

Somerville *by* DESIGN



DAVIS SQUARE PIN-UP IDEAS

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor



AT THE CHARRETTE...

When Somerville by Design was launched it represented a new approach to neighborhood planning designed specifically for Somerville. This new methodology brings community members together in a deliberate, proactive way to decide where and how our City can shape forces of inevitable change. With a focus on physical planning and economic development, we “crowd-source” knowledge about places that are working well, and places that are not working so well, from residents, businesspersons, and workers to utilize valuable lessons gathered from people living their everyday lives.

Thorough collaboration, we are able to generate a number and diversity of ideas that can be quickly evaluated and tested by the public. In a low-cost, low-risk environment, good ideas are identified, mediocre ideas are improved, and bad ideas are eliminated. The Somerville by Design philosophy calls this model of neighborhood planning “Outreach, Dialogue, Decide, Implement”.

The Somerville by Design: Davis Square neighborhood planning process began in the spring of 2013. Activities focused on outreach and dialogue have been ongoing over the course of the summer, and in early September, we launched a three-day design charrette to begin the “Decide” phase of the public process. City planners, public officials and design consultants moved into the neighborhood for three days of intensive, collaborative engagement with the public. A vacant storefront at 377 Summer Street was brought to life as a temporary design studio, open to the public for casual

drop-ins as well as more formal meetings. Businesspersons, commercial property owners, and community groups were scheduled for one-on-one meetings with City officials and designers. One-hour topical meetings were held with subject experts and any interested members of the public were welcomed to contribute.

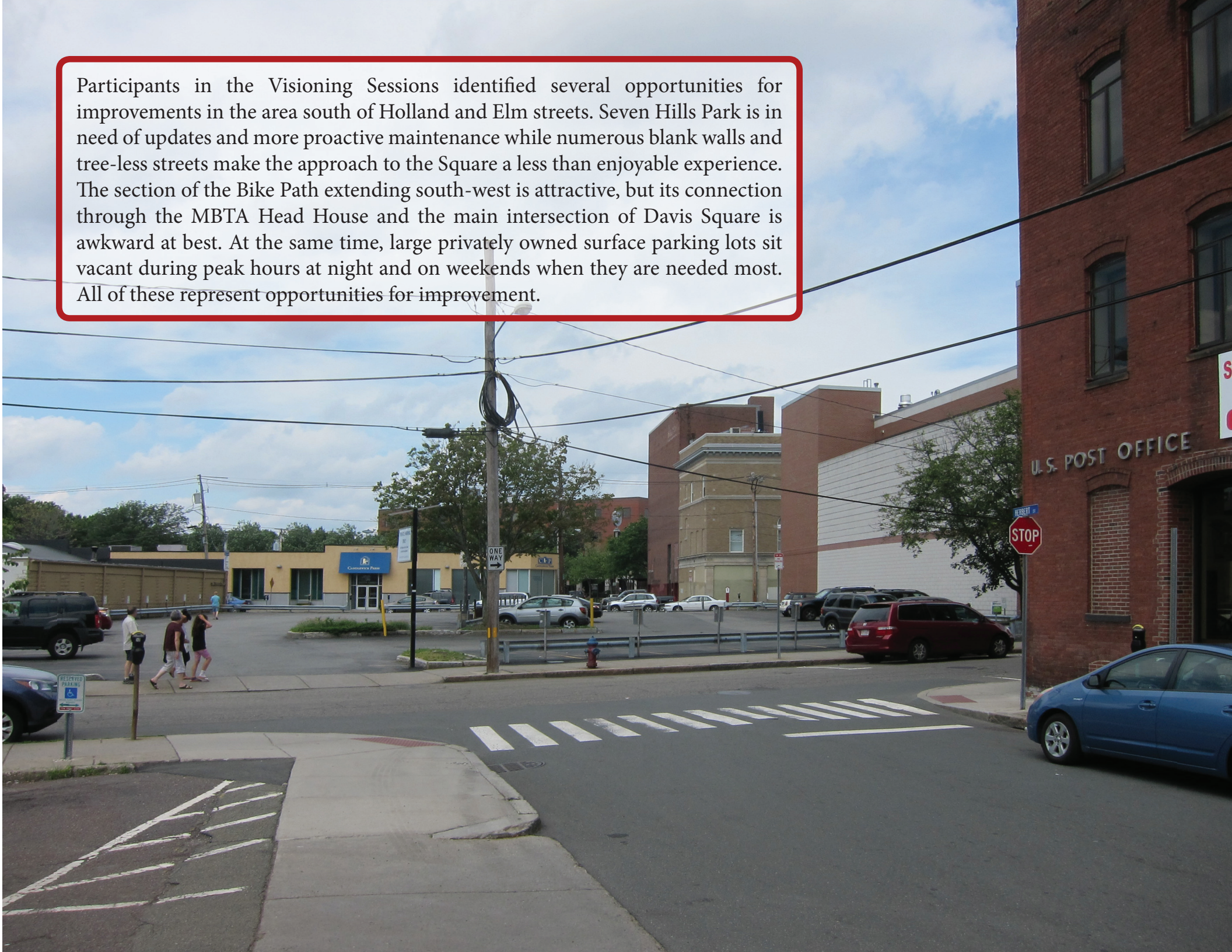
To attract members of the public that would not normally be interested in a neighborhood planning event, we set up a temporary public plaza with food trucks, movable seating, and artistic performances in front of the studio space, drawing residents and workers into the planning process who might not otherwise know about it, feel interested, or be comfortable making their voices heard.

At the end of three days, all of the ideas produced were organized and shared in a “Pin Up Presentation”. Roughly seventy residents attended the presentation at the Davis Square Theatre, using survey forms to share opinions on each of the 42 ideas that came out of the charrette.

Some of the ideas illustrated in the following pages can be achieved in a few months, while others might require a decade or more. Some ideas can be implemented by the City, but most involve partnerships between the public and private sector. And now we need your feedback on which ideas make the most sense for Davis Square!

To provide feedback, please visit City Hall, call 311, or submit feedback on www.somervillebydesign.com. Enjoy!

Participants in the Visioning Sessions identified several opportunities for improvements in the area south of Holland and Elm streets. Seven Hills Park is in need of updates and more proactive maintenance while numerous blank walls and tree-less streets make the approach to the Square a less than enjoyable experience. The section of the Bike Path extending south-west is attractive, but its connection through the MBTA Head House and the main intersection of Davis Square is awkward at best. At the same time, large privately owned surface parking lots sit vacant during peak hours at night and on weekends when they are needed most. All of these represent opportunities for improvement.



CONCEPT 01

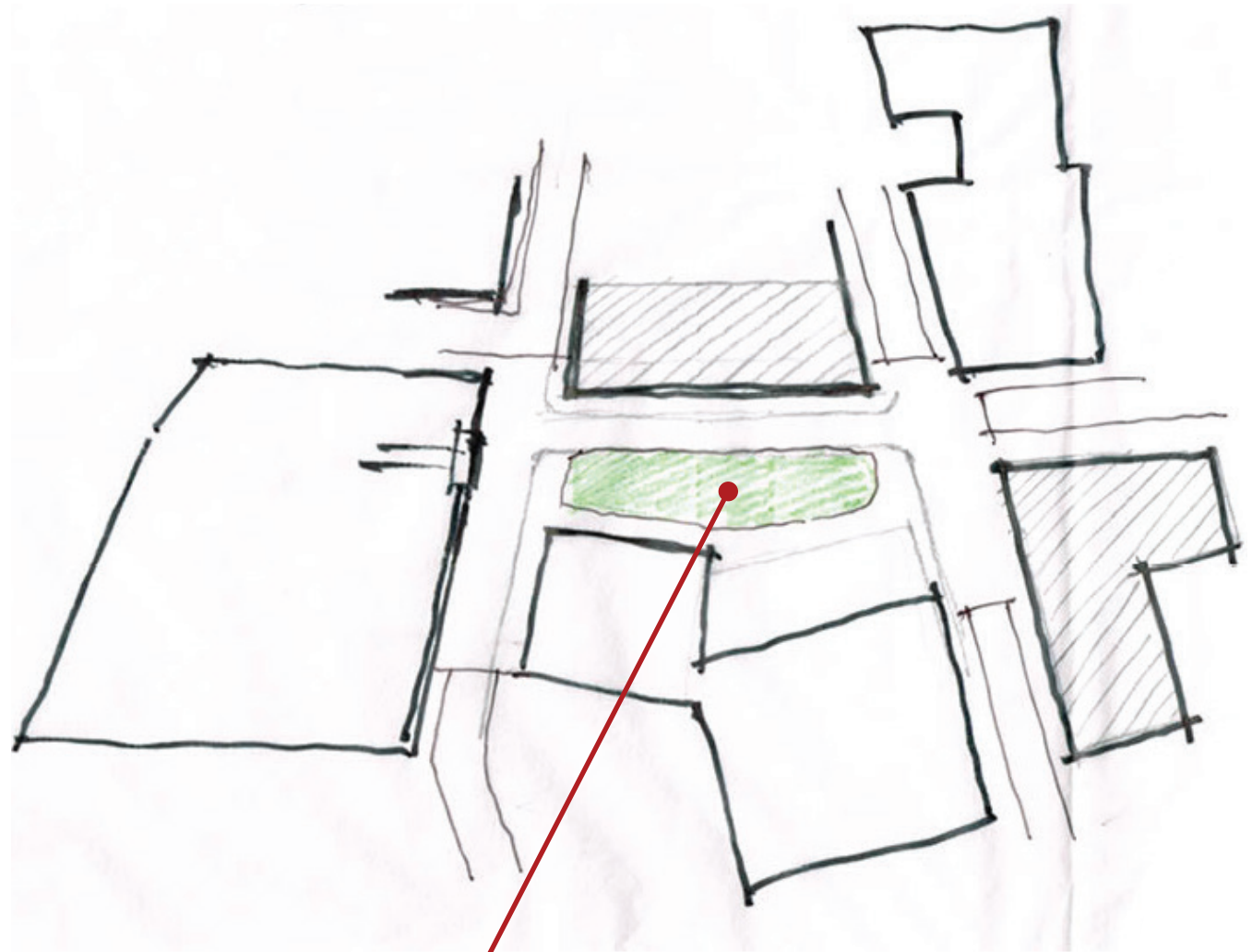
This simple sketch imagines the Day / Herbert parking lot as a permanent “market square” for the Farmers’ Market and other community uses, with a small, one-way access road on its edges to facilitate truck access and loading. The privately-owned parking lots between Day Street and Dover Street are shown with townhouse-style residential development to soften the blank rear wall of One Davis Square, an east-west pedestrian street, and a “U”-shaped boutique hotel adjacent to Flatbread and Ideal Engine.



Day/Herbert
Parking Lot

CONCEPT 02

This sketch for the privately-owned parking lots between Day Street and Dover Street explored the creation of an elongated, attached square (green space) in the existing parking lot. A new street connects Dover and Day and is fronted by a new building softening the blank rear wall of One Davis Square. The Day/Herbert parking lot features a small, infill building.



