

Watertown Square Area Plan



City Council/Planning Board Hearing

Thursday, June 13, 2024



City of Watertown, MA | planning@watertown-ma.gov

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Goals for Watertown Square

Why are we making a new plan for Watertown Square?

- To create lively public spaces
- To create street design that promotes safe walking and biking
- To ensure that small businesses can thrive
- To promote shared public-private open spaces that are activated and expanded, with more access to the Charles River
- To create expanded housing options
- To explore more opportunities for public art
- To reuse, enhance, or preserve the Square's most significant historic structures
- To make the Square a destination for residents and visitors alike, with attractions for community members to visit and spend time



Watertown Square Area Plan

City Council/Planning Board Review Draft
May 30, 2024



City of Watertown, MA

Elements of the Plan

Existing Conditions Analysis

- Synthesis of past plans, including the Comprehensive Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and Resilient Watertown
- Identify travel patterns and desire lines
- Analysis of current small businesses
- Soft sites analysis

Public Engagement

- Stakeholder Engagement: Watertown Business Coalition, Kitchen Table Conversations with the Community Conversations group
- Polis Online Survey
- Design Charrette

Urban Design & Redevelopment Scenarios

- Potential development opportunities
- Public realm recommendations: street reconfiguration/lane diet
- Urban realm design: open space proposal acknowledging subsurface conditions and their impact at grade

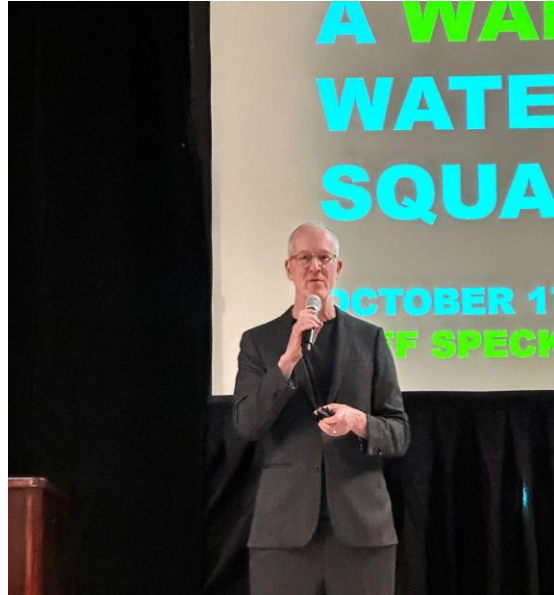
Transportation & Parking Plan

- Detailed conceptual plan for redesigned street right-of-ways
- Implementation timeline
- High-level peer review

Rezoning

- Development of a tiered zoning approach
- MBTA Communities compliance analysis
- Public engagement: Webinar and WCATV

Public Engagement



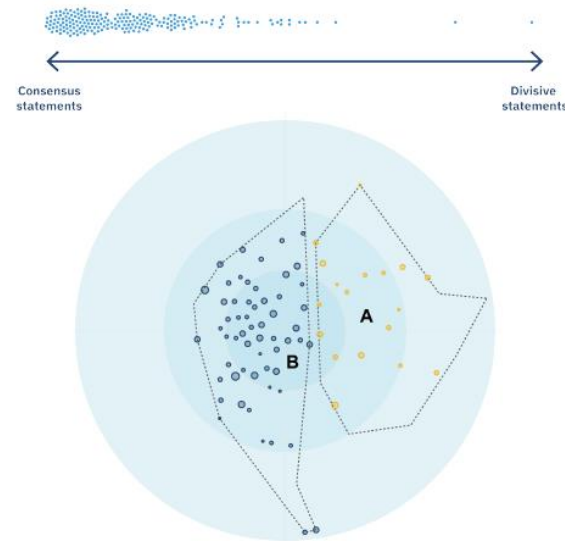
First Public Meeting
October 17

The project kicked-off with a talk by Jeff Speck during the first public meeting, which focused on opportunities and strategies to make the Square a more walkable, mixed-use destination.



Kitchen Table Conversations
October 23 - November 16

Watertown Community Conversations held Kitchen Table Conversations to engage the community in what you like about Watertown Square and what you'd like to see change.



Polis Online Survey
October 23 - November 16

The Polis online survey was launched concurrent with the KTC to engage a broader swath of the community for feedback on Watertown Square and what should be implemented in the future.



Design Charrette
November 28 - 30

The Design Charrette took place over three days and involved an interactive exercise between the consultant team and the public to imagine alternative urban design scenarios for Watertown Square.



Second Public Meeting
February 29

The second public meeting presented refinements to the Four Corners and Mini Main St public realm schemes that emerged from the charrette. The design team also presented initial zoning proposals, including options for compliance with MBTA Communities.



Third Public Meeting
April 4

The third public meeting presented refinements to the preferred Four Corners scheme, as well as refinements to the zoning recommendations and the boundaries of the by-right "collar."

Public Realm

Urban Design Features
Mobility Infrastructure

Existing Condition

Current Plan



4 Corners

Concept Plan



4 Corners

Area Reclaimed for Public Realm

156,730 SF

Gained Space

10,220 SF

Lost Space

146,510 SF

(3.36 AC)

