



ASSEMBLY SQUARE

Neighborhood Plan Update



PUBLIC DRAFT - JUNE 2022

TYPES OF PLANS

The Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development produces a number of long-range plans to guide further decision making for the City. Each type of plan is summarized below:

1

Comprehensive Plans

Massachusetts state law requires Planning Board's to adopt a comprehensive master plan that sets municipal goals and policies for land use, housing, economics, resources, open space, infrastructure, and mobility. SomerVision, Somerville's current master plan, calls for additional design-based area plans that are adopted as an amendment and implementation appendix to the master plan.



2

Neighborhood Plans

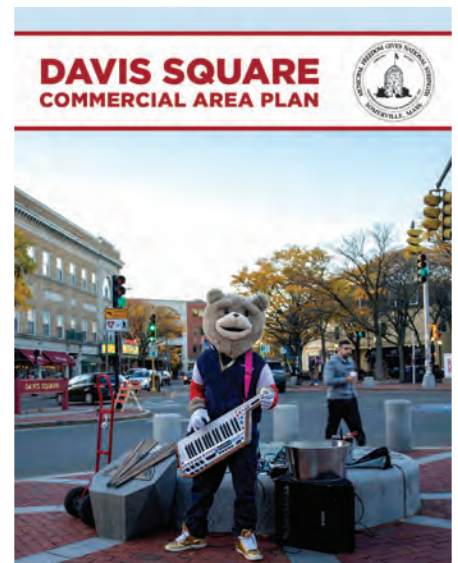
Neighborhood plans focus on one of the major socio-geographic neighborhoods of Somerville. These plans address the same topics as a comprehensive plan but help translate the city-wide goals and policies of the comprehensive master plan to the local scale.



3

Area Plans

Area plans focus on more specific topics or on a specific geography such as the core commercial area of a neighborhood, the area within walking distance to a transit station, the campus of an educational institution, or other special areas. All types of area plans provide background information and policy and capital project recommendations to guide later decision making, but don't typically include all the topics covered by a more comprehensive neighborhood plan.



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...AND HUNDREDS OF SOMERVILLE RESIDENTS

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ES. Executive Summary

The executive summary provides a high-level overview of the vision for the Assembly Square neighborhood.

ASSEMBLY SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Assembly Square is Somerville’s newest and burgeoning neighborhood. Originally an industrial site, the area evolved into a suburban shopping hub before becoming a mixed-use main street. The development of the first Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan created reflects community demands for mixed-use development and transit access at this location. As a result of continuous community involvement, the plan included the creation of the Assembly Square Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Station, Assembly Row and Mass General Brigham as well as changes to the Assembly Marketplace.

Today, numerous development applications are poised to continue Assembly Square’s transformation, necessitating an updated community plan. With a refreshed vision in place, these new developments can create the neighborhood that all Somerville residents want.

*Dream Big
and
Fight Hard*



PUBLIC PROCESS

The City hired Dover, Kohl & Partners (referred to elsewhere in this document as, “the design team”) to assist with an open public process to develop a cohesive vision for Assembly Square. The City’s SomerVoice 2040 website hosted information about the neighborhood plan and facilitated conversations between the design team and the public. Participants could access initial findings, surveys, polls and a virtual charrette hub, as well as join live meetings throughout the December 2020 charrette week. Online charrette week events included the kick-off presentation, small group discussions, technical meetings, open design studios and the work-in-progress presentation. The resulting Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan is an accumulation of concepts that came out of this public process.

Interactive Online Activities

- SomerVoice & Somerville By Design Websites
- Virtual Charrette Hub
- Online Polls
- Virtual Tour
- Residential Survey
- Community Survey
- Community Image Survey
- Questionnaires
- YouTube Films
- Preliminary Scenarios

Virtual Charrette Events

November 30, 2020

Kick-Off Presentations
Small Group Discussions

December 1- 3, 2020

Technical Meetings
Open Design Studio

December 4, 2020

Work-in-Progress
Presentation

5 BIG IDEAS

1

BUILD GREAT NEW PLACES (THAT ARE COMPATIBLE AND RESPECTFUL OF CONTEXT)

Participants want the needs of the community to be kept in mind as the neighborhood is developed. Specifically, they want to see buildings and streets brought together as a cohesive space that everyone can enjoy. That means designing blocks that are more walkable. It means human-scaled buildings should front the public realm while still accommodating large-footprint buildings like Life Science complexes. And it means properly proportioned public spaces, like streets and greens, that feel like inviting outdoor rooms that are open and available to all.



2

INCREASE ACCESS TO NATURE AND BUILD SUSTAINABLY

Sustainability was a common theme during the public discourse. Participants asked us to explore district-wide energy goals, improve air and water quality, and to build new structures in an environmentally friendly way (e.g., constructing taller buildings by the highway to block pollution in residential areas and public spaces). Similarly, many people cheered the creation of a string of high-quality parks and public spaces that would run throughout Assembly Square, connect to the regional trails systems, and celebrate the often underutilized and overlooked Mystic River. With an eye towards the future, the design team was challenged to recognize the vulnerability of the site in an era of increased flooding.



3

DEMAND SAFE, COMFORTABLE, AND INTERESTING STREETS AND INCREASED TRANSIT AVAILABILITY

Participants recognized that Assembly Square needs to bolster its mode split of transit, cycling and walking options to better connect with the surrounding city including connections to east Somerville and Foss Park under the highway. For residents, that will mean balanced street spaces to provide a mix of mobility and placemaking. For commuters and shoppers, it's boosting transit access and investment with increased MBTA Orange Line frequency and additional bus routes. For pedestrians, it will mean appropriate uses of the frontage, clear paths and well-planned sidewalk zones. And for safety, four-way high contrast crosswalks should be added at intersections and a clearly defined ring of infrastructure for cyclists and low-speed mobility.



4

GROW REVENUE-GENERATING USES FOR SOMERVILLE

The community wants to expand the City's non-residential tax base to help diversify the tax base. Assembly Square is poised to help Somerville do just that. It can be done sensibly, by enhancing the site's current strengths, such as the Mystic River, Draw Seven State Park, the MBTA Orange Line and the area's strong business cluster. It can be done shrewdly, by working with entrepreneurs and developers to encourage Life Sciences growth, and by challenging innovators to cultivate new catalytic niches, including investments from CSR programs and the arts. And it can be done thoughtfully, by updating the land development regulations to encourage development of the highest quality.



5

CULTIVATE THE ASSEMBLY COMMUNITY & RECONNECT PHYSICALLY AND SOCIALLY TO THE BROADER CITY

There are many ways a neighborhood can better connect itself to surrounding areas. Physically: remove obstacles, add transit options, and make Fellsway, Kensington Connector, and the river more crossable. Socially: foster business improvement districts, main street associations, and neighborhood groups. Spiritually and psychologically: develop a meaningful identity for Assembly Square that is broader and deeper than just "Assembly Square." Two important ways these can be addressed are: 1) by expanding the residential population with a wide variety of housing options for a broader mix of people, and 2) by making space for small, local, independent businesses.



THE PLAN: FOCUS AREA

1

Middlesex Corridor

Middlesex Avenue is located in the western portion of the Assembly Square neighborhood and serves as a critical connection between Fellsway and Mystic Avenue. Because Middlesex Avenue lies adjacent to the elevated Interstate-93 viaduct, developing taller buildings in this area can create a physical barrier between the highway and the rest of the neighborhood. This makes the location ideal for Life Science and workplace uses. Middlesex Avenue is also home to the courthouse, which can be expanded. The avenue can serve as a main connection accommodating motor vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.



2

Assembly Marketplace

The Assembly Marketplace site is the largest single-owned redevelopment opportunity in the Assembly Square neighborhood. Its mixed-use residential character can be extended from Assembly Row across Grand Union Boulevard. Interconnected streets can create a network of walkable blocks with connected civic spaces at the heart of the neighborhood. It provides the opportunity to create the Assembly Square that the entire neighborhood centers around. Mid-size buildings at the center of the site can transition to taller buildings along Grand Union Boulevard and Middlesex Avenue with green roofs at the edges.



3

Assembly Square South

Currently, the Assembly Square South area features an aging, suburban, motor vehicle-oriented development. Some sites are vacant, while others are occupied by prospering businesses. In the long term, there is an opportunity to redevelop underutilized parcels visible from I-93 for office use, and parcels closer to Grand Union Boulevard for residential use. This plan gives an urban edge to the Assembly Point micro-district. Overall, uses should be diversified to serve a full range of daily needs and increase vitality. Over time, parcels like the Assembly Square South site can be redeveloped as well.



4

Assembly Point Micro-District

The southern portion of Assembly Square has multiple property owners and a visibly different character from the rest of the site. Existing buildings are small and mostly occupied by makers and smaller businesses. This area can become a vibrant micro-district for arts and crafts, maker spaces, and local restaurants. Shared streets that prioritize pedestrians, combined with new and refurbished buildings can create a lively area with an identity all its own.





TEN HILLS

SYLVESTER BAXTER
RIVERFRONT PARK

ARTISAN WAY

CANAL ST

ASSEMBLY ROW

FOLEY ST

MIDDLESEX AVE

MCGRATH

ASSEMBLY SQUARE
MBTA STATION

DRAW SEVEN
STATE PARK

MASS GENERAL
BRIGHAM

ORANGE LINE

INTERSTATE 93
MYSTIC AVE

EAST
SOMERVILLE

BROADWAY

LEGEND

- City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- Primary Pedestrian Network
- Proposed Buildings
- Planned Building
- Existing Buildings
- Proposed Green Space
- Existing Green Space
- Plaza Space
- Shared Street
- Blocks
- River

Note: Planned buildings refer to buildings received necessary approvals, and proposed buildings are suggested general building footprints in this Neighborhood Plan but not individually designed yet.



MOBILITY

AREAS OF PRIORITY

The design team identified eight areas of priority within the Assembly Square neighborhood that demonstrate how changes in right-of-way can provide greater options for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders. The focus of these proposals is to:

1. Ensure that current and future streets within Assembly Square allocate more space for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders.
2. Address the barriers to greater connectivity between Assembly Square and the surrounding neighborhoods like Ten Hills, Winter Hill, and East Somerville in the design of Fellsway and I-93.
3. Create a connection across the Mystic to the growing residential, shopping, entertainment, and fermentation districts of Everett.

STREET NETWORK

Our guiding philosophy is to prioritize pedestrians, cyclists and transit users while focusing single occupancy motor vehicle use on the perimeter of the site. The following mobility principles should be considered in future developments and changes to the right-of-way:

1. Create a compact and walkable street network that connects with existing streets and adjacent neighborhoods to the south and west.
2. Promote the design of mixed-use streets that encourage multimodal activity.
3. Provide safer routes and lighting for residents and visitors traveling by foot, bicycle, transit or car including coming from east Somerville.

MODE SPLIT

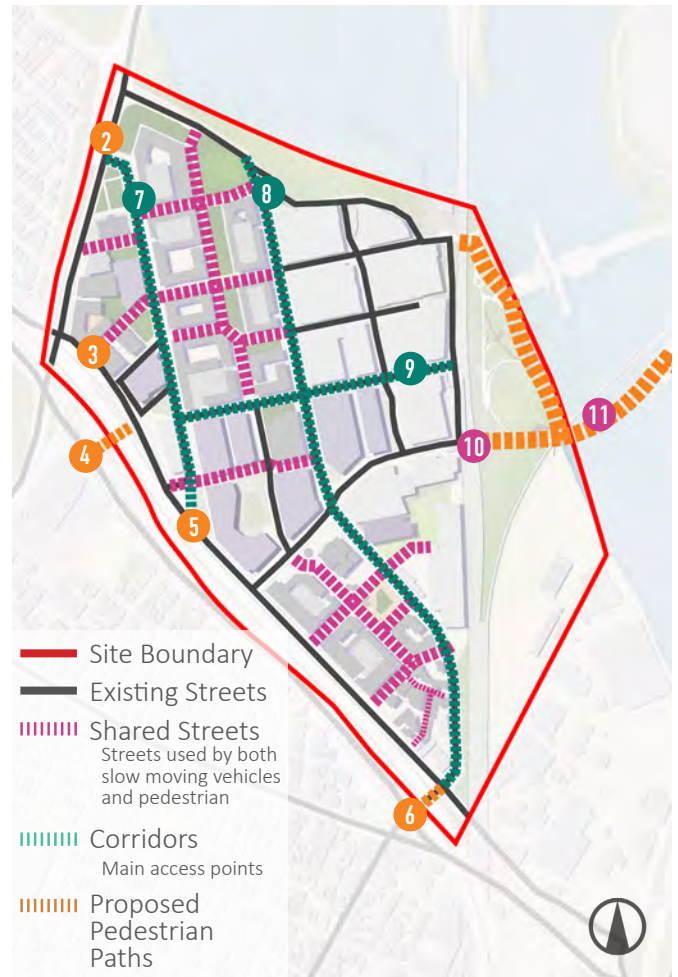
Currently, more than 50% of trips to, from and within the Assembly Square neighborhood are made by car. The goal is to reduce that number by half, so 75% of trips would not involve a single-occupancy motor vehicle. By limiting parking, increasing transit options and designing multimodal streets, the City can shift the dominant transportation mode.

Increased Transit

Frequency of the MBTA Orange Line should be increased at Assembly Square. Multiple additional bus options can connect Assembly Square to Porter Square and to Union Square, including the City's new MBTA Green Line extension stops. Additional bus lines with more direct connection to Assembly Square and to the Orange Line should be considered.

Transportation Demand Management

The Assembly Connect program helps manage transportation demand for the neighborhood. New local business users should be encouraged to participate by providing employees with transit passes and discouraging parking on site.



AREAS OF PRIORITY

Gateways

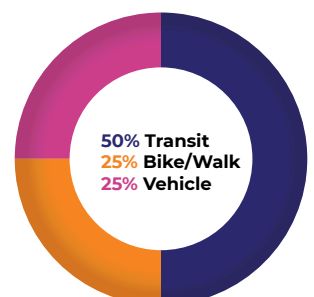
- 1 Grand Union Boulevard (North) Gateway
- 2 Middlesex Avenue (North) Gateway
- 3 Fellsway/Mystic Avenue Gateway
- 4 Kensington Connector Gateway
- 5 Middlesex Avenue (South) Gateway
- 6 Lombardi Street Gateway

Corridors

- 7 Middlesex Avenue Corridor Street Section
- 8 Grand Union Boulevard Corridor Street Section
- 9 Foley Street Corridor Street Section

Access

- 10 New access to Draw Seven Park from the MBTA station
- 11 Pedestrian bridge connection to Everett



ECONOMICS

THREE TIERS TO SUPPORT THE SITE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

1

Enhance the site's current strengths.

Assembly Square has a strong business cluster effect. The proof is in its key research and laboratory anchor tenants, its well established retail base and its growing residential footprint. Now it's time to broaden the neighborhood's economic, commercial and office offerings through coordinated branding and conscious cluster development. The goal is to attract diverse but complementary businesses of all sizes and types.

2

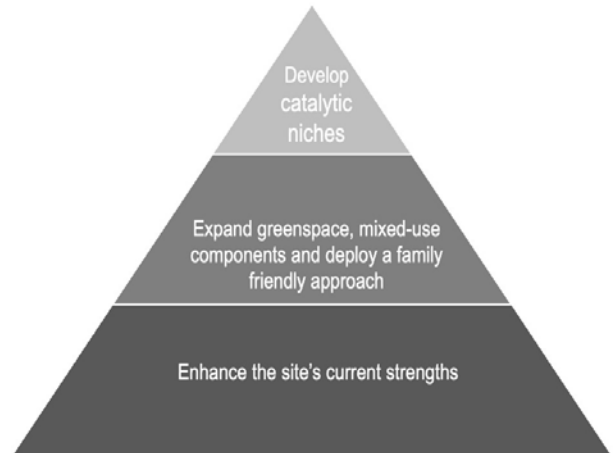
Expand greenspace, mixed-use components, and a family-friendly approach.

Assembly Square is home to much of Somerville's shoreline. This river's edge has the potential to become an even more vibrant, beloved waterfront park that serves and delights the local community and draws regional visitors year-round. Priority actions include waterfront programming, a connected loop of civic spaces throughout the neighborhood, and inventive sustainability and resiliency projects that enhance recreation opportunities. A central square can serve as the heart of the community upon which workforce housing and an expanded variety of housing types may be available.

3

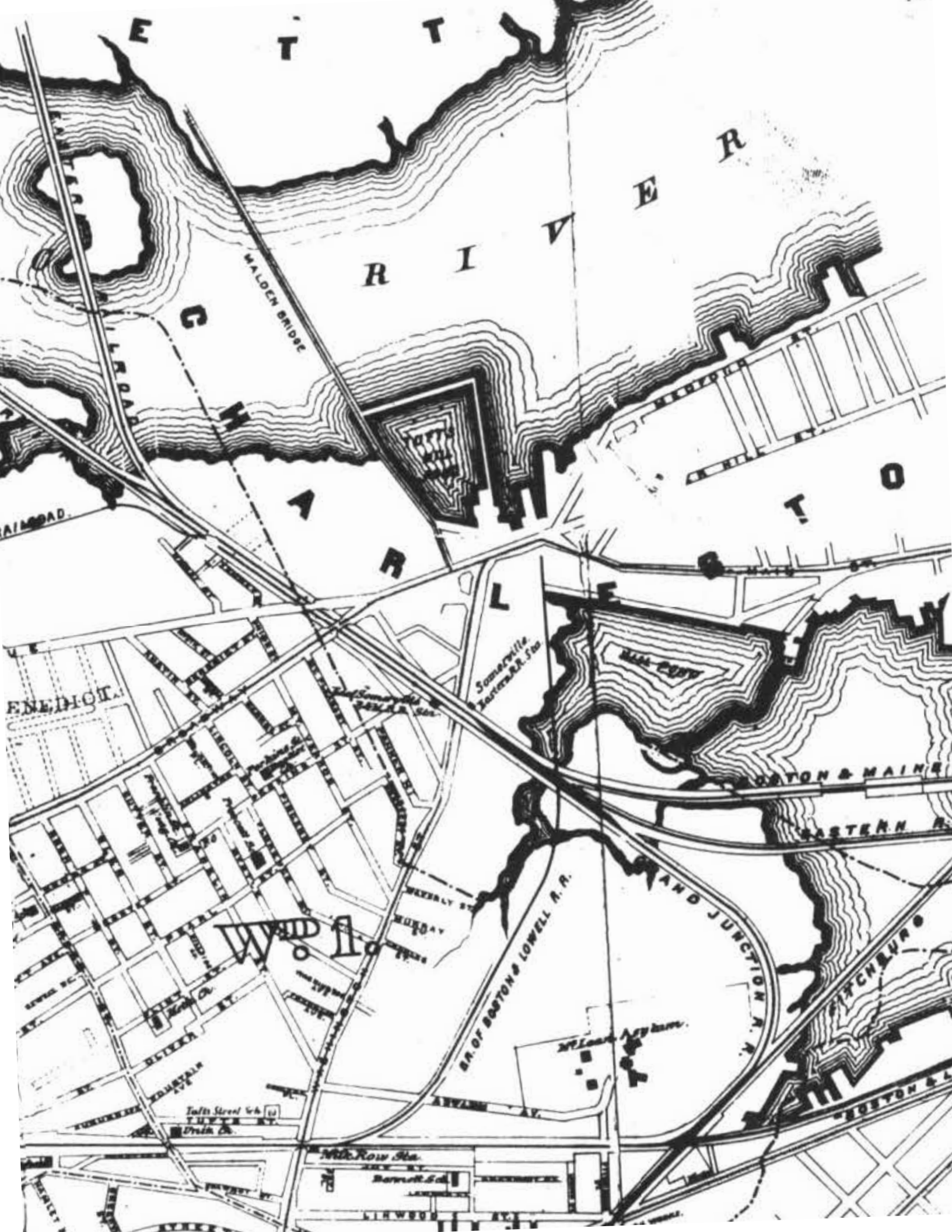
Develop new catalytic niches that complement the commercial footprint.

While commercial space is key to tax revenues, balancing the neighborhood requires more "soft-power" investments help to bring additional life and overall gains to the local and City economy by increasing the civic opportunities within the neighborhood for both residents and visitors. These could include attracting education resources and the arts community, creating small-footprint markets, and increasing corporate social responsibility programs and other similar community investments. Micro businesses and retails that enhances the neighborhood character should be encouraged. Affordable rental spaces should be provided to support local businesses and startups.



Three tiers to support the Assembly Square's economic development potential





1

.Background

Assembly Square is a unique Somerville neighborhood with a great deal of potential for change. This chapter lays out what Assembly Square is today and some of the forces shaping its future. The “we” in this document refers to the City, the residents and the design team as a unit.

ASSEMBLY SQUARE VISIONS

ASSEMBLY SQUARE HISTORY

Somerville is composed of vibrant, compact and connected neighborhoods which are physically and socially distinct. When it came time to develop the last neighborhood of this great city, Assembly Square, anti-urban, suburban forces pushed for a single-use commercial pod of big-box retailers and parking lots. Somerville pushed back. The City wanted to see Assembly Square become a neighborhood as mixed in uses, diverse in people, unique in character, and rich in social, recreational and economic opportunity as any in the region.

Assembly Square is surrounded by the historic neighborhoods of Somerville. It's just 2.5 miles northwest of Downtown Boston but is separated from the rest of the city by Interstate 93 (I-93) and the Mystic River.

The roughly 150-acre site was once home to a Ford Motor Company assembly plant, which gave this neighborhood its name. The plant closed in 1958, and in 1979, Somerville declared the Assembly Square district to be blighted. The City adopted the Assembly Square Revitalization Plan, and the former auto plant became Assembly Square Mall. This 360,000- square-foot shopping center featured a Kmart, a Jordan Marsh, smaller retail stores and a food court.

Large retailers offer tax benefits to the City, but most areas in Somerville are unfavorable for such developments. Assembly Square's site conditions proved ideal, however. A big-box Home Depot opened southwest of the mall in 1992. In 1999, IKEA purchased two waterfront industrial sites, adding another behemoth retailer. Extra parking was required because Assembly Square is a heavily trafficked regional center framed by highways. The area was becoming a suburban district in the heart of the region's most densely populated city.

But the residents of Somerville had other plans. In 1998, the Mystic View Task Force, a citizens group, created a bold, new vision for Assembly Square. The Task Force wanted to see a lively, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development. The City of Somerville initiated an extensive planning process that produced the 2000 Planning Study for Assembly Square. The plan proposed a 24-hour mixed-use district with residential, retail, office and recreational space as well as cinemas, restaurants and hotels. Assembly Square was rezoned to promote the mixed-use concept and design guidelines, and a design review committee was created to further the citizen vision.

In 2005, Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT), a Maryland-based real estate investment trust and developer, purchased the ailing Assembly Square Mall. In 2006, Somerville mayor Joseph Curtatone worked with IKEA to swap its centrally located waterfront parcel with an internal parcel to allow FRIT to create a waterfront mixed-use development. With the addition of a hard-won and highly prized Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) Orange Line station in 2012 and the construction of Assembly Row and Mass General Brigham, the outlook for this neighborhood drastically improved.



Mystic River and East Somerville in 1870



Ford Assembly Plant



Old Ford Assembly Plant: Assembly Square Mall



Aerial view of Assembly Row

ASSEMBLY SQUARE TODAY

In 2020, after 20 years of working to achieve the people’s vision, the City of Somerville commissioned a team led by Dover, Kohl & Partners to update the 2000 Planning Study and plan Assembly Square’s ultimate state as a walkable, attractive, livable and sustainable part of Somerville’s fabric. A real neighborhood, in other words. To make that happen, we first had to have a conversation about what it meant to be “a real neighborhood” — and take inventory of what the area had become..

After decades of urban planning wins and losses, Assembly Square had morphed into a curious mix of big-box retail stores and fields of parking lots abutting Assembly Row’s mixed-use main street with its more attractive shopfronts, tree-lined sidewalks and enviable, award-winning urbanism.

Assembly Square has housing, but the units are largely rented by single occupants who only live in them during the workweek. Many of these residents gave up their Assembly Square apartments when COVID-19 hit, returning full time to their homes elsewhere on Massachusetts’ lovely North Shore or in the historic towns in the western part of the state.

Unlike other neighborhoods in Somerville, Assembly Square does not have a focused business association, main street association, neighborhood association or homeowner’s association. The Assembly Square Advisory Committee functions as a business and neighborhood association. Even the landmark artworks featured in Assembly Square, such as the three gateways made of iron I-beams, recall the site’s industrial past, feeling like corporate art rather than local art. “If you’ve ever wanted to live in shopping a mall, then you’re in luck,” wrote The Boston Globe.

Assembly Square lacks a soul. What will it take to make the area one of the Somerville’s great neighborhoods?



Caffè Nero in Assembly Row



Assembly Row Streetscape



Amphitheater at Baxter Park



Public space at Assembly Row

EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

EXISTING MOBILITY CONDITIONS

The following images represent key locations within Assembly Square for mobility and what it looks like to get around the neighborhood. Because the dominant form of transportation today is automobiles, this looks at parking garages and lots, but shows the new BlueBikes as a point to the future of micro-mobility within Assembly Square. Existing retail and commercial requires unsightly loading and services especially along Middlesex Ave.

The planning for transportation should be community centered. Connection to adjacent communities should be safe and convenient. There is currently no safe pedestrian access from Assembly Square to neighborhoods such as East Somerville and Ten Hills. The transportation planning should focus on the needs of the community and develop a people-based transportation process.



Access Points



1. Grand Union Blvd (S)



2. Revolution Dr



3. Middlesex Ave (S)



4. Middlesex Ave (N)



5. Grand Union Blvd (N)

Parking Garages



1. Great River Garage



2. Artisan West Garage



3. Artisan East Garage



4. Canal Garage



5. Mass Gen Brigham Garage

Parking Lots



1. Christmas Tree Shop



2. Middlesex Ave



3. Marketplace



4. 5 Middlesex



5. Home Depot

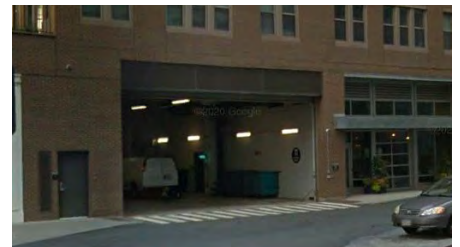
Loading/Service



1. Artisan Way



2. Middlesex Ave



3. Canal St

Micromobility



1. BlueBikes

IMPORTANT TRENDS

POPULATION TRENDS

Somerville is anticipated to grow. The latest Metropolitan Area Planning Council projection shows a 15% population increase between 2017 and 2030. Many new residents are moving to Somerville, especially young professionals. The city's population rose 7% from 2010 to 2017. The number of residents aged 25–34 increased by approximately 1/3 of Somerville's entire population. However, the number of residents aged 18 and under has dropped almost 20%, and overall, Somerville's population has seen a high turnover rate. Assembly Square should be encouraged to create a range of housing sizes and types to allow more people to potentially relocate within Somerville as their households and housing needs change.

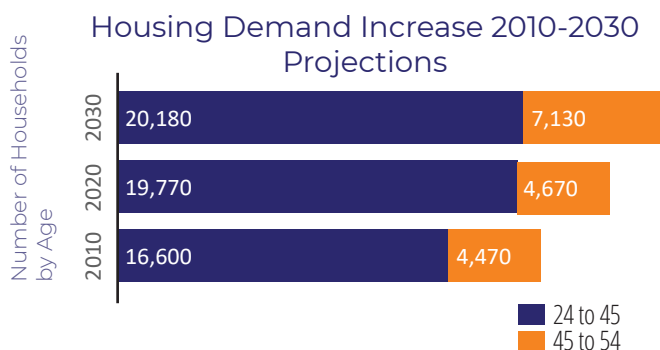
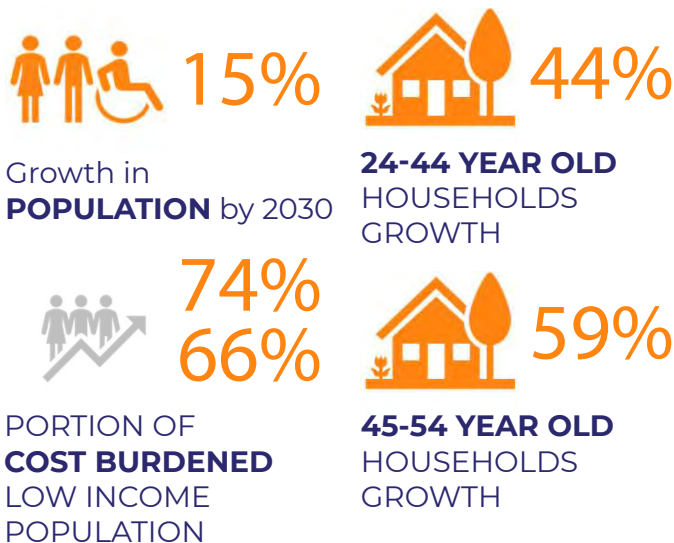
HOUSING TRENDS

In addition to its robust community life, Somerville's close proximity to the schools and industries of Boston makes the city a highly desirable destination. The population increase between 2017 and 2030 corresponds to approximately 5,500 new housing units that must be built just to satisfy the new growth.

The SomerVision 2040 plan identifies six main housing-related challenges facing the city: the rising cost of housing, the lack of affordable housing, forced displacement, chronic homelessness, an insufficient diversity of housing stock, and an inadequate condition of the existing housing stock. Only about 10% of units in Somerville are currently deed-restricted affordable. For comparison, Boston has 19% and Cambridge has about 15%. The minimum requirement for inclusionary housing was raised to 20% after SomerVision 2040 and the amended zoning. As new housing is built in Assembly Square, it is required to have 20% of the units affordable, which will help to increase the overall supply.

MOBILITY

The density of urban development in Somerville facilitates efficient mobility among neighborhoods. However, Assembly Square is cut off from other neighborhoods due to I-93, Fellsway, the Orange Line and the Mystic River. The Orange Line stop and bus route 90 help to connect Assembly Square to the rest of the city. As part of an equitable plan for access and circulation to and through the city, Somerville plans to have 50% of new trips be via transit, bike or walking. Movement within Assembly Square should be balanced between all travel modes.



17%
MODERATE-
INCOME

35-40%
LOW-INCOME

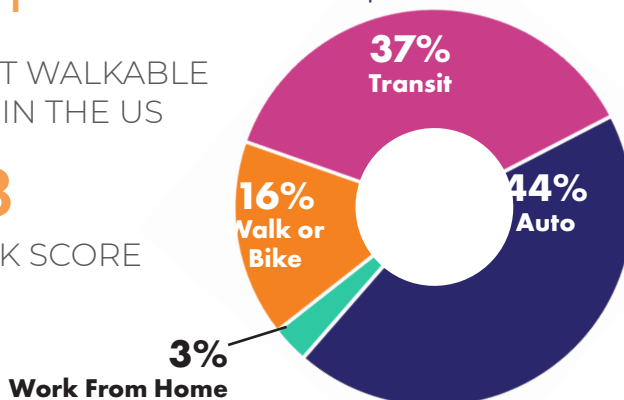
~2/3 OF THE
POPULATION ARE
RENTERS

Source: Sustainable neighborhoods working group recommendations report December 2015

7TH
MOST WALKABLE
CITY IN THE US

88
WALK SCORE

How People Get to Work*



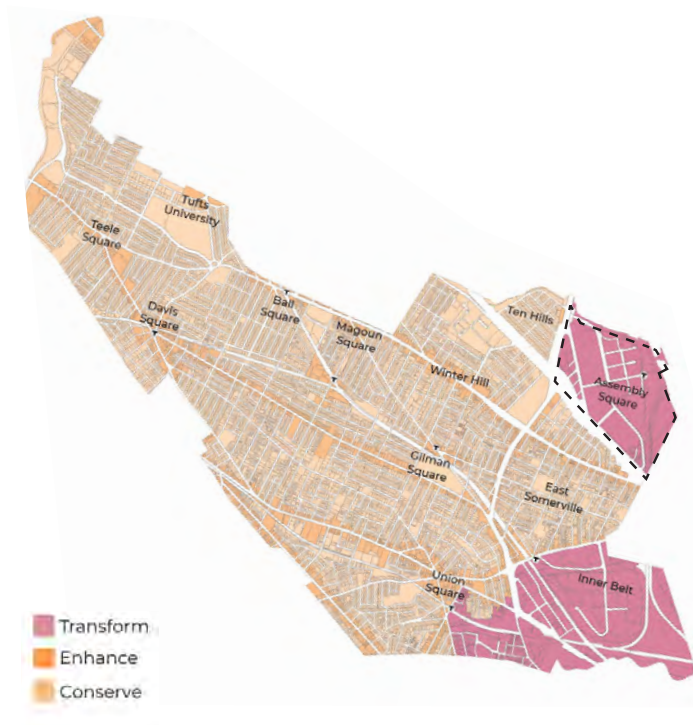
Note: 2015 Data, Pre-COVID

CITY ANALYSIS MAPS

The following maps present a snapshot of the regional and citywide existing conditions as well as broad initiatives that affect Assembly Square. These analysis maps provide an in-depth look to illuminate the dynamics of the neighborhood. Key takeaways for each of these maps are summarized below by topic.

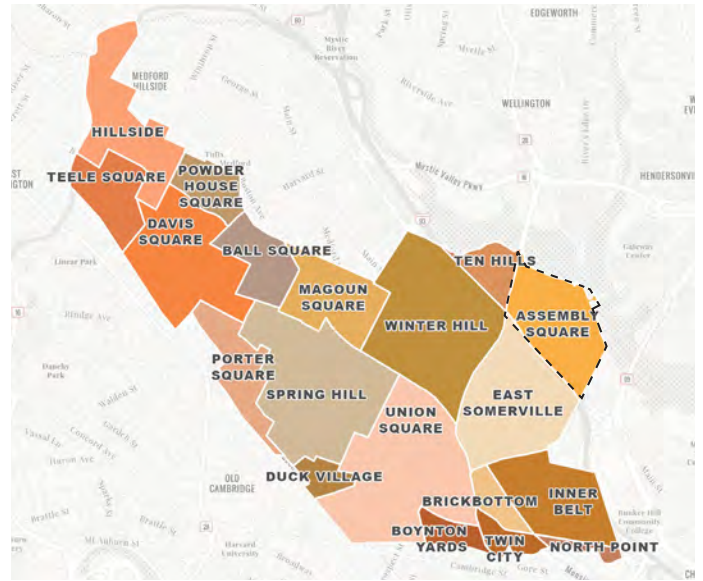
SOMERVISION PLAN

SomerVision 2040 is an update to the City of Somerville's comprehensive plan. The original plan was created nearly 10 years ago, and the update checks in on the progress made to date and extends the planning horizon an additional 10 years into the future. SomerVision 2040 sets the overall vision and framework for the city as a whole and identifies areas for transformation, enhancement and conservation. Plans for individual neighborhoods and new MBTA station areas then take a closer look at specific areas for development within the city. SomerVision 2040 identifies the Assembly Square neighborhood as one such area for transformation.



CITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Somerville is a series of neighborhoods, each with their own identity. The neighborhoods are then divided into seven wards with Assembly Square being located within Ward 1. Assembly Square is the newest neighborhood in the city, previously being an industrial and commercial area. The riverfront park and retail shops are attracting more people to Assembly Square to both visit and live.



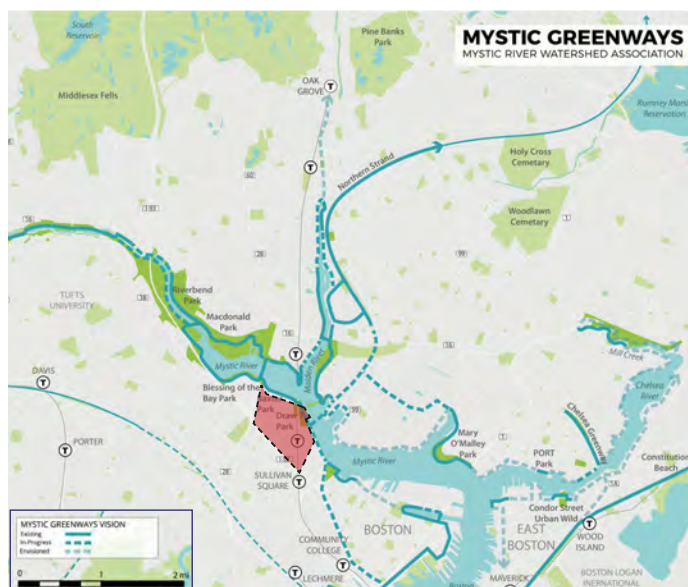
1900 SANBORN MAP

This Sanborn Map for Somerville was created in 1900 by Sanborn Map Company. The historical street network is mostly preserved in the current street pattern. The site of Assembly Square was undeveloped when the map was first published. The map also shows the historical course of the Mystic River. A significant portion of the current Assembly Square land was obtained through reclamation.



MYSTIC GREENWAYS

The Mystic Greenway Initiative will connect 25 miles of trails. The plan can improve numerous parks and engage community members from Mystic Lake to Boston Harbor. The greenway runs through the Assembly Square site and will enhance its connection to adjacent neighborhoods.



DRAW SEVEN STATE PARK

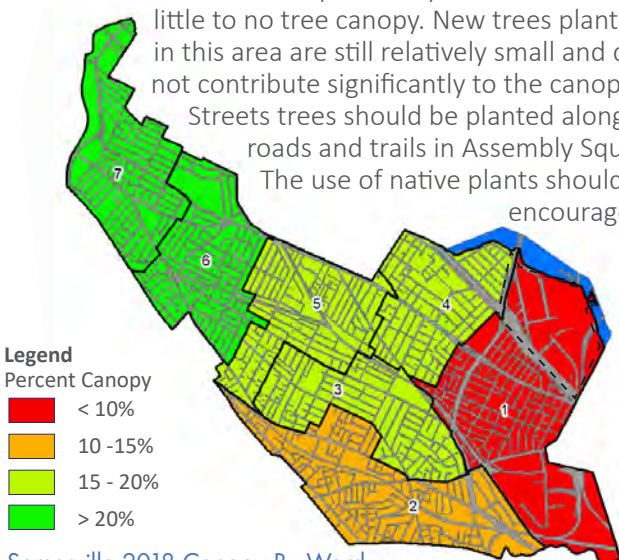
Assembly Square has a State-owned waterfront park called Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park. The park features an amphitheater, child's playground and views of the Mystic River. If people follow the river, they find themselves in Draw Seven State Park, which is currently underutilized. To help remedy this, a renovation effort by the Department of Conservation and Recreation is underway with plans to create a series of new pathways and gathering spaces. The project will restore ecological habitats and incorporate freshwater wetland and saltwater living shoreline. The proposed topography can accommodate anticipated sea level rise and storm events.



