



## KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS SUMMARY DATA

**Watertown Community Conversations** (WCC) facilitates the use of dialogue to strengthen the social fabric of our City, increase understanding across differences, build our collective capacity for constructive conversation, and support community-engaged decision-making. We partner with community sponsors to design and facilitate dialogue around issues vital to our civic life. To learn more, please visit [www.watertownconversations.org](http://www.watertownconversations.org).

**In October and November 2023, WCC partnered with the City of Watertown to engage a total of 168 Watertown residents, business owners, employees, and students in discussion around a central question: *How can Watertown Square become a more vibrant community center?*** To gather input from a broad, diverse group of community members and galvanize public involvement in the City's ambitious plan for the Square, WCC facilitated 20 "Kitchen Table Conversations" (KTCs) at homes and public spaces throughout Watertown. Each conversation was hosted by a Watertown resident and was facilitated by a Watertown Community Conversations facilitator.

Along with an online survey and in-person design charrettes that culminated at the end of November, the feedback from these KTCs were submitted to the City's consulting team for incorporation into its planning process, which will look at all physical and human-centered aspects of the Watertown Square study area. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts about Watertown Square, and they found the conversations enjoyable and interesting. WCC anticipates that a long-term effect of the KTCs will be enhanced civil discourse and increased trust among residents and members of City government.

### A SNAPSHOT

Below are some **anonymized quotes** from the KTCs that capture some community members' hopes and dreams for Watertown Square:


*"We're all walkers, and we never walk through Watertown Square."*

*"The library is the heartbeat of the Square. How can this reverberate and be expanded throughout the Square?"*

*"Watertown Square needs more inspiring architecture and beauty."*

*"The Square should be a place where you could sit with your coffee, watch your kids play, or meet up with a friend and just chill for a while — rather than 'I'm coming to do an errand and then I'm leaving.'"*

*"Restaurants are what draw people to an area, and then they'll stay and go shopping. That's why open air shopping works — you go to dinner and then hang out for an hour or so. And make that family-friendly!"*



*“Plan accessibility FIRST when thinking about Watertown Square — whatever is not functioning well for us [low vision and blind community members] needs to be top of the list for any upcoming changes.”*

*“Watertown Square should be less of a highway and more of a destination. Give it a sense of place, with clues that say ‘you have arrived.’”*

*“Tree planting will change aesthetics — some charm please! I’m tired of box architecture — let’s explore curved walls, interesting roofs and lines.”*

*“Plan the Square for the year 2100 and make the investment now. Small changes every decade will not be successful. Be bold.”*

*“My pet peeve is the Delta, which lacks charm. Why don’t we copy European examples? Install a fountain, benches, and invite food carts.”*

*“The river is an incredible asset — find ways for people to engage the river.”*

*“We already have a lot of what we want, but there isn’t a design to foster a community feel, enhance businesses that are here, and connect all the pieces. Often we have to stumble upon things.”*

*“Put artwork in every window in the Square — it would build community.”*

*“Climate and energy are on the forefront of people’s minds, but the town center doesn’t reflect that. We need an identity to show that we’re thoughtful about energy and shade. How can that manifest in physical form?”*

*“Arsenal Yards is a cautionary tale. Is there a way to do that without chains? We want to retain our New England character and preserve our history.”*

*“We live in an era of ‘nature deficit disorder.’ The more we can have public spaces that provide free access to the beauty of nature, the better it is for our health and well-being — particularly for folks who do not have their own yard or space to grow flowers.”*

*“Grow businesses around anchor shops that are unique to Watertown. Some examples are SoWa Open Market, The Tall Ship in East Boston, and Time Out Market Boston. The Wada Hoppah is unique, but then what do folks see when they arrive on the dock? We need a funky café near the river.”*

*“Bus lines should connect to each other so we are not stuck across the street waiting for the light to change while our connecting bus pulls away.”*

*“Watertown Square IS vibrant!”*

*“Watertown should be a haven for housing — it’s one of the things that makes Watertown great.”*



## A SUMMARY

The 20 KTCs generated a number of exciting ideas about how to revitalize and redesign the Watertown Square area. Below is a summary of some of the key themes from participant feedback:

### **Walkability and Pedestrian Safety**

- Improve sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signals, and lighting to make the area more walkable and pedestrian friendly
- Widen sidewalks, add pedestrian islands, introduce raised crosswalks for safety
- Reduce traffic lanes and speeds to improve safety

### **Traffic Flow**

- Conduct analysis on traffic patterns, vehicle counts to inform changes
- Consider diverting some traffic away from the main intersection
- Improve traffic light timing, turn signals
- Add rotaries/roundabouts to manage flow

### **Parking**

- Maintain parking lots for small businesses
- Build parking garages to reduce surface lots and free up space
- Clarify overnight parking rules

### **Bike Access**

- Add dedicated bike lanes through the intersection to connect existing paths
- Increase bike parking infrastructure

### **Public Transit**

- Create unified bus depot with better amenities
- Implement intra-Watertown shuttle connecting key destinations

### **Gathering Spaces**

- Create more small public plazas and pocket parks for gathering
- Activate alleyways and space behind buildings with seating
- Expand and improve Saltonstall Park and farmers' market area
- Add outdoor seating, cafés, dining areas facing sidewalks rather than parking lots



### **Businesses and Services**

- Attract more small, local businesses like cafés, bookstores, markets
- Support business mix that creates active daytime and nighttime activity
- Highlight and support existing assets like the library

### **Urban Design**

- Incorporate unified signage, lighting, facade improvements to enhance aesthetics
- Enhance public art, greenery, events to add visual interest and draw people in

### **Access to the River**

- Develop safer, more inviting pedestrian and bike connections to riverfront
- Program events and activities along the riverwalk
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### **Housing**

- Create denser housing to support local businesses and increase vibrancy
- Introduce affordable housing and redevelop existing spaces for additional housing