Net Gained Space



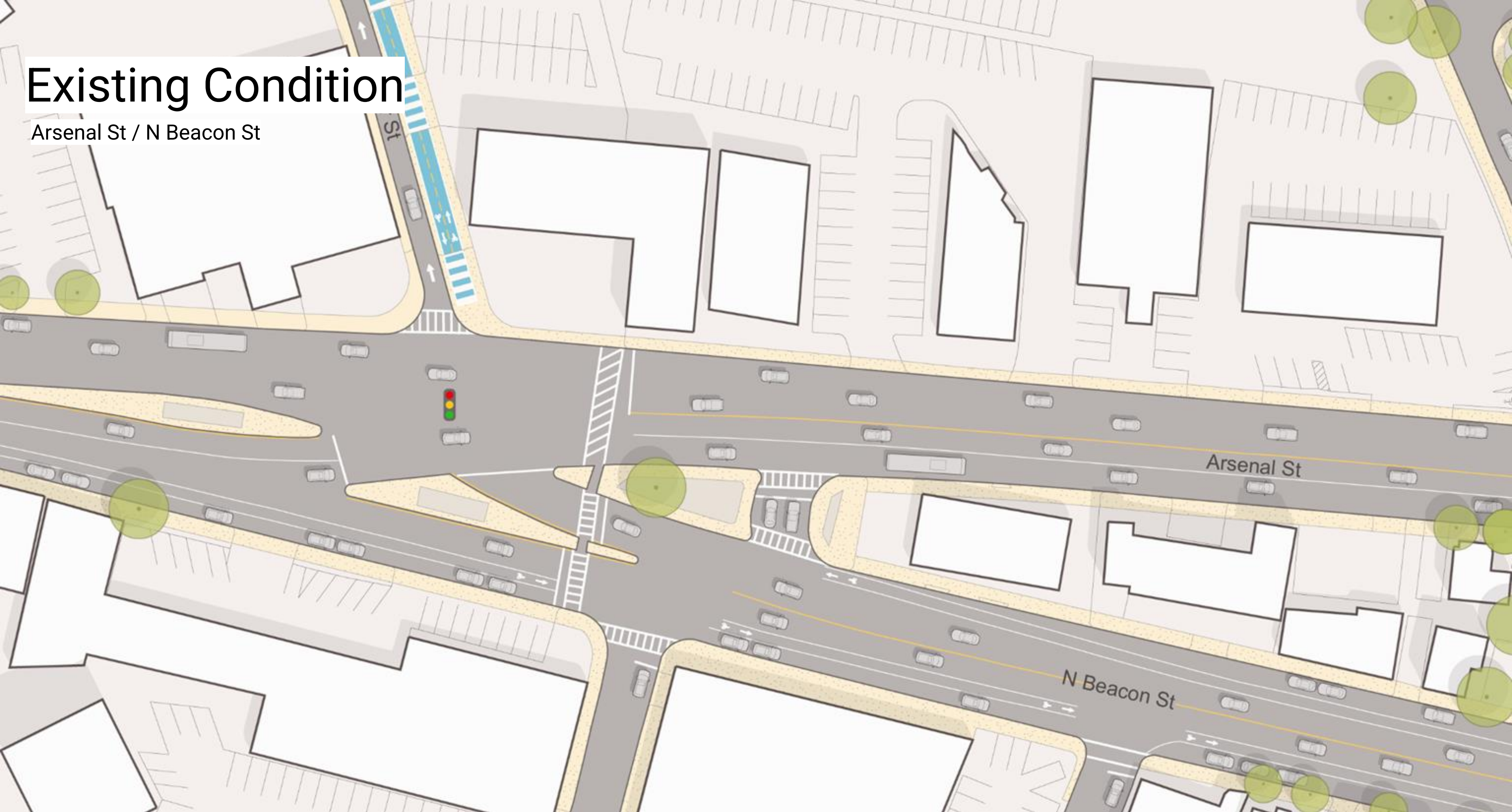
4 Corners

Concept Plan



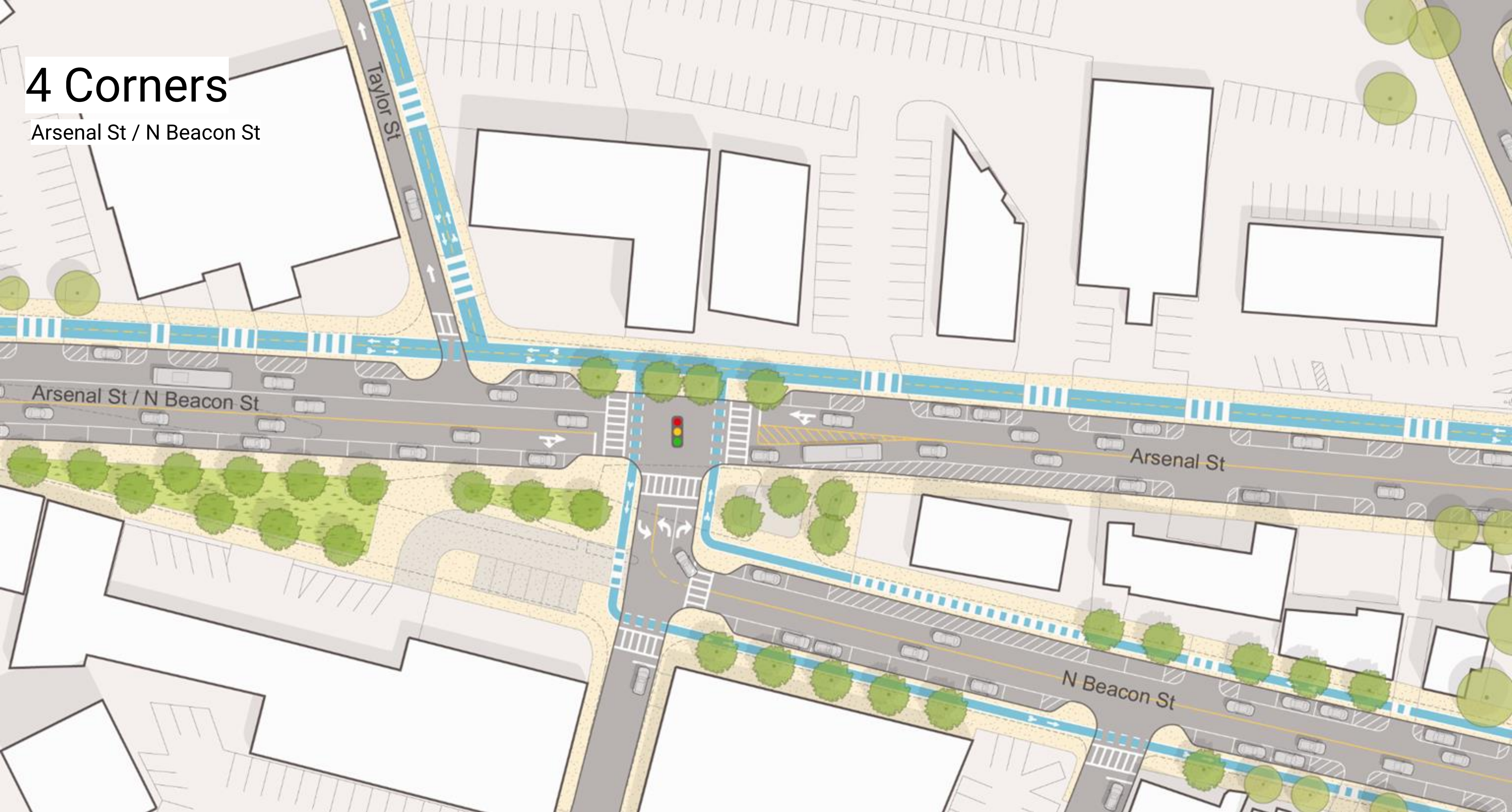
Existing Condition

Arsenal St / N Beacon St



4 Corners

Arsenal St / N Beacon St



4 Corners

Concept Axonometric

- Residential
- Retail
- Parking



4 Corners

Key Urban Design Moments

- Residential
- Retail
- Parking

Redistribution of existing off-street surface parking spaces to on-street parking and centralized parking structure

Denser, context-sensitive mixed-use developments

Redeveloped municipal parking lot sites

Increased residential developments

Pedestrian-friendly path

Activated street wall framing the Square

Increased retail frontage and public realm spaces

Retail Pavilions

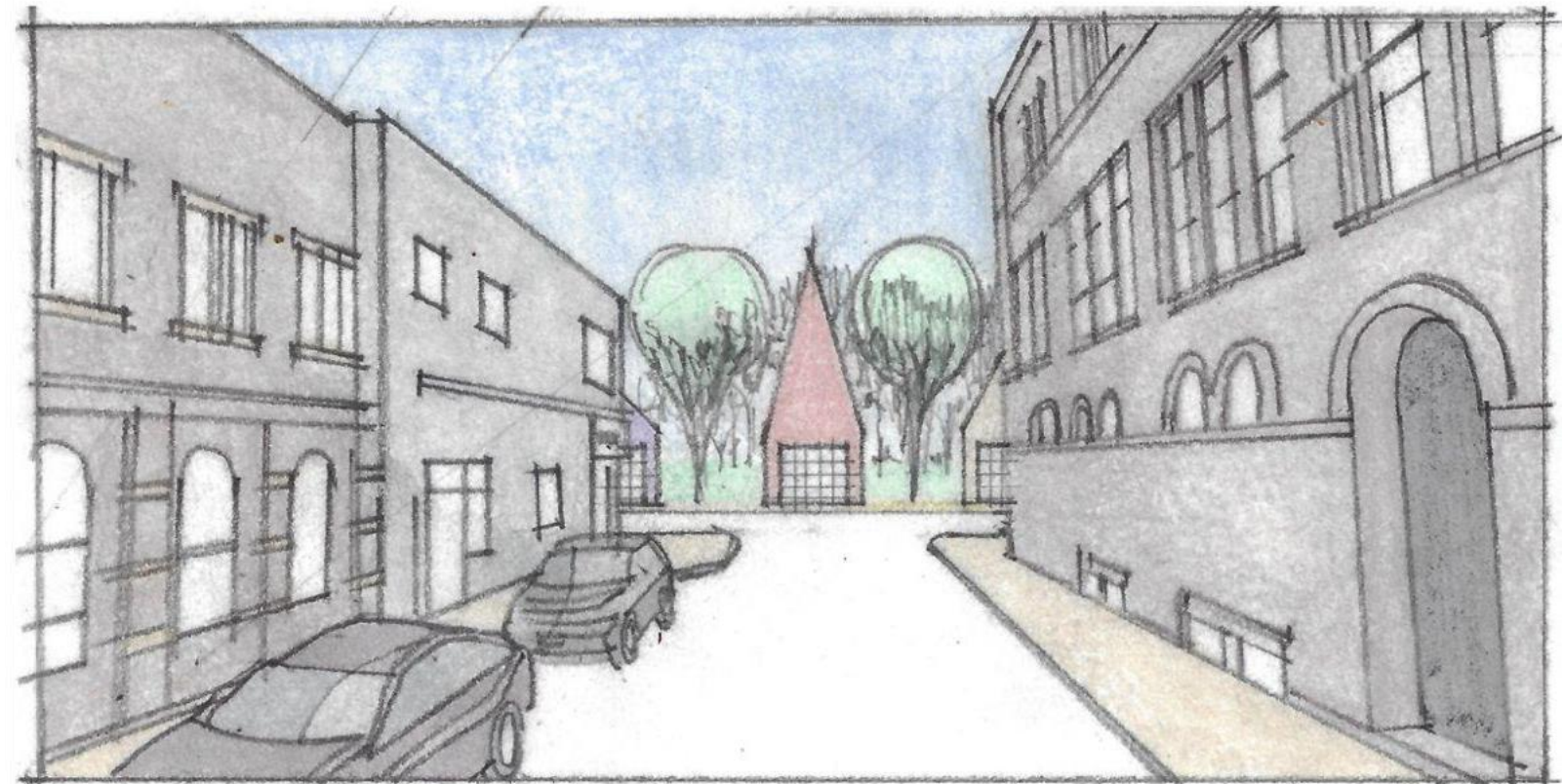
Programmed event spaces on expanded central green