URBAN FORESTRY

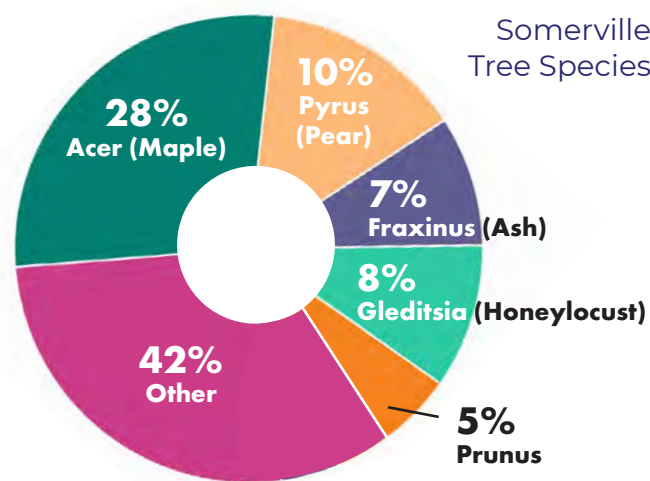
Somerville has been a Tree City USA community for 25 years and boasts a tree canopy covering 14.6% of the city. Tree City USA community members have a tree ordinance that maintains a proper budget for tree-related expenses, and are proudly committed to celebrating Arbor Day. Ward 1, where Assembly Square is located, has the least canopy cover in the city. This is because Assembly Square consists of industrial or previously industrial lands with little to no tree canopy. New trees planted in this area are still relatively small and do not contribute significantly to the canopy.

Streets trees should be planted along all roads and trails in Assembly Square. The use of native plants should be encouraged.



Legend
Percent Canopy
■ < 10%
■ 10 - 15%
■ 15 - 20%
■ > 20%

Somerville 2018 Canopy By Ward
1.8



14.6%
TREE CANOPY COVERS

77.6%
IMPERVIOUS SURFACE

13,604
TOTAL PUBLIC TREES

\$1,047,466
ANNUAL BENEFITS OF STREET TREES

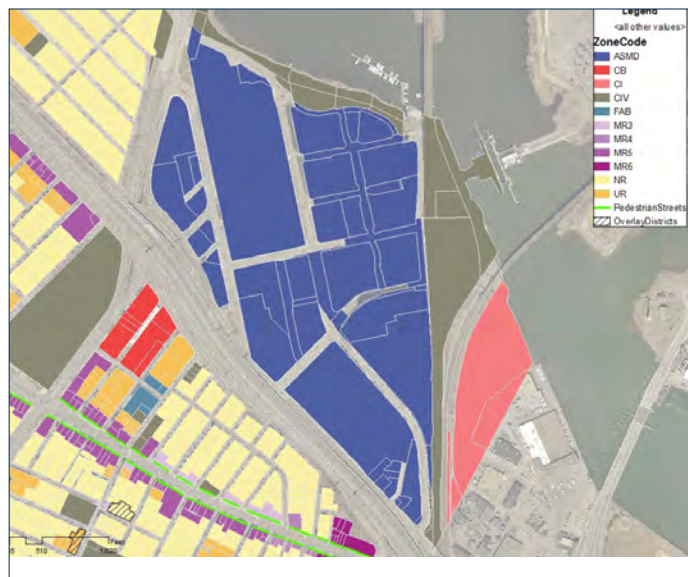
Source: Draft Urban Forest Management Plan

CURRENT LAND USE PLAN

There are several large properties under single ownership that may be divided into multiple blocks and large floor plates. The two areas along I-93 to the north and south end of the site are split among more than a dozen smaller property owners, allowing for the possibility of finer-grained development. The riverfront green spaces in Assembly Square are owned by the State and the MBTA.



The Assembly Square Mixed Use District is a special district intended to implement previous Assembly Square planning through the redevelopment of Assembly Row in close walking distance of the new MBTA orange line stations.



Assembly Square is shaped by I-93 (an elevated highway), Fellsway/State Route 28 (a six-lane highway), and the MBTA's Orange Line and Haverhill Commuter Rail line, which are all barriers to other neighborhoods. There are vast surface parking areas throughout the neighborhood. Assembly Row development will create a walkable block structure around large-footprint buildings.



PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

For 94.9% of Somerville residents, one of many city parks is within a 5-minute walk. SomerVision 2040 sets an ambitious target of 125 new acres of usable open space—no small feat in an area of just 4 square miles. Through the creative use of privately owned public spaces, we may be able to find the open space we need to realize our vision of a greener Assembly Square.



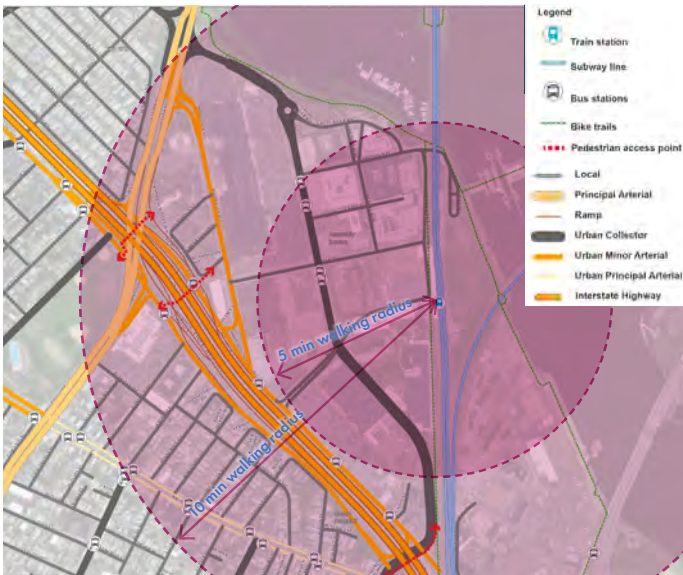
PRIVATELY OWNED OPEN SPACE

There are a few existing privately owned open spaces within Assembly Square. These spaces include the green space owned by Mass General Brigham and the open spaces in Assembly Row, such as those next to JP Licks, Caff  Nero and Smoke Shop.



TRANSIT ACCESS

Most of Assembly Square is within a 5-minute walk of the MBTA's Orange Line transit station; the rest is within a 10-minute walk. The neighborhood is also served by the MBTA's route 90 bus. There are three access points to Assembly Square from I-93: Grand Union Boulevard, Fellsway, and a narrow pedestrian sidewalk underneath the viaduct connecting Kensington Avenue to Mystic Avenue.



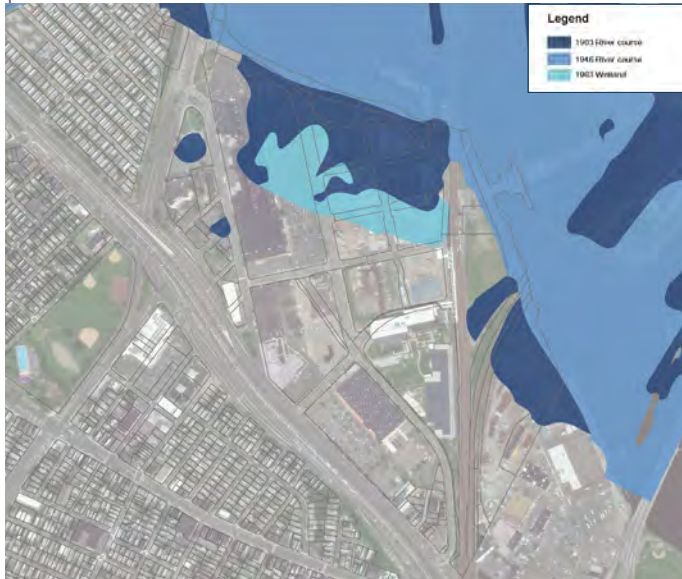
TOPOGRAPHY

Assembly Square is generally flat, with elevations of about 5 to 10 feet above sea level. The Amelia Earhart Dam (AED) was constructed in 1966. The dam stabilized the water level of upstream Mystic River and eliminated the tidal activities. The lower Mystic River, along most of the Assembly Square district, was also converted into a freshwater river as a result of the dam.



HISTORIC SHORELINE

This area of Assembly Square originally consisted of tidal flats and estuaries. They were filled during the 19th century to serve railroad and industrial uses. The Mystic River remained tidal until the 1960s. The AED, located on the Mystic River just east of Assembly Square, was built to protect surrounding areas from storm surge impacts on Boston Harbor. Today the shoreline is occupied by popular parks and waterfront trails.



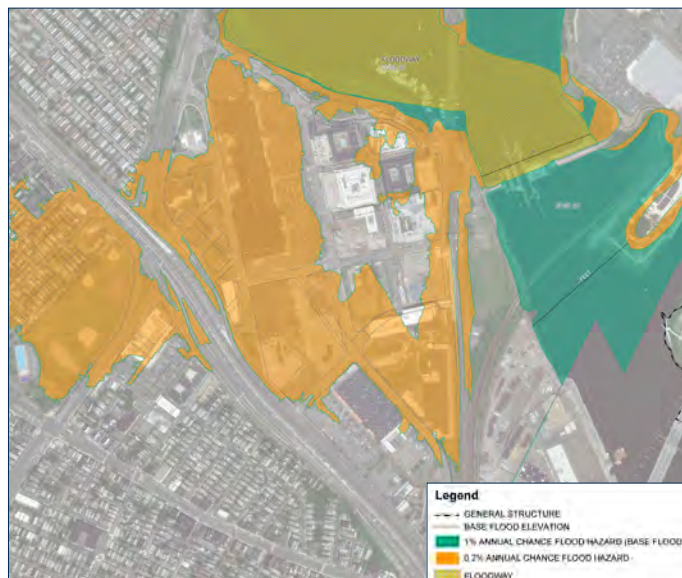
LOW LYING AREAS

The northwest and southeast parts of Assembly Square have the lowest elevations; these areas will be most likely to suffer flooding in future storm events. Assembly Square's existing stormwater drainage system is designed to handle 4.8 inches of rain in 24 hours. Fairly frequent rain events larger than that threshold can overwhelm the drainage system.



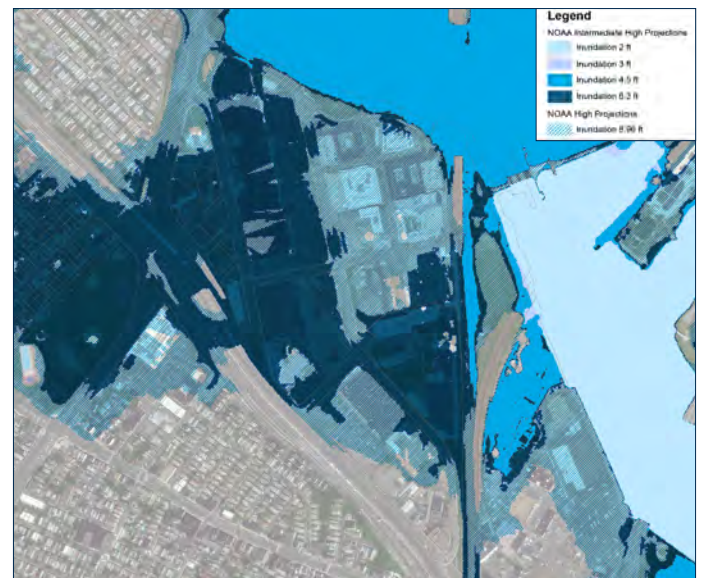
FEMA FLOOD MAP

FEMA flood maps show most of Assembly Square as Flood Zone X. This means the area has a 0.2% chance of flooding in any given year, or a 500-year flood status. A portion of Baxter Park is considered Zone AE, meaning it has a 1% chance of flooding in any given year. Upstream of the AED is identified as a floodway in this map, as the AED controls floodwaters downstream.



SEA LEVEL RISE POTENTIAL IMPACT

Assembly Square is likely to experience impacts from sea level rise and storm surge by 2070 according to the Climate Action Plan. The AED currently protects the surrounding areas from storm surge impacts. As seas rise, the AED will not offer the same level of protection as today and flooding will likely become a larger problem.



CLIMATE CHANGE PLANNING

In Somerville, the climate and resilience conversation is quite advanced and the commitment to new rules and investments is very strong. How can the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan help that effort?

In 2015, Somerville mayor Joseph Curtatone committed to the Compact of Mayors, a global coalition of city leaders dedicated to reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and making their communities more resilient in the face of climate change.¹ Following that commitment, Mayor Curtatone pledged to make Somerville carbon neutral (having a net-zero release of GHG emissions) by 2050. What followed was a series of adaptation goals and plans to achieve carbon neutrality. These plans include the City's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory (2016), the Carbon Neutral Pathways Assessment (2017), the Somerville Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (2017), and the Somerville Climate Forward Plan (2018). The plans envision:

- Implementing net-zero and resilient new building standards,
- Adapting buildings to flooding and heat,
- Improving energy performance in existing buildings,
- Improving equitable low-carbon mobility, including improving bus reliability and expanding bicycle infrastructure,
- Transitioning the City's fleet to electric vehicles,
- Updating stormwater management to consider new flooding events caused by the Mystic River,
- Expanding the urban canopy with resilient trees, and
- Reducing waste.

Climate solutions must be homegrown because many of the climate initiatives that work in one place don't work in others. This is due to factors such as the availability of solar, wind and geothermal energy as well as local climatic variation in elements like soils, precipitation and tides. However, cities like Somerville may be able to learn something from cities like San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and Vancouver in one way: plan implementation. West Coast cities are ahead when it comes to leading by example, advocating at the state level for carbon neutrality and the de-carbonization of electricity, and creating a culture of climate action.

That is the job of plans like the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan: making climate preparedness a goal for leadership on every level, from the City Council and Planning Board to the residential building managers and local business owners. Our mission is to use our public process and our plan to educate locally on resilience. In this way, we foster community climate action.

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan will be the first neighborhood plan for Somerville since the adoption of the Somerville Climate Forward Plan, and it will be the first to incorporate the plan's recommendations. As urban designers, we can imagine a neighborhood that goes beyond net zero to become far more self-sufficient—a neighborhood in which people walk to meet their daily needs despite a hotter world and the potential for regular flooding. As educators, we can go even further than that and imagine a neighborhood with the common value of resilience at all levels. We have done our job well if neighborhood residents and business owners understand the climate threat and advocate for mitigation and adaptation at the local, state and even federal level like no other community in the region.



REQUIRING RESILIENCE AT ASSEMBLY SQUARE

The world has seen a rise in sustainable building in the last few decades, and while part of the trend is thanks to a surge in demand for more sustainable structures, most of the achievement can be attributed to a higher standard of building regulations at the municipal level. When Somerville's new zoning ordinance was approved in 2019, we raised the environmental standard for new construction higher than neighboring communities, including the city of Boston, and the development community pushed back.¹

When we sought commentary from various stakeholder groups, some prospective developers of Life Science buildings argued we had raised the bar too high. They said it would cost the city the high-paying jobs and tax revenue that the world-class, multi-story, multi-block Life Science research labs, administrative offices and campuses would provide. They suggested that Somerville was still an untested market and that developers would simply build in Cambridge, Brookline, Quincy or one of the other emerging Life Science markets in farther-flung Watertown and South Boston.

The specific issue is that Somerville's zoning ordinance requires developments over 50,000 square feet to achieve LEED Platinum certification. Earlier drafts of the ordinance established the requirement at LEED Gold to match sustainability standards in Boston and Cambridge.

"No one can build an all-electric building on this site," said one of the property owners who hoped to sell to a Life Science developer. Life Science laboratories are especially energy-consumptive, and the owner felt that nothing short of an all-electric building, powered by solar panels, would produce enough points to meet the LEED Platinum requirement.

The reality is that there are many paths to LEED Platinum certification. Somerville has also given property owners and the development community plenty of notice of the change in standard. In November 2018, Somerville adopted its Climate Forward Plan with the goal of producing only as much carbon as the city consumed by 2050. The plan proposed reducing emissions from buildings, among other actions. It made sense that the code update that followed the Climate Forward Plan would mean higher LEED standards as a condition of awarding a building permit.

So far, the development of Life Science buildings has not been slowed by the new regulations. Case in point: the 5 Middlesex Ave Business Campus is the latest large project proposed for Somerville's Assembly Square, and it includes over one million square feet of Life Science offices for pharmaceutical and technology companies in addition to 380 luxury residential units with restaurants on the ground floor. The 5 Middlesex Ave project alone would mean over 4,000 construction and permanent jobs for the City.²

The communities which have climate adaptation within their locally approved plans are the ones that will see the biggest gains in resilience. There will be a cost to the public and private sectors, but as the 2018 Somerville Climate Forward Plan makes clear, the threat is dire. The cost of trying to mitigate the damage from climate inaction will far exceed that of planning for resilience.

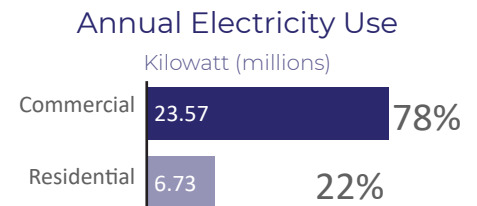
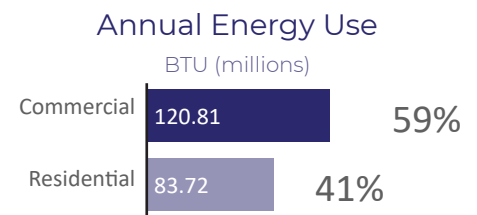
In other words, resilience is not an option. It's how we move forward.

¹ Levine, Elie. August 30, 2021. Scout Somerville. Retrieved from: <https://scoutsomerville.com/leed-platinum>

² Boston Real Estate Times. June 15, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://bostonrealestatetimes.com/biomed-realty-to-acquire-somerville-property/>

SUSTAINABILITY is the practice of reducing or eliminating environmental impact and improving quality of life for communities.

RESILIENCE is the practice of designing things to endure physical, social and economic shocks and stresses.



77.2 BTU (MILLIONS)
ANNUAL ENERGY USE
PER HOUSEHOLD IN
SOMERVILLE

Note: Data from Urban Footprint/ESRI/
AMERICAN COMMUNITIES SURVEY(ACS)

The LEED v4.1 BD+C guidelines, the latest version of the standards developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, provide a framework for green building and construction based on a wide variety of factors including the land's proximity to public transit and bicycle facilities, water efficiency, light pollution, rainwater management, and renewable energy.



2. Public Process

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan was created from ideas generated by the residents and stakeholders of Assembly Square and Somerville. This chapter details the process for receiving the community's ideas.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan is a master plan and zoning recommendations report that establishes a path for future growth in the neighborhood. This plan was created with the involvement of the public, property owners, civic groups, stakeholders and residents. When the Covid-19 pandemic made a planned series of in-person meetings, events and community interactions impossible, the design team responded with an engaging virtual process that allowed people to communicate with the City, the design team and fellow residents from the comfort and safety of their own homes. This remote, digitally based approach helped ensure that all segments of the community had a voice in this key process, even while social distancing.

The design team facilitated online engagement through the City’s SomerVoice website, stakeholder meetings and an interactive virtual charrette. A series of robust public workshops, presentations, surveys, questionnaires, polling and one-on-one conversations helped us create a collective vision for the future of the Assembly Square neighborhood.

VIRTUAL SITE VISIT AND ANALYSIS

As discussed in our “Background” chapter, the Assembly Square neighborhood is a distinctive area within Somerville that has its own particular set of challenges and opportunities. Once an industrial landscape, Assembly Square transformed into a suburban big-box retail location. The identity of the area drastically changed over the past 10 years with the development of Assembly Row and Mass General Brigham as well as changes to the Assembly Marketplace. Current applications for development indicate an emerging biotech center and more residential uses. Today, the area is at an important crossroads in its development. Assembly Square can continue to evolve into a commercial center, or it can become a mixed-use neighborhood. The design team learned about the forces at play in the area and spoke to large property owners and individual residents alike to understand the dynamics of the neighborhood.

Site Analysis

The design team compiled a series of maps, observations and economic information to obtain a better understanding of Assembly Square as it is today. Much of this initial analysis is included in the “Background” chapter of this report.

Residential Survey

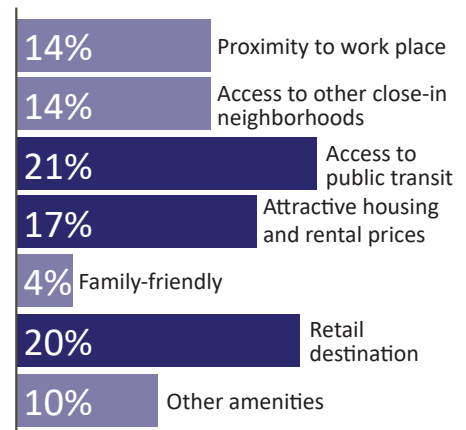
A survey was sent to Assembly Square residents to ensure that the voices of renters and owners were heard. The survey helped us better understand what brings people to Assembly Square and what keeps them in the neighborhood.

Stakeholder Meetings

Starting in August 2020, the design team conducted ongoing meetings, phone calls and interviews with a variety of stakeholders in Assembly Square to learn how current efforts and concerns as well as future goals might be represented in the plan. The design team heard from property and small business owners, residents and members of the local community, including “Youth Voices” and the Mystic View Task Force. In addition, the design team met with groups from the City and other public agencies focused around the topics important to the City including:

- Engineering & Utilities
- Mobility
- Sustainability & Environment
- Planning & Zoning
- Economic Development
- Public Space & Urban Forestry
- Parks and Recreation

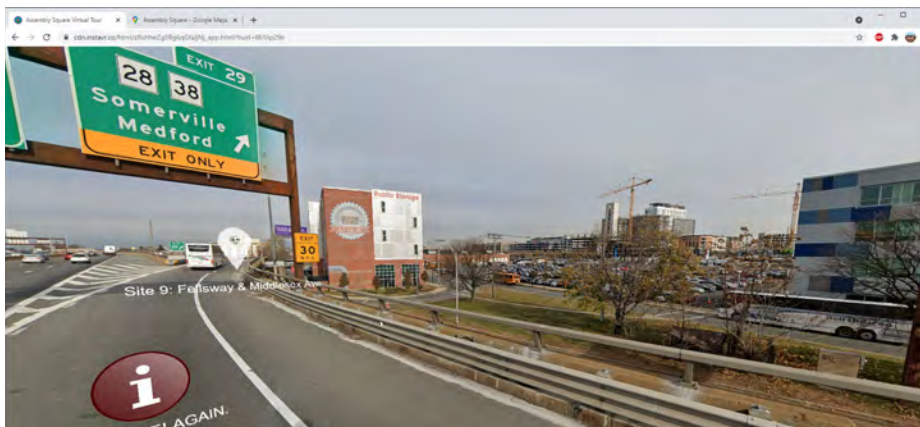
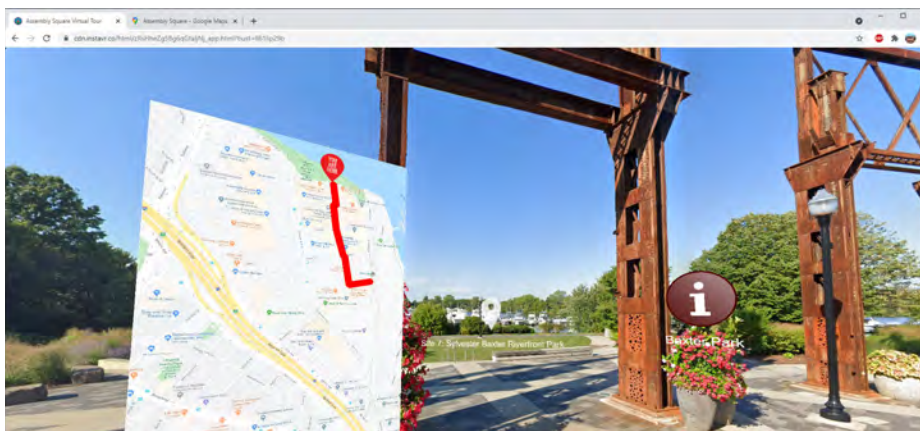
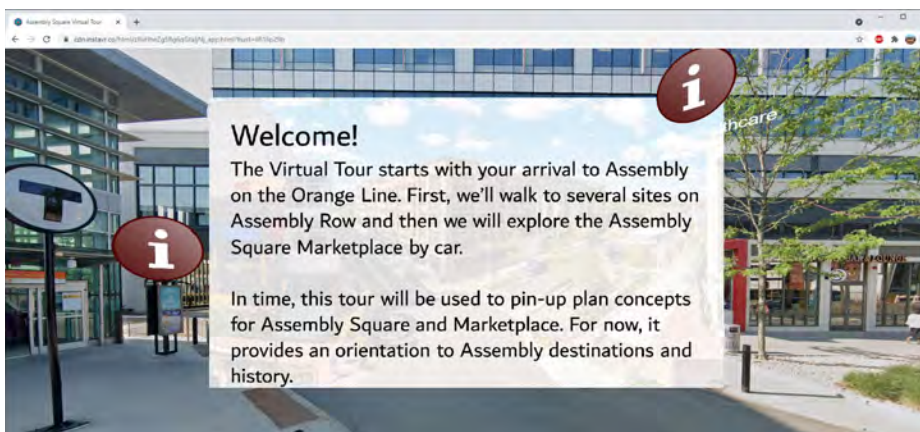
What **ATTRACTED** you to Assembly Square?



Residential Survey Results

Assembly Square Virtual Tour

Drawing on our team's knowledge of the area, and online resources like google earth, the design team created an online site tour with a web-based virtual reality app. A link to the app was shared on the SomerVoice project website, allowing the public to tour the project site remotely. The tour walked people through the site from two points of view. The first approached the site on foot along the Orange Line MBTA station and down Assembly Row. The second approached the site by car, revealing views of the site from I-93. Points of interest and team observations and insights were highlighted along the routes to educate and enhance the user experience.



Virtual Tour Stops

Pedestrian Tour:

- Assembly Station – MBTA Orange Line Station
- Corner of Revolution and Assembly Square
- Assembly Row and Foley Street
- Assembly Row and Artisan Way
- Artisan Way and Great River Road
- Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park

Car Tour:

- I-93 and Exit 29
- Fellsway and Middlesex Avenue
- Fellsway and Grand Union Boulevard
- TJ Maxx parking lot on Grand Union Boulevard
- Grand Union Boulevard and Assembly Square Drive

INTERACTIVE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

SomerVoice website and Somerville by Design were used as the virtual hub for all project activities. This resource helped the public learn more about the project through videos, virtual site tours and links to online meetings throughout the virtual charrette. By answering a series of surveys and open-ended questions posted on the SomerVoice website, the public helped to shape the plan concepts.

5,080+ WEBSITE VIEWS

630+ DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS, SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, INTERACTIVE TOOLS, SOCIAL MEDIA LIKES & FOLLOWERS

370 ONLINE POLL RESPONSES

550+ VIEWS OF THE YOUTUBE FILMS

12,000+ TRACKABLE MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

City of **Somerville**

Search



[SomerVoice Home](#) [City Website](#) [City Calendar](#) [SomervilleByDesign](#) [SomerVision2040](#)

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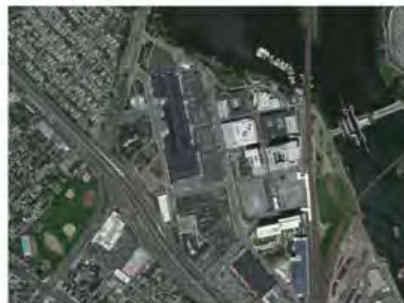
[Home](#) » [Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan Update](#)

Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan Update



About

The Assembly Square neighborhood planning process will be unique. Where in other areas the challenge faced by Planning Staff has been to preserve and enhance the most desirable characteristics and potential of an existing neighborhood, here we will focus on realizing Assembly's full promise as a Transformational Area. This neighborhood also requires that we assess and develop an infrastructure framework suited for the needs and pressures of what is becoming one of Somerville's major new Regional Centers, an effort that will rest heavily on assessing the status of current infrastructure to ensure it provides support for expected new growth.



Learn More

Visit the [project's main page](#) to read all related documentation and materials.

Check out this [Assembly Square Virtual Tour](#)!

Save the date for our upcoming virtual and interactive meeting series from **Monday, November 30** through **Friday, December 4**. [See details for each meeting here](#). A link to access the virtual meetings will be posted at a later date.

Important Links

[SomervillebyDesign Main Page](#)

Who's Listening

Victor Nascimento

Planning Outreach Coordinator

Email: vnascimento@somervillema.gov



Rebecca Lyn Cooper

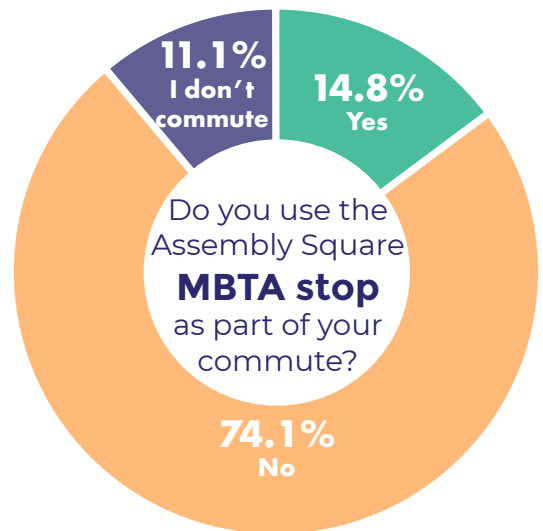
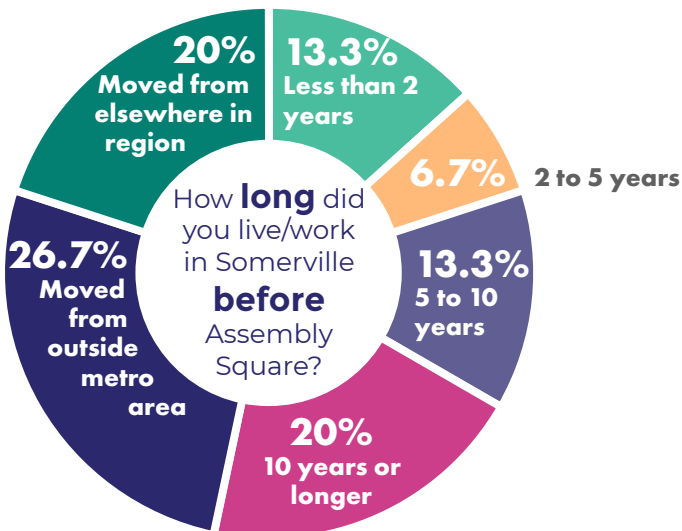
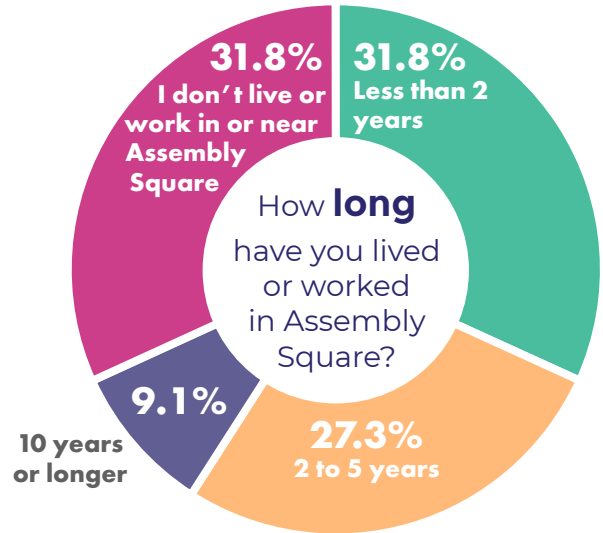
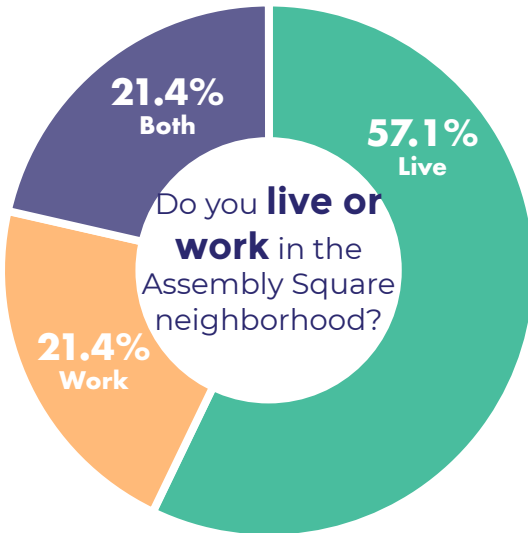
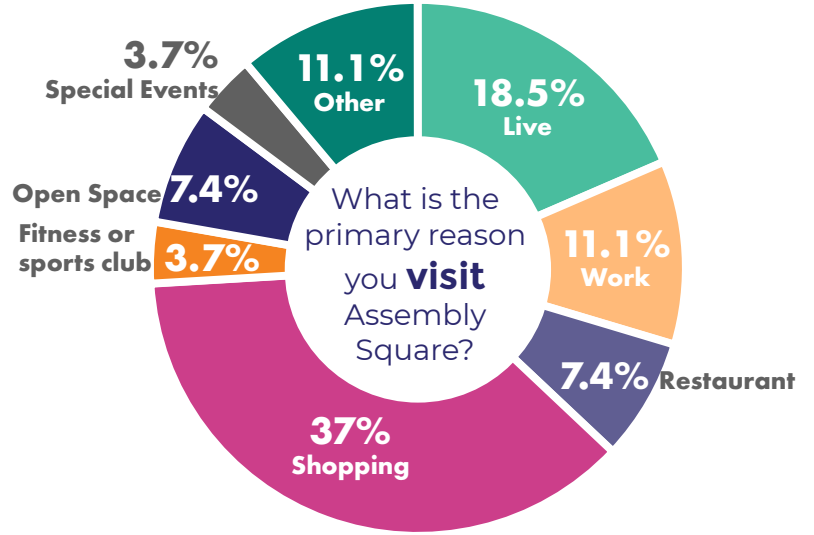
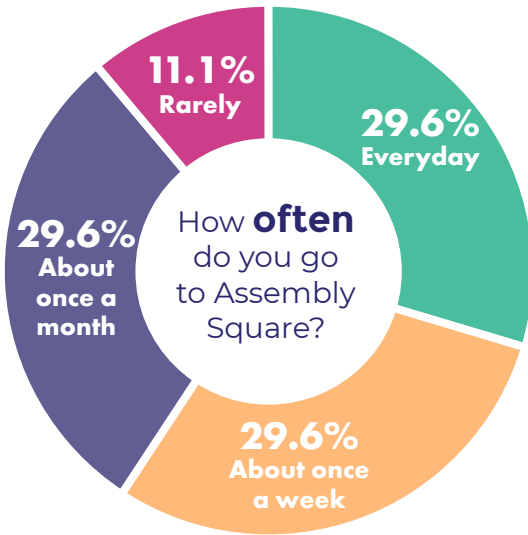
Senior Planner

Email: rcooper@somervillema.gov



Custom

Online Survey Responses



How would you rate the availability of the following at Assembly Square?

1	Restaurants
2	Shops
3	Apartments
4	Playground/Green space
5	Professional offices
6	Grocery store
7	Housing
8	Medical services
9	Other
10	School / Daycare
11	Drug store

Others: Hotel, affordable housing, green corridor for wildlife, affordable options

How excited are you about bringing more of the following to Assembly Square?

1	Cyclist & pedestrian safety
2	Increased non-car travel
3	Places for recreation
4	New places to shop & eat
5	Enhance character
6	Adding to the tax base
7	New job opportunities
8	Other

Others: Improving green space near the dam, green corridor for wildlife, affordable options, I'd like it to be nicer to walk around certain area

What would you like to see more of at Assembly Square?

1	Playground/Green space
2	Drug store
3	School / Daycare
4	Other
5	Grocery store
6	Medical services
7	Restaurants
8	Housing
9	Professional offices
10	Shops
11	Apartments

Others: Green corridors & native plants, aerial yoga, outdoor grills in parks, dog park, affordable housing, walking connection with Encore Casino Services (senior, food, etc), arts/community space More Small Businesses

What is your preferred mode of travel in and around Assembly Square?

1	Walk
2	Transit (subway)
3	Bike
4	Private Car
5	Transit (bus)
6	Rail
7	Carpool

How concerned are you about the following at Assembly Square?

1	Walkability
2	Connect to neighborhoods
3	Green Space
4	Traffic
5	Affordability
6	Noise
7	Safety
8	Density
9	Parking
10	Other
11	Schools

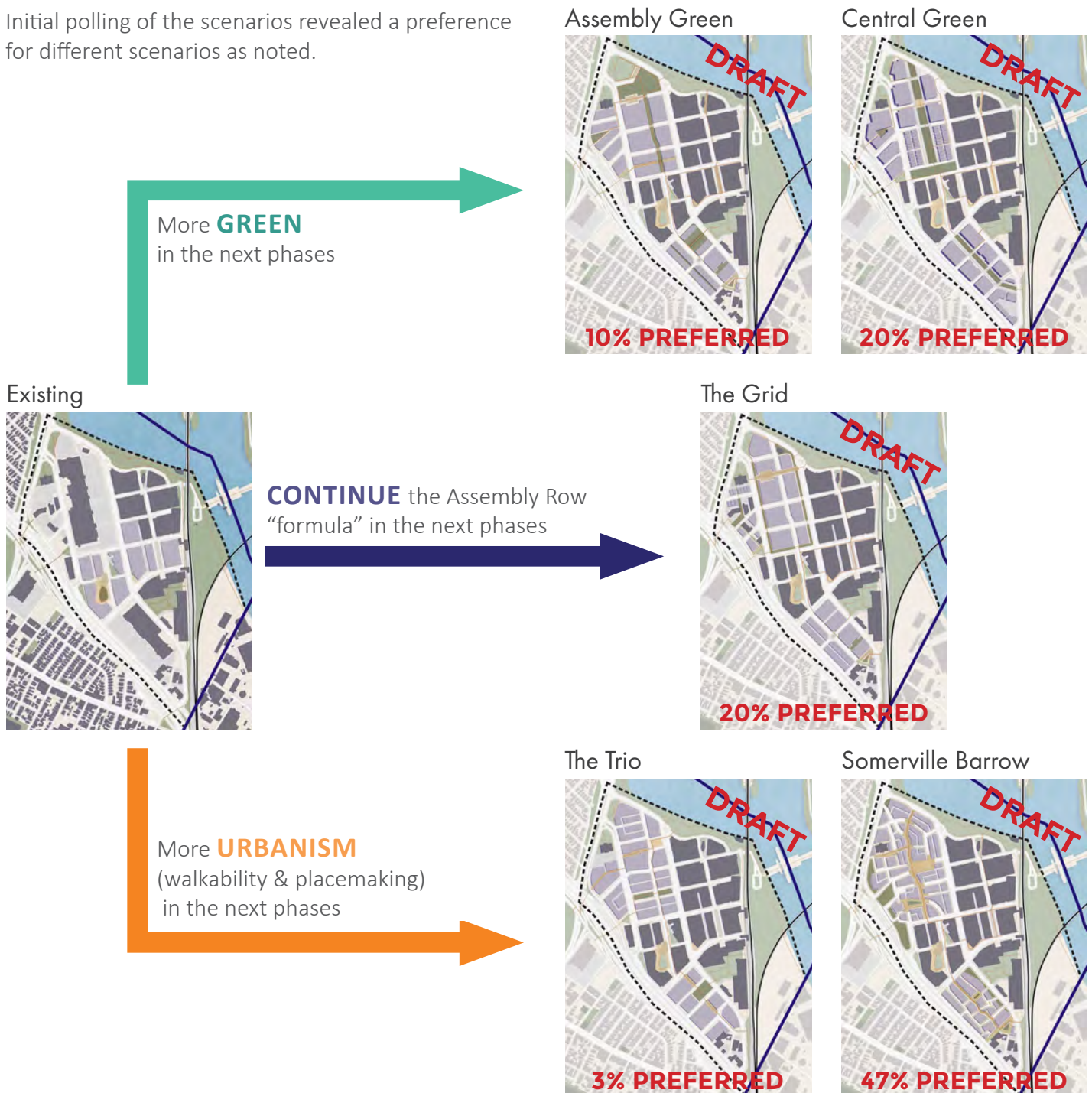
Others: The insane amount of paved space and lack of trees, limit cars in shop area to residents and delivery, There is too much parking, wasted space

PRELIMINARY SCENARIOS

A series of diagrammatic scenarios were created to illustrate the development potential for the Assembly Square neighborhood and to facilitate early conversations about its future.