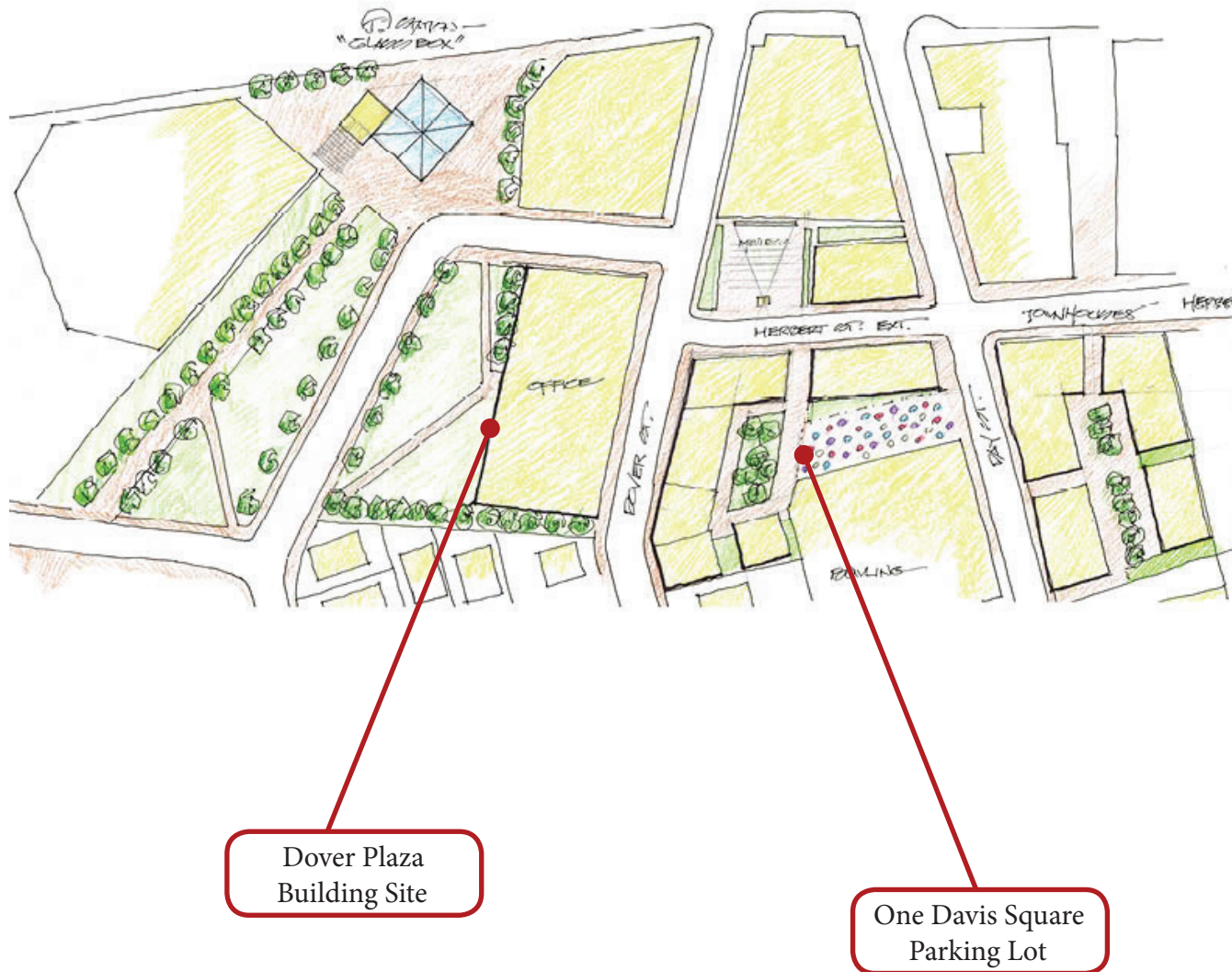
One Davis Square
Parking Lot

CONCEPT 03

In this sketch, Meacham Road is retained and the 1980's bunker-style MBTA headhouse is replaced with a smaller glass structure to improve visual connections between Seven Hills Park and Davis Square. The Dover Plaza lot is redeveloped with a new attached square extending on the left and a multi-story office building sited on the right.

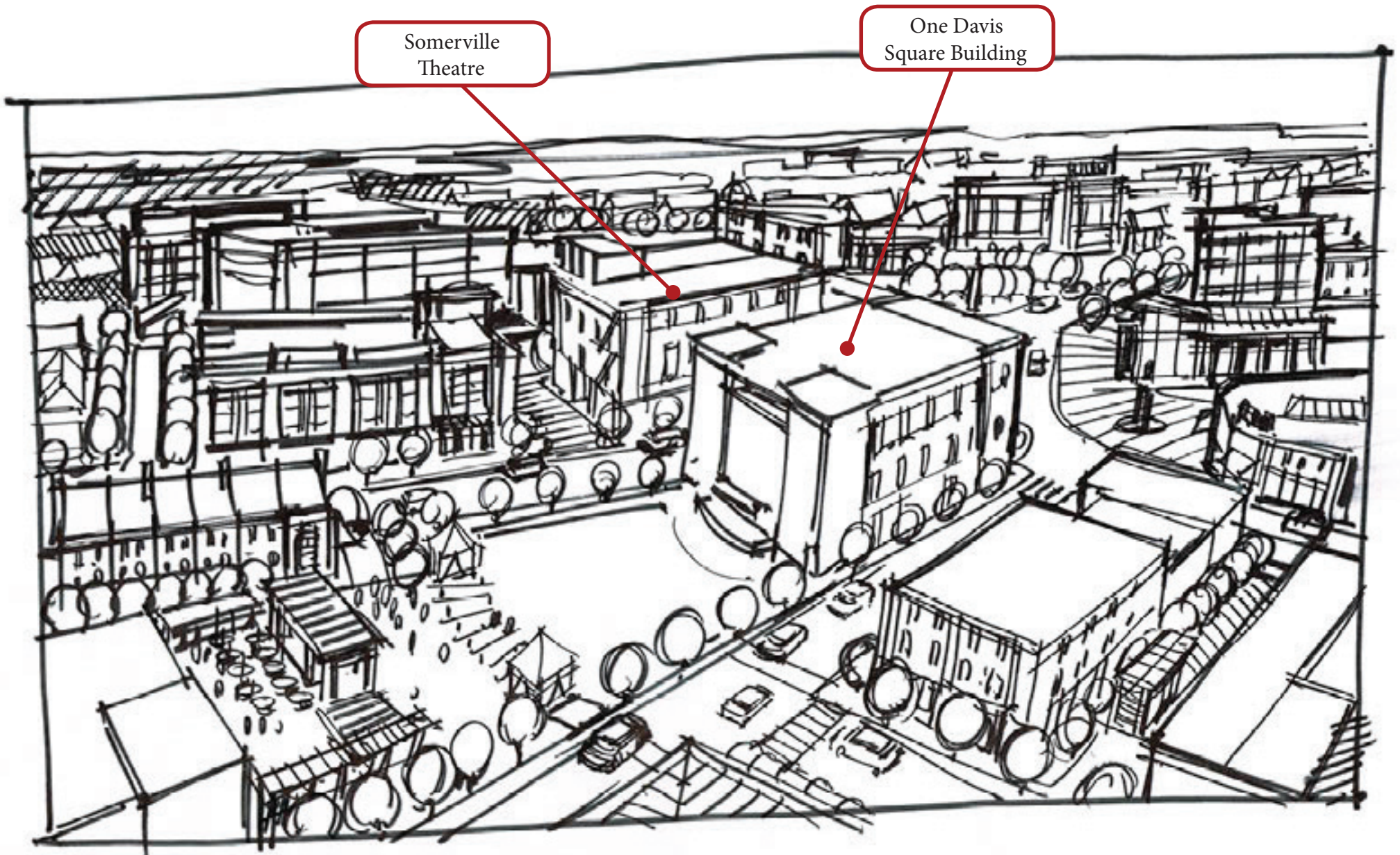
Behind One Davis Square, Herbert Street is extended, connecting Day to Dover. The north half of the parking lot is shown with community outdoor space (including a movie screening area) and a small infill building.

The southern portion of the parking lot and the existing the Ideal Engine site is imagined with new townhouse-style development framing the street, with courtyards created adjacent to Flatbread. The Day Street / Herbert Street lot is similarly shown with a center courtyard framed by townhouses.





CONCEPT 3: Perspective view looking North at the bend in Dover Street as it approaches the Square



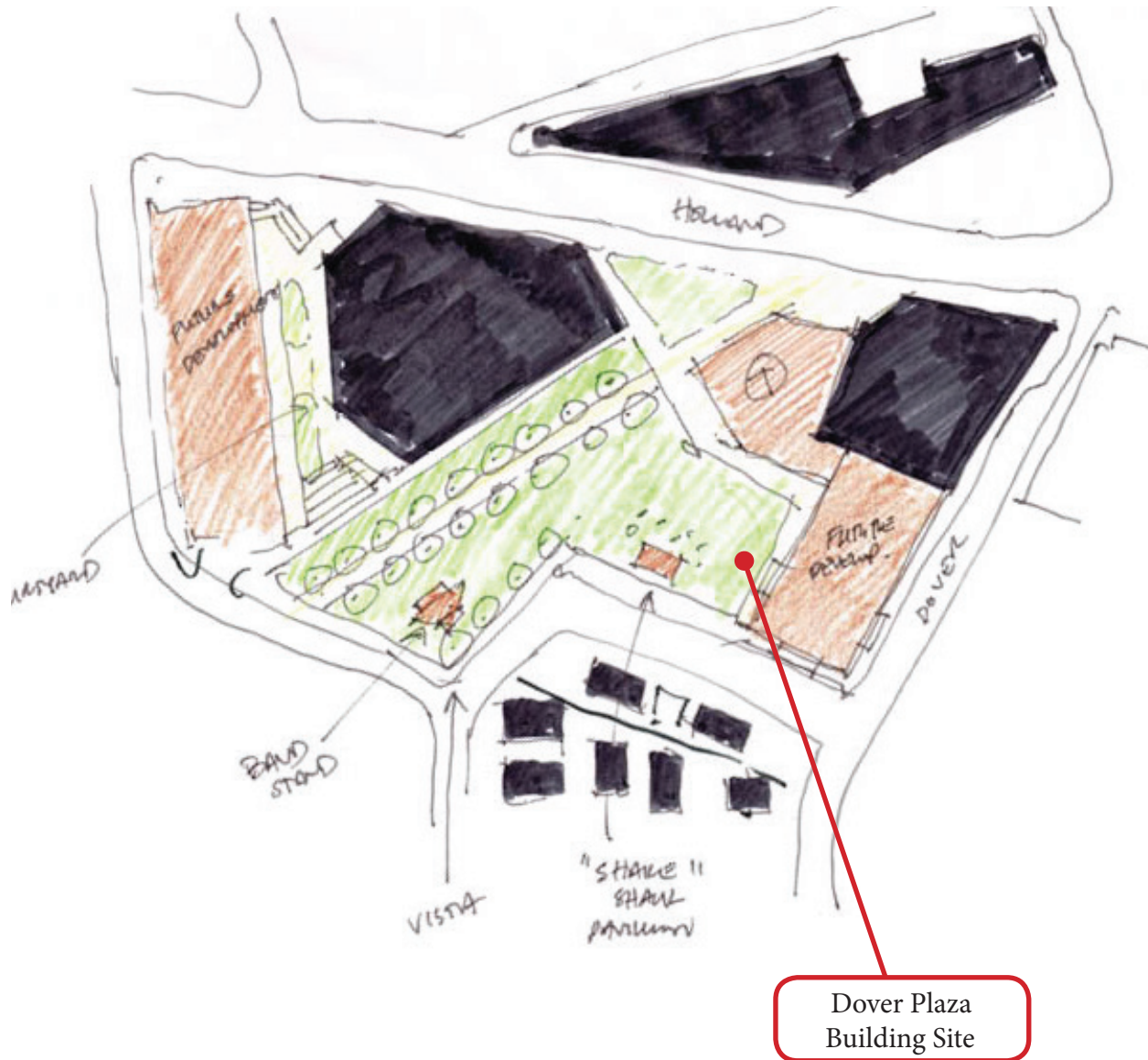
CONCEPT 4: Axonometric view depicting how all the various pieces fit together in this concept.