Widened sidewalk and activated outdoor spaces

Expanded tree canopy coverage

Reclaimed open space and enhanced views/access to riverfront

Opportunities for Civic Art

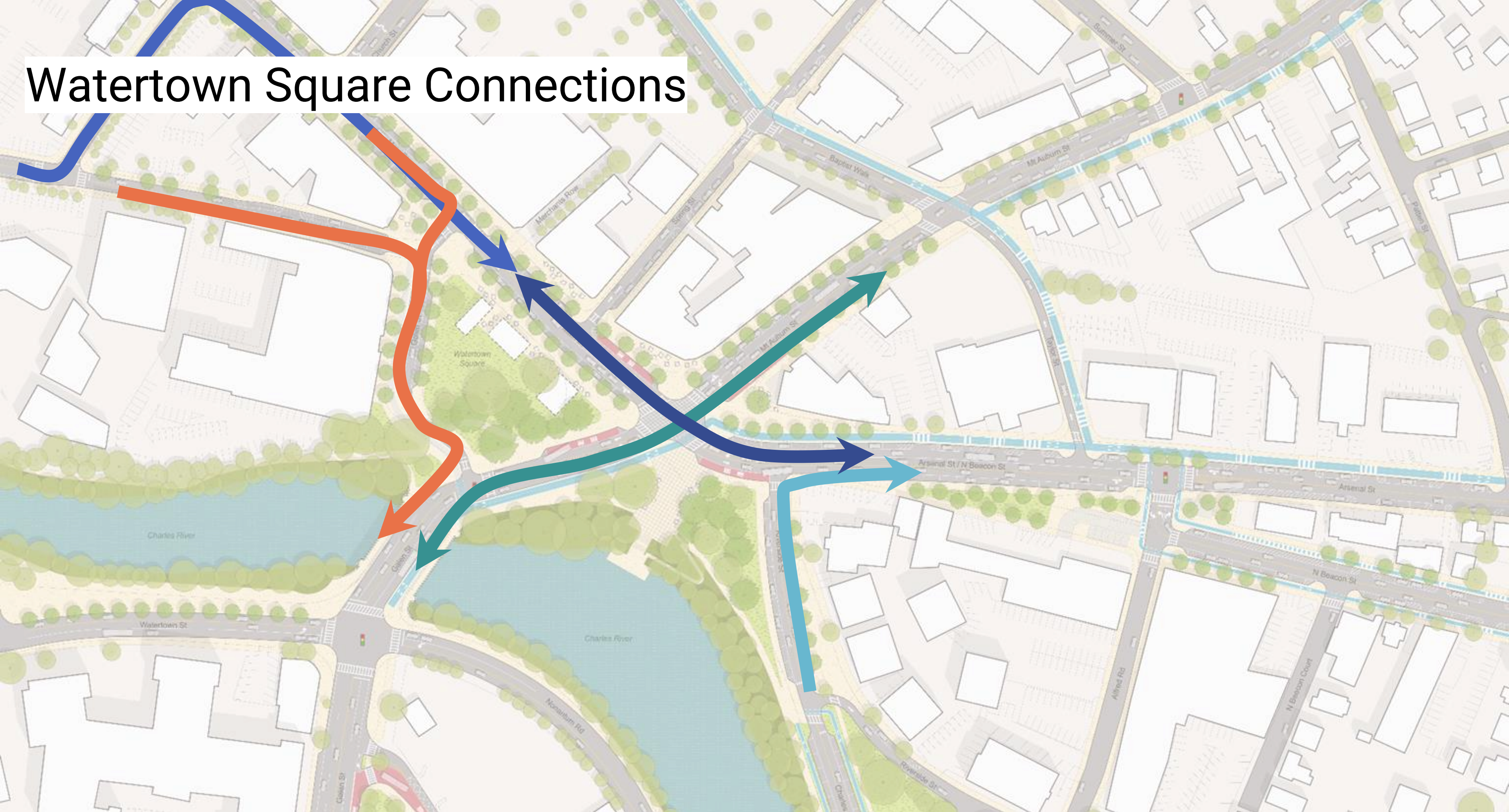


4 Corners

Concept Plan



Watertown Square Connections



Multimodal Benefits



Expanded curbside for parking and loading, activating storefronts



Complete bicycle network and enhanced bus stops in Watertown Square to prioritize cyclists and transit riders



Consolidate bus terminus for Route 59 and 71 at Watertown Yard for seamless transfers

Zoning Redesign

Zoning Recommendations
MBTA Communities Compliance

By-Right vs Special Permit



By-Right / Site Plan Review zoning is concentrated in a small area in and near the center of the Square

- Desirable in areas where the City wants to encourage transformation
- Desirable for publicly-owned parcels (e.g./ Watertown Yard and municipal parking lots) because of community and City Council involvement during the site redevelopment process



Special Permit zoning applies to the rest of the study area and provides additional care for development on sensitive sites

- Desirable on sites whose buildings contribute to the existing character of the Square and/or contain important legacy businesses
- Desirable for parcels that abut lower-density residential districts

Criteria for Compliance

MBTA Communities

1A. District Shape, Size, and Density

- Contiguity standards- 50% of land area in one contiguous district, all districts at least 5 acres
- Minimum district(s) area
- Gross Density requirement
- Mandatory mixed-use districts are limited to 25% of the required multi-family unit capacity

1B. Zoning Standards

- Setbacks, height limits, parking requirements, etc. allowed
- No age restrictions
- No restrictions on # of bedrooms, size of bedrooms, # of occupants

2. Multi-Family Unit Capacity

1,701 unit capacity

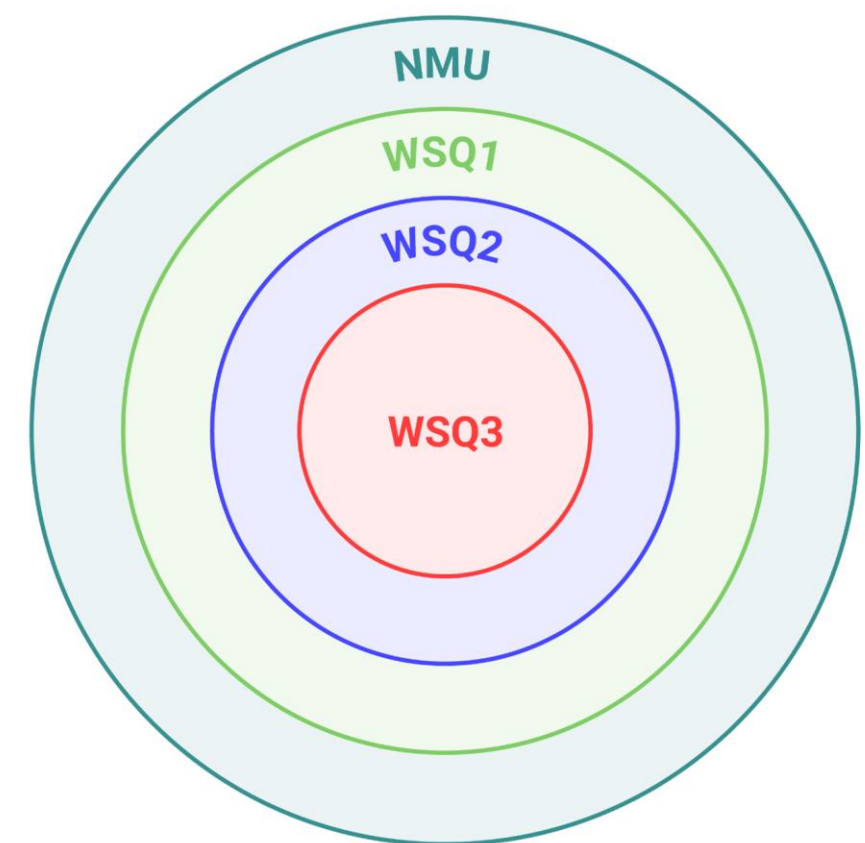
Compliance Deadline:
December 31, 2024

This is simply a zoning capacity - not a requirement to *build* a certain number of units

Zoning Recommendations

Tiered Zoning Approach

The proposed code uses a **tiered zoning approach**: Higher density zones are concentrated around a central commercial area and lower density zones transition to smaller-scale residential areas.



WSQ3:
5+ stories



WSQ2:
4+ stories



WSQ1:
3+ stories



NMU:
2+ stories

Note:
The "+" floor is an occupiable penthouse

Proposed Zoning

Partial Study Area Zoned By-Right

Unit Capacity:

3,133 units

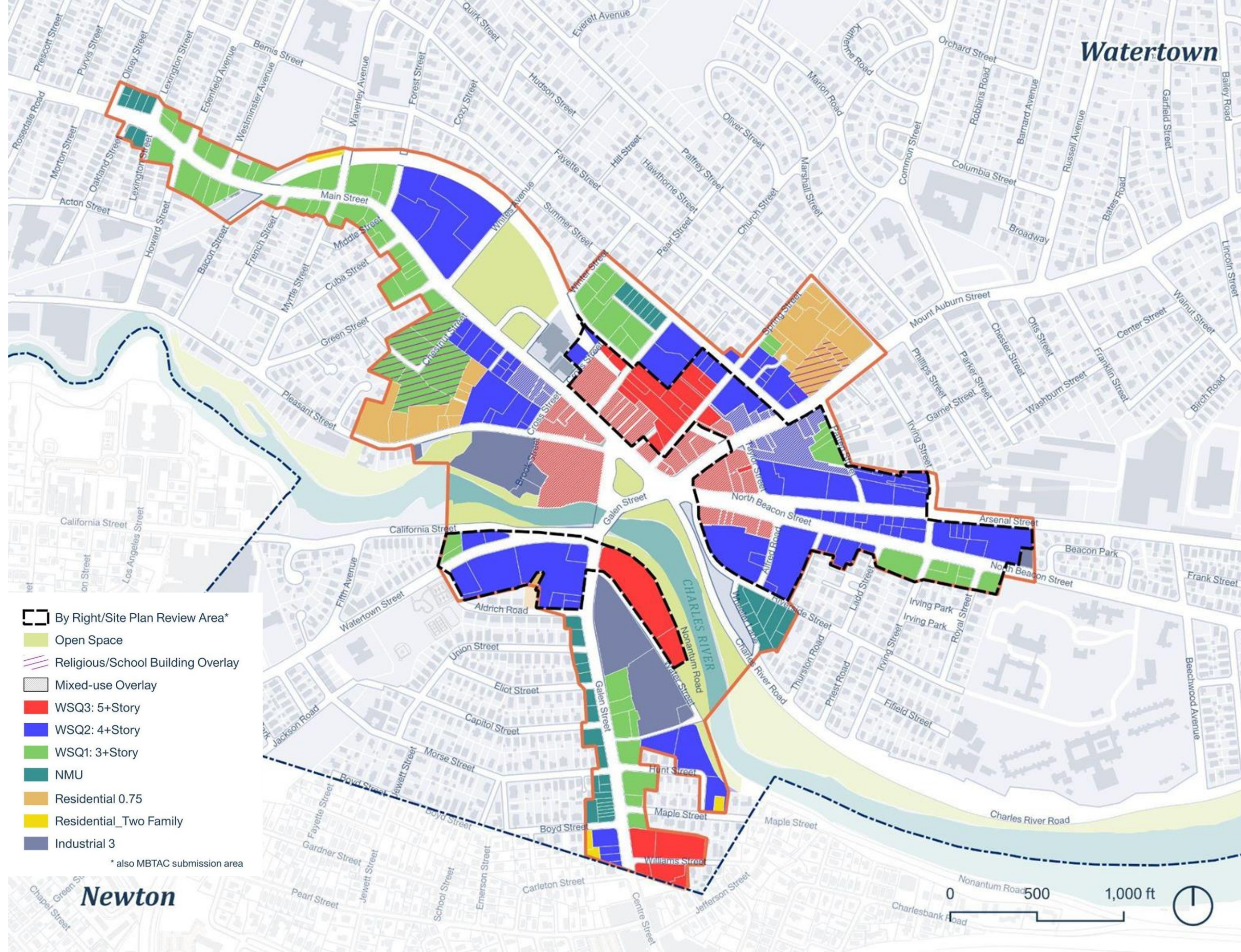
(1,432 units beyond requirement)