The purpose of this exercise was not to pick a scenario but to identify what strategies to lead with and what elements of the plan people liked or did not like. The resulting vision plan is a composite of these elements using both strategies in unison.

Initial polling of the scenarios revealed a preference for different scenarios as noted.



VIRTUAL PUBLIC CHARRETTE

A virtual public charrette was held from Monday, November 30, 2020 through Friday, December 4, 2020. Members of the design team engaged the community in a series of public meetings, workshops and events.

Kick-Off Presentation & Breakout Room Sessions

The virtual charrette week began with a kick-off presentation and breakout room sessions on Monday, November 30, 2020. These were held virtually over Zoom. The meeting began with Mayor Curtatone encouraging participants to dream big. He reminded them that dreaming big had brought an Orange Line MBTA stop to Assembly Square when everyone said it was impossible. He said that dreaming big had also resulted in the successful Assembly Row development.

During this event, the design team presented initial findings based on the existing conditions in Assembly Square. The design team discussed issues such as connectivity, mobility, infrastructure, urban design and economics.

Following a kick-off presentation, participants broke off into smaller groups for a hands-on design session. Participants discussed and documented their most important issues using interactive digital maps to show what was missing from the Assembly Square neighborhood that could improve their quality of life. At the end of the session, each table distilled their solutions and identified “3 Big Ideas” to present to the larger group. As the groups presented, potential subjects for consensus and key design ideas emerged.

Virtual Charrette Events

November 30, 2020

Kick-Off Presentations
Small Group Discussions

December 1- 3, 2020

Technical Meetings
Open Design Studio

December 4, 2020

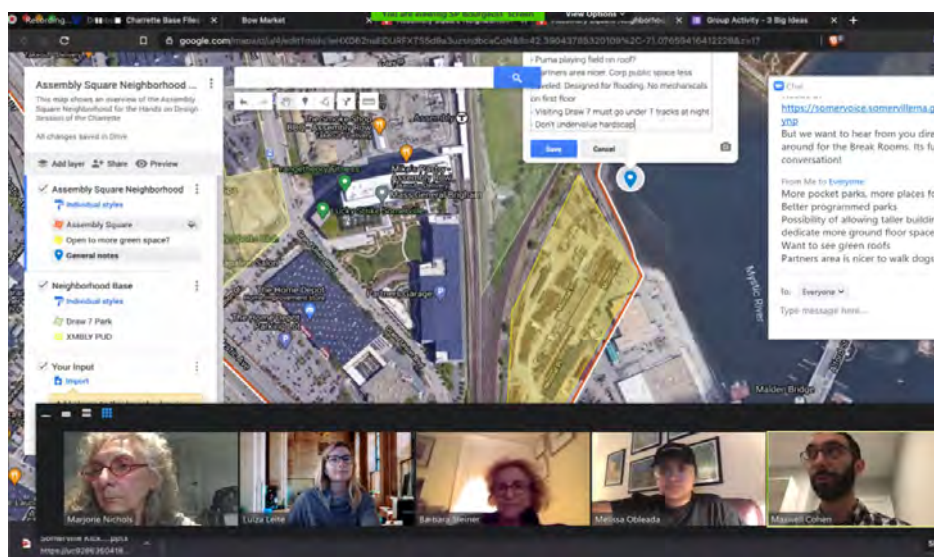
Work-in-Progress
Presentation

70+

ATTENDEES

11 TABLES

SMALL GROUP
DISCUSSIONS

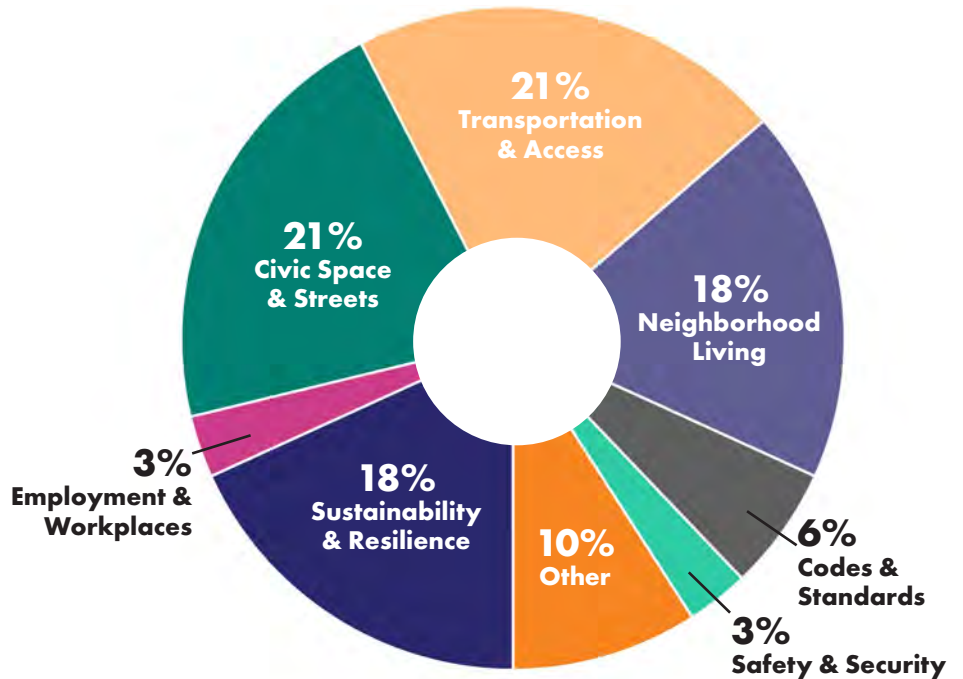


Screenshot of the Kick-off meeting and small group discussions



3 Big Ideas

Each group categorized the main theme of their big ideas. Of all the ideas discussed, transportation, access, streets and civic spaces were of the largest concern, followed closely by both neighborhood living and sustainability and resilience.



One Word Answers

As part of the live keypad polling, the design team asked participants to tell us one word that came to mind about the Assembly Square neighborhood.

NOW



IN THE FUTURE



Participants were asked for one word that summarized what they would like to see **IN THE FUTURE**



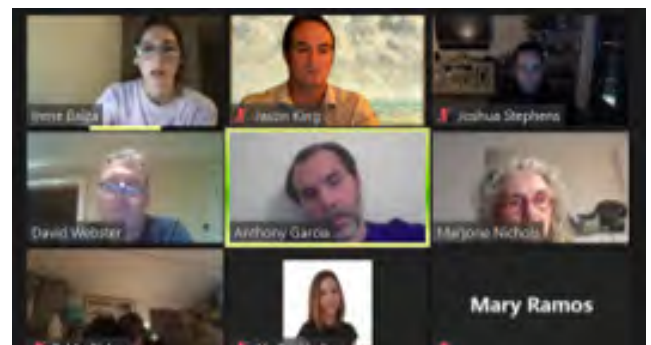
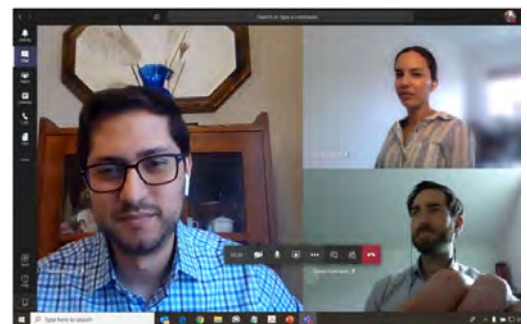
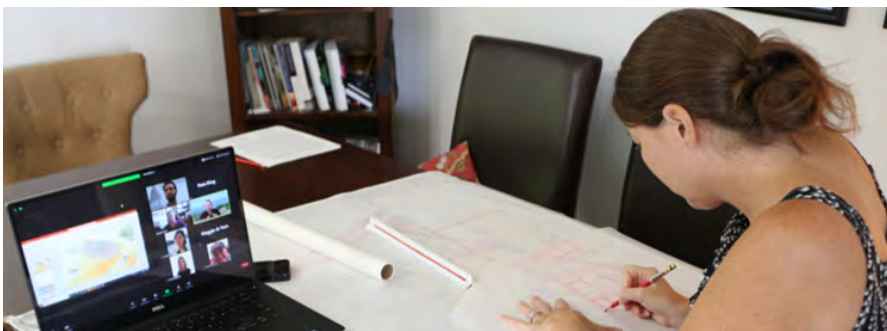
Word size corresponds to the number of people who responded with that word.

Open Design Studio & Technical Meetings

Following the kick-off presentation and breakout sessions, the design team began working on ways to address the themes and concerns that emerged during the table workshops. A synthesis map was created summarizing the ideas from an earlier table discussion. During the week, each member of the planning team studied specific areas in Assembly Square so they could illustrate how the design could best address community concerns.

Members of the public were encouraged to participate in the process by attending any of nine online open design studios. The open studios enabled members of the community to see the work as it was being produced, engage in discussions about the potential solutions and bring additional suggestions of their own. J.J. Zanetta of Zanetta Illustrations drew people's ideas in real time—a popular, interactive segment of the sessions called, “Veduta with J.J.”. Various technical meetings were held throughout the week to discuss the details of the plan as they emerged, to ensure that the vision plan was implementable and to discuss any concerns. Meeting topics included mobility, economic development, planning and zoning, engineering, and sustainability. In addition, the team met with numerous City activist groups, particularly the Mystic View Task Force, to hear concerns from interested citizens who have spent over a decade advocating for better development of the Assembly Square neighborhood.

240+ VIRTUAL
STUDIO VISITORS &
MEETING ATTENDEES



Pictures from the open design studio

“Work-in-Progress” Presentation

The week culminated in a work-in-progress presentation on Friday, December 4, 2020. This summarized the week’s events, engagement results, preliminary designs and policies, and it confirmed the initial vision for the future of the Assembly Square neighborhood.

Topics included the illustrative plan, mobility, infrastructure and economic development. Polling measured responses to various design concepts and draft policies.

Did you **ATTEND** any of the charrette events this week? (open studio, kick-off meeting, etc.)

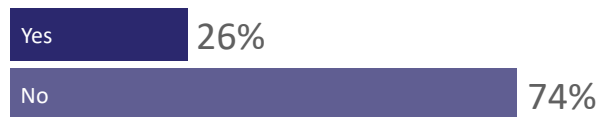


Next Steps

Following the virtual public charrette, the design team further refined and detailed the draft ideas presented at the work-in-progress presentation to create the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan. As part of this refinement phase, the design team continued to have conversations with technical experts, city administration, and city staff, all of whom helpfully encouraged and challenged the design team to push the plan to be big and bold.

The resulting ideas and policies encompassed within this report stand as a testament to the power of creativity, collaboration, and community.

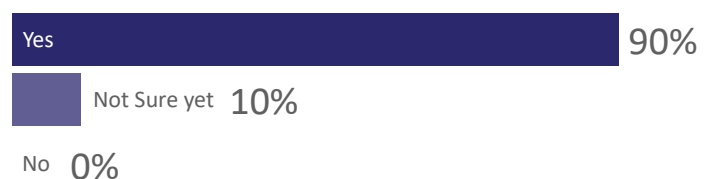
Do you **LIVE** in the Assembly Square Neighborhood?



What do you **THINK** of this idea?



Do you think the DRAFT plan presented tonight is **ON THE RIGHT TRACK**?





3.5 Big Ideas

The 5 Big Ideas grew from conversations held with the Assembly Square community. Although specific details may change as the plan is implemented, the “5 Big Ideas” should remain intact.

1. Build great new places (that are compatible with and respectful of context)
2. Increase access to nature and build sustainably
3. Demand safe, comfortable and interesting streets and increased transit
4. Grow revenue-generating uses for Somerville
5. Cultivate the Assembly Square community and connect physically and socially to the broader city

1. BUILD GREAT NEW PLACES

(THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH AND RESPECTFUL OF CONTEXT)

Design matters: buildings and streets should come together as a cohesive whole to create places people can enjoy

To create vibrant, pedestrian-oriented districts, every aspect of the public space must be designed to work together as a group, including the businesses, residences and workplaces. Motor vehicle elements (such as travel lanes, parking and curbs), pedestrian components (such as trees, sidewalks and lighting) and building features (such as shopfronts, awnings and colonnades) should be coordinated to create a unified outdoor space. A well-designed street can accommodate shoppers, diners, pedestrians, cyclists, on-street parking and travel lanes comfortably. Buildings should be brought up to the edge of the sidewalk and face other buildings across the street. Street trees, furnishings and benches all play a role in creating a well-designed space.

Buildings

There is a place at Assembly Square for everything, but design is key. Assembly Square can feature human-scale development that addresses the public realm while still accommodating large-scale buildings like Life Science complexes. Large-footprint buildings can be integrated into the urban fabric. Active uses such as retail and restaurants should be encouraged along the ground floor of major pedestrian thoroughfares. Towering structures should be located away from the pedestrian core and adjacent to highways.

Height-To-Width Ratio

The height-to-width ratio is the proportion of spatial enclosure. If the width of space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than open sky, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place.

The ratio of 1:6 is the perceivable maximum. The ratio of 1:3 is best for public spaces. The ratio of 1:1 creates pedestrian paseos. Note that the ratio is not based merely on the curb to curb measurement but instead on the entire right-of-way and including building frontages, from building face to building face. In the absence of spatial definition by facades, disciplined tree planting is an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that have substantial front yards.

Excerpted from
The Lexicon of New Urbanism

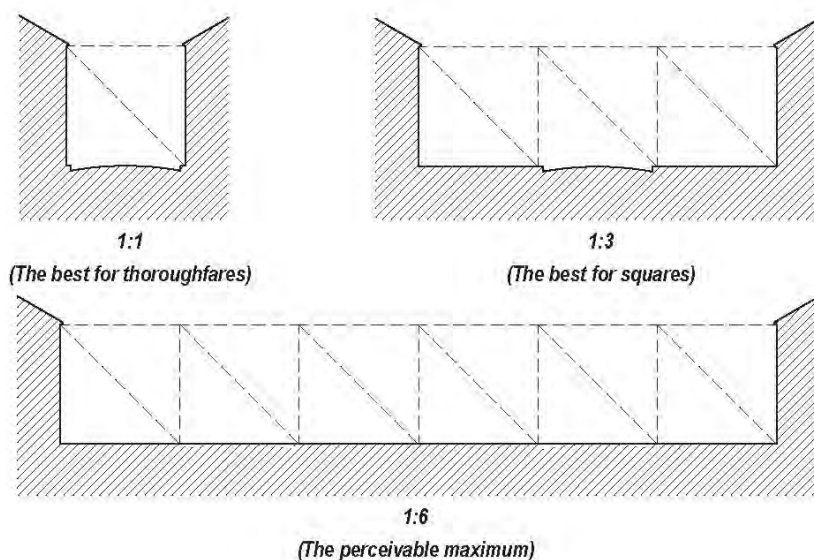
Blocks

Block size is the number one factor for walkability, so blocks should be designed to a walkable scale. Pedestrians will rarely choose to walk unless they feel there is a relatively direct path to their destination and the walk will be less than five minutes. The length of a single block face should be no more than 600 feet and ideally no more than 450 feet. A block should be composed of multiple buildings or have design features that break a monotonous facade. Where this is not possible, designing mid-block passages to be safe, interesting spaces for pedestrians can preserve the walkable scale of the neighborhood.

At the same time, a connected street network is a city's main public space and is essential for distributing traffic. Assembly Square should seek to increase the street network and create more blocks which creates more connectivity and enhances economic vitality.

Scale of Public Spaces

While the ground floors of buildings should be designed in proportion to pedestrians, the perceived height of buildings should be designed in proportion to the street or public realm. The preferred building-to-street ratio is 1:1 to 1:3. This creates a sense of safety and enclosure that is important in urban environments because the public realm — the space between buildings — becomes the public's living room.



Welcoming Public Spaces

Public spaces should feel open and available to all. During the virtual charrette, however, participants remarked that although recent development projects fulfilled open space requirements, some of these areas felt privatized and uninviting to the public. Residents did not feel comfortable using certain civic spaces even though they were not gated and had no signage telling them to “keep out”.

New development should be integrated into the community and welcoming to all. Public spaces should be open to at least one street and have multiple entrances. By fronting civic spaces with streets, outdoor areas can be made to feel more welcoming. This will encourage a sense of shared ownership for the community.

The Elements of a Neighborhood

Neighborhoods are places to shop, work, socialize and more. During the virtual charrette, participants proposed multiple uses for public open spaces, including a performing arts space, a library and a fire station. Other community needs include a grocery store, a late-night pharmacy, a dog park and places for children to play.

When adding residential uses, playgrounds and tot lots should be located within a five-minute walk of most households. Each play area is usually less than a half-acre in size and several should be featured in a typical neighborhood. Playgrounds should contain play equipment, soft surfaces, benches and ample shade.

Going Forward

The City must continue to consider the relationship between buildings, streets and pedestrians as part of the approval process. Development review should evaluate new projects for their urban context and create more specific standards for quality development as redevelopment occurs. New buildings and additions to existing buildings should be positioned and architecturally equipped to form agreeable streets and public spaces. Likewise, the streets themselves should be sized to work for all users. Large-footprint buildings should be subject to development-approval scrutiny on a site-specific, case-by-case basis. Ground floor uses should not be pre-permitted or allowed as-of-right. Instead, uses should be conditional and subject to review and approval to ensure all building and street elements are coordinated.

DESIGN MATTERS

There are many design choices to consider when developing a neighborhood, ranging from the street layout to the color of a new building. The most important choices, with the greatest impact on the community, are those related to urban design — the design of the streets and public spaces and how buildings relate to those spaces.

Fronts and Backs

Buildings and lots have fronts, sides and backs. How these elements relate to one another forms the neighborhood character. Building fronts ideally face the fronts of other buildings, though they sometimes can face the sides. However, the front of a building should never face the back of another. When building fronts face one another, both buildings benefit from street activity.

Streets

Well-designed streets can achieve a symbiotic balance functioning as both public spaces and thoroughfares for mobility. Street lighting and trees help to define the public realm while also making the pedestrian feel safer and more comfortable. Trees, even in winter, add ambience and a sculptural quality to the streetscape.

Building-to-Street Relationship

The physical and functional relationships between buildings and public spaces are essential to creating safe, comfortable and alluring places. When buildings have interesting and friendly entries, stoops and storefronts, they attract activity.

Building Standards

These are the rules related to building placement and massing (such as setbacks, build-to lines or zones, and building height). They require buildings to align with the sidewalk and ensure the building form enhances public spaces.

Parking

Parking is an urban necessity. By locating parking in mid-block locations, it allows the fronts of buildings to have active ground-floor uses with sidewalks and amenities along the street.

2. INCREASE ACCESS TO NATURE AND BUILD SUSTAINABLY

Create high-quality parks and public spaces in Assembly Square

Public space is crucial for a vibrant neighborhood. Somerville needs more open, green, sunlit spaces, but the land for parks and public spaces is precious in such a densely populated city. Parks must be strategically placed, deliberately designed, multi-use and well-connected to promote walkability. The public space needs to function ecologically, providing natural services such as stormwater capture, but it should also accommodate the social needs of the community, such as gathering and recreation.

Somervision 2040 identifies Assembly Square as an important transformational area with potential for creating new parks and public spaces as development occurs. Somerville's neighborhoods are historically centered around squares. Assembly Square needs to be given its own central "Assembly Square" that brings the neighborhood together.

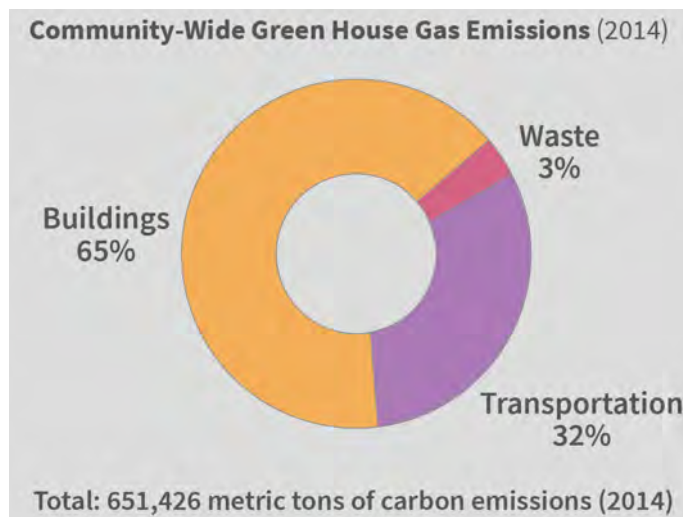
Celebrate the connection to the river

There are currently several proposed projects that would promote walkability and enhance the connection between Assembly Square and other Somerville neighborhoods like Ten Hills, East Somerville and Winter Hill to the river. The trail between Draw Seven State Park and Route 99 in Sullivan Square is one such project; the bike/pedestrian bridge across the Mystic River is another. Signage and wayfinding systems should guide users to the riverfront trails, while gathering and seating areas along the green network could accommodate a variety of uses. Trees along all trails will ensure shade, and adding native plants would provide valuable food sources and habitat for pollinators and wildlife.

Build sustainability

Fossil fuels and carbon emissions are driving climate change. Green buildings that apply sustainable materials and practices can greatly reduce carbon emissions. New buildings in Assembly Square should be built green and sustainably. With the recently passed land development regulations, all new buildings in Assembly Square must be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certifiable. Buildings can achieve net-zero energy goals by utilizing on-site renewable energy resources such as solar panels and ground source heat pumps.

Green roofs can enhance environmental performance as well as reduce a building's heat island effect. A system of



In net-zero energy buildings, renewable energy can be generated on-site through solar arrays and other methods, to help meet the building's total annual energy demand.



Public space should be designed to be welcoming and accessible

heat energy transfer can potentially harness the existing wastewater infrastructure that runs under Assembly Square to heat buildings.

Transportation fueled by gas-powered engines creates a large share of carbon emissions. Single-occupancy motor vehicles are the biggest culprit. Creating a walkable neighborhood and increasing transit services can reduce the miles traveled by single-occupancy motor vehicles in and around Assembly Square. Walkability and bikeability should be a design priority for the street network and building configurations.

Assembly Square's energy production and carbon reduction goals should be measured district-wide instead of on a project-by-project basis. This allows design flexibility, especially for the owners of smaller properties where on-site renewable energy generation may not be possible.

Improve air quality and water quality

Recent studies show that exposure to airborne ultrafine particulates emitted from traffic has long-term public health impacts. The Wellbeing of Somerville Report (2017) highlights air pollution as an issue with serious health implications, with the neighborhoods adjacent to I-93 being impacted most directly. New residences and civic space should not be located within 500 feet of the highway when planning the further development of the area. Buildings close to the highway should be taller to help block particulate matter, and they should have central air purification systems integrated with the HVAC facilities. The requirements that reduce energy consumption can also improve air quality and water conservation because of the potential reduction of on-site use of fossil fuel.

Most of Somerville currently has a combined sewer system, but the City is taking steps to separate its stormwater and wastewater sewer systems. One consequence of these updates is that stormwater runoff will no longer be cleaned along with other wastewater. This necessitates a commitment to improving the quality of stormwater runoff. What's more, stormwater infrastructure standards are evaluated using current rainfall levels rather than future projections. Given that the City's Climate Vulnerability Assessment (2018) shows that the 25-year storm will likely become the 10-year storm by 2070, new development projects in Assembly Square should use drainage design criteria that reflect these future projections. Infiltration beds, rain gardens, porous pavement and other green infrastructure practices should also be encouraged.



An example of rain garden



Tree wells can be used as a green infrastructure device to capture stormwater



Native plants can require less water, fertilizer, and maintenance than many traditional garden plantings.

3. DESIGN SAFE, COMFORTABLE AND INTERESTING STREETS AND INCREASE TRANSIT AVAILABILITY

Increase “mode split”

Assembly Square features a mix of urban and suburban development with a great deal of space dedicated to cars and their storage. With appropriate development parameters and transportation interventions, the City can split the mode choice more evenly among the various transportation options (transit, walking, cycling), decreasing single-occupancy motor vehicle use while still providing parking to visitors from other areas.

Achieving a more balanced mode split is as much about providing multimodal facilities as coordinating land-use planning and transportation planning. This community goal can be reached with a combination of frequent reliable transit service, comfortable, interesting and safe streets for walking and biking, and an Assembly Square with a diversity of uses, places and people.

Assembly Square’s goal should be for 75% of trips to and from the site to not involve a single-occupancy motor vehicle. Another goal should be to design the neighborhood so that no internal trips are ever taken by car.

Balanced street spaces

Assembly Square’s streets should be designed for everyone, including pedestrians, those with disabilities, cyclists, transit riders, freight and delivery drivers, motorists and those who are ride-sharing. The streets should provide access to businesses and residences but also allow for socializing, shopping, dining and celebrating. In Assembly Square, the goal is to balance mobility and placemaking. There should be less focus on moving people through the neighborhood and more on being in the neighborhood.

While streets like Grand Union Boulevard will need to accommodate motor vehicles, other streets can be focused on pedestrians and cyclists. Areas like Assembly Point can provide a European feel, with streets that are narrower and prioritize pedestrians. A paseo could extend from the northern to southern end of the site (like La Rambla in Barcelona). And Middlesex Avenue can be rebalanced from a wide back street to be a complete street fronted by buildings.

Increase transit access

A convenient, safe and reliable transit system is essential if people are to choose transit over single-occupancy motor vehicles. This is particularly vital when it comes to connecting Assembly Square to the rest of Somerville, the broader Boston Region and other destinations.

The MBTA Orange Line station in Assembly Square is a huge achievement for Somerville and exemplifies how dreaming big and working hard can result in real changes. However, the trains are packed during peak hours and arrive from Medford already full. An increase in service frequency and an exploration of other transit options will help address this issue. These include alterations to bus route 90, a new bus route linking Assembly Square to the MBTA Green Line and other Somerville destinations, and a possible water taxi route across the Mystic River.

“The design of cities begins with the design of streets. To make a good city, you need good streets, and that means streets where people want to be.”

- John Massengale
Street Design: The Secret to Great Cities & Towns



A shared street rendering

Parking is an essential element of modern society, but its impacts and cost are significant. A well-managed parking system can contribute greatly to the health and image of any community. One of the keys to a successful system is the development of effective strategies and policies.

Create streets for pedestrians

Assembly Square streets should be designed to prioritize people, with a special focus on walkable sidewalks buzzing with social and economic activity. Streets should be safe, comfortable and interesting for pedestrians, featuring continuous street walls with many windows, doors, shopfronts and awnings. Highly visible four-way high contrast crosswalks should be used for pedestrian street crossings.

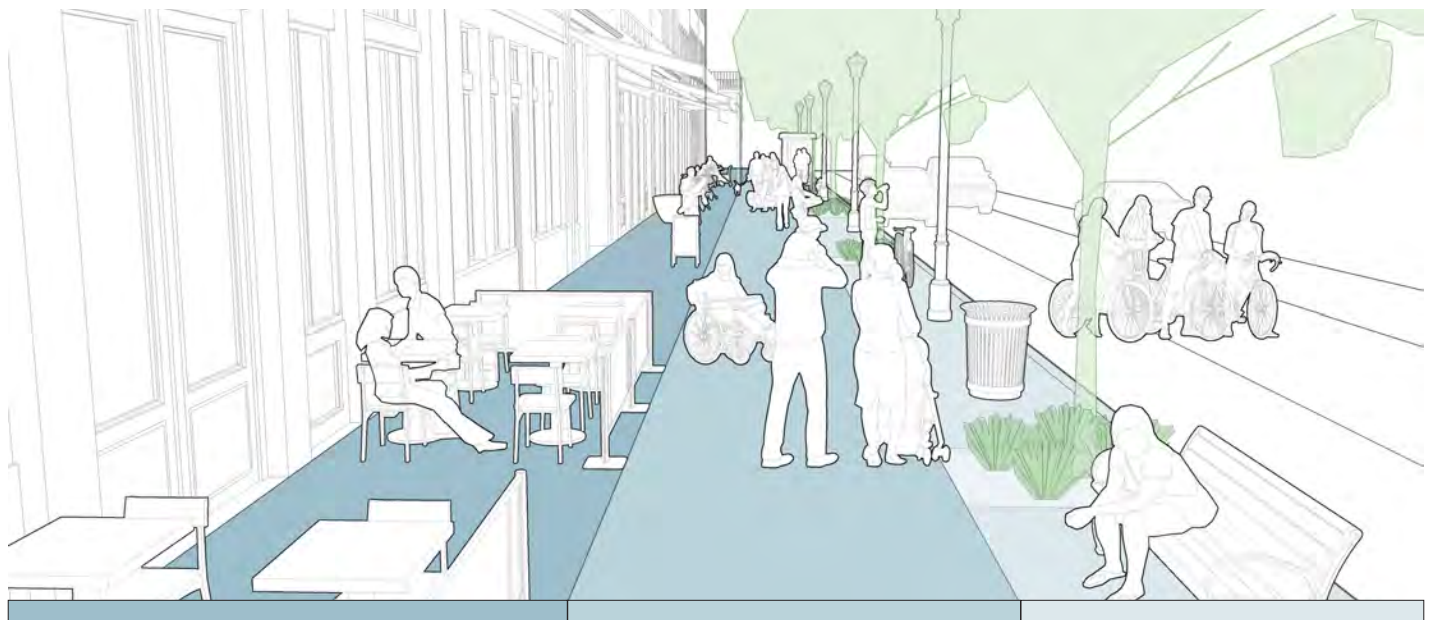
Assembly Square's sidewalks should be designed using three functional zones: frontage, walkway, and furnishing. Each zone's purpose remains the same across the neighborhood, but the specific design and dimensions of these zones of sidewalk will vary depending on the individual character of each street and block.

Create streets for cyclists and low-speed mobility

Bike infrastructure for commuting and recreation should be expanded throughout Assembly Square. Ideally, a full ring of neighborhood bike infrastructure that connects to the larger regional bike path network should be created. Bikes should be accommodated above the curb level or at least by parking-protected bike lanes whenever possible.

Ensuring ample, secure and convenient bike parking is a critical step for encouraging use. Bike parking within Assembly Square should be provided on sidewalks, on the street, within parking lots and in parking garage facilities.

Additionally, the development of other low-speed, motorized mobility options offers significant potential benefits for Assembly Square, albeit with safety challenges similar to those of cycling. Scooters and e-bikes should not be encouraged to operate on sidewalks because they negatively impact pedestrian safety and convenience. They also should not necessarily be encouraged in vehicular travel lanes. Protected lanes should be available and sufficient so that bikes and scooters have no desire to be sidewalks or roadways. Assembly Square will plan for low-speed mobility modes by incorporating them into the planning for bike lanes and other bike facilities.



Frontage

This space extends a buildings' activities. It is the location for seating, signs, retail displays, and landscaping.

Walkway

The clear path is dedicated to pedestrian travel. It must be accessible and free of physical obstructions to allow for the movement of people.

Furnishing

This space's primary purpose is to separate the clear path from motorists and provide a location for street furniture, trees, and utilities.

4. GROW REVENUE-GENERATING USES FOR SOMERVILLE

Expand the City's non-residential tax base

Assembly Square's current contribution to Somerville's tax base is significant, and the neighborhood is well on its way to vastly increasing its market values and tax revenues. Expanding the tax base is about creating more assets on the City's tax rolls in the form of new or improved business properties. This spreads the cost of municipal operations across more entities. The result is more money to enhance government-funded community features that add to Somerville's quality of life.

Growth at Assembly Square allows residential property taxes elsewhere in the city to remain manageable. Property taxes are the primary means for funding local education, police, fire protection, government, roads and infrastructure like sewers, bridges, street trees and streetlights.

Somerville is a largely residential community and must optimize its mixed-use places. In Assembly Square, office, retail, restaurant, entertainment, hotel and residential uses are planned, under construction or entirely foreseeable. During the virtual charrette, participants recommended allowing just enough residential uses to ensure 18-hours of street activity. The plan recommends continuing the effort to attract a diverse portfolio of revenue-generating uses with an emphasis on offices and labs.

Enhance the site's current strengths

One of Assembly Square's strongest assets is its proximity to the Mystic River. The neighborhood boasts nearly a mile of waterfront and shoreline access through the State-owned parks at the river's edge. These beloved waterfront parks can continue to be enhanced to continually engage the local community and draws regional visitors year-round. Priority actions include creating a loop of connected park spaces throughout the neighborhood that join to the riverfront parks at both ends, adding waterfront programming, and implementing inventive sustainability and resilience projects that enhance recreation opportunities. The improvements at Draw Seven State Park should be supported by increasing access through better signage (by Artisan Way) and a new entrance over the rail line by Revolution Drive.

The Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Playground is a popular destination within Assembly Square, the space can be potentially expanded to accommodate more users. More children's parks should be created within the neighborhood. Assembly Square has already proven that it has a strong business cluster effect. Now the goal is to expand and deepen this effect by branding the entire neighborhood, broadening its economic, commercial and office offerings, and appealing to complementary enterprises of all sizes and types.



Assembly Square has the ability to have something for almost everyone. The land development regulations should enable the uniqueness possible for each portion of the neighborhood.

Encourage Life Sciences

At Assembly Square, innovative office developers who specialize in providing high-end office, retail and lab space are successfully attracting investment. As a result, the area is emerging as a Life Sciences hub with a growing mix of offices for health care services, technology and research.

One of the ways Assembly Square can foster innovation is by taking a cue from an incubator model. Assembly Square should offer a market space where businesses scale and grow — where metro neighbors, students, entrepreneurs, artists and tourists come to shape a community they can call their own. Creating a complete, mixed-use, 18-hour neighborhood will help to attract businesses, employees and residents. Trends bode well for the site's long-term occupancy, job creation and population growth.

Collaborate with developers

The site's developers and Somerville's planners bring a substantial body of experience with building and economic development program design. For Assembly Square in particular, they have focused on achieving and maintaining a new avenue of economic growth for Somerville that pays for itself and contributes to the City's overall budget commitments with a mix of national and local retailers. The neighborhood residents, planners and other key stakeholders within the City's business ecosystem are broadly concerned with improving livability and equity for residents through policies that support people, sustainable growth and productivity improvement across the board. As development occurs the city's planners should collaborate with developers to ensure the continued push for diverse business offerings at all scales and price points.

Develop new catalytic niches

While commercial space is key to tax revenues and developers, balancing the neighborhood needs more "soft-power" investments that can bring overall gains to the local economy. Attracting and promoting investments in the arts community, along with small-footprint markets, will help to create a fully rounded and decidedly local neighborhood. Assembly Square should seek out investments from, and creative partnerships with, area corporations (social responsibility programs), community nonprofits and academic institutions. This could help the neighborhood benefit from bespoke cultural experiences. For example, surprising residents and visitors with street art or museum-sourced artifacts on loan from area nonprofits and universities. Encouraging activities like these within Assembly Square will bring more people into the community either to visit for the day or to live.

Build well and build for everyone

Assembly Square is not a "sacrifice zone" or area that has been permanently impaired by economic disinvestment that must do whatever it can to be filled. The Somerville community has high standards, and the City is positioned to demand the best from every development. The area has multiple large sites ripe for redevelopment. New developments and new businesses must be of the highest quality to meet the needs, demands and aspirations of the community.

The complete Assembly Square neighborhood should have a range of uses to meet the daily needs of the community, including a grocery store or late-night pharmacy, parks that connect the different parts of the neighborhood, and additional housing including workforce housing along with more units appropriate for larger households.

Update zoning

Zoning should reflect and encourage development that is in line with the community's vision for the Assembly Square neighborhood. Whether that is best achieved by adjusting the existing code or creating additional form-based standards should be fully explored.

It is important to note that not all of Assembly Square should look the same. Some areas by the highway should feature taller structures and not allow residential uses or civic spaces. Other areas should feature lower-profile buildings that create the feel of a comfortable outdoor "room." In some cases it will be appropriate to encourage larger-footprint buildings to accommodate lab and office spaces. In others, smaller lots should allow low-scale incremental development. Bottom line: the code should reflect the nuance of the vision while also allowing flexibility to ensure that the right kind of development is encouraged.

5. CULTIVATE THE ASSEMBLY SQUARE COMMUNITY AND CONNECT PHYSICALLY AND SOCIALLY TO THE BROADER CITY

Connect physically

Assembly Square can feel disconnected from the rest of Somerville because it is bounded by large transportation facilities and the Mystic River. The plan recommends establishing more physical connections to the rest of the city, particularly the adjacent neighborhoods of Ten Hills, Winter Hill and East Somerville. Examples of ways to connect include the Kensington Connector, making Fellsway easier to cross on foot or bike, and adding a bike/pedestrian bridge which crosses the river.

Transit provides a connection to Assembly Square, and new and enhanced transit may be possible. In time, the site will have a large enough residential population and host a sufficient number of destinations to become a candidate for Bus Rapid Transit along Fellsway, and more frequent local bus and MBTA Orange Line service.

Draw Seven State Park can have improved access with the addition of a connection over the rails near the MBTA Orange Line station by Revolution Drive. Every effort should be made to increase connections and access to Assembly Square.

Connect socially

Assembly Square is a relatively new development in a city of otherwise well-established neighborhoods. Building the kind of community found in older areas will take work. It was not until the development of housing at Assembly Row and the relocation to Assembly Square of Mass General Brigham, a major employment center, that the area became more than an industrial and commercial hub.

Potentially galvanizing yet nascent business improvement districts, main street associations, and neighborhood and homeowner associations are just beginning to form and need support. Spaces with civic uses, or spaces for NGOs and non-profits, would make Assembly Square a center of live social and political activity.

Public art can take various forms, such as murals, sculptures, large-scale installations or music. A good piece of public art can enhance and transform a public space, creating a sense of place and community. The culture and traditions of Somerville can be expressed in a piece of public artwork, manifesting the unique identity/stories of the community to residents and visitors.



A central civic space can provide a place for the neighborhood to come together and be the Assembly Square the neighborhood is centered around.

Enhance the Assembly Square neighborhood identity

When most people in the Greater Boston region think of Assembly Square, they think of Assembly Row and the Assembly Marketplace. Both have done an excellent job of building their brands. But as Assembly Square develops, the identity of the neighborhood must broaden. New development should strengthen the community's character by ensuring cohesion and flow between the buildings and within the public realm. Whether through street design, furnishings or wayfinding signage, Assembly Square needs to forge its own all-inclusive identity.

Arts and culture reflect the spirit of a place. Incorporating public art into a community promotes economic growth and sustainability, strengthens cultural identity, stimulates local artist involvement, increases social cohesion, and enhances health and belonging. Artists can connect to the neighborhood and make authentic spaces that are completely unique to Assembly Square.

