



WORKING GROUP SESSIONS November 29 and 30, 2023

The Intersection: How can we make it work for all modes--and support the Square we want?

This session will consider alternative ways for personal automobiles, shared transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, and freight to move through Watertown Square. A focus will be on how alternative designs meet other critical goals: lively public spaces and interaction, thriving businesses, open spaces, and an environmentally-sustainable Square. On-street parking, loading zones, street trees and landscape buffers are part of the discussion. **WEDNESDAY, 10-11 AM**

Urban Form: What should the Square look like--building scale, public realm and more?

The built environment involves choices about building dimensions (heights, setbacks, etc.) ground floor activation, parking, energy efficiency, historic assets and building placement/facades. The session will also include the public realm (e.g., plazas, parks, street trees and furniture) and private realm (privately-owned spaces that may have more limited access). **WEDNESDAY, 11:30 AM-12:30 PM**

Strategic Sites: How do we design for these key development opportunities around the Square?

The Watertown Square study area has several significant opportunities for a combination of development and public realm. This session will consider options for important sites, including the Watertown Yard (owned by the MBTA) and the parking area behind the municipal/private-owned buildings on Main Street. These sites could also be opportunities for public/private partnerships and for a combination of development and public realm uses. **WEDNESDAY, 2-3PM**

Destination Square: How we design a Square where small business can thrive?

Our small businesses need a built environment that helps them thrive. This session will focus on conversation about public and private infrastructure, parking requirements and locations, allowing spaces that provide outdoor (or flexible indoor/outdoor) dining and commerce, where first floor activation is need, and public spaces/uses that can become a destination. **THURSDAY, 10-11 AM**

MBTA Zoning: How do we get to the 1,701 zoned units we need under the new law?

By the end of 2024, Watertown must comply with the MBTA Communities law by creating a zoning district that allows multifamily housing by right at or over 15 units an acre and has the capacity for 1,701 units. The discussion will build on the prior sessions by exploring options for district boundaries, density and required features. **THURSDAY, 11:30 AM-12:30 PM**

MBTA ZONING Fact sheet

The MBTA Communities Law (passed in 2021) applies to the 177 cities and towns (excluding Boston) that have transit stations (or are adjacent to such communities). Watertown is included among the 177 as an adjacent community. We must adopt compliant zoning by 12/31/2024.

The law addresses the state’s housing shortage by requiring all MBTA communities to zone for multifamily housing by-right. The law and state guidelines contain these critical elements:

- Minimum gross density of 15 units per acre.
- Located near a commuter rail station, subway station, or ferry terminal. If a city/town has no station within its borders (e.g., Watertown), a suitable location like a downtown.
- No age restrictions and suitable for families with children.

By-right is a permitting process that allows development without the need for a special permit, variance, zoning amendment, waiver, or other discretionary zoning decision. Site plan review—a non-discretionary process that may result in reasonable conditions on the appearance and layout of a specific project—is allowed. Our zoning ordinance generally requires a special permit process for multifamily housing in the Watertown Square study area.

The state guidelines limit our ability to include certain zoning requirements because of concern that they could make multifamily housing infeasible. We may require ground floor non-residential uses (e.g., retail) for up to 25% of the district if there is a broad mix of such uses allowed by right and there are no minimum parking requirements for them. We can continue to apply part of our existing inclusionary zoning requirement within the district (10% affordable units at/below 80% of area median income) but will need to show “financial feasibility” to apply the other part (5% at/below 65% of AMI). Finally, we cannot require higher energy efficiency standards for multifamily housing than other uses.

WATERTOWN MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS			
Unit capacity*	Land area**	Developable station area***	% of district to be located in station area****
1,701	24	27	0

* Multifamily unit capacity is based on our 2020 housing stock and our community type.

** The state set our minimum land area at 24 acres. The study area is approximately 150 acres.

*** Developable station area is based on a half-mile circle around a station, excluding certain land types.

**** Watertown is an adjacent community with no station within its borders. State guidelines ask adjacent communities to locate the district near an existing downtown or village center, near a bus stop or line, or in a location with under-utilized land that can be redeveloped into new multifamily housing. Watertown Square meets this definition.