

Bos

Bittersweet feeling

By Joanne Mason

The announcement has finally been made. The office is being relocated.

In a way, I feel like a child whose parent has gotten a job transfer and is moving the family to a new neighborhood. A thousand questions swirl in my head, but instead of worrying about a new school and making friends, I wonder how many buses or trains it will take to get to the new location, what the area has to offer, and whether we can get good Thai food for lunch.

Soon my colleagues and I learn the truth: not only are we moving, but we're moving out of the city to a suburban office park.

I go back and forth on it. On one hand, I am delighted, for selfish reasons. The move will cut my 90-minute commute to 30 minutes. No longer will I have to get up at 5 a.m. to get to work on time. Imagine. I can probably sleep until 6:15. I'll be able to have a life on weeknights instead of excusing myself early because it's past my bedtime. And what will I do with the extra five hours a week? Learn a language? Watch reality TV? Cook a real dinner instead of popping leftover macaroni and cheese into the microwave? The possibilities are endless.

However, as the weeks unfold and we find ourselves closer to packing boxes and deciding what to take and what goes in the shredder, I am wistful.

There will be a lot to miss about working in Boston. I have to admit there are things I actually like about my long commute. I get lots of reading done on the commuter rail. When I was in graduate school, I did most of my studying on the Haverhill line. I like peeking at the covers of other people's books and magazines. I shared smiles with more than a few fellow train travelers as we lugged the enormous fifth Harry Potter hardcover around two summers ago.

I will miss my daily morning walk from North Station. On Beacon Hill, I always enjoy the holiday decorations, such as the jack-o'-lanterns in flower boxes or the vivid Christmas tree lights

that somebody forgot to turn off the night before. Last fall, residents festooned their doors and windows with banners supporting presidential candidates and posters that said, "Go Red Sox!" and "Believe!" My path then takes me through Boston Common, where I admire the motivation and concentration of the people exercising there so early in the morning. Wending my way through the Public Garden, I see the first signs of spring when the lagoon is finally filled and the tulips start blooming.

And every day, without fail, I turn around before crossing Arlington Street to face the Washington statue and view the Public Garden from the opposite direction — one of the loveliest sights in Boston.

I recognize how spoiled I am by my work location. Everything I need is at our doorstep in Copley Square.

Every year, I do my holiday shopping on my lunch hour, not venturing into a mall from Thanksgiving to New Year.

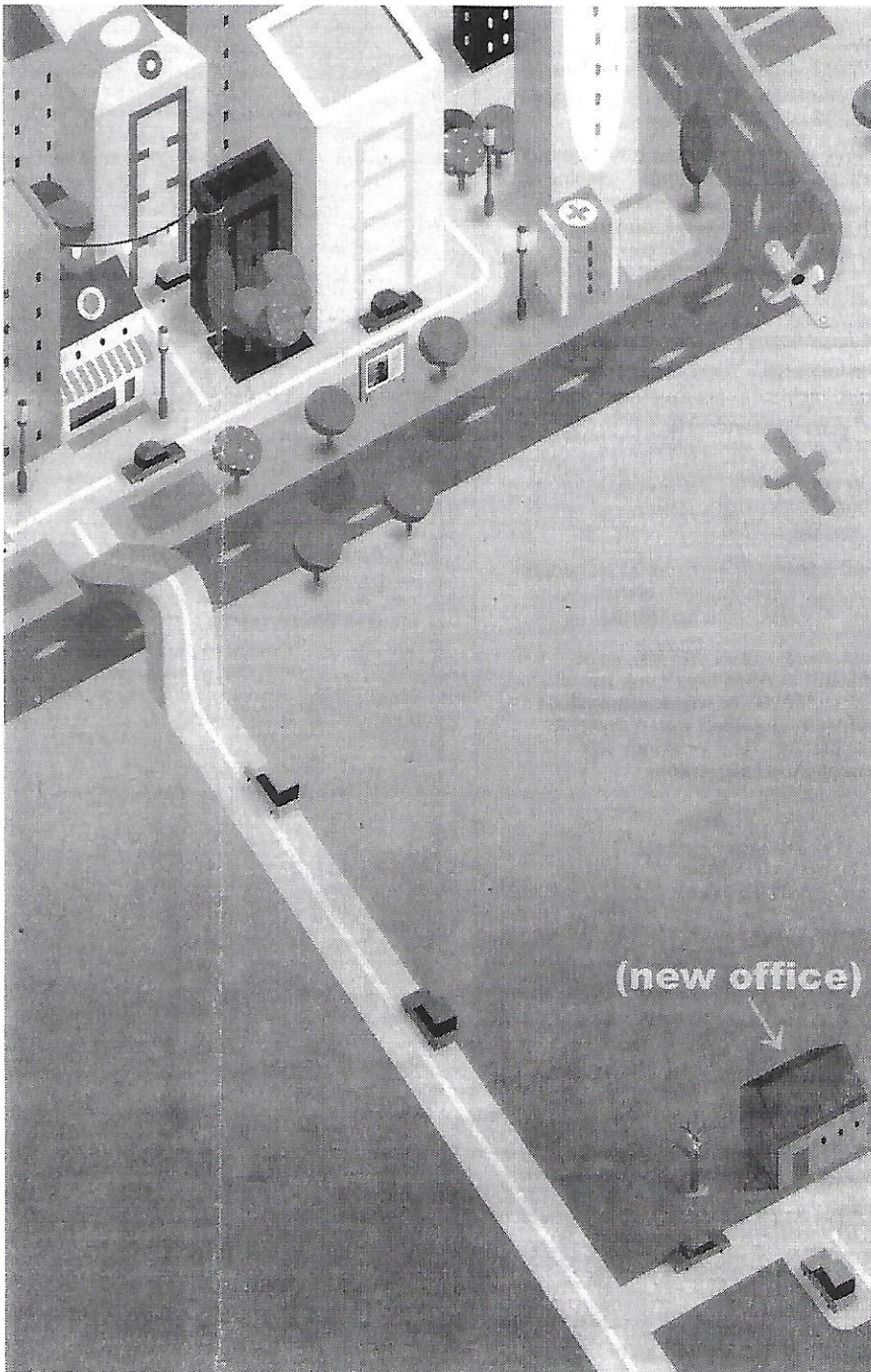
I've been able to find bamboo knitting needles, frames for record album covers, and gifts for my friends' babies, all in a three-block radius. I can mail that last-minute birthday present on my way to work.