Make space for small, local, independent businesses

In the virtual charrette, residents of Assembly Square talked about how the neighborhood lacked some of the more distinct, independent and locally owned establishments. Federal Realty, one of the site's principal property owners, discussed how attracting small business retailers is a major responsibility for the company's development team. They pushed back against the perception that Assembly Row and Assembly Marketplace are just chain stores. Over 10% of the tenants are small businesses, and Federal Realty has acknowledged that increasing that balance is their responsibility and goal.

Federal Realty described how it works to achieve the right mix of national retailers (to provide a regional draw) and local businesses (to provide uniqueness). Business development teams will often attend small craft fairs and farmers' markets with the goal of providing temporary spaces, carts and kiosks to smaller businesses. It is difficult for small businesses to compete with major chains because the cost of occupancy: the rent is lower for tenants seeking a ten-year lease for a large space, but small businesses tend to prefer one-year leases with less square footage. To address this issue, Federal Realty frequently offers reduced rents and smaller storefronts to "mom-and-pop" operations in order to achieve local distinctiveness.

Along these lines, attendees of the virtual charrette asked if it might be possible to require affordable spaces for small businesses in the same way affordable housing is required. While this is an interesting idea worth exploring, at present it is not clearly supported by State statutes, has not been widely implemented nationally, and has not been tested in State courts. Still, there are different ways to potentially help establish and grow local retail and small businesses. Approaches could include offering smaller spaces with corresponding lower lease rates or offering spaces with below-market lease prices (achieved via public subsidy).

Cultivate the Assembly Square community

As the mixed-use development at Assembly Square grows, so will the residential development. To accommodate the range of needs, build the Assembly Square community, and make the neighborhood suitable for all ages, there should be an array of housing options for a wide variety of people, including rental and ownership opportunities.

People want to visit — and live in — authentic places. They seek authenticity in food, drink, art, music and space. Often, people will frequent independently owned establishments because they feel a connection with the business owner or operator. A locally owned business is more likely to express a distinct vision and is less likely to adopt uniform aesthetics. A healthy neighborhood has a mix of both corporate chains that can bring in new people and small local businesses that can become locally loved. Micro-chain, family-operated and startup businesses are key to a resilient local economy.



4. The Plan

This chapter lays out a vision for the Assembly Square neighborhood, offering a glimpse of what the future could look like if the plan's concepts are implemented.

ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

The plan for the Assembly Square neighborhood addresses Somerville's current needs and offers big, bold possibilities for the future. Plan ideas touch on multiple focus areas and envision **great new places that are compatible with and respectful of community context**. The illustrative plan shows how these places might develop by bringing to life the proposed streets, buildings, alleys, parking locations and open spaces of a full future build-out of the Assembly Square neighborhood.

Of course, big changes don't happen overnight. The plan is designed to be implemented one piece at a time, as opportunities arise. Although some plan details may change over time to meet physical, regulatory or market constraints, the main concepts should be followed.

The plan calls for **growing revenue-generating uses for Somerville**, increasing the commercial tax base to keep residential taxes manageable. It shows new development where existing land is not achieving its highest and best use. This is illustrated in the Assembly Marketplace and Assembly Square South focus areas, where large single-story retail buildings with large surface parking areas are re-imagined as mixed-use, mid-rise buildings to serve a diverse set of neighborhood needs. Assembly Square is emerging as a life science center, with high-rise lab and commercial buildings proposed for the Middlesex Avenue corridor, particularly to the west of Middlesex Avenue. If this trend is encouraged as the plan intends, it could help the City meet some of those aforementioned revenue-generating goals.

When looking at the future of Assembly Square, it's vital to recognize the site's vulnerability in an era of increased flooding and to implement climate mitigation strategies through **increased access to nature and building sustainably**. This includes reducing the carbon footprint by decreasing the use of single-occupancy motor vehicles and increasing the amount of green space and urban canopy. This plan shows new mixed-use, LEED Platinum buildings with green roofs and additional green civic spaces that could be utilized for storm water management.

As Assembly Square attracts new development, workers and residents will **demand safe, comfortable, and interesting streets and paths as well as increased transit** to get to and around Assembly Square. The plan shows more streets connecting existing development across the entire neighborhood. For example, a center street between Middlesex Avenue and Grand Union Boulevard would be a pedestrian alternative to parallel streets focused on motor vehicles, connecting different civic spaces for a more interesting pedestrian journey. It would offer a delightful setting for a neighborhood walk, provide restful places to linger and a picturesque view from surrounding buildings. Several shared streets are proposed that could create safe and engaging spaces which prioritize pedestrians and can be closed to traffic as needed for community events.

Lastly, as Assembly Square grows to meet the needs of its residents and builds great new places to attract more people, it must better **connect physically and socially to Somerville and cultivate the Assembly Square community**. Community life could be enriched by developing a cohesive identity for the neighborhood, whether by adding more unique art and creating civic spaces that foster human connections or by partnering with passionate local leaders, makers, entrepreneurs, nonprofits and corporate social responsibility programs to further define and energize the very spirit of the area. To be clear, this aspect of the plan is not simply an exercise in design or beautification, but a deliberate attempt to ignite pockets of social and cultural transformation. The section that follows details how areas of differing character can influence development and reflect the diverse needs of Somerville's residents.













FOCUS AREAS:

- 1 Assembly Marketplace**
See more on page 4.12
- 2 Middlesex Corridor**
See more on page 4.16
- 3 Assembly Square South**
See more on page 4.21
- 4 Assembly Point Micro-District**
See more on page 4.24

FOSS PARK

ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

LEGEND

	City Boundary
	Neighborhood Boundary
	Primary Pedestrian Network
	Proposed Buildings
	Planned Building
	Existing Buildings
	Proposed Green Space
	Existing Green Space
	Plaza Space
	Shared Street
	Blocks
	River



GENERAL PLAN CONCEPTS

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan imagines different character areas to meet the various and evolving needs of the neighborhood. This isn't policy itself, but the vision for the potential future character, office buildings, spaces, and uses, that can drive policy choices for the neighborhood area. The plan shows redevelopment and infill throughout the neighborhood (which is distilled in the figure ground diagrams to the right).

PROPOSED BUILDING HEIGHT

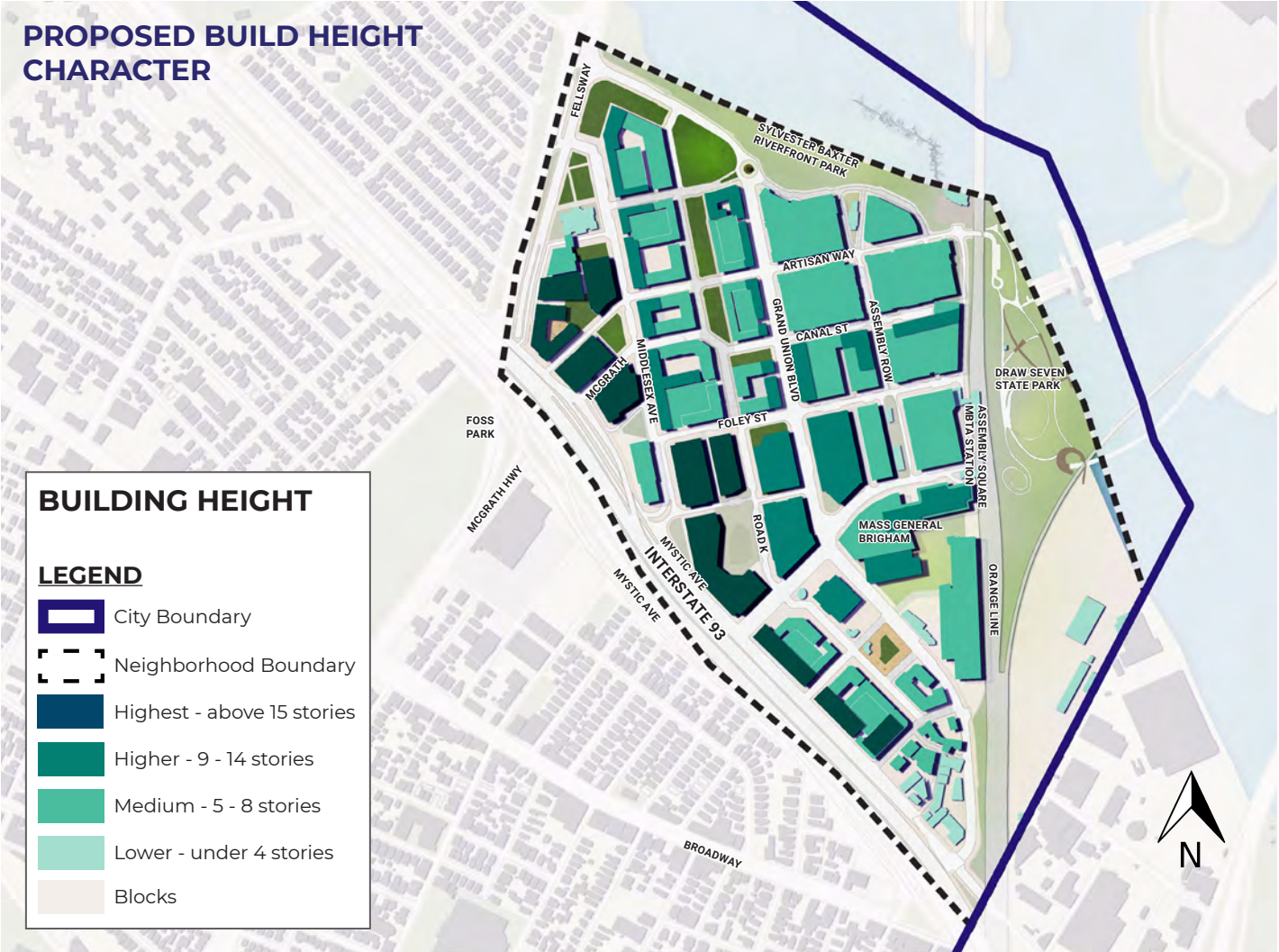
Building height is a defining characteristic throughout Assembly Square. The existing buildings east of Grand Union Boulevard are 6 stories or less, though there are 12-story towers in some areas. West of Grand Union Boulevard are single-story commercial buildings. With new development, the highest buildings would be located within 500 feet of I-93 to prevent highway air pollution from penetrating further into the neighborhood. The motor vehicle corridors of Middlesex Avenue and Grand Union Boulevard would also have taller buildings, stepping down in height toward a central green space that provides sunlight. Buildings within Assembly Point would likely have smaller footprints and remain at a lower height.



Existing Figure Ground



Proposed Figure Ground



Shade Study

One of the major concerns in setting appropriate building heights is ensuring adequate lighting at the ground level. A shade study was conducted which analyzed sample areas of Middlesex Avenue and the central civic space to determine if there was adequate sunlight throughout the year. Each location was checked daily for shortest, longest and equal hours of sunlight.

Middlesex Avenue

Assembly Square's neighborhood streets primarily have north-south orientation. This means that streets like Middlesex Avenue and Grand Union Boulevard can have taller buildings. The upper floors on the east side of the street receive more sun exposure in the morning; the buildings facing west get more sunlight in the afternoon; and the street level still sees sun for at least a few hours throughout the day.



Shade Analysis of Middlesex Avenue street view, looking north towards Grand Union Boulevard from where the Lincoln Technical Institute is currently located.

Central Civic Space

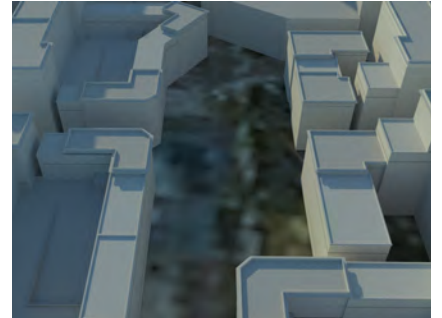
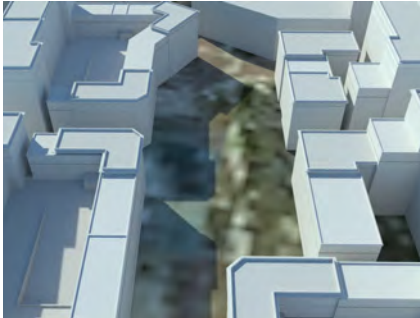
The central civic space should be well lit throughout the day and feel open toward the sky. The buildings around the space are shorter (6 to 8 stories) and spaced farther apart across the green. The central civic space also has a north-south orientation. This location, along with the lower building height, allows for a long period of sun exposure that will let many trees and plants thrive. The east side of the central green area gets more sun exposure in the morning, and in the afternoon the west side of the park space gets more sunlight.

Spring/Autumn Equinox

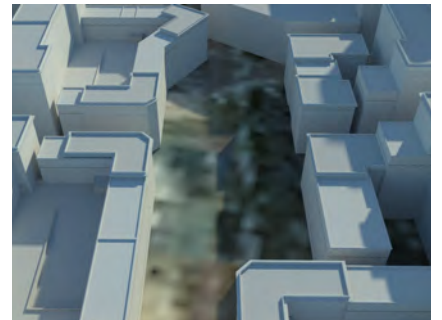
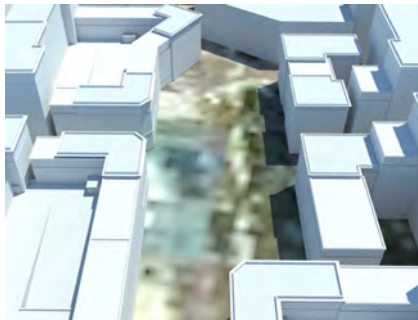
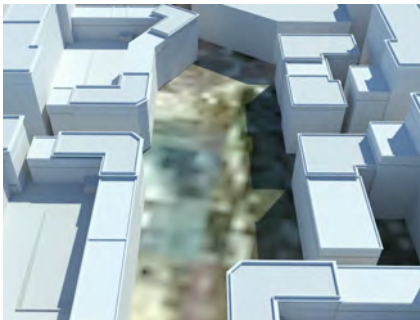
Summer Solstice

Winter Solstice

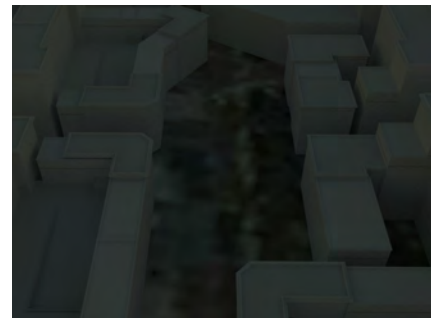
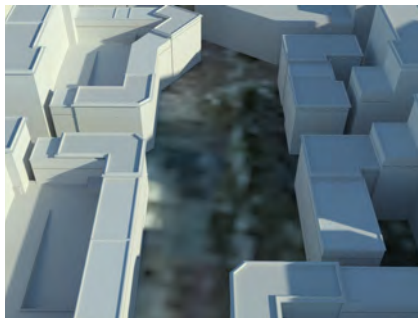
9 am



1 pm



5 pm

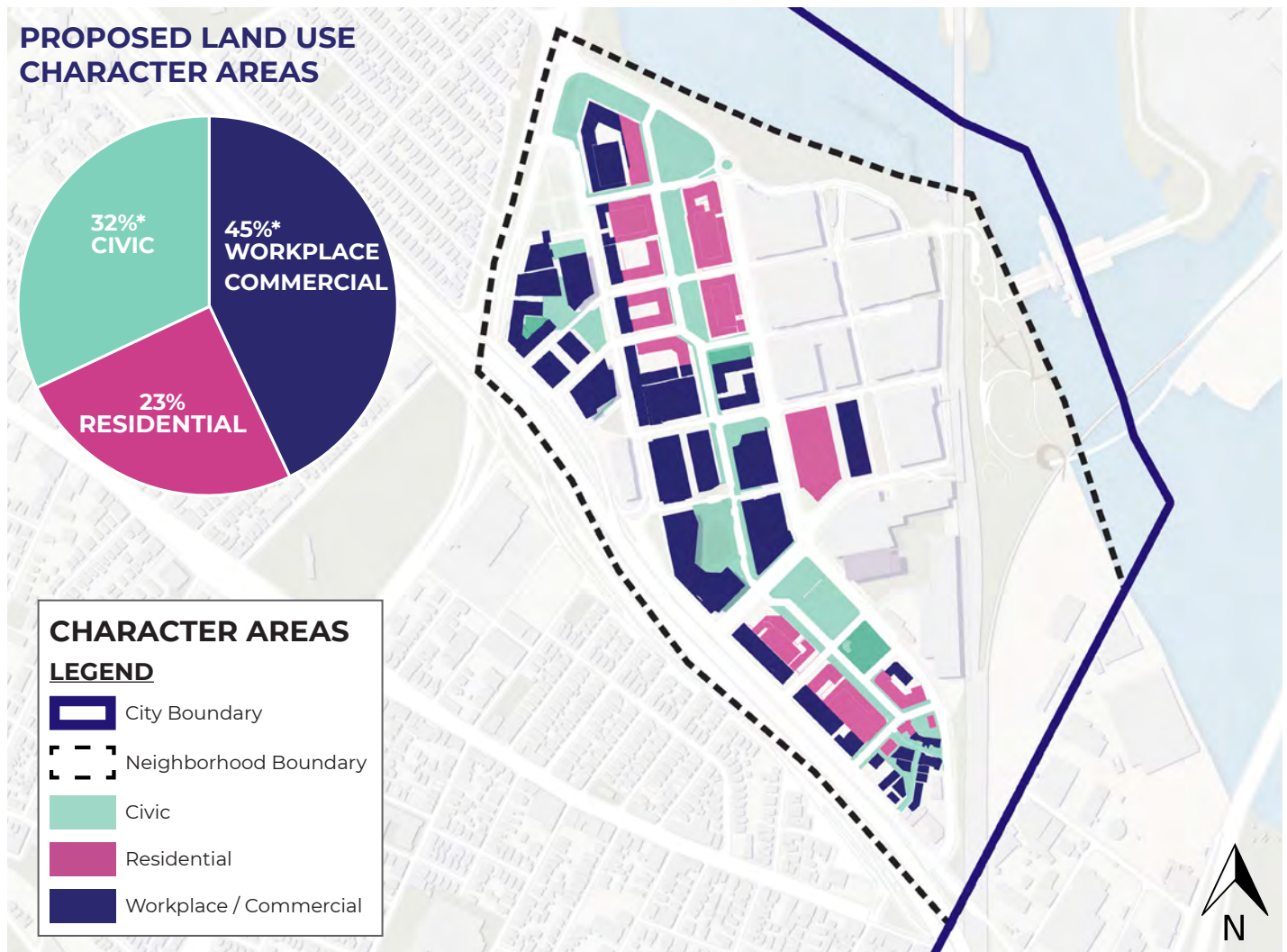
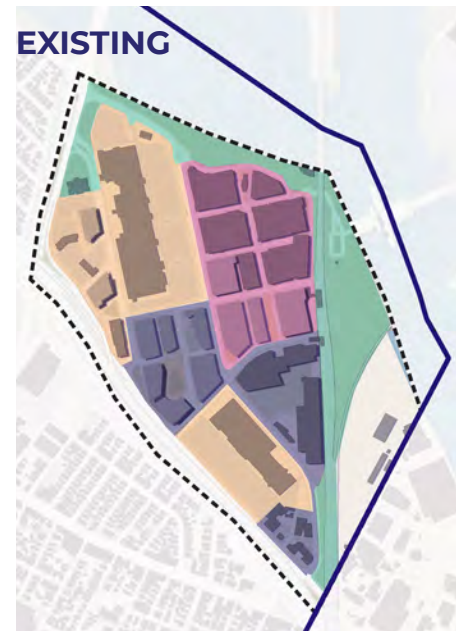


Shade Analysis of the central civic space, looking south towards Foley Street.

LAND USE CHARACTER

While Assembly Square will be mixed-use as a whole, some areas will develop a character based on the dominant use. Currently, the neighborhood consists of the residential and retail character of Assembly Row, the workplace character of Mass General Brigham, and the retail character of Assembly South and Assembly Marketplace.

In the future, there will be a vertical mix of uses to create a more urban feel and livelier neighborhood expression. Retail will often occupy the ground floors of buildings, with the upper floors varying. Informed by market demand studies and the existing dominance of residential use, this plan proposes that 50% of new development be for workplace and lab use. Residential uses should be located around new civic spaces. By identifying these general character areas, policies and zoning can be decided based on each area's needs.



CIVIC SPACES

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan portrays a variety of civic space types that together would allocate 30% of land for public use. The various civic spaces would serve a wide range of functions and offer something for everyone, making the spaces less likely to become crowded or overused. The goal is to have enough space to maintain a healthy environment and allow for fresh air, recreation and events. The plan describes the following primary strategies for a connected network of neighborhood civic spaces:

1 Central Commons

The centerpiece of the master plan is the Central Commons, a chain of civic spaces linking Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park in the north to the Assembly Point micro-district in the south. The Central Commons would take different forms based on the varying character of the surroundings.

1.A

A new civic park space that visually connects to the waterfront park across Grand Union Boulevard can be associated with a library, museum or arts space plus a restaurant or café.

1.B

At the heart of the Assembly Marketplace is the new Assembly Central Green. New residential development is oriented around the green in the area flanked by Grand Union Boulevard and Middlesex Avenue. This Central Green can host community events like art fairs, farmer's markets or food truck rallies.

1.C

Central Commons then evolves into a tree-lined street with wide sidewalks and outdoor dining in the Assembly Square South area, where it joins to a square that fronts a new civic building.

1.D

Central Commons then evolves into a tree-lined street with wide sidewalks and outdoor dining in the Assembly Square South area, where it joins to a square that fronts a new civic building.

1.E

Finally, as it reaches the Assembly Point micro-district, Central Commons once again becomes a shared street that intermittently widens into plazas for social and community events.

1.F

A new firehouse is proposed at the ground floor.

1.G

Existing police substation opened in 2016

2

Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park

Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park is Assembly Square's primary waterfront park and is directly adjacent to the Assembly Row development across Great River Road. The park can be better connected to the neighborhood by transforming Great River Road into a shared street.

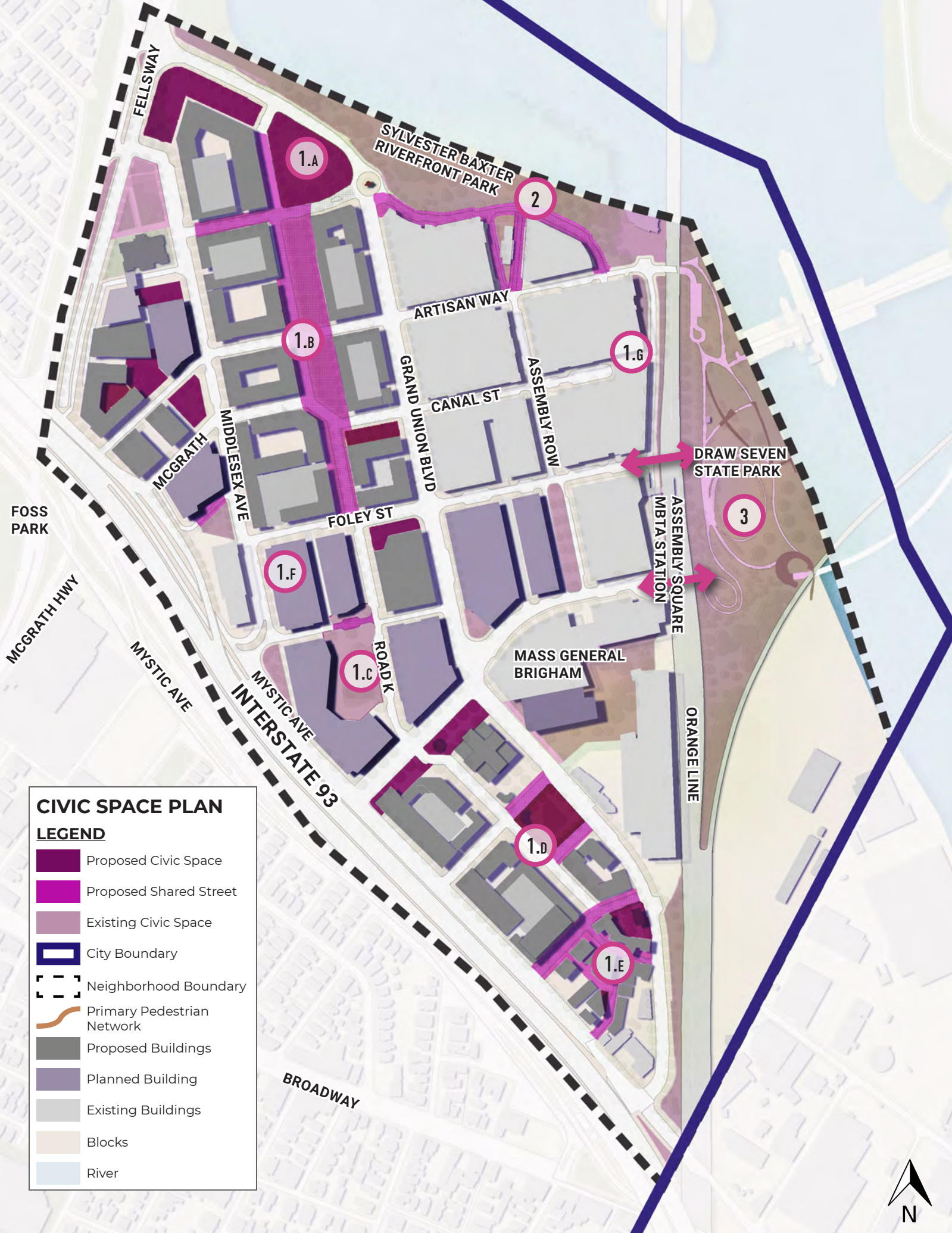
3

Draw Seven State Park

The City and State could work together to update and refresh Draw Seven State Park, creating a large, modern waterfront park along the Mystic River. The park's location (east of several rail lines) reduces its visibility and makes it difficult to reach from the neighborhood. Improved wayfinding and visible access along Great River Road and Artisan Way would strengthen the park's connection to the neighborhood and encourage visitors. The City and State could also create an additional park entrance accessible from the Assembly Square MBTA Station near Foley Street or from Revolution Drive over the rail lines. This would significantly improve access to the park. This new entrance, combined with the Central Commons, would create a green loop through the neighborhood .

SHARED STREETS AS CIVIC SPACE

The Assembly Square neighborhood should reclaim street spaces in order to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists over the movement of motor vehicles whenever possible. This plan champions Shared Streets as the place for the community to take back the street as civic space. Shared Streets prioritize walking over all other movement, while providing spaces for bikes and allowing vehicles limited access at low speeds. Curbless profiles, pedestrian friendly textures, and permeable paving can reinforce the primacy of pedestrians, rather than motor vehicles. Pavers on pedestrian sidewalks should have larger sizes to allow continuous surface. These streets should be designed to adapt to different civic functions—such as closing the street for community events like farmers markets or food truck events.



CIVIC SPACE PLAN

LEGEND

- Proposed Civic Space
- Proposed Shared Street
- Existing Civic Space
- City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- Primary Pedestrian Network
- Proposed Buildings
- Planned Building
- Existing Buildings
- Blocks
- River

UTILITIES AND STORMWATER

The first step in developing a utilities infrastructure master plan is to identify and assess the condition and capacity of the existing utilities and infrastructure. This assessment must be done in relation to existing buildings and loads that are already served by the utilities. As-built drawings, other documents, physical assessments on site and coordination with the Somerville Department of Public Works (DPW) are all useful ways to gather this information. Research required for an accurate assessment should not be limited to review of existing documents, records and discussions. On-site surveys, cross-checking information through analysis, videotaping, and other tools applicable to the specific utility that is being evaluated should also be considered. Depending on the situation, determining existing loads could require some analytical effort. This might include computer modeling (pipe flow analysis), calculations and estimations based on industry guidelines and standard practices.

	ESTIMATED SEWER FLOWS GENERATED (GPD)	USAGE BREAKDOWN ASSUMPTIONS
OFFICE (75 GPD/1,000 SF)	345,000	OFFICE = 4,600,000 SF
RETAIL (50 GPD/1,000 SF)	77,500	RETAIL = 1,550,000 SF
RESIDENTIAL (110 GPD/BEDROOM)	550,000	RESIDENTIAL = 2,500 UNITS
TOTAL (GPD)	972,500	

The next step involves evaluating the impact of each building addition, deletion, or renovation on each of the affected utilities. Based on estimated daily sewer flows laid out in the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) State Environmental Code (310 CMR 15.00), we were able to calculate an approximate daily increase that will need to be accounted for based on the development option chosen. The proposed development will generate approximately 972,500 gallons per day (GPD) in additional sewer flow. As with sewer, the water requirements for each use will need to be further analyzed by a licensed plumbing engineer, and the capacity of the existing infrastructure will need to be analyzed in coordination with the Somerville DPW to determine if mains need to be replaced, upgraded, or added in certain locations. In terms of stormwater drainage, according to MassDEP regulations this area will not allow for infiltration in any extent due to formerly polluted soils, etc. Therefore, proposed stormwater piping will likely be required to convey roof and pavement runoff from these areas into the municipal pipe network to be discharged elsewhere.



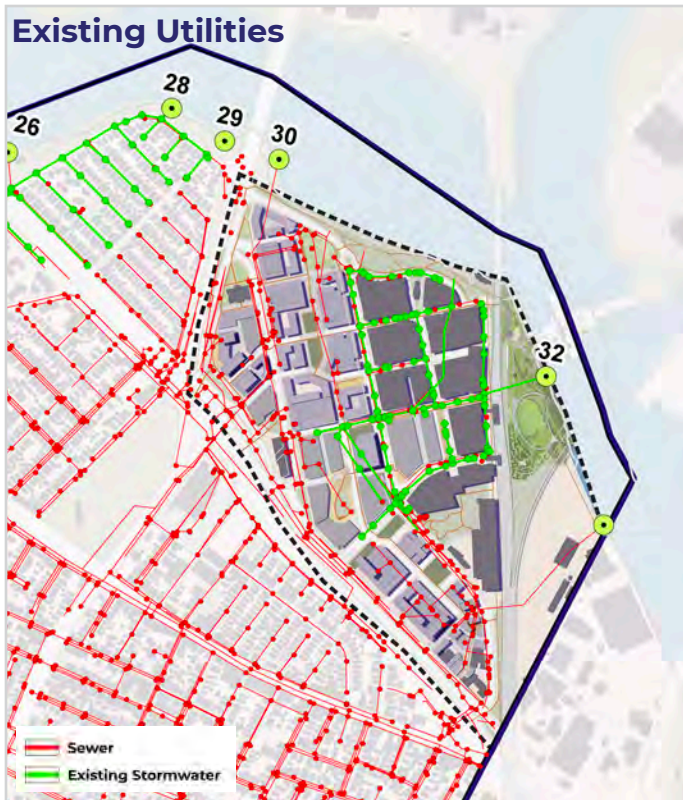
North Grand Union Boulevard



Grand Union Boulevard



South Grand Union Boulevard



UTILITIES

Utilities stormwater considerations include low impact development (LID) techniques, utilizing best management practices, underground infiltration systems, porous surfaces and bioswales. All of these methods will be considered in the proposed stormwater management plan.

CELLULAR ACCESS

Cellular communication technologies experienced rapid growth in the last two decades. Cellular infrastructure are essential services for a community. The planning and optimization of broadband cellular access including coverage planning, power optimization and channel assignment should be investigated further as the assembly Square neighborhood grows and expands.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

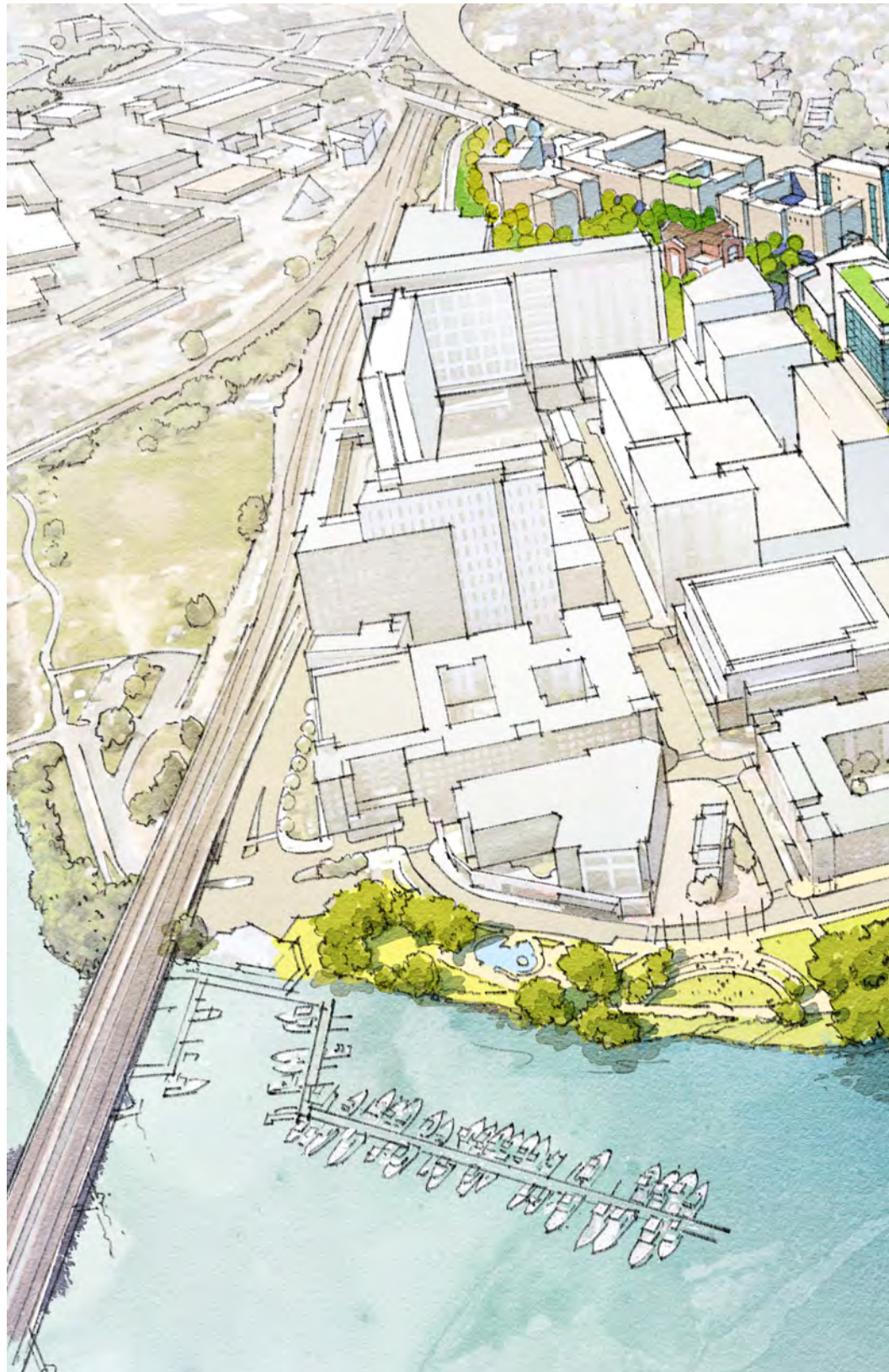
- Stormwater infiltration is not allowed due to MassDEP requirements.

ASSEMBLY MARKETPLACE

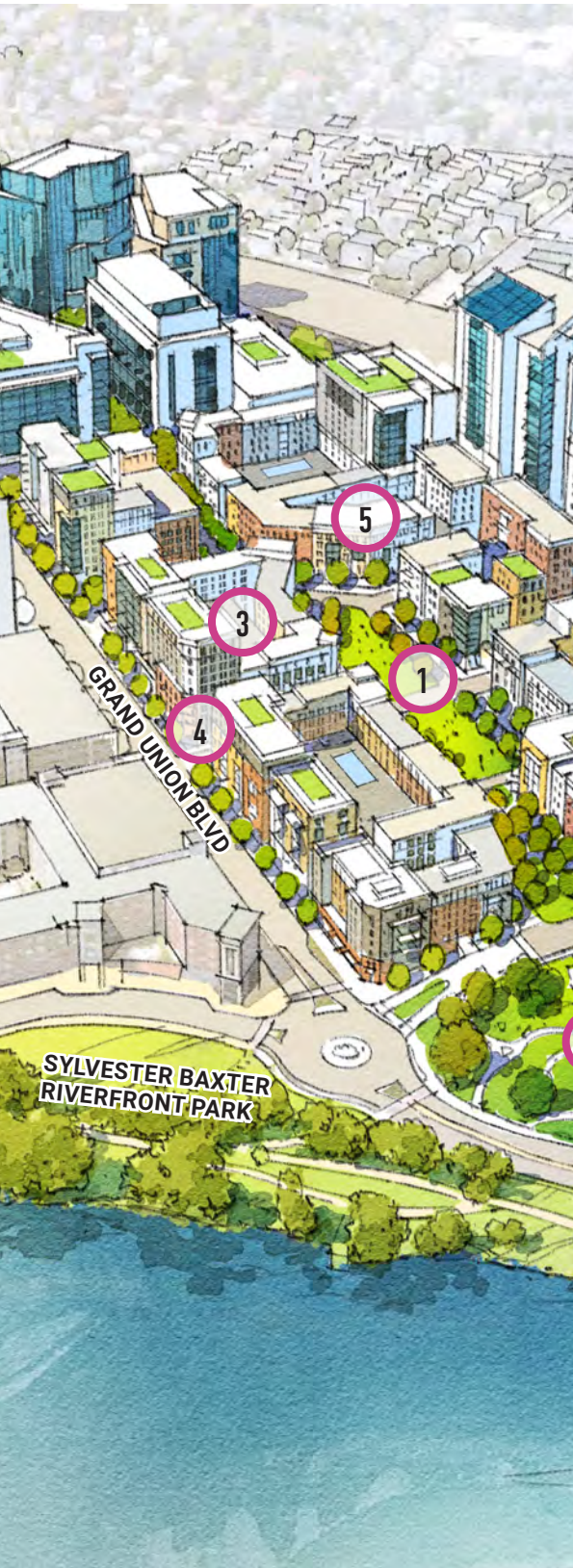
MARKETPLACE REDEVELOPMENT

The Assembly Marketplace site represents the largest redevelopment opportunity in the Assembly Square neighborhood. The site currently consists of one large retail building fronted by surface parking. The vision for the future extends the mixed-use residential character from the east side of Grand Union Boulevard. An interconnected network of streets would create a fine-grained system of walkable blocks with a series of civic spaces in the heart of the neighborhood. Mid-rise buildings at the center (fronting ground-level amenities, a central green and shared streets) would transition to larger buildings along Grand Union Boulevard and Middlesex Avenue.