CONCEPT 05

This sketch is focused on the existing Candlewick Press building and Seven Hills Park. Meacham Road shifts south, creating an opportunity to extend Seven Hills Park into the newly configured land behind the Somerville Theater. The venting and fire suppression system close to the MBTA head house is re-sited, creating a clear view into the square for users of Seven Hills Park. A pavilion and bandstand are added to Seven Hills Park.

This sketch also shows two new buildings, one above the Buena Vista Garage, with an urban courtyard running alongside, and a small-footprint, urban building that fronts on both Dover Street and Seven Hills Park. The new bandstand is complemented by a terraced and ramped transition that doubles as performance seating at the Buena Vista infill site.

The new infill development behind the Somerville Theater is “buffered” from the residential lots to the south by moving Meacham Road slightly to the south. The new block face created receives infill houses so that the backs and sides of existing homes are not exposed to the new street alignment.



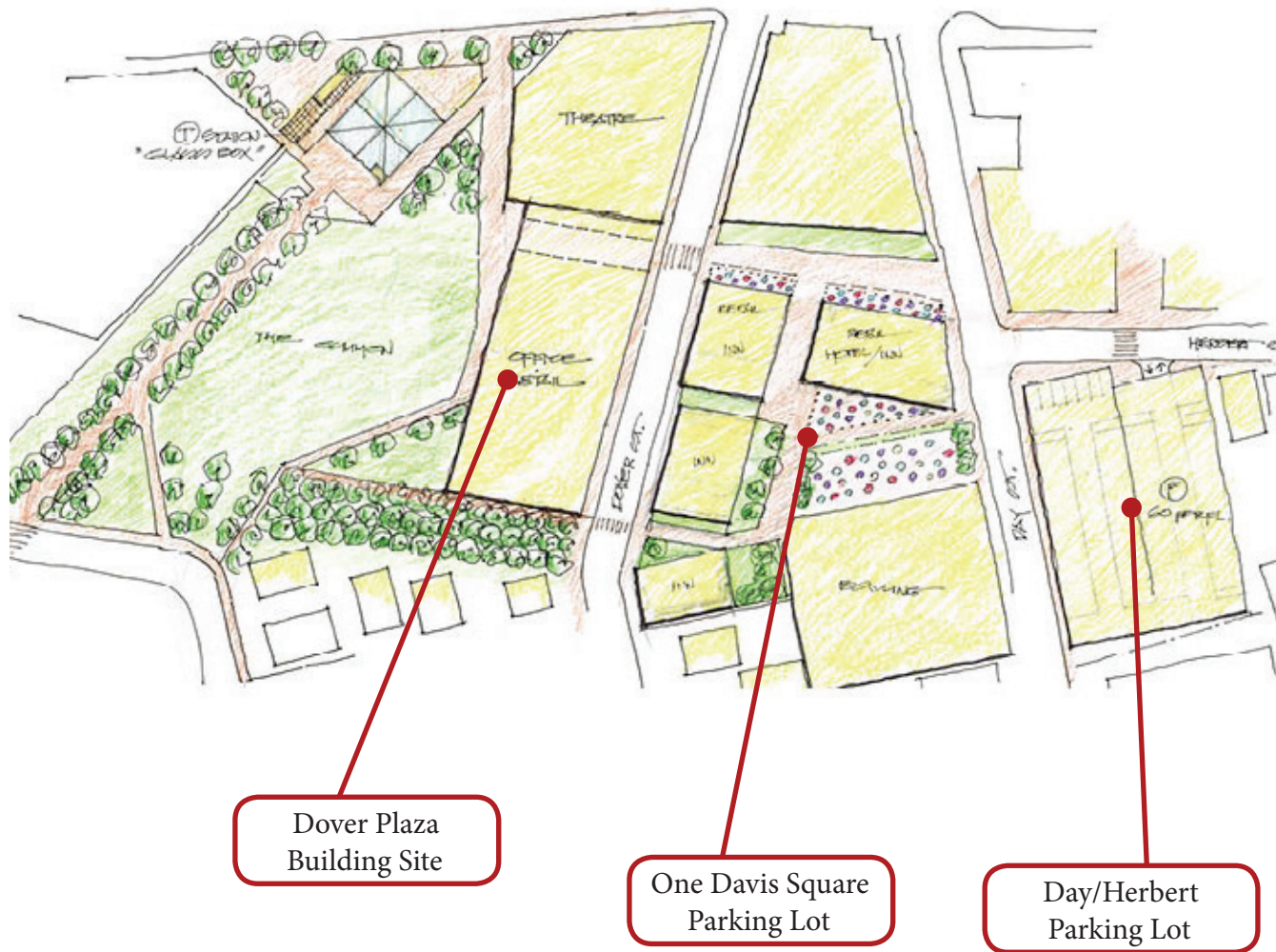
CONCEPT 06

This image is similar to #5. More detail is included in this sketch, which shows townhouse-style development along the re-aligned Meacham Road to serve as a buffer for the residential neighborhood to the south. A thin alley between the new townhouses and the existing homes permits tuck-under parking for the new residential.

In this concept, the parking lots between One Davis Square and Flatbread / Ideal Engine are re-imagined to show a possible development scenario, which includes a new street connection between Day and Dover. Some surface parking could still be accommodated internal to the block via an access point off of the new street.



CONCEPT 07



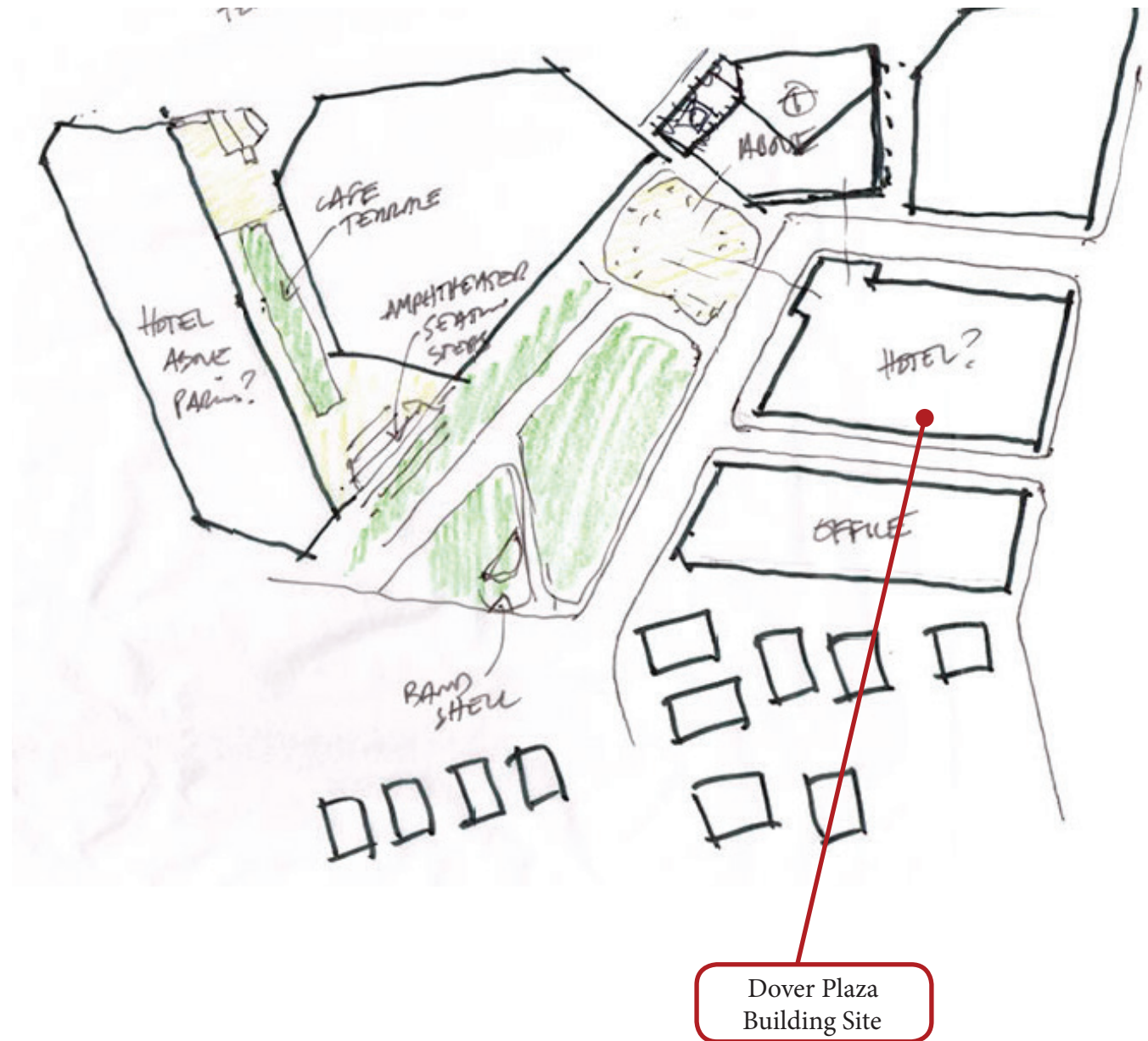
This idea replaces the existing Dover Plaza building and removes Meacham Road connection to Dover. A new office/retail building fronts onto Dover Street and Seven Hills Park significantly increased in size, while Buena Vista and the Meacham Road become merged.

The parking lots behind One Davis Square could facilitate redevelopment with a number of small buildings fronting onto an internal courtyard/plaza and Dover/Day Streets. The opportunities for outdoor seating become readily apparent in this concept.

The Day/Herbert lot is shown as a parking garage. The lot is not large enough to fit a standard parking deck of generic design, increasing the cost involved to put structured parking on this site.

CONCEPT 08

This idea keeps the amphitheater like seating steps, Buena Vista lot infill and general improvements to Seven Hills Park shown in concepts 5 and 6 (above), but does not move Meacham Road. An important variation is the Dover Plaza building site, which is replaced with two buildings: a boutique hotel on the northern portion, and a smaller office building on the southern portion. The street between the two could be flexible in its design.



This satellite photo covered in red and green dots was created by participants at the Visioning Sessions held prior to the Davis Square Design Charrette. The map illustrates feedback on both the “good” and the “bad” of the neighborhood. Participants were given 3 of each color and asked to place them on the map as they wish. The dots tend to speak for themselves, and as a form of crowdsourced feedback, multiple dots clustered on a specific spot identify areas problematic for multiple people. There are a few spots identified as needing some attention, but one in particular jumps off the page for both maps: the main intersection of Davis Square.

