeways through the area. Have multi-gated fence around Wetlands. Install snow fences (or their kin) where soccer balls and the like go into the bushes. The aim of these fences would be to keep those playing the games from diving through the bushes searching. These fences would not be to keep children from investigating the area on their own.

• Over time replace all invasive non-native species within designated wetlands area with native ones trying to replicate as much as possible a pre-Columbian environment. This will need constant tending to keep out Rosa floribunda, Norway Maple, and other invasive plants.

• Take away the land bridge/causeway path between the 8th Grade courtyard and the Studio/Shop area. Replace it with a boardwalk. This will enhance the water storage capacity and connect two areas of wetlands without impacting any land presently available for buildings.

• An understanding should be conveyed to the students about the water systems at the school. Where does the stream come from? Where does it go?

Maintenance

• **Grass**: Consider alternatives to sod. Students could be engaged in experiments with various approaches. Try raking bare areas, seeding and spreading 1/3" compost. Feed soil instead of plant for long term health. Consider "weaning" fields off of chemical fertilizer towards sustainable methods. Look to other schools and towns that have made this choice for suggestions.

• **Leaves**: Leaves should be chopped and used as a mulch or in compost. As long as appropriate materials are used compost does not attract animals. Can be used as a teaching tool with students to model how we deal with refuse. School should make a commitment to this principle.

• **Weeds**: Remove weeds before they go to seed. Watch out for invasives such as garlic mustard behind Assembly Hall (students could be involved in removal) and Japanese Knotweed in front of 6th grade building. However, certain native ‘weeds’ such as pokeweed can be beautiful and instructive. They can also provide food for wildlife.

• **Mulching**: Mulching should be done where bare soil is exposed around bushes. The amount of ground covered with mulch each year should be decreased. Some weeds and wildflowers could be allowed to grow under bushes. Ground cover should be planted where possible. Cedar mulch should be used sparingly as a poison to keep other plants from growing or as a pesticide around buildings. Mulch should NOT be heaped up into a cone around tree bases. Trees mulched in such a fashion will develop rot around their bases. Mulch around trees should be used to inhibit weed growth around the base of the tree and need only be 1 or 2 inches deep.

• **Care of Trees and Shrubs**: Do not sheer shrubs into round ‘muffins’ but prune for health, overall size and removal of spent blossoms. Always cut back to crotch of plant. Proper pruning techniques must be used to remove dead or crossing branches. Occasionally bring in professionals to assess plant health and do major pruning. If necessary, spray hemlocks (if any) with Horticultural oil in March.

• **Watering**: Select drought-tolerant materials. Plants need deep, long slow watering once a week to encourage deeper root systems. This is true of grass as well, once established. Drip irrigation should be used if any new irrigating is added. Compost or aged bark mulch will help retain moisture around plantings.

A well should be sunk to provide water for the fields. Smaller areas may warrant sprinkler systems connected to public water supply. Large areas should use well water.

• **Gravel areas**: The gravel around buildings should be maintained aggressively where building wood (structural or siding) is within 1 foot of the ground to keep wood from wicking up moisture and to discourage insect invasion. When ground meets concrete foundation, no wood is within one foot, and the area is not a drainage ditch, a gravel trough is unnecessary and a softer natural ground cover should be encouraged right to the building foundation.

Supporting Documents

"The school believes in material simplicity in coexistence with the fullness and richness of the intellect and sprit. It therefore attempts to maintain a physical plant which is functional, unpretentious and in scale with the children it serves."

Long Range Planning Committee, 1992

"The style and scale of Shady Hill's classroom buildings are fundamental expressions of its educational philosophy. Our wood-frame structures are absolutely essential. Changing the buildings would change the school irreparably. The campus is a treasure. A sense of intimacy prevails. Children are not overwhelmed.

"The school is 'funky' rather than 'beautiful'. It appeals to kids. We mustn't sacrifice spirit for a better building. That's why we didn't go ahead with the proposed new assembly hall.

"The Lower School Common building is out of balance aesthetically which is a design mistake. In future construction projects there may be room for compromise without the overwhelming mass of the Lower School Commons building.

"Is Shady Hill growing or shrinking? Two-story buildings imply that we are growing. Changing the scale would be harmful."