- 1 *Public civic spaces would form the heart of the neighborhood and create space for community events.*
- 2 *A natural park at the northern edge would connect with Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park and bring nature into the neighborhood.*
- 3 *A network of small, walkable blocks would create a pedestrian-friendly district.*
- 4 *Along the wider streets (Grand Union Boulevard and Middlesex Avenue), buildings would have a denser character, rising approximately 12 to 15 stories and creating a 2:1 ratio of height to width.*
- 5 *Buildings around the central green space would be 4 to 8 stories and ideally create a 1:3 ratio of height to width.*



Proposed Redevelopment



ASSEMBLY CENTRAL GREEN

The vision for the Assembly Marketplace makes civic space central to the neighborhood with a series of formal spaces that run through the middle of the marketplace blocks. Commercial ground floors and residential upper floors would look out onto these civic spaces.

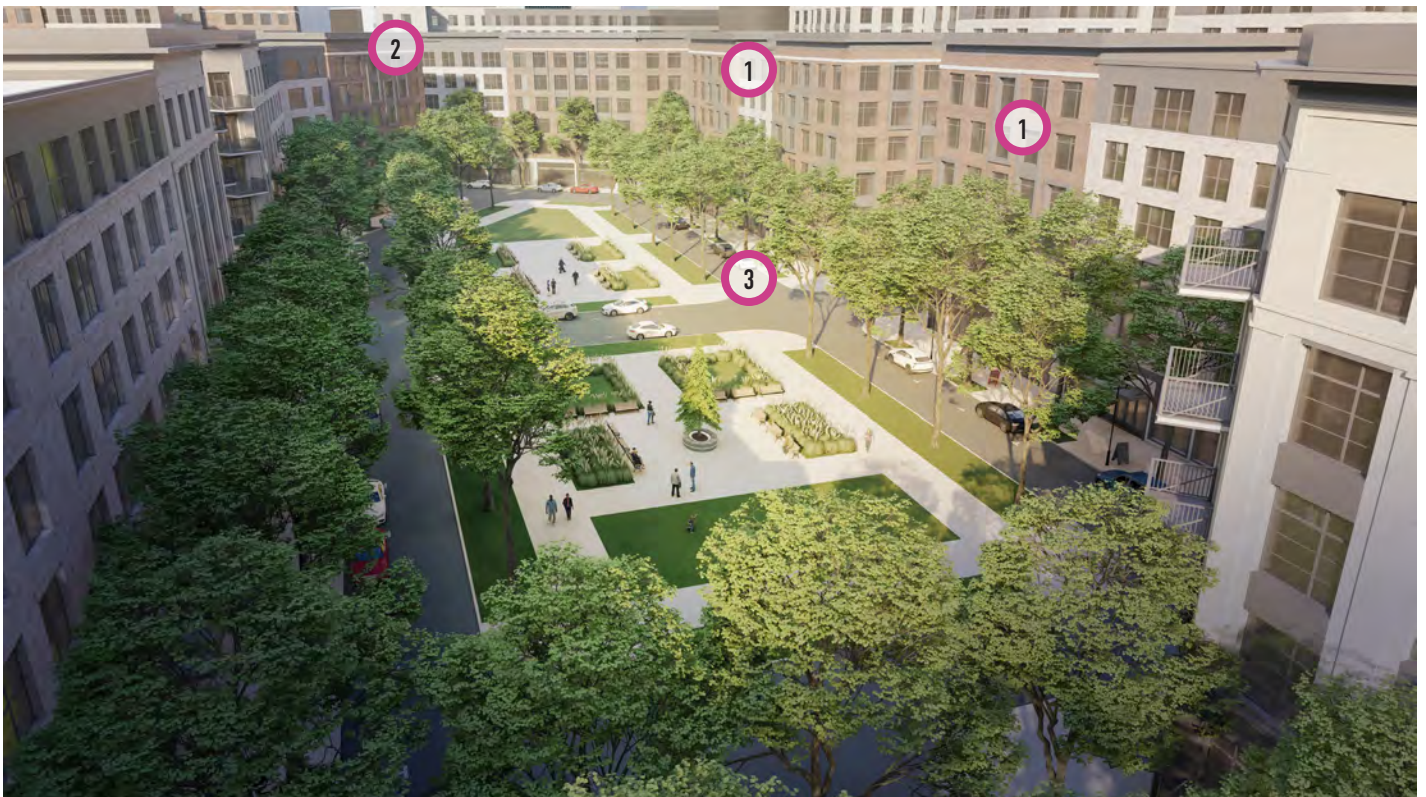
The block sizes in Assembly Marketplace are smaller than those on the other side of Grand Union Boulevard. This creates a more informal urban environment with a neighborhood form reminiscent of older area neighborhoods. The plan for the Assembly Marketplace would also create a series of distinct spaces with unique character and carefully curated views, inviting people to continue along to “see what’s around the next corner.” Each street would maintain its primary cardinal direction of north to south or east to west, keeping the area easy to navigate.

Some blocks would be slightly larger to accommodate parking garages that are lined on all sides by habitable buildings with doors and windows facing the streets.



Illustrative Plan

- 1 Buildings with habitable space line the street with mid-block parking garages
- 2 Strategically located angled streets create a more informal urbanism and distinct spaces
- 3 Shared streets run along the Central Green



Assembly Central Green



Civic spaces along the Central Commons would vary in character and function. Some could be more open and formal, such as the Assembly Central Green at the center of Assembly Marketplace, allowing flexibility for events such as farmer's markets and art fairs. This image shows a section of a promenade as it opens up to larger civic spaces at the center of the neighborhood.



Other civic spaces are larger and more natural, creating a refuge from the bustling activity of the adjacent urbanism. This image shows an extension of Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park that connects it to the neighborhood.

MIDDLESEX AVENUE CORRIDOR

Middlesex Avenue is in the western portion of the Assembly Square neighborhood and is a critical connection between Fellsway and Mystic Avenue. Mystic Avenue and the elevated I-93 viaduct form the western edge of the area and create a barrier to surrounding neighborhoods.

Earlier plans for the neighborhood focused on large parcels located east of Middlesex Avenue. Large parcels mean fewer owners, making it easier to carry out the broad changes proposed. In the decades since these earlier plans were made, Assembly Square has successfully evolved and is attracting new residents, workers, visitors—and attention from developers. The smaller parcels located along the western side of Middlesex Avenue are now the sites of several proposed projects for office, lab, and research and development space. This corridor is ideally positioned to become the premier location for life sciences in the city.

The Corridor Today

The eastern side of Middlesex Avenue is lined with Assembly Marketplace's back of house, a large blank wall stretching over 1,000 feet that prevents the excitement of Assembly Row from spilling over to Middlesex Avenue. Smaller parcels on the western side have a mix of parking lots and buildings with various uses. Several small streets intersect with Middlesex Avenue but offer little connectivity because they end at the interstate. The corridor's northern end is the site of Somerville's District Court building. The street reflects its industrial character with a wide stretch of unmarked pavement, including wide lanes, no street trees, intermittent sidewalks and limited crosswalks. The Middlesex Avenue corridor can look to Assembly Row for ideas to inspire its own evolution.



Aerial image of the Middlesex Avenue corridor today



The Middlesex Avenue Corridor Today



1 Projects in the Works

Upcoming projects along Middlesex Avenue, including 5 Middlesex, 74 Middlesex and 120 Middlesex, may bring hundreds of thousands of square feet of office, lab, and research and development space to the neighborhood.

2 Re-Imagining Middlesex Avenue as a “Complete Street”

Middlesex Avenue could be transformed into a great urban street with wide sidewalks, regularly spaced street trees, cycle tracks and on-street parking. This would allow a wide range of mobility options while also making it possible for activities within the buildings to spill out onto and enliven the sidewalks.

3 A Premier Research Corridor

Taller buildings housing office, lab, and research and development space would be located closest to the interstate, gradually decreasing in height toward the center of the neighborhood.

4 Courthouse Transformation Options

The Somerville District Court building is an existing civic use in the neighborhood, and its future is not yet determined. Options could include maintaining the current building, expanding the current building or relocating the courthouse to a different part of the city.

5 New Connections

The neighborhood’s east–west streets would extend westward past Grand Union Boulevard, creating new blocks where Assembly Marketplace is currently located. This would connect the Middlesex Avenue corridor to the rest of the neighborhood.



Illustrative plan showing the envisioned future of the Middlesex Avenue Corridor

A Growing Premiere Research Corridor

The 2000 Assembly Square Planning Study envisioned that the predominant use in the district would be office and research and development space with active retail at street level. The new plan backs that idea and recommends changes to further support those uses, particularly along the Middlesex Avenue corridor.

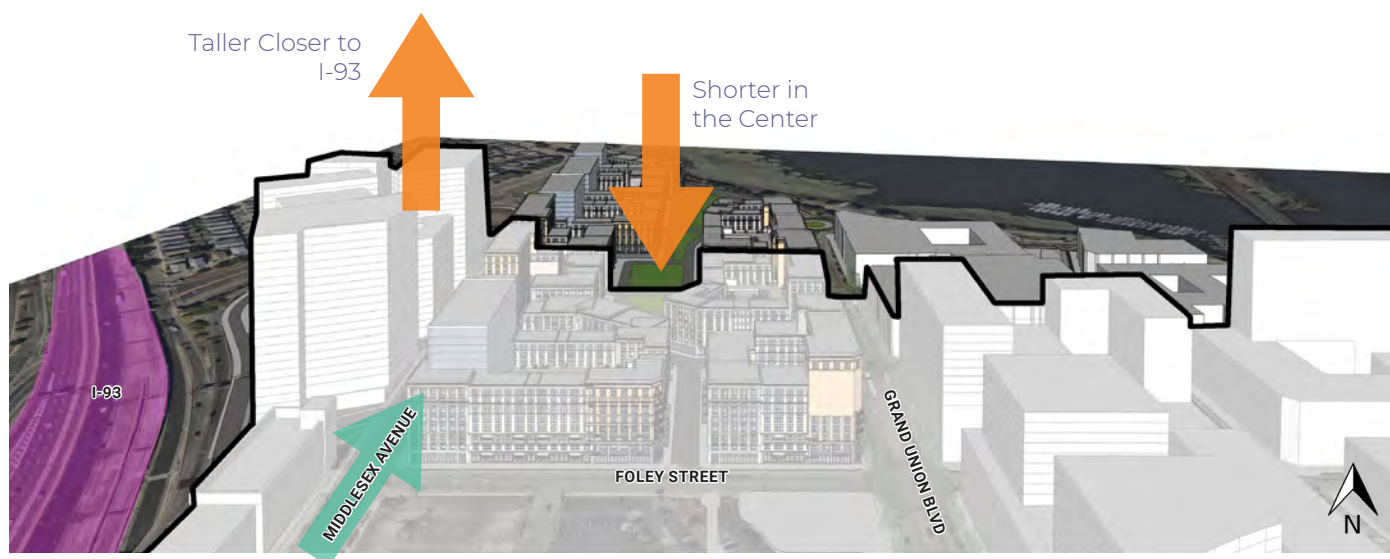
Middlesex Avenue properties are beginning a transformation that is largely driven by the region's demand for life science lab and office space. Three large mixed-use projects along the avenue have either recently been approved or are well into the process, including 5 Middlesex, 74 Middlesex and 120 Middlesex. Each proposal includes a large expanse of office, research and lab space with building heights of up to 275 feet.

The corridor has relatively good access given the constrained nature of the neighborhood. It has connections to I-93, Fellsway and Mystic Avenue, and it's only a 10-minute walk from the Assembly MBTA Station. Proximity to the interstate brings noise and air pollution, making the area west of Middlesex Avenue less suitable for residential uses and green space. During the public design charrette, participants frequently mentioned wanting taller buildings closer to I-93 to create a "wall of buildings" to mitigate noise and air pollution. This contrasted with their desire for more moderate heights elsewhere.

Taller permitted building heights closer to I-93 can accommodate modern office, research and lab space with greater floor-to-floor heights. The existing Assembly Square zoning regulates building height based on its distance from the Assembly MBTA Station entrances. With a distance of over 1,000 feet from a station entrance, building height is limited to 125 feet, which would accommodate up to 8 stories for office, lab, and research and development space within this corridor.

A more nuanced approach to height regulations is needed. The entire neighborhood is within walking distance of the Assembly Square MBTA Station, and there is a desire for taller buildings within 500 feet of the highway. Allowing taller buildings west of Middlesex Avenue would attract growing industries to relocate here, increasing the overall tax base while preserving other areas within the neighborhood for residential use. The Middlesex Avenue corridor should permit buildings of up to 18 stories on the western side and 12 to 15 stories on the eastern side, tapering down to 4 to 8 stories along the Central Commons.

The ground floors of these buildings should have habitable space and businesses to create an active and engaging street wall for a better pedestrian experience. Civic spaces should be open, inviting and clearly public.



Taller buildings will be located closer to I-93 while a more intimate scale forms the residential center

Re-imagining Middlesex Avenue

As Assembly Marketplace redevelops and streets like Artisan Way are continued through to Middlesex Avenue, this corridor will be better connected to the rest of the neighborhood. A new street design for the avenue that recognizes all mobility options, including walking and biking, would create desirable street addresses for businesses. To further knit the neighborhood together, the plan would slow traffic speeds, provide wide sidewalks and protected bike lanes, and create safe pedestrian crossings at regular intervals.

Middlesex Avenue is imagined as a vibrant and welcoming space, embracing its new uses. The expanse of pavement would become designated travel and curbside management lanes. Regularly spaced street trees would add a sense of formality and enclosure. Protected bike lanes could be located adjacent to widened sidewalks. Buildings could be brought up to the sidewalk to create an engaging street wall of shops, offices and building entrances. While the specifics of the design may evolve to meet mobility needs, the key elements of a great urban street would carry through.



Middlesex Avenue today, looking north at the intersection with McGrath Highway

- 1 Bioswales & green infrastructure
- 2 Regularly spaced street trees
- 3 Raised protected bike lanes and wide sidewalks
- 4 Curbside management lanes with electric vehicle charging stations
- 5 Engaging street fronts
- 6 Bikeshare station



Rendering illustrating a possible transformation of Middlesex Avenue

COURTHOUSE TRANSFORMATION OPTIONS

Somerville District Court sits at the intersection of Middlesex Ave and Fellsway, one of the major entrances to Assembly Square. The courthouse building is fronted with a triangular green space and has surface parking at the back. There are several future possibilities for the courthouse site: maintain the current building, expand the current building or relocate the courthouse to a different part of the city.

Courthouse Expansion

The parking garages in future development near the site could offer designated parking spots for courthouse users. This would alleviate the parking pressure from the surface parking lot. An addition to the courthouse could be built on a portion of the existing parking lot with the remaining parking lot area transformed into a civic space. A building addition has the potential to create a more friendly frontage on Fellsway.

Courthouse Relocation

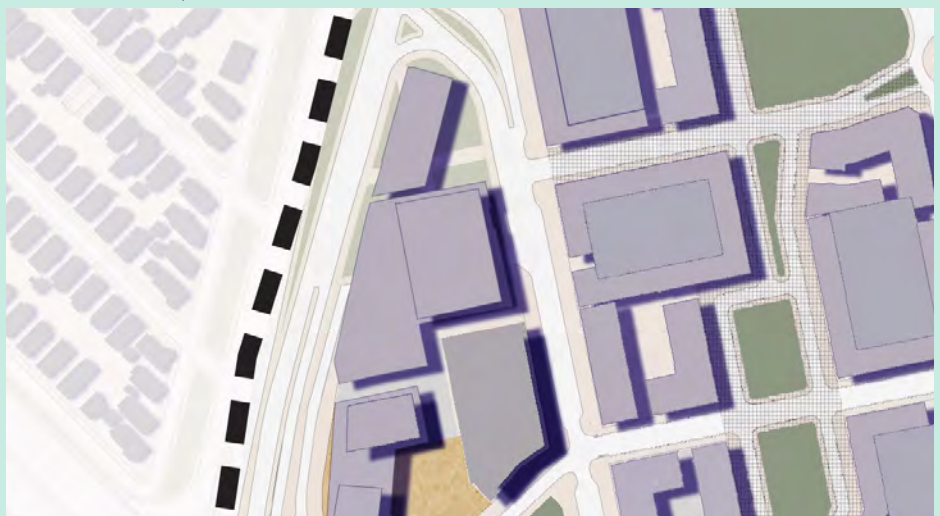
Relocating the courthouse would allow for a complete site redesign. The civic space could be framed by new buildings, providing a buffer to the noise and particulates from Fellsway. The new building configuration would also create a more active street frontage.



Courthouse Existing Conditions



Courthouse Expansion



Courthouse Relocation

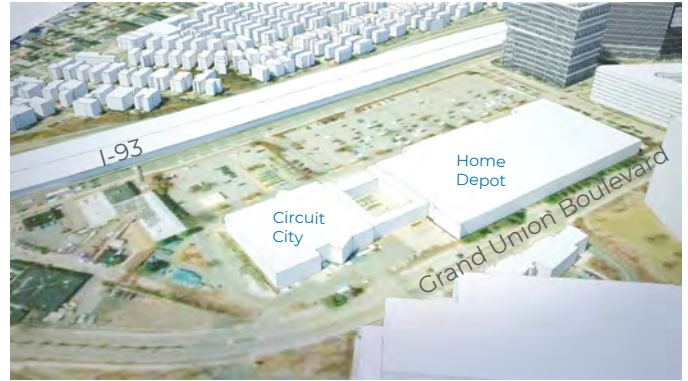
ASSEMBLY SQUARE SOUTH

Currently, the Assembly Square South area features aging, suburban, motor-vehicle-oriented development. Single-use commercial developments with large surface parking lots were designed to capitalize on visibility to motor vehicles passing by on I-93. Some sites are currently vacant, while others are occupied by businesses that continue to prosper. A careful phasing plan would allow portions of the area to evolve as conditions permit.

Redevelopment Ideas

As Assembly Square South evolves over time, the area could become more dense and vertically mixed-use. The business offerings could be more diversified to meet the daily needs of locals instead of being a regional draw accessed predominantly by motor vehicles. Multi-story buildings could bring more people to the area to live, increasing its vitality.

A layer of office and lab space could be built on the portion of the site closest to the highway. If taller and more continuous, these office buildings would help to screen the rest of the site from motor vehicle pollution and highway noise. Office uses would also benefit from highway visibility.



Assembly Square South, existing auto-oriented conditions



Phased redevelopment focused on building complete civic spaces



Assembly Square South, growing more complete over time.

In locations farther from the highway and with less pollution, property use could transition to include a variety of dwellings. Residential uses could be organized around public green spaces of various sizes, shapes and functions.

The mix of uses could include a commercial retail component designed to complement the walkable format of the new residential buildings and offices.

The site plan should accommodate phased implementation as older commercial buildings become ready for redevelopment. For example, the former Circuit City site could be redeveloped first to complement the Assembly Point micro-district while the Home Depot continues to operate. Redevelopment phasing should be organized to produce series of complete two-sided streets and civic spaces.

- 1 Playground
- 2 Café pavilion
- 3 Central lawn
- 4 Naturalistic park



Grand Union Boulevard looking south, a focal vista.



Civic spaces can accommodate many activities, serving a diverse population.



A focal building site which could house a museum...



...or a performance space...



...or a market hall, or many other potential uses.

The southward vista (looking down Grand Union Boulevard) currently ends at the back corner of the Home Depot building. When the Home Depot site eventually redevelops, this vista could be designed to culminate with the view of a signature focal building. This building could house many possible uses, such as a market hall, science museum, performance space or simply additional infill development. Focal architecture would also enhance the attractiveness of adjacent civic spaces.

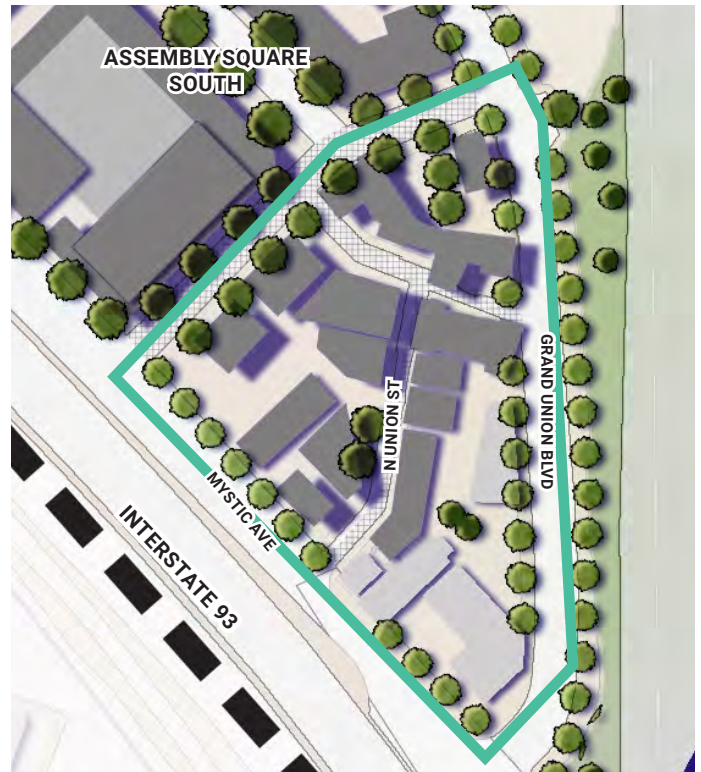
New streets and civic spaces offer an opportunity to add a great deal of green space to the large paved site. Street trees and other plantings should be used to increase pedestrian comfort throughout. Open spaces could feature a variety of landscape treatments, from formal lawns to naturalistic areas, playgrounds, tree-shaded dining terraces and café kiosks.

A plaza café on the walk to the Assembly Square MBTA Station.



ASSEMBLY POINT MICRO-DISTRICT

Throughout the public process, participants expressed a desire for the human-scale design and finer-grained development represented by the Somerville Assembly Point micro-district area. Assembly Point has a more distinctive street and block network. Its existing streets, small parcels and multiple property owners give it a character all its own. The existing buildings have smaller footprints and are mostly occupied by artisans and smaller businesses. This area is ideal for a vibrant micro-district supporting a diverse range of uses, such as arts and crafts, maker space, local restaurants, and residential use. These small parcels would be maintained by individual local owners.



Illustrative plan showing the vision for a new micro-district



Small museums



Maker space



Arts and Crafts



Local restaurants



Boutique hotel



Art installation

Assembly Point Design

The design for the Assembly Point micro-district celebrates the small-business character of the area. North Union Street would be maintained and extended as the main street. Street width would vary to create pockets of civic space along the way, culminating at a public plaza. The street's winding path would create a sense of mystery and discovery. Strategic infill development could line the main street with building facades and activity. The Assembly Point area of the future would offer residents and visitors a unique experience.



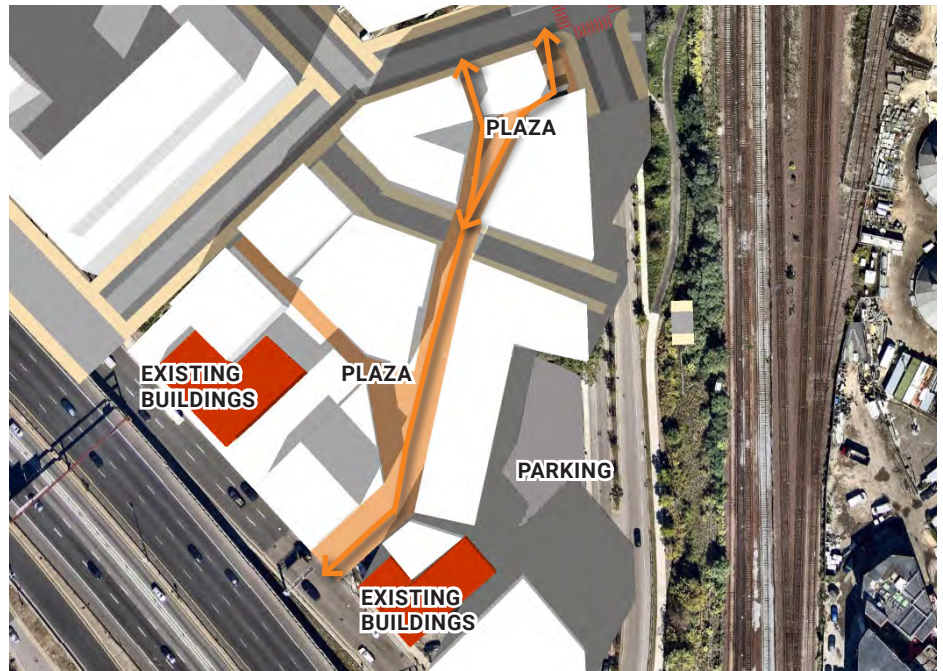
Existing Conditions

- 1 Existing buildings would remain
- 2 Solar panels on new development
- 3 Green roofs on new development
- 4 Strategic infill development



Civic Space In Assembly Point

Civic space would be an essential component of the Assembly Point micro-district. Buildings would line civic spaces consisting of a shared street and two plazas. The character of these spaces could integrate work from local artists and reflect the site's industrial heritage. These spaces should be flexible and multifunctional to support various daily and seasonal uses, such as special events, food trucks, outdoor dining and market displays.



Civic Space Diagram



A possible civic space design for Assembly Point

Assembly Point Streetscapes

Currently, a portion of North Union Street is paved with yellow brick, and its fine texture creates a sense of human scale. New street paving should take a cue from this material and develop it into a consistent style and character throughout the area. North Union Street could be a pedestrian-friendly main street for the district, with lighting and plantings that create a comfortable and safe streetscape.

Outdoor furnishings could be selected to fit the character of the adjacent properties. The rendering looking south at existing buildings shows features in tune with small businesses such as studios and workshops for artists and artisans. The rendering looking north has a more formal streetscape design to match the architectural style of new development.

The North Union Street right-of-way should have varying widths, widening in some locations to become plazas or other types of civic space and allowing room for outdoor dining and events.



A possible streetscape design for Assembly Point, looking south



A possible streetscape design for Assembly Point, looking north



5. Mobility

This chapter outlines the mobility recommendations for Assembly Square. The following analysis shows how Assembly Square can develop walkable, transit-served streets within the neighborhood while also helping to reconnect it with surrounding neighborhoods.

INITIAL MOBILITY FINDINGS

OUTREACH PROCESS

As discussed in our Public Process chapter, the design team conducted a virtual outreach process and met with citizens, developers, stakeholders and staff regarding the existing mobility challenges facing the neighborhood.

These meetings included conversations with property owners and prospective businesses about their vision for mobility and how to best meet the needs of the local community. Participants discussed daily commuting, economic and commercial activities, deliveries, special events and more. The team also hosted open studio hours where community members could view the planning and development work being produced in real time and provide feedback based on their experiences and expectations.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The collected feedback indicated there is major vehicle congestion each day in and around Assembly Square. The community identified the Fellsway as being particularly problematic during the morning and evening peak times. This heavy traffic makes travel to the site difficult, especially for residents coming from the greater Somerville area. The issue is compounded by a general lack of connection to Somerville for transit, biking and walking that leaves residents less likely to travel to Assembly Square with any frequency. Once visitors are at the site, pedestrian travel is seen as difficult and unsafe because of the wide roadways and high-speed vehicle traffic. Residents and stakeholders hope for better access and more pedestrian and bicycle facilities that improve safety when traveling to and within Assembly Square.

WHAT WE FOUND:

- Wide roads, heavy traffic and long crossing distances make the neighborhood less inviting for walking or biking.
- Large-footprint highway infrastructure and elevational differences make it a challenge to connect with adjacent neighborhoods.

WHAT WE HEARD:

- “Lack of connectivity from the greater Somerville area.”
- “Crossings into Assembly Square are unsafe and unreachable.”
- “There are issues with speeding on Great River Road and Grand Union Boulevard and major vehicle congestion around the site’s perimeter.”

Street hierarchy diagram



Access points diagram

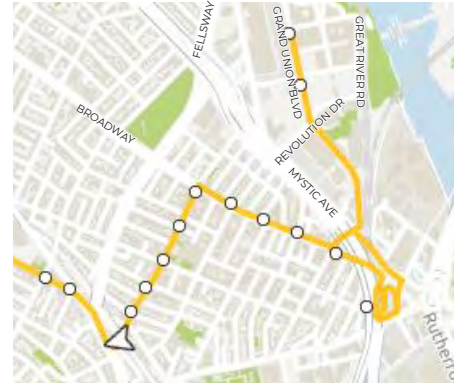


TRANSIT NETWORK

MBTA bus route 90 is the only bus route that directly serves the Assembly Square area. Bus route 90 runs between Davis Station and Assembly Square, traveling along Highland Avenue and through the East Somerville neighborhood. Three other bus routes (89, 101 and 95) pass through Somerville in the vicinity. Bus route 89 runs between Davis Station and Sullivan Square, traveling primarily along Broadway. Bus route 101 runs between Malden Center Station and Sullivan Square, passing through the City of Medford and along Broadway within Somerville. Bus route 95 runs between Arlington Center or West Medford, passing through the City of Medford and along Mystic Avenue (Route 38) through Somerville. Bus route 95 is an underutilized service along Mystic Avenue that experiences traffic congestion delays. In the short term, there are plans for an inbound peak-hour bus lane on Mystic Avenue with a possible future expansion to a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) facility between Sullivan Square and Medford Square.



MBTA Route 90 Bus to Davis Square



Existing MBTA Route 90



MBTA Orange Line

MICROMOBILITY

Bluebikes have two locations and Zipcar has a single location in Assembly Square. The first Bluebikes station is located at the Assembly Square MBTA Orange Line stop and has 14 docks. The second Bluebikes dock is located at the corner of Grand Union Boulevard and Foley Street. The Zipcar parking spaces are in the Canal Street Garage.

Fellsway is the primary access road to the Assembly Square neighborhood. Emergency access is currently located at a fire station approximately a half mile away along Fellsway.

Micromobility



Existing transit network diagram



STREET NETWORK

The existing street network is characterized by large blocks to the west of Grand Union Boulevard and a network of small streets to the east. There are basic bike lanes on Grand Union Boulevard and other locations as seen below. One major theme of the analysis, and an observation frequently mentioned by the public, is that Assembly Square is cut off from surrounding neighborhoods due to I-93, Fellsway and the Mystic River.

VEHICLE ACCESS + LOADING

Primary vehicle access points are at the northern and southern entrances of Grand Union Boulevard. Other access points include Revolution Drive and the northern and southern entrances of Middlesex Avenue.

There are loading and service areas throughout Assembly Square. Within Assembly Row, loading areas are typically located on the first floor, internal to the buildings. Loading areas in Assembly Marketplace and on Middlesex Avenue are located at the rear of the buildings within the parking lot.

ACCESS + CONNECTIONS

As mentioned earlier, there is major vehicle congestion within and around Assembly Square. Traffic on Fellsway is particularly heavy during the morning and evening peak travel periods. And vehicles traveling at high speeds and on wide roadways make pedestrians feel unsafe. This creates a real challenge for those who would like to travel to the site. Residents are asking for better transit options for easier access to Assembly Square. They want more pedestrian and bicycle facilities that improve safety when traveling to and within Assembly Square.

WHAT WE FOUND:

- There are 11 prominent loading areas throughout the neighborhood.
- Primary emergency access is on Fellsway.

Existing bicycle network diagram



5.4

Emergency Access



PARKING

Parking garages are located on the eastern side of Assembly Square and are primarily used for retail and residential parking. An exception is the Partners garage, which is used by Partners employees. All garages are pay-access parking spaces located on the western side Assembly Square. Parking is free in the lots adjacent to Assembly Marketplace (with a maximum of three hours). Not surprisingly, the free Assembly Marketplace lot typically has higher occupancy than other parking lots and garages.

In total, the Assembly Square development currently has about 7,000 parking spaces available at varying rates. With approximately 8,650,000 square feet of built development, the parking ratio is about 0.8 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet. One thousand eight hundred additional parking spaces are planned.

WHAT WE FOUND:

- Large city blocks and parking lots are oriented to suburban travel.
- There are few micromobility options in Assembly Square.

Surface Parking + Garage Spaces



On-Street Parking



PRIORITY AREAS

Nine priority areas within the Assembly Square neighborhood were chosen to demonstrate how changes in the right-of-way can help provide greater options for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. These proposals have two main goals:

1. Ensure that current and future streets within Assembly Square have more space for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders, and;
2. Address the barriers to greater connectivity between Assembly Square and the surrounding neighborhoods

Gateways and Corridors

Priority areas are divided into two main categories: gateways and corridors. The proposed recommendations for the Assembly Square gateways detail how to improve connectivity to the neighborhood and create easier and safer ways for residents and visitors to reach their destinations. These changes might include tightening curb radii, right-sizing streets and improving pedestrian visibility at crossings.

The gateways plan also imagines new designs for Assembly Square's perimeter roads along Fellsway and Mystic Avenue. The proposal envisions reducing the I-93 footprint by consolidating highway ramps and travel lanes as well as reconfiguring the structural columns, allowing for the area under the highway to be used as a public space and further improving travel into and out of Assembly Square.

The priority areas also include changes to the corridors. Long-term alterations to the street section will be studied. Instead of traditional auto-oriented design, the recommendations suggest that new roads be designed to generate walkable densities and land-use diversity along new corridors.



The above photos depict current gateway conditions at Grand Union Boulevard (top), Fellsway Avenue (middle), and Middlesex Avenue South (bottom). The proposed gateway designs address the barriers to greater connectivity between Assembly Square and the surrounding neighborhoods



AREAS OF PRIORITY

Gateways

- 1 Grand Union Boulevard (North) Gateway
- 2 Middlesex Avenue (North) Gateway
- 3 Fellsway/Mystic Avenue Gateway
- 4 Kensington Connector Gateway
- 5 Middlesex Avenue (South) Gateway
- 6 Lombardi Street Gateway

Corridors

- 7 Middlesex Avenue Corridor Street Section
- 8 Grand Union Boulevard Corridor Street Section
- 9 Foley Street Corridor Street Section

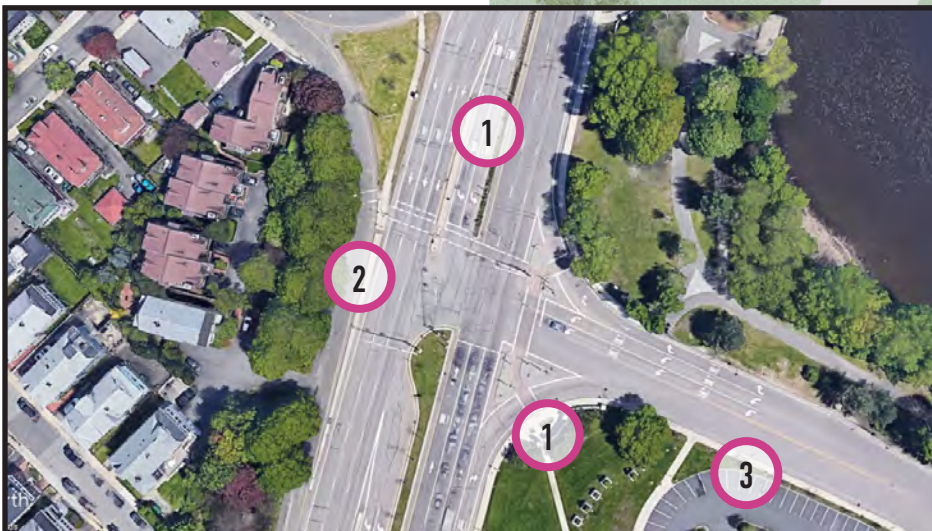
Access

- 10 New access to Draw Seven Park from the MBTA station
- 11 Pedestrian bridge connection to Everett

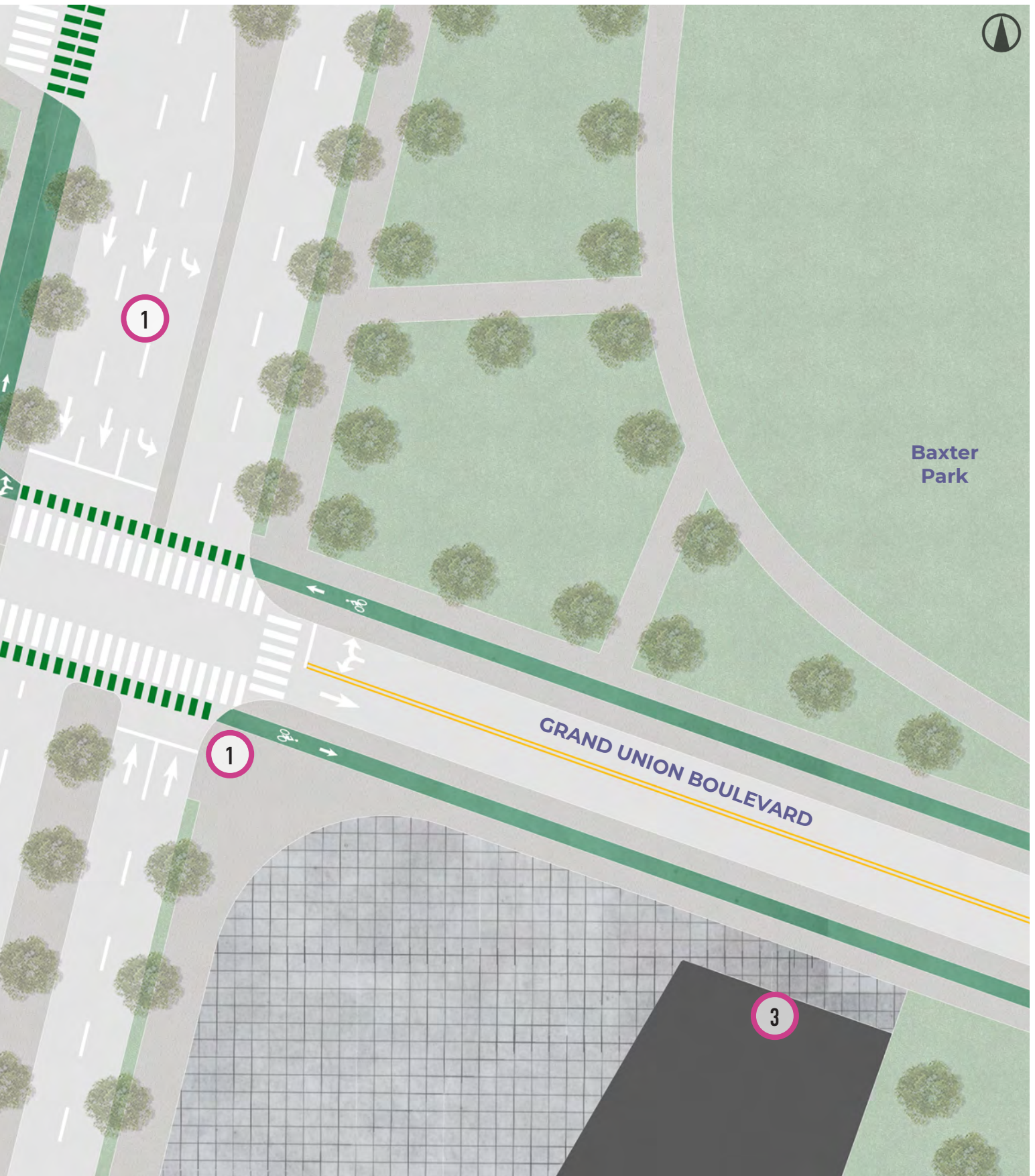
GATEWAYS

1. GRAND UNION BOULEVARD (NORTH) GATEWAY

- 1 This plan imagines a reduction in the number of lanes on Fellsway and fewer accepting lanes on Grand Union Boulevard. It also removes the right-turn pockets and reduces the curb radii to discourage high-speed turns by motorists.
- 2 The proposal envisions a more human-scale Fellsway with a sidewalk-level protected bike lane, landscaped pedestrian crossing islands, a tree-lined boulevard, wide sidewalks and shorter crossing distances.
- 3 The new design removes surface parking lots from the perimeter areas and encourages active urban edges. It envisions the transition from Baxter Park into a denser neighborhood to the south.