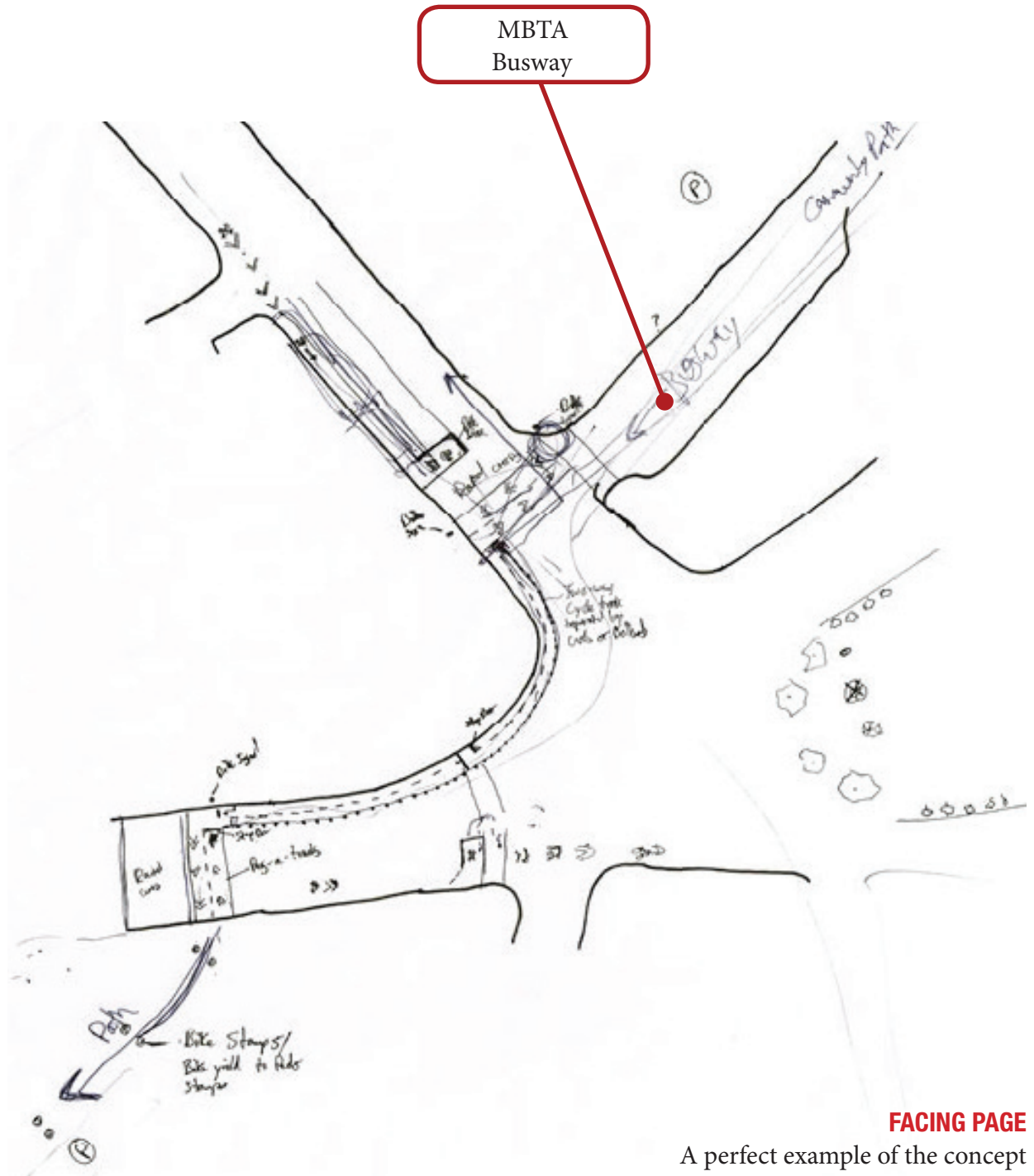


CONCEPT 09

The Somerville Community Path is a recreational and commuting resource for local residents as well as the regional population. For many years, the City and its partners have worked to improve the path connections across Davis Square. Participants in the “Somerville by Design” process tested several ideas, both new and old.

This sketch imagines a two-way cycle track following the curve of Statue Plaza from College Avenue to Holland Street. The cycle track would be separated from the street, and from the plaza by curbs or flexible bollards. A raised crossing is installed on College Avenue, much like the one recently installed on Holland Street. Bike signals would be installed at each crossing, and a stop bar is shown at the pedestrian crosswalk connecting Mr. Crepe to Statue Plaza.

On Holland, new surface materials are shown just east of the existing raised crossing, leaving the raised crossing for use by pedestrians but not bicycles. Riders are directly connected to the newly paved path section between the MBTA head house and the Somerville Theatre, reducing the number of cyclists riding underneath the Holland Street head house canopy.



FACING PAGE

A perfect example of the concept
from Argentina (Plaza Serrano)





CONCEPT 10

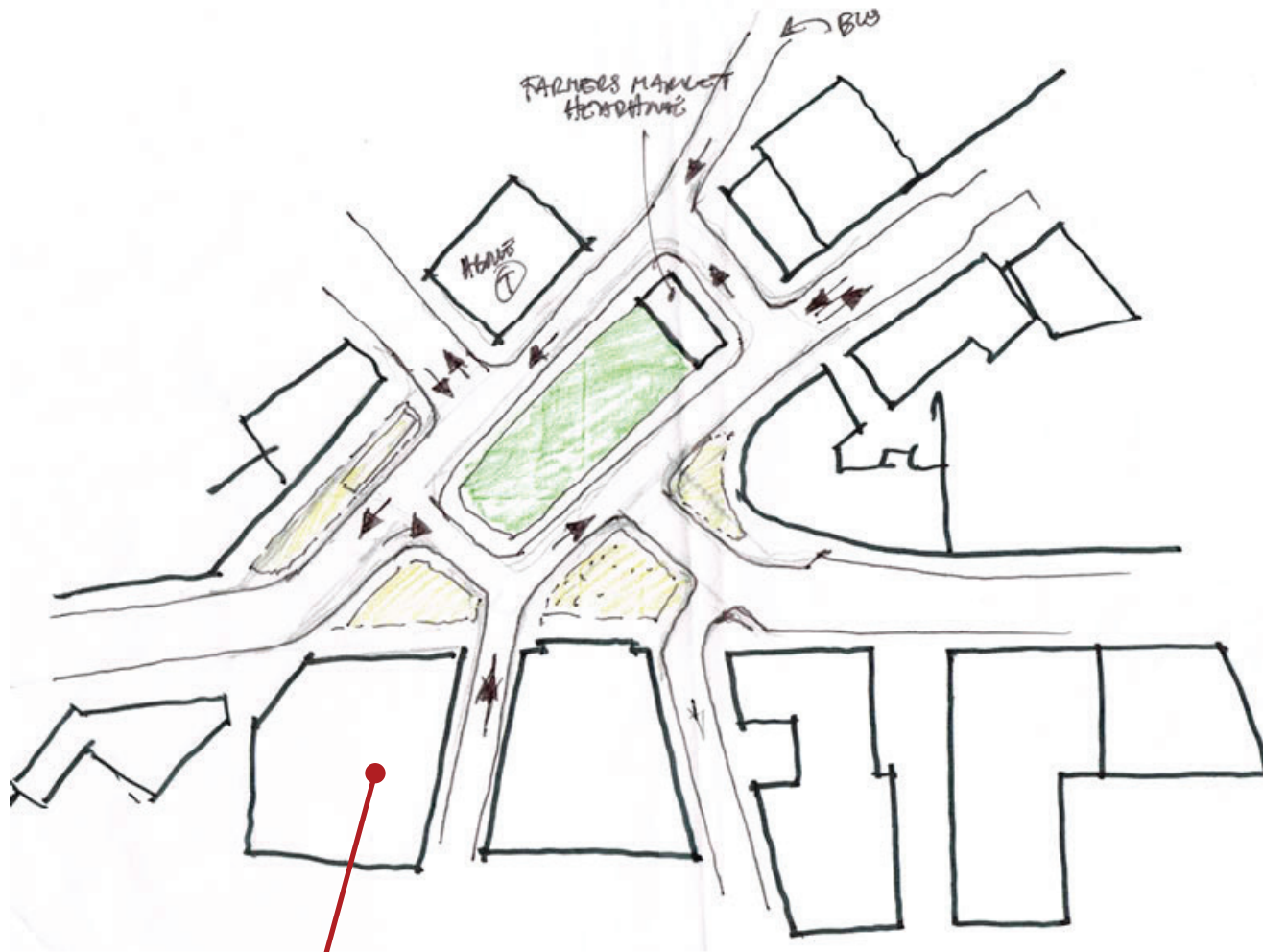
The mapped bikeway network through Davis Square and the actual bikeway network live in different worlds. Today many bicyclists either have to dismount and walk their bikes through Statue Plaza to the western connection of the Somerville Community Path, or they fight through heavy pedestrian traffic while still riding across the square. We have yet to observe

any bicyclists using the street connection to avoid riding (or walking) through Statue Plaza. Consultants and City Staff have been working hard to brainstorm both potential new routes and/or infrastructure improvements that could help alleviate conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars through the square. This series of diagrams proposes increased bike parking

facilities to relieve congestion at existing facilities and two possible locations for a second Hubway Station in Davis Square. The diagram also identifies the importance of finding a solution to connecting either end of the Community Path through Davis Square as discussed in Concept 9 (above).

CONCEPT 11

This scenario assumes restoration of two-way traffic on Highland Avenue as well as redevelopment of the Middlesex Bank property. Statue Plaza is shifted to a central location, with a rectangular shape (a smaller pedestrian plaza is retained in front of JP Licks and Boston Burger). This sketch envisions a structured canopy for Farmers' Market / Flea Market uses. Larger pedestrian plazas are created in front of the Somerville Theatre, One Davis Square, and Mike's Food & Spirits.