Parents' Council, 1990's

"The buildings are low. The many windows and monitors admit much light, even on the grayest days. Doorways hug the ground and students spill into the outdoors easily. The numerous porches invite book-toting children to read quietly on them in warmer weather. Elsewhere in the Northeast, less robust students move from class to class in heated interior hallways. Not Shady Hillers. Drenching rains and punishing winter winds simply cannot deter our hearty students from moving along outdoor pathways – the only way to get from here to there…

"Children belong out of doors for a good part of every day, where the natural world gives birth to wonder. Laboratory study and in-class work are essential, of course. They have an important place. But for young children, nothing can supplant the delight in discovering a colony of ants, marching to who-knows-where and back again…

“The campus is remarkable. Still, like the children it serves, the buildings and grounds age, requiring constant attention… Program changes as well have forced previous renovations and will again…

“Perhaps our most important charge is to be certain that the school does nothing that will put the campus out of balance: the original vision, now eighty years old, still seems right.”

Bruce Shaw, Director, Shady Hill News, Spring 2003

“Think of the imposing edifices that our children move on to when they attend high school and college, and you’re reminded of how simple and self-effacing the structures at Shady Hill really are, and what an utterly appropriate architectural gesture that is –“

Jeffrey Katz, Chairman of Buildings and Grounds,
Shady Hill News, Spring 2003

Letter to the Director from the Science Department Faculty, May 17, 2004

Dear Bruce,
Not only is our campus unusually large for an elementary school but also we have the extraordinary benefit of having ungardened “wild” areas for teaching and learning. In the science department, we use the outdoors as an extension of the classroom. For example, second graders collect plants and search for animal tracks in the snow behind the science building and the director’s house; fifth graders use the stream for water quality and pond studies; sixth graders make seasonal outdoor observations, survey trees, dig in the earth and go bird watching; apprentices learn how to conduct outdoor classes.

We hope that strategic plans, particularly those that involve building a new gym, shop and studio, understand the important role that the outdoor environment has in our school curriculum now and could have in the future.

<u>What we’d like:</u>

WETLANDS RESTORATION:
We would like to see the wetland areas preserved and restored, replacing non-native invasive species over time with native species, and if possible connecting patches of ‘wild’ areas so that there is more of a continuous whole. We would like to be actively involved in this wetland restoration as part of the science curriculum, Flex Week and community service projects.

MORE GARDENING:
We would like to expand student gardened areas from the science building to other places around the school. Grade heads could choose to garden areas outside the classroom with support and assistance from the science department, offering a chance for students to take responsibility for the school.

What we would NOT like:

LOSS of NATURAL AREAS
Over the last 15 years, the ratio of groomed to natural habitat has shifted, with a loss of wilder areas and an adverse impact on our curriculum. There is simply less natural habitat to show kids. It is harder to find burrs, a variety of birds, salamanders, a variety of insects, etc.

Ideally the amount of natural habitat and student gardened areas could increase. We believe that our science curriculum and the educational mission of the whole school will be strengthened and enriched by this. We offer our support to do so. Please let us know how we can be helpful in moving ahead.

Sincerely,

The Science Department (Jeanne McDermott, Barbara Bratzel, Monica Chrambach, Michael Horn, Tracy Polte)

Letter to the Campus Vision Committee from SHS parent Patricia Berman

Here is my homework assignment, such as it is, which was to try to reconstruct my first impressions of the Shady Hill campus from my first visits last year:

The most striking thing about the campus for me was the way it seemed to crystallize and concentrate what I understood to be Shady Hill's philosophy of student-driven inquiry. It felt cozy, safe, open, and easily navigable. The intimate scale of most of the buildings, their dispersal across the campus, and their pitched roofs suggested a village in miniature. The consistency of texture and color of most of the buildings, coupled with their domestic scale and vocabulary, gave the ensemble the reassuring feel of a bungalow colony or a camp. The varied sizes and treatments of windows, dormers, and porches seemed to create a sense of liveliness and distinctiveness to each building, providing landmarks and little zones of safety and familiarity — "homes" — for the children.

