

Watertown Square Area Plan

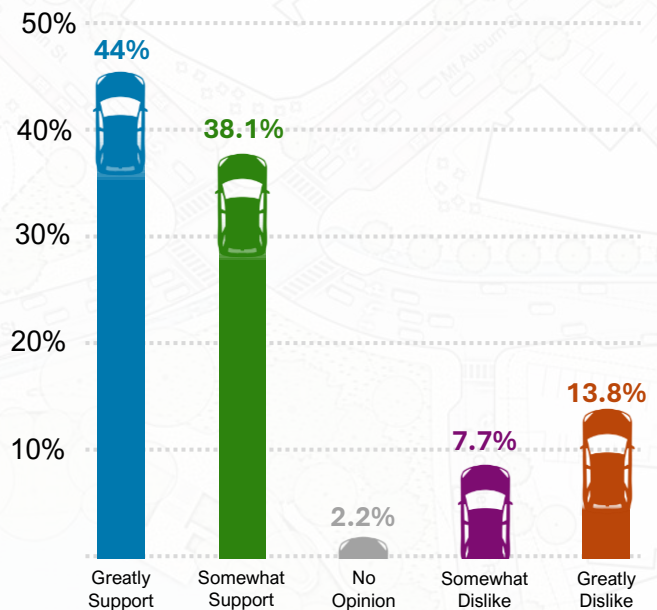
April 4, 2024
Public Forum
Public Feedback Review

On April 4, 2024, the City of Watertown hosted a Public Forum reviewing the proposed plans for the street reconfiguration scheme, urban form, and MBTA Communities zoning details. The event hosted nearly 300 people in-person and over 100 more watching from home. Below is a review of the multiple-choice feedback form responses received from both online submissions and paper copies. In total, the City received 499 submission to the feedback form between April 4-13.

Transportation & Streetscape

At the April 4 Public Forum, the City and Design Team presented a final draft proposal for an updated streetscape– the Four Corners plan. At the completion of the meeting, and online afterwards, the City received 483 responses to the question specifically about the updated street proposal. Of those responses, 44% responded that they “greatly support”, and 38.1% “somewhat support” the updated proposal. Meaning 82.1% of the responses received at least “somewhat support” the updated streetscape design. The City and Design team are analyzing the open response data received to learn the specifics about the Four Corners scheme that residents feel are important to incorporate into the plan and future implementation.

Share your general thoughts about the updated street proposal



Trends of Community Feedback



Getting Through the Square

43.9% “greatly support” and 29.6% “somewhat support” the current proposal of getting through the Square. Although receiving general support for the proposed plan, several detailed questions raised will be addressed as part of the final draft plan or incorporated in the engineering design phase.



Gathering Space

Throughout this process, the City has regularly received feedback supporting gathering spaces, greenspaces, and plazas. This continued, as over 50% of responses “greatly support” the proposed gathering spaces.



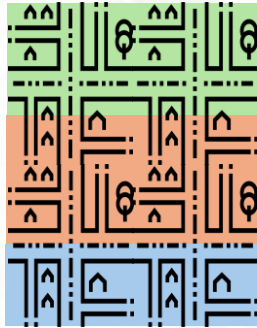
Pedestrian Safety

Safety considerations are something the City Team, Design Team, and community have continually given attention to. This feedback form highlighted participant appreciation and (in some cases) concern for safety in specific areas of the Square.

Zoning & Urban Design

The feedback about zoning and urban design continues to vary across different opinions among the community. The feedback form asked a series of questions about the MBTA Communities Zoning approach (471 responses), the Building Heights (479 responses), and specific zoning approaches in areas around the Square (499 responses).

MBTA Zoning Approach



Too Big
35%

Just Right
39.5%

Too Small
25.5%

With the new MBTA Communities Zoning Law, the City of Watertown needs to add by-right zoning that accommodates a minimum of 1,701 units to comply. The Comprehensive Plan identified Watertown Square as the most appropriate location for this capacity. The proposal put forward by the City zones for a “unit capacity” of 3,133. This is a measurement of the maximum number of units that could be built should the land be vacant. This does not mean 3,133 units are being built if this proposal is approved. In response to the question about whether the respondents believe zoning for a 3,133 units capacity is “too big”, “just right”, or “too small”, responses spread across the spectrum, ranging from 39.5% (Just Right), to 25.5% (Too Small).

Building Heights

The Watertown Square Area Plan is also considering updates to the current zoning with regards to how buildings are designed and allowing for more flexible maximum building heights around the Square. After collecting the responses to the feedback form, a combined 55.9% of responses indicated the proposed building heights were “just right” or could be bigger. This is made up of 35.2% responding the proposed heights were “just right”, and 20.7% responding they’re “too small”. Meanwhile, 44.1% of respondents indicated that they believe the proposed building heights are “too big” and wish for them to be smaller.



Too Big
44.1%

Just Right
35.2%

Too Small
20.7%

Choosing a Zoning Approach

The proposal includes two zoning approaches for approval – “by-right” and “special permit” – that could be applied to all or portions of the study area. By-right zoning would allow development projects to be reviewed and approved by the Planning Board as a site plan review hearing. This approach only allows for the Board to include reasonable modifications for approval and a project can not be denied. On the other hand, the special permit process allows the Zoning Board of Appeals or Planning Board to deny a proposed project, or (more typically) give a conditional approval that can limit, add, or clarify what specifically is being approved. There are benefits and drawbacks to each approach, however regardless of the approach, there are limitations and parameters to what is allowed with all zoning. Below are the percentage of responses to each zoning approach option in the feedback form. They are each given a percentage out of the total 499 form responses received.

By-right through the study area

31.1%

By-right in areas important to transform

42.5%

Special permits on blocks with important older buildings

59.9%

Special permits on blocks near residential areas with lower density

50.9%