Somerville
Theatre

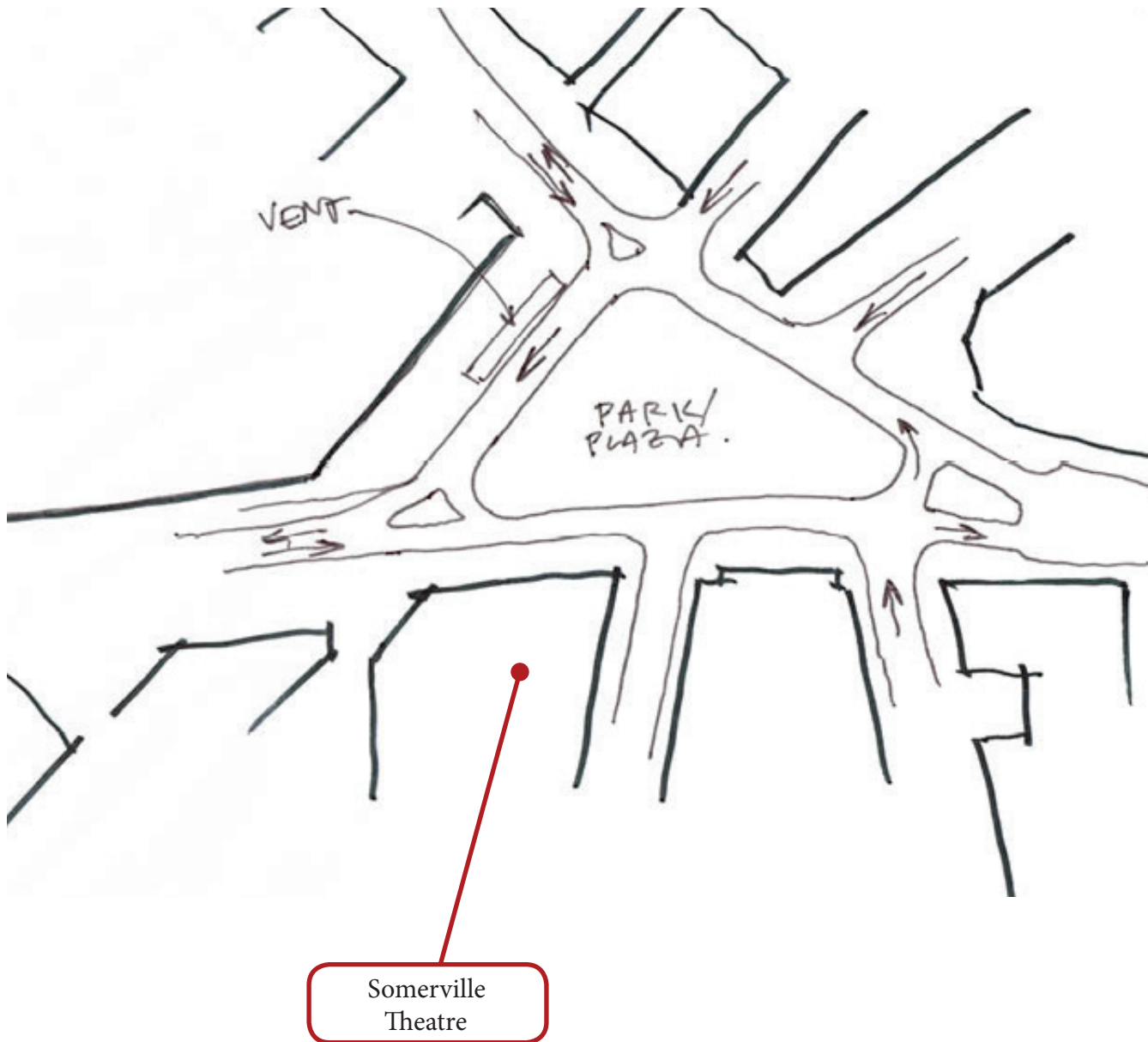
CONCEPT 12

This idea also keeps one-way and two-way streets, as well as all buildings facing the square in their present configuration. The major change is expanding the size of Statue Plaza and shifting its location into the middle of the intersection. All traffic from College Avenue and Highland Avenue would be routed around the new plaza. Major sidewalk widenings occur in front of Middlesex Bank and Mike's.



CONCEPT 13

There is only a small difference between Concept 12 and 13. Concept 13 maintains the MBTA vent in Statue Plaza. If the vent is maintained in the current location, the proposed Park/Plaza is smaller.



CONCEPT 14

This idea reduces the space dedicated to cars in the heart of the intersection. The pedestrian island currently in front of Mike's is enlarged and shifted to a location in front of Middlesex Bank, which separates traffic entering the square from College Avenue and Highland Avenue. All existing one-way and two-way regulations remain consistent.



CONCEPT 15

This concept creates new pedestrian amenities by closing the last block of both Highland and the MBTA Busway. Villa Avenue and Grove Street are re-connected to the busway. Meacham Road is re-routed to support an expansion of Seven Hills Park, which includes a permanent bandshell facility.

This sketch also shows several long range redevelopment concepts. The Highland Avenue Rite-Aid property is redeveloped, creating a pedestrian-friendly urban corner at Highland and Grove Street. Dover Plaza (the one-story office building at Dover Street and Meacham Road) is redeveloped into a more urban form. A smaller redevelopment concept is shown north of the busway, between College Avenue and Villa Avenue. Small infill buildings are also shown on the Ideal Engine site between Day Street and Dover Street, and an outdoor stage is imagined at the rear of the One Davis Square building.



CONCEPT 16

This sketch cleans up the main intersection by interrupting the eastbound flow from Holland Street to Elm Street with a large pedestrian plaza in front of One Davis Square, which creates a four-way intersection. Highland Avenue is transformed into a shared street for buses, pedestrians, and commercial loading. Westbound automobile traffic on Highland is routed through the existing MBTA busway. This scenario could offer the benefit of bringing Highland Avenue to life as a pedestrian block.



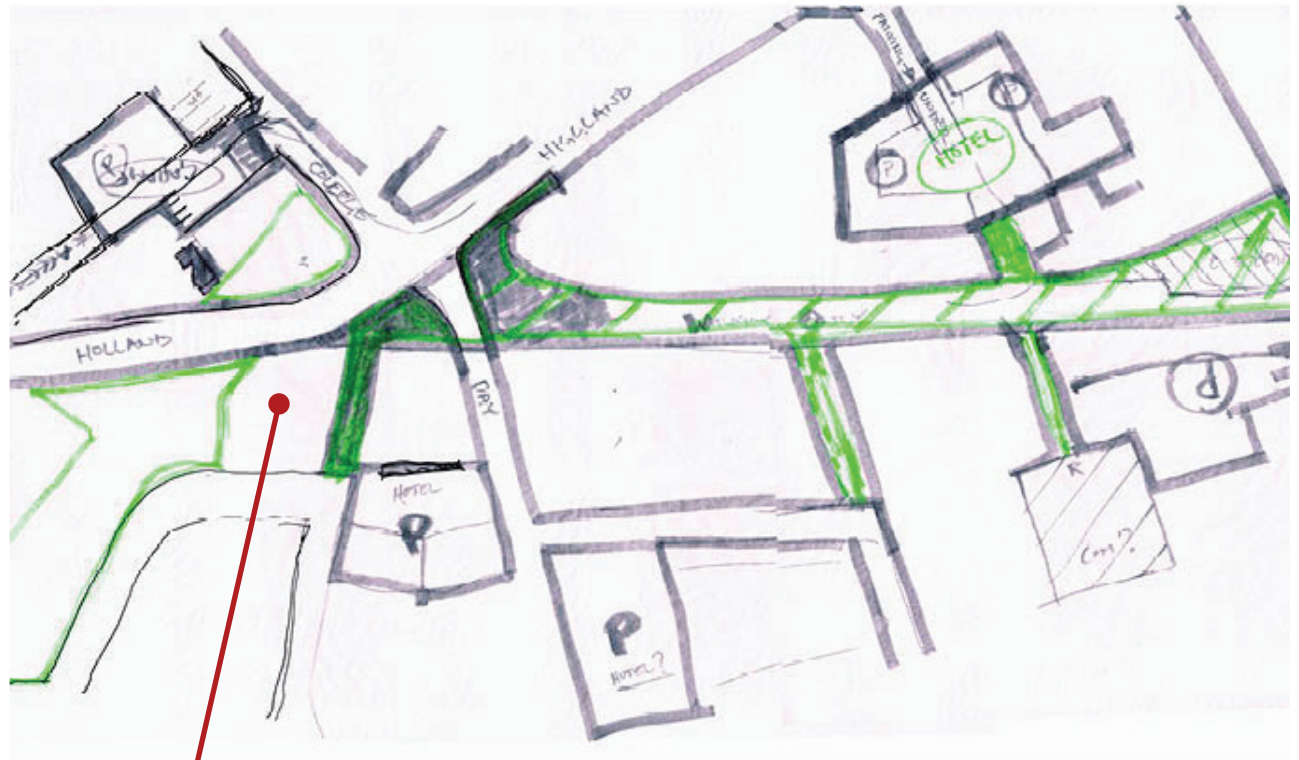
CONCEPT 17

Concept 17 was created by a local charrette participant and shows a variety of ideas (please note that this sketch is 'upside down,' One Davis Square is at the top of the sketch). Elm Street (from College to Grove) and Chester Street (from Herbert to Elm) are turned into pedestrian streets. Day Street is turned into a two-way street between Herbert and Mass Ave. Statue Park is expanded as well as the public space in front of Mike's. Kenney Park is expanded south toward Elm Street, and a pedestrian alley is opened between Elm and Highland. There is an infill development behind One Davis Square, where a private parking lot is today, to create a transition from the residential neighborhood to Davis Square.



CONCEPT 18

This drawing was also created by a local charrette participant and shows major intersection changes in the Square. Holland, Highland, College, and Day Streets form the main intersection. Elm from the square to Cutter, Chester from Elm to Herbert, and Bowers from Elm to Cottage, and the bottom of Grove Street are turned into pedestrian streets. Parking is a shared resource located primarily in lots/garages. A hotel development is located over a municipal garage on Grove Street.



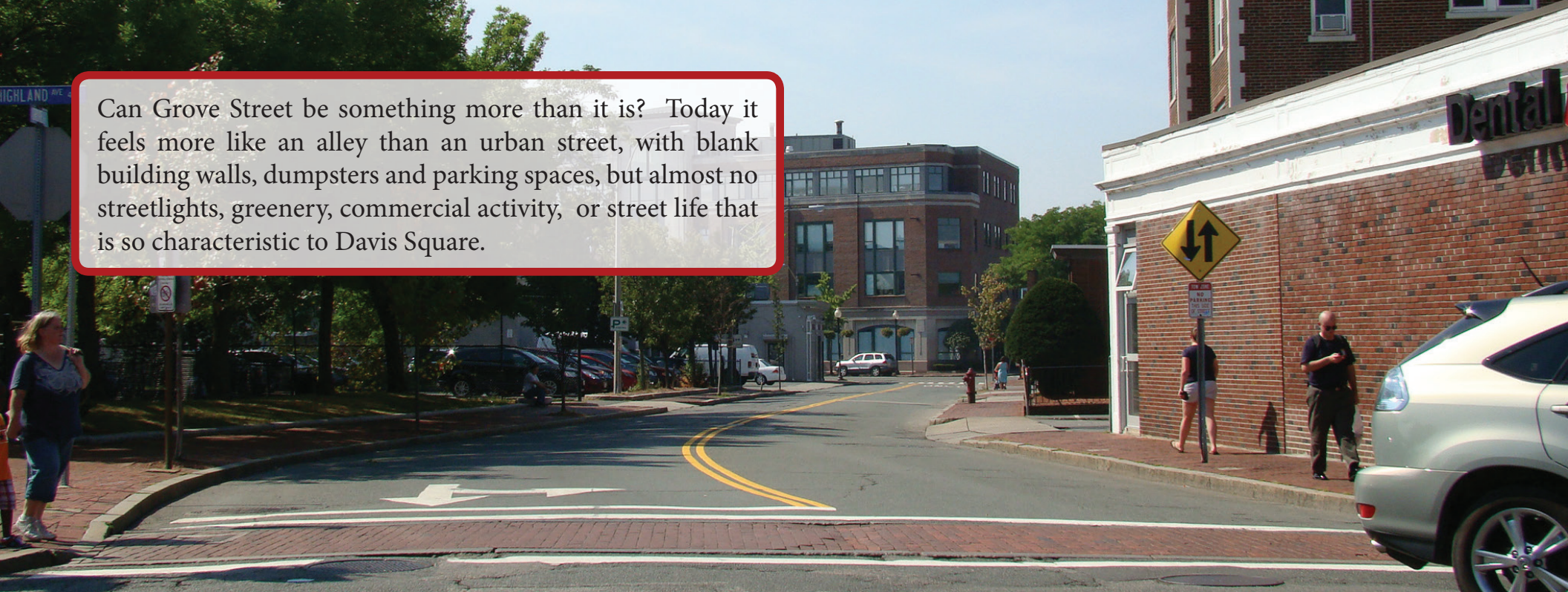
Somerville
Theatre

CONCEPT 19

A modified version of the four-way intersection closes Dover Street between the square and Meacham Road. By swinging Holland Street slightly north around a pedestrian plaza at One Davis Square, a regular four-way intersection is created. This sketch shows two-way traffic on Elm Street and Highland Avenue, but the concept could be built even if the current traffic pattern was maintained. Circulation south of the square is improved by creating a connection street between Day and Dover across the privately-owned parking lot behind One Davis Square.