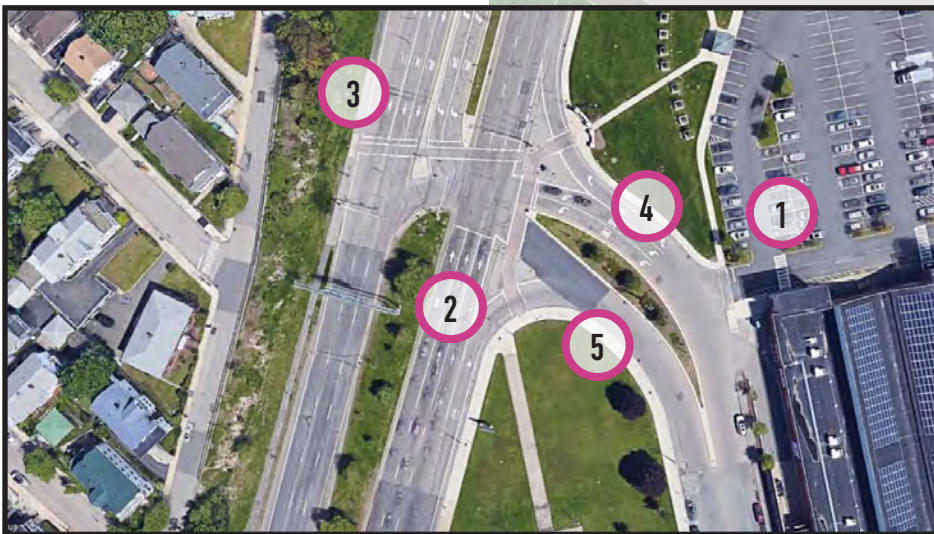
Existing intersection conditions



Proposed intersection design

2. MIDDLESEX AVENUE (NORTH) GATEWAY

- 1 The gateway at Middlesex Avenue is currently designed as a suburban mall entrance. This proposal would better define the edge of Fellsway as a grand boulevard by infilling the existing mall parking lot with buildings that face the street with active frontage.
- 2 Crossing distances and curb radii would be reduced.
- 3 The design consolidates surplus lanes on the Fellsway and reallocates that space as a bi-directional protected bike lane.
- 4 Sidewalk-level bicycle infrastructure on Middlesex Avenue would connect to the Fellsway protected bike lane.
- 5 The scale of this intersection would be reduced by eliminating a right-turn pocket and median.



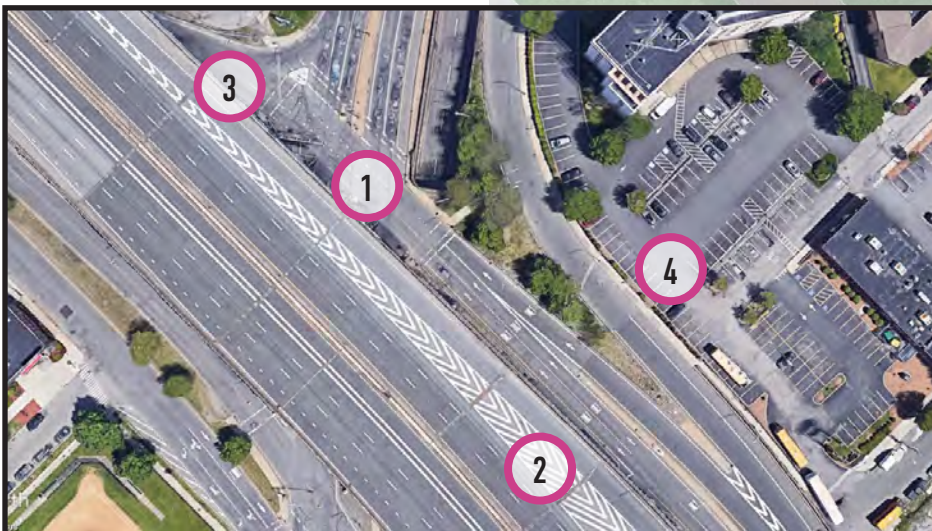
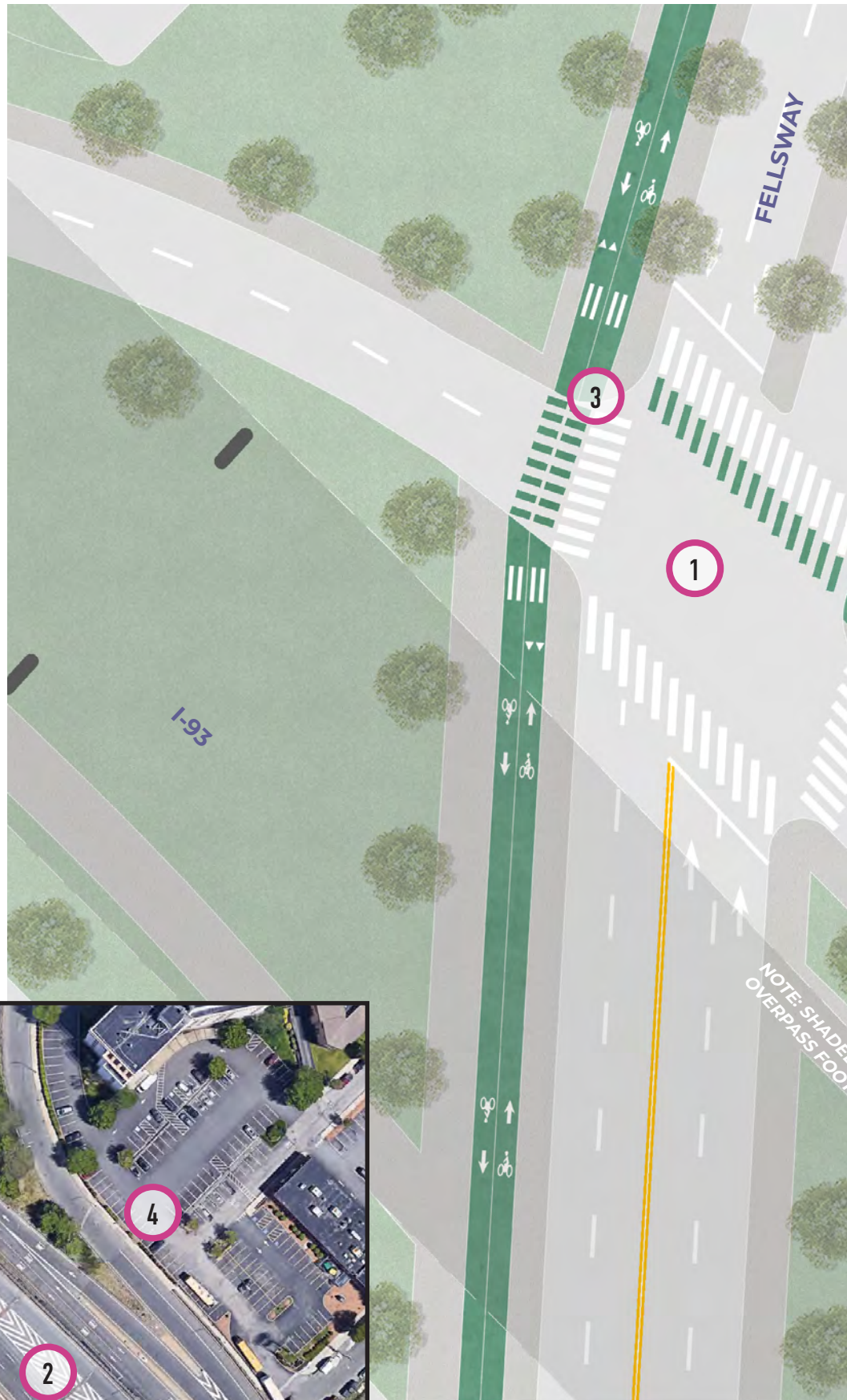
Existing intersection conditions



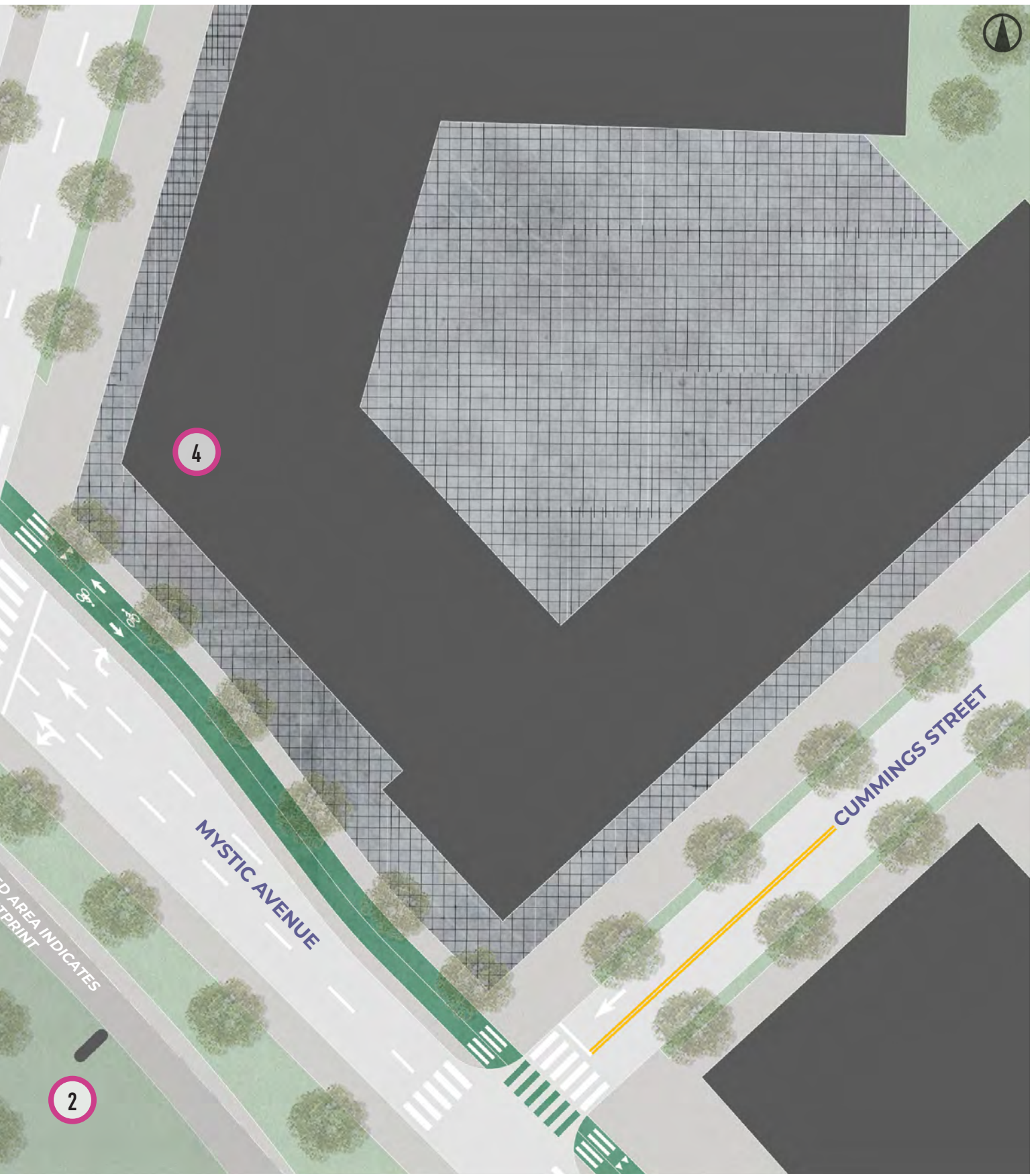
Proposed intersection design

3. FELLSWAY/MYSTIC AVENUE GATEWAY

- 1** This long-term design envisions the transformation of this busy highway interchange (with limited access to Assembly Square) into a safer and more inviting intersection with tighter curb radii, shorter crossing distances and safer pedestrian access.
- 2** The I-93 footprint would be reduced, creating a more humane urban edge for Assembly Square. Decreasing ramps and highway columns would allow the area under the highway to be used as public space.
- 3** This proposal continues the elevated two-way bike facility south of Foss Park to connect to protected bike lanes along Broadway. A two-way bike facility along Mystic Ave is also envisioned.
- 4** Large surface parking lots would be replaced with infill buildings that line the street and frame public space.



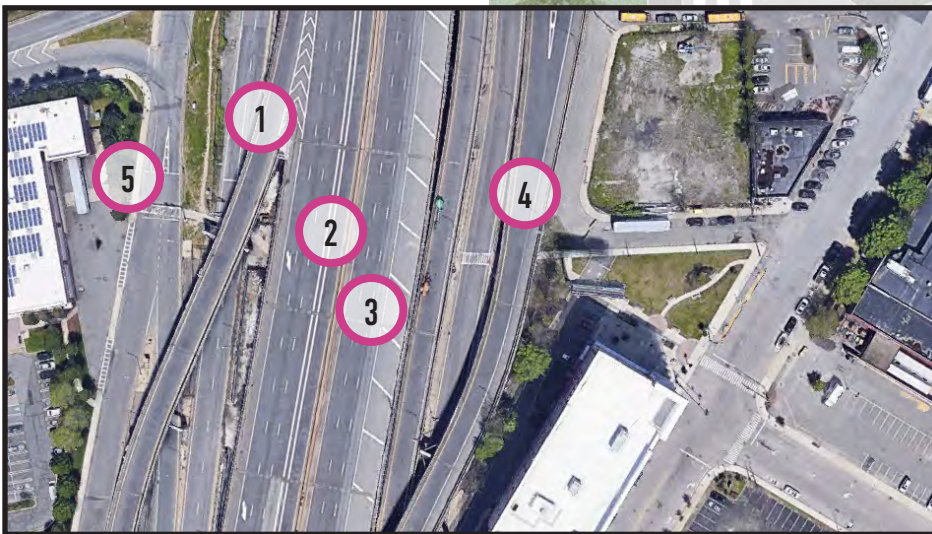
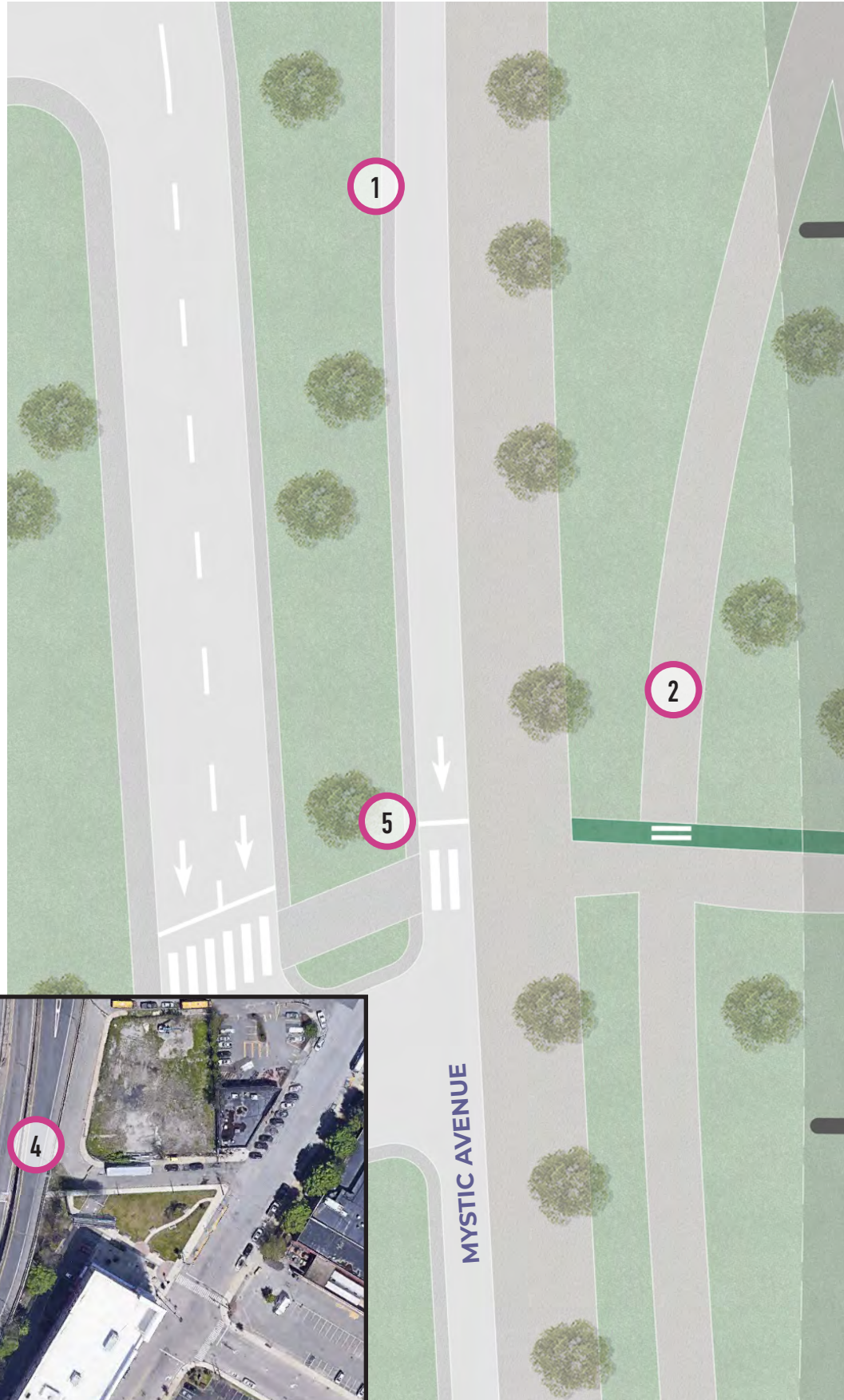
Existing intersection conditions



Proposed intersection design

4. KENSINGTON CONNECTOR GATEWAY

- 1** The proposed design for the Kensington Connector seeks a future consolidation of entry ramps and an overall reduction in the I-93 footprint.
- 2** Cyclists and pedestrians would enjoy direct and indirect shared paths to explore the public art pieces and natural elements to be installed along the new underpass infrastructure. The design for Kensington Connector Revitalization Project is underway.
- 3** The design allocates space for a rotating public art program and would include opportunities for art on the underpass structure and around the pedestrian and bike path.
- 4** Consistent with the proposal for Fellsway, a redesigned Mystic Avenue would now connect to Kensington Avenue.
- 5** Pedestrian crossings should apply HAWK signal with full signalization.



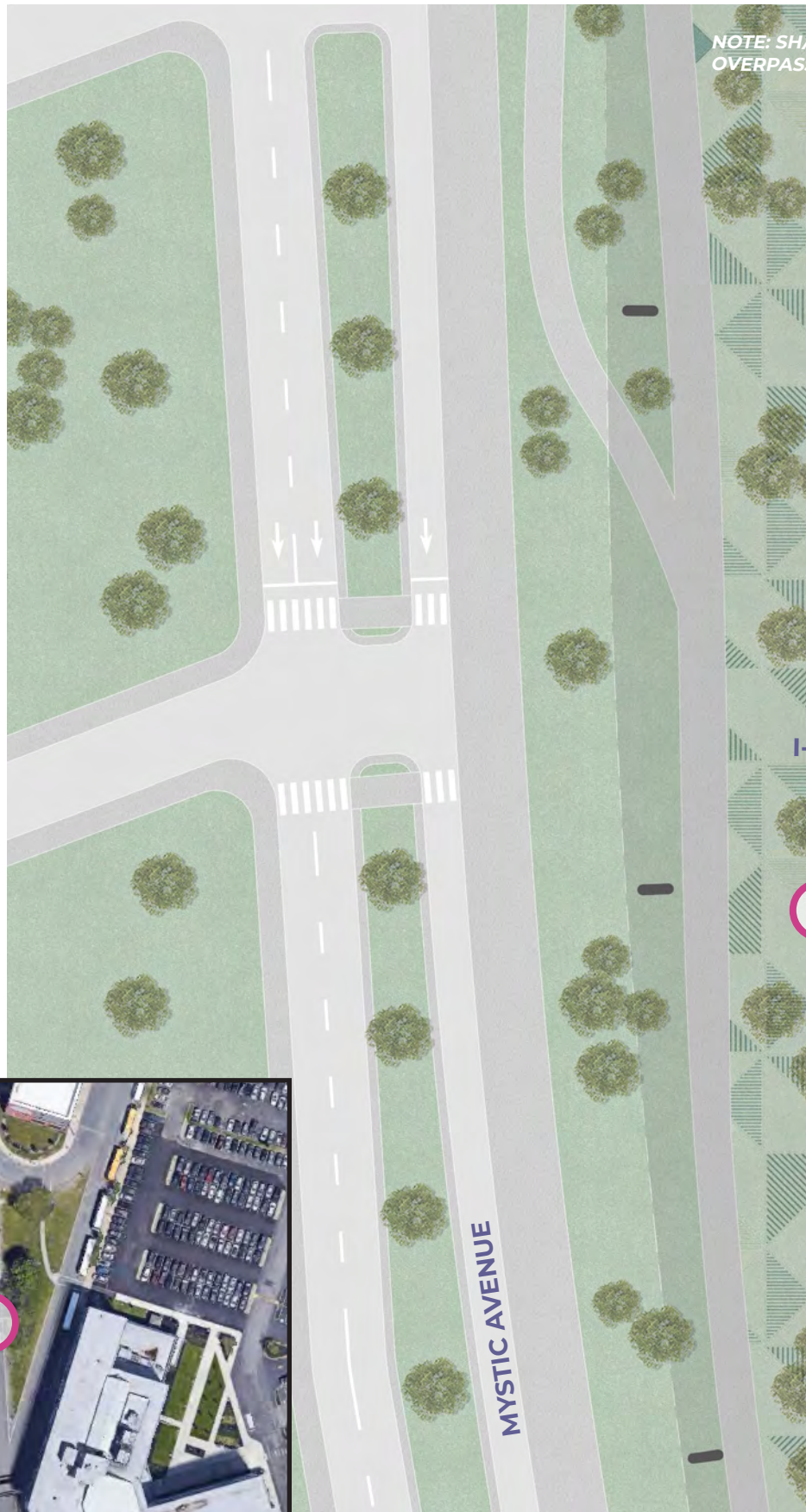
Existing intersection conditions



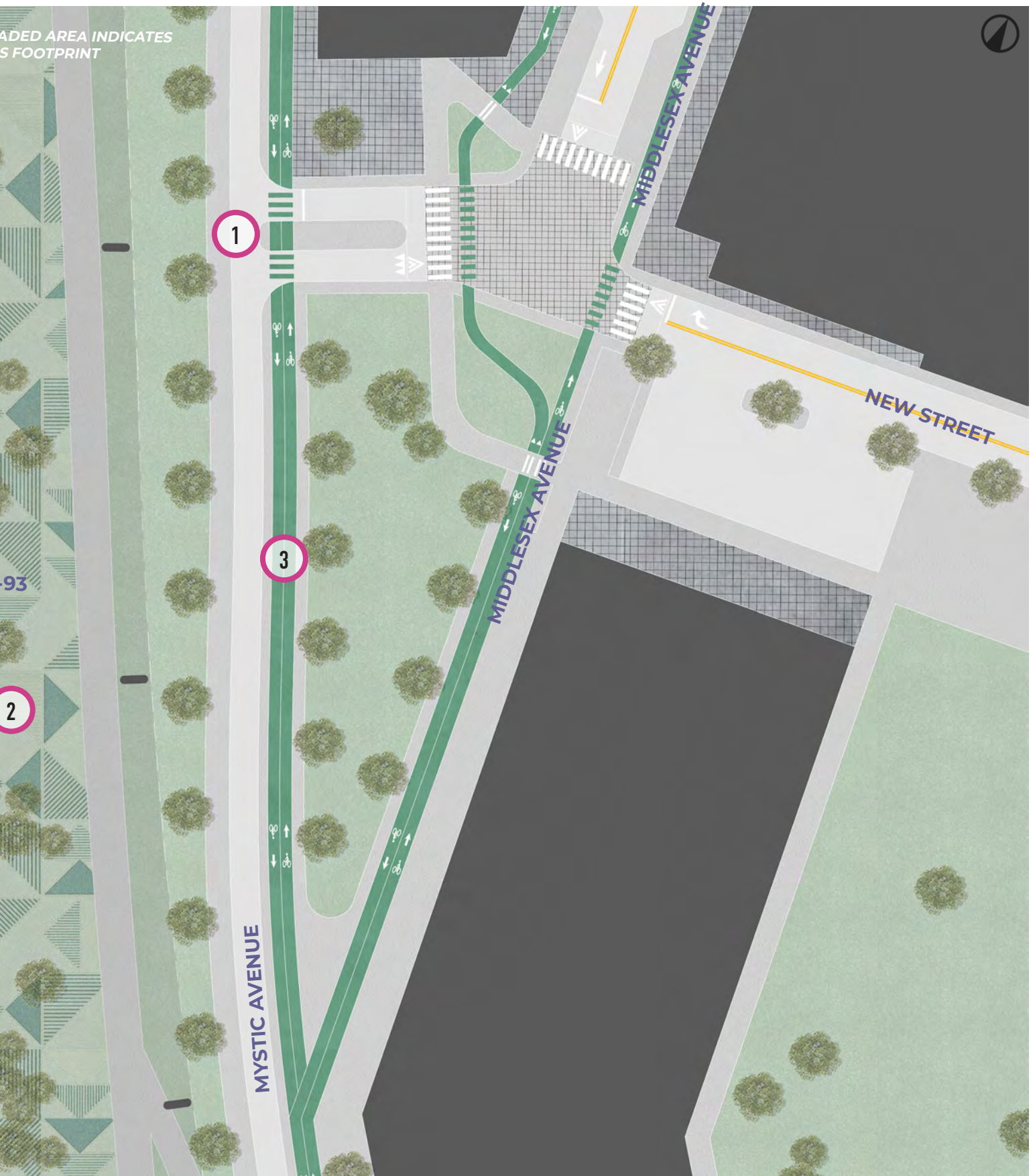
Proposed connector design

5. MIDDLESEX AVENUE (SOUTH) GATEWAY

- 1 Redesigning the intersection of Middlesex Avenue and Mystic Avenue would eliminate the angled entry into Assembly Square. A new street, a reconfigured neighborhood park and a protected bike lane on either side of Middlesex Avenue would be created.
- 2 The design shows the I-93 footprint reduction to accommodate a better pedestrian and bicycle amenity along the underpass, connecting the neighborhood from south to north and allowing the greater Somerville area to access Assembly Square in a simpler, safer, more enjoyable way.
- 3 The Mystic Avenue corridor would incorporate a bidirectional bicycle facility to connect the proposed bicycle lanes on Middlesex Avenue and Grand Union Boulevard.



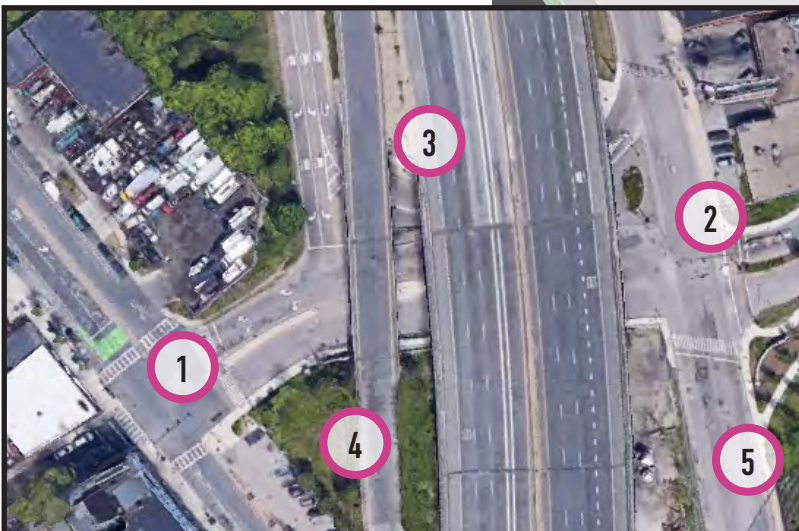
Existing intersection conditions



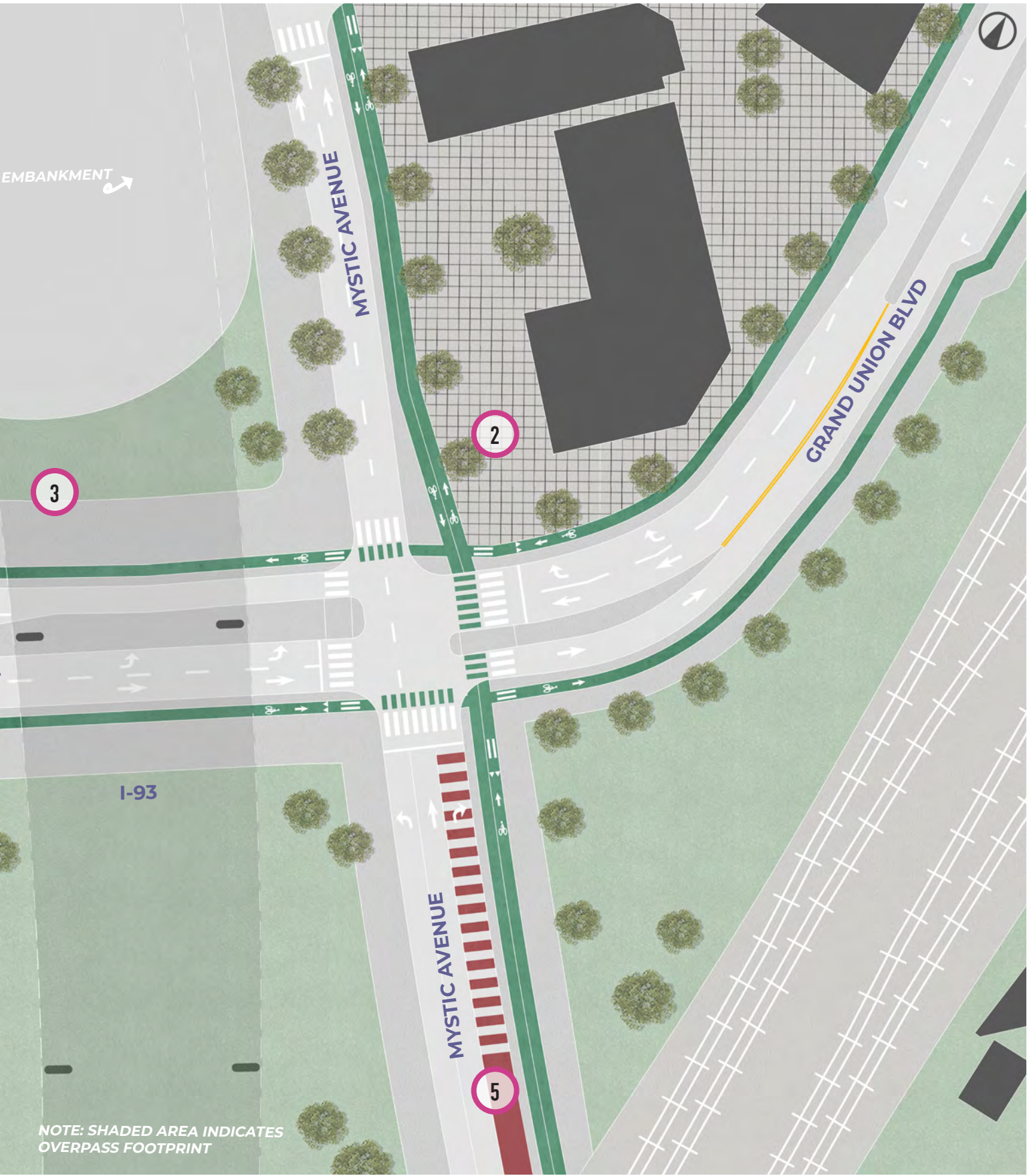
Proposed intersection design

6. LOMBARDI STREET GATEWAY

- 1** The gateway design at Lombardi Street illustrates how the proposed bicycle facilities on Mystic Avenue and Grand Union Boulevard would connect to protected bike lanes along Broadway.
- 2** This plan envisions a two-way protected bike facility and fewer travel lanes on Mystic Avenue.
- 3** The design removes the turnaround from southbound Mystic Avenue to northbound Mystic Avenue and creates a safer crossing situation for pedestrians traveling along Lombardi Street.
- 4** Consolidating ramps and highway infrastructure also creates an opportunity for more expansive urban parks.
- 5** A new right-side dedicated transit lane will ease transit flow through the Grand Union Boulevard bus routes, while accommodating vehicle right-turn movements into Assembly Square.



Existing intersection conditions



Proposed intersection design

STREET NETWORK

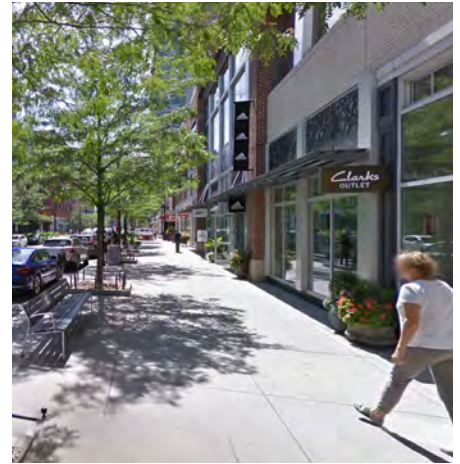
GENERAL APPROACH

Our guiding philosophy is that pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users are central to the design of the transportation network and will reduce the use of single-occupancy vehicles.

The design team established these mobility principles for future developments and changes to the right-of-way:

1. Create a compact and dense street network that connects with the existing streets within Assembly Square and with adjacent neighborhoods to the south and west.
2. Encourage the design of mixed-use streets that encourage multimodal activity.
3. Everyone should have safe places to walk, safe places to ride bikes, and safe places to drive.

The design team took inspiration from streets like Avenida Amsterdam in Mexico City and Las Ramblas in Barcelona. These streets were designed for a human-scale environment. Their popularity is undeniable and proves that more space for people means more participation in public life and a better quality of life. These examples influenced the recommendations in each priority area. Streets and street networks should be designed with the safety and accessibility of all travelers in mind.



Sidewalk conditions at Assembly Row

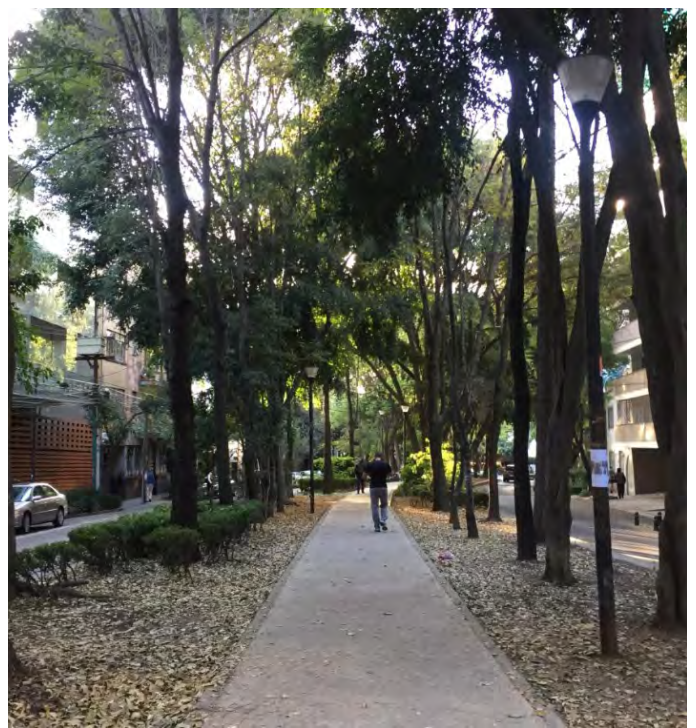


Current conditions at Grand Union Boulevard allows for room to accommodate wider sidewalks or protected bike lanes.

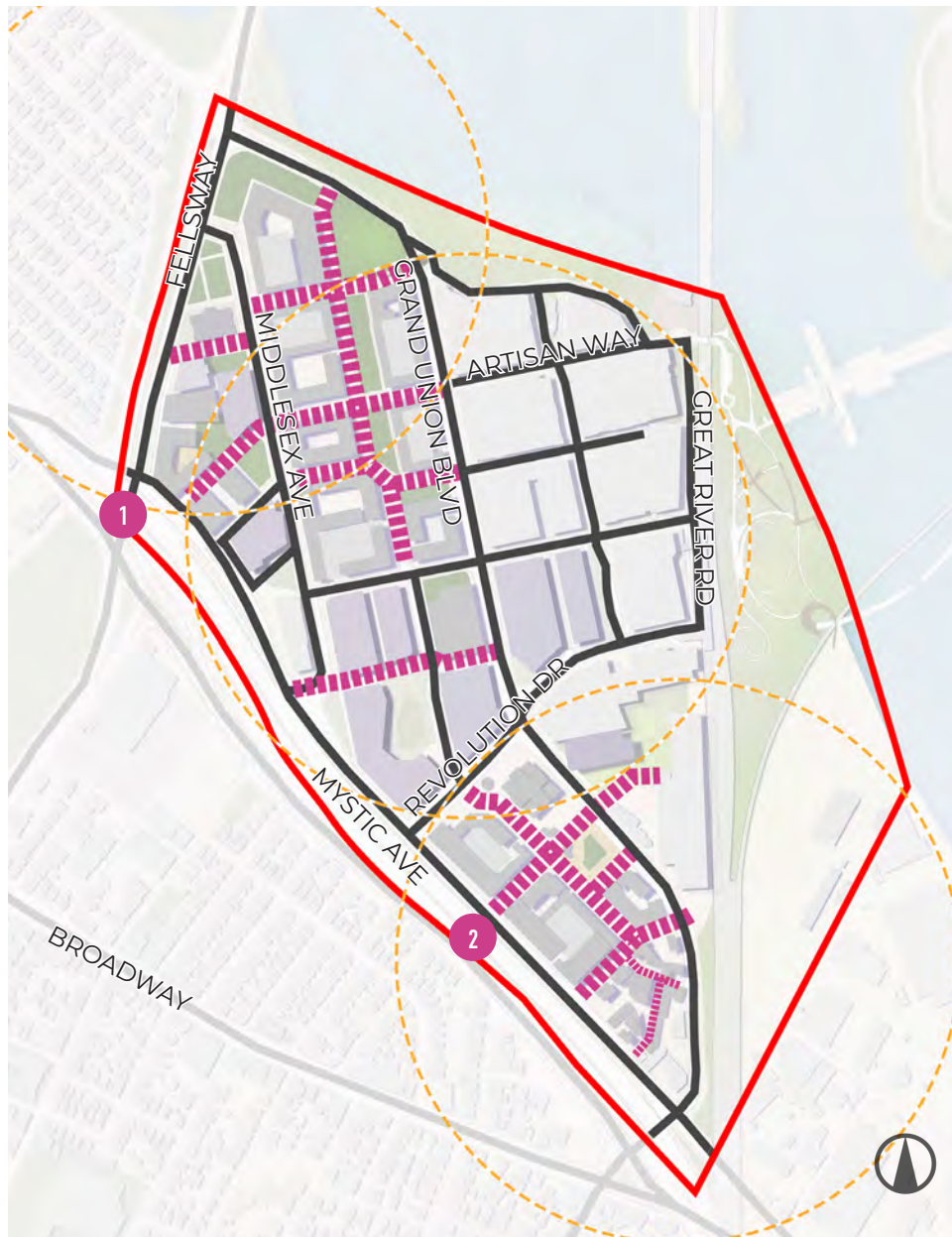
Las Ramblas, Barcelona



Avenida Amsterdam, Mexico City



PROPOSED STREET GRID



- Site Boundary
- Existing Street
- - - - - 1/4 mile radius Pedestrian Shed: area covered by a 5-minute walk from center to edge
- - - - - Streets created by the proposed grid
- 1 The new grid will create new entry points into the neighborhood
- 2 By creating smaller blocks, Assembly Square will be more compatible with its surrounding context

STREET GRID RECOMMENDATIONS

Walkable street networks are characterized by direct pedestrian paths of travel that provide the shortest distance to transit stops, a high density of intersections, and continuous sidewalks connected by well-designed crossings.




