A recent Facebook post and comments highlighted one segment of the Mount Auburn Street project: changes in street parking along Mount Auburn Street between Parker Street and Chester Street. There are changes proposed as part of the project all along Mount Auburn Street to improve safety and operations. These changes are the result of a detailed operational and safety analysis of the project area. The analysis identified deficiencies in roadway, traffic and safety, in particular, illegal operations such as location of parking spaces.

Improving safety at project area intersections requires changes to the current parking layouts. The existing parking spaces within the Mount Auburn Street at Common Street intersection present a safety hazard for both vehicular traffic and pedestrians alike. According to Massachusetts General Laws, Section 700 CMR 5.501, parking within an intersection is prohibited due to these safety concerns. As such, the spaces currently located within the intersection must be removed as part of the project, regardless of any other parking changes that are implemented. The parking spaces at this location are not being eliminated, but rather they are being relocated to the opposite side of Mount Auburn Street to a location that is safe and legal according to Massachusetts General Law, MassDOT design guidelines and Federal Standards.

The design team understands the importance of parking to local businesses. During public meetings, residents and business owners have expressed a strong desire to preserve or enhance parking in each of the business districts along Mt. Auburn Street. The team determined that additional parking can be provided in this business district to compensate for the loss of parking at the intersections.
First, the team found that an additional 10 parking spaces can be provided on the westbound side of Mt. Auburn Street, between Russell Ave. and Common Street, where no spaces are currently provided. Although parking on the westbound side of the street requires patrons to cross the street to access the nearby businesses, there are benefits to this arrangement. Currently, vehicles traveling westbound on Mount Auburn Street must circulate through the neighborhoods to access the eastbound parking spaces. This will be reduced or eliminated with the newly created spaces.

Second, the team met with the MBTA to review the inbound bus stops at Patten Street, Parker Street, Russell Ave., and Walnut Street. These bus stops are closely spaced by MBTA standards. Also, the current location of the bus stop at Parker Street means that Transit Signal Prioritization (TSP) would not be able to be implemented at Common Street. TSP requires the bus stop to be located after the signal (“far side”) to allow for increased capacity and safety benefits. Improving transit speed and reliability is one of our Complete Streets goals, and TSP can reduce delays at traffic signals by holding green lights and reducing red lights for buses. Relocating the bus stop to Mount Auburn Street at Chester Street allows TSP to be implemented at Common Street. The implementation of far-side bus stops, project-wide, has also gained support from the MBTA as a way of improving the level of service, relieving intersection congestion and improving traffic operations.

Although the remaining 3 parking spaces are removed between Parker Street and Chester Street, an additional 7 spaces can be restored between Phillips Street and Parker Street. Furthermore, removal of the Russell Ave. bus stop allows 5 additional spaces to be restored near Russell Ave., when these two bus stops become one consolidated, relocated stop at Chester Street. The consolidation of the inbound bus stops in the vicinity of Common Street and other safety measures were viewed with overwhelming public support at the May 14, 2018 Mount Auburn Street Open House held at the Hosmer Elementary School.

Although parking spaces have been “relocated” between blocks of the roadway in this segment, the actual number of provided legal parking spaces has increased from 17 existing spaces (which includes the 7 spaces noted as illegal) to 22 legal spaces between Phillips Street and Otis Street (south side, eastbound) and Russell Avenue to Marshall Street (north side, westbound). By relocating parking spaces to an appropriate and convenient location, Watertown preserves rather than eliminates parking spaces for the convenience of all users. Moreover, the relocated parking spaces, in conjunction with safer intersections and pedestrian facilities, will retain parking along Mount Auburn Street safely and ensure parking and traffic is not redirected to the neighborhood streets.

We understand that concerns have been raised regarding handicapped parking near the adjacent businesses. Although there are currently no handicapped spaces provided in the block between Phillips Street and Chester Street, we will consult with the MBTA to see if a handicapped parking space could be provided in addition to the relocated bus stop. We will also consider if a handicapped parking or short-term loading space could be provided on Chester Street, adjacent to the commercial building.
In addition, a new signalized intersection with pedestrian equipment, ADA compliant curb ramps, and a crosswalk will be constructed to allow for safe pedestrian travel to area residents and businesses. As the design progresses, we look forward to continuing to engage the community about providing additional amenities in the business areas, such as benches, tables and bike racks to make the area more comfortable and attractive for shopping, dining, gathering, and socializing.

The intent of the project is to improve safety and traffic operations for all users along the corridor by incorporating Complete Street design principles. Organizing and optimizing on-street parking will preserve and create legal spaces throughout the Mount Auburn Street corridor.

We have attached a plan showing the proposed parking and parking changes. For additional information and to sign up for email updates about future opportunities to participate, please visit the project website: www.MountAuburnStreet.com.