Can Grove Street be something more than it is? Today it feels more like an alley than an urban street, with blank building walls, dumpsters and parking spaces, but almost no streetlights, greenery, commercial activity, or street life that is so characteristic to Davis Square.



CONCEPT 20

This perspective sketch looks east, across Grove Street and up Highland Avenue (Kenney Park is on the right edge of the image). A four-story building is imagined to replace the surface parking lot and the adjacent one-story pharmacy building. The site is large enough to support a small, boutique hotel, and the location is close enough to the heart of Davis Square to make it attractive to independent, innovative hotel operator.



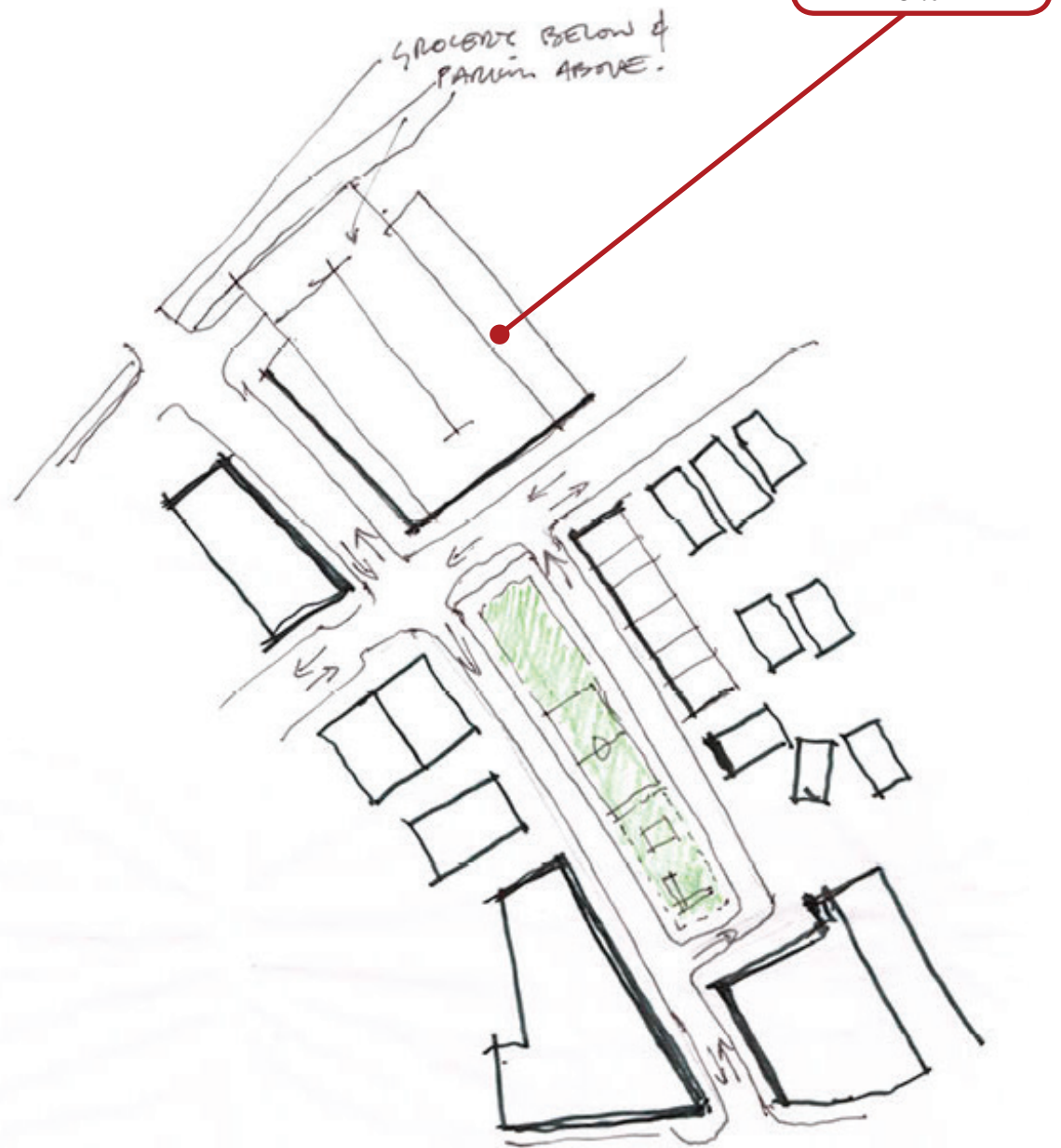
□ RITE AID BLOCK
CONCEPT

CONCEPT 21

This quick sketch imagines a radical expansion of Kenney Park southward across the parking lots. A narrow, one-way access road connects from Grove Street to Highland Avenue along the east side of the park, and a narrow band of townhouses are shown facing westward to frame the space.

A concept originally considered in the 1982 Davis Square Action Plan is revisited here: creating a grocery store with structured parking on the northeast corner of Grove and Highland. The ground-floor grocery store is built across the existing City-owned parking lot, creating urban edges for the corner. A ramp system accessed from what is currently the rear parking lot would bring vehicles to a multi-story parking structure.

This sketch is also memorable for its creative approach to one-way and two-way traffic patterns at this often-congested corner. Grove Street is imagined as a two-way street on its northern and southern edges, but the central portion adjacent to the park is one-way headed south. Highland Avenue is envisioned as returning to two-way traffic, except for a short segment just east of the intersection.



CONCEPT 22

Many participants identified Grove Street as a major gap in the urban fabric of Davis Square. Surface parking lots on both sides of the streets are obvious candidates for modestly-scaled redevelopment, but after conversations with property owners, business owners and nearby residents, a more ambitious idea began to take shape involving a potential large underground parking garage beneath Grove Street and several surrounding properties. A south-facing down ramp brings cars into the structure from Highland Avenue, and a south-facing up ramp returns them to street level at Elm Street. In between, a single level of parking extends underneath Kenney Park, the privately-owned surface lots on either side of Grove Street, and under new buildings imagined for both corners of Elm Street and Grove Street.

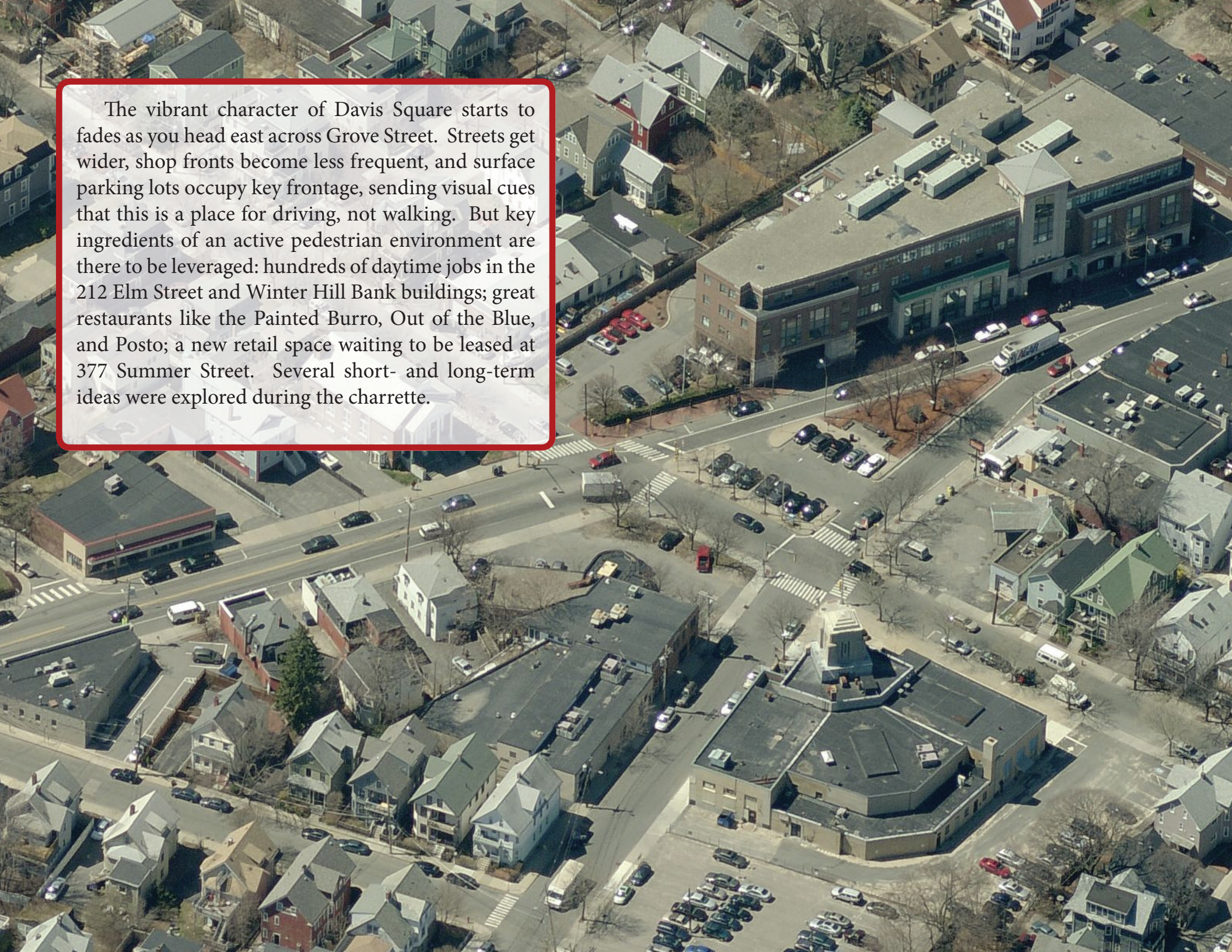
Neighboring residential properties along Dresden Circle, and the buildings at the southwest corner of Highland and Grove are preserved and protected. A garage this size could hold roughly 180 cars, and the expense of construction could be shared with commercial property owners realizing the benefit of new development revenue.





CONCEPT 22: Axonometric view showing how Grove Street might look with a hidden underground parking deck and new development on the surface lots of today

The vibrant character of Davis Square starts to fade as you head east across Grove Street. Streets get wider, shop fronts become less frequent, and surface parking lots occupy key frontage, sending visual cues that this is a place for driving, not walking. But key ingredients of an active pedestrian environment are there to be leveraged: hundreds of daytime jobs in the 212 Elm Street and Winter Hill Bank buildings; great restaurants like the Painted Burro, Out of the Blue, and Posto; a new retail space waiting to be leased at 377 Summer Street. Several short- and long-term ideas were explored during the charrette.