The by-right boundary represents the parcels that will be submitted toward MBTA Communities. **Parcels within this boundary are by-right and subject to Site Plan Review.**

All re-zoned parcels outside this boundary are Special Permit. These include historic buildings and extended mixed-use required areas.

Notes:

- Only zones within the submission boundary were tested
- Assumes 0.5 parking spaces/unit
- Includes unit capacity of Mixed-Use parcels
- Publicly owned parcels do not count toward the unit capacity



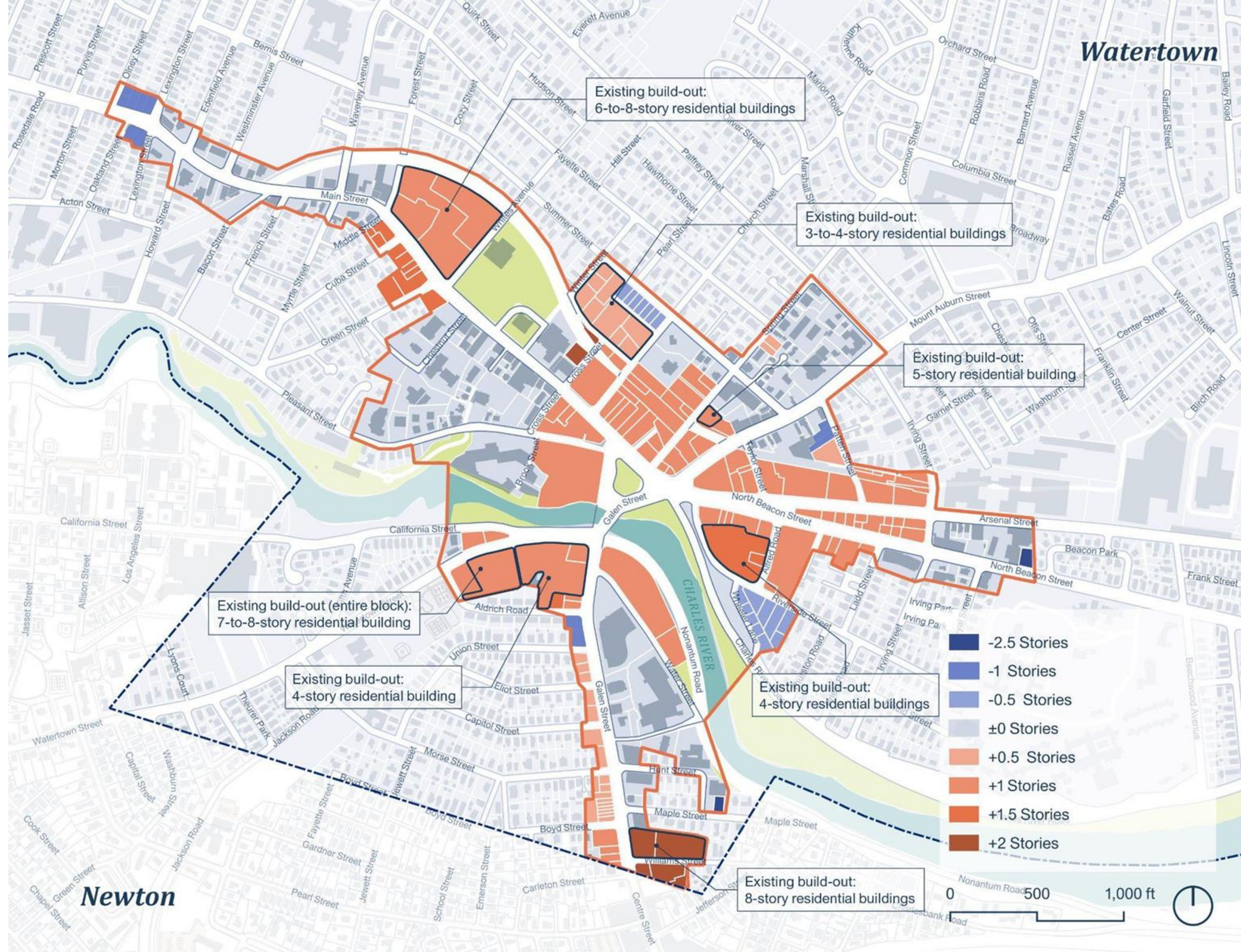
Change in Height

Comparing Proposed vs Existing Zoning Heights

The proposed zoning **does not substantially increase building heights** compared to what is currently possible with the existing zoning in the Square.

Half of the parcels in the study area will have no change in height under the proposed zoning, with the other half increasing in height by 0.5 - 1 story.

There are some instances where the existing buildings on site are taller than the proposed zoning, as noted on the map.



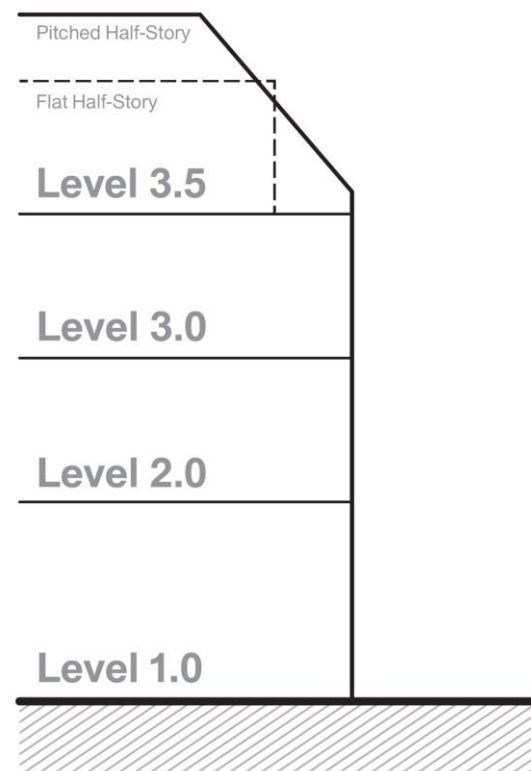
Zoning Approach

Form-based code “light”

We propose a zoning code that regulates urban form through the following principal mechanisms:

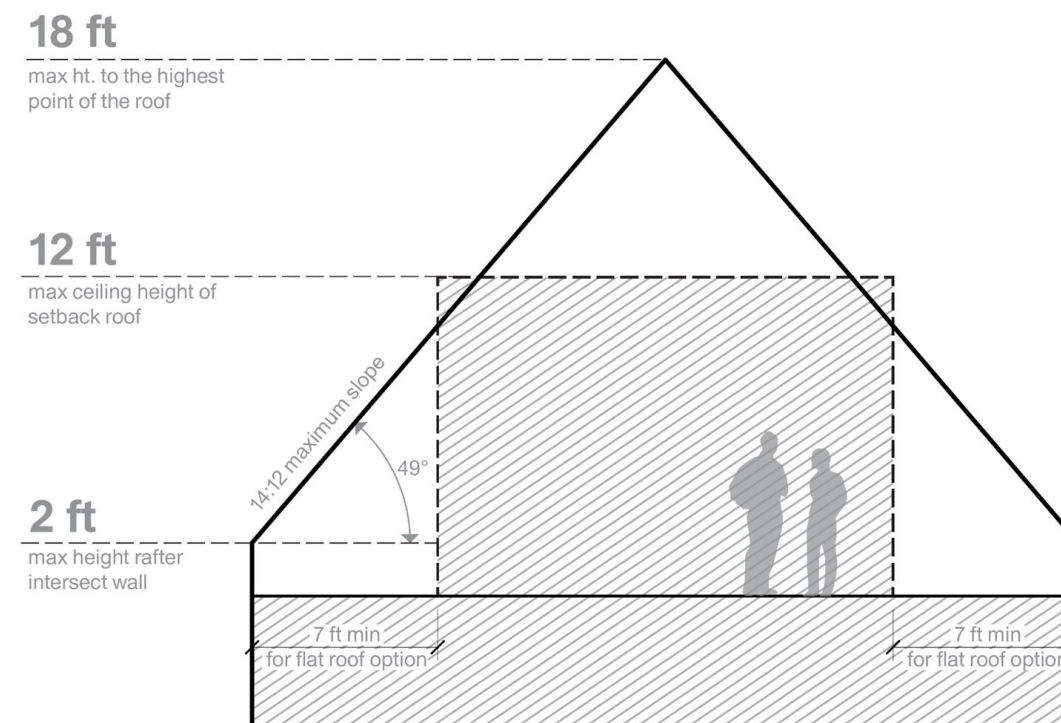
1 Building Height

Sets the maximum height in stories/feet



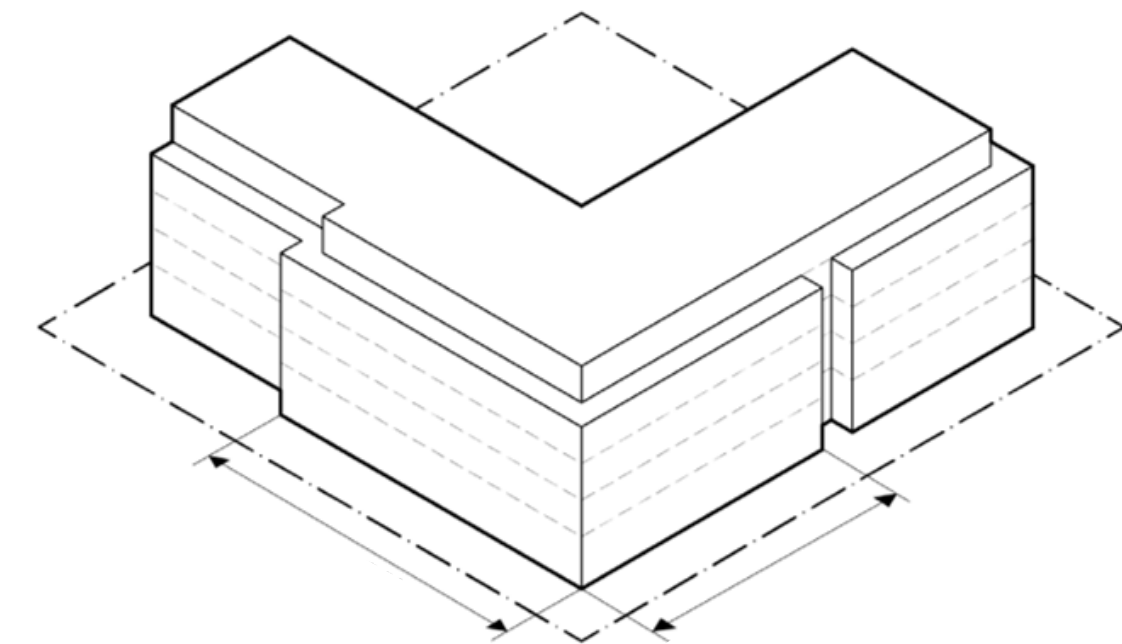
2 Roof Form

Provides options for a flat or pitched roof half-story



3 Facade Articulation

Provides options to break down building massing and diversify facades



Building Placement

Design Standards

The proposed code integrates the following urban design and open space goals:

- **Promotes wider sidewalks** by requiring new development in the WSQ1, WSQ2, and WSQ3 districts to be set back an additional distance in order to provide 12' of sidewalk between the curb and building facade
- **Promotes vibrancy and activation** by proposing zero lot lines along the front and side setbacks in the denser districts and a minimum facade build out ratio
- **Promotes quality outdoor spaces** by proposing minimum outdoor space requirements in the lower-height districts, and minimum civic space requirements for large lots to provide publicly-accessible open space

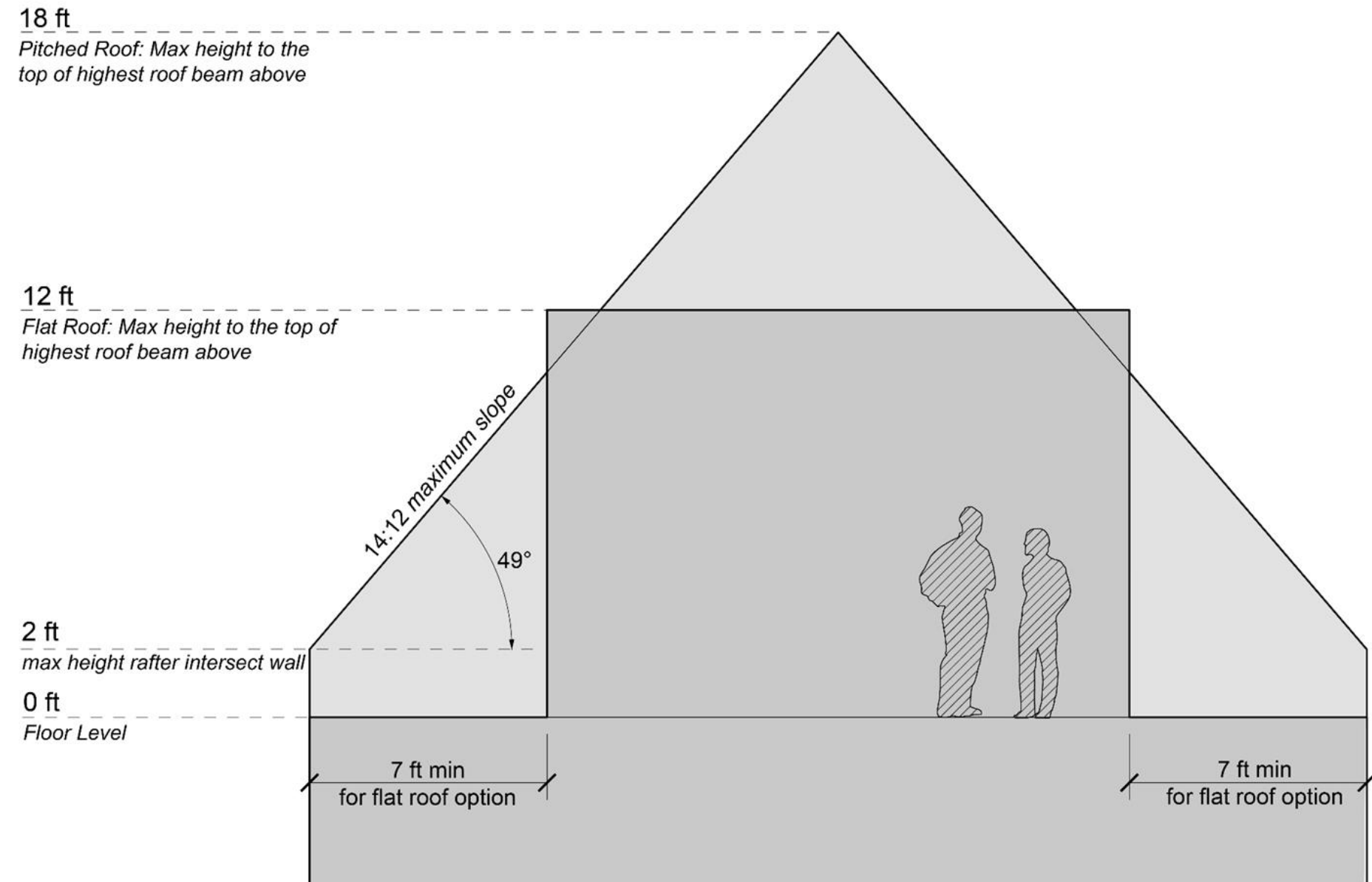


Building/Story Height

Design Standards

The code proposes regulating maximum building heights in the following ways:

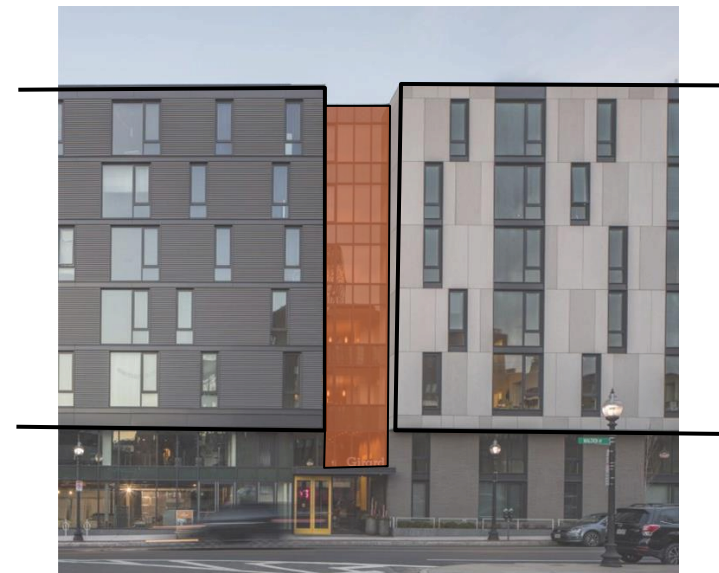
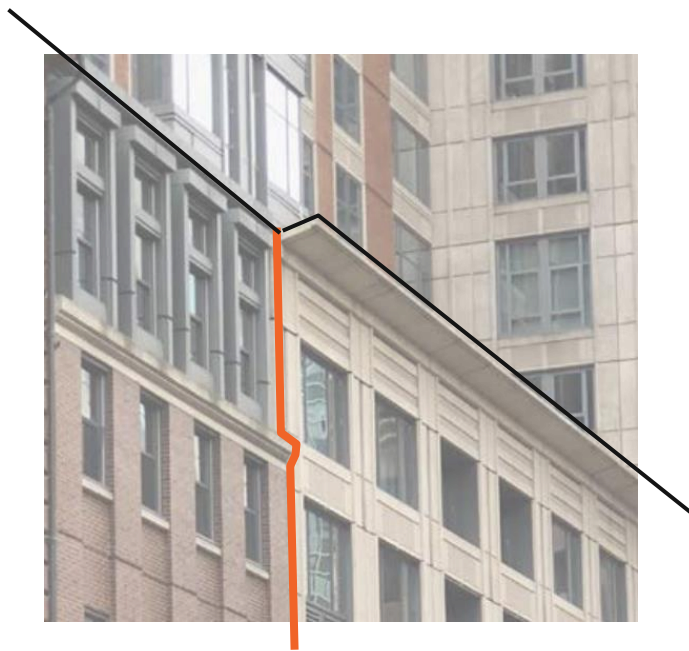
- **Sets maximum height based on stories and feet**, with different maximum building heights based on pitched roof or flat roof buildings
- **Sets minimum and maximum ground story height**, with lower ground floor heights for the lower tier districts and higher ground floor heights for the WSQ3 district
- **Sets maximum roof (+ story) heights**, with greater height allowed for pitched roofs to provide design flexibility
- **Sets minimum flat roof setbacks** that are deep enough to allow for usable balcony space



Facade Articulation

Design Standards

Facades may be no longer than 100' without having a facade demise line or facade recess/offset.



