



Watertown Square Area Plan: November 2023 Design Charrette Working Groups Summaries

Urban Form

The Urban Form working group explored ideas on the future look and feel of the built form and public realm of Watertown Square. While most participants were interested in seeing a diversity of building heights and storefronts, some community members expressed their preference for new and denser developments, whereas others prioritized maintaining the existing built environment and preserving the neighborhood feel of the area, highlighting the need for design standards for new buildings. Providing affordable housing units, supporting existing and new small businesses, renovating or redeveloping vacant sites and buildings, and improving parking configurations are among the other identified priorities related to the built form of Watertown Square.

The discussion on public realm improvements centered on the desire for better access to the riverfront and other open spaces, improved pedestrian and cycling connectivity, expanding green infrastructure extents, improved wayfinding, widened sidewalks, and increased public amenities like benches and tables. Community members would also like to see more indoor and outdoor programming to activate ground floor public spaces.

Strategic Sites

In the Strategic Sites working group, community members identified several key sites where they see the potential for better development and public realm uses, including the parking areas along Baptist Walk/Winter Street, various larger parcels along Main and Mount Auburn streets near the Delta, and Watertown Yard. In locating sites with higher likelihood for redevelopment, participants considered such factors as current uses and density, parking, street wall and storefront conditions, and location. Many were interested in seeing mixed-use developments that explore higher density and better parking configurations, while others expressed the need for a sensible approach to setbacks and design standards.

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Destination Square

The Destination Square working group explored design strategies to help small businesses thrive in Watertown Square. In discussing the current retail and small business mix in Watertown, many community members felt strongly about supporting existing businesses, while indicating the desire for a wider variety of small businesses in the future, including bookstores, boutiques, breweries, bakeries, ice cream shops, and grocery stores. Community members also provided input on public realm and streetscape improvements that could improve the small business environment. These include outdoor dining, providing more recreational amenities and programming at or around the Delta and the riverfront, widening sidewalks, expanding tree canopy and other green infrastructure, and providing space on pedestrian paths for pop-up businesses, food carts, and art installations highlighting Watertown Square as a destination.

Various policies were recommended as potential avenues to support small businesses, including subsidies for businesses, ensuring adequate street parking, a branding identity for Watertown Square, facade improvement programs, universal design, working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to enhance recreational opportunities near Charles River, and improving wayfinding. Community Preservation Act funds and public-private partnerships are two potential funding sources discussed by community members.

MBTA Communities Zoning

The MBTA Communities Zoning working group explored the community's preferences on district boundaries, densities, and required features in complying with the MBTA Communities law, which requires creating a zoning district in Watertown allowing multifamily housing by right at or over 15 units an acre and has the capacity for 1,701 units. While the discussion yielded highly varied preferences on density, there was a general consensus on allowing higher density residential developments around the Delta and along the Arsenal Street and North Beacon Street corridors, and transitioning to lower density further away to the west from Watertown Square. Most community members also supported incorporating parcels lining Galen Street into the zoning district. On the topic of commercial use in new developments, many were in favor of requiring developments to be mixed-use on parcels near the Delta lining Main, Mount Auburn, Arsenal, and North Beacon streets. However, some community members expressed concerns about allowing any by-right development on a select few highly visible parcels near the Delta and its consequences on the character of the built form.