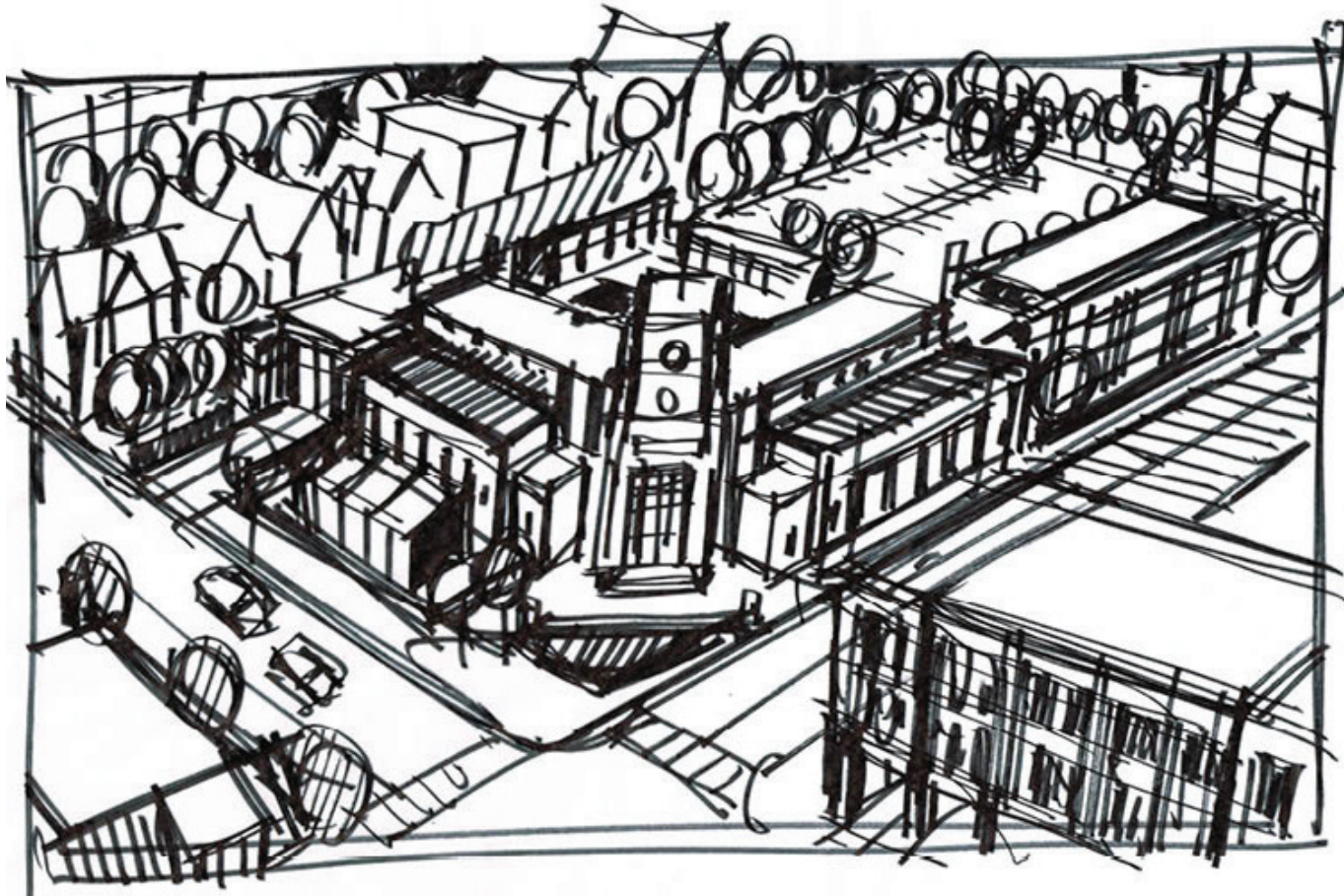


CONCEPT 23

This aerial sketch brings many of those aspirations to life. The parking lot itself is shown as a well-designed urban plaza. A canopy is imagined in the center of the space, which could potentially support open-air market-type activities. A small monument is shown on the west end, where Elm Street and Summer Street split, to help draw foot traffic from the core of Davis Square. This sketch preserves automobile and bus traffic on Summer Street, although other design ideas have suggested reclaiming the roadway for additional plaza space.

The corner of Elm, Russell and Cutter is framed by new buildings and the restored steeple of the historic church. On the surface parking lot adjacent to Citizens Bank, a modestly-scaled townhouse building is shown. This type of residential use would promote safety in the new civic space, with many windows facing the plaza and new residents providing evening and weekend foot traffic. On the left side of the image, a traditionally-designed four-story mixed use building is shown on Domino's / Wing Works property. The building extends right up to the sidewalk on Cutter Avenue, to enclose the civic space and create visual friction for drivers approaching the corner of Elm, Russell and Cutter.





CONCEPT 24

This perspective sketch imagines an adaptive re-use of the iconic Winter Hill Bank building along with infill development of the portion of the privately-owned VFW parking lot fronting on Summer Street. A small, independent hotel operator might find the unique configuration of building space shown here to be an asset.

In the foreground of the image, a three-story building is shown replacing the Dominoes Pizza building, creating an attractive edge for the new civic space imagined at Cutter Plaza.

Possible architectural floor plans and a site plan for were explored to understand the feasibility of the concept as well.

Coordination between private businesses and property owners, government agencies, and local nonprofit or advocacy groups is a key to creating and sustaining a vibrant business district. The Somerville by Design: Davis Square process has succeeded in getting many of the right people in the room together to plan for the future, but a formalized, representative organization may be needed to take the lead on implementing many of the ideas. The following three slides visually illustrate activities that might be best managed by a new district management organization.



MAIN STREETS ORGANIZATION

Typically a Public/Private Partnership

Executive Director

- Raises Funding
- Incorporates the Organization
- Drafts an Annual Work Plan
- Implements Programs

Potential Funding

- Municipal Budget Appropriations
- Community Development Block Grant Funding
- District Improvement Financing (New incremental tax revenues from property improvements in district are spent in district)
- Enterprise Funds (Separate fund created for Sales Tax/Fee Revenue gather from a specific service provided)

Sometimes Supported by City Staff



CONCEPT 25

The Main Streets Organization (MSO) model was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1977. Background information can be found at this [link](#). MSO's are community development organizations that work with business owners, property owners, and interested residents to enhance the Square. These organizations typically have an Executive Director on staff and a volunteer Board of Directors. Events frequently rely on volunteer-driven efforts. In Somerville, two Main Streets organizations currently exist, serving Union Square and East Somerville. Twenty individual Main Streets districts operate within the City of Boston.

There are several ways to fund a Main Street Organization: municipal budget appropriations, federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, District Improvement Financing (DIF), and local Enterprise Funds. Some are more viable than others. CDBG funding is not currently likely in Davis Square, since federal eligibility standards require an area to meet specific income levels among residents. Municipal budget appropriations would likely require prioritization of funds away from another program. District Improvement Financing would take a percentage of future property tax increases from the Square to fund the Main Street Organization. Lastly, an Enterprise Fund would create a new revenue stream (using defined sources like sales tax, or fees from parking) that fund the Main Street Organization.

CONCEPT 26

Business Improvement Districts (BID) are non-profit or quasi-government organizations established to support existing town centers and main streets. They have dedicated funding and a Board of Directors comprised of business owners, property owners, and interested residents.

There are several ways to fund a BID – a tax surcharge to properties in the district, District Improvement Financing (DIF), and Enterprise Funds. The tax surcharge option would be applied to properties in the business district, and funding generated would be held in a special account that can only be used for improvements within the district. DIF and Enterprise Funds would function as described in Concept 25.

To establish a BID, businesses in the area need to petition the City to create the BID. The City then determines that a majority of businesses in Davis Square want the BID. Lastly, the City enacts legislation through the Board of Alderman creating the BID. Services performed by BID can include maintenance (waste management, sidewalk cleaning, rodent control, landscaping); marketing (district branding; event management, wayfinding and signage); parking management (pricing strategies, shared-use arrangements, valet services); and even economic development technical assistance (storefront improvements, business recruitment and tenant-landlord matching).

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a non-profit corporation or quasi-governmental organization with a board of directors composed of some combination of property owners, businesses, and government officials.

Potential Funding:

- Voluntary Added Tax on Real Estate Assessments
- District Improvement Financing (New incremental tax revenues from property improvements in district are spent in district)
- Enterprise Funds (Separate fund created for Sales Tax/Fee Revenue gather from a specific service provided)

Sometimes supported by City Staff



While larger scale redevelopment has its place, incremental, small-scale improvements are increasingly seen as a way to allow a host of local actors to test new concepts before making substantial political and financial commitments. Low-risk, short-term commitments that develop social capital between residents can often lead to long term improvements that increase livability and contribute to the unique character of a community as a whole.



Visitors enjoy the “pop-up plaza” created in the Cutter Avenue parking lot during the course of the SomervillebyDesign: Davis Square charrette.

CONCEPT 31

Somerville has a rich tradition of public murals. Currently, Davis Square has only one prominent mural – on Winter Street, on the rear facade of Johnny D's. Throughout the business district, many blank walls exist, creating opportunities to add visual interest to the urban environment without breaking the bank. Likely candidates might include the rear face of the Tedeschi store, the back side of the Middlesex Bank block (facing the busway), or the side/rear faces of the Somerville Theatre or One Davis Square. A near-term project site could be identified through conversations with commercial property owners, and project financing could be explored by the City of Somerville and the Somerville Arts Council.

ACCENT BLANK WALLS WITH MURALS





CONCEPT 32

For years, a weekly summer film series sponsored by the City has brought residents and visitors to Seven Hills Park. But the logistics of using a temporary movie screen in the middle of a grassy park can be challenging. An alternative model of outdoor movie showings uses empty parking lots for seating, and blank building walls as screens. Several of the design ideas for the Seven Hills Park / Dover Street / Day Street area included more permanent facilities for outdoor film screenings. But a short-term pilot could easily be arranged to test whether the idea makes sense, for moviegoers as well as event organizers and private property owners.





TURN EXCESS PAVEMENT INTO PLAZAS



CONCEPT 33

“Pavement to Plaza” is another tactical urbanism idea that Somerville has been testing in recent years. Our SomerStreets series, the Farmers’ Markets in Davis and Union Square, the Davis Flea, and the Assembled craft market in Assembly Square (not to mention Davis Square favorites like Honk!, ArtBeat and Porchfest) all represent efforts to reclaim urban space for pedestrians that is usually given over to automobiles.

During the three-day Somerville by Design charrette, the 11-space Cutter Square parking lot was converted into a temporary plaza, with movable tables and chairs, potted plants, food trucks, and artistic performances bringing pedestrian activity to this space. Many participants in the Somerville by Design process asked how Cutter Plaza could become more of a permanent amenity to the neighborhood. Luckily, phase two of the 2012 Davis Square streetscape project calls for just that.