Demise Line

Recess / Offset



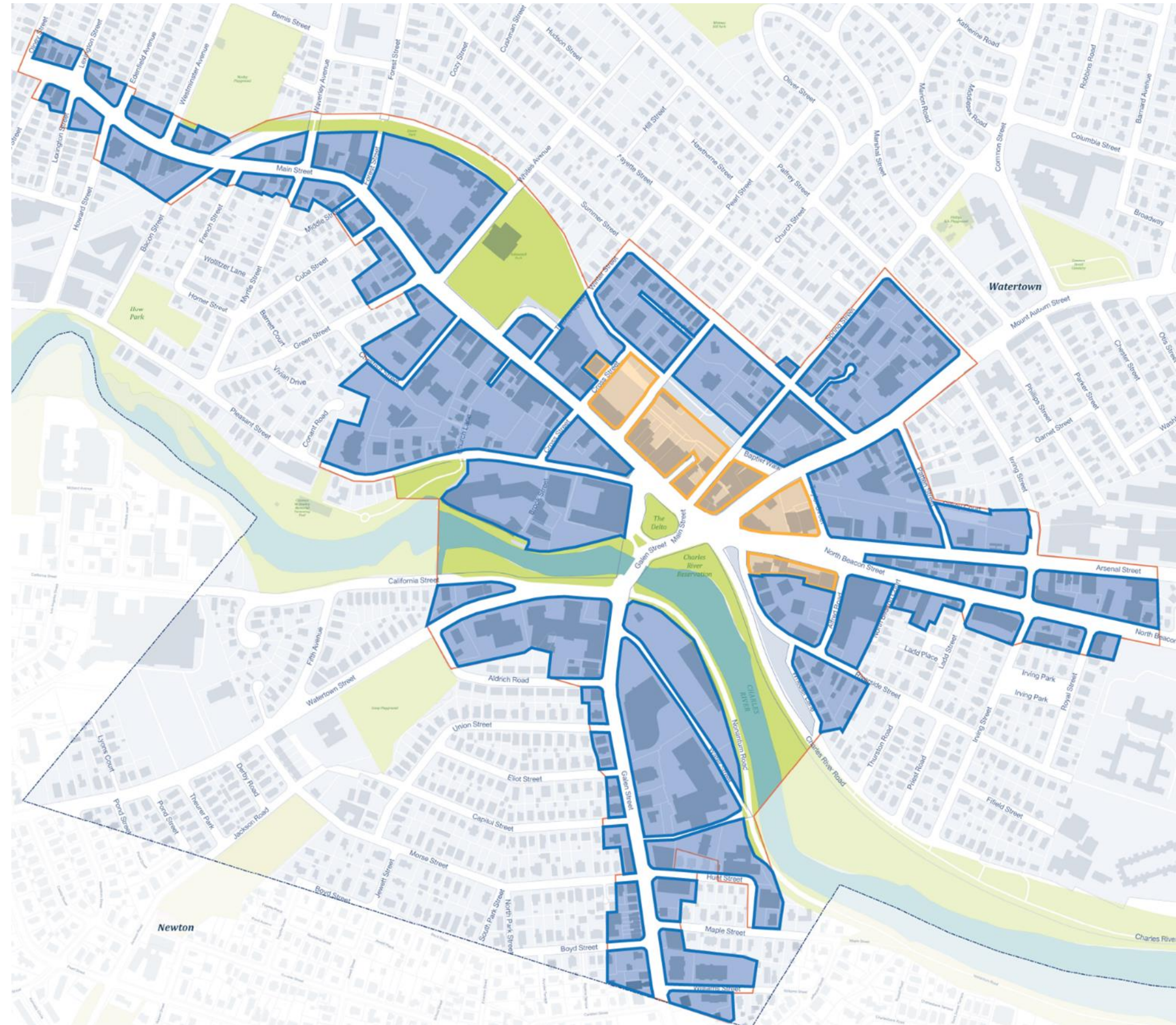
Required

Not Required



Required

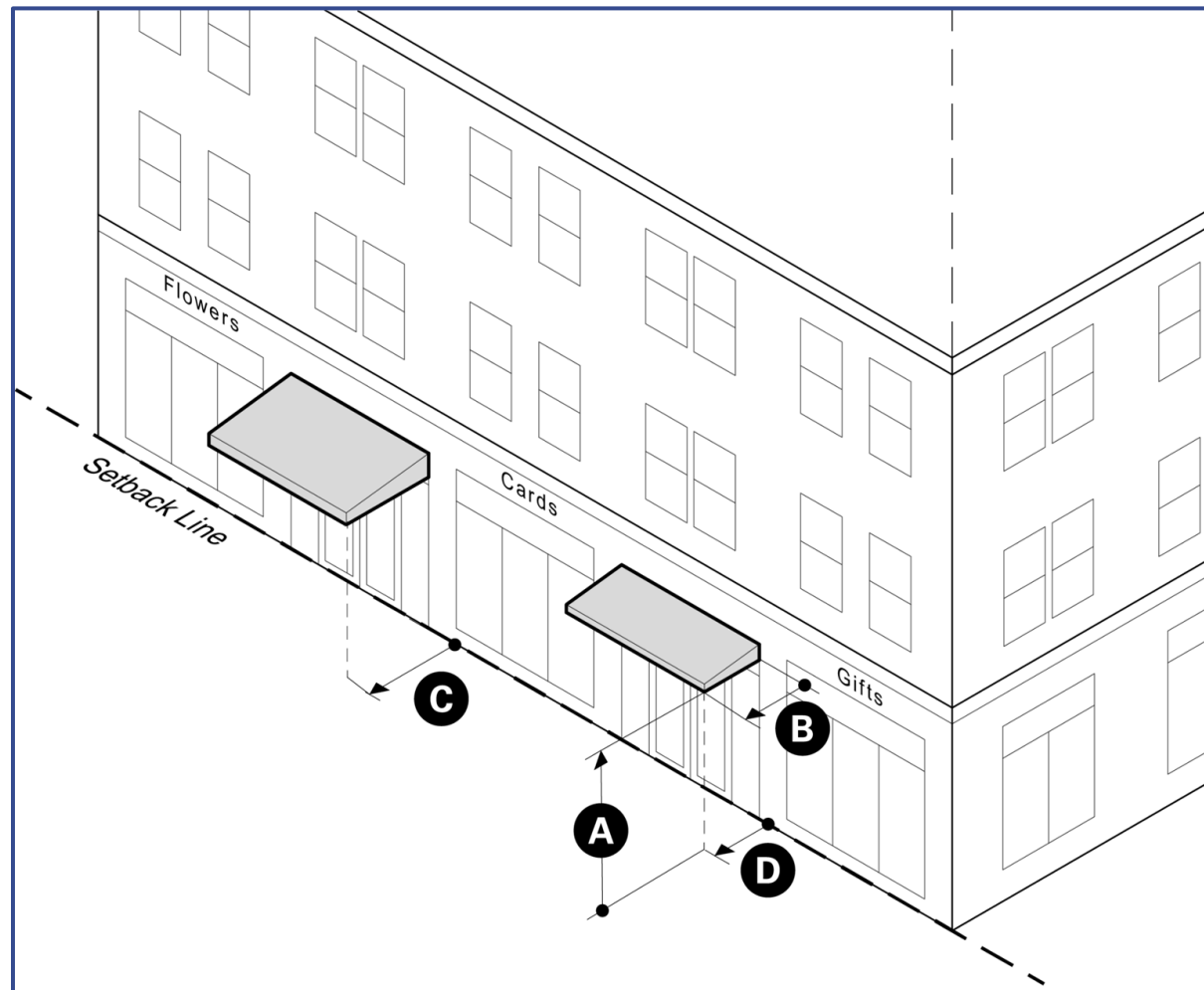
Required



Architectural Features

Design Standards

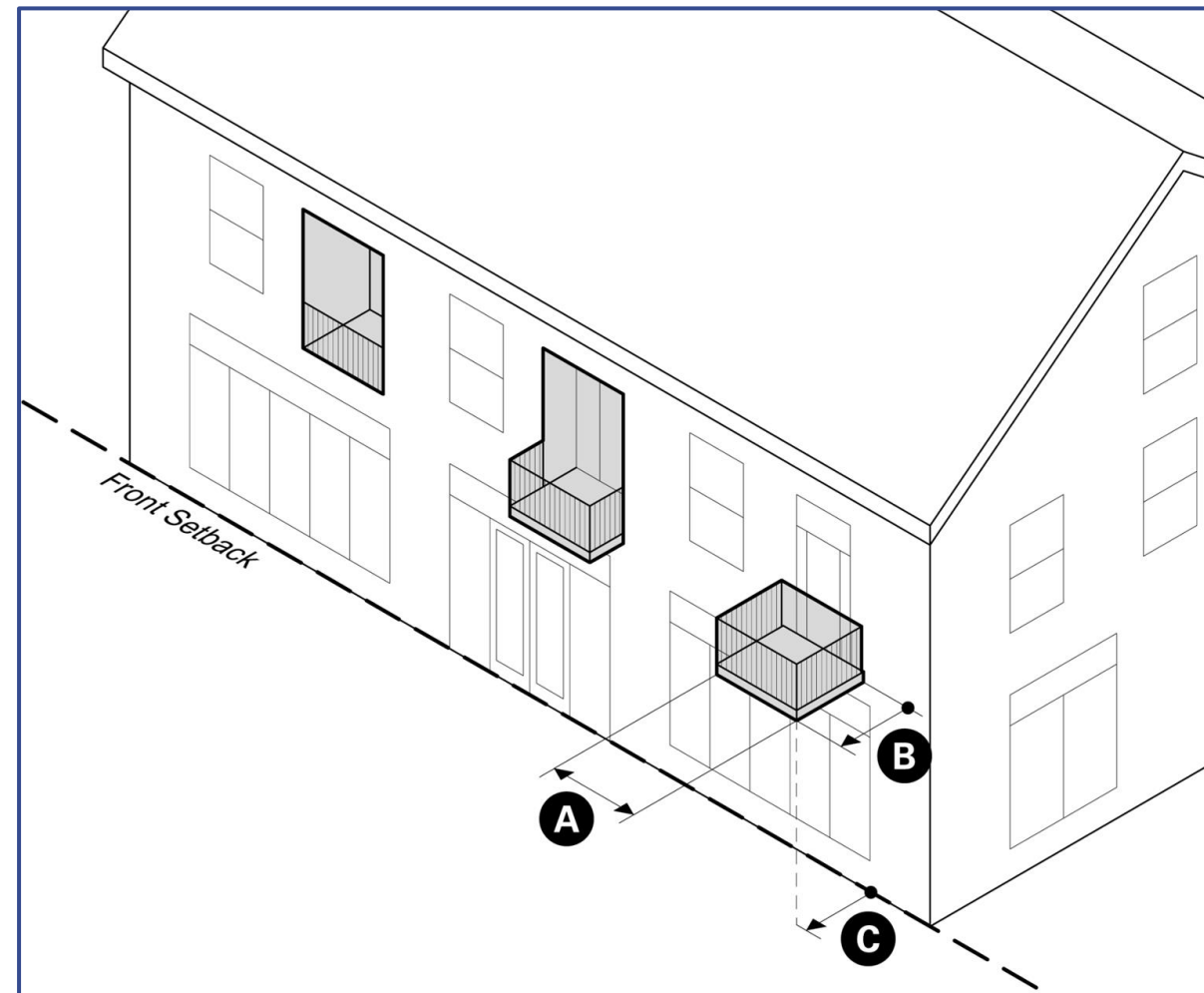
Awnings



Standards include:

- Width and depth
- Clearance above grade
- Extension into the right of way

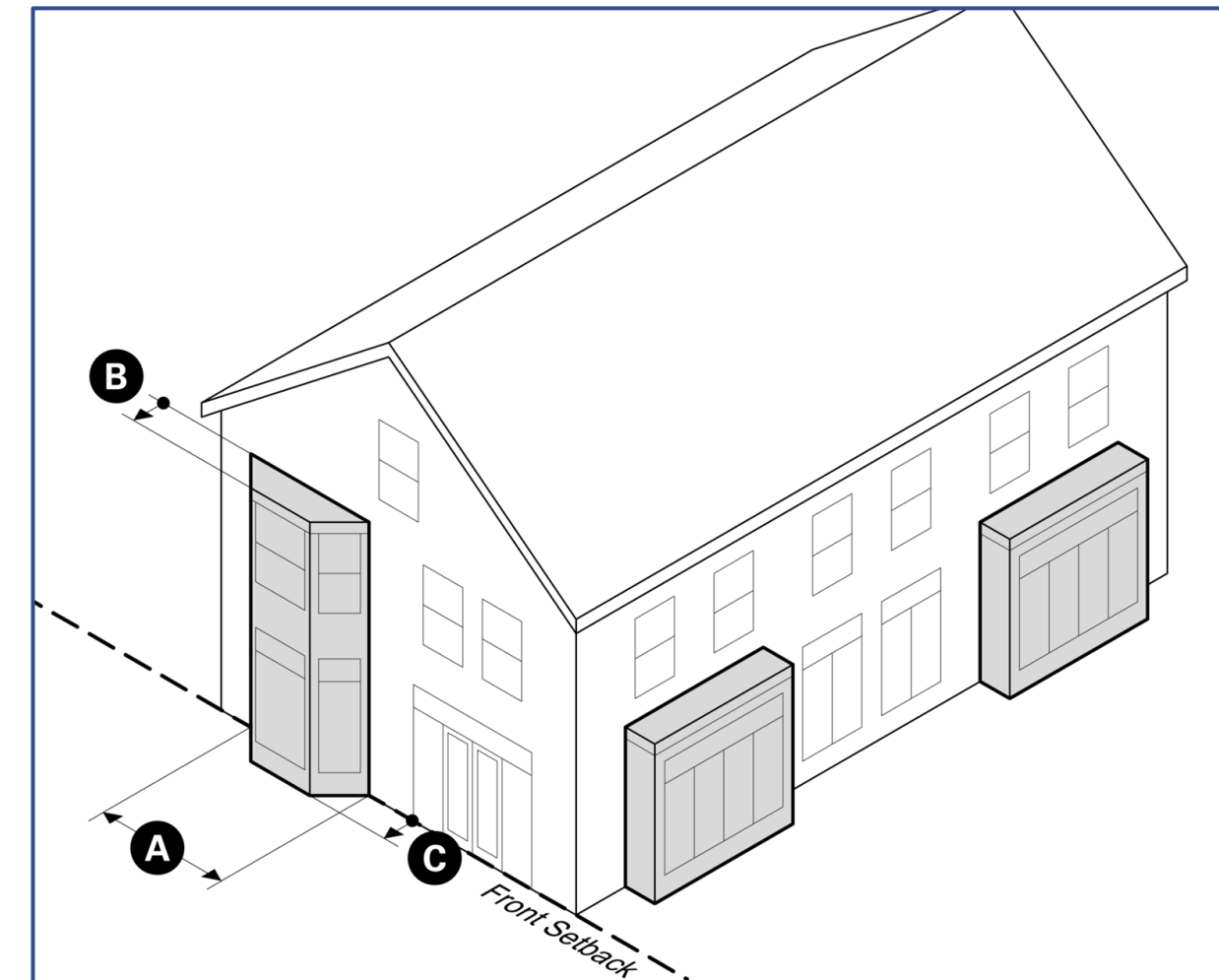
Balconies



Standards include:

- Width and depth
- Clearance above grade
- Extension into the right of way
- Setback encroachment

Bay Windows



Standards include:

- Width and depth
- Setback encroachment at ground story
- Fenestration %
- Clearance above grade within right of way
- Extension into the right of way

Affordable Housing Bonus

Design Standards

To incentivize a greater supply of affordable housing, the zoning proposes an affordable housing bonus for developments with at least 50% permanently affordable units.