The new street grid proposal was born out of the idea that shorter blocks can contribute to great neighborhoods, preserve Somerville's heritage, encourage infill development, and promote a safe, walkable environment. The goal of these recommendations is to make it easy for people to walk, bike and take transit.

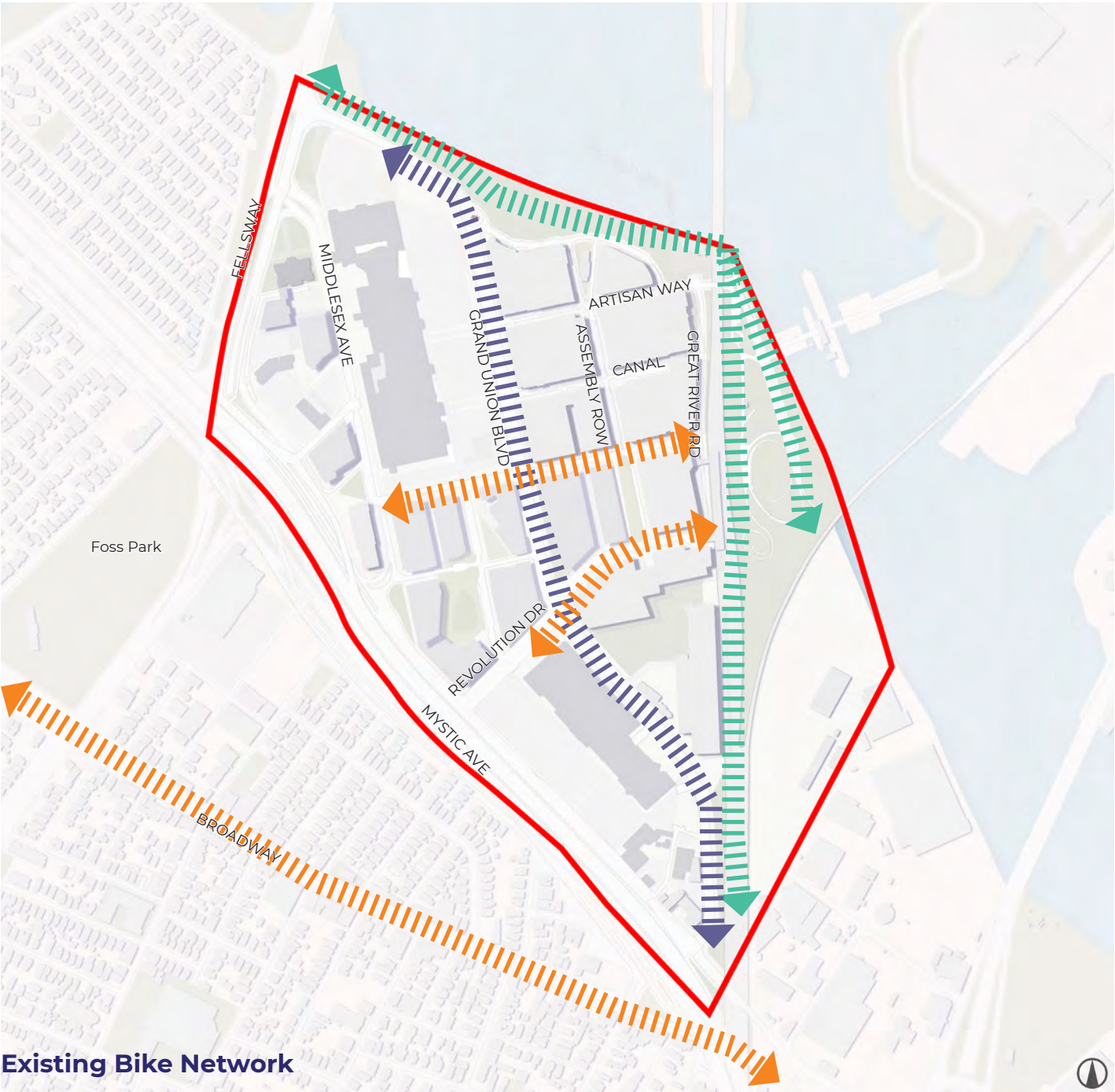
The proposed design extends the existing urban fabric found in Somerville's historic core to the west of Assembly Square, an area with a walkable street pattern and historically and architecturally significant buildings. Its streets are well-defined by trees, active building facades and pedestrian activity. The new grid will allow the Assembly Square neighborhood to uphold this standard by eliminating physical barriers to pedestrian activity, providing more direct paths to destinations, and generally paving the way for a more human-scale environment.

BICYCLE NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS

Existing Bike Network

The bicycle network in Assembly Square currently has basic bike lanes along Grand Union Boulevard, Foley Street and Revolution Drive. In addition, there are shared-use paths along the waterfront parks. Otherwise, bikes travel within the travel lanes.

-  Site Boundary
-  Shared Use Path
-  Basic Bike Lane
-  Flexpost-protected Bike Lane

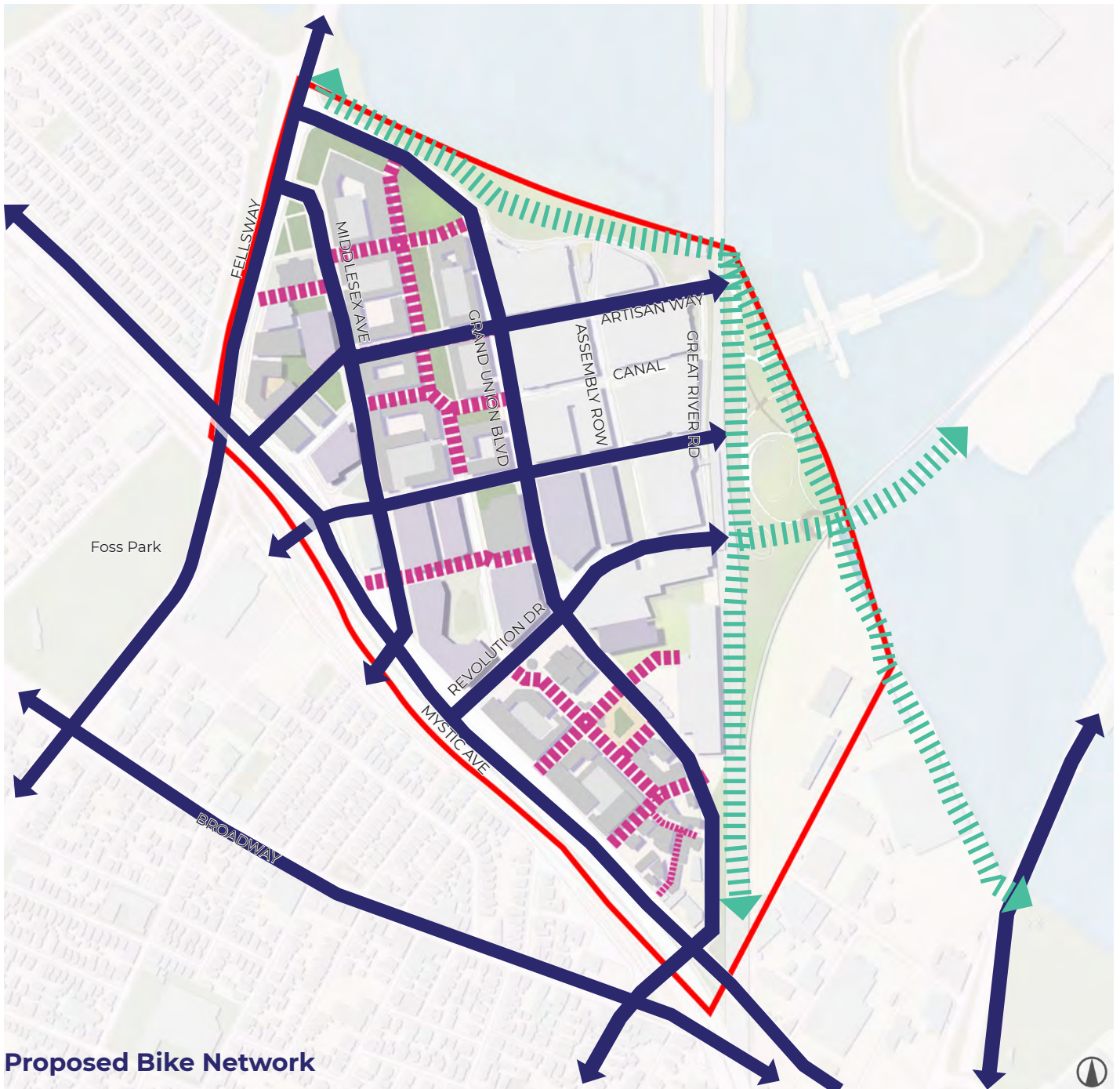


Existing Bike Network

Proposed Bike Network

The plan proposes additional shared-use paths that extend from the parks and connect across the river and down to the protected bike lanes on Alford Street. Grand Union Boulevard, Foley Street, Middlesex Avenue, Mystic Avenue and Fellsway will include protected bike lanes. Artisan Way and Revolution Drive will include protected bike lanes. A new street grid throughout the neighborhood will also provide additional low-speed mobility paths.

- Site Boundary
- ||||| Shared Use Path
- ||||| New Street Grid
- Protected Bike Lane



Proposed Bike Network

STREET SECTIONS

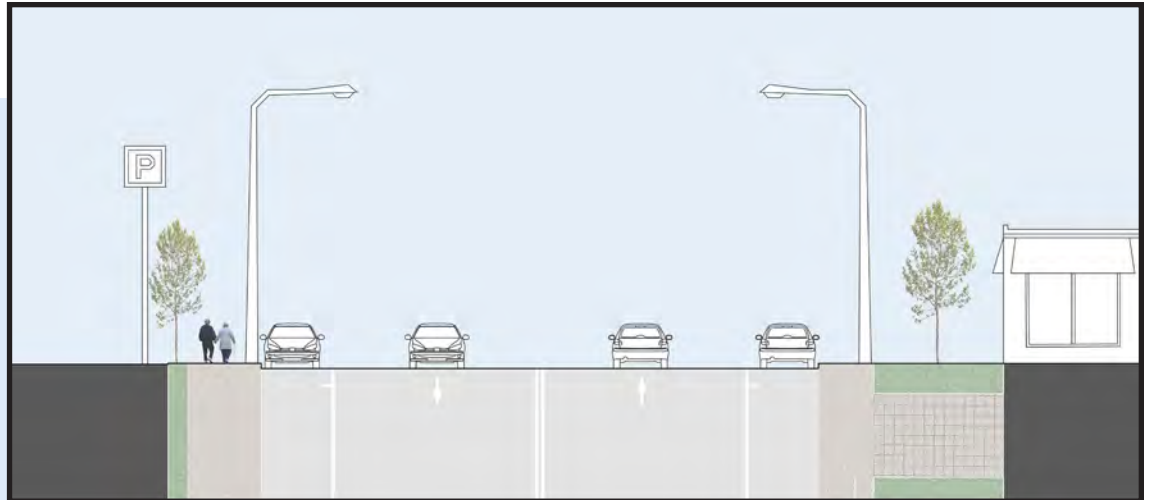
The following proposed street sections illustrate ways to reallocate existing roadway space to improve bicycle and pedestrian access and safety throughout the Assembly Square neighborhood.

MIDDLESEX AVENUE STREET SECTION

The long-term street section design recommendations for Middlesex Avenue propose the transformation of overly wide lanes and uninviting pedestrian facilities into a street with narrower lanes, on-street parking, and ample space for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The design also introduces a tree-lined median that can serve as pedestrian islands at intersection crossings or as a center turn lane when needed.



Proposed long-term street section design



Existing street section



GRAND UNION BOULEVARD STREET SECTION

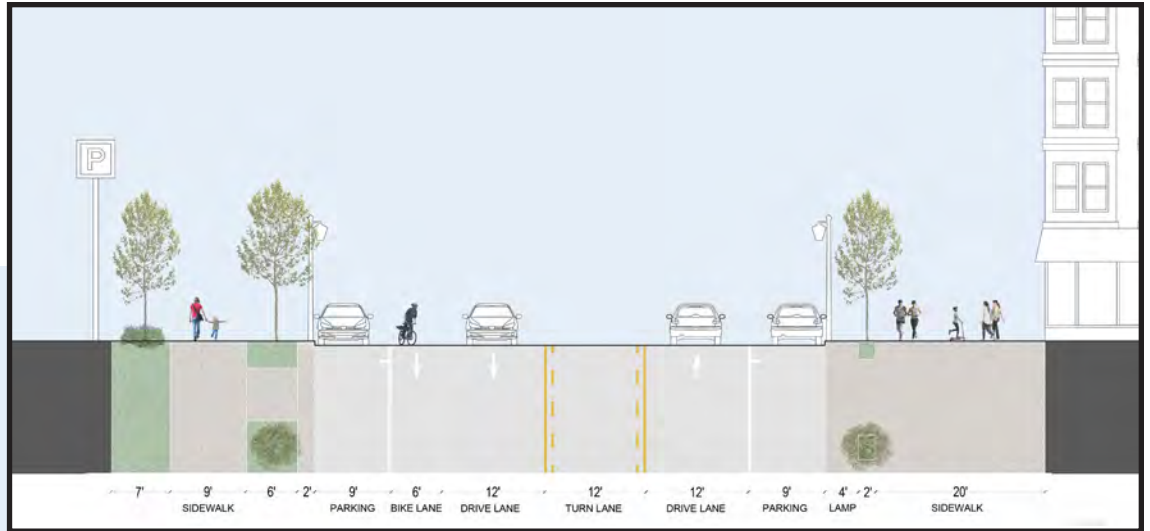
Grand Union Boulevard will remain one of the most important streets in the Assembly Square neighborhood network.

The boulevard currently has a continuous turning lane, a 12-foot travel lane in each direction, 9-foot on-street parking stalls and a basic bike lane in one direction.

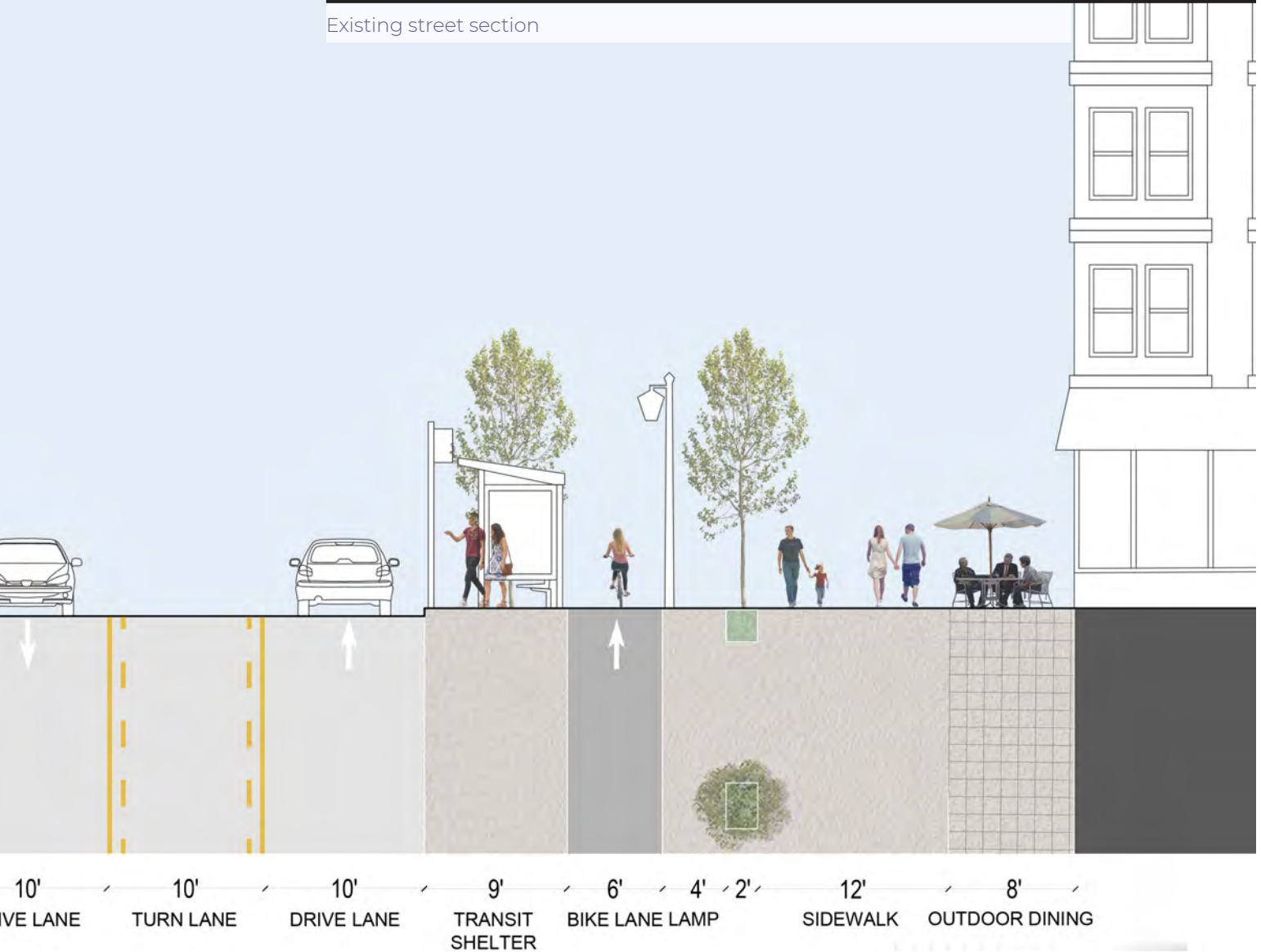
The proposed changes reduce travel lane widths to accommodate a more formal design solution, incorporating a protected bike lane into the sidewalk (in both directions), street trees, and transit shelters for local bus stops.



Proposed long-term street section design



Existing street section



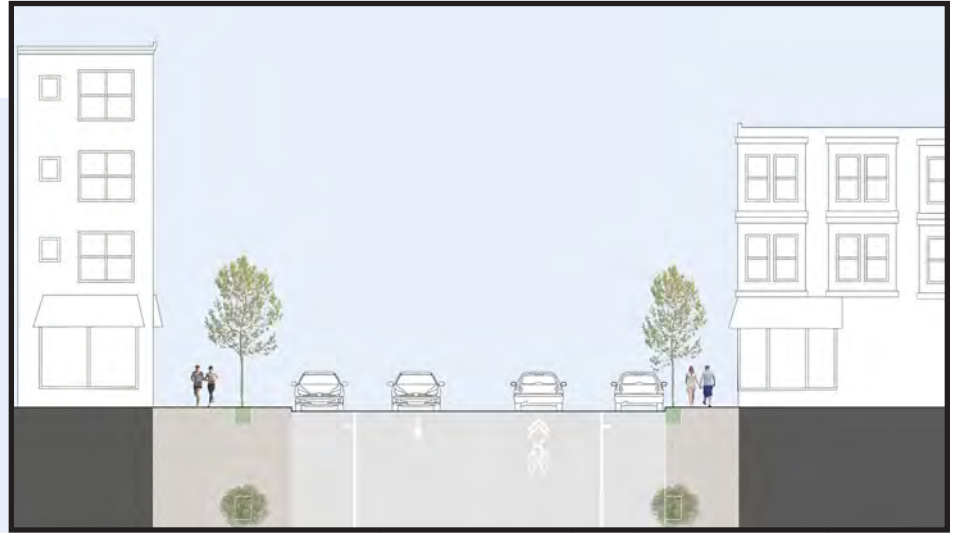
FOLEY STREET SECTION

Foley Street currently has wide, 15-foot travel lanes. Cyclists share the lane with motor vehicles.

The long-term design envisions a sidewalk-level protected bike lane as well as curbside lanes for uses such as parking, rideshare pick-up zones and bike corrals.



Proposed long-term street section design



Existing street section



MODE SPLIT AND LOADING

With the appropriate development and transportation interventions, the City can help shift modes of travel from motor vehicles to walking, biking and public transit. Our goal is that 75% of trips to and from the Assembly Square neighborhood will not involve a single-occupancy vehicle.

Consider the current and aspirational mode splits for trips to and from the Assembly Square neighborhood are below.

CURRENT MODE SPLIT

The current mode split in Assembly Square shows that approximately 50% of all trips are made by motor vehicle, 10% of trips are bicycle and pedestrian, and the remainder via transit services.

	VEHICLE	TRANSIT	BIKE/WALK
RESIDENTIAL	43%	47%	10%
RETAIL	50%	25%	10%
OFFICE	54%	36%	10%

ASPIRATIONAL MODE SPLIT

The aspirational mode split would increase transit trips to 50% and biking and walking to 25%—thereby reducing motor vehicle trips to 25%.



50% Transit
25% Bike/Walk
25% Vehicle



Basic Bike Lane in Somerville



Bluebikes Dock at Assembly Station



Assembly Row Loading



NEW DAILY AVERAGE TRIPS

There will be new average daily trips associated with the proposed development density in Assembly Square. Many community members and stakeholders expressed interest in having Assembly Square be a place where trips between different land uses are generated by site development. These internal trips were included in the analysis of new daily trips to reflect these travel patterns.

LOADING

Assembly Square has many internal loading areas, primarily in the Assembly Row portion of the neighborhood. There are existing external loading areas on the west side of Assembly Square, primarily at the Assembly Marketplace and Home Depot sites as well as businesses on Middlesex Avenue. As Assembly Square continues to develop, loading should be internal to all new buildings to improve the safety and comfort for all users. Several developments have already incorporated this into building plans.

	INTERNAL CAPTURE			
	MULTIFAMILY HOUSING (MID-RISE)	OFFICE BUILDING	SHOPPING CENTER	TOTAL
AUTO (VPD)	2,250	10,878	14,002	27,130
TRANSIT (PPD)	5,055	24,448	48,532	78,035
WALK/BIKE (PPD)	2,528	12,225	24,267	39,020

* vpd = vehicles per day; ppd = persons per day

TRANSIT

POTENTIAL TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS

The design team explored additional transit service possibilities to better connect Assembly Square to Somerville. We identified three bus routes that could provide service between Porter Square and Assembly Square. The routes shown in Options 1 and 2 could potentially be modified to remove redundancies and ensure that the existing bus route 90 serves more of the Somerville area.

Option 1 (Orange)

Like other existing bus routes, this route would follow Somerville Avenue and Washington Street, but it would provide a more direct east–west link across Somerville. This route would stop at Sullivan Square to connect to the MBTA Orange Line.

This route would also pass through Union Square, connecting Assembly Square with the new Union Square MBTA station being built as part of the Green Line Extension.

Lastly, this route would cross the Fellsway Bridge to connect with the Wellington neighborhood at a more local level. At present, the only connection across the Mystic River is on the MBTA Orange Line.

Option 2 (Pink)

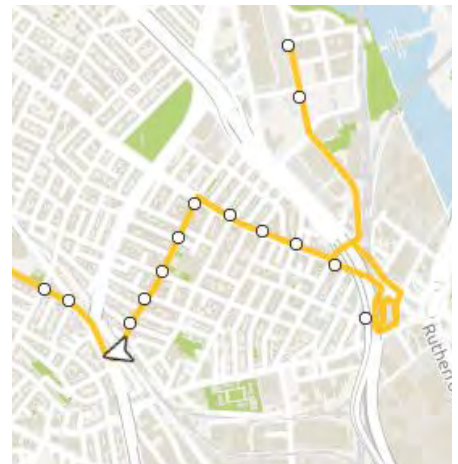
This route would also start out on Somerville Avenue and pass through the Union Square area, but it would go through East Somerville as it approaches Assembly Square. This route would help residents adjacent to Assembly Square make a safer, less stressful connection across I-93 and Mystic Avenue. In order to maintain an existing MBTA Orange Line connection, this proposed option would pass by Assembly Station instead of Sullivan Square Station.

Option 3 (Green)

This route is a more local neighborhood option that would pass through the Winter Hill area of Somerville via Broadway and Central Street. Connections with the MBTA Orange Line would be made at Assembly Station. The Winter Hill neighborhood currently has two buses running along Broadway which terminate at Sullivan Square; therefore, to reach Assembly Square they would have to make a connection. This route alternative would give residents a direct east–west connection across I-93 and Mystic Avenue. This alternative also would also circulate around the Assembly Square development, providing access to more of the new buildings.



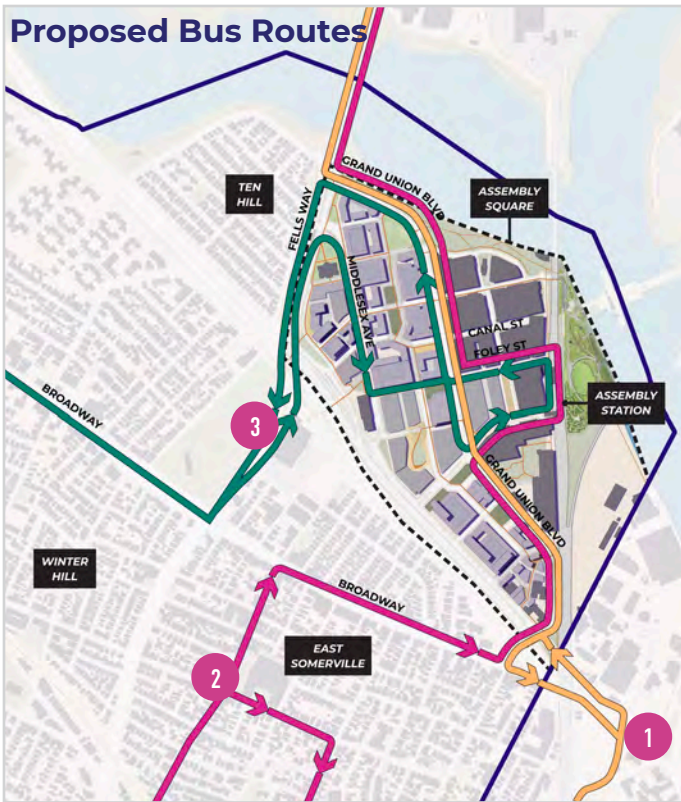
MBTA Route 90 Bus to Davis Square



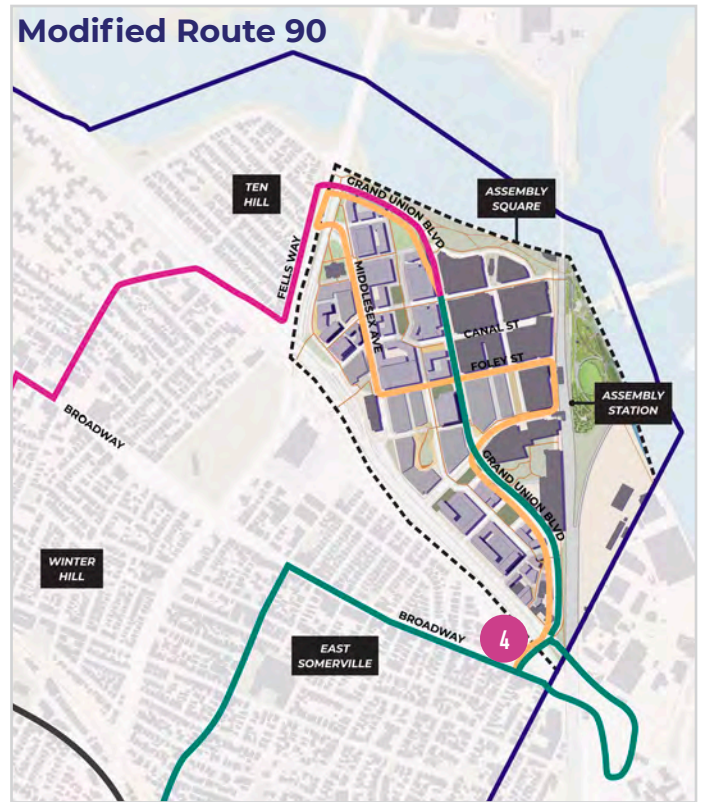
Existing MBTA Route 90



MBTA Orange Line



- 1** Route 1: Following Somerville Avenue and Washington Street
- 2** Route 2: Somerville Avenue, through Union Square and East Somerville



- 3** Route 3: Local route through Winter Hill via Broadway and Central Street
- 4** Route 90 Modifications

ROUTE 90 MODIFICATIONS

Option 1 (Orange)

This modification would coordinate well with the proposed new bus route 1. If a connection between Sullivan Square and Assembly Square is made via the new proposed route, the existing bus route 90 could cut out Sullivan Square and instead connect with the MBTA Orange Line at Assembly Station. If the proposed new route is Option 2 or 3, cutting Sullivan Square Station from bus route 90 is not as strongly recommended, since it provides at least one link between Sullivan Square Station and Assembly Square via the street network.

Option 2 (Pink)

This variation would work well if proposed in coordination with the new route Options 1 or 2 that pass through East Somerville, serving different areas of the city. This route would provide additional access to the Winter Hill neighborhood on select outbound buses during the day while still maintaining the existing bus route 90 at all other times. The route would take Temple Street, Broadway and School Street to get back on Highland Avenue in the outbound direction.

MOBILITY MANAGEMENT

Mobility management, also called Transportation Demand Management (TDM), promotes increased commuting via public transportation, cycling and walking and decreased commuting via single-occupancy motor vehicle. By providing incentives and/or discouraging different features, TDM aims to modify travel behavior to improve broader goals such as the livability of a community, automobile congestion, environmental concerns and transportation equity.

BASELINE REQUIREMENTS

Current development proponents are required to join Assembly Connect, Assembly Square's Transportation Management Association (TMA). Future development should also be required to participate in Assembly Connect with a designated coordinator to decrease reliance on single-occupancy motor vehicle use in the neighborhood. Per department policy, all developments for the City of Somerville are required to have a Mobility Management Plan. Property owners of buildings with 50,000 square feet or more of commercial space and multi-tenant buildings where the tenants, in combination, have 50 or more employees are required to provide the following for their tenants:

- An on-site transportation coordinator for the building;
- An annual mobility management educational meeting for tenants and their employees;
- Posted and distributed mobility management information; and
- Unbundled parking (spaces rented, leased or sold as an option rather than a requirement).

These owners must also require future tenants to provide the following through lease agreements:

- Qualified transportation fringe benefits for employees; and
- A guaranteed ride home program for employees.

Employers (future tenants) with 50 or more employees are required to provide the following:

- An on-site transportation coordinator for the business;
- An annual mobility management education meeting for employees;
- Posted and distributed mobility management information;
- Qualified transportation fringe benefits for employees; and
- A guaranteed ride home program for employees.

The property owner of a commercial parking facility is required to provide the following:

- Preferential parking locations for carpool/vanpool vehicles; and
- Posted mobility management information.

Existing Bluebikes Station



The property owner of a residential building with 20 or more dwelling units is required to provide the following:

- Posted mobility management information;
- Distributed mobility management information; and
- Unbundled parking.
- Covered bicycle storage and bicycle parking

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The City of Somerville recommends additional TDM elements that proponents of new developments within the Assembly Square neighborhood should consider to encourage active and high-occupancy transportation options and discourage single-occupancy motor vehicle usage. For commercial developments, these additional measures include:

- Subsidized transit passes for all employees;
- Subsidized bike share memberships for employees;
- Subsidized car share memberships for employees;
- Public parking offered at market rate prices; and
- Any reserved employee parking offered at market rate unbundled from employment agreements.

For residential developments, these include:

- Subsidized transit passes for the first 1–12 months of tenancy;
- Subsidized bike share memberships for the first year of tenancy; and
- Subsidized car share memberships for the first 1–12 months of tenancy.

Pricing parking at market rate and eliminating free parking on public lots may promote the use of transit, walking and biking instead of driving. One study found that the Assembly Station on the MBTA Orange Line generates 5,000 trips but could have created 10,000 trips if there was less parking available in the area. Free parking on public lots can be eliminated.

Character of the neighborhood





Transit Screens



MICROMOBILITY + PARKING

MICROMOBILITY

The City of Somerville has already authorized Bluebikes locations within the Assembly Square neighborhood. The locations offer the opportunity to incorporate future development plans into the locations of Bluebikes stations as Assembly Square continues to redevelop. Micromobility includes options like Zipcar spaces, electric vehicle charging stations, or e-bikes and scooter charging stations that could be included in development mitigation efforts.

-  Existing Bluebikes
-  Planned Expansion
-  Future Planning Options

Existing and Proposed BlueBike Stations



PARKING PARADIGM SHIFT

The future of Assembly Square is one with less parking.

Building more roads and vehicle lanes correlates with people using them more, which generates more traffic. When a free or cheap amenity such as more road space is made available, it generally alleviates congestion in the short term but creates greater demand in the long term. Parking follows a similar trend. Providing more parking, especially free parking, creates more parking demand and causes increased traffic congestion (as vehicles circle to find spaces). A survey on emerging parking trends by the International Parking Institute noted that “it’s estimated that 30% of the traffic in any city is people in cars searching for parking.” Furthermore, when free parking is available, people tend to drive around for longer periods of time to find an available spot rather than pay for garage parking. The bottom line is that people always seek the most convenient way to access their destinations; when parking is free and accessible, it can become preferred over modes such as transit, walking and cycling.

Loading and service areas are located throughout Assembly Square. Loading areas within Assembly Row are typically located on the first-floor internal areas of buildings. Loading areas in Assembly Marketplace and on Middlesex Avenue are located at the rear of the buildings within the parking lot.

Most travel to Assembly Square is by single-occupancy motor vehicle. The greatest determinant of a driver’s mode choice is free parking. Assembly Square has a substantial amount of free or inexpensive public parking which encourages vehicle travel to the neighborhood. Several plans for continuing development in Assembly Square include additional off-street parking.

Recommendations for retail and office development include increasing the price of parking to market rate to discourage vehicle travel and continuing parking maximums with new development. Parking for residential development should be unbundled to encourage a shift to other modes of transportation. This may also decrease the need for parking; some residents may not own a car and do not need a parking space. New development should also contribute to TDM efforts required and suggested by Assembly Connect. This includes electric vehicle parking, vehicle share/carpool programs, Bluebikes and shared mobility programs.

The City should coordinate and work with the TMA (Assembly Connect) to establish an overall cap on additional permitting of parking spaces.

Existing Parking





6. Economics

Assembly Square is Somerville's largest commercial and industrial district (145 acres) and is on a short list of sites with the greatest potential for development in the Metro Boston Area.

POLICY REVIEW

Assembly Square is one of the premier development sites in New England, following an earlier plan for the neighborhood, the development at Assembly Row has been very successful with retail spaces fully leased with a mix of national and local tenants and residential units leasing and selling well. Eight development blocks have been built, generating 860,000 square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of retail, restaurant, and entertainment space, and over 1,000 new residential units.

The development is anchored by the 750,000-square-foot headquarters for Mass General Brigham, the state’s largest health care system and employer. The move to Assembly Row consolidated a dozen facilities around Boston under one roof in a state-of-the-art, signature building. Today, 4,500 employees work at the headquarters, with the opportunity to expand and build a new 400,000-square-foot building in the future.

Assembly Square’s developers and Somerville’s planners are committed to using their substantial experience to drive economic growth for Somerville that pays for itself. They want to achieve and maintain a proven avenue of job growth in health care, biomedical and life sciences industries as well as the general technology sector. Similarly, neighborhood residents and other key business stakeholders are broadly concerned with improving livability and equity for residents through policies that support employment and encourage sustainable growth.

Assembly Square’s current and future contribution to the tax base is significant. Somerville is well on its way to expanding commercial tax revenues and market values with Assembly Square leading the way—through contributing 860,000 feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of retail, restaurant and entertainment space, and more than 1,000 new high-end residential units, with another 300,000 feet of space under construction. Other discussed projects include a new 180-room hotel, a 210-unit residential building, and a planned 1.4-million-square-foot mixed-use development along

STRENGTHS

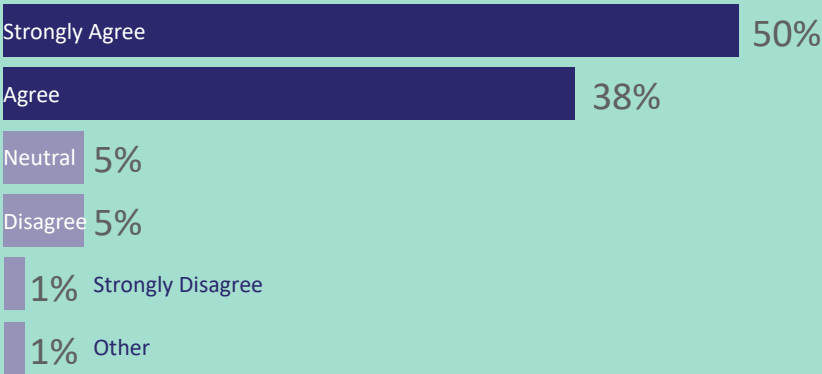
Assembly Square has inherent strengths that will serve it well through the pandemic recovery phase and during continued development. Brokers and investors say there are four elements that bode well for greater economic development over the next decade:

1. Half the city’s residents are young (although the median age is creeping upwards) and highly educated in key sectors.
2. There is sufficient parking and access to Boston/Cambridge via public transit.
3. Urban amenities are increasing.
4. Prices across all real estate segments and classes are lower relative to nearby urban peers.

Somerville enjoys characteristics that are long-term strengths for the real estate sector, including:

1. A continuous increase in residents who are knowledge workers;
2. A diversified mix of knowledge industries ;
3. Proximity to clients and tenants with limited access to new land or expansion options at their current locations; and
4. Access to a wide range of housing types at a variety of price points.

How likely are you to **recommend** Assembly Square to your friends and family as a place to live?



Results from Assembly Square Resident Survey

Middlesex Avenue. The broadened tax base from Assembly Square makes this development a critical commercial and residential tax engine for the entire City.

From a municipal finance perspective, the project has been a boon for the City. To date, the District Improvement Financing (DIF)-captured increment has significantly exceeded debt service payment amounts with an anticipated fund balance of \$9 million by the end of Fiscal Year 2020 to be used for infrastructure improvements.