CONCEPT 34

People love people-watching in urban environments – just try to find a seat in Statue Plaza on a warm summer evening! Creative ways to add street seating are popping up in cities everywhere. One common technique is the fixed bench installation like the ones in front of Dente's Barbershop on Highland Avenue. More recently, wooden benches have been designed around street trees (Tufts University installed this type of seating in several on-campus locations in 2013). Different techniques can work in different cases, but the benefits are universal: more people on the street tends to promote safety, business activity, and sense of place.

INSTALL STREET SEATS



EXPAND THE MARKET CULTURE



CONCEPT 35

Every Wednesday and every Sunday between spring and fall, Davis Square offers an open-air market experience. The long-running Farmers' Market (located on the Day Street / Herbert Street public parking lot) and the Davis Flea (now in its second year at the Buena Vista public parking deck) are popular shopping venues, for residents and visitors alike. Both events utilize roughly half the space available on their respective sites.

To reinforce Davis Square's market culture, these successful markets could potentially be expanded onto larger footprints. Opportunities for a third market event could be explored (including an indoor Winter Market, similar to the successful one at the Armory in Somerville's Spring Hill neighborhood). And as illustrated in several of the sketches produced during the Somerville by Design process, a three-season canopy space could be developed at various locations around Davis Square.

CONCEPT 36

Cities around the country have been testing alternative uses for land dedicated to on-street parallel parking spaces in business districts. With proper siting and effective coordination, these alternative uses (common examples include bicycle parking, parklets and micro-retail spaces) can be embraced by residents and nearby business owners.

In 2011, Somerville launched a bike corral program, allowing business owners the option to replace a single on-street parking space with a corral that can handle up to 16 bicycles. Diesel Cafe's Elm Street corral is one of the busiest in Somerville. In 2012, the Hubway bike-sharing program sited several stations throughout Somerville. Lastly, in 2013, a Union Square restaurant owner worked with the City of Somerville to create a "dining deck" in a public parking lot in front of the store, valuing more customers over cars.



GET MORE OUT OF PARKING SPACES



REPLACE THE GROVE STREET GATE WITH A BICYCLE GATEWAY



CONCEPT 37

Many participants in the Davis Square design charrette wondered about the future of the Grove Street Gate, which separates the MBTA busway / Somerville Community Path from residential neighborhoods to the north. If preventing cut-through automobile traffic on Grove Street is still desirable, but forcing bicyclists onto the narrow sidewalks is not, one potential solution is the “bicycle gateway”. Various combinations of paving, landscaping and signage could replace the rusting metal gate and failing brick sidewalks to create a more functional and attractive barrier to cars, while improving safety and access for pedestrians, persons with disabilities, and cyclists.

CONCEPT 38

Kenney Park is an important open space resource, anchoring the corner of Highland Avenue and Grove Street. It has been more than 20 years since the last major upgrades, and the park is not as heavily used as might be expected. A major City redesign and reconstruction project will take place over the next several years, but tactical urbanism strategies can be used to make improvements in the meantime. A low-cost, temporary installation of movable chairs helped bring Cutter Plaza to life during the Somerville by Design event, and bringing movable chairs to Kenney Park could offer similar benefits.

ADD MOVABLE CHAIRS TO KENNEY PARK





MAKE A PLACE FOR MICRO-RETAIL



CONCEPT 39

Many Davis Square stakeholders have expressed concerns about the mix of businesses in the neighborhood. In recent years, several prominent retail spaces have been converted to restaurant use, and fears about national chains moving in and undermining the funky independent nature of Davis Square are common.

These challenges are not unique to Davis Square, and around the country, cities have begun using tactical urbanism to encourage local retail activity. Shipping containers are being converted to three- and even four-season retail spaces, offering a low-risk, low-cost alternative to traditional storefronts. Creative siting of these “structures” can have the added benefit of encouraging pedestrian activity by filling in gaps in the streetwall, creating visual interest in place of empty parking lots. Locations like Grove Street could be potential places to test whether micro-retail works in Davis Square.

CONCEPT 40

Grove Street between Highland Avenue and Elm Street captured the imagination of participants in the Davis Square design charrette. Today, this street feels like a boundary line between the vibrant core of the square and the less active east end. Most of the land along Grove Street is used as parking lots. There are few reasons to walk along Grove, and even fewer to stop and linger.

In communities as different as North Adams, MA and Detroit, MI, streets like Grove Street are being re-imagined as places of community activity. A “Pavement to Plaza” initiative, temporary market uses, “urban beach” installations, or even just a colorful coat of paint on the roadway might offer short-term, low-risk techniques to bring Grove Street to life.

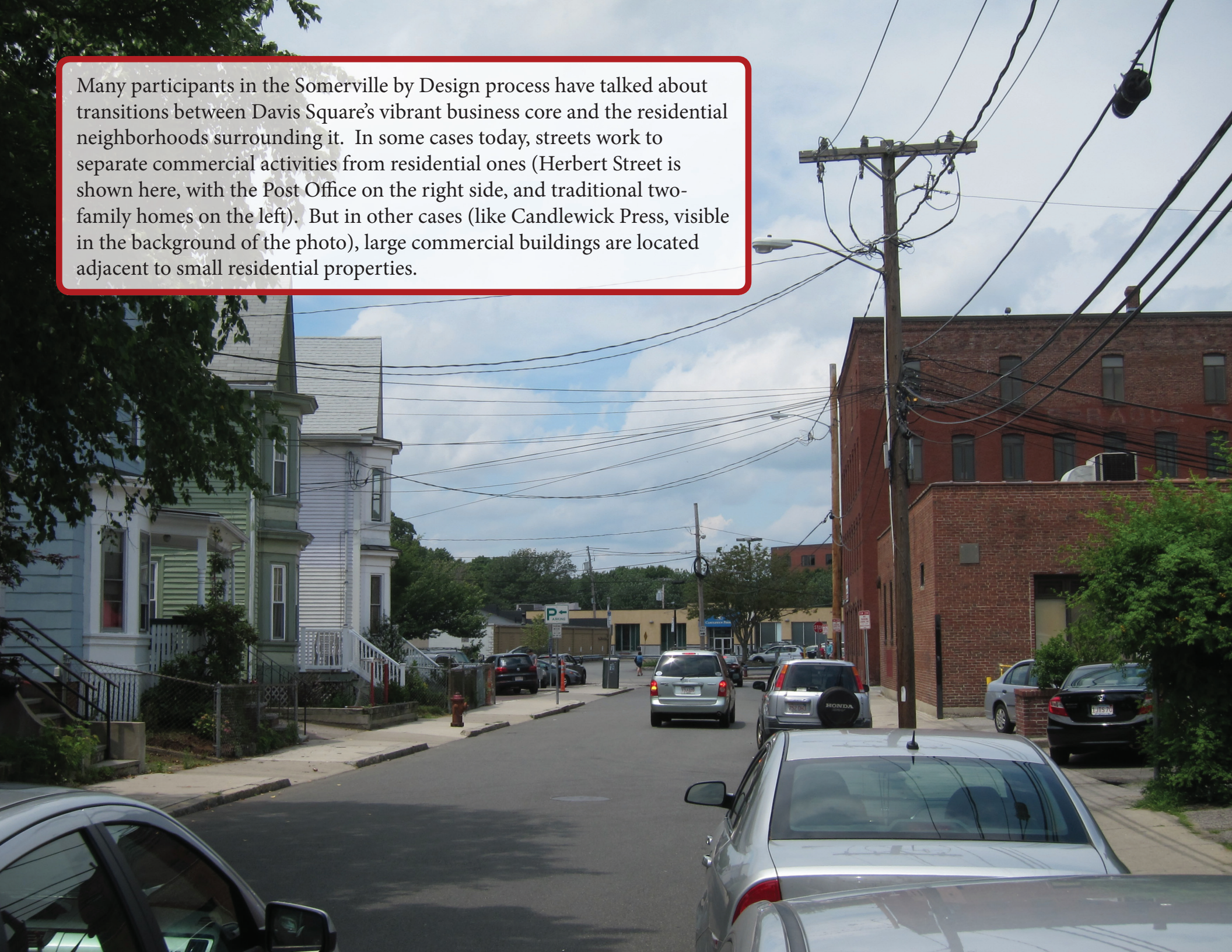




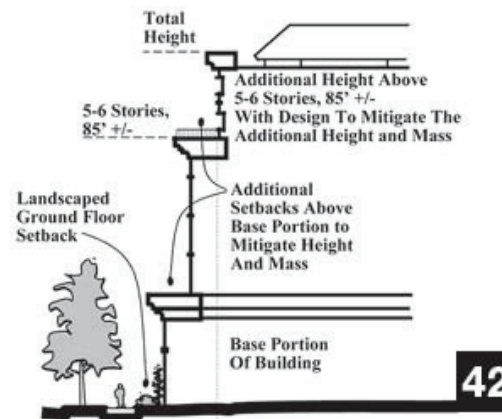
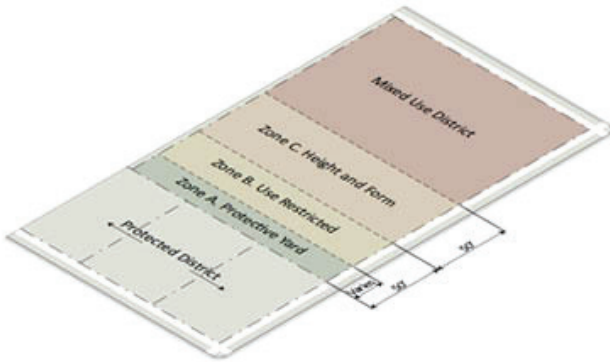
CONCEPT 41

Food trucks have become popular in cities across the U.S., because of their funky character as well as their suitability for start-up restaurants. But their mobility creates several challenges: first, food trucks need a place to park. Second, their gas-powered generators can undermine the outdoor dining experience. Third, competitors in brick and mortar restaurants can feel like the playing field is not level: food trucks don't have property taxes passed onto them by their landlords, and operators are not necessarily maintaining public spaces (like sidewalk snow shoveling) in the same way that traditional restaurant operators do. A solution that has gained popularity to address these concerns is the "food truck pod". Cities have begun dedicating space to food trucks, often providing electric hook-ups and predictable parking assignments in return for truck operators taking on lease payments and property management responsibilities.

Many participants in the Somerville by Design process have talked about transitions between Davis Square's vibrant business core and the residential neighborhoods surrounding it. In some cases today, streets work to separate commercial activities from residential ones (Herbert Street is shown here, with the Post Office on the right side, and traditional two-family homes on the left). But in other cases (like Candlewick Press, visible in the background of the photo), large commercial buildings are located adjacent to small residential properties.



CONCEPT 42



The final concept generated at the charrette is related to creating a physical transition between commercial areas, with their high-level of pedestrian activity, and nearby residential properties, which line quieter streets. Today, many residential lots “harden” their perimeters in an effort to mitigate highly-trafficked sidewalks and noisy uses. Even where noise ordinances and upper floor step-backs are utilized, “unpleasant” adjacencies can still exist.

Developing a physical transition where one does not exist today will require a delicate balance of highly calibrated regulation and skillful physical design. A possible solution would be to develop a new zoning district that buffers the two areas by using a combination of lower-intensity permitted uses within residential, lower scale building forms. As we see on College Avenue, law offices and doctors’ offices can use these residential structures efficiently.