The bonus would be granted to qualifying developments, allowing the following standards:

- **Height**
 - **Maximum increase of 1 level**
(No height increases allowed within a certain distance of one or two-family residential districts)
- **Parking**
 - Reduced minimum parking requirement of 0.25 spaces/residential unit, with further reduction by special permit

Number of Affordable Housing Units Required		
	Rental	Ownership
Tier 1 (% of units)	50%	50%
Area Median Income (AMI)	Less than or equal to 80%	Less than or equal to 100%

Other Code Elements

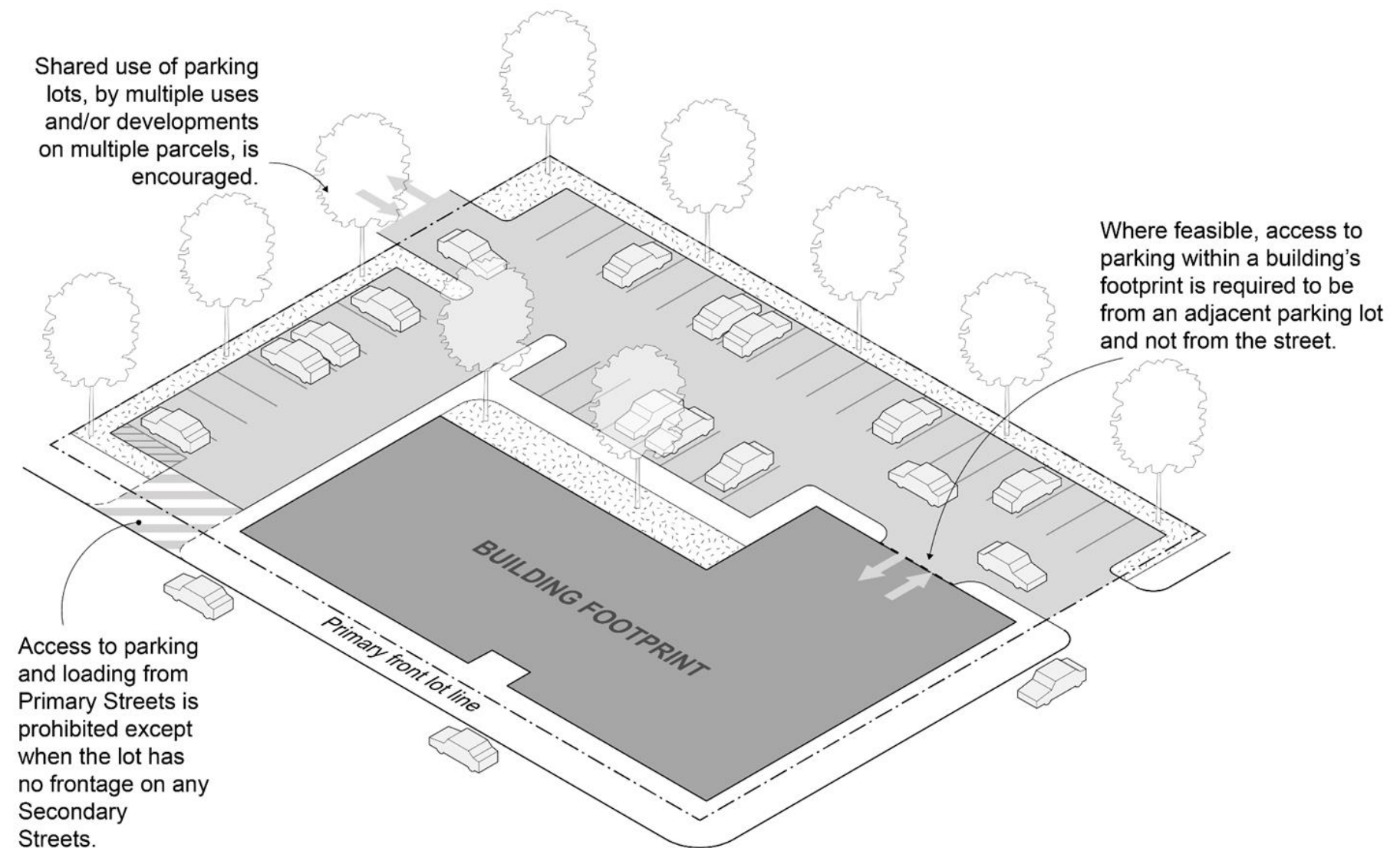
The report includes recommendations for other zoning elements, including:

Resilient Design Standards, such as:

- Energy assessment requirement
- Resilient roof treatment (reflective, solar, or vegetated)
- Deep energy efficiency and electrification of buildings

Parking Design Standards, such as:

- Minimum of 0.5 parking spaces and maximum of 1.0 parking spaces per residential unit (the requirements can be reduced by special permit)
- Elimination of ground floor retail parking requirements
- Shared use of parking lots, by multiple uses and/or developments, where feasible



Testing Zoning Parameters

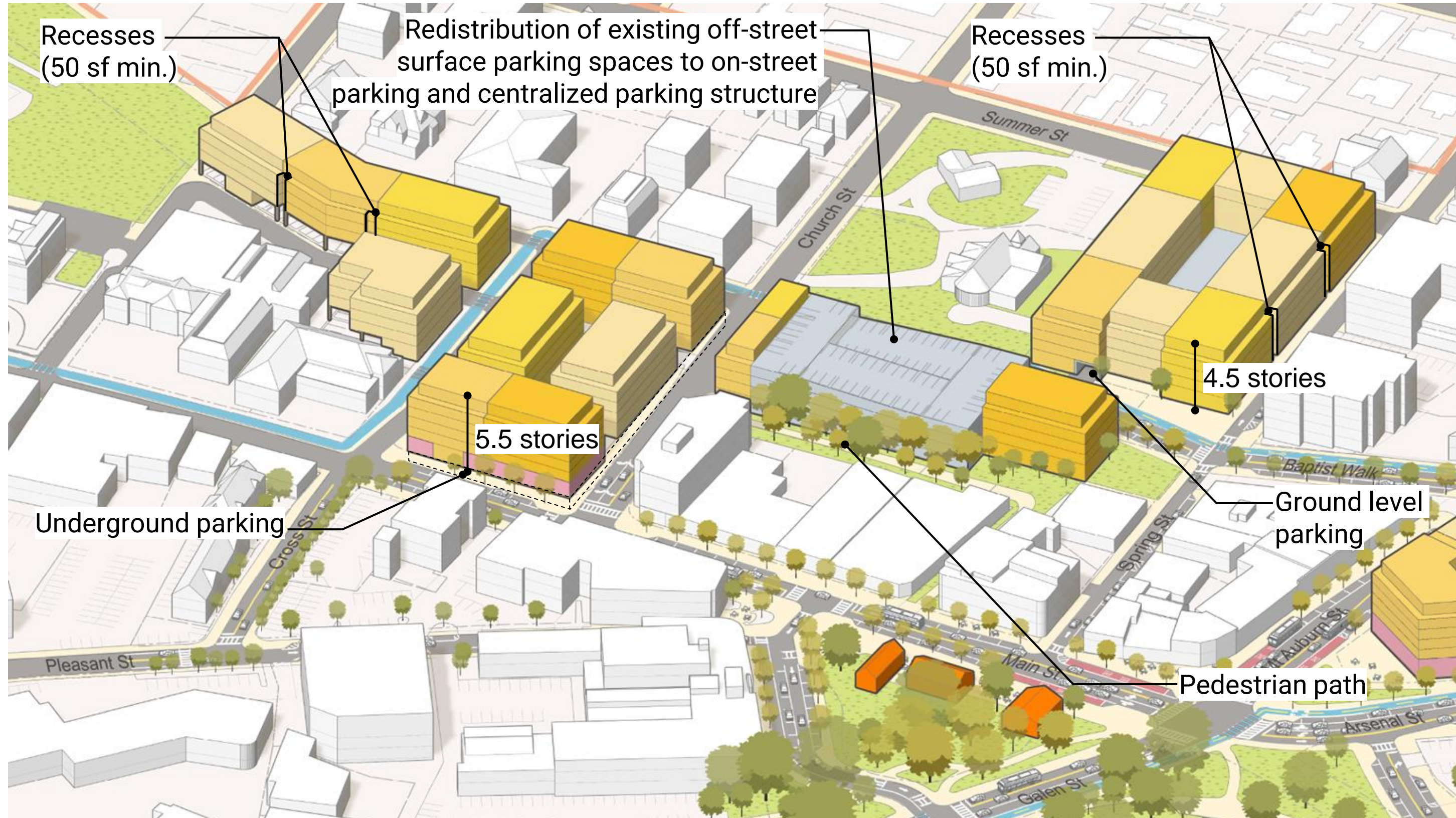
Zoning Parameters		
Zone	Zone A	Zone B
Setbacks	0' Front	0' Front, 10' Side
Maximum Building Height	4.5 - 5.5 stories	
Top Level Stepback	7' min.	
Facade Articulation	Demise Line Required Every 100'	Demise Line & 50 sf min. Recess Required Every 100'

Residential

Retail

Parking

N



Priority Redevelopment Opportunities

Library Expansion

Watertown/Belmont Church on Mt Auburn St

City-owned Parking Lots

MBTA Bus Yard Site

Priority Redevelopment Opportunities



Library Expansion

- Library could expand onto former police station site or onto the site of the parking lot behind the library
- Explore incorporating mixed-uses, with affordable and/or market rate housing



Watertown/Belmont Church on Mt. Auburn St

- Explore potential for affordable housing development, reusing historic Church structures
- Apply the Religious/School Building Overlay District (R/SOD) to allow for more flexible use of the site

Priority Redevelopment Opportunities



City-owned Parking Lots

- Create a redevelopment authority that could partner with a suitable private developer via a request for proposals (RFP) process
- Through the public/private partnership, construct a parking garage to replace the existing parking and create mixed-use residential development with public benefits



MBTA Bus Yard Site

- Collaborate with the MBTA to frame development expectations for future RFPs on the site
- Explore a mixed-use residential development that balances active ground floor uses, green space, and MBTA bus layover requirements

Conclusion

4 Corners

Concept Axonometric

- Residential
- Retail
- Parking