For well over a year the global pandemic has sharply interrupted our everyday lives—how we work, commute, study, shop, play sports, and socialize with friends and family. Closures, job losses and deep economic pain have been widespread. The return to more normal economic activity, especially in a commercial setting is underway, but still depends upon the continued success of the nation's vaccine efforts.

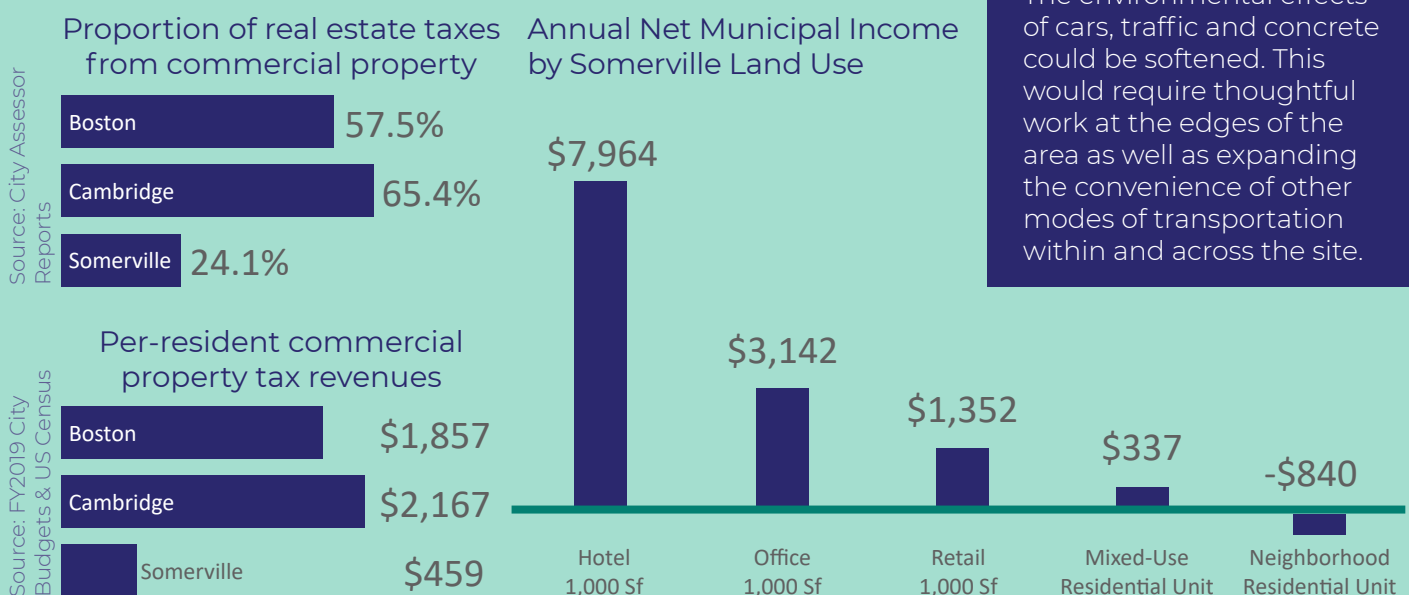
Resident survey results show that both renters and owners view Assembly Square as a distinctive neighborhood, and participants express broad satisfaction about living here. Economic development priorities, tools and objectives can be used to further enhance Assembly Square's livability and extend its integration into the urban fabric of Somerville.

At a time when real estate fundamentals are being reevaluated, Assembly Square's tenants in sectors such as health care, technology and life science research have been welcome outliers, mitigating some of the downturn experienced elsewhere. Established developers who specialize in providing high-end office, retail and lab space are drawing new tenants, attracting both investment capital and innovative office developers. This sustained strength bodes well for the site's long-term occupancy and job creation — and ultimately for population and family growth.

OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges exist for Assembly Square. The impact of the pandemic on retail is real and deep, and future growth opportunities may not look like those in the past. But challenges also represent a chance for greater progress and responsive improvements. Consider the following opportunities and areas for improvement:

- The real estate use mix is successful but including new options will make it an even more attractive destination.
- Assembly Square works well for its core markets, but it could work for more people.
- It's important to balance job creation and housing, especially units of larger sizes that allow for various household structures.
- Arts and culture could be more deeply interwoven into Assembly Square's economy and lived experiences.
- The environmental effects of cars, traffic and concrete could be softened. This would require thoughtful work at the edges of the area as well as expanding the convenience of other modes of transportation within and across the site.



EFFECTIVE TRADE AREA

Transportation time trade areas are one-way economists and retailers determine where the majority of shoppers will come from for a given retail location. Given a choice, customers will shop at stores that are closest and most convenient to their homes that have the products they want to buy. In evaluating the local capacity to support retail in this location, a two-minute, five-minute, and ten-minutes transportation time trade areas were looked at.

The two-minute transportation time also corresponds with the neighborhood boundaries and is a walkable and bikeable from elsewhere in the neighborhood as well as from the MBTA Orange Line Station. Access to the area by high quality transit expands the effective trade area along MBTA routes and bus routes. The five-minute transportation time area includes the adjacent Somerville neighborhoods of Ten Hills, East Somerville and Winter Hill as well as areas across the Mystic River in Medford. The ten-minute transportation time area includes the rest of Somerville, as well as Medford, Malden, and Everett. Households in these effective trade areas are looking for local serving retail, local entertainment, job opportunities with short commute times.

In a location that once housed a Ford Edsel automotive assembly plant, Assembly Row has transformed one of the State's largest brownfield sites into a thriving neighborhood.



Assembly Square ESRI Site Map with 2 minute, 5 minute and 10 minute drive times.

ASSEMBLY SQUARE RESIDENTS & OCCUPATIONS

Real GDP

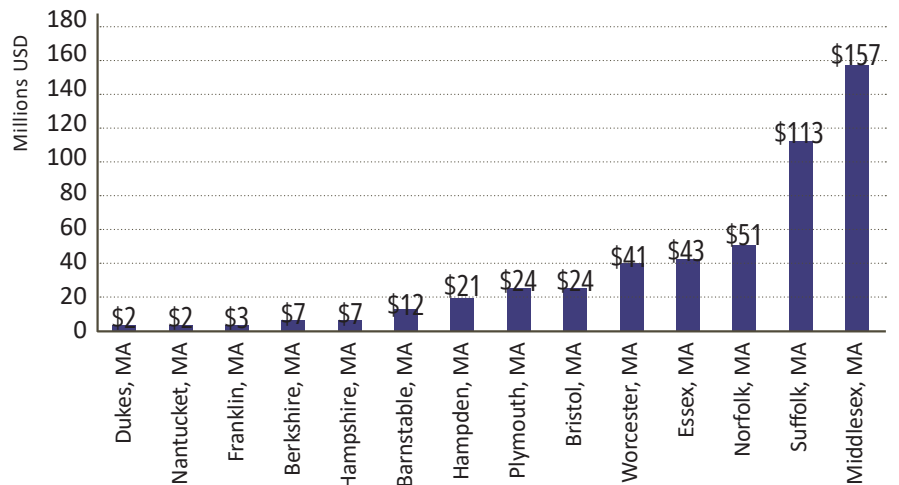
Middlesex County has by far the highest Gross Domestic Product (a measure of the goods and services produced in the area) within the State of Massachusetts at \$157 billion USD. This engine will help the City and Assembly Square through pandemic recovery and beyond.

Change in Occupation

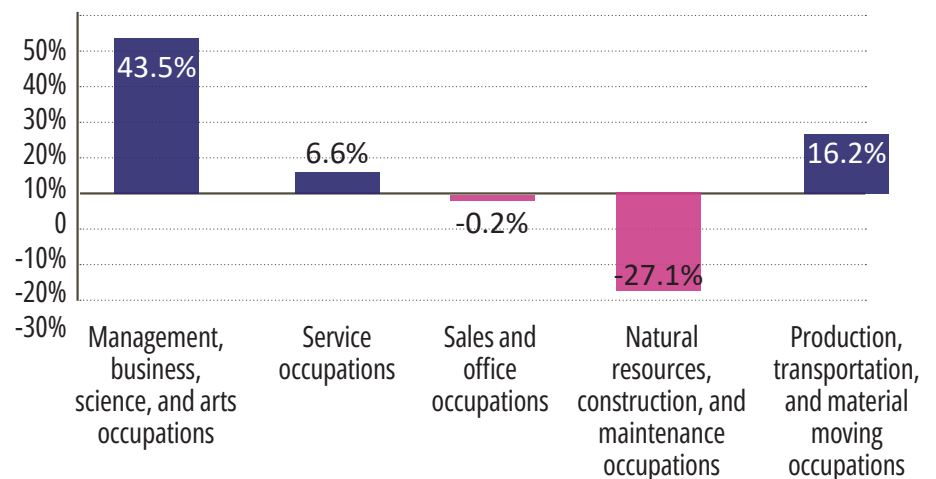
Somerville's economic development policies as well as its proximity to the broader economic engine of the Boston MSA have resulted in a shift toward the "knowledge industries," with a remarkable increase in jobs in business management, computer and sciences, and financial services.

Median Income

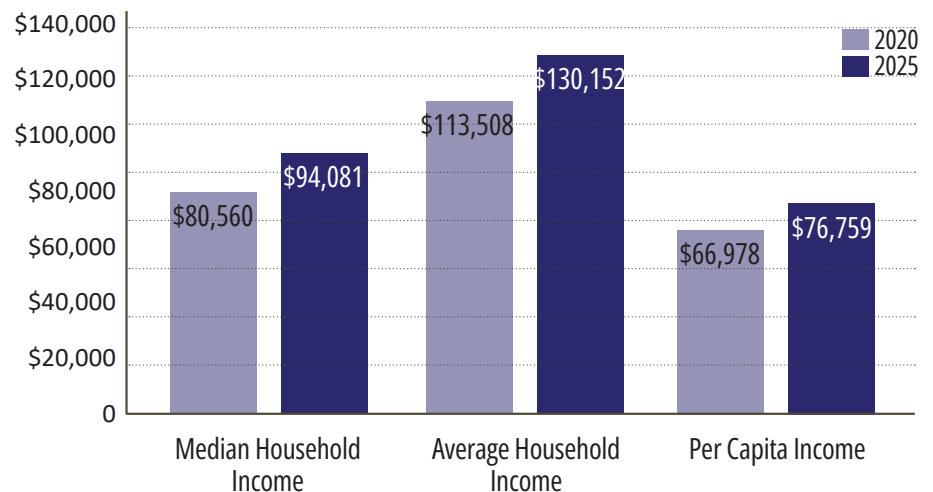
Median incomes both now and projected into 2025 are high (\$113,000 in 2020 and \$130,000 in 2025), showing how different the Assembly Square population is likely to be from that of the average Somerville neighborhood. Even with Somerville's recent gains in income growth, Assembly Square is becoming a relatively wealthy enclave within the City. Local retail amenities in the area will likely reflect the residents' tastes and income levels. Average income estimates are as of 2018, but at \$93,000, they are still higher than the Somerville average.



Real GDP (chained 2012 dollars) by Metro Area or County in Massachusetts - 2018 (\$M - Bureau of Economic Analysis)



Change in occupation by civilian employed population: cumulative change 2010-2018 (US Census ACS)



Estimates of changes to income in Assembly Square: 2020-2025 (ESRI)

Nearly **1M**
people live within a
15 minute drive
of Assembly Square

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Based on analysis, economic data synthesis, stakeholder consultations and public input, Assembly Square’s economic development strategies can be summarized as resting on the following three tiers:

THREE TIERS

- 1. Enhance the site’s current strengths.** Assembly Square has already proven that it has a strong business cluster effect through key research and laboratory anchor tenants, an established retail base and a growing residential footprint. Now the goal is to expand and deepen these effects by broadening the neighborhood’s economic, commercial and office offerings through coordinated branding and conscious cluster development (attracting complementary enterprises of all sizes, diversity, class and type).
- 2. Expand greenspace, mixed-use components, and a family-friendly approach.** Assembly Square boasts a large portion of Somerville’s one mile of river waterfront access and shoreline. This river’s-edge space has the potential to become a vibrant waterfront park that delights the local community and draws regional visitors year-round. Priority actions include waterfront programming, inventive sustainability, resiliency projects that also enhance recreation opportunities, and increased workforce housing and an expanded variety of housing types may be available.
- 3. Develop new catalytic niches that complement the commercial foot-print.** While commercial space is key to tax revenues, a balanced neighborhood needs more “soft-power” investments that can bring net gains to the local and City economy. Priority actions include promoting investments to attract the education and the arts communities, small footprint markets, and doing more through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and similar community investments.

These strategies apply to both current and future opportunities while providing policies and methods to address growth challenges. They use the City’s existing and emerging strengths in residential and retail establishments, community fabric, historic areas, a relatively diversified industrial and service base, and growing life sciences clusters. They can be taken as a group or individually depending on the status of the City’s comprehensive plan, budgeting processes and leadership preferences.



Three tiers to support the site’s economic development potential as part of the Assembly Square neighborhood plan

THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES FROM THESE ACTIONS INCLUDE:

1. Increasing new market entrants in Assembly Square and providing a supportive environment to allow for a doubling of smaller-scale business on site.
2. Doubling the number of permanent residents on site and creating a plan to attract different household types and families by offering larger units.
3. Increasing the number of employed persons by at least 5% every year, drawing from both unemployed persons and those out of the workforce. Increasing satisfaction as measured by a consistent tool by at least 10% annually among citizens and businesses when doing business with the city.
4. Raising satisfaction scores (as measured by a consistent tool) by at least 10% annually among citizens and businesses who are doing business with the City.
5. Improving the City’s year-over-year competitiveness standing (e.g., investment, opportunities, talent, livability, affordability) using a custom-developed competitiveness measurement tool.

TIER 1: ENHANCE THE SITE'S CURRENT STRENGTHS

Tier 1 seeks to foster existing trends within Assembly Square and promote the continuation of factors that have made it a dynamic location for business and retail in Somerville.

Maximize business cluster effects

Clusters represent an important organizing principle for metro region economic development organizations and offer a framework and a context to support business competitiveness. Established anchors such as Mass General Brigham, Puma Boston HQ, and Assembly Row can serve as a foundation for establishing clusters — more interconnected companies, start-ups, specialized vendors, service providers and education players.

- Develop a short-term plan to attract smaller-scale businesses. Integrate this into the city-wide post-COVID-19 recovery plan.
- Review and strengthen City-led efforts to attract biotech, laboratory, and the broader health and science sectors.
- Enhance cluster effects with stronger efforts to attract and retain supply chain participants for the main corporate anchors already on site.

Lead an effort to define the neighborhood as more than retail

While retail forms a backbone for the site, it's not just national brands that can thrive here. Local and regional market concepts are an easy win to build a broader, more inclusive brand for Assembly Square. The site's visibility, access to the waterfront, history and commercial attributes can also be emphasized.

- Establish a working group with broader stakeholder representation to create and promote an area-wide identity to use in specific efforts to support the overall site and long-term neighborhood vision.



Assembly Row



Mass General Brigham
(formerly Partners Health)



Proposed New Development



Baxter Park Events

Increase the use of financing tools to support social goals

Developers and investors have an increasing number of options they can use as they plan new projects; these can be coupled with clear social and community objectives. These objectives could include transportation, housing, environmental quality, energy and sustainability.

- Collate all available incentives including District Increment Financing (DIF), Tax Increment Financing (TIF), property tax abatements, etc., and offer a web-based tool that developers can use to estimate the impact of incentives on their proposed projects.
- Promote the tool on the City's SomerVision website, and through email, banner advertising and paid search.

Use Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) or similar area measures to promote tradable development rights

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) allows social goals, such as parks and open spaces, to be more easily met. Developers can buy and sell excess development rights to one another to meet their specific needs. For example, a TDR seller in an area that wants to remain (or become) a green space can be paid by buyers who need additional development rights on their specific parcel. This transfer can create or maintain green spaces in perpetuity and allow developers to better utilize their sites with additional density.

- Create a working group to evaluate the mechanics and policy framework for Assembly Square TDRs.
- Establish seller (sender) and buyer (receiving) zones and the actual policy framework for use.

Consider additional Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) that align City and private goals

City-owned assets and the City's ability to provide non-traditional financing mechanisms can be used to achieve social goals through PPPs. Such projects could include providing City assets (such as land, access points and transportation options) at low or reduced rates to improve community outcomes across a broad range of activities. These partnerships provide flexibility to developers and tenants while allowing the City to selectively experiment with how best to use its limited resources for outcomes that align market realities with social goals.

- Lease City-owned land at a discount to market rate for tenants who bring a high-development concept with a credible plan to reach a social goal such as affordable housing, educational partnerships, innovation projects or retail development.
- Experiment with tax increments to pay for the difference between market and affordable rents. In this version of a master leasing concept, the City acts as the lessee and guarantees payment to the building owner of the difference between market rent and tenant rent for a fixed period.
- Use corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments in a dedicated fund as loan-loss reserves (or something similar) that can indirectly support larger affordable housing initiatives and "owner-operated" enterprises.

Take into account the revenue generation potential of projects in Assembly Square

Assembly Square is essential to contributing to the City's long-term funding goals through tax generation. Keeping a well-balanced mix of uses will be key to ensuring this objective. All new developments should estimate net tax revenues to the City as part of their permitting (as per the existing legal agreement) to strengthen the tax base and add to the area's employment base.

- Require new development projects to estimate their net tax contributions (total taxable increases to the area less assumed City service provision).
- Maintain a potential net taxable contribution summary for undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels to estimate the remaining possible net tax generation available under current zoning.

TIER 2: EXPAND GREEN SPACE, MIXED-USE COMPONENTS AND A FAMILY-FRIENDLY APPROACH

Tier 2 aims to expand emerging trends in Assembly Square to create a more nuanced neighborhood. The focus would be on an environment with a broad appeal for all types of residents and visitors. This would create a heightened competitive advantage. Assembly Square can be a truly mixed-use place that fully incorporates the waterfront and other uses that are community-inclusive, flexible, and support a year-round neighborhood culture in Somerville.

Expand and bring the waterfront and park lands into the economy; showcase sustainability

Community feedback is unanimous: the waterfront could be developed more from both a design and an activity perspective. Suggested ideas include additional recreational options, environmental and ecological education, history of the site, sustainability demonstration opportunities and more. A deeper commitment to a waterfront park in the form of bioedges, rain gardens and demonstration stream gauges is desirable.

- Embrace designs that enhance green spaces.
- Promote and support sustainability projects with clear environmental impact reduction objectives (e.g., energy, environment, flood control/resiliency, parks and recreation).
- Emphasize the waterfront profile in efforts to identify Assembly Square as a cohesive neighborhood.
- Establish a waterfront park programming working group to introduce activities/offerings to cover all four seasons (e.g., ice skating in winter).
- Consider allowing small-scale retail within the waterfront parks (cart, bicycle or similar).

Build out site with attention to health effects and sustainability

The site's proximity to major highways creates concern regarding more airborne pollutants (e.g., PM2.5) and decreases in overall air quality indicators. Climate-related impacts such as a rise in water level and potential flooding may impinge on the site. Promoting standards such as LEED and integrating adaptation and mitigation options at scale (e.g., energy and water use) will be key to a manageable environmental footprint. This approach would support business competitiveness as well as differentiate the area from similar regional sites.

- Assess and account for air quality impacts from the I-93 roadway and other major thoroughfares.
- Consider promoting net-zero buildings as demonstration sites and continue to promote LEED standards with particular emphasis on indoor air quality.
- Limit or restrict residential development along Middlesex Avenue near I-93/Route 28. Promote more commercial uses (e.g., laboratory and biotech, biomedicine and other advanced science uses).

Experiment with affordable housing financing tools for workforce or middle-income housing

The site's current residential development footprint is small (though likely to expand) and generally seen as serving the luxury market. As Somerville has become more affluent, workforce housing needs have lagged—and these needs are being clearly articulated by the community. Typically, workforce or middle-income housing is affordable for households earning between 80-120% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Workforce housing targets middle-income workers, a group which includes police officers, City workers, firefighters, teachers, health care workers, retail clerks and those with similar jobs.

- Create a dedicated workforce housing trust fund, repurpose vacant land and underutilized retail/commercial space, allow greater flexibility as part of the inclusionary zoning mandates and/or update the development codes.
- Work with the affordable housing department and developers to bring more workforce housing into new developments using tax increments, specific bond issuances or an area-wide housing trust fund that offsets the development cost gap inherent in affordable housing.
- Experiment with non-traditional funding approaches for public policy goals, such as using a master leasing structure to allow for lower-cost entry to the retail market for local artists or entrepreneurs.

Encourage a broader (in both size and tenure) range of residential units

For the Assembly Square neighborhood to appeal to more types of residents, units with a greater variety of overall size, bedroom counts and ownership possibilities are needed. Larger units with more bedrooms would draw families with children, help round out the site's demographic concentration and contribute to a less transient environment. In addition, the introduction of an expanded variety of housing types would allow for other mixed uses to take root: education, day care and parks.

- Work with developers to increase the quantity and availability of three- and four-bedroom units in Assembly Square to attract different household types (market rate and affordable/workforce AMI targeted).
- Encourage developers to provide additional residential units for sale.

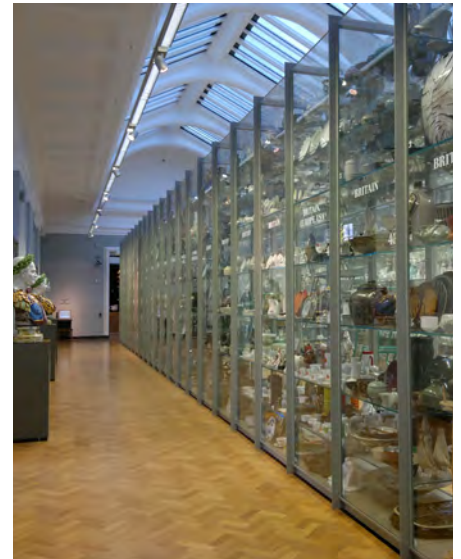
TIER 3: DEVELOP NEW CATALYTIC NICHES THAT COMPLEMENT THE COMMERCIAL FOOTPRINT

Tier 3 brings together catalytic activities that add economic synergy and dynamism to the area while enhancing a sense of distinctive community and belonging.

Attract area artists, vendors and small-scale, inventive retail

Somerville has the highest number of resident artists of any city in New England; it's estimated that as many as 5% of all city residents are artists. As the Assembly Square neighborhood matures, it can reflect this rich legacy of arts practitioners across many avenues—galleries, studios, public art and markets. Similarly, there are many small, independent, micro-retail, seasonal makers who could benefit from access to workspace, markets and loyal customers. Creating flexible rentals or ownership options would be useful. Generating tourist-friendly public art and art walks could link artists to the built environment in ways that enhance Assembly Square and provide an iconic look and feel to the area.

- Partner with Boston-area and local arts organizations to connect artists to City programs and bring new ideas to City officials.
- Allow small vendors to sell from pushcarts, food trucks and temporary sales areas.
- Identify target areas within Assembly Square for public art initiatives.
- Consider competitions and other grassroots engagement tactics to increase public participation in the design process.
- Experiment with affordable retail spaces distributed across new developments and work hand in hand with additional financial support to help them.
- Target local businesses (particularly non-chain and micro-businesses) for support to allow artists and other entrepreneurs affordable access to the market through fixed locations.
- Build/expand existing business incubator initiatives that support the growth of small businesses through advice and links to resources for marketing, branding, accounting, networking, mentoring and overall business strategy.



Visible Storage, Victoria & Albert Museum

Turn Assembly Square into a creative and educational outpost through savvy nonprofit partnerships.

Turn Assembly Square into a creative and educational outpost through savvy nonprofit partnerships. Somerville and the Boston metro region is rich in educational and cultural institutions. Many of these organizations are actively seeking ways to be more relevant to their audiences across several dimensions: content and programming, education, access, and job creation and retention. Assembly Square could be a useful location for one or more of these institutions to act as an anchor for an entirely new educational and cultural cluster. The metro region's educational, museum and arts organizations already store, conserve and perform retail operations, but many of their holdings and functions remain cloistered and inaccessible to the public. Assembly Square, with its transit access, common areas, daytime density and proximity to other parts of Somerville and northern suburbs, could provide an ideal location for experimental mini-satellite spaces.



Bow Market

- Engage with major educational and cultural institutions in our area to promote Assembly Square as a satellite location (e.g., annex functions like conservation, storage, education outreach).
- Connect with one or more education centers to promote Assembly Square as a satellite location for classrooms, studios, and temporary or seasonal workspaces.
- Explore the ability to blend cutting-edge technology with existing assets and underserved educational niches (such as childhood education) to bring a completely unique offering to the area.

Use smaller-footprint retail to mirror successes

Many of Somerville's (and the region's) food halls and local markets are proven winners in the fiercely competitive retail environment, being premier local destinations for unique food, drinks and shopping. Assembly Square can use similar smaller-footprint market models and apply a different twist to the formula. Taking a cue from the life sciences incubator model, Assembly Square could offer a market space where businesses scale and grow—where metro neighbors, students, entrepreneurs, artists and tourists come together to create and shape a community to call their own. Experimental kitchens, established businesses from East Somerville, and retail concepts that are looking to move from the micro-market into a more permanent retail space could provide exciting options for residents and visitors alike.

- Engage with retail and marketplace developers and determine how best to integrate the arts and small-scale inventive retail into their plans (e.g., annex functions like conservation, storage, education outreach).
- Consider a full or partial arts overlay district for Assembly Square.
- Work with existing community programming to expand activities/offerings to cover all four seasons (e.g., ice skating in winter, etc.).

Pursue Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding for Assembly Square's arts and cultural programming

As the site matures and development continues, it may be possible to convince leaders of large area businesses to allocate some portion of their current CSR budget to Assembly Square. Whether they fund green space or climate adaptation improvements, diversity and inclusion initiatives or the arts, their corporate funds could make the kind of impact they desire. Assembly Square's development could provide a showcase of how to maximize CSR impacts for both the corporate sponsors and area recipients.

- Reach out to major Assembly Square commercial interests as well as local and city-wide corporate and other business interests (e.g., family office and area philanthropic groups) to discuss directing some of their CSR funding to Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan project ideas.
- Solicit a pipeline of CSR projects from various ongoing initiatives that can be fed into the public policy goals of the City's Economic Development Department.

WHAT IS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)?

Corporate social responsibility is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable—to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. By practicing corporate social responsibility, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental.

To engage in CSR means that, in the ordinary course of business, a company is operating in ways that enhance society and the environment, instead of contributing negatively to them.

7. Implementation

This chapter outlines next steps for the City to undertake to realize the plan's vision for the Assembly Square neighborhood.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This plan lays out the framework for a coordinated approach to development for the Assembly Square neighborhood. The plan's ideas represent a collective vision for the area created during a collaborative virtual charrette process. Much of what the plan entails is to be carried out by both public and private entities as individual properties are developed over time. In the short term, public sector strategies and action items should be implemented within three to five years to establish the groundwork and regulations for private development. The plan is intended to be flexible. The illustrative plan is an example of what could be done to bring design strategies and an array of stakeholder goals to life. As properties develop in the years ahead, the property owner will have some flexibility to refine the plan for their parcel to meet their unique needs and account for changing economic conditions and market demand overtime. While no one expects the plan to be implemented exactly as it's been drawn, in developing policy to guide future development, the City should strive to retain key characteristics that can make this district a walkable, mixed use, transit-oriented urban neighborhood.

In the study of successfully planned communities, we find that two types of actions have been critical to achieving desirable outcomes: long-term planning and a willingness to reconsider one's values. Communities work to identify values and then let those values guide action. When a community's development energies are guided by a plan, every new public and private investment is more likely add to quality of life and not detract from it. Always have a plan, but recognize that the conversation, the act of planning itself, is the most important part.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The following implementation matrix organizes strategies and actions by the Five Big Ideas discussed in Chapter X 3. Each action is accompanied with additional information.

Action	Description of policy, program or action that should be taken
Lead Agency	The organization(s) leading or coordinating the implementation of the action item.
Timeframe	Describes the anticipated timeframe and/or duration for implementation for each action item, defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing: immediate / continuous • Immediate: within the first year following plan adoption • Near-Term: 1 to 5 following plan adoption. The plan is intended to be flexible. The illustrative plan is an example of what could be done to bring design strategies and an array of stakeholder goals to life. • Long-Term: 5 years or longer

1. BUILD GREAT NEW PLACES

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 1.1: Create Human-scale and Pedestrian-oriented Buildings and Blocks			
Action 1.1.1	Active uses such as retail and restaurants should be encouraged along the ground floor of major pedestrian thoroughfares.	City	Ongoing
Action 1.1.2	Require the length of blocks to be no more than 600' and ideally not more than 450'. Where the length requirement is not achievable, a mid-block passage should be designed for pedestrians.	City	Immediate
Action 1.1.3	Continue to include the evaluation of the relationship between buildings and streets as a part of the approval process.	City	Ongoing
Action 1.1.4	Amend the zoning ordinance to permit and encourage the nuanced development desired for the different areas of Assembly Square.	City	Near Term
Strategy 1.2: Create Welcoming Public Spaces and Amenities			
Action 1.2.1	Require new public spaces in Assembly Square to be open to a street with multiple entrances from public thoroughfares. The design of new public spaces should create a shared sense of ownership for all.	City	Immediate
Action 1.2.2	Encourage, reserve or otherwise acquire land for public amenities such as a performing arts space, library, fire station, grocery store, late-night pharmacy, dog park, and play spaces within the Assembly Square neighborhood.	City	Near Term
Action 1.2.3	Require new residential developments to include playgrounds and tot lots within a five-minute walk of most households.	City	Immediate

2. INCREASE ACCESS TO NATURE AND BUILD SUSTAINABLY

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 2.1: Develop Sustainable Buildings and Infrastructure			
Action 2.1.1	Assess existing utilities infrastructure throughout Assembly Square.	City	Immediate
Action 2.1.2	Perform a comprehensive analysis of existing utility loads based on building uses.	City	Immediate
Action 2.1.3	Evaluate the impact of each building addition, deletion, or renovation on the affected utilities.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 2.1.4	Coordinate with Somerville Department of Public Works and licensed plumbing engineers to determine if mains need to be maintained, upgraded, or added throughout the development.	City	Near Term
Action 2.1.5	Design additional drainage infrastructure to convey roof and pavement runoff from the development into the existing drainage system to be discharged elsewhere due to MassDEP's concern with infiltration into polluted soil beneath the project area.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 2.1.6	Continue to require all new buildings in Assembly Square achieve LEED Platinum certification.	City	Ongoing
Action 2.1.7	Encourage new developments to achieve net zero energy goals and utilize on-site renewable energy resources.	City	Ongoing
Strategy 2.2: Increase Access to Parks			
Action 2.2.1	Establish a trail network that connects the parks and open spaces within Assembly Square.	City Private	Immediate
Action 2.2.2	Create pockets of green space for gathering and seating along the trail network.	City Private	Near Term
Action 2.2.3	Create a central 'Square' to become the heart of the neighborhood.	City Private	Near Term
Action 2.2.4	Use wayfinding and signage to highlight the connection of a complete loop of park space, civic space, and trails within Assembly Square as well as how those networks connect to the surrounding area.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 2.2.5	Require trees and native plants along all trails to provide shade and create habitat for pollinators and wildlife.	City	Long Term
Strategy 2.3: Set Proper Energy Goals and Design Criteria			
Action 2.3.1	Set district-wide energy and carbon reduction goals instead of on a project-by-project basis to allow design flexibility.	City	Near Term
Action 2.3.2	New development projects in Assembly Square should use drainage design criteria that reflects future projections and climate change trends.	City	Near Term

3. DESIGN SAFE, COMFORTABLE AND INTERESTING STREETS AND PATHS AND INCREASE TRANSIT AVAILABILITY

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 3.1: Build Streets that are Safe, Comfortable and Interesting			
Action 3.1.1	Remove the right turn pockets and reduces the curb radii between Fellsway and Grand Union Boulevard/ Middlesex Avenue to discourage high-speed turning movements by motorists, and expands the pedestrian area, to create shorter crossing distances.	City	Near Term
Action 3.1.2	Reduce the number of lanes on Fellsway, and reduce accepting lanes on Grand Union Boulevard.	City	Long Term
Action 3.1.3	Improve the Kensington Connector with public art and lighting.	City	Near Term
Action 3.1.4	Adopt and implement the street sections in the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan.	City	Near Term
Action 3.1.5	Implement improvements to the Lombardi Street intersection with Mystic Avenue.	City	Long Term
Action 3.1.6	Implement improvements to the Middlesex Avenue intersection with Mystic Avenue.	City	Long Term
Action 3.1.7	Explore the reduction of the I-93 footprint by clearing up the entrance and exit ramps.	City	Long Term
Action 3.1.8	Explore the removal of the Fellsway tunnel under I-93 footprint by clearing up the entrance and exit ramps.	City	Long Term
Strategy 3.2: Prioritize Bicycling			
Action 3.2.1	Incorporate dedicated bicycle lanes / cycle tracks on all major streets.	City	Near Term
Action 3.2.2	Install Bluebikes facilities at the authorized and proposed locations within the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan.	Bluebikes	Near Term
Strategy 3.3: Expand and Improve Transit Services			
Action 3.3.1	Advocate for increased frequency of the Orange Line and Route 90 Buses.	MBTA	Near Term
Action 3.3.2	Advocate for increased frequency of Route 90 Buses.	MBTA	Near Term
Action 3.3.3	Advocate for additional bus services connecting Assembly Square to other parts of Somerville.	MBTA	Near Term
Action 3.3.4	Advocate for a modified Route 90 to incorporate more stops within Assembly Square.	MBTA	Near Term
Strategy 3.4: Increase Transportation Demand Management			
Action 3.4.1	Continue to require future development to participate in Assembly Connect program with a designated coordinator to decrease reliance on single-occupancy motor vehicle use to and from the neighborhood.	City	Ongoing
Action 3.4.2	In addition to the baseline requirements for transportation demand management, new development should also provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidized transit passes for all employees • Public parking offered at market rate prices, and • Employee parking charged directly at market rate prices. 	MBTA	Near Term

4. GROW REVENUE-GENERATING USES FOR SOMERVILLE

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 4.1: Enhance the Site's Current Strengths			
Action 4.1.1	Enhance the wayfinding signage and add a new entrance over the rail line by Revolution Drive.	City	Immediate
Action 4.1.2	Create a more vibrant waterfront park with community events programming and sustainable projects at the river's edge that serve the local community and regional visitors year round.	City Private	Immediate
Action 4.1.3	Expand the area of the waterfront park to increase event capacity.	City Private	Near Term
Action 4.1.4	Continue to work with the site's developers on economic development program design that maintains and achieves a new avenue of economic growth. Consider additional "Public Private Partnerships PPP's" that align city and private goals	City Private	Near Term
Action 4.1.5	Increase the use of financing tools (DIF/TIF, property tax abatements, etc) to support social goals. Use Floor Area Ratios (FAR) or similar area measures to promote tradable development rights.	City	Near Term
Strategy 4.2: Expand the City's Non-residential Tax Base			
Action 4.2.1	Include a diversity of uses at Assembly Square and expand the City's non-residential tax base.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 4.2.2	Enhance business cluster effects by broadening the neighborhood's economic, commercial and office offerings through coordinated branding of the entire neighborhood, and consciously attracting complementary enterprises of all sizes, diversity, class, and type.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 4.2.3	Create a market space that serves as an incubator where businesses can grow and scale. The entrepreneurs, residents, students, and artists can come together to shape the future of the community.	City	Near Term
Action 4.2.4	Position and enhance Assembly Square as a life-science center by creating and supporting a real neighborhood to attract businesses, employees, and residents.	City	Ongoing
Action 4.2.5	Increase the price of parking and create a pricing structure for parking at all Assembly Square parking locations.	City	Immediate

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 4.3: Develop New Catalytic Niches			
Action 4.3.1	Attract and promote investments in the arts community, along with small foot-print, inventive retailers.	City	Near Term
Action 4.3.2	Seek out investments from corporate social responsibility programs, nonprofits and other similar community-minded investment sources.	City	Near Term
Action 4.3.3	Partner with regional and local arts organizations to support connecting artists to city programs and to bring new perspectives and ideas to city officials.	City	Near Term
Action 4.3.4	Identify target areas within Assembly Square for public art initiatives. Consider competitions and other mechanisms to increase public participation in the design process.	City	Immediate
Action 4.3.5	Experiment with affordable retail spaces that are distributed across new developments and work hand-in-hand with additional financial support to them.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 4.3.6	Treat local business (particularly non-chain and micro-businesses) as targets for affordable support to allow artists and other entrepreneurs to access the market through fixed locations.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 4.3.7	Build / expand existing business incubator functions that provide small businesses with support for their growth, through mentoring, networking, and connections to others for marketing, branding, accounting and overall business strategy.	City	Near Term
Action 4.3.8	Engage educational and cultural institutions to promote Assembly Square as a satellite location.	City	Near Term

5. CONNECT PHYSICALLY AND SOCIALLY TO SOMERVILLE AND CULTIVATE THE ASSEMBLY COMMUNITY

Strategy / Activity		Lead Agency	Timeframe
Strategy 5.1: Strengthen Physical and Social Connection			
Action 5.1.1	Support projects that enhance the physical connections between Assembly Square and adjacent neighborhoods such as improving the Kensington Connector, and making Fellsway easier to cross on foot or bike.	City	Ongoing
Action 5.1.2	Add a bike/pedestrian bridge to cross the river.	MBTA City	Near Term
Action 5.1.3	Improve the access to Draw Seven Park by constructing a connection over the rails near the Orange Line station by Revolution Drive.	MBTA City	Near Term
Action 5.1.4	Support the social infrastructure of business improvement districts, main street associations, neighborhood and homeowner associations specific to Assembly Square.	City	Near Term
Strategy 5.2: Enhance the Assembly Square Neighborhood Identity			
Action 5.2.1	Provide public display spaces for art to highlight the work of local artists.	City	Near Term
Action 5.2.2	Incorporate art into the streetscape in the form of furnishings, benches, streetlights, trash receptacles, bike racks, paintable walls and other streetscape elements.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 5.2.3	Ensure that there is cohesion and flow between the buildings and within the public realm in street design, furnishings, and wayfinding signage that help Assembly Square to establish its unique identity.	City	Near Term
Strategy 5.3: Cultivate the Assembly Square Community			
Action 5.3.1	Encourage a broader range of residential units in both size and tenure.	City	Near Term
Action 5.3.2	Encourage locally-owned, micro-chain, family-operated, and startup businesses in Assembly Square. Allow short-term leases or reduce rents to operations that help achieve local distinctiveness.	City Private	Ongoing
Action 5.3.3	Allow / enhance the ability of small vendors to sell from pushcarts, food trucks, and temporary sales areas.	City	Immediate
Strategy 5.4: Experiment with Affordable Housing Financing Tools			
Action 5.4.1	Work with the Housing Division of OSPCD and developers to bring more workforce housing into new developments using tax increments, specific bond issuances or an area-wide housing trust fund that can offset the cost gap inherent to developing affordable housing.	City Private	Near Term
Action 5.4.2	Experiment using non-traditional funding approaches for public policy goals, such as using a master leasing structure to allow for lower cost retail market entry for local artists or entrepreneurs.	City Private	Near Term