The library is just down the street, so I can stock up on train reading. Normally I'm a brown-bagger, but if I forget my lunch, there is fast food and not-so-fast food, plus Mexican, Vietnamese, Italian, and some of the best clam chowder around. There are plenty of spots in the area to get away from it all at lunch. I can read quietly in the Commonwealth Avenue park or meet friends and picnic in the Public Garden.

There are other aspects of city working that won't be available in the suburbs. Little things, like the Krispy Kreme doughnuts that were given away one day; the Copley Farmer's Market, where for years I have bought fresh tomatoes, berries, and pumpkin squares on summer Tuesdays and Fridays; the concerts in the park, where as an aspiring violinist I could watch — and wonder — how the professionals do it; the dramatic juxtaposition of architecture between Trinity Church and the John Hancock tower; the occasional movie being filmed; the random celebrity

tonWorks

s when the office is relocated



ILLUSTRATION/OLIVIER LATYK

sighting. Once, some of my colleagues rushed in to tell me (the ultimate Beatles fan) that Ringo Starr walked by. Now that isn't going to happen in the suburbs.

Co-workers have bonded to a certain extent through our experience of working in the city. Three Patriots victory parades passed right by our windows. Our office

almost emptied, with people bundled up on the sidewalk cheering loudly and waving signs. There was still an infectious fervor when everyone returned, still carrying their signs and hanging them up in offices and cubicles. I'm not that interested in football, but my colleagues brought me into the fold of fandom, even if temporarily. This wouldn't have happened if we weren't in the right place at the right time.

Similarly, we watched John Kerry's rally site being erected on Election Day, with all the scaffolding and staging by the Boston Public Library. Regardless of party leanings, it was hard to miss the enthusiasm and optimism in the air. As I was about to leave work that day, I heard a familiar voice outside. "Is that James Taylor?" I asked a co-worker. We went to the square and heard Taylor's sound check, of "The Star-Spangled Banner." My co-worker turned to me and said, "I love working in the city."

I know that I have to give the suburbs a chance. I have visited our future home and while my bias causes me to look at the stark building, parking lot, and adjacent strip malls with some disdain, I keep telling myself it won't be bad. It'll just be different.

Exploring the neighborhood, I have found different places for lunch. Maybe I'll find the best suburban clam chowder. The main street is busier and less architecturally interesting, but we'll still be able to take walks. Maybe there are side streets with beautiful old houses tucked away. We can probably find a park nearby. There's still plenty of shopping and we can run errands. It's worth investigating. We'll adjust. And there will be tradeoffs. For example, in the dead of winter, it will be just a short jaunt to the car instead of that monstrous wind tunnel walk to Back Bay Station.

In a sense, we live in our work neighborhood, spending 40-odd hours there a week, sometimes more. In spite of our inside surroundings — the offices, cubicles, copiers, and fax machines — the neighborhood brings something more to the work experience. And like the little girl whose mom or dad got a job transfer, I will try to learn to love our new home.