The grounds felt welcoming and varied. I appreciated the combination of axial and meandering paths, of small pockets of space between the class buildings, the openness of the "village green" where the flagpole stands, and the area of play for the little kids. The open vistas provided by the expansive playing field (and by the BB&N playing fields over the fence) seemed to me to suggest a permeability of activities and emphases. The sense that the classroom and outdoor worlds intermingle suggested great freedom and openness. I very much appreciated what I first perceived to be "unprogrammed space" — sites all over the campus that kids could colonize and explore in their own ways, and likely reinvent at each age level. The ship ("the

“Shelley”?) was a huge magnet for me (and later for Jacob). It spoke of whimsy and adventure that I found, and continue to find, exceptionally appealing.

My memory of the buildings’ interiors is of intimacy and openness. The light pouring in from all of the windows, the visual access to the outdoors, and the quirky variations in dimension — and the high, soaring ceilings — in many of the buildings, suggested a variety of experience, and a simplicity of means, that would stimulate and not overwhelm children’s imaginations. The lower school rooms felt like big, open laboratories set in carriage houses, informal and warm. The big expanse of windows allowed visual and psychological access among the occupants of the room, the people outdoors, and those in neighboring buildings. This felt reassuring and enlivening. Of course, I was most keenly interested in the Beginners’ facilities and I found these to speak of everything I hoped for in a school: In their openness in plan and in fenestration, they speak of freedom of movement and inquiry. At the same time, their domestic scale provides a gentle physical containment that is reassuring.

I guess in my long-winded way, I felt that the architecture and grounds help to foster both a sense of the distinctive group in which a child would be located in a given year, reinforcing a sense of intimate group identity, yet not at the expense of collective identity. The visual access to others in the community; the close physical proximity both to other classroom buildings, and to community or special function buildings; and the shared formal vocabulary around the campus, creates a strong sense of cohesiveness that suggests continuity among grades and activities.

The library blew my mind. It still does.

I would like to add that when we brought Jacob for his group interview, he LOVED the physical environment of Shady Hill. He immediately ran along the paths (not yet, of course, knowing the rules -- he still finds ways of circumventing them...) and stopped to survey the larger collective spaces. He climbed all over the “Shelley” and wanted to walk onto the porches of the classroom buildings. The ways in which the layout of the campus enabled him to feel at home in a brand new place, and in which the buildings seemed to beckon him, spoke of a kind of openness and empowerment that is rare. He is not a shy child, but I have rarely seen him feel free to “take over” a space as he did on that occasion. We had told him before his school interviews that he was going to “play school.” Throughout that winter, he referred to Shady Hill as “THE play school.”

On one final note, I first saw the school in the Fall in the rain, then at the Shady Hill fair, and then in January. I had a sense of landscape as being utterly accessible and manipulable by children. Much of it is, of course, but areas of it are also perhaps too manicured and tamed. I continue to love the idea of my son getting down dirty in the mud and reinventing spaces and places for imaginative purposes and hope that, if we agree, we can articulate that definition of the landscape. It is nice to think of as “child’s play.”

Humbly submitted by a “6 month parent” to the collective wisdom of, likely, those with 200 “child years,”

Patricia Berman, parent, March 2004

Photographs of Landscape Conditions

The perimeter of the campus should be considered as an opportunity to add another unprogrammed space for children to play and explore. A planted buffer along the boundary with BB&N and Cambridge Cemetery could have dense planting for exploration yet be transparent enough for security.

The wetlands should be celebrated, not treated as leftover space.

Use of landscape materials should be consistent throughout the campus. Unless there is a strong motivation to introduce a new material, materials traditionally used on the campus such as asphalt, granite, slate or bluestone should be used in new construction (e.g. the brick courtyard by the 8th grade building feels oddly different because it is the only place on the campus that is paved in brick.)

Mulch should NOT be heaped up into a cone around tree bases. Trees mulched in such a fashion will develop rot around their bases. Mulch around trees should be used to inhibit weed growth around the base of the tree and need only be 1 or 2 inches deep.

Shrubs should not be shaped, but pruned for health, overall size and removal of spent blossoms.

Photographs of Building Conditions

Simple, unified volumes and symmetrical entry. This generic feeling is not an unwanted quality.

The open-air tradition: small paths, buildings with light and view.

Entrance stoops raised slightly above grade, with protective roofs are ideal.

Back porches should vary in size to accommodate different activities.

A developed building section reflects the roof configuration, varies ceiling height, and allows natural light through clerestory windows.

Buildings should be didactic, with structure, fasteners and some mechanicals exposed.